Aboriginal People and Local Government. A Shepparton Story

by

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I am the author of the thesis entitled

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Dedicated to

Pam Nieman

champion of the “fair go”

and

Clive Mander

my Dad, who always knew I could do it

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# Table of Contents

*Aboriginal People and Local Government. A Shepparton Story* .......... 9

**The Shepparton Chronicles** i. Prologue ................................................................. 9

## PART 1: Introduction – The Calling .......................................................... 10

**How I will tell the Story** ......................................................................................... 11

1. **First Interlocution: The players in the Story** .............................................. 15

   **Introducing the players** .................................................................................... 15

   1.1 **Australia – the mise-en-scène** ..................................................................... 15

   1.2 **Local government** ...................................................................................... 15

   1.3 **The City of Greater Shepparton** ................................................................. 16

   1.4 **Yorta Yorta Nation and the Bangerang people** ........................................... 17

   1.5 **Myself** ...................................................................................................... 17

   **The Shepparton Chronicles I. The struggle** ................................................. 18

2. **Second Interlocution: The voice of this Calling** ....................................... 20

   2.1 **Knocking before I enter** ............................................................................. 20

   2.2 **Learning to worry** ................................................................................... 20

   **The Shepparton Chronicles II. A valuable partner in Reconciliation?** .... 21

## PART 2: About Australia – setting the scene ............................................. 23

**A little drop of Australia** ....................................................................................... 23

**The Shepparton Chronicles III. The Closing The Gap Campaign: Driver Of Policy?** ....................................................................................................... 24

3. **Third Interlocution: Are we making progress...?** ......................................... 25

   3.1 **Who are we?** ............................................................................................. 25

   3.2 **We are the invaders** .................................................................................. 26

   3.3 **Treaty** ..................................................................................................... 27
3.4 Reconciliation
3.5 The non-Aboriginal problem?
3.5.1 Aboriginal disadvantage or government dysfunction?

The Shepparton Chronicles IV. Talking With A Lot Of People

The Shepparton Chronicles V. Reflection

4. Fourth Interlocution. Progress...or just going round in circles?
4.1 Assimilation and Closing The Gap
4.2 Assimilation or integration?
4.3 Times change in the seventies
4.4 Self-determination
4.5 Conclusion: Assimilation is "about what whitefellas want"

The Shepparton Chronicles VI. The Long-Awaited Meeting With An Eminent Aboriginal Australian

5. Fifth Interlocution: Is Australia a racist country?
5.1 Racism in Shepparton
5.2 What is racism?
5.3 Is racism the same as nationalism?
5.3.1 The rise of a mean spirit
5.3.2 What is a nation?
5.3.3 The Cronulla riot: defending our nation?
5.3.4 The cult of forgetfulness
5.4 Race: a "biological fiction"
5.5 Ideology
5.6 Institutional racism
5.6.1 Lingering colonial thinking
5.6.2 My own institutionalist mindset
5.7 "I'm not racist..."

Dr Carmen Lawrence speaks at the Dungala-Kaiela Oration
6.5 Local government’s new directions................................................................. 95
6.6 ”Can local government create conditions in which Aboriginal culture can
flourish and reconciliation blossom?” .................................................................. 98
6.6.1 Returning to the original question.............................................................. 98
6.6.2 Aboriginal Australians are not just another minority group....................... 99
6.7 The return of politics to local government .................................................... 100
6.7.1 Revolution? ............................................................................................... 101
6.7.2 Policy networks: democratic solution or an unmanageable mess? .......... 103
6.8 How to proceed? ......................................................................................... 105

Conclusion to Part 3. Local Government ....................................................... 106

The Shepparton Chronicles IX. Stumbling Around And Learning By Doing
...................................................................................................................................... 107

Part 4. My (love) Story: Shepparton and me ......................... 110

7. Seventh Interlocution: Fixing things is the problem................................. 112

The Shepparton Chronicles X. Sorting things out........................................ 115

8. Eighth Interlocution. Seeking Shepparton.................................................... 117
8.1 Yorta Yorta Nation ...................................................................................... 117
8.1.1 The Yorta Yorta people ........................................................................... 118
8.1.2 Yorta Yorta and Bangerang .................................................................... 121

The Shepparton Chronicles XI. Liking Shepparton ...................................... 122

8.3 European history of Shepparton ................................................................. 124
8.3.1 Shepparton today ................................................................................... 125

The Shepparton Chronicles XII. Being a tourist........................................... 129

9. Ninth Interlocution: From Paralysis to Purpose.......................................... 131

The Shepparton Chronicles XII. I am ”bricoleur” ........................................ 137
10. Tenth Interlocution: Kaiela Planning Council ........................................ 139
   10.1 The genesis of KPC ................................................................. 139
   10.2 The life of KPC .................................................................. 141
   10.3 Kaiela Institute .................................................................. 142
   10.4 Has KPC been successful? .................................................. 143
   10.5 Membership of KPC – agencies that serve the Aboriginal community ...... 145

The Shepparton Chronicles XIII. Shepparton: The Willy-Willy Of First
Impressions ....................................................................................... 150

11. Eleventh Interlocution: Ways of Knowing .......................................... 153

The Shepparton Chronicles XIV. Running hard to keep up ..................... 158

12. Twelfth Interlocution: The Meeting Place? ...................................... 161
   12.1 Searching for my own methodology .................................... 161
   12.1.1 Establishing trust ............................................................. 162
   12.1.2 Cultural values in harmony ............................................. 163
   12.1.3 A reflexive, flexible, emergent methodology ................. 164

The Shepparton Chronicles XV. Going feral? .................................... 165

13. Thirteenth Interlocution: Action research ........................................ 167
   Figure 1 .................................................................................... 171

14. Fourteenth Interlocution – The Plan ................................................ 173
   14.1 Encountering Shepparton .................................................... 173
   14.2 Laying out the Plan .............................................................. 174
   14.2.1 Additional research methods ....................................... 174
   14.2.2 Preparing for fieldwork ............................................... 175
   14.3 Values and Ethics ............................................................... 176
   14.4 My Research Plan as submitted to DUHREC .................... 177
   14.4.1 Aims ........................................................................... 178
   14.4.2 Research methods ....................................................... 179
   14.4.3 Benefits ...................................................................... 180
14.4.4 Methodology ........................................................................................................ 182
14.4.5 Duty of care ........................................................................................................ 184
14.4.6 Regarding the ethically problematic use of my house for hospitality......... 186
14.4.7 Summary ............................................................................................................ 187

The Shepparton Chronicles XVI. Hang On To Your Hats! ....................... 188

15. Fifteenth Interlocution: Stop worrying and just do it .............................. 190

The Shepparton Chronicles XVII. Things are going very slowly............. 194

16. Sixteenth Interlocution: The Plan goes awry........................................... 196

The Shepparton Chronicles XVIII. Searching For The Way In..................... 198

17. Seventeenth Interlocution: Proud, strong family... that's Rumba!........ 201

The Shepparton Chronicles XIX. Go Rumba...................................................... 204

The Shepparton Chronicles XX. Getting To Know People............................... 207

The Shepparton Chronicles XXI. Climbing Out Of The Black Hole........... 211

18. Eighteenth Interlocution: The City of Greater Shepparton Council (CoGS)
............................................................................................................................. 216
18.1 Defining CoGS...................................................................................................... 216
18.1.1 Optimalist municipalities are defined as ‘champions of their areas’........ 217
18.1.2 Optimalism may be considered as a moderate ‘third way’................. 218
18.1.3 Optimalism in local governance thus envisages municipalities leading and
coordinating............................................................................................................... 221

The Shepparton Chronicles XXII. So far, so good ............................................ 222

18.2 How is Council policy made? ................................................................. 224

The Shepparton Chronicles XXIII. Can white people escape our own
oppression? ............................................................................................................. 228

18.3 Community Development Framework ..................................................... 233
18.3.1 A B C D methodology ................................................................. 234
18.4 Does the Community Development Framework benefit Aboriginal people 237
18.4.1 Paternalism in government practices ........................................... 237

  The Shepparton Chronicles XXIV. Getting it together ....................... 239

18.5 Day to day Community Development in Shepparton Council ........ 243
18.5.1 The Arts as community builders .................................................. 243
18.5.2 Community Development staff ..................................................... 243
18.6 The Treasure on the Edge of Council: The Shepparton Library ...... 245

  The Shepparton Chronicles XXV. Love .............................................. 246

18.7 The City of Greater Shepparton Council in 2010 ........................... 247

A Forum .................................................................................................. 250
  19.1 On vision for the future ................................................................. 250
  19.2 On consultation ............................................................................. 251
  19.3 On Partnership .............................................................................. 252
  19.4 On what happens when the Gap is closed? .................................... 253
  19.5 On unfinished business? ............................................................... 253
  19.6 On what could be the function of local government in achieving justice? 254
  19.7 What should the Aboriginal community do? ................................. 258
  19.8 PLENARY ...................................................................................... 259

  The Shepparton Chronicles XXVI. How do I leave? ......................... 260

Part 5. Looking back. Time for Reflection ........................................... 265

20. Twentieth Interlocution: What happened to my Plan? ..................... 265
  20.1 My planned research methodology .............................................. 265
  20.1.1 My preparation .......................................................................... 265
  20.1.2 The question of Ethics ............................................................... 266
20.1.4 Institutionalism again? ................................................................. 267
20.1.6 How action research and I came unstuck ....................................... 268
20.1.7 The power trap ............................................................................ 269
20.2 My reconstituted methodology ......................................................... 270
20.2.1 Defining my reconstituted methodology ......................................... 271
20.2.2 If it’s not action research, what is it? ............................................. 273
20.3 Conclusion: What happened to my Plan? .......................................... 274

21. Twenty first Interlocution: The Dance of Opposites ......................... 276
21.1 Optimism and pessimism in Shepparton ........................................... 276
21.2 The "hyphen" – the "tension of difference" ......................................... 278
21.3 The "ethical space" ........................................................................... 279
21.4 Dialogics, Love, Democracy and Conflict ....................................... 280
Conclusion: The Dance of Opposites .................................................... 281

Part 6. Returning to where we started .................................................. 283

22. Twenty-second Interlocution: "Yes" ..................................................... 283
22.1 The "meeting places" in my research ............................................... 283
22.2 The Question .................................................................................. 284

Can local government create conditions where Aboriginal culture can flourish
and reconciliation blossom? ................................................................. 284
22.2.1 Can local government change? ..................................................... 284
22.2.2 Consultation, partnerships, CD Framework: is this enough? ....... 285
22.3 Dreaming Shepparton .................................................................... 286

23. Twenty-third Interlocution. "No" ...................................................... 288
23.1 The City of Greater Shepparton ....................................................... 289
23.2 Alliances ....................................................................................... 290

The Shepparton Chronicles XXVII. Leaving Shep – Epilogue ............ 291

References ............................................................................................ 293
Appendices ........................................................................................... 308
My first thought on waking: I'm in trouble. Lying in bed in my tiny Hayes Street cottage, I stare unseeing at a ceiling cobweb. I have come to the end of my fieldwork in Shepparton. Next week I will be back on campus for my writing phase. I know it's irrational, but I feel as though I have done no research at all. I can no longer see the border between my life and my research. I love these people. How can I call them my research? Yet I also feel I have gained a wealth of knowledge through my life here with them over the past fifteen months. Not data, not even information, no answers, but a deep questioning knowledge. To write a thesis about this seems careless. I suddenly feel in panic that I cannot remember a thing.

I consult my journal. It is full of my stories of anguish and delight; my opinions about experiences I have had, questions I have asked myself, and my responses to people I met. This is where the knowledge springs from: getting to know Shepparton people, their joys and agonies; what they hope for, what brings them to despair. Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. The gentle healing I received from an Aboriginal friend when my father died. Here – in Shepparton – where I'm researching. This is what I need to write about: what is this knowledge and how did I come by it.
PART 1: Introduction – The Calling

(Governance) is an expression of the people’s vision of what kind of community they are, of the relationships within that community that they value and want to sustain, of the ways they feel decisions should be made and people should be treated, of their place in the world around them. This is one of the reasons why external impositions of governmental form have such a poor history of success around the world. They cannot capture the allegiance of the community because they do not express the community’s own vision of what governance should be and do.1

Stephen Cornell

The question: "Can Local Government create conditions in which Aboriginal culture can flourish, and reconciliation blossom?"

My research question was formed at the genesis of my project. Now, at the project’s completion, the answer is "no". And "yes". "No" not now, not in the spirit of this age. But "Yes" because to say "no" is to extinguish possibilities. I am comfortable with this contradiction, because of two important things that happened during my research in Shepparton.

The first was the apparent disintegration of my planned methodology, due in part to my naive perception of Aboriginal people. This is when I realised that as a quintessential settler Australian, I was a valuable participant in my own research. The mistake I had made in assuming Aboriginal people would willingly participate in my project was the same shortsighted mistake that I have observed in local government and other white institutions, including the academy. This confidence in the supremacy of "our" way is a barrier to achieving justice for Aboriginal people. This is why the answer is "no".

Secondly, my research experience in the City of Greater Shepparton was a profusion of perplexing dichotomies. In my story, I relate how I came to appreciate this dance of opposites, and see that it could be, if not the solution to the problem of injustice to Aboriginal people, then at least the threshold leading to genuinely productive

1 Cornell 2008
dialogue. In my fifteen months living as a member of the community, I became aware of a palpable pessimism/optimism dichotomy regarding Aboriginal justice. I found the settler community, especially those involved in government and other institutions, tended to be optimistic about reconciliation, whereas Aboriginal people were more likely to be pessimistic, though this divide was not necessarily consistent. Although this binary may appear to be a manifestation of polarity, I came to understand that when reflectively considered, it provides an overview of the "whole picture". Viewed in this way, it can actually be a point of connection, the "hyphen" that both separates and links\(^2\), as Jones and Jenkins describe it, and which could over time help to lead the community to social inclusion and justice for Aboriginal people. This concept is not new, dating back as far as Aristotle's theories of politics and democracy\(^3\). However it has not yet been seriously applied to community governance. Nevertheless in new models of governance, and in Friere's ideologies of dialogics and love\(^4\), there are possibilities. This is why the answer is "yes".

