Binan Goonj is a phrase taken from the Bidjara language in South-western Queensland and means ‘they hear, but they don’t listen’. Binan Goonj: Bridging Culture in Aboriginal Health was first published in 1992. Eighteen years on and the health status of many Aboriginal people remains the poorest in Australia, despite so many years of research, policies and interventions. This fully updated new edition examines the background, processes and practices behind this situation, and provides practical strategies to assist in addressing this complex subject. Extensively adopted as a teaching text across Australia, Binan Goonj provides coverage of essential Aboriginal health topics in an accessible manner.

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Anne-Katrin Eckermann
Toni Dowd
Ena Chong
Lynette Nixon
Roy Gray
Sally Johnson
This logo, designed by Ena Chong, depicts the gulf that exists between many cultures and the potential for safe ways to bridge understanding from one culture to another. *Binang Goonj* is a program which symbolises this understanding and builds on it for effective cross-cultural interaction.

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*Think outside the book…evolve.*
Binaŋ Goonj:
Bridging Cultures in Aboriginal Health

3rd edition

Anne-Katrin Eckermann
Toni Dowd
Ena Chong
Lynette Nixon
Roy Gray
Sally Johnson
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This is the third edition of *Binaŋ Goonj* and represents the culmination of the authors’ 19-year-long collaboration. We began our journey in 1991, when we were drawn together to design a distance education package to familiarise non-Aboriginal health workers, including doctors and nurses, with the distinctive needs and aspirations of Aboriginal people living in rural/urban Australia. The then Commonwealth Department of Community Services and Health funded the project through its Rural Health Support Education and Training (RHSET) Program. We began the process by inviting health care professionals and Aboriginal community people to participate in a survey to identify the most important issues and concerns in Aboriginal health. On the basis of this information, available literature and our own research/experiences, we produced the teaching materials. We were also encouraged to publish our material in book form in order to make it available to a wider audience.

The first edition of *Binaŋ Goonj* was published in 1992, updated in 1994, and reprinted in 1995 and 1998. Another RHSET grant in 1993–94 provided the Team with the opportunity to develop face-to-face cross-cultural training workshops. These workshops have reached individuals and organisations throughout Australia over the past 15 years and have done much to enhance understanding of the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal peoples across Australia.

Throughout the three editions of *Binaŋ Goonj* we have made reference to ‘Aboriginal people’ rather than ‘Indigenous’ or ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander’ people. This has been a deliberate decision. The Aboriginal co-authors of this text consider themselves Aboriginal people who are descendants of specific Aboriginal nations. They do not identify with the generic term Indigenous, although they recognise that it describes people across the world who have strong ties with their land, were colonised and continue to follow cultural traditions different from those of the colonisers.

Our focus on Aboriginal rather than Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander situations was also deliberate. Although there was Torres Strait Islander involvement in the project’s inception, time constraints precluded sustained contributions. As none of the Team could claim first-hand experience of Torres Strait situations, it was decided that, in line with the principles of self-determination and community control, it would be wrong for us to ‘speak for’ the needs and aspirations of this group of Australians. The Team does, however, believe that many of the principles outlined in this project have direct relevance to the health needs of the Torres Strait Islanders, and health workers and community people from these regions have adapted materials to reflect their particular situations.

Although the core of our Team has remained intact since 1991, our dear friend Mary Martin left in 1995 to pursue her work on Aboriginal Health Worker accreditation and preparation of GPs for work in community-controlled health services. Sally Johnson joined
the Team in 1995 and followed through the pilot that Toni Dowd developed with colleagues in Central Australia to devise and implement their own Aboriginal Cultural Awareness Program—Kaltye-Le-Antherrentye. Over the next decade, the Team conducted cross-cultural workshops with literally hundreds of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal health care professionals.

The second edition of *Binaŋ Goonj* was published in 2006. It is a measure of the speed of change in current Aboriginal affairs that the first edition of *Binaŋ Goonj* held its general currency for more than a decade, while the second edition was out of date by 2009. Clearly major, rapid policy changes, particularly from 2006 onwards, have been a response to continuing poor health, education, housing and employment statistics as well as increasing levels of violence in some communities. The cycle of disadvantage, with which many Aboriginal people have had to cope, has intensified and their life chances have been further limited.

Our Team has been active in the analysis, administration and/or delivery of health care to Aboriginal groups for a number of decades. Consequently, the materials presented here draw heavily on our experiences and perceptions, on research and government reports on Aboriginal affairs and Aboriginal health, as well as on the comments of those health care providers and community people who have shared their perceptions and concerns with us.

We began the process of material development and selection on the premise that Aboriginal people's current life chances are intrinsically linked to their past and present socio-economic, political and cultural status in Australian society. We therefore believe that it is impossible to understand Aboriginal people’s health situation unless we become aware of their history since Australia's invasion in 1788, and their place in Australian society then and now. Such understanding is also essential to facilitate positive cross-cultural interaction between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. We are all products of the past, which has overtly or covertly influenced our perceptions and attitudes.

Our analysis, then, includes an overview of the history of colonisation in Australia and its aftermath; we consider the place of Aboriginal people in Australian society today, including their health status, their interactions with the majority, and how the nature of such interactions has influenced how the minority feels, sees itself, reacts and interprets. Conversely, we examine, by means of case study material, the underlying factors that may influence non-Aboriginal reactions, perceptions and interpretations in the delivery of health care services in such cross-cultural situations.

To this purpose, the book is divided into the following chapters:
1. Background to Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal interactions in Australia
2. Aboriginal communities today
3. Coping with change and violence
4. Cultural vitality
5. Culture shock
6. People Centred Care
7. Empowerment in Aboriginal health

The phrase *Binaŋ Goonj*—‘you hear but don’t listen’—continues to reflect many Aboriginal people’s experiences of communication with health professionals. No doubt some health professionals also believe it to be true of some of their clients. Nevertheless, we have found a growing number of health professionals who recognise that their power and status allows them to control communication, and who have been willing to step back and to listen to the stories of Aboriginal clients. DasGupta (2007, pp 1384–1385) explains that:

> to elicit, to interpret, and to integrate patient stories into their work effectively [health professionals] must be in a state of awareness and attention, attuned to their emotional and intellectual reactions ... [the experiences of Aboriginal people in the form of narratives] hold unique insights for [health professionals] in how to engage in an ethical,
empathetic, and self reflective practice. In particular these narratives demonstrate the importance not only of story but also of stillness or silence to the practice of medicine [and nursing]. The voices of patients and their families hold both literal and allegorical lessons for [health professionals] in how to move toward a … practice involving not only diagnosis and treatment but also recognition and healing.

… the heart of medicine [and nursing] beats in the space between stillness and story

We fully endorse these sentiments. At no time over the three editions of Binaŋ Goonj have we presented the reader with a checklist of ‘things to do’ or ‘not to do’ when working and/or living in an Aboriginal community. There are no easy checklists or magical formulae. Instead, there are a number of processes, such as reflection, empathy, self-knowledge and respect, which may lead to culturally safe behaviour and practice.

Similarly, our concept of ‘community’ encompasses a number of interrelated principles. ‘Community’ in this material does not necessarily refer to ‘designated communities’ as is common in some State government definitions. Rather, we are using the concept to include the family groups that occupy specific territory or use particular services. The use of ‘community’ in this sense does not imply ‘unity’ or commonality of interest, as outlined later.

Finally, Binaŋ Goonj is an attempt to explain the varying perspectives of health care workers and Aboriginal clients. On reflection, we may have stressed client needs over those experienced by providers. Again, there is some justification for this. Health care providers are most frequently members of the dominant society and, within that group, belong to essential, respected and frequently powerful professions. Aboriginal clients, however, most frequently belong to disadvantaged, ‘at-risk’ groups. Given this imbalance of power, and its effects on Aboriginal people’s life chances, we believe that it is easier for health care workers to adapt to differing needs from their position of strength. Such adaptation will not influence their life chances significantly. Failure by health care providers to develop appropriate cross-cultural attitudes will, however, endanger Aboriginal people’s social, cultural, physical and mental health.

Use of the material

People may wish to use Binaŋ Goonj not only to develop their own knowledge and competence but also to develop that of others through in-service, seminars and discussions. In these situations we would stress the following processes and procedures:

1. The material should be discussed, adapted and restructured in collaboration with local Aboriginal communities.
2. Local case studies, resources and experiences from within the Aboriginal community should be sought; they will demonstrate the reality and pervasiveness of general principles influencing local Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal interaction.
3. The material should be presented in collaboration with Aboriginal facilitators.
4. Respectful use of materials including acknowledgement of the original sources should be negotiated.
About the authors

**Anne-Katrin Eckermann** migrated from Germany to Australia with her parents in 1958. She has worked in Aboriginal communities since 1969 and has carried out over a dozen major research projects. She has been extensively involved in consultation with Aboriginal communities and government departments and has made major submissions to national inquiries in Aboriginal affairs as well as Aboriginal health and education. Her expertise in action research, including the training of co-researchers, and her ability to coordinate small- and large-scale projects has been sought over the past 30 years by many professional and community groups. From 1977 until 2007 she taught first at the Armidale CAE and later the University of New England. As Head of the Department of Aboriginal and Multicultural Studies, Professor, Director of the Centre for Research in Aboriginal and Multicultural Studies, and Associate Dean (Research) Anne-Katrin has actively sought consumer direction and recognition of practitioner expertise in the development of programs and courses in the tertiary sector—courses such as the Graduate Diploma in Aboriginal Education, the Associate Diploma in Aboriginal Studies, the Diploma in Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing as well as the Pre-Orientation Program (POP), a tertiary entrance program for Aboriginal students. Since 1976 Anne-Katrin has had ongoing contact through her research, external teaching, residential schools as well as training and research workshops with remote area health professionals including nurses, Aboriginal Health Workers and other educators. Anne-Katrin retired from the university in 2007 but continues her work with communities in south-western Queensland.

**Toni Dowd** comes from the Hunter Valley in New South Wales. She is a Remote Area Nurse who has received national/international academic awards such as a Kellogg Nursing Scholarship (1983–85) and a Public Health Training and Development Award from the National Health and Medical Research Council (1988–92). She was elected a Fellow of the Royal College of Nursing Australia (RCNA) in 1985 and served on the executive of the Council of Remote Area Nurses of Australia (CRANA) from 1985 to 2005. Toni was invited by the Australian Health Minister’s Advisory Council (AHMAC) Working Party to convene the Remote Area Nurse Working Group, to review the *Roles and Interrelationships of Nurses, Indigenous Health Workers and Doctors in Remote Australia*. Her expertise has been sought by both RCNA and CRANA to review...
research submissions, position statements and policy direction. She has made numerous submissions to State and Federal governments that have informed strategic direction in relation to Indigenous health/human rights, rural/remote area health, nursing education, Remote Area nurse and Aboriginal Health Worker roles/education and practice legislation. Toni has been responsible for cross-cultural education and facilitator training since 1994.

**Ena Chong** was born in the Atherton Tablelands in far North Queensland. She is a member of the Jittabal nation, commonly known as the ‘Rainforest People’. Her childhood was spent in the Millaa Millaa district and the area of Innot Hot Springs on the Great Western Highway. Ena and her husband moved to Ipswich where they raised six children. Ena worked for the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services in Ipswich and Brisbane for a period of 20 years. In this capacity she has supported many community initiatives, for example, the Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Forum, community-initiated health reviews and prison visiting programs. Ena has faced issues related to cross-cultural understanding for many years by conducting in-services on Aboriginal perspectives for police and medical officers. Over the past 15 years she has been involved in many cross-cultural education workshops as part of the Binaŋ Goonj Team. Ena retired from community-controlled health in 2007.

**Lynette Nixon** is a Gunggari woman who was born in south-western Queensland. After working on properties throughout the area, she raised seven children. Over the past 30 years Lynette has been involved in community development through the Mitchell Aboriginal Housing Company, the local Aboriginal education committee, women’s health groups and the Nalingu committee. This committee has negotiated the return of the former Aboriginal reserves to the Mitchell Aboriginal community and is currently developing this land for cultural and recreational purposes. Lynette studied at the University of New England, where she completed the Associate Diploma in Aboriginal Studies. She has worked as a full-time researcher for the Nalingu Aboriginal Corporation as well as on the evaluation of the Queensland Aboriginal Health Program and a number of ARC grants. Most recently she has been recording the stories and language of the Gunggari people, who were taken away from their country after the turn of the twentieth century. Over the past 15 years she has been involved in many cross-cultural education workshops as part of the Binaŋ Goonj Team. Lynette is now retired and living in Mitchell. She continues her involvement with Nalingu as well as any land issues concerning the Gunggari people.

**Roy Gray** is an elder of the Yidinji Gimuy Clan and a descendant of the Dabah family who reside at Yarrabah in northern Queensland. He is an authority on oral history and languages in this area, and is the archivist of the Menmuny Museum. Over the past 15 years, as a member of the Binaŋ Goonj Team, Roy has found it satisfying to help facilitate cross-cultural workshops because he has gained much understanding about cultural differences. His qualifications in solution-oriented counselling and Ericksonian therapy influence his desire to create respectful, practical, relevant learning solutions in helping Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to ‘hear’ each other, and ensure that Aboriginal people enjoy equality in Australian society.
**Sally Johnson** has been a Remote Area Nurse in Australia for over 25 years. She is nationally recognised as a leader in Primary Health Care and cultural safety. She worked on Nguiu, Normanton, Yarrabah and came out of the bush to help write the Cairns Health Worker Diploma Course. In Alice Springs Sally helped to develop and deliver a course built on the principles of Binaŋ Goonj, which takes health professionals on a journey through which they discover more about themselves, and the theory of power against the background of Aboriginal experience. Sally was a foundation member of the Council of Remote Area Nurses of Australia (CRANA), of which she was president for some years. She managed the CRANA Locum Relief Support Project in northern Queensland, was a co-researcher in the Remote Area Nurse Competency Project, curriculum writer for the Remote Health Practice Program at the Centre for Remote Health in Alice Springs, and represented CRANA on many working parties and projects. A Binaŋ Goonj facilitator for many years, Sally was recognised for her contribution to Aboriginal health and her dedication to remote area nursing when she was made a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) in 1995.
Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the 100 or so nurses, doctors and Aboriginal people who originally guided this project by responding to our initial survey in 1991 to identify issues and concerns they experienced in Aboriginal health, by taking part in face-to-face in-servicing to test the usefulness of concepts and orientations, and by initially reviewing the first edition of *Binaŋ Goonj*.

The then Commonwealth Department of Community Services and Health through its Rural Health Support Education and Training (RHSET) Program in 1991 and again in 1993–94 provided funding for this project.

In 2006 we produced the second edition of *Binaŋ Goonj*—much had happened in the 15 years since *Binaŋ Goonj* was first conceived. Over those years, we learned a great deal from the many groups of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people with whom we have worked throughout Australia. The policies and practices in Aboriginal health also changed considerably over that time. When we came together to prepare the second edition of *Binaŋ Goonj* our friend Mary Martin was unable to join us. We would, however, like to acknowledge her sustained commitment to *Binaŋ Goonj* and her dedication to improving Aboriginal health throughout Australia.

This, the third edition of *Binaŋ Goonj*, has also been enriched by contributions from Remote Area Nurses, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal workshop participants as well as Aboriginal local organisations in south-west and northern Queensland.

Elsevier Australia and the authors would like to extend their sincere thanks to the following reviewers for their valuable feedback on the third edition manuscript: Juli Coffin, Combined Universities Centre for Rural Health; Marlene Drysdale, Monash University; Anton Isaacs, Monash University.

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Case Study — Compliance or control; Case Study — The policy is ...; Fig 5.3; Fig 5.4; Fig 6.1; Case Study — Nurse on tap not on top; Case Study — We did it our way; Case Study — The AHW—she gave permission for me to be in the community and practise; Case Study — Shattered dreams; Case Study — Diminished and demeaned; Case Study — Internal disempowerment; Case Study — Finding common ground; Case Study — External disempowerment; Case Study — We are taking charge; Case Study — Our past is our future.
CHAPTER 1

Background to Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal interactions in Australia

Objectives
After working through this chapter you should have an understanding of:

- European scientific and intellectual beliefs which influenced the evaluations of different cultures
- the terms and concepts necessary to study culture contact and culture conflict within the processes of colonisation
- the history of colonisation in Australia and its aftermath
- the development of government policies towards Aboriginal people from first ‘settlement’ to the present
- some of the legacies left in Australian society today by the policies and practices of the past.