The settler/Aboriginal relationship must be resolved, for justice, rather than "reconciliation". I am convinced that there is no alternative but to continue the struggle to restore justice to Aboriginal Australians and repair past injustices. This conviction is an \textit{a priori} presumption in my research. In this prejudice I am exposing my own epistemological origins. Nevertheless a continual critical examination of my beliefs, knowledge and experience has been included in my project.

\section*{How I will tell the Story}

Somebody said to me that my title should be "A Shepparton Love Story". I hope it is. It is the story about my time in Shepparton, and for me, it IS about love. It's about friendship, and conflict, and frustration, and failure, and a vision for the future. I hesitate to call it an epic. Nevertheless, it is a story to be told; it is more a narrative than a treatise, I have chosen to tell this as "my story", because stories engage humans in a way that writing in an "objective" passive voice style cannot. If research is important enough to be done, then it must connect with listeners (or readers). Jo-ann Archibald believes that stories "engage us as listeners and learners to think deeply and to reflect on our actions and reactions...[and create] a synergy for making

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{2} Jones and Jenkins 2008
  \item \textsuperscript{3} Bickford 1996
  \item \textsuperscript{4} Freire 1970 – 1996
\end{itemize}
meaning through the story and making one work to obtain meaning and understanding". For this reason, I will write my Shepparton Story in as plain language as possible.

I chose action research as my methodology after much careful searching. I was determined my methodology should harmonise with Indigenous research paradigms, yet in the field it became obvious that it was fundamentally inappropriate. Therefore, at the end of my story, I will evaluate not only my own implementation of the methodology, but the methodology itself.

I would expect a study of the relationship between Aboriginal people and settler Australians to seek to bring about change, especially having chosen action research methodology, transformation being one of its elements. The cyclical (or spiral) structure of action research is designed to initiate change, originating from the community itself, rather than from "top-down" intervention. As my project will show, justice for Australian Aboriginal people will not come from government policies alone, on whatever level, but must arise from within people, individually and communally. Politicians are people too. My Shepparton "odyssey" has changed me, as both researcher and participant. I hope that, as readers of this thesis join me on the adventure, they will change also.

I have kept a journal from the inception of the project. I will tell my story using my journal as a source, following its chronology. My journal will provide the backbone of the narrative, under the title The Shepparton Chronicles. Journal extracts are meaningless without the context of the progress of learning. Telling the story chronologically sets out the journey from ignorance to knowledge in a way that is clear. "Chronicles" means a story told from beginning to end.

I have named my discussion sections Interlocutions. They contain the contributions of many players in my research, the theorists and the commentators. The term "Interlocution" means "conversation" or "dialogue". My review of literature is dispersed and embedded throughout my Story. Inductively, during my research, new ideas and discoveries send me back to the library to seek the knowledge of these players to help in my evaluation of what I see, hear and experience. The term

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*Interlocution* describes the spirit of the knowledge I have received during my time in Shepparton.

Participants in my project include Municipal Councillors, Yorta Yorta Elders, Council Officers, NGO Officers, Club Officials and other stakeholders in Aboriginal justice in Shepparton. When I use the names of people in the public domain, they will be unchanged, for example, it is pointless using a pseudonym for a CEO of an organisation when that information is public knowledge. However, private individuals, and public individuals speaking privately, will be allocated a pseudonym, and if circumstances are so specific as to make identification possible, these circumstances will be described in general or unidentifiable terms so as to protect the privacy of the individual. Organisations will be treated in a similar way, except that in most cases no pseudonym will be given. There are many organisations in Shepparton that have played a part in this project, and as far as the information is publicly accessible, real names will be used. My project was approved by the Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee in June 2010, under the reference 2010-073.

I will use the terms Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal in most cases. I acknowledge that these terms are clumsy, but alternatives can be vague or problematic, for example, Aboriginal people in New South Wales and Victoria refer to themselves as "Koori". I have used this term on occasions, but it is confusing to outsiders as it is a generic term and does not refer to a Nation or clan. I do not like to use the expression "mainstream community" for non-Aboriginal Australia as it implies a lesser status for Aboriginal Australians. I avoid it when possible. The "wider community" is a better alternative. I have used "settler" in many instances for the non-Aboriginal community. It is not completely satisfactory because the term infers a transitory situation, and this is certainly not so in Australia. Australia in the twenty-first century is an established Western nation that has not yet come to terms with the detritus of its colonisationist past. New Zealand conveniently calls its people of European descent "Pakeha". There may similar terms used locally in Australia, but these are not generally known or used. Other descriptions that may appear are "Western" (especially relating to government) or "white" (but never "black"), and the informal terms, "whitefella" or "blackfella" in quotations. Note that the term "Western" refers to a hegemonic mindset, and has nothing to do with geography.
Here then is the Story.
1. First Interlocution: The players in the Story

Introducing the players

The players in my research story are Australia, Local Government, in particular the City of Greater Shepparton, the Yorta Yorta Nation and Bangerang people, and myself as an intimate and convenient source of white colonial attitudes, and who struggles to change them.

1.1 Australia – the mise-en-scène

Australia, or more precisely, settler Australia, in this story is in the minds of its people, the "imagined community" of Benedict Anderson's definition. Its role is as the mise-en-scène, a theatrical and film term for setting or "staging", of the study. The so-called "Australian way of life" provides the backdrop, or context, for the study; and it is the main reason for the "no" answer to my research question. The zeitgeist of the Australian settler population in this century and the last is a major impediment to Aboriginal justice. As I discuss in Fifth Interlocution, racism is prevalent in Australia, although most people would deny being racist. There is a tendency to mistake "pride" in one's country for a kind of defensive exclusivity, where the Other is different, in looks, dress, speech or ways of seeing the world, and therefore a threat. There is plenty of evidence that Aboriginal people are seen as Other, and not genuinely Australian. "Common sense", that is, what we "know" through our own experiences and upbringing, plus what is fed by those in power through media, drives the creation of stereotypes.

1.2 Local government

Local government is a predominantly Western institution that is in the position, close to the community, to make a significant contribution to Aboriginal justice, but is hamstrung by its own often-unwitting racism. In addition, it depends on State Government legislation for its existence, not having Federal Constitutional status for independence. According to some Aboriginal people, contact with local councils is not "culturally safe" because there is a "lack of respect and recognition of the

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6 Anderson 1983/2006
7 Government has nurtured this view when it is to its advantage. See Fifth Interlocution 5.3.3
8 See Third Interlocution 3.2
9 See Fifth Interlocution 5.8
positive aspects of Aboriginal culture and its centrality in creating a sense of meaning and purpose for Aboriginal peoples"10.

However, my thesis will show how the role of local government has changed considerably over the last two to three decades, particularly during the term of the Kennett Liberal/National coalition government in Victoria during the nineties decade. Generally local government's historical role of services to infrastructure, that is “roads, rates, rubbish", has grown into "services to people". Many attempts have been made to seek justice for Aboriginal people in the past,11 but only recently has local government, especially since the work of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, been seriously considered as a major actor. The importance of local government to Reconciliation is expressed in the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation's Final Report:

"Local government is one of Council's most valued partners in achieving reconciliation. Local governments, because of their on-the-ground presence, their potential for local leadership and their role as managers of social and physical infrastructure, are of critical importance to nation-wide reconciliation."12

1.3 The City of Greater Shepparton

Shepparton is a Victorian regional city of approximately 62,000 people, about 200km north of Melbourne. Situated in the fertile Murray-Goulburn13 district, it is a fine, prosperous-looking city, being the centre of a major fruit-growing and canning area. It presents as proudly multicultural, and has been willing to accept refugees. It comprises the highest Aboriginal percentage of the population of any municipality in Victoria. Shepparton hosts campuses of at least two tertiary institutions. However, like all human communities, Shepparton has its problems: crime rates are higher than

10 Frankland, Bamblett & Lewis 2011:27
11 Reynolds 1998
12 CAR 2000a, austlii website
13 The Murray River forms most of the border between Victoria and New South Wales. The Gouburn River is a major tributary of the Murray. Shepparton is situated close to where the Broken River, and Seven Creeks join the Goulburn, This river system has created a very fertile floodplain.
the Victorian average\(^{14}\). It has a higher than average unemployment rate, particularly among Aboriginal people,\(^{15}\) and lower mean income\(^{16}\).

1.4 Yorta Yorta Nation and the Bangerang people

Yorta Yorta Nation is the Victorian Government's "Recognised Aboriginal Party" (RAP) in the district. The Yorta Yorta are river people. Their country crosses the Murray River, or Dungalah\(^{17}\), and includes the Goulburn River, or Kaiela\(^{18}\), and includes the City of Greater Shepparton. The European invasion reduced Yorta Yorta Nation by approximately 80% in one generation\(^{19}\). One of the remaining legacies of this destruction is an internalised "lateral violence", demonstrated in bitter disagreement among some Aboriginal communities. In Shepparton it manifests in, among other things, the dispute over the relative status of Yorta Yorta and Bangerang peoples, a conflict that causes anguish for many.

1.5 Myself

As a settler Australian, living in the twenty-first century, I long to see Aboriginal people given a "fair go". No doubt there has been an element of high moral ground in my concern. It did not occur to me until well into my research project that in my righteous anger about Australia's past, I considered myself to be in a powerful position, the rescuer of the "poor disadvantaged Aborigines". This romantic imagining was heightened by the fact that until I began researching in Shepparton I knew no Aboriginal people, therefore had no point of reference.

I began my fieldwork in Shepparton with preconceived ideas, undoubtedly prejudiced, although I had believed my mind was open. Once in the community I found myself in a maelstrom of reality, which tore apart my conceptions, and even my methodology, though I had thoroughly researched it before I went to Shepparton. I am a fifth generation Anglo-Celtic settler Australian, as are many of the non-Aboriginal people Aboriginal Australians have to deal with every day. It is therefore

\(^{15}\) National Centre for Vocational Education Research Ltd. (NCVER) www.ncver.edu.au/2003
\(^{17}\) Yorta Yorta name for the Murray River (spelling may vary)
\(^{18}\) Yorta Yorta name for the Goulburn River
reasonable to assume that I will share inherent and implicit beliefs informed by my epistemological background, with other non-Aboriginal people. Consequently my own worldview is a valid player in this story.

The Shepparton Chronicles

I. The struggle

March 2009

Outrage is driving me to do this research. Not curiosity, not anger. Outrage. Not only because of the brutal way Europeans took possession of Australia in the nineteenth century, and that we had not been taught this in school, but also because of the lack of anger in today's Australia about our history of colonisation. Sovereignty has never been ceded. We still live on stolen country. Contemporary Australians rarely question our occupation of this land. I am affronted by our history. Our cruel invasion cost Aboriginal nations everything. Aboriginal author and poet Kevin Gilbert claims: "It is my thesis that Aboriginal Australia underwent a rape of the soul so profound that the blight continues in the minds of most blacks today."\textsuperscript{20}

I am not guilty. I was not there. But if I can take pride in the pioneering spirit of my ancestors, which I do, then I also can feel shame. I do not know what part my forebears played in the dispossession of the First Australians, but I am aware that the colonial attitude of "the world belongs to white people" still exists in Australia today. This is why I believe reconciliation is one of the most important subjects in our times. But I am also aware that many people of goodwill have tried and failed to achieve justice for Aboriginal people right from the time of the invasion. Henry Reynolds says that from the 1830s, "Humanitarians ... believed that a central and inescapable reality was that Aborigines owned the land and that by denying this fact the British Australians jeopardised any chance for

\textsuperscript{20} Gilbert quoted in Short 2008:1
negotiation or reconciliation.  

Reynolds explains that early humanitarians were not opposed to settlement per se. "But what united a disparate group of reformers across generations was the conviction that colonisation need not be so brutal, so lacking in compassion, so drenched in blood."

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21 Reynolds 1998: 247
22 Reynolds 1998: 246
2. Second Interlocution: The voice of this Calling

*With the drawing of this Love and the voice of this Calling*
*We shall not cease from exploration.*
*And the end of all our exploring*
*Will be to arrive where we started*
*And know the place for the first time.*

_T. S. Eliot^23_

2.1 Knocking before I enter

In accordance with Indigenous protocol as presented by Karen Martin in *Please Knock Before You Enter*, I will begin by introducing myself "so that connection can be made on political, cultural and social grounds..."^24_ I was born in Melbourne, on Wurundjeri country, where I have lived most of my life. I have also lived briefly in Sydney, also Gilgandra and Narrandera in rural New South Wales when I was a child. My husband and I spent two years in Toronto, Canada. My son was born there. I have lived on a hobby farm in North-Eastern Victoria, and ten years in Melbourne's inner-suburb Richmond. I now live in the Dandenong Ranges, east of Melbourne, with my husband and dog.

My forebears came to Australia from Britain in the mid nineteenth century, some by way of New Zealand. They were good people, I think; at least the ones I knew – my grandparents, and my parents. I was raised with a strong sense of compassion and social justice. Nevertheless, I do not remember knowing very much about this country's First Peoples, let alone encountering any Aboriginal people in my day-to-day life, as I was growing up in the fifties and sixties, even in country towns. As in Stanner's "cult of forgetting"^25_, it was though Aboriginal people did not exist.

2.2 Learning to worry

I realised early in the process that I am a fix-it person. No matter how much more knowledgeable than me a person may be, if they mention a problem, I have a million ideas on how to solve it. A problem of how to achieve Reconciliation? *I'll throw myself into a PhD and find the solution!*

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^23_ Eliot, T S, *Little Gidding*
^24_ Martin 2003:209
^25_ Stanner 1969
In my Honours research in 2002, which included local municipalities on the eastern seaboard of Australia, I had found that, despite the apparent lack of interest from the Howard Federal Government, many were becoming increasingly aware of the need to reconcile with their local Aboriginal communities. The Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) and the state Local Government Associations (LGAs) had a consistent policy of leadership, support and advice to municipalities in reconciliation issues. I decided to continue this investigation at a doctorate level.

The Shepparton Chronicles

II. A valuable partner in Reconciliation?

April 2009

Local government has demonstrated a commitment to Reconciliation when other levels of government appeared to have abandoned it. So, before I begin my project, I have decided I need to seek the advice and reflections of various local government officials.

One officer referred to the importance of leadership, and felt that local government should be involved in encouraging emerging leaders. Local government is involved in employment opportunities through placement schemes, and is frequently involved in arts festivals promoting local Aboriginal culture. However, this officer queried where the "energy" for these schemes emanates from, and if one person on Council is the driving force, "what happens when they are not there?" He pointed out that nevertheless, a number of municipalities are forming agreements, memoranda of understanding and action plans in partnership with local Aboriginal communities.26

Post script to this Chronicle:

I made another observation while talking to local government people. If I approach them acknowledging that I am an outsider, rather than try to

26 Journal 12/8/09
impress them with how much I already know, the conversation flows more easily, and information is less guarded. My impression is that local government bodies at all levels bend over backwards to do the right thing—with constant internal research and community consultation, forming of “action plans”, with priority points and strategies.
PART 2: About Australia – setting the scene

A little drop of Australia

Greater Shepparton comprises people who would be likely to refer to themselves as "ordinary Australians". In its "ordinariness", it represents a small essential drop of the Australian nation, therefore at the risk of begging the question, I can presume that the Australian nation as a whole reflects most of the qualities found in Shepparton. Authors such as P G McHugh\(^{27}\), and Aboriginal poet and activist Kevin Gilbert\(^{28}\) have pointed out that the effects of Australia's colonial past are still affecting Aboriginal lives, and lives of all Australians, in the present day. Therefore, to understand Shepparton, its community and its local government, it is important to understand Australia, its history and its politics. For this reason, in Part 2, I have covered three specific areas. In Third Interlocution I have provided some historical background to this study, and also reviewed aspects of Australian history over the last sixty years, and how they relate to current community attitudes and government policy. Secondly I have become aware of a disturbing similarity between the recent driver of policy, the Closing The Gap campaign, and Minister Paul Hasluck's Assimilation policies of the 1950s and 60s. Closing The Gap is a dominant theme guiding Aboriginal policy in all levels of government and NGOs in the new century. In Fourth Interlocution I will therefore compare Closing the Gap with Assimilation, and look at the implications of their similarity on current policy development. Thirdly, a recent newspaper report quoted a University of Melbourne study conducted in three Victorian municipalities, including Shepparton, that

\(^{27}\) McHugh 2004
\(^{28}\) Gilbert 1977
stated that 97 percent of Aboriginal Victorians "were the target of verbal or physical abuse or discrimination in the past year".29 As these attitudes are unlikely to be confined to Shepparton, in Fifth Interlocution I have explored the extent of and possible reasons for racism in Australia.

The Shepparton Chronicles

III. The Closing The Gap Campaign: Driver Of Policy?

May 2009

Things have certainly moved on since my research project in 2002. A municipality I had studied previously has now implemented a comprehensive policy for Aboriginal Welfare in the district, an advance on its first steps of 2002. The officer I spoke to there complained about the heavy-handed nature of state government policy that often overrides the work of Council, and that Government is not listening to Indigenous people. This attitude, he felt, undermined the consultation process that led to the formulation of the present policy. He gave me two documents demonstrating this Shire’s commitment to a "Reconciliation Strategy and Action plan" and to a “Community Well-Being Plan",30 and drew my attention to Closing The Gap, the widespread and very important campaign in the struggle to overcome Aboriginal disadvantage.

30 Journal 23/4/09
3. Third Interlocution: Are we making progress...?

"God in making the earth never intended it should be occupied by men so incapable of appreciating its resources as the Aborigines of Australia. The white man had indeed only carried out the intention of the Creator in coming and settling down in the territory of the natives. God's first command to man was "Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth".31

John Dunmore Lang
Presbyterian Minister 1856

3.1 Who are we?

In the process of my research I perceived that Aboriginal people see themselves as part of nature, of the Spirit of the Land, whereas Westerners tend to regard humans as discrete from nature and see nature as something to be exploited32. Peter Harrison believes the biblical edict to "Be fruitful and multiply, replenish the earth and subdue it"33 also Jesus' bidding to "Go make disciples of all nations"34 "played a pivotal role in justifications of colonization in the seventeenth century".35 P G McHugh points out that the era of British imperialism coincided with the Enlightenment, which he describes as a "broad, complex discourse (or series of them) encompassing many diverse and often contradictory strands". The rights of the individual acquired a new priority. Evangelical Christians felt the calling to "civilise" the heathen. But Christian values were confused with British values. In applying British law to its non-Christian subjects, the British "instinctively and chauvinistically applied the idea of law which they regarded as the foundation of their polity and the Empire. What was best for them, was best for everyone (the tribal especially)."36

Through the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, as trade and international competition burgeoned with improved technology, and as improved seaworthiness of ships in the 16th century opened up sea routes to Asia and the East Indies, these callings were followed. Empires were built.37 It is likely that biblical approval of

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31 John Dunmore Lang quoted in Harrison 2005:27
32 See Eleventh Interlocution, Arbon 2008
33 Biblical reference – Genesis 1:28
34 Biblical reference – Matthew 28:16-20
35 Harrison 2005:25
36 McHugh 2004:122/123
slavery also justified the capture of Africans as workers for the New World plantations. C A Bayly notes that

*All classic theories of imperialism built ideology into their formulations. In ...formulations of the imperialism of free trade, ideology was a mask behind which lurked the brute urge to power of states and classes.*

Non-European peoples were seen as inferior, and Darwin's evolutionary theories in the 19th century provided a convenient explanation. In Australia it was commonly believed that the "weaker" Aboriginal race would soon die out. McHugh asserts that

"Vulgarized Social Darwinism tinged with Victorian religiosity fuelled the belief that the Aborigine would disappear in the face of the vastly superior civilization that had reached their shores. 'Protection' was a means of 'smoothing the dying pillow' of the Aboriginal race".

Edward Said and Homi Bhabha describe how Europeans construct this worldview to suit themselves, in writings on "Orientalism" and the "Other", allowing Westerners to build the wall of "white supremacy".

The Industrial Revolution swept across Europe in the 18th century bringing economic prosperity to some and poverty to others. With poverty came an increase in petty crime. Deportation was the chosen solution, because according to Bayly, "Convict colonies reduced the cost of the domestic security budget." In addition, Europeans who emigrated to Australia in the nineteenth century would have been attracted by the prospect of easy land ownership in the new colonies.

### 3.2 We are the invaders

Bayly claims that by the end of the nineteenth century the invasion of Australia was complete; that the Aboriginal nations were defeated by greed, guns and sheer numbers. Since the European invasion of Australia, Aboriginal people have been shot like pests, rounded up, forced into domestic service, infected with Western diseases, ignored, treated like children, converted to Western-style Christianity,

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38 Biblical references – 1 Kings 9:15, Ephesians 6:5, Colossians 3.22–4.1, Titus 2:9,10, 1 Peter 2:18
39 Bayly 1998:38
40 In this case, in the late 19th century
41 McHugh 2004:189
42 Mooney 2003
43 Bayly 1998:35
44 Bayly 1998:30
assimilated, forgotten, imprisoned and separated from country and families. In the mid twentieth century it was commonly believed by politicians that "assimilation" would bring justice to Aboriginal people. This conviction, and earlier "protectionism", gave rise to the notorious "stolen generation" policies, not only of government but of institutions such as churches and charities as well. In the seventies the aim was "self-determination". In the eighties there was talk of the longed-for Treaty, which never eventuated. During the nineties the Australian government attempted "Reconciliation", but this was scuttled mid-decade by a surge of hard-hearted, neo-conservative political attitudes. In the first decade of the new century the aim has been to "Close The Gap", and now a favoured thrust is "Social Inclusion". These recent programs have aims and strategies notably similar in intent to the now scorned assimilation policies. They still bear the underlying conviction that "our way is best", that "rights" are not inherent, but granted, and that Aboriginal culture has nothing of value to contribute to the so-called "Australian way of life" in the new century.

"Reconciliation" was the buzz-word of the nineties. During the previous decade a Treat-y was the priority subject of debate and discussion. In 1977 the National Aboriginal Conference was set up as a forum for Aboriginal views. In 1979 the second NAC called for a Treaty between the Commonwealth Government and Aboriginal people and recommended the term, Makarrata for the Treaty, which has a meaning in the Yolgnu45 language similar to the English word Reconciliation.46

3.3 Treaty

Unlike countries with comparable history, such as Canada, United States and New Zealand, Australia does not have a Treaty with its Aboriginal people. Since the 1967 Referendum, the idea of change in the Australian Constitution has been discussed as a way of officially redressing the errors of the past and rectifying the damage, a legal acknowledgement of prior occupation of the land.47 A Treaty and a Bill of Rights entrenched in the Constitution have also been talked about since the 1970s, but with no evident progress. An Aboriginal Treaty Committee was formed in 1979, when the then Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser “offered to discuss the treaty with Aboriginal

45 Yolgnu: Aboriginal people of east Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, Australia
47 Bennett 1999:170
people". In 1988 Prime Minister Bob Hawke promised a Treaty by 1990. But as Scott Bennett points out, “despite such occasional bursts of interest, in truth the attitude of many people has been decidedly lukewarm and even openly hostile to the concept”. Bennett adds that the differing views among the Aboriginal community also made discussion of a treaty difficult.48

Many Aboriginal people see a Treaty is essential to reconciliation. Patrick Dodson49 states, “as a nation we must be prepared to recognise that there is unfinished business between us and that the only way that this can be resolved is through a formalised agreement between our peoples.”50 Marcia Langton also favours a Treaty. She points out that there has been no problem with the constitutional entrenchment of similar agreements in Canada, and “that many recent agreements have been affirmed by the Canadian Constitution is evidence that there are alternatives to the limited framework of the legal canon in Australia." Langton concludes that "Without such entrenchment, the legislatively defined place of Indigenous Australians in the modern state will continue to dishonour us, and to disavow our rights and entitlements."51

Aboriginal people have made it very clear that they claim self-determination, as set out in the Barunga statement 52, the Eva Valley statement 53 and Patrick Dodson’s 4th Vincent Lingiari Memorial Lecture, "Until the Chains are Broken".54 Not as yet-another-hand-out legislated by white government, but a formal Treaty, that is, an agreement between parties of equal power, embedded in the Australian Constitution. Aboriginal Professor of Law Larissa Behrendt has summed up the "spectrum of rights" that should be included in a Treaty:

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\text{the right not to be discriminated against, the right to enjoy language, culture and heritage, our right to land, seas, waters and natural resources, the right to be educated and to work, the right to be economically self sufficient, the right to be involved in decision-making}
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48 Bennett 1999:173
49 Professor Patrick Dodson and Professor Marcia Langton are prominent Aboriginal leaders
50 Dodson P 2000:270
51 Langton 2001:25
52 see Appendix (1)
53 see Appendix (1)
54 Dodson, P 2000
Constitutionally protected land rights are of vital importance to real and lasting reconciliation apart from its symbolic and ceremonial importance. As Mick Dodson remarks, "If change has constitutional force it makes it harder to get out of your promise." Aboriginal peoples' relationship with the land is the basis for other elements of reconciliation such as self-governance, and economic independence. In 1988 Prime Minister Bob Hawke was presented with the *Barunga Bark Petition*.

At that time Prime Minister promised a Treaty within the life of his government. We did not get a Treaty, but we got "Reconciliation" instead.

### 3.4 Reconciliation

My family have been Australians since the mid nineteenth century. Why then, do I not have any Aboriginal friends? Why do I not even know any Aboriginal Australians socially? It is a severe indictment on Victoria's history that I can live my whole life in this city and not have contact with Aboriginal peoples.

The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (CAR) was established in 1991 by a bi-partisan supported Act of Parliament in response to Recommendation 339 of the *Royal Commission Into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* that declared that Reconciliation must be achieved "if community division, discord and injustice to Aboriginal people are to be avoided." The Commission recommended that "political leaders use their best endeavours to ensure bi-partisan public support for the process of reconciliation and that the urgency and necessity of the process be acknowledged."

From its inception the idea of a Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation was not necessarily embraced, including by some Aboriginal Australians. Aboriginal author Mudrooroo said that "many Indigenous people see it as yet another government body.

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55 Behrendt 2003:19
56 Dodson M 2001:12
57 See Appendix (1)
imposed on them from above."\(^{60}\) Writer and activist Kevin Gilbert refused to accept the concept at all:

> What are we to reconcile ourselves to? To a holocaust, to massacre, to removal of us from our land, from the taking of our land? The reconciliation process can achieve nothing because it does not at the end of the day promise justice.\(^{61}\)

The term "reconciliation" infers returning to a relationship that was once benign, but that had recently disintegrated. In Australia, it is doubtful that any such beneficial relationship ever existed between Aboriginal people and settlers. The European invasion virtually cost Aboriginal nations everything. "Reconciliation" costs settler Australians nothing.