To this end, the chapter is divided into two sections: Part A, Colonisation in Australia, and Part B, Government policies.

PART A: COLONISATION IN AUSTRALIA

Introduction
This chapter provides a broad overview of the history of colonisation in Australia and its aftermath. It sets out the background to the interaction between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Australian society today and a chronological guide to government policies. It is essential that we begin here in order to explore why Australian history developed the way it did and why, even today, Australian society finds it difficult to deal with its roots. We need to remember too that this history has influenced, and continues to influence, all Australians—Indigenous and non-Indigenous, and that it has left us with a legacy of far-reaching social and emotional dis-ease. To understand the history of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal interaction in Australia, we need some tools, such as an understanding of culture and culture change.
What is culture?
Hunt and Colander (1984, pp 43–4) provide a neat summary of the many and varied definitions of culture, by pointing out that culture includes the totality of a group’s behaviours, values and beliefs, as well as its art, language, tools, world view, symbols, in fact ‘a blue print for all human behaviour’ which one generation teaches the next.

Similarly other writers, such as Matsumoto and Juang (2004), believe that culture is a dynamic concept which identifies systems of rules, beliefs, attitudes, values and behaviours, shared by a group, taught across generations, relatively stable but capable of change across time. Schein (2004, p 17) focuses on the role of culture in problem solving and states:

The culture of a group can … be defined as a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solves its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.

As Schaller and Crandall (2004) point out, if you asked a hundred people what culture is, you would get a hundred different answers. Therefore, ‘cultures must not be assumed to be uniformly shared among some aggregate of people. Everyone does not know the same things …’ (Irvine 2002, p 9).

However, most writers would agree that the dynamic nature of culture is not only influenced by the individuals who are members of the cultural group, but is also subject to environmental influences. We will take this approach in our analysis of colonisation in Australia.

Our definition of culture is based on an ecological approach, which helps us to understand how environments influence cultural change and adaptation. Let’s start with the fact that all cultures are learned. Such learning takes place throughout life—people gain an understanding of the world and, in the first instance, learn values, beliefs and traditions from their families. Obviously these values, beliefs and traditions don’t exist in a vacuum; they are influenced by the class and ethnic group to which people belong. They are an essential part of the styles of living that guide action. They influence how people think, act, interact, are motivated and make decisions. Overarching these cultural values are the environments in which they are enacted. By ‘environments’ we mean more than the physical environment—how people think and act is very much influenced by the economic, political, social and historical environments in which they and their group(s) interact and have lived. This is a key to understanding culture and how it changes—that is, to accept that human beings, their social groups and their social, economic, political, historical and physical environments, are inseparably linked. The interaction of culture, environments and individuals is presented diagrammatically in Figure 1.1. Note that there is a feedback loop, which suggests that we respond to, initiate and adapt to change in our environments and vice versa.

Such an approach to ‘culture’ is not without its critics. Some Aboriginal people maintain that the cornerstones of their culture are lore, law, language and land, which form the basis of their identity.

Activity
How would you define culture?

Culture, for us, then, is more than ‘a people’s way of life’. Culture tells us what is pretty and what is ugly, what is right and what is wrong. Culture influences our preferred way of thinking, behaving and making decisions. Most importantly, culture is living, breathing, changing—it is never static. Because of this, it is important to understand the forces that lead to change and adaptation.
CHAPTER 1 • BACKGROUND TO ABORIGINAL/NON-ABORIGINAL INTERACTIONS IN AUSTRALIA

Adaptation

The process of adaptation is important. It is based on problem solving, steeped in creativity, and characterises the process of coping when environments—physical, economic, political, historical and social—change. Because the process is dynamic, because it is influenced by perceptions, needs or perceived needs, wants and wishes, it is not easy or smooth. As Sahlins (1968, p 369) pointed out many years ago:

To adapt … is not to do perfectly from some objective standpoint: it is to do as well as possible under the circumstances, which may not turn out very well at all.

If we consider colonisation in Australia within this framework, we begin to see some of the forces at work.

Over the past 40,000-plus years, Aboriginal people clearly adapted to their environments in Australia. This adaptation proved wholly satisfactory and the people developed unique social, cultural, religious and economic ways of life.

In 1788 Australia was ‘discovered’—or should we say invaded and colonised—by Europeans. They too had developed unique social, cultural, religious and economic ways of life based on centuries of adaptation in Europe. But adaptation in the two societies had taken different forms and, alien and inexplicable to one another, the two met head on.

**Culture clash**, **culture conflict** and **culture shock** resulted. Ultimately, the ‘pushier’ culture, with greater numbers and more deadly weapons, won out—Australia was colonised by the European invaders.

Let us briefly step aside and consider what these terms mean.

### Definitions

**Culture Clash**

McConnochie (1973) points out that two important factors will determine whether or not cultures clash: whether or not people recognise each other as human beings, and whether or not people share, or believe they share, similar values and beliefs.

So, when people from different cultures ‘look alike’ and seem to ‘be alike’, culture clash is less likely to occur than when people from different cultures ‘look different’ and seem to ‘be different’. Human beings find it difficult to tolerate difference; they...
are generally suspicious of ‘strangers’ and apt to react to such strangers on the basis of ethnocentrism and stereotypes, or over-generalisations. Our own group, or Us, becomes the in-group; and strangers, or Them, become the out-group. Let us spend a little time sorting out concepts such as ethnocentrism, stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination.

ETHNOCENTRISM

We found Matsumoto and Juang’s (2004, p 63) definition of ethnocentrism useful. They define:

… ethnocentrism as the tendency to view the world through one’s own cultural filters … it follows that just about everyone in the world is ethnocentric. That is, everyone learns a certain way of behaving, and in doing so learns a certain way of perceiving and interpreting the behavior of others. This way of perceiving and making interpretations of others is a normal consequence of growing up in a society. In this sense, ethnocentrism per se is neither bad nor good; it merely reflects the state of affairs—that we all have our cultural filters on when we perceive others.

The problem is that the ‘other’ becomes less good, or dangerous, or strange. ‘They’ become ‘the other’ to ‘Us’. A stranger in a small town is ‘other’, a person from another country is foreigner or ‘other’, a poor person is the ‘other’ to the privileged and vice versa. ‘Otherness’ may also be assigned to a whole range of human characteristics – gender and sexual orientation, religion or spiritual belief, ethnic origin or migrant experience, age or generation, and disability.

STEREOTYPES

Stereotypes are overgeneralisations (see Allport 1982). They, too, are part of human life and thinking because people are encouraged from an early age to categorise the things around them. For example, we categorise an object as ‘table’—whether it has four legs or one leg makes no difference. Consequently, overgeneralisations always deprive the ‘object’ of individuality. As a result, when stereotypes are applied to people, we develop ‘mindsets’ (whether these are positive or negative) which deny individual talents and abilities, e.g. all southern Europeans are hot blooded.

PREJUDICES OR PREJUDGEMENTS

These are the positive or negative attitudes people develop around the stereotypes they have about the ‘other’. Prejudices are based on half-truths, myths, rumours and overgeneralisations in which we invest a good deal of our emotions. As a result, prejudices become quite resistant to change. Prejudices in their turn can lead to discrimination.

DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination is the acting out of prejudice, the active speaking or acting against those who are different from ‘us’. But discrimination can also take the form of providing or not providing a service to an individual or family because we assume we ‘know’ what’s best for them. So discrimination can take the form of acts of commission as well as omission.

CULTURE CONFLICT

Cultures in conflict find it difficult to understand each other and consequently difficult to adapt to one another. If people do not share language, similar lifestyles and expectations, are not committed to similar goals and motivated by mutually understandable ambitions, do not make decisions on the basis of similar principles and philosophies, then culture conflict will occur. When one cultural group has power over another it may impose its systems and organisations, even to the extent of enforcing its beliefs and values on the less powerful group by violence or legislative sanctions.
CHAPTER 1 • BACKGROUND TO ABORIGINAL/NON-ABORIGINAL INTERACTIONS IN AUSTRALIA

CULTURE SHOCK
Any individual who has ever travelled, lived or worked with another cultural group has experienced some measure of culture shock. It is that feeling of uneasiness, anxiety and stress that arises when suddenly all our familiar cues, language, interpersonal relationships, tastes and actions appear to be out of place, suspect or even inappropriate, and we must reassess our behaviour in the light of foreign expectations.

When culture clash and culture conflict involve groups with unequal power, the less powerful, as individuals and as a group, experience the anxiety associated with culture shock. Subordinate status ensures that its members lose control over the process of adaptation, and their reality becomes defined by the oppressor.

Our framework for analysing the colonisation of Australia needs to incorporate the processes of culture clash and the inevitable ramifications of culture conflict and culture shock. It can do this if we remember two things.

Aboriginal people, like Europeans, have always had to adapt to other groups sharing their environments. In both cases they shared with groups fairly similar to themselves. Although there were many different Aboriginal cultures and languages in Australia BC (‘Before Cook’, as Oodgeroo used to say), Aboriginal nations shared some fundamental principles (see Berndt & Berndt 1988): a spiritual association with their land; a social commitment to kin; and a religious affiliation with the Dreaming from which they derived their values, norms and social-emotional and spiritual wellbeing. The economy was based on hunting and gathering, and although they have been described as ‘nomadic’, they actually followed a very structured/seasonal migration within their territory to make use of the resources it provided. Extremely sophisticated kinship structures and rules governed interpersonal behaviour, marriage and trade, while extraordinarily rich forms of art, dance and music enhanced their lives. Equally importantly, contact, and at times conflict, between nations was governed by strict rules of engagement and never led to land alienation.

When the colonists arrived, Aboriginal societies suddenly had to accommodate a group with a very different world view, economy and social structure. European society, on the other hand, did not have to adapt to traditional Aboriginal Australia; it simply took over. Consequently, the onus fell on the traditional owners, the subjugated, to ‘fit in’, to find a new niche in their own country. This niche was, and still is, largely defined by the more powerful non-Aboriginal majority.

Terra nullius
The process of colonisation began with the ‘discovery’ of Australia by Captain Cook, who claimed the land for the Crown as ‘uninhabited’. The classification of Australia as ‘terra nullius’—an empty continent—was based on extreme ethnocentrism combined with scientific racism, incorporated into the British and European legal codes. Australia was named ‘empty’ because Aboriginal people ‘failed’, in the invaders’ eyes, to use the land, to display those features then assumed to be the mark of ‘civilisation’—use of agriculture, settlement in towns or cities, government by chiefs, kings and/or parliaments. The invaders’ perception of ‘civilisation’ and ‘settlement/occupancy’ were clearly guided by political philosophers of the time. Thus de Vattel (1758) wrote that:

Of all the arts, tillage or agriculture is without doubt the most necessary and most useful. It is the chief source from which the state is nourished, cultivation of the soil increases greatly its produce, it constitutes the surest resource and the most substantial find of wealth and commerce …

… it is the justification, of the rights of ‘Property’ and ‘Ownership’ …

… when, therefore a nation finds a country uninhabited and without an owner, it may lawfully take possession of it …
... when the Nations of Europe, which are too confined at home, come upon lands which the savages have no special need of and are making no present and continuous use of, they may lawfully take possession of and establish colonies in them.

(de Vattel 1758, quoted in Wright B 1986 Aboriginal/Settler Relations)

Such concepts were also enshrined in the writings of the English economist Locke, who argued that land ownership was dependent on working the land. Land that was not cultivated was consequently empty, common land that could be taken by those who would cultivate it—other lands, annexed through colonisation, could be held by the Crown to be sold or leased to those who wanted to cultivate it later (Miller 1985).

As a result, two principles governed all future Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal interactions. The first was that Australia was considered an empty continent; the country was discovered, annexed and settled—Aboriginal people were not even accorded the status of ‘conquered people’ (Gumbert 1984). Consequently, the British government did not feel obliged to negotiate a treaty, unlike any other European colonial situation since the 1600s. The second was that, when Cook ‘claimed’ Australia, the whole of the continent became Crown Land. Both principles proved to have far-reaching consequences for the position of Aboriginal people in the country AC (After Cook).

**Consider**

Before we go on, stop for a minute and consider:

After reading about the basis on which Australia was declared ‘empty’, what does that tell you about Europeans’ perceptions and evaluations of different cultures?

They had no understanding of, but felt they had a right to evaluate, to measure, other cultures against their own. (We will pursue this theme and its roots later.) Importantly, this ‘habit’, established in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, persists—we continue to evaluate ‘others’ in terms of our own frame of reference. It is a common yet destructive habit, and shows little understanding of the intricacies and complexities of the term ‘culture’.

The process of colonisation in Australia was unique only because of the annexation of Australia as an ‘unoccupied continent’. In all other aspects, colonisation in Australia followed the patterns established in all other parts of the world. We will discuss how these were manifested in Australia next.

**Cultural relativism**

All cultures are learned and shared products of how groups come to terms with their environments, their needs, wants, aspirations, hopes and fears. A people’s culture is satisfying, appropriate and proper for them—others may follow different traditions, emphasise different values, because they have different needs and wants. Consequently, while a culture is right and proper for those who follow its traditions, it may not be appropriate for others, better than others, or the only way to conceptualise the world. Those who wish to work with culturally different groups must therefore support a position of **cultural relativism**—that is, an acceptance that different cultures represent the legitimate adaptation of different peoples to various historical, natural, socio-economic and political environments. This does not mean that we should abandon our own traditions or philosophies. It does mean that we **suspend judgement** about those things that we do not understand, that we make a conscious effort to become **sceptical** of rash evaluation of what is ‘good’ and ‘bad’ for others, and that we **constantly question** our own predisposition to seek security in those things that we feel we ‘know’ about other groups. Fundamental
to this process is identifying the cultural groups to which we belong—societies are not homogeneous; they are composed of many groups, which adhere to differing values and beliefs. What are our values and beliefs?

**Principles underlying colonisation in Australia**

The four keystones of colonialism in Australia, as anywhere else in the world since the eighteenth century, include:

- basic ethnocentrism and xenophobia
- the ‘scientific’/intellectual climate of the times
- the Protestant ethic and industrialisation
- cultural violence.

We will apply these to the Australian situation as some of the variables that have influenced Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal interactions, which form the historical past on which our present is based.

**Basic ethnocentrism and xenophobia**

Previously we have argued that all groups are ethnocentric to some extent.

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Unfortunately ethnocentrism may lead to *xenophobia*—a morbid fear of foreigners or, indeed, anything perceived as *strange* and *different*.

When Cook first visited Australia he believed that the Aboriginal people he saw were far happier than people in Europe because they did not have or indeed seem to want the trappings of European civilisation. Instead, he noted that ‘[t]hey live in a Tranquility which is not disturbed by the Inequality of Condition … ’ (Cook, in Beaglehole 1955, p 399).

This now famous quotation from his journal reflects Cook’s philosophy of the ‘Noble Savage’, which, arising out of the Enlightenment, reflected ‘a sympathy and respect for primitivism which extended from the classical writers to the more recent accounts of the North American Indians’ (Williams 1985, p 43). While these descriptions of Aboriginal people appear favourable, they are nevertheless ethnocentric in that the ‘primitive’, the ‘Noble Savage’, is described as living in a utopian, elementary state of development. The stereotypes of tranquillity, simplicity and equality, however, do not persist for long.

As colonialism spread, the imagery reverted back to Dampier’s famous description of Aboriginal people as ‘the miserablest People in the World’ (cited in Williams 1985, p 35). By 1846, they were thought to be at the lowest rung of evolution, without civilisation, clothing, knowledge of housing or agriculture, eager to eat grubs, snakes and carrion (Woolmington 1973, p 16).

Similar statements were made by all sections of colonial society—see the works of Evans et al 1988, Lippmann 1999, Reynolds 1989 and Moses 2004 for excellent examples. Summarising the writings of the mid-1870s, Moses (2004, pp 5–6) points out that Aboriginal people were described as:

‘ineradicably savage’ … the male possessed the deportment ‘of a sapient monkey imitating the gait and manner of a do-nothing white dandy’ as well as suffering from a ‘low physiognomy’ that rendered him lazy and useless. ‘It is their fate to be abolished; and they are already vanishing’, … The ‘aboriginal Australian blacks … were so extraordinarily backward a race as to help them to hold their own’. 
Obviously, perceptions of Aboriginal people had changed drastically since the image of the Noble Savage found in the journals of Cook and others. Why? Perhaps because colonisation and culture contact had brought home the realities of culture clash and culture conflict, of power and powerlessness, as well as the need to rationalise land alienation and exploitation.

This kind of ethnocentrism was not only extended to Aboriginal people. Consider the xenophobia inherent in the Boomerang’s (1891) editorials. (The Boomerang was a Queensland daily newspaper.) For example, the paper urged all good Queenslanders not to give way to the influences of Italians (considered to be at a lower level of human development) and their evil, cheap labour (see Evans et al 1988).

Similar material was published about the Chinese by newspapers, clergymen and so-called ‘scientists’. These writers maintained that:

[The Chinese] physiognomy indicates no beam of intelligence or play of fancy but rather stolid stoicism … They have been described as ‘materialism put in action’ being sceptical and indifferent to everything that concerns the moral side of man and destitute of religious feelings and belief …

(quoted in Evans et al 1988, p 244)

Colonial society, then, was intolerant of all ‘others’, including many poor European immigrants, and convicts. From these short quotes it is obvious, however, that although ethnocentrism and xenophobia devalued those who were not ‘white’ Anglo-Saxon, the imagery varied between different groups. Italians and Chinese were clearly considered a real economic threat. Aboriginal people, on the other hand, were of such a ‘low species’ that they were believed to belong to the lowest rung of humanity.

Partly this kind of reasoning arose from and was supported by the scientific ‘research’ of the time.

‘Scientific’/intellectual climate

As long as people have lived in groups and met strangers who looked different from them, they speculated about the reasons for such differences in appearances. The ancient Greeks hypothesised that differences in appearance were due to climatic variations. During the 1700s theorising about such differences began to be couched in full-scale ‘scientific’ speculation about the nature of humanness. In line with physical scientists, philosophers and social scientists attempted to account for progress, development and cultural differences. At the same time, theologians as well as scientists attempted to explain evolution and change. Hundreds of research papers were published by Europeans speculating about the physical, cultural and spiritual qualities of non-Europeans.

This search reached fever pitch in the mid-1800s through the impact of Social Darwinism, a bastardisation of Darwin’s theory of evolution applied to physical, cultural and intellectual evolution. As writers such as Miller (1985) and Reynolds (1989) explain, much of this research was based on the concept of The Great Chain of Being by which all life was arranged in a hierarchy, from the simplest to the most complex—that is, ‘man’. In turn, human beings were arranged in a similar hierarchy, from the most ‘primitive’ to the most ‘civilised’.

Such research has been termed scientific racism. As McConnochie et al (1988, p 14) point out, it is based on three premises:

1 That comparative morphology and anatomy provide a valid technique for identifying real and discrete biological entities called ‘races’.
2 That the racial differences identified caused individual differences in ability and temperament between groups which, in turn, caused cultural differences.
3 That RACE was the driving force of history, providing an explanation for the rise and fall of cultures and civilizations, and particularly, that the concept of race provided an explanation for the dominance of the white races during the nineteenth century.

Consequently we need to sort out what we mean by racism and scientific racism.
DEFINITIONS

Like McConnochie et al (1988), Cashmore and Troya (1983, p 35) maintain that racism is:

The doctrine that the world is divisible into categories based on physical differences [most important of which are/were skin colour] which can be transmitted genetically. Invariably, this leads to the conception that the categories are ordered hierarchically so that some elements of the world’s population are superior to others.

This doctrine developed from the ‘scientific’ research which set out to establish the superiority of ‘whites’ over all other skin colours, cultures, religions, family organisations, art, music and general ‘development’.

Scientific racism, then, is the research carried out by scientists into the physical, social, intellectual and moral qualities of culturally different people where such differences are equated with inherent, biological inferiority, when compared to qualities associated with the scientists’ own in-group. Most frequently this in-group has been Western European.

Such ‘scientific’ research became the basis of and justification for a number of stereotypes about Aboriginal people, which, we would argue, are still being perpetuated. Some of these stereotypes included the notion that Aboriginal people were locked into a static Stone Age culture and environment; that they reacted/survived by instinct rather than by use of intellect; that they were ancient, archaic survivors of the ‘missing link’; that they had only a rudimentary religion, history and government; and that, overall, they were childlike and consequently unpredictable. These stereotypes are fully explored in the work of Chase and von Sturmer (1973), McGrath (1995), Lippmann (1999), Broome (2002) and Moses (2004).

Scientific racism was reflected in the ‘non-scientific’ statements of the day. As Woolmington (1973, p 14) points out, as early as 1789, the Aboriginal nature was blamed for the fact that the early settlers had failed to implement Governor Phillip’s orders to ‘conciliate their affections’.

Thus, John Harper, who was to investigate the possibilities for establishing a mission around Batemans Bay, wrote that the Aboriginal people in the area were ‘degraded … almost to the level of brutes … [and] in a state of moral unfitness’ (Woolmington 1973, p 18)

The attitudes and values, misconceptions and stereotypes formed about Aboriginal people at that time on the basis of ‘scientific thought’ still persist today and are still used to justify the position of Aboriginal people in our society.

Let’s have a brief look at a ‘travel journal’ written in 1889 by an ‘anthropologist’ called Carl Lumholtz. This book, entitled Among Cannibals, describes Lumholtz’s four years of travel in Queensland and his experiences among Aboriginal people in the west and north of that State. Lumholtz portrays Aboriginal people as the lowest of the human race (p 113), lazy (p 162), and as having no traditions or historical sense (p 223). He claims that even the most ‘civilised’ cannot be trusted (p 294), know no religion (p 366) and lack any faculty of artistic appreciation (p 367). This he considers is clearly linked to their small skulls and low intellectual development (p 282), their childlike tendencies (p 211) and their treachery (p 285). In short, Lumholtz’s book is a supreme example of the scientific racism that characterised the nineteenth century. Why do we hark back to that book here? Because it was republished in 1979, and its blurb claims that it is a valuable account of ‘all aspects of Aboriginal culture and Australian wildlife’.

Similarly, consider some of the comments made in the press in 1984 by highly respected leaders of our community when the Federal Government was considering introducing national land rights legislation. Below is an article that appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald.
Extract

Land rights: a step back to paganism

By PAUL KELLY and PATRICK WALTERS in Canberra

Aboriginal land rights threaten to wipe out the Australian mining industry, represent a spiritualism that is anti-Christian and will create a bitter backlash from the wider community, according to the executive director of Western Mining Corporation, Mr Hugh Morgan.

In a speech yesterday to the Australian Mining Industry Council here, Mr Morgan launched the most far-ranging attack on the land rights concept by accusing the Federal Government of supporting Aboriginal sovereignty over land and setting aside all constitutional prerogatives to the contrary.

Referring to the land rights movement, he said that the mining industry was being attacked on religious grounds by an anti-Christian doctrine when its own Christian basis had been established in St Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians.

‘For a Christian Aborigine, land rights or the proposed Heritage Protection Act is a symbolic step back to the world of paganism, superstition, fear and darkness,’ Mr Morgan said.

He drew the battle lines by warning that the mining industry spoke not just for itself but for many Australians of European, Aboriginal and Asian descent who would not go in the direction set by the Government.

‘The Australian people would be appalled if the consequences of Crown ownership of minerals for everybody else, but Aboriginal control and hence de facto ownership of minerals on Aboriginal land, were carefully and simply explained to them,’ he said.

‘If the doctrines and principles underlying the Northern Territory legislation are applied to the rest of the Commonwealth, then there will be no exploration activity in this country, and ultimately, no Australian mining industry.

‘We are entirely legitimate in complete obduracy when such fundamental issues are at stake,’ he said, adding that land rights was an area where compromise was impossible.

‘Either the Crown owns the minerals or it does not. If it does not then those who do own or control minerals have, in particular places, very great potential financial, even political advantages when compared with the rest of the Australian community.

‘Belonging to that particular group of people will become a major ambition for those not belonging.

Aboriginality was now virtually ‘a matter of self-definition’. But, because such financial advantage was going to be bestowed upon people by virtue of descent, self-definition would become impossible and a register of Aborigines would be needed with all of the racial classifications that implied.

‘I do not think that either governments or commentators have realised the full implications of present policies,’ Mr Morgan said.

‘If these creeds are given legislative support, if the legislation uses these beliefs as justifying argument, then it will be very difficult to deny either legitimacy or financial support for the whole package of tribal belief, custom and practice.

‘On what grounds can a minister or a parliament say, on the one hand, we respect, recognise and give legal support to the spiritual claims you have to a very substantial portion of this country, but on the other hand we cannot sanction infanticide, cannibalism and the cruel initiation rites which you regard either as customary or as a matter of religious obligation …

‘It is relevant there to note that vengeance killing, a religious duty, exacted a far greater toll on the Aboriginal population in the nineteenth century than any depredations by the Europeans.

‘Charges of genocide of the Aborigines by our nineteenth century forebears, whether they be made by ministers or by land rights activists, are nonsense.’
Mr Morgan said that Aborigines exacted a fearful toll on each other—a greater toll in proportion of their number than the casualties sustained by the European armies at the battle of the Somme in 1916.

‘Nineteenth century accounts of clashes between Europeans and Aborigines, particularly in North Queensland, are quite explicit concerning the partiality of the Aborigines for the particular flavour of the Chinese, who were killed and eaten in large numbers.’

Defending the mining industry, Mr Morgan quoted St Paul saying, ‘Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called.’

He said that St Paul was a tent maker and knew in his own time that mining was a key factor in the prosperity and defence of the Roman Empire.

‘Those who attack us as materialist, unspiritual, are themselves heretical in their religious philosophy. They are followers of Manichean doctrines which have always been condemned by the Christian church as heresy.’

Mr Morgan likened some ministerial statements on land rights with Manichean doctrines—founded by a third century Arabian preacher, Mani.

He drew the contrast with Christianity as a ‘religion which celebrates work and the physical world which is universal’.

**Land rights attack**

Mr Morgan’s comments signal the industry’s determination to fight the Government’s proposed legislation on both sacred sites and land rights and they ensure that these issues will return to a very high place on the political agenda.

Questioning the basis of sacred sites, Mr Morgan asked whether orebodies were sacred sites. He said the mining industry was being made a scapegoat since the orebody was usually found before the sacred site was declared.

He quoted the lines spoken by Ben Blakeny when the Queen opened the Sydney Opera House more than 10 years ago, which began with: ‘I am Bennelong. Two Hundred years ago, fires burned on this point … the fires of my people.’

Mr Morgan asked whether anybody could deny with confidence that the Opera House site would not be claimed as a sacred site.

Speaking to the same conference, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Mr Holding, said the campaign against land rights was being used by more extreme groups as part of a broader effort with racist overtones.

(Kelly P. Walters P 1984 Land rights: a step back to paganism, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 May, pp 1, 3)

Note how illogically Morgan links land rights with paganism, and cannibalism and mining with Christianity and progress; how he denies and dismisses the true history of colonisation; and how cleverly he supports ignorance and fear of Aboriginal rights.

**Activity**

Look at the newspapers today, check out the web, and analyse the kinds of statements made about Aboriginal people. Are similar arguments perpetuated in the twenty-first century?

But let’s not get too far off the point. What message did ‘scientific’ material of this kind put across and how did it support official and unofficial policy towards Aboriginal people?

Certainly the all-pervading message of ‘inferiority’ made it easy to justify alienation of land and colonial exploitation of Aboriginal labour. Both land and labour were important to
the colonisers and their commitment to ‘progress’ and ‘development’ born out of the period of industrialisation that dominated Europe in the nineteenth century.

The Protestant ethic and industrialisation

Again we need to recognise that extremely far-reaching changes in European value structure, economic and social organisation, and political structure made it almost impossible for Australia not to become a colonial possession.

From the mid-1700s and throughout the 1800s, Europe moved through enormous social, cultural and economic change. Societies that had a mainly rural economic and social base, governed by hereditary rulers, controlled by orthodox religion, became urban-based nation States reliant on industry, governed by parliaments and influenced by belief systems, which questioned orthodox dogma. Changing values stressed the importance of achievement, of materialism and wealth as indicators of God’s grace, where once piety, resignation to fate and acceptance of the established order had ruled the day. No longer was it a sin to reach beyond one’s station in life—progress, development and achievement were defined materialistically and the more one had (individually as well as nationally), the better one was. These rapidly changing States of Europe required resources in order to feed their nationalistic and industrial fervour. No continent escaped their militaristic and economic expansion.

Broome (2002) maintains that Aboriginal resistance to this new order was frequently interpreted as ‘laziness’ by those committed to the value of work as an expression of piety, and quotes a Moreton Bay missionary who described Aboriginal people as follows:

Among these evil dispossessions of the Aborigines I may mention an extreme sloth and laziness in everything, a habit of fickleness and double dealing … They are deceitful and cunning and prone to lying. They are given to extreme gluttony and if possible will sleep both day and night.

(Broome 2002, p 39)

Christie (1979) presents an interesting analysis of how these forces influenced the pattern of invasion in Australia. In Christie’s account, the struggle for land, the ‘scientific’ rationale to support such theft, and the cruelty of this time, all interact. He concentrates his analysis on Victoria and shows that:

- ‘Settlers’ deliberately moved into areas not yet ‘opened up’ for settlement by governments, to escape payment of fees and taxes.
- These ‘settlers’ were imbued with the beliefs and attitudes which insisted that Aboriginal people were akin to gorillas, smelly, treacherous, greedy and even lower in the scale of evolution than the African negro (pp 34–5).
- In order to hide their motives, groups wishing to move into ‘open’ country frequently and deliberately used so-called humanitarian motives—‘to help the Aboriginal people’—to hide their clear economic greed.
- Consequently, it became both profitable and philosophically acceptable to clear the land by shooting and poisoning the Indigenous owners.

It was the ‘best way’, wrote Black, ‘provided the conscience of the party was sufficiently seared to enable him to, without remorse, slaughter natives right and left’.

(Christie 1979, p 40)

Similarly, Stevens (1981), Yarwood and Knowling (1982), Lippmann (1999) and Broome (2002) point out that ‘scientific’ rationale, negative attitudes towards ‘primitives’ and religious arrogance were not the only factors underlying Australian colonisation. An equally strong motive was economic exploitation, particularly land/labour exploitation. Indeed, in his analysis of Aboriginal labour relations, Stevens (1981) demonstrates that the tie between ‘scientific’ rationale and economics created Aboriginal living conditions, which were akin to slavery.
This early contact set the framework for the present position of Aboriginal groups in Australian society. Resultant poverty, the vicious circle of dysfunctional adaptation and the miserably constrained ecological niche prescribed for Aboriginal groups by the dominant non-Aboriginal system sets the scene for what Galtung (1990) calls cultural violence.

**Cultural violence**

**DEFINITION**

By cultural violence we mean those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence—exemplified by our religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science... —that can be used to justify or legitimise direct or structural violence. (Galtung 1990, p 291)

European cultures were/are exemplified by a ‘hard’ religion (Galtung 1994)—one that demands complete commitment and is relatively intolerant of other belief systems. Their ideology was and continues to be shaped by the Protestant ethic and its emphasis on achievement and wealth, which continues to shape Australian society. Thus as late as 2006, Hugh Morgan believed that Australia, like the great city states of Northern Italy, should celebrate wealth and linked this value to the parables in the Bible.

I would like to see the word ‘rich’ recover its respectability. Margaret Thatcher once gave a sermon on the parable of the Good Samaritan in which she emphasised that the hero of the story was a businessman who was rich enough to pay for the hotel costs of the traveller (rescued by the Good Samaritan) who had been beaten and left for dead. (Morgan 2006)

Similarly, European sciences have been instrumental in raising racism to respectability by ‘proving’ that non-whites were inferior on the human ladder of development and evolution.