The Council of Aboriginal Reconciliation was originally to be titled the "Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation and Justice" but the 'and Justice' was viewed by the prime minister's advisors as excessive and was subsequently axed from the final version.\(^{62}\)

The status of Aboriginal people in Australia in the twenty-first century remains unjust. The Collins dictionary defines the word "just" as "fair or impartial in action or judgment" and "conforming to high moral standards; honest."\(^{63}\) I would add that justice has a quality of rightness, or righteousness, in a realm beyond any human view of fairness and morality.

Professor of Politics Colin Tatz, argues that the "Reconciliation Bargain" is no bargain for Aboriginal people.\(^{64}\) "Reconciliation" calls for no responsibility from the settler community for restoring justice to Aboriginal people. Tatz believed Reconciliation was a concept to placate those non-Indigenous Australians who resisted the notion of an apology by the nation, with its implications of reparation and/or compensation. "Reconciliation" was a shibboleth, promoting the easy bargain (for non-Aborigines) of "forgive and forget."\(^{65}\) In an impassioned passage he wrote

> It is they who must forgo the desire or need for retributive justice; it is they who must eschew notions of guilt and atonement and, all too often,

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\(^{60}\) Mudrooroo 1995:228  
\(^{61}\) Gilbert, K in Mudrooroo 1995:228  
\(^{62}\) Short 2003:492  
\(^{63}\) Sinclair, Collins English Dictionary 1979:840  
\(^{64}\) Tatz 1998:2  
\(^{65}\) Tatz 1998:1/2
compensation for harms done. It is they who must agree to the diminution, or even abolition, of that shared historical memory that holds victim groups together. It is they who must concur in the substitution of their memory with our memory and their history with our history. It is they who must connive at ignoring the importance of accountability for the crimes against them, and agree to the blurring or obliteration of responsibility for who did what to whom. It is they who must cease being so hysterical about denialism, that major tributary of forgetting, which claims (all too often) that there was nothing to remember in the first place, or, at least, nothing all that serious. 66

On the other hand, Jesuit priest and lawyer Frank Brennan supported the concept of Reconciliation. He states "We had to find a way of owning the past, drawing the line and moving forward, shaping a better future." However he has similar reservations to Tatz. He fears that

Like all buzz-words, it can be used dangerously in the political process... [R]econciliation can be used to paper over the differences, pretending the worst is all behind us, acting as if there is now a level playing field, and silencing the advocates for justice who might be upsetting the existing power and resource sharing arrangements.67

Aboriginal public speaker and writer, Lillian Holt, relates an old Indigenous joke about "an old Indigenous bloke, sitting on a slag heap, reflecting on life" that illustrates the capriciousness of white commitment to achieving justice for Aboriginal Australians:

"First of all, they said I was primitive, then I was a savage, then a pagan, then a heathen, then uncivilised, then handicapped, then deprived, then culturally deficit, then marginalised, then a victim, then dysfunctional, blah blah blah, ad infinitum. My position in life hasn't changed but I sure have one hell of a vocabulary."68

The Council's brief was to "to improve the relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider Australian community." It was given a ten-year life in which to prepare and present a "Document of Reconciliation" to the nation. The Chair of the first three-year section was prominent Aboriginal leader, Patrick Dodson, a Yawuru man from Broome, West Australia.

66 Tatz 1998:2
67 Brennan 2000:27
68 Holt 2000:148
This decade of Reconciliation was a politically turbulent time. The historically significant High Court decisions on the Mabo and Wik land claim cases\(^69\) sent the conservative community into an unnecessary and ill-informed panic about "backyards being taken over". Neo-conservative politicians seized the opportunity, aided by the media, of whipping pastoralists and farmers into a frenzy of fear. Extreme right-wing Parliamentary Member for Oxley, Pauline Hanson, rose to prominence on this wave, and (then) Prime Minister John Howard said nothing to contradict her inflammatory remarks, under the guise of her right to "free speech". Deputy Prime Minister Tim Fischer promised "bucket loads of extinguishment"\(^70\) on Native Title. This time is discussed further in *Fifth Interlocution*.

In 1997 the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities (HREOC) report on "Stolen Children", *Bringing Them Home*, was tabled in Parliament. Members wept openly. Although a primary recommendation of the report was for a national apology\(^71\), Prime Minister Howard steadfastly refused to do so. The *Apology* did not take place until eleven years later after a change of government. John Howard did not consider actions of past governments should be a source of shame for the present generation. Therefore he ignored the recommendations presented in HREOC's *Bringing Them Home* in 1997 and the CAR's final report in 2001. Consequently, at the birth of the new century, *Reconciliation* slipped off the national agenda.

It seems then that the cause of Reconciliation had not been advanced by the decade long work of the Council. It seems the status of Reconciliation had progressed no further than at the beginning of the decade. White Australia still did not know its own history. Damien Short writes:

> The research suggested that after ten years of reconciliation non-indigenous Australians were still largely ignorant of the nuances of the

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\(^69\) These two cases were landmarks in Aboriginal Justice. *Mabo and Others v State of Queensland* involved Eddie Koiki Mabo and his people claiming traditional ownership of Murray Island in Torres Strait, north of Australia. The decision of the High Court for Mabo negated the fiction of *terra nullius* in Australia, that is, the continent was occupied, not vacant, when Europeans invaded. The *Wik Peoples v The State of Queensland* decision ruled that statutory pastoral leases in rural Queensland do not give lessees exclusive use of the land, and that pastoral leases do not extinguish Native Title.

\(^70\) McKenna 2004

'Aboriginal problem'. There was no real appreciation of the burden of the past in the present, of Aboriginal disadvantage, of the legacy of dispossession and of the quite appalling effects of cultural erosion. It seemed that the reconciliation process has made no progress in 'educating wider society' about indigenous issues.\textsuperscript{72}

Lillian Holt believes that not knowing our own history has "diminished whitefellas", and "seems to be a luxury of white supremacy, which allows people to refrain from the pain of pondering."\textsuperscript{73}

This 'not knowing' by whitefellas of what has happened in their own backyards, for yonks, both fascinates and infuriates me. Fascinates me, because such institutional hierarchies are supposed to represent all that is worth knowing. And infuriates me, because often more is known about South Africa and New Zealand and their racial issues than about our own country.\textsuperscript{74}

Yet, despite the discomfort of acknowledging our own scarred history, Holt asserts that, "in looking, in interrogation lies liberation, as my closest white friends have attested. And with liberation can come reconciliation."\textsuperscript{75}

There were significant events during the nineties that, if they did not advance the cause to any great extent, at least increased awareness. The Mabo case proved that we could no longer live in the fiction that Australia was \textit{terra nullius}, an empty land, before the British invasion. The Native Title Act 1993 was drafted to give a framework for land title claims. The Wik decision reminded us that pastoral leases do not extinguish native title. This had been the case from the beginning, but the outrage surrounding the High Court's decision implied that incredibly, in a reversal of reality, some in the community actually believed they could be dispossessed by Aborigines. Furthermore, Short points out that

\textit{Howard's use of traditional Australian national imagery in [his] speech, perhaps highlights a significant problem faced by indigenous peoples in this 'debate', namely the propagation of the battling bushman farmer, rather than the Aborigine, as the one who truly belongs to the land.}\textsuperscript{76}

Historian Norman Etherington suggests that

\textsuperscript{72} Short 2008:128  
\textsuperscript{73} Holt 2000:150  
\textsuperscript{74} Holt 2000: 149  
\textsuperscript{75} Holt 2000:150  
\textsuperscript{76} Short 2008:80
This [conception] is so widespread that it has become possible for the media to do what would have been impossible on the basis of historical documentation: to present the Aborigine as the alien Other who threatens to dispossess people of their ancient patrimony.77

P G McHugh is damning in his evaluation of the last quarter of the twentieth century in Australia:

Reconciliation, ... involved squaring the rights of aboriginal polities with the overriding sovereignty and constitutional values of the settler-state. In that regard it continued the historically-embedded insistence of the settler-state that aboriginal presence would only be officially ... countenanced on Anglo terms.78

It appears, then, that in the last half-century Aboriginal people have been promised land rights, self-determination, a compact, a Makarrata and a decade of Reconciliation, none of which have been particularly effectual. Are we making any progress or just going around in circles? The attitude of the settler population, including politicians, is that we are the real Australians and Aboriginal people are the intruders into our way of life. I dropped “Reconciliation" from my thesis title because when I use the word in the company of Aboriginal people I notice they look at either the ceiling or the floor. I interpreted that gesture as, if not disapproval, then certainly discomfort caused by the use of the term. I am now not certain whether Reconciliation is valid process or not. Paul Keating as Prime Minister reminds us of our real status in his 1992 seminal "Redfern Park speech":

We non-Aboriginal Australians should perhaps remind ourselves that Australia once reached out for us. Didn’t Australia provide opportunity and care for the dispossessed Irish? The poor of Britain? The refugees from war and famine and persecution in the countries of Europe and Asia? Isn’t it reasonable to say that if we can build a prosperous and remarkably harmonious multicultural society in Australia, surely we can find just solutions to the problems which beset the first Australians - the people to whom the most injustice has been done.79

Our failures are so great, how can we "reconcile"? Can we return the land, restore sacred sites from mining and development, repair fractured family structures? Can we acknowledge that Aboriginal communities are able to determine their own

77 Etherington quoted in Short 2008:80
78 McHugh 2004:322
79 Keating 2000:61. See whole speech Appendix (2)
methods of governance and way of life, and trust them to do it? The answer is, in many occasions, "yes, to a limited extent", but only if the settler community supports these moves. Damien Short cites Alfred (1999) who suggests that "settler state granted 'rights' should be viewed as part of colonialism and not a remedy to it since 'rights' are invariably controlled and regulated by the state."\(^{80}\) Short adds "In other words, such rights are entirely derived from a 'superior' European based legal system."\(^{81}\)

History has demonstrated that white Australians can show compassion and support, for example, the resounding 90.77% "yes" vote in the 1967 Referendum\(^{82}\), and the "Bridge Walks" in major cities around the nation to support Reconciliation. However, if we perceive that justice for Aboriginal Australians is threatening us and our property, demonstrated by the panic following the Wik decision, we are not so kind. Short remembers his thoughts while participating in a Walk:

> I was left with the overwhelming impression that the CAR's lack of focus on key indigenous aspirations facilitated such large numbers of people to 'walk for reconciliation', but I remained unconvinced that such numbers would have 'walked for indigenous land-rights and self-determination'.\(^{83}\)

Despite the discussion of a Treaty that took place between Aboriginal people and politicians in the 1980s, Australian governments have not graduated from rhetoric to action. We still want to "fix" the "Aboriginal problem" our way. I argue then that the recent campaigns for "Reconciliation", Closing The Gap and Social Inclusion are evasions of vital dialogue on a Treaty, and as government action on Aboriginal justice, it is "more of the same".

### 3.5 The non-Aboriginal problem?

The most recent stereotype of Aboriginal people in Australia that could be added to the old-bloke-on-the-slag-heap's list is "disadvantaged". The old bloke needs to be "helped". He is not seen as contributing to the economy or the "Australian way of life". Stephen Cornell, in his 2008 Reconciliation Australia lecture, "Closing The

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\(^{80}\) Short 2008: 22

\(^{81}\) Short 2008:23


\(^{83}\) Short 2008:117
Gaps" remarked that "...the message that keeps going out to the world is about the dysfunctionality of Aboriginal communities."\(^84\)

Similarly, community leader and Elder in Shepparton's Yorta Yorta community, Paul Briggs, commented,

> There is a penetrating sadness in the consequence that Indigenous people in communities such as Shepparton are constantly portrayed as groups which have not made a contribution to the economic and social fabric of the wider community.\(^85\)

Bill, a Shepparton Councillor, told a story that illustrated this point. It concerned the reaction of some in the wider Shepparton community to an incident in which the flags were moved from the Council offices to make way for renovations. The City of Greater Shepparton has for a number of years flown the Australian flag, the Shepparton flag and the Aboriginal flag side by side. During renovations they were moved to the war memorial. There were immediate protests from some community members that the Aboriginal flag was being flown at the war memorial, a "white" sacred site, despite the fact that Aboriginal soldiers fought for Australia beside non-Aboriginal comrades in two world wars, before they were even considered citizens.\(^86\)

Paul Keating affirmed Aboriginal contribution in the Redfern Park speech.

> Where Aboriginal Australians have been included in the life of Australia they have made remarkable contributions. Economic contributions .... They are there in the frontier and exploration history of Australia. They are there in the wars. In sport to an extraordinary degree. In literature and art and music.\(^87\)

### 3.5.1 Aboriginal disadvantage or government dysfunction?

> I have to say...this looks very much to me like the dysfunctionality of Government continually changing the rules of the game, unable to sustain community engagement, unable to recognise or take advantage of Indigenously-generated solutions, and uncertain how to cope with diversity in those solutions.\(^88\)

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\(^84\) Cornell 2008  
\(^85\) Briggs in Cutcliffe 2006:3  
\(^86\) 180411b  
\(^87\) Keating 2000:62  
\(^88\) Cornell op cit
I find it sad that this statement by Stephen Cornell reflects the failure of albeit well-meaning government initiatives in Australia over the last 220 years. Policies and programs still tend to be welfare- or service-based and not rights-based. The refusal, or at least neglect, by governments at all levels, to acknowledge the value to the whole of Australia of Aboriginal people is pure racism. I have been reluctant to use the term "racism" in this research to any great extent. In Australia it has become an emotive expression, evoking a defensive attitude that tends to mitigate the dialogue that is necessary for its elimination. Nevertheless, the Australian community and its governments display a persistent colonial attitude that has become a habitual way of viewing reality, steeped in stereotypical images to the detriment of creative and just policy-making. Therefore I have come to believe we must acknowledge our racist tendencies if we are to correct them. I have discussed racism in Australia in depth in the Fifth Interlocution.