The process of colonisation certainly demonstrates the level of direct violence to which Aboriginal people were subjected—so far we have identified forcible dispossession supported by racist language, science and ideology. As a consequence, European culture(s) ‘preaches, teaches, admonishes, eggs on, and dulls us into seeing exploitation and/or repression as normal and natural, or into not seeing them (particularly exploitation) at all’ (Galtung 1990, p 295).

Galtung’s analysis becomes very real when we look at the process of colonisation in Australia in more detail.

**The process of colonisation**

The colonial ‘push’ took different forms in different States and occurred at different times—approaches towards the ‘Natives’ varied, but never the end result, which was dispossession. Such dispossession was firmly based on a belief in absolute superiority, and legal as well as philosophical justification which argued that:

given the Divine injunction to subdue the earth, the Indian [or Native] could not expect to remain forever in exclusive possession of the whole ... continent. (Reynolds 2003b, p 21)

As a result, Australia’s history is characterised by a long struggle for land, marked by up to thirty years of guerrilla warfare, massacres, retaliatory raids and open genocide.

To clarify the process of colonisation, we will follow Bodley (1975) and consider colonisation in terms of the uncontrolled frontier, establishment of government control, development of government control, and the aftermath of contact.
The uncontrolled frontier

We all know that Australia was fully occupied BC (Before Cook). We also know that Captain Cook ‘discovered’ the continent and took possession of it. Colonisation spread fairly rapidly after the turn of the nineteenth century, across New South Wales at least. Still, until the 1850s, Australia could be described as a ‘frontier’ situation in which British law was supposed to cover all subjects of the Queen (Aboriginal as well as non-Aboriginal people) but in which the law did not actually reach much beyond the major settlements. In some areas, such as Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, the frontier days lasted well into the 1900s.

This time was marked by local guerrilla warfare between settlers and Aboriginal people as well as by some accommodation between the two groups. A steady increase in the numbers of settlers, the areas ‘opened up’, and improved communications also led to the rapid dehumanisation of those Aboriginal groups closest to places of major British settlement.

Some historians talk about the influence of convicts and sheep (Yarwood & Knowling 1982, for example) and this is a good way of conceptualising some of the factors in Australia’s colonisation. However, we would maintain that the loss of the American colonies played a much greater part in ‘opening up’ Australia than a need to find a ‘home’ for British convicts. Perhaps the fact that Aboriginal groups first came into contact with the most dehumanised sections of European society—the convicts—did influence later contacts.

Thus Ward (1982), in his book *Australia Since the Coming of Man*, presents a vivid and enlightening picture of Australian colonial society, its general lawlessness (the activities of the Rum Corps, for example) and its brutality (floggings, hangings, systematic sexual exploitation of convict women):

> A more wicked, abandoned, and irreligious set of people have never been brought together in any part of the world … order and morality is not the wish of the inhabitants; it interferes with the private view and pursuits of individuals of various descriptions.
> (Governor Hunter 1798, in Ward 1982, p 63)

Yet Ward’s analysis, as well as that of most other historians, suggests that the real damage was done by ‘civilised’, arrogant, racist, free settlers rather than the convict element. This makes sense, particularly in view of the fact that the ‘real problems’ were related to land alienation and value conflict.

McConnochie’s (1973) model clarifies this. As we have pointed out, McConnochie maintains that the two most important factors that determine how negative colonialism/culture clash will be are: whether or not groups recognise each other as human beings, and whether or not groups share similar values. Yarwood and Knowling (1982) demonstrate that value consensus at initial contact was low—individualism, ‘achievement’, personal gain, ‘improvement’, ‘work’, values based on the Protestant ethic, found little reflection in the value structure of traditional Australia. Further, there was no ‘religious’ consensus. Europeans brought with them a ‘hard religion’ (Galtung 1994) that was intolerant of other philosophies, maintained rigid rules of right and wrong tied closely to the Protestant ethic, and functioned within hierarchies of established power and class. It seems to us that the people most likely to exhibit such values and also most likely to be in positions of power over Aboriginal people were not convicts, but squatters, farmers and traders (apart from the police, government officials and ministers of various religious groups). Ward (1982) suggests that the ‘squattocracy’ in Australia was drawn from the English middle class rather than the upper class. Perhaps it proved more ‘open’ in its exploitation than the ‘upper’ class because it was not steeped in the same tradition of ‘sensitivity’ or ‘humanism’. These were the people who took on ‘the white man’s burden’—that is, to uplift the poor savages, or to drive them off land that the settlers wanted, or to exploit their labour where possible.
Inevitably, then, the level of conflict between the traditional owners, who had suddenly become 'reduced to “want land” ’ (Reynolds 2003a, p 23), and the colonists was high. The literature is full of references to the ferocity with which small Aboriginal groups defended their country. Broome (2002) records many battles, such as those along the Darling River, which kept pastoralists and stock away, or the fierce Aboriginal campaign for the east coast of Van Diemen's Land; or, for example:

In South Australia the Milmenrura people of the Coorong region carried out an effective resistance in the early 1840s. They raided stations and settlements, often in groups of 300 warriors, firing pastures, dispersing and destroying stock. Several detachments of the military had to be sent against them. Similar fighting raged in the south Queensland region in the 1840s.

(Broome 2002, p 47)

Similarly the contributors to Perkins and Langton's (2008) First Australians, recorded Aboriginal freedom fighters in every state.

There is, then, no doubt that Aboriginal warfare played havoc with non-Aboriginal settlement. For example, in the Condamine, '[s]everal stations had been abandoned, twelve white men murdered, and a considerable number of cattle and sheep lost' (Skinner 1975, p 31). Similarly, Reynolds (1987, p 9) points out that ferocious warfare was carried out over extended periods of time and that from 1830, right through to the 1880s, farm workers and squatters in New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia were in constant dread of being attacked and killed.

Many writers, including Skinner (1975), Broome (2002) and Kinnane (2008) further argue that such guerrilla warfare did not cease until the formation and deployment of the Native Police, which was composed of Aboriginal troopers recruited from distant areas, commanded by white officers. Their job was to re-establish confidence among the settlers and, to that end, they ruthlessly pursued any group of Aboriginal people in the vicinity of any disturbance. Thus in the Fitzroy Region of Western Australia there:

… was one of the most horrific incidences of mass murder in the history of this state …

it was a ruthless campaign designed to inflict mass fatalities; men, women and children …

(Peterson, quoted in Kinnane 2008, p 244)

The numbers actually killed during such raids or massacres throughout Australia 'no one but their commander and themselves ever knew' (Skinner 1975, p 31). Broome (2002) adds that the war between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people was fairly evenly pitched, until, in addition to the Native Police, the introduction of the repeater rifle and Aboriginal decimation by disease took their toll.

Even today, the ‘frontier times’ are remembered and form a part of the people’s present folklore. Mrs Quinlan from Armidale, for example, recounts in her life story:

that was the time of the killing … They were killing all through the area. The worst was a fella called — … Suppose he had a lot of others to help as well. I lost one grandmother over the bluffs near Armidale. They killed a lot of our people—pushing them over the bluffs—Wollomombi, you know. Then the other grandmother, I lost on the Macleay on Pee Dee Creek. They used to herd them up and shoot them—go about shooting blacks like wallaby I suppose. They were only young women …

(Quinlan 1983, p 37)

Establishment of government control

After the period 1830–50 in south-eastern Australia, and much later in northern and western parts of the continent, settlement density and the extent of agricultural/herding exploitation increased. As Lippmann (1999) and McGrath (1995), among others, have pointed out,
government agents such as police, magistrates and the Native Police took over the task of keeping law and order. Early government policy of extending to Aboriginal people the privileges of British citizenship had been largely forgotten. The law now considered them wards of the State, unable to testify before the courts because they were not Christians. Further, neither the upholders of the law nor the general public showed much respect for or patience with Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people, they maintained, had given ample evidence of their treachery, laziness, mental inferiority and general barbarity. Therefore, in any conflict between Aboriginal people and Europeans, the law tended to favour Europeans.

Indeed, it seems that fewer Aboriginal people died through actual conflict of arms than because of the destruction of their livelihood (alienation of their land), undermining of their social organisation (dispersal of groups, capture of Aboriginal women, addiction to alcohol), and disintegration of their religious world view (activity of missionaries).

Mulvaney (1975) provides some excellent insights into the ecological upheavals caused by changes in land use due to non-Aboriginal settlement. He points out that:

To judge from numerous recollections of early European settlers, the advent of stock and unsystematic burning had drastic ecological effects ... Pastoral occupation upset the delicate balance of nature through over-grazing and the destruction of grasslands and forest which provided many edible seeds and roots and supported a rich fauna; erosion also followed. In Western Victoria, brush and useless timber grew thickly in areas of former open woodlands; even in 1900 it was possible to gallop a horse near Aboriginal art sites in the Grampian Mountains where today the brush is almost impassable; Major Mitchell recorded the same impression for the Sydney area a century earlier ... In arid areas, where erosion was so marked, another factor operated. After a few good seasons grazing on slowly regenerating native grasses, stock fouled and trampled shallow waterholes, and by destroying the surrounding vegetation, ensured their elimination through evaporation and erosion ...

(Mulvaney 1975, pp 58–60)

Such ecological changes caused havoc with Aboriginal food supplies. Further land alienation disrupted the social/spiritual structure of groups. Woolmington's (1973) analysis of archival records indicates the influence of alcohol, prostitution and disease on the fragmented groups, which sought some form of livelihood on the outskirts of non-Aboriginal settlement. The work of Evans et al (1988) records equally depressing facts. These authors demonstrate how, through the process of colonisation, Aboriginal people's social, economic, political and physical environment changed rapidly and drastically, while their participation in the new environment(s) was strictly defined and constrained by the dominant white society. As a result their new social, economic, natural and political environments became predominantly negative.

<table>
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<th>Consider</th>
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<tr>
<td>A whole people became the victims of social, economic and cultural trauma, and as a subordinate group they became subject to the colonisers’ definitions of themselves.</td>
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</table>

This pattern finds clear reflection in Aboriginal people's legal status in colonial society. Little (1973), one of the first to explore the legal status of Aboriginal people, maintains that they were never really admitted to the status of British subjects—despite the fact that there were a number of concerned humanitarians who advocated for Aboriginal rights throughout the nineteenth century (see Reynolds 1989). Instead, at various times they were accorded features of such subordinate statuses as 'conquered subjects,' 'wards,' 'hostile Aliens,' and 'persons unworthy of legal protection.' Indeed, Little (1973) argues, Aboriginal people were
most often confined to *slave status*—certainly throughout the nineteenth century. Reynolds (2000, pp 88–9) records that:

Many station owners—and other people who had Aboriginal servants—clearly believed that they owned rather than employed the blacks who worked for them. In 1885 a correspondent wrote to the Queenslander from Thargomindah describing the situation of Aboriginal servants in the south-west of the colony. They were employed in all the towns and on all the stations. Indeed it was hard to see how the stations could ‘be worked without their assistance’. They were ‘bound by no agreement’, but were ‘talked about ‘as my, or our niggers, and [were] not free to depart when they like[d]’. It was not considered etiquette to employ blacks ‘belonging’ to another station and when ‘boys’ or ‘girls’ ran away they were pursued, taken back and flogged.

Why did non-Aboriginal society react like this? Hartwig (1973), Evans et al (1973), McConnochie (1973), Reynolds (1982, 1987) and Lippmann (1991), to mention just a few, demonstrate that colonial Australia needed to rationalise and justify its actions—that is, dispossession of land and exploitation of labour. In the process, Aboriginal people throughout Australia became subject to *institutional racism*.

### DEFINITION

* Institutional racism * is manifest in the laws, norms and regulations that maintain dominance of one group over another. It is covert and relatively subtle; it originates in the operation of essential and respected forces in society and is consequently accepted. Because it originates within the society’s legal, political and economic system, is sanctioned by the power group in that society and at least tacitly accepted by the powerless, it receives very little public condemnation.  

(adapted from Carmichael & Hamilton 1967)

Why have these facts been ignored for so long? From a non-Aboriginal perspective, the kind of ‘scientific’ material produced by Lumholtz ([1889], 1979) and his contemporaries has helped non-Aboriginal Australians ignore Aboriginal people and their place and plight in Australian society. The history of dispossession has ensured that most non-Aborigines have shied away from clear analysis, while in the past the legal system has helped to subjugate Aboriginal people and to sanction their oppression. Equally importantly, historians, as Hartwig (1973) argues, displayed the same ‘mental block’ by consistently ignoring and minimising the place of Aboriginal people in history as well as the role of race relations in Australian society. Indeed it was not until the early 1970s that historians, such as Hartwig or Evans et al (1973), became seriously involved in the debate about Aboriginal issues and the reality of racism in Australian history.

It could be argued that such neglect bears all the marks of cultural violence—remember how many generations of Australian schoolchildren heard either nothing about Aboriginal people in their classes, or were presented only with the explorer Dampier’s comments that Aboriginal people are among the most brutal and primitive in the world. Hartwig (1973) also argued that such neglect reflected a cult of forgetfulness and disrespect.

Obviously, ‘forgetfulness’ and ‘disregard’ of Aboriginal people have been a feature of the Australian education and social, as well as legal and economic, systems for generations. Undoubtedly such ‘mental blocks’ have had their effect on our present attitudes and values. Indeed, reactivating the disregard and disrespect of past Australian histories, Windschuttle (2002) has argued that there were no atrocities associated with colonisation; that Aboriginal people never owned the country and that they were far too primitive to understand the concept of property ownership, to carry out warfare and to survive European settlement.
To understand these factors a little better, we will focus on Myrdal’s (1971) analysis of race relations. Myrdal argues that any interaction of minority and majority (or Indigenous and colonising cultures) is marked by the following aspects. Minority and majority act towards one another on the basis of distinct statuses. The inferior status of one (minority/Indigenous group), based on numerous factors (e.g. cognitive conflict, stereotyping, prejudice, history of contact), results in a standard of lower living and this ‘lower living’ reinforces inferior status. In this vicious circle, one state accommodates the other. The effect is cumulative. As one state occurs, other aspects of the circle are brought into play and these have repercussions on all other factors of interaction and adaptation. Change, Myrdal (1971) argues, frequently demands some readjustments, but these tend to reinforce the vicious circle rather than reverse its effects, particularly if the circle is maintained by institutional racism.

Consequently, in Australia, cultural, social and economic disruption led to ‘low living’ in Myrdal’s terms, which reinforced and supported disruption. In the process, two vicious circles were set up. One perpetuated Aboriginal poverty, the other consolidated negative attitudes towards the minority by means of the earned reputation theory. Diagrammatically we can represent this as two intertwining circles, as in Figure 1.2.

Activty

Return to Galtung’s (1990, p 291) definition of cultural violence:

By ‘cultural violence’ we mean those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence—exemplified by our religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science … —that can be used to justify or legitimise direct or structural violence.

Now reflect on the establishment of government control in colonial Australia and list those aspects of cultural violence inherent in colonial society that have demonstrably disadvantaged Aboriginal people.

Thus, while scientific racism provided initial justification for discrimination on the basis of earned reputation (that is, Aboriginal people are so low on the human scale that they really are little better than animals and deserve to be treated as such), as contact intensified, dispossession and disruption also intensified, and observation of the latter provided further evidence of Aboriginal non-humaness and further justification for discrimination. This discrimination then became embodied in the law, regulations about where Aboriginal people
could live, how long they could attend school, for how much they could sell their labour, and whether or not they were fit parents, capable adults and thinking decision makers. In this way, through the process of establishing government control in the colonial situation, 

*racism became institutionalised*—it was no longer an individually accepted phenomenon, but had become established within the system.

| Remember the definition of institutional racism given earlier. |

Following Galtung (1990), it is clear that Australian culture became one of violence towards Aboriginal people. Think about the following descriptions of Aboriginal people as colonisation and government control spread, and more and more groups were dispossessed of their country:

George Carrington defined these ‘tame blacks’ as those who:

Hang about stations and public houses, and the outskirts of towns, begging always, stealing when they get the chance … They learn to drink grog and smoke and become weak and lazy, content to live on the white man’s scraps, rather than exert themselves to get their own living …

The stereotype of the derelict Aborigine which developed, therefore was built upon such observations as these …

(Evans et al 1988, p 89)

Such stereotypes typified all Aboriginal people as:

a most idle thriftless lot … [who] will never settle to work with any regularity … They can never be made of much use to the settler … [They are] neither industrious nor trustworthy and will never become reliable servants …

(CH Allen, quoted in Evans et al 1988, p 90)

Here is an excellent example of victim blaming. Aboriginal people are/were forced off their country, lost their independence, saw their social and religious institutions under attack from all sides, at times turned to ‘anti-social’ non-Aboriginal pastimes and were then blamed for the state of affairs in which they found themselves. Again consider Galtung’s (1990, p 295) words: ‘[it] dulls us into seeing exploitation and/or repression as normal and natural, or into not seeing them (particularly exploitation) at all’.