The Shepparton Chronicles

IV. Talking With A Lot Of People

June 2009

Jim recommended the book by Linda Tuhiwai Smith, "Decolonising Methodologies". I have that book and others. "City's Outback" by Gillian Cowlishaw is inspiring me with her ethnographic, "participant observation" approach. However, reading further, this seems as unpopular as any other variety of "Western" research of indigenous cultures. Nevertheless the chaotic, receptive, reflexive nature of working this way seems tailor-made for my project. I’m enjoying this exploration and looking forward to finding out more.

I have talked with a lot of people. I have talked with Indigenous academics, and I had the privilege of a very significant conversation with a high-profile Aboriginal community leader. No reply to my first email, so
I had to send him a second one. I even had to get some help writing it because my first attempt sounded so limp. I do have a problem with the “just a student” syndrome. Why would anyone want to talk to me?

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At last he has replied to me, inviting me to make a time, but not for another six weeks. I’m overwhelmed. Meanwhile I’m reading Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s book. Very interesting and challenging, but a bit discouraging for people like me—a non-Indigenous researcher examining Indigenous areas. However, it’s made me think that perhaps I am not such an outsider; that in a way, I AM the relationship, exhibiting all my goodwill and concern for social justice and fairness, but very steeped in habitual colonial thinking, attitudes and worldview. Perhaps this is an opportunity to “interrogate my own whiteness” like Lillian Holt suggests we should.

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I wrote to another prominent Aboriginal person today requesting a meeting but received no response.

3.6 Explaining “Closing The Gap”

As I mentioned previously, recently drafted programs such as Closing The Gap bear an uncanny resemblance to a 1961 report to Parliament by Paul Hasluck on a conference about Assimilation strategies. Australian Aboriginal people have no Constitutional rights as First Peoples, therefore policy concerning them is subject to the favoured ideology of the current legislators. Governments still regard Aboriginal communities as "disadvantaged", in need of "services", too often ignoring those already established by the community itself, as I will discuss later.

The Closing The Gap (CTG) campaign has been a major driver of policy in all levels of government in Australia since it was launched by Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in Sydney in April 2007. The Closing The Gap program was formulated in response to the final Social Justice report 2005 by the (then)

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92 Smith 1999
93 Hasluck 1961
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Tom Calma. The Commissioner called for "the governments of Australia to commit to achieving equality for Indigenous people in the areas of health and life expectancy within 25 years"94.

In March 2008 COAG's Closing The Gap "Statement of Intent" was drafted and signed at the National Indigenous Health Equality Summit in Canberra95. It stated that "the Australian governments and Indigenous peoples will ‘work together to achieve equality in health status and life expectancy between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians by the year 2030’"96. The newly elected Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd encapsulated the spirit of Closing The Gap in his Apology speech in 2008:

_This new partnership on Closing The Gap will set concrete targets for the future: within a decade to halve the widening gap in literacy, numeracy and employment outcomes and opportunities for Indigenous children, within a decade to halve the appalling gap in infant mortality rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children and, within a generation, to close the equally appalling 17-year life gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous when it comes to overall life expectancy._97

As well as government, CTG also involved other organisations such as National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO), Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR) and Oxfam.98 As I was to discover later, CTG principles permeated all community agencies dealing with Aboriginal inequity.

One Council Officer explained that his Council's community policies are based on the World Health Organisation's (WHO) Social Determinants of Health, although "Health" is viewed in a wider, social context, not necessarily medical. The WHO's

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96 Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet Access date 26/7/12
Commission on Social Determinants of Health (CSDH) was established in 2005 to provide advice globally on how to reduce health inequities in countries around the world. The Commission reported back in August 2008, and made three main recommendations:

- *Improve daily living conditions*
- *Tackle the inequitable distribution of power, money, and resources*
- *Measure and understand the problem and assess the impact of action* \(^{99}\)

COAG set out six targets in 2008 to address disadvantage faced by Aboriginal Australians: In neat dot points they are to:

- *close the gap in life expectancy within a generation (by 2031);*
- *halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five by 2018;*
- *ensure access to early childhood education for all Indigenous four year olds in remote communities by 2013;*
- *halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements for children by 2018;*
- *halve the gap for Indigenous students in Year 12 (or equivalent) attainment rates by 2020; and*
- *halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and other Australians by 2018.\(^{100}\)*

The Australian government is optimistic about its venture:

> A long road lies ahead, but the new partnerships emerging between governments, business and the wider community have the potential to achieve results where previous efforts have failed.\(^{101}\)

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This statement on the Federal Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) website is reassuring to me in that it acknowledges new tactics are needed to replace past approaches that have failed. However, as I discuss further in Fourth Interlocution, the CTG campaign policy displays elements of the old colonial approach of "what to do about the Aboriginal 'problem'"; and white governments are still the ones trying to "solve" it.

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**The Shepparton Chronicles**

**V. Reflection**

*July 2009*

I've just browsed through the introduction of a new book I've bought, *Paradigm Wars. Indigenous Peoples Resistance to Globalisation* by Jerry Mander and Victoria Tauli-Corpuz. The main point of this collection of writings is quite alarming, and sets a new consideration in my research: that colonisation and globalisation will continue to threaten Indigenous lands as oil, minerals, timber and arable land diminish in the dominant cultures of the "West". Indigenous people now have to consider how to protect themselves and their land. "Reconciliation" may need redefining. Perhaps local government is an important ally for Indigenous communities. (But who is the adversary in this project?).

The *Engaging with Indigenous Australians and Understanding Their Beliefs and Cultures* seminar was cancelled. This was very disappointing especially as I had battled my way through appalling traffic to get there.

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I have been reading Battiste and Henderson’s book, *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage* and agree with what they have to say regarding Indigenous Rights:

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102 Mander & Tauli-Corpuz 2006
the governments of the day, often our legal guardians and fiduciaries, do not want to discuss ways of transforming legal or political institutions to include Indigenous peoples in nation-states. They do not want to end their national fantasies and myths about their nations. They do not want to expose the injustices that have informed the construction of state institutions and practices. They do not want to create postcolonial states. They do not want to sustain efforts at institutional reform. They reject the idea of hybridised states that include Indigenous peoples in the political and adjudicative realms. They want Indigenous people to vanish into separate replicative or imitative institutions or into organisations without equalised funds or capacities or shared rule.\(^{103}\)

This is an all too familiar and recognisable picture of the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. We settler Australians don’t show any willingness to change. Any kind of just reconciliation cannot happen until we do.

How depressing!

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\(^{103}\) Battiste and Henderson 2000:7
4. Fourth Interlocution. Progress...or just going round in circles?

Assimilation relied on the well-established and widely-accepted view that we were inferior to white Australians and that our way of life, our culture and our languages was substandard. It assumed that we would willingly give up our Aboriginality and adopt the dominant white culture. Assimilation presupposed that the Indigenous people of Australia were a dying race. Embedded within the policy of assimilation was a clear expectation of the cultural extinction of Indigenous peoples.

Mick Dodson

4.1 Assimilation and Closing The Gap

Assimilation is still a pernicious theme in Australian Aboriginal/settler relationships and government policy. Harold, a Yorta Yorta Elder, declares he has no faith in the processes of government.

It seems that every function of white governance, no matter how beneficial, serves the process of assimilation. Education and jobs, while necessary for survival and self-respect, draw young Aboriginal people inevitably into the white culture. White governments dole out the benefits of "our" (i.e. their own) culture.

When I compare Closing The Gap policies and programs with Assimilation policies of six decades ago, I find a disturbing proclivity in government policy-makers to repeat the same ineffectual "top-down" techniques in different guises. According to the stated aims of the Closing The Gap Campaign, programs will plan ways of finding Indigenous youth employment in "mainstream" industry. Housing will cater to white ideas of what a family requires. Education will be focused on providing skills to survive in a Western world. Justice will mean compliance with the law of the land, that is, laws based on the British system. Health programs are still mostly administered by white government institutions (although there are exceptions). I do not intend to condemn the Closing The Gap campaign. Many Aboriginal people will benefit from better conditions, although they are theirs by right of citizenship. However, in this campaign there is still a strong inference that “we know best”; and

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104 Dodson M 1996:4
105 261010
like Hasluck's *Assimilation* policies we aim to achieve equality by drawing you into our culture, which means forsaking yours, because it's inferior.

Paul Hasluck MP was the major proponent of *Assimilation* policies in the 1950s and '60s. It had become clear after the Second World War that Aboriginal people were not going to gradually die out as would be expected if they were a phase in the evolutionary chain. Policies therefore had to change from pre-war *Protectionism*. Hasluck believed that Aborigines needed to be "groomed for citizenship", meaning becoming more like Europeans. However, this applied only to "half-castes", "quadroons" and "octroons". "Full-blood" Aborigines remained "wards of the state". The government controlled every aspect of their lives – where they could live, travel, who they could marry, etc. This policy led to the infamous practice of removing "half-caste" children from their families, presumably intended for their benefit, to be educated in European ways, and eventually absorbed into a reluctant white community.106

I can compare the *Closing The Gap* strategies with Paul Hasluck's speech, *The Policy of Assimilation*, given in Federal Parliament in April 1961. Mr Hasluck (later Sir Paul Hasluck), as Minister for State and Territories, was reporting on "A conference of Commonwealth and State Ministers was held at Canberra on 26th and 27th January, 1961, to consider the advancement of the welfare of Australian aborigines."107 Common to both *Closing The Gap* and the 1961 *Assimilation* strategies, is the aim for better standards in health, nutrition, education, housing, employment, and child welfare. Hasluck advocated also encouraging participation in sport, and vocational training "in ways which will assist aborigines and part-aborigines to make a contribution to the advancement of their own people".108 He also proposed extending welfare "provided for other members of the community to be available to aborigines and part-aborigines"109 *Closing The Gap* principles endorse working in *partnership* with Indigenous communities and health organisations, whereas *Assimilation* aims to absorb Indigenous people into the

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106 Moran 2005, McGregor 2005
107 Hasluck 1961: 2/3 See Appendix (6)
108 Hasluck 1961: 2/3
109 Hasluck 1961: 2/3
mainstream community. Hasluck acknowledged that successful assimilation depended on awareness and goodwill in the community.\footnote{Ibid}

Although it is hard to argue against such apparently beneficial policies as health and education, Hasluck's intentions were, in fact, genocidal. His desired outcome of the policies would be for the Aboriginal population to be absorbed into the general Australian community so as to be indistinguishable from it. However, I argue that Hasluck's vision was delusional, that it was not possible for the general community to accept Aboriginal people "without prejudice". White supremacy attitudes were, and still are, rife in the community. Hasluck betrays his own prejudice by his choice of words: "the Australian community", meaning the settler community. Anthony Moran writes that

(Hasluck) claimed that he had always viewed Aborigines as individuals, not as members of another "race" or distinct community. ... (but) Hasluck's blindness to Aboriginal differences, and to the importance to Aborigines of their Aboriginal associations, history and ongoing connections with the land, led him to conclusions about the Aboriginal future, and Aboriginal assimilation, that proved ultimately unsustainable, and ... inhumane.\footnote{Moran 2005:187}

Moran adds that this attitude was common in the Australian settler community.\footnote{Moran 2005:187} Russell McGregor describes Hasluck's ideology as highly individualistic. According to McGregor, Hasluck regarded Aboriginal group culture as having no place in modern citizenship, and that if Aboriginal people were to become citizens their social lives and culture would need to be "remodelled" to conform to national norms. Hasluck allowed for some "residue" of Aboriginality, but could not conceive of Aboriginal peoples' culture making a positive contribution to their own citizenship.\footnote{McGregor 2005:528}

4.2 Assimilation or integration?

But assimilation in the 1950s had another strand. The main voice for this was anthropologist A P Elkin. His vision was for "group" assimilation rather than individual. Elkin did not see Aboriginal culture as an impediment to full citizenship

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\begin{itemize}
  \item \footnote{Ibid}
  \item \footnote{Moran 2005:187}
  \item \footnote{Moran 2005:187}
  \item \footnote{McGregor 2005:528}
\end{itemize}
although he expressed concern, as did Hasluck, about the development of separatism. He became concerned that "The Commonwealth's assimilation policy displayed no respect for Aboriginal culture."\(^{114}\)

Moran describes the opposing voices of Assimilation:

> For Elkin, Australian society could function successfully with different identities interacting. For Hasluck, such identities got in the way of, even threatened, the social order of the nation – the movement toward true nationhood meant the atrophy of group identities that might provide the basis for disloyalty toward the "one community" of the Australian nation-state.\(^{115}\)

But Moran reminds his readers that "there was a competing strand of assimilationist thinking that saw more value in ongoing Aboriginal culture and identity."\(^{116}\)

Although the terms "assimilation" and "integration" are similar in generic meaning, the political concepts are different. H C (Nugget) Coombs writing in 1978, identified the difference between the two views. The former advocated "that policies should be directed to incorporating Aborigines into white society to produce an homogenous social structure" and the latter that "Aborigines should be enabled, to the extent that they wished, to build on the remnants of their own culture and traditions and to maintain a separate and distinctive social and racial identity within the Australian community".\(^{117}\) History may have been different had policy-makers of the time followed Elkin's model of "assimilation". However, according to Geoffrey Partington, an author who supports Hasluck's model, there was support from Aboriginal sources for assimilationist policies also. He quotes William Cooper, a noted Yorta Yorta man and originator of the Australia Day "Day of Mourning" campaign, writing in 1937 in one of his numerous letters to government:

> We want the right to full education, academic, cultural and industrial, and to be able to take our place beside the white race in full equality and responsibility. We ask the right to be fully British.\(^{118}\)

Assimilation as a policy has become popularly unacceptable, and Hasluck something of a pariah in contemporary thinking. Nevertheless, as Harold recognises, the old
spirit of assimilation invades political thinking and policy-making to this day. However, to be fair to Hasluck, we should acknowledge that while there is no doubt that he could not countenance a pluralistic view of Australian society, he did genuinely have the welfare of Aboriginal people at heart, and was determined to bring them into full Australian citizenship.\textsuperscript{119}

4.3 \textbf{Times change in the seventies}

\textit{Assimilation} was not the only influence on Aboriginal concerns in the 1950s and 60s. There was change globally, and the burgeoning of access to immediate news via television brought these changes closer to home. Civil rights demonstrations in the United States added encouragement to Australian Aboriginal people and their supporters to speak out. There was a groundswell in land rights campaigns. In 1968 the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI) Conference discussed a national petition:

\begin{quote}
\textit{urging the granting of land rights and rights to compensation with respect to all existing Aboriginal Reserve land throughout Australia, and the provision of a secure compensatory right to land for all Aboriginal individuals and groups seeking to live on, use, and develop land in traditionally occupied areas.}\textsuperscript{120}
\end{quote}

As (then) FCAATSI President Joe McGinness declared "You can't have a people without land"\textsuperscript{121}.