As a result of widespread colonisation, Indigenous people became completely demoralised—and with demoralisation came exposure to and death from European introduced diseases, which wiped out whole groups and totally undermined others. Between 1870 and 1890 the Indigenous population decreased to such an extent that ‘scientific’, popular and government opinion considered it inevitable that they would die out.

**Consolidation of government control and aftermath of contact**

Lancaster-Jones (1970) presents an excellent analysis of the decimation that took place. Consider his statistical analysis of the Aboriginal population between 1788 and 1966: the estimated Aboriginal population of 300,000 in 1788 had fallen by between 50 and 90 per cent by 1947, depending on geographic area … Even given the fact that—’All figures except those of 1961 … involve considerable guesswork, are of uncertain reliability, and in some cases omit sections of the Aboriginal population’ (Lancaster-Jones 1970, p 5)—these are horrific statistics, particularly when we remember that Butlin (1983) estimates the population of Victoria and New South Wales alone to have comprised some 250,000 people BC, while Mulvaney (2002) has suggested that the Aboriginal population was about 750,000 at the time of first contact.
Lancaster-Jones’ (1970) and Rowse’s (2004) analyses indicate that by 1947 the population was once again on the ‘upsurge’, yet even then the estimated population sizes had recouped at most between 15 and 50 per cent of their original numbers. Different States reflect the decimation of colonial war and its aftermath at different times, depending on the years in which these processes occurred.

To salve public and private conscience, governments decided to protect Aboriginal people on reserves, where they could be housed and fed until their last remnants had disappeared. This was the beginning of the Protection Era, which Rowley (1978) calls the era of ‘Smoothing the dying pillow’. Numerous settlements, missions and reserves were set up—mainly on land which Europeans didn’t want—rations were handed out and the people’s lives were ordered and controlled by government or mission staff. A number of Acts were passed to ensure Aboriginal protection; they also ensured that Aboriginal people lost all vestiges of civil rights and became totally dependent on government/mission organisations.

Note that, although official policy changed from Protection/‘Smoothing the dying pillow’ to ‘Assimilation’ in the 1930s, missions and reserves were still being established until well into the 1940s. This period sees the expansion and solidification of institutional racism.

Before we analyse government policies in greater depth, let us summarise the materials we have discussed in relation to Aboriginal/European contact in Australia so far. Past cultural traditions and European attitudes, formed by the Industrial Revolution, basic ethnocentrism and the scientific traditions of the time, led to institutional racism and cultural violence, which characterised European reaction to Aboriginal people. A combination of basic racism and economic motivation led to the displacement of Aboriginal groups by means of force, the undermining of Aboriginal traditions through Christianity, the extermination of people by disease and war, the dislocation and dehumanisation of Aboriginal people through alcohol, disease, sexual abuse and economic exploitation. Diagrammatically we present this in Figure 1.3.

![Figure 1.3 The spiral of cultural violence](image-url)
CHAPTER 1  •  BACKGROUND TO ABORIGINAL/NON-ABORIGINAL INTERACTIONS IN AUSTRALIA

The land rights issue with which we battle today, which arouses such heated emotions—for as well as against—is with us now because hostilities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people have never been settled, because the resentment of 100 years of institutional racism and resultant cultural violence have never been addressed on a national/political level or on a cultural level—that is, within an Australian cultural perspective, which recognises its roots, not only in Europe but also in traditional Australia.

To really understand current issues, we must be aware of the many policies and Acts that have shared Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal interactions. In Part B we will look at these in detail.

PART B: GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Every Act imposed on Aboriginal people between the 1890s and the 1960s can be classified as an example of institutional racism embedded in cultural violence. Let’s take each of the major policy eras in turn. Remember that from 1788 to the 1890s there were no overarching policies but rather piecemeal, missionary-inspired approaches within a general climate of neglect and ‘elimination.’ This was followed by the segregation era, by assimilation, integration, self-determination, self-management, a decade of reconciliation as well as economic rationalism, and, now, after the Federal Government’s Apology to the Stolen Generations for past wrongs, the possibility of a new beginning. These eras are summarised in Table 1.1. Note that the dates indicated in the table relate largely to the eastern parts of Australia—some would argue that forcible assimilation still dominates Aboriginal communities in remote Australia. We have plotted government policy to the present, because we believe that Australia continues to be dominated by colonial attitudes and policies. It could be argued that the attitudes, beliefs and practices of colonisation were well and truly extinguished in the 1960s, but we do not agree. Aboriginal people are still subject to attitudes, beliefs and practices born out of the history of colonisation—and there is still no recognition of Aboriginal sovereignty.

Each of these historical facts can be translated into actual or de facto policy eras, which have influenced and continue to affect Aboriginal communities.

Protection/segregation (1890s–1950s)

The first official, legally sanctioned policy was the Protection Policy. We have referred to it previously, but what did this policy mean to people’s lives?

Through ‘protection’ or ‘Smoothing the dying pillow’, as de Hoog and Sherwood (1979, p 29) point out, Aboriginal people were issued with rations, which were barely enough to survive, and the Chief Protector of Aborigines became the legal guardian of all Aboriginal and ‘part-Aboriginal’ children up to the age of 16, which gave him enormous power over these

Activity

After working through the material on colonisation, it would be worth taking time to think about the following issues:

- Because Australia was considered ‘terra nullius’, an empty continent occupied by ‘peaceful settlement’, Aboriginal resistance to colonisation was labelled ‘rebellion’ rather than ‘war’. Consider the ‘legal’ implication of this distinction. What were the economic implications?
- Importantly, consider the current issues we have to face because of the process of colonisation. If war is recognised, as it was in New Zealand, for example, then some kind of treaty, some sort of agreement, must be reached in order to settle the hostilities. If resistance is interpreted as ‘rebellion’, then it can be quashed and dispossession can be rationalised.
Table 1.1 Interaction between the history of colonisation and legislation directed towards Aboriginal people

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HISTORICAL FACTS</th>
<th>EUROPEAN JUSTIFICATION</th>
<th>ABORIGINAL ACTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT (1788–1880s)</td>
<td>• Taking the land</td>
<td>Aboriginal people = ‘the missing link’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Extermination poisoning/shooting</td>
<td>• No culture—no morality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Hopelessness, soul destroying</td>
<td>• No humanity</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Retaliation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Defeat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Resignation to White domination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Sickness/loss of heart, loss of land, leadership, traditions, language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 SEGREGATION (1890s–1950s)</td>
<td>• ‘Smoothing the dying pillow’</td>
<td>• Aboriginal people were to be educated for full citizenship without distinction either among themselves or between them and white people. Progressively through training and welfare [they] were to be given equal opportunity whenever possible.’ (Rowley 1971)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• ‘Civilise the savages’</td>
<td>• Distrust, suspicion</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• ‘Bearing the white man’s burden’</td>
<td>• Passive resistance</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Heavy influence from the churches</td>
<td>• Endurance, growing anger at society and its discrimination</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Development of FCAATSI as a national pressure group</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 ASSIMILATION (1950s–60s)</td>
<td>Policies to elevate standards:</td>
<td>• Distrust of Europeans</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Housing</td>
<td>• Efforts to achieve</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Health</td>
<td>• Growing movement pressing for self-determination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Education</td>
<td>• Growth of Black Power movement, National Tribal Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 INTEGRATION (1967–72)</td>
<td>Emphasis on positive relations, chance for Aborigines to say what they want (choice)</td>
<td>Pressure to make up for some past mistakes—internal as well as overseas, e.g. infant mortality rivals that of many Asian or African countries (Moodie 1973)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Distrust of Europeans</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Growth of Black Power movement, National Tribal Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 SELF-DETERMINATION (1972–75)</td>
<td>Aboriginal people are/should be in charge of their own affairs—financial help, technical skills, socio-economic support</td>
<td>Recognition of multicultural society, cultural diversity/difference, some rights etc</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Growing awareness of making own decisions</td>
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<td>• Tent Embassy</td>
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<td>• Strong pressure to become self-reliant but still subject to ‘We’ll help you to do what we want you to do’</td>
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<td>• Development of NACC</td>
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Table 1.1 Interaction between the history of colonisation and legislation directed towards Aboriginal people—cont’d

<table>
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<th>HISTORICAL FACTS</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>6 SELF-MANAGEMENT STAGE I (1975–88)</strong></td>
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</table>
| Aboriginal people must be held accountable for their decisions and management of finance | • Some white backlash  
• Government review of NACC, reshaped into NAC and its eventual disbandment  
• Attempts to introduce national land rights abandoned | • Heavy push for land rights, separate legal, health, housing services  
• Development of NAC ‘MAKARRATA’ ‘resumption of normal relations following a period of hostility’  
• Recognition of prior ownership of Australia:  
  – Land rights  
  – Cash compensation  
  – Reserved seats for Aborigines in parliament |
| | | |
| **7 SELF-MANAGEMENT STAGE II (1988–96)** | | |
| Aboriginal affairs are reorganised under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC):  
• emphasis on welfare issues, e.g. housing, health, employment and education | Aboriginal decision making in Aboriginal affairs is recognised:  
• pressure to ‘normalise’ relationships via a compact or Treaty of Reconciliation | Some hope for change but some suspicion—continued stress on global issues, e.g. land rights, compensation etc |
| | | |
| The RCIADIC is set up to investigate ‘suicides’ in custody | Acceptance that the legal system does not provide adequately for Aboriginal people | Renewed vigilance and suspicion of the agents of the law |
| | | |
| Native Title legislation | High Court judgement that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have prior ownership rights to Australia | Hope for change, respect and recognition; enormous activities in all communities to develop Native Title claims |
| | | |
| **8 RECONCILIATION OR ECONOMIC RATIONALISM? (1996–2007)** | | |
| Inquiry into the Stolen Generations | Government reluctant to accept the history of colonisation | Anger and anguish; formation of community-based support groups |
| | | |
| The Wik Decision, which extends Native Title rights, and the Ten-Point Plan, which limits Native Title rights | Government reluctant to proceed with Native Title; pressure from pastoralists to water down legislation | Anger and despair; conflicts within some communities about who are the traditional owners of land, disputes about borders |
| | | |
| Council for Reconciliation established | Government unable to apologise, wants ‘practical reconciliation’ rather than ‘black armband’ approach to history | Anger |
| | | |
| | Grassroots movement, Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR) | Some Aboriginal people join the ANTaR movement, others support it tacitly, still others are suspicious of ‘Aboriginal’ reconciliation and want to establish true Native Title and compensation before beginning discussions about what reconciliation means |

Continued
Table 1.1 Interaction between the history of colonisation and legislation directed towards Aboriginal people—cont’d

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ATSIC is abolished in 2004 and a National Indigenous Council (NIC) is appointed by the government</td>
<td>Government argues that ATSIC is inefficient and corrupt, and does not represent the Aboriginal people. The NIC will advise the government, and its members are chosen because of their expertise rather than their representativeness</td>
<td>Ambivalence towards ATSIC, but deep suspicion towards the NIC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| A growth in dysfunction in Aboriginal communities documented by a range of reports such as Violence in Indigenous Communities (2001), Indigenous Education 2005–2008 (2006), The Little Children Are Sacred Report (2007) | • Belief that dysfunction is due to Aboriginal parents’ neglect  
• Some argument that ‘this’ (i.e. child sexual exploitation and family violence) is a ‘cultural matter’ | • General condemnation of male perpetrators and demands for stronger action against them  
• Some shame and demands that Aboriginal people not be labelled  
• Demands for better access to appropriate infrastructure |
| Increased media attention to child abuse and family violence, particularly in remote Aboriginal communities | Debate about the reasons for such dysfunction fills the newspapers and there is a strong call for government action and intervention | Some Aboriginal people call for government action, others call for governments to face their responsibilities in providing access to services and infrastructure |
| Introduction of the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) aka ‘the Intervention’ on 21 June 2007 | The government believed that the level of child sexual abuse and family violence was of epidemic proportions and ‘something’ had to be done quickly ‘to improve the safety and wellbeing of children and laying the basis for a sustainable and better future for residents of remote communities in the Northern Territory’ (Yu et al 2008) | Confusion and fear about government intervention and labelling of communities |
| Most controversial radical action in 73 specific communities centred on:  
• Child health checks (at first to be compulsory, but changed to voluntary)  
• Income management, without mechanisms for review or appeal  
• Abolition of CDEP  
• Resumption of Aboriginal lands in the 73 communities on a 5-year lease  
• Abolition of the permit system governing entry to Aboriginal lands  
• Suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth) (RDA), and the NT Anti-Discrimination Act to accommodate the processes and practices of the Intervention | • Belief among many politicians and some of the public that Aboriginal people are a ‘problem’, which has to be solved because they are not capable of solving the problems themselves  
• Agreement that ‘something’ had to be done but heated debate about what should be done, the time frame and the philosophy underlying the intervention  
• Deep concern about the suspension of the RDA and its ramifications  
• Concern that the real issues of poor housing, education, health and inadequate infrastructure are not being addressed | • Many Aboriginal people feel belittled, shamed and humiliated by being singled out on the basis of their ‘race’ and not worthy of protective legislation, particularly in relation to the compulsory acquisition of land and the blanket application of income management without access to review (Yu et al 2008)  
• There is a great deal of confusion about the new regulations and extent of the Intervention  
• Condemnation of the government for acting without extensive planning and coordination  
• Condemnation of the government for annexing Aboriginal lands in 73 communities without compensation  
• Condemnation of the government for revoking the permit system, which gives Aboriginal people control over who access their lands |
children’s lives—even the power to remove them from their parents. Further, reserves were set aside for Aboriginal people to live in segregated communities, Aboriginal children could not attend State schools, many country towns enforced curfews and they were not allowed to go to Perth. Aboriginal status was defined by an Act of Parliament, and anyone who wanted to escape the conditions imposed on Aboriginality had to gain exemption papers and refrain from associating with other Aboriginal people. ‘Protected’ Aboriginal people could not access social services payments, were not allowed to drink, vote or live with a non-Aboriginal person unless they had specific permission from the Chief Protector. Interestingly, as the Depression took hold, rationing was decreased which caused further pressures.

It is certainly true that de Hoog and Sherwood (1979) are referring specifically to Western Australia; however the conditions described applied fairly uniformly throughout the country. What struck us was that as the Depression hit, so ‘assimilation’ within ‘protection’ was adopted.

Assimilation within protection

Although assimilation became official policy during the 1950s, it had already been made explicit in 1939 when the then Minister of the Interior, John McEwan, said:

the final object of the Government in its concern for these native people should be the raising of their status so as to entitle them by right, and by qualification, to the ordinary

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Table 1.1 Interaction between the history of colonisation and legislation directed towards Aboriginal people—cont’d

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labor wins the election in Nov 2007</td>
<td>The majority of Australians reject the Coalition’s conservative politics</td>
<td>Some hope for the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIC is disbanded Jan 2008</td>
<td>The NIC does not represent Indigenous people</td>
<td>Some hope that there will be appropriate consultation and a new representative body</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Labor retains the Intervention with amendments, e.g. CDEP is reinstated and compensation is paid for annexed lands | • Belief that the ‘problem’ is so huge that the government cannot step back from its responsibilities  
• Concern that the government will never commit enough funds to reverse the years of neglect in remote communities  
• Continued concern about the abolition of the RDA and its consequences of generating policies according to ‘race’ | • Continued concern about the level of racism inherent in the Intervention  
• Support for the reintroduction of CDEP and its new component of compulsory training for permanent jobs  
• Acknowledgement of the government’s compensation as RIGHT and a move towards a more respectful relationship between governments and communities |
| PM Rudd (2008) makes a formal apology, on behalf of the Government and the Australian people, to the Aboriginal people for the wrongs of the past | • Acceptance by the majority of Australians that the past has to be acknowledged and atoned  
• Formalisation of ‘Sorry Day’, the unofficial response by ANTaR and others to former PM Howard’s resolve never to apologise for the past | • Pride in their struggle for recognition and justice  
• Hope for the future  
• Expectation that future relationships will be marked by respect, trust and partnership (Yu et al 2008) |
| The government sets up consultative committees to advise on the creation of a National Indigenous Representative Committee | Acknowledgement that Aboriginal people must have representation at the highest level to ensure Indigenous policies and practices are appropriate | Support for a new era in government/Aboriginal interaction, negotiation and Aboriginal self-determination |
rights of citizenship, and enable them and help them to share with us the opportunities that are available in their own native land.

(quoted in Rogers 1973, p 11)

Rogers (1973) believes that this policy had its roots in two distinct Australian traditions: the principle of equality of opportunity, and the egalitarian ethic. We don't agree with Rogers and would urge you to remember the time when these sentiments were being expressed, as well as the actual actions that occurred. The times (the 1930s) were marked by widespread economic depression—the last thing on people's minds was the welfare of the least-valued section of Australian society. The times were marked by political upheavals, particularly in Europe, which was still very dear to the heart of the Australian Government, at least.

The actions of State governments and their agents certainly belied any emphasis on equality of opportunity and the egalitarian ethic. Throughout the 1930s control and subjugation of Aboriginal people in fact intensified. This was the period when self-supporting, independent Aboriginal people were forcibly rounded up by police and placed on reserves under the pretext that 'training', in isolation, in segregation, was necessary before Aboriginal people could be admitted to citizenship and 'equality of opportunity'.

At this time:

the law in New South Wales allowed an Aboriginal or a person 'apparently having an admixture of Aboriginal blood' to be removed by order of a court to a reserve, where he must remain until the cancellation of the order … thus during the depression New South Wales authorities followed the hard practice of what was sometimes referred to in Western Australia as ‘clearing the towns'. This correspondence in time of economic disaster with harsh laws is suggestive of majority attitudes …

(Rowley 1971, p 49)

Not surprisingly, those people thus removed lost rights to unemployment benefits while, as de Hoog and Sherwood (1979) point out, rations on reserves were cut. Aboriginal people 'found themselves in a very grim predicament' indeed—unable to live off the reserves, yet economically dependent and living in poverty on the reserves. Governments, however, could save money while maintaining that they were concerned only with Aboriginal people's welfare.

Some time ago, Anne-Katrin Eckermann recorded Mrs M Quinlan's life story (1983). Her story clearly indicates that her people were dispossessed twice: once when the Dhunguddi were forced off their land during the time she calls 'the killings'. The second time, when government policy, as described by Rowley, changed Bellbrook, her father's farm, from an independent and self-sufficient Aboriginal settlement to a government institution. The parents and grandparents of many people currently living in north-western New South Wales had similar experiences at that time. They were forcibly removed by police from Tibooburra and placed on the nearest government settlement—Brewarrina, even though they lived and worked in self-supporting droving camps. This was the time of the NSW Aboriginal Protection Board, which had enormous powers over Aboriginal people in that State.

The Board, not the parents, was charged with the provision of custody, maintenance and education of children. It could appoint local (white) committees and (white) officers known as 'guardians' of Aborigines. It could remove any Aborigine from a reserve (regardless of the fact that his or her whole family were resident there) and could 'apprentice' a child to any occupation. Should the child refuse, he or she would be sent to an institution. Outside employment of adults could be terminated by the Board, which might require an employer to pay the wages of an Aborigine to one of its own officers …

(Lippmann 1999, p 24)

Other States followed similar policies and supported similar boards or departments to enforce them. In Queensland, for example, complaints were made about Ena Chong's father, whose number was W-163, because he and his friends were 'cheeky' and 'seem to be under the
impression that they can go about as they desire …’ (Office of Protector of Aboriginals North Queensland 1945) after which the Director of Native Affairs issued a memorandum that he:

… should be informed that if he continues to associate with aboriginals, i.e., allowing aboriginals controlled by the Act to reside with him in his house, he is making himself liable for the cancellation of his Certificate of Exemption issued to him in February, 1942.

(Office of Protector of Aboriginals North Queensland 1945)

Thus, assimilation as interpreted by McEwan, at times did little to ‘raise’ Aboriginal people’s status, instead it marked the continuance or imposition of protectionism.

**Assimilation (1951–65)**

In 1951, the Assimilation Policy became very clearly defined.

It stated that all Aborigines shall attain the same manner of living as other Australians, enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting the same responsibilities, observing the same customs and being influenced by the same beliefs, hopes and loyalties.

(Lippmann 1981, p 38)

One important aspect, deleted from later official policies, was McEwan’s (cited in Rogers 1973) reference to ‘their own native land’. Perhaps by the 1950s and 1960s the ‘threat’ of land rights was becoming real enough to ensure that no government would commit itself to acknowledging prior ownership officially. We would argue that this era in Aboriginal polity should be included within the framework of protection/segregation because, although policies may change, administrators generally do not. Although policies may be influenced by misguided but humanitarian principles, their implementation depends on attitudes and values that are influenced by a whole history of scientific/institutional racism and cultural violence. Thus, as Lippmann (1981) points out, the States continued the process of dehumanising Aboriginal people by means of special ordinances, such as the Welfare and the Wards’ Employment Ordinances 1953 of the Northern Territory, which made them wards of the State if their lifestyle was thought to be inappropriate, they were considered unable to manage their own affairs, they associated with ‘undesirables’, i.e. other Aboriginal people, and their behaviour was evaluated as unacceptable.

**Consider**

Consider the enormous amount of power that such an ordinance hands over to administrators. Consider the dangers inherent in having your ‘personal associations’ classified and evaluated by someone who has the power to totally disenfranchise you. Consider this in relation to your own life.

By 1965 the Assimilation Policy was redefined to read:

The policy of assimilation seeks that all persons of Aboriginal descent will choose to attain a similar manner of living to that of other Australians and live as members of a single community—enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting the same responsibilities and influenced by the same hopes and loyalties as other Australians.

(Commonwealth of Australia, Aboriginal Welfare Conference 1963)

However, even this element of choice, now introduced to the policy, did little to alleviate the cultural pressures exerted on Aboriginal groups to be ‘just like white Australians’. These were not social pressures, but legal pressures, enforced by a whole bureaucratic structure in each State and its agents.

These legal pressures made it possible for agencies to forcibly remove children from their families on spurious grounds. Even towards the end of the twentieth century, some eight per cent
of Indigenous people in New South Wales ‘aged 25 years and over reported that they had been taken away from their natural families by a mission, the government, or welfare’ (ABS 1996, p 1).

The personal devastation caused by the policies of segregation/protection and assimilation are still being felt today and have been extensively documented by the report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families, 1997, Bringing Them Home. This publication caused enormous concern in Australian society, not only because it highlighted hundreds of heart-rending stories of abuse and neglect, but also because the reality of such abuses contradicted and challenged basic Australian values of social justice and human rights. It could be argued that, because this inquiry was open and public, many Australians had to face the fact that they had been so ‘dull[ed] … into seeing exploitation and or repression as normal and natural, or not seeing them (particularly not exploitation) at all’ (Galtung 1990, p 295) that they had become silent witnesses of cultural violence. Ten years after the release of the Report, comparisons of levels of dis-ease between those Aboriginal people who were removed from their families and those who were not, demonstrated that those who were removed experienced higher levels of long-term illness, poorer educational outcomes, higher rates of violence, higher rates of problems with the law and poorer rates of employment (MCATSIA 2006).

A change to self-determination or self-management? (1972–1988)

Since the mid-1960s, we have become familiar with policy statements advocating integration, self-determination and self-management. De Hoog and Sherwood (1979, pp 30–1) distinguish these three approaches in Aboriginal affairs as follows:

**Integration** puts an emphasis on positive relations between the Aboriginal and white community, while recognising that Aboriginal people may have different needs and aspirations in some aspects of their lives.

**Self-determination** takes these different needs and aspirations further, literally meaning that Aboriginal people should have the right to choose their own destiny, with government help in an enabling role, providing finance, technical skills, and social and economic support.

**Self-management**, which is the current Federal policy, has somewhat similar stated aims, but stresses that Aboriginal groups must be held accountable for their decisions and management of finance.

**Consider**

In our analysis, and we do stress that it is our analysis, we can see a big shift in policy from integration to self-determination.

In 1972, when self-determination became ‘official’, there was a fresh wind; funds were made available (unfortunately not enough and certainly, at times, too hastily). However, when we consider what has happened since self-management has become policy, it seems to us that we are returning to an assimilation type of approach.

We don’t agree with de Hoog and Sherwood, who see self-determination and self-management as similar, with more emphasis on Aboriginal accountability in the latter. Rather, we think, we ought to look at the meaning of the two words: ‘determination’ and ‘management’. People who are determinative are in a position to define; those who ‘manage’ tend to organise and even control on the basis of someone else’s decisions. This is the real difference between the two terms; a difference which is both philosophical and practical.

What do you think?
In principle, ‘self-determination’ or self-management should have enabled Aboriginal people all over Australia to decide their own fate, to make their choice of lifestyle, economic pursuit, political allegiance, and cultural patterns. Although these are the principles, no government has as yet formulated policy in these terms.

We believe that self-determination (1972–1975) saw an upswing in Aboriginal political movement, both nationally and internationally. This was the time when community-controlled services in health and housing had their origins. This was when the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee (NACC) was set up to provide an elected voice for Aboriginal issues and concerns. This period saw the emergence of a number of self-help programs in line with the policy of self-determination. Unfortunately, many of them were set up to give Aboriginal people a measure of economic independence and self-sufficiency. No doubt there has, and will continue to be, some Aboriginal support for these schemes. Nevertheless, they were often non-Aboriginal inspired and non-Aboriginal supervised endeavours. A large percentage of funds spent on ‘Aboriginal programs’ were frequently expended on consultative fees and salaries for non-Aboriginal experts, supervisors and administrators. Sometimes such schemes failed and there was a general outcry about the lack of Aboriginal responsibility and commitment, and the waste of thousands of dollars of taxpayers’ money. It caused significant concern about what is often referred to as white ‘backlash’.

In relation to such ‘backlash’, Ryan’s (1976) work, Blaming the Victim, although now quite old, continues to make us think. He points out that explanations of other peoples and cultures have frequently centred on what such people lacked in comparison to the dominant culture and beliefs. Given this approach, the majority attempts to rectify the ‘deficit’, the lack. Consequently, the dominant groups tend to:

- identify a social problem.
- Second, study those affected by the problem and discover in what ways they are different from the rest of us as a consequence of deprivation and injustice.
- Third, define the differences as the cause of the social problem itself.
- Finally, of course, assign a government bureaucrat to invent a humanitarian action program to correct the differences.

(Ryan 1976, pp 8–9)

Thus, in terms of our discussion, Ryan clearly shows us that how we define the ‘problem’ will influence the ‘solutions’ we seek. If the ‘problems’ and the ‘solutions’ are developed by outsiders, and the programs fail, then it becomes easy to blame the recipient of the ‘humanitarian action program’.

Traditionally in Aboriginal affairs, the people have been considered ‘the problem’—first they had to be removed from the land, then they had to be protected and segregated because they would die out, then they had to be segregated and trained so that they could fit into the dominant society; later, they had to be moulded to be just the same as everyone else, and later still they had to be guided so that they could become self-determining.

As Tatz (1979, p 8) points out, we must assess Aboriginal affairs by measuring the realities of practice and performance against both policy aims and policy claims. Perhaps an even more important measure is policy outcome. In terms of ‘self-determination’, the outcomes were dubious, and when the government changed, the policy changed to ‘self-management’ to ensure accountability. In line with streamlining services, the NACC was reshaped into the National Aboriginal Congress (NAC), the Northern Territory Land Rights Act 1976 was passed, as was the New South Wales Land Rights Act 1983, and Aboriginal groups continued the political struggle and pushed strongly for a treaty. This was Stage I self-management.

When the government changed again, the policy continued to be self-management, but a number of political changes were made—the NAC was disbanded and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) was enacted to provide the government with advice on all aspects of Aboriginal affairs. ATSIC also took over the funding of all Aboriginal
organisations and held responsibility for health, education, housing, employment and enterprise development portfolios. It was the time to recognise land rights—Queensland passed its *Aboriginal Land Act 1991* and the *Commonwealth Native Title Act 1993* was passed after the High Court finally accepted Eddy Mabo’s case for traditional land rights and rejected the principles of *terra nullius*. Yet the socio-economic conditions of Aboriginal people were not significantly enhanced—the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC 1991) clearly demonstrated that social and emotional dis-ease was rife among Aboriginal groups, and the Stolen Generations were gaining major public debate. This was Stage II Self-Management.

Reconciliation or economic rationalism? (1996–2007)

The late 1990s saw a definite change in government approach to Aboriginal people. The RCIADIC had seriously questioned the country’s legal system and its dealings with Aboriginal people. The Inquiry into the Stolen Generations (1997) caused enormous uproar. The country was divided about whether to believe the claims of atrocities in the past—the institutionalisation and abuse of Aboriginal children—and the Prime Minister declared that he would not accept a ‘black armband’ approach to Australian history. In terms of land rights, just as the Wik Decision extended Native Title over pastoral leases, the government introduced the Ten-Point Plan to safeguard leases. ATSIC’s portfolios were reduced to employment and housing, while health and education were mainstreamed. Although the government would not accept the history of colonisation, it did support a people’s movement of reconciliation and committed itself to ‘practical’ reconciliation through improvements in health, education, housing and employment rather than a treaty or acknowledgement of Aboriginal sovereignty. In 2004, ATSIC was abolished, after months of controversy generated by allegations of misconduct against the Chair and Deputy Chair of the organisation. With the demise of ATSIC, the elected voice of Aboriginal people has been silenced.

The issue is not whether ATSIC should have been disbanded or not, but that Aboriginal people lost an autonomous, elected voice and that vital programs in health, education, employment and housing were subsequently mainstreamed. The underlying rationale was that there had been no significant change in Aboriginal life chances over the previous sixteen years and that a National Indigenous Council, composed of prominent Aboriginal professionals, would give better advice to the government than an elected body. Further, all services for Aboriginal people were mainstreamed, even those controlled by community organisations. The latter had to form partnerships with regional health authorities or agencies, for example, in order to secure funding.

Many Aboriginal leaders criticised the government. For example:

Noel Pearson of Cape York Partnerships has referred to the ‘old mainstreaming disaster’, former ATSIC Chair, Lowitja O’Donoghue, claimed there is ‘no guarantee that mainstreaming is going to improve anything’… According to recent media reports the Senate Select Committee inquiry established to inquire into the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Amendment Bill 2004 and related matters has found widespread concern over the mainstreaming of funding’.  

(Pratt & Bennett 2004, p 11)

The policies of mainstreaming, the Coalition Government’s absolute refusal to acknowledge the history of Australian colonisation and its aftermath, and its steadfast commitment to equality for all, rather than equity based on need, did little to enhance Aboriginal life chances over the 11 years of its stewardship of Australian society. Indeed, it has been argued that:

Following a cut to the Aboriginal Affairs budget in the first Howard Government budget, the funding of Indigenous programs has not kept pace with inflation or with the increase in the number of Indigenous Australians between the 1996 and 2001 census … While in the future the Howard Government may not be accused of the
removal of Indigenous children from their families, there will be widespread debate on the level of institutional neglect which has allowed the basic rights of the child in health, housing and education to go unmet. Blaming past ‘failed’ policies or state and territory governments for the contemporary state of affairs in remote communities does not acquit the Howard Government for the lack of adequate funding for health, housing, education, and employment opportunities.