4.4 \textbf{Self-determination}

Assimilation still lingers in the policies of Australia in the 2000s, including \textit{Closing The Gap}. In the seventies, with the advent of the Whitlam government and subsequently the Fraser government, the direction of Aboriginal affairs became more like Elkin's assimilation rather than Hasluck's. Nevertheless, the pro- versus anti-assimilation debate became very acrimonious, not only in the seventies, but extending into the later decades of the twentieth century.

The death-knell for Hasluck's \textit{Assimilation} philosophy sounded when, shortly before his death in 1967, Prime Minister Harold Holt established the Council of Aboriginal

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{119} Hasluck 1988:150  \\
\textsuperscript{120} Taffe 2007-2008 (1)  \\
\textsuperscript{121} ibid
\end{flushright}
Affairs, comprising three eminent members: H C (Nugget) Coombs, former chair of the Reserve Bank heading the Council, with anthropologist and author Professor W E H Stanner, and Barrie Dexter, formerly Australia's Ambassador to Thailand. This was an obvious rejection of Assimilation, as Coombs was an opponent of Hasluck's principles. Although Coombs was prepared to accept Assimilation, the council believed it was its responsibility to listen to Aboriginal people. Coombs found that "many Aborigines were far from eager to be assimilated into white society and firmly believed that the option of a distinctive Aboriginal identity within a pluralist Australian society should be open to them." "Nugget" Coombs believed that "a long period of education and of trial and error will be necessary before these and other experiments show conclusive results" and that until then, "they will continue in a state of economic and social dependence."

*I am satisfied that, in the end, only Aborigines can resolve the problems of Aborigines in our society, and that to do this they need to involve institutions for social decision-making which are based on and grow out of their own traditional systems of authority but which increasingly draw on the professional resources which the wider society can offer them.*

During the post-Assimilation seventies the Federal Governments, both Labor and Coalition used their new Constitutional authority to enact laws concerning Aboriginal people, especially regarding land rights and racial discrimination. However it is obvious that self-determination has not "closed the gap" between white advantage and Aboriginal disadvantage. The gap, although narrowed, still exists in the twenty-first century. But does this mean a return to Assimilation is the answer?

"Nugget" Coombs was respected by many Aboriginal people. Michael (Mick) Dodson refers to him as "the whitefellas' most senior elder" In his 1996 discussion paper, Assimilation versus Self-determination. No Contest, Dodson wrote:

> Assimilation was then, just as it is now, about what whitefellas want. First, what they want for themselves and second, what they want for us. I

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122 Taffe 2007- 2008 (2)
123 Coombs 1978:9
124 Coombs 1978:53
125 Coombs 1978:53
126 Endowed in the 1967 Referendum. See Appendix (3)
128 Dodson 1996:1
believe that the real essence of Nugget's contribution is that he cared about us, thought about what we wanted, what we saw as our future is what is our concept of what is our place in our country.\footnote{129}

It is significant that Dodson praised Coombs so highly, not for his innovative policy ideas, but that he saw "who we are and listened to our voices".

Damien Short reports that in the 1970s, "Indigenous leaders and spokespersons were becoming increasingly convinced that the ills of their communities could not be resolved by 'white people'"\footnote{130}. Short quotes Kevin Gilbert who states, "if there is to be a regeneration of blacks, it must come through self-determination, however hesitant the first steps".\footnote{131} P G McHugh viewed the white acceptance of "aboriginal self-determination" in law- and policy-making as being "vague and unformed", more an "ideal towards which national practice strove unevenly, fitfully, and patchily and, even then, it was apt to be treated as ... synonymous with 'self-management'".\footnote{132} This, he believes, has continued.

It is now more than forty years since self-determination as a policy was conceived. In the end, despite fine words and promises, it is evident that the white Australian community does not trust Aboriginal people to be able to manage their own affairs. Although there have been advances in policy-making in the seventies and beyond, as McHugh points out "for aboriginal societies it remained essentially the continuation from their earlier history ...(and) aboriginal peoples remained locked inside a history that still kept the onus of adjustment on them".\footnote{133}

4.5 Conclusion: Assimilation is "about what whitefellas want" \footnote{134}

There have been many people of goodwill in the past sixty years, doing their best to advance the well-being of Aboriginal Australians. Why then, are Aboriginal people still suffering? It is evident then that the Closing The Gap campaign has much in common with the Assimilation policies of the 1950s and 60s. On the one hand it is pro-actively concerned with reducing the disadvantage Aboriginal people still have in employment, education, housing, justice and health. But on the other, the
campaign, although supported by many in the Aboriginal community, is still controlled by white government authorities. This has been the pattern since the policies of Protectionism in the first part of the twentieth century. In the early days of self-determination, Coombs, Stanner and Dexter, three white men, advised government on Aboriginal issues. When special government departments for Aboriginal affairs were established, Ministers and staff were white people. John Tate observed that by the time John Howard was contesting the 2007 Federal election, "Australia had moved away from a multicultural model of nation and returned to a more 'constitutive' model, premised on an ideal of assimilation which was dominant during Australia’s pre-multicultural history."\textsuperscript{135}

Yorta Yorta Elder Harold complains that all government initiatives are assimilationist, that the object is still the annihilation of Aboriginal culture.\textsuperscript{136} These elements are evident in the Closing The Gap campaign. Although benefits of health and education are the rights of all Australian citizens, there is an expectation in Closing The Gap that receipt of those benefits will be on "our" terms, delivered in "our" way. The fact that Aboriginal culture may have something to contribute is not considered. Harold does not regard Closing The Gap as the solution to Aboriginal "disadvantage". He points out that the stigma of being a "burden to the taxpayer" remains.\textsuperscript{137} Governments at all levels appear reluctant to relinquish control of Aboriginal business. Self-determination is still a dream. Governments still apply "top down" approaches to dealing with Aboriginal issues and they have been less than effective.\textsuperscript{138} Liam, a municipal Officer, declared that the State Government was "not listening". On the other hand, Christine, a Yorta Yorta Elder whose employment includes the well-being of young people, believes that "assimilation is not all bad, especially if it gets Aboriginal kids enthusiastic about their future."\textsuperscript{139} However Carol, a Councillor, reports that "young people often do not identify as Aboriginal,"\textsuperscript{140} preferring to embed themselves in "mainstream" culture.

\textsuperscript{135} Tate 2009:97
\textsuperscript{136} \textsuperscript{136} 261010
\textsuperscript{137} \textsuperscript{137} 261010
\textsuperscript{138} \textsuperscript{138} 230409, 180411b
\textsuperscript{139} \textsuperscript{139} 070311
\textsuperscript{140} \textsuperscript{140} 180411a
The question arises then, in all these areas, and also in local government – when the Gap is closed, what then? What unfinished business will there be? It is encouraging that there are questions and uncertainty. White people have always known "what is best", always had the answers, and in policy failure we have been proved wrong. Now, in this second decade of the twenty-first century, perhaps we can change our tack, and as "Nugget" Coombs suggests, determine to *listen* to Aboriginal people, to find a genuine interface, or meeting place.

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**The Shepparton Chronicles**

**VI. The Long-Awaited Meeting With An Eminent Aboriginal Australian**

*August 2009*

This was the first time I feel I have touched the jarring reality of the effects of the European invasion. I am shocked. But do I have the right to say it breaks my heart? This tragedy is not mine. Nevertheless, the devastating grief is here, in his office, underneath that gentle voice and quiet chuckle. My project has deepened. It can no longer involve only my intellect and my outrage, but it must penetrate my spirit as well. The early stage of ‘flu is making me feel feverish and disoriented. He is saying it’s a “minefield". A "minefield" indeed. I had not realised the extent of the damage to Aboriginal families and communities in Victoria. I feel sick and ashamed.

**EMAIL**

From: gln@deakin.edu.au  
Sent: Thursday, 13 August 2009 5:03 PM  
To: Vicki  
Subject: Visit  

Hi Vicki,

Thank you for recommending this meeting. It was a great opportunity to speak with a person of his stature. Turns out he will be in Belgrave on Sunday, only 7 minutes from where I live in Monbulk, and here I am driving up the highway to see him!
At first, the meeting was very useful, without being spectacularly enlightening. But, as often happens with cold calls, what was important emerged in the last few minutes. Before that was a very useful conversation about his work in Indigenous governance, which doesn't really dovetail with mine as it is more about internal community governance than relationships with municipalities. However, the ham-fistedness of mainstream governments is evident in these projects.

I have some people he recommends I contact, also he suggests I read a lot about the relevant legislation and its effects. He feels the "agreement" model is outdated, and that the Reconciliation Action Plans that some local governments have in place are much more effective. He also suggested that I explore definitions of Reconciliation.

All this gives me new avenues to explore, but the greatest revelation for me was when I was thinking about getting up and leaving, and he shook his head and said, "it's a minefield", and I asked why. I was going to examine colonialism anyway, and lingering attitudes, but I hadn't realised how devastating colonialism has been and continues to be on Aboriginal communities, especially in Victoria, and that this destruction is still being played out in appalling rifts and conflicts within Aboriginal communities, which have to be resolved BY the communities before good relationships with any level of government can be forged. He says strong (Aboriginal) leadership is vital to resolving those conflicts.

I am glad I have been made aware of this, but it certainly adds another level of thinking to my project. Do you agree with what he has said? I may need some more help here. I'm wondering if I have bitten off more than I can chew!

Best regards to you

Gillian

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Last week I met a PhD student who is a bit further down the track than I am. Her field is similar to mine, so she knows the pitfalls. She says Aboriginal people are a bit reluctant to talk to whiteys, so I'll have to plan carefully.

Jim says he thinks I should be setting up my case studies now. He recommends that I look at five! I was thinking of three, but I think he may be right. I guess it doesn't matter whether the municipalities match the Aboriginal communities. I need to think about this a bit longer, talk to my supervisors first. I'm arranging a meeting with the mayor of another municipality, but I need to make sure she realises it's in the nature of a "consultation" about research design, not data gathering.
5. Fifth Interlocution: Is Australia a racist country?

Whiteness gains interpretive stability because its meanings are anchored to a former biological notion of race that produces the commonsense understanding that whiteness is what one sees.\textsuperscript{141}

\textit{Celine-Marie Pascale}

I did not encounter racism in Shepparton. I worked with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people during my Shepparton case study and observed only respect among them, even when they disagreed. However I was told stories. These were not about riots, violent confrontations, or even name-calling. Rather, the stories were about houses for rent that were suddenly not available for Aborigines, real estate that was withheld from sale when it was known that it would be a centre for Aboriginal youth, a community protest over a proposed aged care facility for Aboriginal people, a customer who requested not to be served by an Aboriginal staff member.

This is the so-called contemporary or new racism, supposedly less serious than open hostility. However, I argue that this aspect of prejudice and stereotyping penetrates every level of the community including institutions that are meant to serve the needs of Aboriginal people.

This racism is an impenetrable wall. Aboriginal people do not feel they can safely participate where white values dominate. Even more damaging is the fact that the white-supremacist notion that white is right and Aboriginal culture is of no value, has, in many cases, insidiously infected Aboriginal people's perception of themselves. "Lateral violence" among the Aboriginal community is racism at its most tragic.

\textsuperscript{141} Pascale 2007:35
I argue that our “common sense” is at the heart of stereotypical beliefs and hence racism. This also has implications for my research as a participant in the community. Will the knowledge that I gain from my experiential approach to my Shepparton case study reveal a deep truth as I hope, or merely feed my own prejudice?

5.1 Racism in Shepparton.

I do not accept that there is underlying racism in this country. 142

Prime Minister John Howard 2005

Most Aboriginal Victorians are subject to racist attacks, with 97 per cent reporting they were the target of verbal or physical abuse or discrimination in the past year.

A survey of 755 Aboriginal adults in four Victorian communities, released by VicHealth on Wednesday, found more than 70 per cent of respondents were the target of eight or more racist incidents.

It found a person's risk of psychological distress increased with the number of racist incidents, and half of respondents reported high or very high levels of psychological distress.