(Gale 2006, p 1)

From 2001 onwards numerous reports and a great deal of media coverage identified increasing levels of dis-ease in Aboriginal communities. Such dis-ease was linked to deteriorating housing, poor health, rising unemployment and continued under-education, which expressed itself in violence towards self and others, child abuse, drug abuse, truancy and continuing high rates of suicide (see for example Memmott et al 2001, Lawrence 2002, Wild & Anderson 2007). The government’s response was to enact the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER), also known as the Intervention, on 21 June 2007.

The NTER, which received bipartisan support, set out to protect children, make communities safer and create a better future for such communities. Seventy-three Aboriginal settlements or town camps (prescribed areas), which included some 64% of Aboriginal people living in the Northern Territory, were identified for specific intervention (Yu et al 2008). As these regulations would be applicable only to Aboriginal people, the Federal Government suspended the Racial Discrimination Act (RDA), while the Northern Territory Government suspended its own Anti-Discrimination Act.

The NTER focused on seven major areas of community and family concern. The areas were:
1. Welfare Reforms and Employment (including income management, without redress to review, and the abolition of CDEP).
2. Law and Order (increasing the number of police stations in prescribed communities).
3. Enhancing Education (encouraging/enforcing school attendance by linking attendance to welfare payments, making changes to the school curriculum and encouraging teachers to remain in remote schools).
4. Supporting Families (enhancing early childhood education, considering the establishment of safe places for women and ‘cooling off’ places for men).
5. Improving Child and Family Health (by means of child health checks originally meant to be compulsory, later made voluntary; and setting up a mobile sex abuse unit).
6. Housing and Land Reform (including resuming Aboriginal land granted under the NT Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1976 for five-year leases back to the government, revoking of the permit system of access to Aboriginal lands, urgent repairs to community infrastructure, encouraging community clean-ups and muting payment of compensation or rent for resumed land).
7. Enhanced coordination of service, processes and procedures.

All commentators agreed, before the introduction of the NTER, that the situation in remote communities required urgent and innovative strategies to deal with the appalling rate of child abuse and community dysfunction. However, when the type of interventions and the procedures became clear, most expressed severe reservations and concern about the suspension of the RDA and the implication that only Aboriginal people, and by implication their culture, were perpetrators of child abuse. Further, many believed that ‘flying’ personnel ‘in and out’ would do little to enhance Aboriginal self-determination.

Thus the Northern Territory Indigenous leader and former Territory MP, John Ah Kit, labelled the Intervention ‘genocide’ (AAP 7/8/2007 01:11pm); Jones (2007, p 1), a paediatrician with many years of experience in dealing with the victims of child abuse, maintained that the NTER seemed more characteristic of a police state that an attempt to intervene in order to provide long-term solutions and support. Further, commentators warned that the strategy
would undermine Aboriginal land ownership and 'essentially, it seems to be about gradually stripping away the assets and resources of Aboriginal people and organisations' (ABC News 18/8/2007). Banduk Marika explained:

For more than 30 years we were told by each federal government how important self-determination is. But there was never any true self-determination. Money to support our community projects and initiatives ... was always very hard to come by. And there were never any real jobs ... Education too was limited and poorly delivered. The same thing happened in housing and health. We became more and more overcrowded and sickness increased, along with drinking and fighting ... And now it seems our whole culture is being blamed by government and media for the problems associated with grog, poor education, a lack of jobs, housing and health care. The main problem our culture is being blamed for is child abuse ... it occurs in Aboriginal communities because of the situation we are living in, not because of our culture ... Many of us do not drink or take drugs, and we protect, respect, love and care for our children, our families and our cultural traditions.

The Government is now trying to say that land, community councils and the permit system are also part of the reason for child abuse. But this is a lie ... Has any non-Aboriginal council ever been taken over by the government because of child abuse occurring in its area?...

Don't use our children as an excuse for stealing this land away from us. (Sydney Morning Herald 14/8/2007, p 11)

At this stage and over the next 12 months, until the NTER was evaluated, both the Coalition Government and later the Labor Government supported the Intervention.

In their review of the Intervention, Yu et al (2008) pointed out that the most controversial aspects of the NTER were the child health checks, income management, the closing down of CDEP, the five-year leases and the abolition of the permit system. Most of all, the authors condemned the process of the Intervention. They argued that there was far too much haste and not enough consultation, which left many Aboriginal people confused and fearful.

Every thinking person would agree that ‘something’ had to be done, however:

... the Board is not persuaded that communities subject to the NTER were effectively engaged or consulted about the various measures of the NTER. There was little evidence that any of the communities involved had a clear understanding of the intentions of the NTER or why they were necessary. (Yu et al 2008, p 26 of 29)

Consequently the Review (Yu et al 2008) found that there was little collaboration between communities and agencies, and, indeed, between agencies themselves. Further, the fact that these measures were ‘racially’ determined, that is they applied only to the Aboriginal people in those 73 prescribed communities, meant that many people subject to the Intervention expressed their bewilderment, shame and humiliation. A cynic might argue that the Intervention, for all of its good intentions, really was a return to the days of institutional racism.

A new beginning? 2008 and beyond

At the end of 2007, Australians elected a new Federal Labor Government and with it came a number of changes in Aboriginal affairs.

- The NTER was retained, although after the review of its first 12 months of operation (Yu et al 2008), a number of changes were introduced.
  - The CDEP program has been reintroduced to remote communities and linked to compulsory training and permanent positions in local government, local Aboriginal councils and the NT Government. In the past all of these agencies had used CDEP as a cheap source of labour (Yu et al 2008).
– The government is now paying compensation/rent for lands alienated under the NTER’s five-year lease system.

– Income management has been expanded (2008–2009) throughout Kimberley and north Queensland communities, and affects 70% of social service and 100% of lump sum payments to residents in these communities.

– Income management has been extended to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families, considered to be at risk, in these areas.

– The link between social service payments and school attendance has been retained, but amended to enable parents to demonstrate that they have done their best to encourage their children to attend school.

– On 13 February 2008, Prime Minister Rudd made a public apology to the Stolen Generations for the wrongs of the past and the pain and suffering they caused. The media (see Irvine 2008) reported that most Australians, including most Aboriginal leaders, reacted very favourably to this gesture. As Ena Chong has pointed out:

  I recognise that many people equate being humble to being humiliated. It seems to me that those in positions of power seem to feel this way. It is so unusual for people in power to say ‘I am sorry, we made a mistake’, that when they do, it makes headlines around the world! Yet, in my opinion, such an admission is a sign of strength and large heartedness not weakness! An offering towards reconciliation and peace! It may never wipe away the pain of the past, but it was a positive step with positive direction. It was so public, so in your face! It was an admission from the highest platform in Australia! My reaction to Mr Rudd’s well-worded, very brave but humble apology was first of all disbelief, followed by a realisation that this powerful man kept his promise! Very heart warming indeed!

It should be noted that the apology was specifically directed towards the Stolen Generations—however, many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians have interpreted it as an apology to all Aboriginal people. As a result, the Aboriginal historian and activist Garry Foley (2009) has labelled the apology ‘meaningless crap’.

– On 3 April 2009, Australia signed the UN Declaration of Indigenous Peoples, which the previous government had voted against in 2007. Macklin, the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, commented that: ‘[t]he Declaration recognises the legitimate entitlement of Indigenous people to all human rights—based on equality, partnership, good faith and mutual benefit’ (2009, p 3).

The implementation and expansion of the Intervention will need to be evaluated against the Declaration. As late as 6 April 2009, the United Nations Human Rights Committee was calling on the Australian Government to redesign its intervention into Indigenous communities.

### Activity

‘Surf’ the net and review the NTER for yourself. Draw up a list of positive and a list of negative features. Why have you identified some of the measures as positive? Why do you think some are negative?

– The Labor Government has committed itself to strengthen the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), to enhance collaboration and coordination between and within levels of government and to allocate appropriate funding in order to ‘close the gap’ between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal life chances. These are ‘absolutes’ against which the Federal Government’s record can, and, no doubt, will be evaluated. As outlined in the COAG Communiqué (2008), they include, to:
  – close the gap in life expectancy within a generation;
  – halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade;
ensure all Indigenous four year olds in remote communities have access to early childhood education within five years;

− halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements for Indigenous children within a decade;

− halve the gap for Indigenous students in Year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates by 2020; and

− halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade.

The Labor Government set up a special Working Group on Indigenous Reform (WGIR) to oversee Indigenous policy developments/implementation related to COAG.

The Labor Government abolished the NIC and has set up a committee to advise on how best to set up a National Indigenous Representative Committee. Tom Calma, the Indigenous Social Justice Commissioner, chairs this committee.

Obviously all of these policies, past and present, have had far-reaching effects on Aboriginal people both individually and collectively. The policies of the past are not eradicated by the present; they live on in the parents and grandparents of today’s children, as well as the oral history of contemporary communities. They also influence how governments believe they should deal with Aboriginal people today.

Nowhere is this more evident than when we consider the legal categorisation of Aboriginality.

The aftermath of government policies: imposed identity

Part and parcel of all Aboriginal policy from 1788 to the 1960s was the process of categorising people’s ‘Aboriginality’ according to their level of Aboriginal ‘blood’ and then applying specific laws to these categorisations—that is, defining identity by legal status on the basis of assumed genetic characteristics. Note the interplay of scientific and institutional racism as outlined in Rowley’s (1971, p 45) analysis:

The New South Wales Aboriginal Protection (Amendment Act 1936) retained the earlier, somewhat slipshod definition of the 1909 Act—‘any full-blood or half-caste Aboriginal’; and this has probably confirmed administrative habits, by which the Board’s officers applied rule-of-thumb methods to assert control or to deny assistance on the basis of personal appearance.

The 1936 legislation was passed while the Board through the police were forcing unemployed Aborigines on to the stations (they were commonly being refused the ‘dole’). The difficulty of deciding just who was Aboriginal was made easier by the provision which made the ‘averment’ in a charge or complaint that the person was Aboriginal or even reference to him as Aboriginal in such a document ‘sufficient evidence of the truth of such averment or reference, unless the contrary is shown to the satisfaction of the Court’. In addition, the court was given power, in doubtful cases, to decide on sight whether a person was Aboriginal, a power retained in the consolidation of the Act in 1963.

We gained further insight into the extent of oppression, and the philosophical roots of this oppression during the 1930s, when the Aboriginal people of south-western Queensland gave us copies of files from the old Department of Native Affairs, dealing with the exclusion of Aboriginal children from white schools in the district. With the people’s permission, we are reproducing for you verbatim just one of the letters of concern and the notes made by Departmental officials. Many letters were sent between 1934 and 1938—we have only omitted the names of the people concerned.
Case study
26th January, 1935
To The Department of Public Instruction
Brisbane
Dear Sir,
Some time ago I wrote to you concerning the attendance of my children at the State School here. As the Schools will be opening again today week, I would like to know if it is compulsory for all coloured children to attend the School that is going to be built on the other side of the river; at present there is no sign of a School being built, there is not even timber or any building material ready and there is talk of the Dark Peoples’ Church being made into a school. This Church was built of rough timber that was purchased with money collected from the Dark People and the building superintended by Mr – the Missionary that was in -. There has always been meetings held there and have also had dead bodies kept there awaiting Burial. And I do not consider it a fit place to teach children as it is only small and it is so hot in it that a grown person cannot sit there during the heat of the day. I would also and so would many other Dark Mothers like to know why the Dark Children are being kept from attending the State School, where they have been going for years. If there is anything wrong with their conduct, how is it that their conduct is always reported good, every year, after exams. And as I live in town on the same side of the River as the State School, it would be more convenient for me to send them to the State. And there is also a Family of coloured people getting State Aid here and they are still going to attend the State School. So if one family of Dark Children are allowed to attend, why bar the rest?
If this is not compulsory, I am still going to send my children that are School Age to the State School. I would be very much obliged to you if you would favour me with a Reply.
I may mention that the Health Inspector has just been around and he does not approve of the Church being made into a School.
Thanking you in anticipation of a Reply.
I am
Yours Truly
Mrs –

Departmental notes
The Aboriginal School is about to be established at -. Two families (half castes) do not wish to go. They suggest that, as they (the parents) attended ‘white’ schools and as their relatives also attended ‘white’ schools, they should not be forced to send their children to the Aboriginal School.
The families concerned are:
X,  
a – 12 yrs 10 mths  
b – 10 yrs 9 mths  
c – 8 yrs 9 mths  
d – 6 yrs 6 mths  
Y,  
a – 10 yrs 1 mth  
b – 8 yrs 7 mths
In the X case
• The mother is a half caste and the father a quarter caste (i.e. 3 parts white, and 1 part black).
• The children are therefore 5/8 white and 3/8 black.
In the Y case
• The father is a half caste and the mother 3 out of 4 parts white.
• The children therefore are also 5/8 white and 3/8 black.
Can you see how devastatingly scientific racism—measuring ‘the blood’ (5/8 black!)—has been used to legitimise institutional racism? Wherever you go in Australia you will find similar examples of exclusion and segregation throughout the 1930s and 1940s. This is the time that Rowley (1971) describes as the ‘training for citizenship’ era. Governments attempted to ‘uplift’ Aboriginal people to become useful ‘citizens’, but not too quickly and preferably at a distance from the rest of Australian society.

Thus, to be identified as an Aboriginal was largely a punitive measure—it subjected you to all kinds of restrictions and authority, legal as well as de jure (those assumed by right). Ironically, similar restrictions applied to people in other States (e.g. Victoria) who were excluded from the category ‘Aboriginal’ and labelled ‘half-caste,’ ‘quadroon’ or ‘octoroon’. These people were, by the 1887 Act (not repealed until 1928), excluded from living on Aboriginal reserves (Rowley 1971).

The restrictions on liberty, interference with family affairs and so on were bad enough, but the effect of such categorisation on people’s identity—their very essence—was devastating. What we have, in effect, are generations of people who have been subjected to legislation because of racial characteristics (i.e. institutional racism). Not only that, but within that group, varying labels have been applied according to the extent of Aboriginal ancestry and, with those labels, varying degrees of restrictions and direction. In this way, the policies have effectively undermined Aboriginal identity as such and have split the minority even further. Indeed, Aboriginal people are not only different from non-Aboriginal people because they adhere to different cultural traditions. They are also different because they have been forced to be so by the way government policies have regulated every aspect of their lives and being. As Rowley (1971, p 61) points out:

Present Aboriginal beliefs and attitudes, even were there no other causes, could be adequately accounted for by reference to the rigid controls which reached a climax in the depression years of the 1930s. The same systems of controls have been a factor in maintaining prejudices towards Aborigines …

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Two of the X children and both of the Y children suffer from Trachoma.
The Head Master – says that the X children give much trouble because of head lice.
The X live on the same side of the river as the State School, but the Y children live in the camp.
Reg. 106 says: Children who are otherwise eligible as pupils shall not be refused admission to any school on account of race or colour, without the specific direction of the Minister.
It is evident, therefore, that the Minister may, if he thinks fit, refuse permission to the X and Y children to attend the – State School.
I suggest
Request Head Master – to furnish a full report on the X and Y children, giving particular information as to their cleanliness, physical condition etc.
Inform Mrs X and Mrs Y that enquiries concerning the matters referred to in their letters are being made.
1/2/35
Tell her that when a dark school is established for coloured children, it will be necessary for all coloured children to attend it.
18/1/38
Say that a school has been established in – for coloured children; the programme of work and the equipment will be specifically designed to suit their aptitudes, and all coloured children must attend it.
Consequently Kennedy (1985, p 25) reminds us in her autobiography:

Our only crime was being a half-caste through no fault of our mothers. May God protect all our descendants from the harsh treatment we went through … Aborigines never felt free—freedom of mind, soul or heart. It lurks deeps within us and we are forever afraid … When white man took away our freedom he replaced it with fear … Our freedom and our fears are locked in our souls and they’ve thrown away the keys. (Kennedy 1985, p 25).

The realities of living on the fringes of poverty and powerlessness are exemplified in the following account of just one fringe settlement in south-western Queensland.

Aboriginal remembrances of fringe settlement life
The immediate, living past concerning the present Aboriginal people in Rural Town relates to the days of the Yumba. By the 1930s the various sporadic camps along the riverbank had solidified into two permanent settlements. One of these was the official Yumba, referred to as ‘East Rural Town’ by Europeans. A number of corrugated iron cottages had been built by the town council and the area was officially reserved for Aboriginal people. The other settlement was unofficial and consisted of families who refused to be classed as Yumba residents, preferring instead to progressively acquire land outside town and to build their own houses there (two large family groups were involved in this independent move). Their unofficial settlement was, during the 1950s, taken over by families who migrated into the area from further west and the coastal regions. This settlement acquired the name of ‘Little Cherbourg’. The settlement always remained small and families settled a good 50–100 metres apart. In two cases, white men were living in ‘Little Cherbourg’ with Aboriginal women. The families in this settlement were not intermarried with those residing on the Yumba. Most of the present Aboriginal population in Rural Town, then, grew up on or associated with the Yumba.

Although the council intended Aboriginal families to live in the cottages provided for them, the cottages were small and families tended to be large. Consequently, as more people settled and more new families were formed, ‘home-made’ shacks and humpies sprang up around the official cottages.

None of the camps were supplied with electricity or water. Water was carted by a European carrier and sold for five shillings for a 44-gallon (200 litre) drum. Carbide lights substituted for electricity. Each family organised its own sanitary facilities; shelters were constructed from galvanised iron and wood; most families slept outside their humpies whenever the weather permitted. Wood stoves or open fires provided cooking facilities. The cottages each had a veranda and two rooms, so most of everyday life occurred in the open.

Until 1951 the Yumba had its own school (‘the dark school’) where one white teacher taught all four grades. The Methodist Church set up ‘the dark people’s church’ in the vicinity of the camp. Men went to work on the stations in the area, women with children stayed on the Yumba, unmarried women worked as cooks and house maids, some in town, most on stations. Recreational activities seem to have centred around gambling (for women) and drinking (for men), the holding of sing-songs and dances. The people built their own gambling shed in the centre of their camp, and games could last for anything up to 48 hours.

Perhaps the best way to describe the Yumba is to present verbatim comments describing the conditions and people’s feelings about their situation (Eckermann 1977).

1 We never were so interested in money then, specially the kids. True, there was no electricity or water laid on, but we had water carted twice a week, and we were happy there. The council built us eight cottages, anyone could move into them as soon as they got empty. Other families, the young ones, you know, built their own houses. We even had a big bough shed right in the middle for gambling …
Drinking was never a problem then with the young people. You could drink if you wanted to but they generally did it at home, the older ones, you know. The publican at – was more or less all for the darkies and saw that they always had a drink, even if it was two o’clock in the morning. All Sunday then the young ones and the old ones played rounders, football, cricket and baseball—you were never short of a team there. The dark people kept right away from the whites. The only whites that visited were those looking for a stray gin. Those were the best days of our lives. The kids all played together. The adults played cards, we were happy there even if we didn’t have proper houses or anything. The kids used to raid the orchard up the river. We used to go there in the day and buy tuppence worth of fruit, had a good look to see where the best fruit was and then come back at night and pick them up. There was never any trouble over drinking, either the drunks were home on the Yumba or on their way—no one ever strayed around the streets drunk like you see some of them fellas today.

Life was hard then, I suppose, but there were all these people, see, the kids were never bored, they raced or played rounders, or went swimming, or played football or cricket, or went exploring in the bush looking for gum or wild bananas or went fishing—the whole mob of them, boys and girls. And the adults joined in the games. There were always things to do, you were never bored. And everyone was together. They had a big bough shed in the middle of the Yumba where they used to have gambling, with this huge table and benches. And anyone could see their house from there and the kids used to play in the open around the shed—that way they never got in the way of the adults and had plenty of room to move and you could keep your eye on them. When we were kids we used to play cards for marbles, or half-pennies to get enough for the pictures. The dark kids were always best in sport, always ran, swam and jumped better.

You didn’t need to worry about anything then, only just about water and wood really and we got the wood for nothing. Not like now when you gotta pay rent and electricity and wood and food and clothes and everything. They should have left us alone, let people live like they wanted to.

There was always something to do—play rounders, young and old together—there was always someone you could meet up with. And you could make as much noise as you wanted and no one’d interfere with you.

These few examples of people’s remembrances of the past clearly show the nostalgia with which they think of those days. They remember mainly the warmth, lack of boredom, fewer responsibilities, having fun and being together away from the prying eyes of the whites. It was a haven, away from the stress of non-Aboriginal society and its rules, regulations, and condemnation, a place to recoup from culture clash and culture shock. It was also a place that in many ways reinforced majority domination and minority dependence.

The Yumba was bulldozed in 1967. During 1963 a parliamentary delegation investigated plans to resettle Aboriginal people on fringe settlements in Queensland towns. On their tour they visited Rural Town. The following is a resume of this visit by the consultant architect to the delegation.

The town planned to resettle the people from the Yumba on another Yumba. The Northern Territory was to serve as an example and the ‘new’ Yumba was to contain proper cottages with communal toilets and showers. The area allocated for this new reserve was where the town dumped its nightsoil. The architect expressed dissatisfaction with this plan, but found it difficult to consult the Aboriginal people. According to his account, the council had organised a token parade of Aboriginal people as the delegation passed through the Yumba and then whisked the members off to an official reception to forestall any real consultation with the people. The architect apparently returned to the Yumba and was able to hold unofficial talks with some of the women. They discussed their situation with him, and complained especially that as long as the Yumba existed, the white men from Rural Town would continue to consider the camp as an unofficial brothel for their exclusive and inalienable use. Consequently, the architect suggested to the council that the Aboriginal people be relocated within Rural Town
itself. The council was not in favour of the idea, maintaining that this would cause great
resentment among the white population, who did not want blacks living next door to them
and who feared a subsequent drop in property values. The architect suggested that Aboriginal
people could be spread throughout Rural Town to forestall any ghetto effect, and that they
might be settled next to white people from a similar socio-economic situation (labourers) to
themselves. This scheme was finally accepted. Indeed it became the ‘salt and pepper’ model
of Aboriginal resettlement that guided government policy throughout the 1960s and 1970s.
Aboriginal people were informed that they must leave the Yumba, but the last families did not
shift until 1967 when the bulldozers moved in. According to the people, they were frightened
of the reception they would get from the white population in Rural Town.

There is no doubt that the reality of the Yumba was far different from the rosy recollections
cited earlier. One woman remembers that:

The young blades from town used to come to the Yumba all the time looking for parties
and women—or they’d race about in their cars, calling out and giving cheek to the
people. Then when they were back in town they behaved as if they’d never been to the
blacks’ camp …

Another woman recalled children dying of dysentery. Further, three men died of alcoholic
poisoning, and two women experienced complete mental breakdowns. Consequently the
warm memories of belonging, of family and fun, need to be seen within a context of real
hardship and some fear. The following case study by Lynette Nixon, of a former resident of the
Yumba, illustrates how hard life in the camp really was.

**Case study**

**Power and powerlessness**

I was 18 years of age and I had two children and a baby. We were living on the reserve in a
house that my husband and my brother had built—dirt floors, basic tin walls, no ceiling—we
had an open fire place in the kitchen—and my little baby, at six weeks old had become sick.
I’d taken him to the hospital early and the doctor thought there was something wrong with my
breast milk ’cause he wouldn’t eat. So he’d taken him off the breast and told me to put him on
this milk called S26 which is real expensive. So I did that but the baby was still being sick, he
was getting really, really sick—he still wasn’t eating and he was getting a temp and a cold and
he had a cough. So I took him over to the hospital again and they told me there was nothing
really wrong with him, to take him back home. We walked from the reserve, across the river—the
back way to the hospital—would have been a couple of miles—but I had two kids in the pram
and one on the hip, and when you’re down crossing the river you’re pulling the pram and half
pushing and pulling it up the hill, but never mind. Anyway I get there and the hospital tells me
to take him back home, there’s nothing wrong with him—back I go, back home with the other
two in tow. My husband’s working, so I’m all on my own during the day. Go back home and this
baby’s still sick. But somebody had told me that if you go to the ambulance and they take him
up to the hospital they can’t refuse to see him. I thought, me taking him up by myself probably
didn’t mean anything, but if they took him in the ambulance he’d get the proper attention. So I
did that, I went to the ambulance, which is probably another mile or more back the other way
into town. I get up there and the ambulance says, you’ve taken him to the hospital and the
hospital said to take him home—there’s nothing wrong with him—there’s nothing we can do. So
we go back home again and in the meantime this baby’s getting sicker and sicker. That’s over
two days. Anyway, the night we’d taken him to the ambulance and gone back home again, there
was this church group there on the reserve and they were giving a service or something.
Someone from the camp must have told him that we had a very sick baby, here. So this church mob comes over, had a talk to us and they took us to the hospital, and we’d gone there with him and they admit the baby. In those days you couldn’t stay with the baby, you had to leave, so we went home. The next morning I got up and rang the hospital, back up town again—you had to go back to town to use the phone—and the hospital told me ‘yeah—he’s fine!’ You know—his temperature’s gone down and that he’s getting better. So I go back home to the camp. Someone had been over to the hospital that day and they came back and told me baby had all those tubes up his nose and mouth and whatever. Well, I hadn’t seen anyone that sick before that they needed tubes, so he must have been really sick. So when my husband came home from work that afternoon I told him what they’d told me about baby and we go back up town that night to ring up.

We had to go and ring up before we could go and see baby, that was just one of the rules. And the hospital said there was no change—well she told me that morning that he was well—so we thought he was fine. Anyway we were going back then and just when we got a couple of blocks down the street the policeman pulls up, picks us up and told us we had to get to the hospital urgently. So he took us up the hospital and the doctor says baby’s really sick, he’s only got two hours to live and he was talking about this wonder drug.

He said ‘I can give it to him, it may save him or it’ll kill him!’ Well, we signed the papers—he was going to die anyway—so he gave him the drug, whatever that was I don’t know, and about five to ten minutes after he gave it to him he was crying—and the matron said ‘that’s a good sign’ and we just broke down and started crying. Pneumonia they said it was, double pneumonia.

For those Aboriginal people who have battled through these years, kept their identity and successfully handed this identity on to their children with at least some positive features, a change is in the air. Instead of hiding their ‘shameful label’, they are openly, and sometimes aggressively, asserting their identity. But the years of protection have also left many people who, because of the hazards described by Rowley, have been reared by parents who have not stressed their Aboriginal identity. Such individuals are now finding it difficult to be accepted, particularly by other Aboriginal people, because they ‘don’t belong’ to a strong Aboriginal community or ‘don’t look’ Aboriginal. Thus these people too are victims of the policy—*their* acceptance, *their* identity is under threat.

Other Aboriginal people were removed from their families and reared in alien, white-dominated and frequently hostile and cruel institutions. The purpose was always the same—to divide the generations and to dilute, as much as possible, the ‘problem’.

As Galtung (1990, p 295) points out:

> When this happens suddenly we can talk of trauma. When it happens to a group, a collective, we have the collective trauma that can sediment into the collective subconscious …

To summarise, the patterns established by colonialism are similar throughout Australia. With rapid change in the socio-economic, cultural and physical environments, Aboriginal
people had to ‘fit in’, to find a new ecological niche. In the past, and to some extent in the present, this ecological niche was segregated physically from the mainstream of dominant society on reserves, missions, government stations or the outskirts of towns. Economically and socially this new ecological niche was, and continues to be, located at the lowest level of Australian social strata. In political terms, the new ecological niche was, and continues to be, dominated by non-Aboriginal authority. It is consequently marked by cultural violence.

Obviously these pressures had an enormous effect on Aboriginal people, have left deep scars and have shaped their lives in the present. Outsiders can analyse, direct, protest, but they cannot feel. The feeling, the despair, the humour and the strength are all portrayed in Bill Rosser’s book, *Dreamtime Nightmares* (1985).

**Activity**

Before we go on to look at the position of Aboriginal people in Australian society today, consider some of the legacies left by the policies of the past:

1. Under-education, indentured labour, lower wages, no control of resources, no control over personal decision making resulting in dependency
2. Powerlessness, leading to resentment as well as acquiescence to European domination
3. Definitions of identity, cultural and personal worth by external agents of oppressive legislation and a condemnatory society.

Select at least three Aboriginal writers and discuss how they view colonisation and its effects.

**CHAPTER SUMMARY**

- To understand the history of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal interaction in Australia, we need to understand culture contact and culture change. Australia’s history since Cook is one of clash between two cultures and their unique social, cultural, religious and economic ways of life.
- Adaptation in the two societies had taken different forms; alien and inexplicable to one another, the two met head on.
- Culture clash, culture conflict and culture shock resulted, and ultimately the pushier culture, with greater numbers and more deadly weapons, won out.
- Australia was named ‘empty’, uninhabited, because the British felt that the Aboriginal people failed to use the land, to display the mark of civilisation.
- Consequently, when Cook ‘claimed’ Australia, the whole continent became Crown Land and Aboriginal resistance was labelled rebellion rather than war—this approach set the tone for all future interactions.
- Australia was colonised by the European invaders and the Aboriginal people became a disadvantaged minority group. The onus fell on this powerless, subjugated group to fit in.

**Basic principles of colonisation:**

- Prevailing attitudes and scientific and intellectual beliefs prevalent in Europe at the time set the tone for dealings with Indigenous inhabitants.
- There were four principles underlying European colonialism:
  - Basic *ethnocentrism* (attributing superior qualities to their own cultural group) and *xenophobia* (a morbid fear of foreigners)
  - The *scientific/intellectual climate* of the times—discussion of nature of humanness and concepts of racial hierarchy in which northern Europeans occupied the number one position.
the Protestant ethic and industrialisation—changing values in Europe, with wealth seen as an indicator of God's grace, and increasing industrialisation demanding more resources

cultural violence—‘those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence—exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science …—that can be used to justify or legitimise … violence’ (Galtung 1990, p 291).

Process of colonisation:
- The uncontrolled frontier (loose government control), sustained guerilla warfare and resistance
- Establishment of full control from 1850s—Aborigines considered legal non-entities or wards of the State
- Consolidation of government control and aftermath of contact—range of policies to control, regulate and direct Aboriginal life through overt or covert institutional racism.

Government policies:
- European settlement (1788–1880s)—Aborigines regarded as lowest rung in social hierarchy
- Segregation (1890s–1950s)—strong missionary influence, ‘civilising the savages’
- Assimilation (1950s–1960s)—push for education to full citizenship
- Integration (1967–1972)—emphasis on choice for Aborigines
- Self-determination (1972–1975)—some recognition of multicultural society, cultural diversity
- Self-management, Stage I (1975–1989)—Aborigines to be accountable for their decisions and manage own finances
- Self-management, Stage II (1989–1996)—the RCIADIC, the Mabo and Wik Decisions, Native Title legislation, increased tensions and legal actions
- Reconciliation or economic rationalism? (1996–2007)—review of the Stolen Generations, demise of ATSIC, increase in systemic frustrations, increase in Aboriginal community dysfunction in some remote communities, introduction of the NTER, suspension of the RDA
- A New Beginning? (2008 and Beyond)—retention and extension of the NTER, Apology to the Stolen Generations, signing of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, additional commitment of funds to Indigenous affairs under COAG and clear performance indicators in terms of ‘closing the gap’, committee to establish a National Indigenous Representative Committee.

Effects of government policies:
- The myth of terra nullius and peaceful settlement becomes part of Anglo-Australian history
- Institutionalisaton of racism within Australian culture
- Desecration and institutionalisation of Aboriginal life, family and economic structure and identity
- Imposed majority power and decision making, resulting in Aboriginal dependence.

NOTES
1 Dis-ease is more than disease—it is a state of discomfort and unease which includes social, emotional and physical wellbeing.
2 Oodgeroo was the late Kath Walker, who endorsed the first edition of Binaŋ Goonj.
3 Myrdal was the first sociologist who analysed race relations in the USA and developed an understanding of the cycle of poverty.
4 Yumba is the Gunggari word for camp.