The survey was conducted last year in Shepparton, Mildura, Casey and Whittlesea, chosen for their comparatively large indigenous populations. 143 144

Kate Hagan The Age 15 November 2012

I came to know many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people during my Shepparton case study. I participated as an observer in various formal and informal meetings and conversations, and was aware only of respect and acceptance among the Shepparton people, even when they disagreed, or criticised each others' actions, as they did from time to time. However, Brigidine Sister Brigida, an Anglo-Celtic Australian nun,


143 Hagan, Kate. "Study reveals racial abuse of Aboriginal Victorians". The Age Published: November 15, 2012 - 3:00AM. This story was found at: http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/study-reveals-racial-abuse-of-aboriginal-victorians-20121114-29cm2.html

144 This story is also supported by Paradies and Cunningham’s 2009 account of the DRUID (Darwin Region Urban Indigenous Diabetes) study where “Interpersonal racism was reported by 70 per cent of participants, most commonly from service providers and in employment and public settings”. P548
who had worked with Aboriginal people to establish schools for Aboriginal children in the area in the 1980s told me that in Shepparton in the '80s and 90s "You were frozen (out) because you're Aborigines. If Aborigines wanted to rent a house or something they just don't get it." Sister Brigida also related how, at that time, the local Catholic parish priests were extremely suspicious of her work with the Shepparton and Mooroopna Aboriginal community. Their lack of encouragement or formal support for her and her co-workers was demonstrated when she volunteered to provide full information to the (then) Monsignor after hearing that rumours were circulating. Instead of welcoming her into the presbytery to present her work, the priest got into her car, told her to drive "around the corner" from the church, and discussed her work with the local Aboriginal community, surreptitiously, sitting in the front seat of her car. Sister Brigida added:

There is a lot of hidden racism around, which some people say there isn't. I had an argument with a priest who was filling in here ... and he said "There isn't any [racism]". I thought, "Where have you been?"

Harold, a Yorta Yorta Elder, commented:

Aboriginal people are not valued in the white community because of prejudice. There is some hostility, but there is also prejudice among well-meaning people who rely on stereotypes to define Aboriginality. What is Aboriginal? Remove the stereotypes and what is left?

Christine related the case of a destructive gang of Aboriginal youth some years ago when the solution to changing their attitude was thought to be a youth centre.

An offer was made for the building chosen for the centre, but was refused by the vendors, despite the fact it was the asking price. It is still for sale.

Harold believes that most people in mainstream Australia do not care enough about Aboriginal people to even bother wishing they weren't there. He notes that

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145 100311
146 Mooroopna: One of Shepparton's satellite towns across the Goulburn River and the river flats from Shepparton.
147 261010
148 140711
149 140711
Aboriginal people are frequently overlooked – in shops, in employment, in policymaking.¹⁵⁰

In my own observation at Rumbalara Football Club home games, supporters of the home and away teams do not mix socially at afternoon tea times. The separation of the mostly Aboriginal Rumbalara crowd, and supporters of the visitors is starkly obvious as they sit at separate tables to eat their cake and drink their tea and discuss the match. I will discuss this scenario further in Seventeenth Interlocution.

David Mellor agrees that

*There is a significant level of prejudice in the Australian general community toward Aborigines, who have been described as “by far the most ‘ Outsider’ group in Australian society” (Angelico, 1995...)* ...
*Although it is more than 30 years since a referendum among the White community gave recognition to Aborigines as citizens, they still struggle to affirm their place as the original inhabitants of Australia, with their own complex cultures and spiritual relationship with the land.*¹⁵¹

5.2 What is racism?

What do we mean by "race"? David Hollinsworth suggests a definition:

*The term “race” is commonly used to refer to specific populations who are thought to share certain characteristics (often said to be genetic in origin) the combinations of which allow them to be distinguished from other such populations...*¹⁵²

Hollinsworth also observes that we are more likely to apply the term “race” to people we don't like, who are not like “us”. He also argues that our own identity is established by favourable comparison with those "unlikables".

*Often people are more willing to identify “races” to which they do not belong. They, “the others”, are noteworthy, their... presence problematic. This process of distancing and characterising can be called othering: that is, our self-identity is formed and secured through projecting marked and usually negative differences onto “others”.*

¹⁵⁰ 160611
¹⁵¹ Mellor 2003: 474
¹⁵² Hollinsworth 2006:24
What would Australia look like now if the early European explorers and pioneers had treated its Aboriginal residents as equals? I find it hard to imagine. Post-colonial philosopher Homi Bhabha maintains that the construction of a fixed "otherness" is essential in the discourse of colonialism, connoting "rigidity and an unchanging order, as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition". Bhabha describes stereotypes as colonialism's "major discursive strategy, ... a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated..." as though repetition is the only proof of its validity.\[^{153}\]

Bhabha's comments affirm the view that the racism that exists in Australia today had its roots in the perverted Darwinian concepts and confident white supremacist attitudes in the early colonising years of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Had our European forebears not regarded the Aboriginal population of Australia as subhuman or child-like, but as equal parties negotiating the populating by whites of the Australian continent, the legal precept of *terra nullius* could not have been possible. As racism served a purpose in colonial times, it continues to have a role in the service of governments today.

5.3 **Is racism the same as nationalism?**

> Now this is the Law of the Jungle—as old and as true as the sky;  
> And the Wolf that shall keep it may prosper, but the Wolf that shall break it must die.  
> As the creeper that girdles the tree-trunk the Law runneth forward and back  
> For the strength of the Pack is the Wolf, and the strength of the Wolf is the Pack.\[^{154}\]  
> Rudyard Kipling

5.3.1 **The rise of a mean spirit**

The Coalition government under Prime Minister John Howard was elected in 1996 after more than a decade in Opposition. This began a period that has been described by Lillian Holt as having "the mean spirit of attitudes in this country in a way I have

\[^{153}\] Bhabha 1996:37  
\[^{154}\] Kipling, R 1894 "The Law of the Jungle" from *The Jungle Book*  
never felt it before". The new government was neo-conservative, reactionary and backward looking. The Prime Minister's outlook was ultra-nationalistic. He did not concur with historians' revelation about the cruelty and neglect with which Europeans have treated the first peoples of Australia over the past two centuries. He disdainfully referred to this knowledge as "the black armband view of Australia", a phrase coined by Geoffrey Blainey in his 1993 Sir John Latham Memorial Lecture. Howard believed Australians should be proud of their history, the courage and resourcefulness of the pioneers, the sacrifice of the ANZACs and the success of our sports people. There was no place in Howard's ideology of nationalism for pride's opposite, "shame". He emphasised the disastrous war event in Gallipoli as "a founding moment of national identity... evok[ing] a time when Anglo-Celtic Australians rallied to support Britain". He extolled the mythical, androcentric quality "mateship". Howard believed in a "united" Australia. By this he meant that all Australians should accept and live by our "values". He abhorred anything that could be conceived as "divisive", such as a Treaty with Aboriginal people. He refused to tolerate migrants who continued to live by their own cultural practices and did not embrace "the Australian way of life", even to the point of suggesting that those from other countries who do not accept our "values", should be deprived of their citizenship. There was no room for Aboriginal self-determination in Howard's vision.

The mid '90s was the era of the rise of "Hansonism". Many in the settler community were fearful of the consequences of Mabo and Wik High Court decisions. This initial fear was stirred into an ill-informed panic by some areas of the media, and manipulated for political advantage by conservative forces. Ultra-conservative
Pauline Hanson entered Parliament as an Independent in 1996. Hanson condemned what she saw as "the privileges Aboriginals enjoy over other Australians."

*I have done research on benefits available only to Aboriginals and challenge anyone to tell me how Aboriginals are disadvantaged when they can obtain three and five per cent housing loans denied to non-Aboriginals.*

...I will work beside anyone and they will be my equal but I draw the line when told I must pay and continue paying for something that happened over 200 years ago. Like most Australians, I worked for my land; no-one gave it to me."160

Hanson called for ATSIC161 to be abolished, calling it a "terminal mess". She accused politicians of "promoting separatism", advocating that those who did, should be "thrown out" of parliament.162

5.3.2 **What is a nation?**

Hugh Seton-Watson declares that "a nation exists when a significant number of people in a community consider themselves to form a nation, or behave as if they formed one."163 Benedict Anderson refers to the concept of a "nation" as an "imagined community" with three main qualities. It is imagined as "limited" because it has boundaries, which exclude the Other. It is "sovereign", being free to decide its own history, past, present and future. It is a "fraternity", which, according to Anderson, "ultimately ... makes it possible ... for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings"164. Consequently it is the strength of this bonding that facilitates the "them and us" perception, where "I am an insider, and you are Other".

5.3.3 **The Cronulla riot: defending our nation?**

The most notorious illustration of perverted nationalism in Australia in recent years was the riot at Cronulla, a beach-side suburb in Sydney. In December 2005, a violent

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160 Ibid
161 The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) was established in 1990, under Bob Hawke's Labor Government. While it was not perfect, it gave Australian Aboriginal people a combined voice in their own affairs. The Howard Government dismantled it in 2004 after allegations of corruption.
162 Ibid
163 Seton-Watson quoted in Tate 2009:99
racial confrontation erupted, apparently, between flag-wearing "Aussie blokes" defending their territory and so-called Lebanese who had allegedly been harassing local women on the beach. The simmering outrage was heated to boiling point and beyond by commercial radio “shock jocks”. The local media joined the fray. Social commentators Andrew Lattas, Judy Lattas and Anthony Redmond\textsuperscript{165} agree that there is more than meets the eye in the Cronulla riots. They report there is a strong denial of racism among the participants and their supporters in the riot. However Judy Lattas contends that the main issue in the confrontation is a new variety of nationalism in which young "Aussie" male "warriors" feel they must defend their territory and the honour of their women from invasion and violation by the "foreigners" from Western suburbs. Judy Lattas argues, "The ugliness of the moment lay in the reckless release of a widely shared, but routinely buried, aversion to and distrust of the Other."\textsuperscript{166} Gillian Cowlishaw declares that there is "no doubt that what we saw at Cronulla were the passions of a vernacular national belonging among a disparate population, a sense of how varied citizens relate to the nation they imagine they belong to and that they believe belongs to them."\textsuperscript{167}

5.3.4 The cult of forgetfulness

This bonding of "us" against the Other is not necessarily overtly violent. It has enabled the "great Australian silence" and "the cult of forgetfulness"\textsuperscript{168} of Australian Aboriginal people for most of last century, according to W E H Stanner's observation; or as J A La Nauze expressed it, "the Australian aboriginal is noticed in our history only in a melancholy anthropological footnote."\textsuperscript{169} Aboriginal people play only a bit part in Australia's historical narrative. Apart from a brief spark as sporting champions, they are not our heroes or pioneers. We often refer to Australia as a "young" country, ignoring millennia of Aboriginal occupation. In Shepparton as in the rest of the country, Aboriginal people are "frozen out", or "overlooked" as Sr Brigida, Harold and others have experienced. But the strength of this "imagined community" is enigmatic, because surely its very falsity and deception is also its

\textsuperscript{165} Lattas, A 2007, Lattas J 2007, Redmond 2007
\textsuperscript{166} Lattas, J 2007: 332
\textsuperscript{167} Cowlishaw 2007:299
\textsuperscript{168} Stanner 1969
\textsuperscript{169} La Nauze 1959:11
weakness. If our nation, or community, exists within our imagination, surely we
retain control, so that inclusion of the Other is possible if only we desire it.

5.4 Race: a "biological fiction"\(^{170}\)

Other writers agree that the concept of race, and consequently racism, is not
biological but has been crafted by humans. Post-colonial theorist, Edward Said
coined the term, "Orientalism" to describe the imperial European tendency to
"construct" an "Orient" in its own image, to its own desires.\(^{171}\)

*Men make their own history, that what they can know is what they have
made, and extend it to geography: as both geographical and cultural
entities... such locales, regions, geographical sectors as "Orient" and
“Occident" are man-made.*\(^{172}\)

Barry Morris and Gillian Cowlishaw maintain that

*Race is not a self-evident and natural category, but historically grounded
social construction, dynamic downshifting. Discourse and imagery
construct a generic Other, an Other who is often perceived as hostile.*\(^{173}\)

Hollinsworth argues that

*The understanding that “race” has no biological reality but is an
historical and social invention expressing a false but persuasive belief in
their existence, has led some writers to urge we abandon the term
completely.*\(^{174}\)

However, Hollinsworth agrees with Diana Fuss who suggests,

*To say that “race” is a biological fiction is not to deny that it has real
material effects in the world; nor is it to suggest that “race” should
disappear from our critical vocabulary. Clearly it is no more adequate to
hold that “race” is itself merely an empty effect than to suggest that
“race" is solely a matter of skin colour. What is called for is a closer
look at the production of racial subjects, at what forces organise,
administered, and produce racial identities.*\(^{175}\)

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\(^{170}\) Diana Fuss quoted in Hollinsworth 2006:26
\(^{171}\) Said in Mongia, Padmini (ed) 1996:20 – 36
\(^{172}\) Said in Mongia, Padmini (ed) 1996:23
\(^{173}\) Morris & Cowlishaw 1997:3
\(^{174}\) Hollinsworth 2006:26
\(^{175}\) Diana Fuss quoted in Hollinsworth 2006:26
5.5 Ideology

What, then, is the source of racism and toxic ultra-nationalism? Hollinsworth believes that “the concept of ideology is central to an understanding of the forces that produce and organise racial identities.” This is because “Ideology shapes the meanings we place on things including ourselves, and others, and how we locate ourselves within meaningful worlds.”\textsuperscript{176} This powerful "ideology" can be seen in Prime Minister Howard's influence on community attitudes while in government. Howard's "ideology" is strengthened by his leadership of a democratically elected government; all the more powerful for being chosen by the people, and therefore supposedly given a "mandate" for his ideology. However, Howard's use of the discourse of power to instill his ideals reflects the Foucauldian concept of "governmentality", or the "conduct of conduct"\textsuperscript{177}. Carol Johnson argues that

\begin{quote}
Howard ... is using debates over values and national identity in ways that attempt to impose particular stereotypes of acceptable identity, beliefs and behaviour on citizens. It is, in Foucauldian terms, a form of governmentality ... that attempts to shape self-regulating citizen behaviour in order to manage a racially and culturally diverse population.\textsuperscript{178}
\end{quote}

Mitchell Dean points out that:

\begin{quote}
A characteristic of “governmentality” stressed by Foucault is the “tendency, the line of force, that for a long time, and throughout the West, has constantly led towards the preeminence over all other types of power–sovereignty, discipline, and so on–of the type of power we can call 'government'"\textsuperscript{179}
\end{quote}

It may seem unfair to single out John Howard's practices in the years he was Prime Minister as the only example of the molding of the community to his own nationalistic ideals; after all, the processes of "governmentality", the "conduct of conduct",\textsuperscript{180} are elements I would expect to find in all institutions in power to varying degrees. Yet he was the Prime Minister who presided over what Robert

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{176} Hollinsworth 2006:26
\item \textsuperscript{177} Dean 1999:17
\item \textsuperscript{178} Johnson 2007: 195
\item \textsuperscript{179} Dean 2010:30
\item \textsuperscript{180} Dean 2010
\end{itemize}
Manne calls *The Barren Years*\(^{181}\). During his watch scandals such as the "Tampa" crisis and "children overboard affair", involving asylum seekers arriving by boat, occurred\(^{182}\). Untruthful and half-truthful stories about what actually happened were circulated in the media. When the true facts were revealed, politicians claimed to have been misled\(^{183}\). After the High Court decision favouring the Wik people of Queensland, Howard's Government's rhetoric implied that Aboriginal people were stealing the rightful leases of the pastoralists. The right-wing media collaborated with Howard to create and disseminate this "politics of fear" discourse\(^{184}\), manipulating community attitudes into a defensive nationalistic outlook.

According to Hollinsworth, discourse is a powerful force in producing identities. He argues that "[d]iscourses are not innocent or objective in that they empower some categories (or subject positions) while disempowering or silencing others"\(^{185}\). The Coalition government led by John Howard from 1996 used the discourse of fear of racial and cultural difference to create categories in which Aboriginal people and (legitimate) asylum seekers were the losers.

As much as both "race" and "nation" are human constructs, in political and community life, they are real, and must be treated as such if solutions are to be found to the dilemma of how to live together with justice, without strife. But how can solutions be found when stereotypes are the servants of power, and will not be readily yielded? As the flag-wearing Cronulla rioters, and the ideology of Howard and Hanson have shown, nationalism gives racism legitimacy. It reinforces what we believe we know about the Other. It provides us with our criteria for social inclusion and exclusion. We are confident in our alliance, and together we recognise the Other, to the point where it no longer requires conscious reasoning. As Hollinsworth maintains,

*Arguments to defend an endangered “way of life” from the impact of “foreigners” can be designated as a “new racism”. However the*

\(^{181}\) Manne 2001

\(^{182}\) Gale 2004

\(^{183}\) Manne 2002. Much has been written about the "Tampa" and the "children overboard" affair. This opinion piece by Robert Manne is an example, and reflects the anger of a substantial proportion of the Australian community over the behaviour of the Howard Government. http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2002/12/29/1040511256443.html

\(^{184}\) Gale 2004

\(^{185}\) Hollinsworth 2006:27
apparent “newness” of such campaigns "lies in the capacity to link discourses of patriotism, nationalism, xenophobia, Englishness, Britishness, militarism and gender difference into a complex system which gives 'race' its contemporary meaning".\textsuperscript{186} Once the notion of national culture becomes essentialised, it is possible to conduct politics and everyday life in racially segregated and exploitative ways without explicit reference to race.\textsuperscript{187}

5.6 Institutional racism

One thought alone preoccupies the submerged mind of Empire: how not to end, how not to die, how to prolong its era.\textsuperscript{188}  
J M Coetzee, Waiting For The Barbarians

5.6.1 Lingering colonial thinking

A teacher insists that an Aboriginal child sit next to a boy whom the child protests is her brother and therefore she is not permitted to sit with him. The non-Aboriginal teacher impatiently contradicts her – "he's not your brother he's your cousin" – and thereby forces the child to transgress her culture's social relations protocols\textsuperscript{189}. In 1989 in the Western District of Victoria the Minister decided to restore the name of the Grampians range to its original Aboriginal name, along with other regional landmarks. He did this without consultation with the local Koori community and consequently got the name wrong. He ended up pleasing nobody, as the local non-Aboriginal community did not share his grand vision\textsuperscript{190}. There are numerous such instances of institutional and government clumsiness, for example, the Northern Territory Intervention, in some places long-awaited and very welcome, but carried out without consultation with local Aboriginal Elders\textsuperscript{191}. Koori healing practices and family structures are not understood by white practitioners who interpret "different" behaviour through their own world view.

Jan Pettman defines institutional racism as

...a pattern of distribution of social goods, including power, which regularly and systematically advantages some ethnic and racial groups

\textsuperscript{186} Gilroy 1987 quoted in Hollinsworth 2006:46  
\textsuperscript{187} Hollinsworth 2006:46  
\textsuperscript{188} Coetzee quoted in Battiste and Henderson 2000:1  
\textsuperscript{189} Morris and Cowlishaw 1997:2  
\textsuperscript{190} Birch 1997:11/12  
\textsuperscript{191} Toohey 2008
and disadvantages others. It operates through key institutions: organised social arrangements through which social goods and services are distributed.\(^{192}\)

Governments in Australia at all levels are constrained by lingering colonial thinking that the Western concept of governance is the only way. In 2003 the City of Greater Shepparton was chosen as the only Victorian site of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Trial. The Trial, whose purpose was to create economic sustainability and equity for the Aboriginal community in Shepparton, was established without consultation with the local Aboriginal community. (This is discussed in detail in *Tenth Interlocution*).

5.6.2 *My own institutionalist mindset*

I am very aware that my thinking is informed not only by my own worldview, but also, as a PhD student, from my academic education. I am part of an institution. Celine-Marie Pascale's experience in her fieldwork echoes my concerns:

> Without question, my own presence as a white person shaped my data collection and analysis in ways that, at times, must have exceeded my awareness. That none of my interviewees engaged in what could be called counter-hegemonic productions of whiteness might be the result of my own presence as a visibly white person.\(^{193}\)

5.7 *"I'm not racist..."*

*Dr Carmen Lawrence speaks at the Dungala-Kaiela Oration,*

**Shepparton, May 2009**

> It's not only bad people who are prejudiced. That would not have such a strong effect; most people would not wish to imitate them and so such prejudices would not have much direct effect except in exceptional times. It is the prejudices of good people that are so dangerous.\(^{194}\)

> Prejudice means a decision or attitude taken without sufficient evidence on the basis of prior opinion.\(^{195}\)

\(^{192}\) Pettman quoted in Hollinsworth 2006:47

\(^{193}\) Pascale 2007:35

\(^{194}\) Seth quoted in Lawrence 2009

\(^{195}\) Hollinsworth 2006:42
Psychologist and former Premier of West Australia, Dr Carmen Lawrence, was invited to Shepparton to deliver the Dungala Kaiela Oration, an initiative of the Kaiela Planning Council and The University of Melbourne. She titled her speech “The Prejudice of Good People", in which she argued, "even those... who think themselves free of it, free of prejudice, may actually express it in their behaviour toward Aboriginal people."196

Dr Lawrence uses experience in her own field of health care to demonstrate how well-meaning and caring professional people may actually do damage to the people they are caring for. She points out that although the social determinants of health such as poverty and lack of education are causes of poor health in racial minorities, recent evidence shows that Aboriginal people do not receive the same quality healthcare as non-Aboriginal people. Dr Lawrence gives the example of a case in West Australia when "there was a recent exploratory study that found that Aboriginal people who had lung cancer or prostate cancer were less likely to get surgery for those cancers than the non-indigenous population".197 This anomaly could not be accounted for in any other way except difference in the quality of healthcare.

*It wasn’t that the Aboriginal people didn’t turn up for their appointments and it’s now generally agreed, I think, that …it can’t be explained by the behaviour of the people who are getting the treatment.*198

Dr Lawrence reluctantly reports that the behaviours of healthcare providers have a part to play in this, although these are the dedicated people who care the most.

*In some cases they can be just as destructive as the more obvious ones because the more obvious ones you can pin down; you can see it, it’s operating – if someone’s calling you a name, crossing the street to avoid you, behaving in an overtly racist way, it’s easy to deal with that than someone whose eyes just slide off you as they’re talking to you, who cut short the consultation rather than spending time explaining things to you, who doesn’t prescribe the necessary medication and truncates the*
Dr Lawrence points out that the effect of this unintended prejudice is underestimated. It affects not only people's relationships with each other, and not only their mental health, but it has a detrimental effect on physical health as well. People who are constantly exposed to disrespectful behaviour will come to believe themselves not worthy of respect and become trapped in a cycle of self-fulfilling anxiety. Dr Lawrence believes that "the knowledge that you're not respected, is at the root of a lot of ... social collapse". She concludes that the only solution is self-awareness. "I think unless we examine ourselves, we’re likely to continue to do damage – the prejudice of good people."

*What can be done is to constantly observe ourselves, to look at the ideas and values that underpin our institutional and public policy, to test it constantly and to test ourselves for prejudicial and racist attitudes.*

Lawrence is adamant that we cannot achieve this without leadership from government, which includes dismantling institutionalised racism. However, ultimately the solution must come from people themselves.

* [...] until we look into our own hearts and try to observe our own behaviour and work closely to provide the mechanisms to reduce that bias in everything that we do and think, we’re unlikely, really, to be able to sustain reconciliation because we’ll be walking around with a set of ideas in our heads that do damage to aboriginal people every day.*

As I will discuss in *Eighteenth Interlocution*, the City of Greater Shepparton will inevitably suffer from the same shades of racism expressed by Lawrence, where day to day operations overshadow concerns about the relationship with the Yorta Yorta and Bangerang people, where partnerships, although well-meaning, may be no more than nominal, and run along Western lines. This discourse is fundamental to my research question whether Reconciliation is possible in the City of Greater Shepparton, and by implication, local government in general, in Victoria, and beyond.
5.8 Normative racism

The specificity of modern racism, or what gives it its specificity, is not bound up with mentalities, ideologies, or the lies of power. It is bound up with the technique of power, with the technology of power. ... The juxtaposition of – or the way biopower functions through – the old sovereign power of life and death implies the workings, the introduction and activation, of racism. And it is, I think, here that we find the actual roots of racism.204

Michel Foucault

The concept ... of institutional racism is very helpful in shifting discussions of racism and exclusionary practices away from the adversarial attack and defence of individual racism.205

David Hollinsworth

There are those in the community who argue that a "natural preference for one's own kind"206 is normal. There is no accompanying hostility, they reason, therefore it cannot be described as racist. This is the so-called contemporary or "new racism", supposedly less serious than open hostility. However Carmen Lawrence's oration infers that this aspect of prejudice and stereotyping penetrates every level of the community including institutions that are meant to serve the needs of Aboriginal people.

David Mellor has observed that "no Aboriginal Australian can ever be an Australian in the same sense as a White Australian",207 and although "it is more than 30 years since a referendum among the white community gave recognition to Aborigines as citizens, they still struggle to affirm their place as the original inhabitants of Australia, with their own complex cultures and spiritual relationship with the land".208

The argument that because there is a cultural norm against racism... contemporary racism is predominantly subtle or symbolic may thus be misleading, at least in the Australian context.... The overt nature of so much of the racism reported by Koori participants suggests that the

204 Foucault quoted in Rasmussen 2011:40
205 Hollinsworth 2006:50
206 Hollinsworth 2006:45
207 Mellor 2003:474
208 Ibid
notions of symbolic, modern, and aversive racism are only new strings to the racist’s bow rather than a new bow.\textsuperscript{209}

As I have shown in paragraph 5.6, race is a social construct, whose stereotypes are informed by individual epistemology, depending on one’s own life experiences. Executive Officer Jason observed that in Shepparton,

\begin{quote}
Most people know only what is portrayed in the media, and that is generally negative. Coverage of the (NT) Intervention and Little Children Are Sacred Report gives the impression that child abuse is rife in Aboriginal life. Unless Australians in the wider community do their own reading and research, they do not learn any more than this. Consequently stereotypes are believed, which results in both overt racist jibes and comments, and covert racism.\textsuperscript{210}
\end{quote}

As Carmen Lawrence has pointed out, the responsibility lies with each person to examine their thinking and if necessary, change it. However, this is not easy, and the great obstacle is "common sense". Celine-Marie Pascale argues, "Common sense is a saturation of cultural knowledge that we cannot fail to recognize and which, through its very obviousness, passes without notice." She points out that, "Ideological hegemony operates at the level of common sense—in the assumptions that we make about life and the things we accept as natural."\textsuperscript{211}

\begin{quote}
Common sense leads people to believe that we simply see what is there to be seen. For example, common sense leads us to believe that we simply “see” different races. I argue that the ability of race to appear to be a self-evident feature of daily life, a matter of common sense, speaks to how the history and the politics of race remain deeply submerged, yet easily readable in daily life.\textsuperscript{212}
\end{quote}

Similarly, Anthony G Greenwald and Mahzarin R Banaji refer to "implicit social cognition" in their work examining stereotypes and argue that this categorising involves the effects of experience, both present and past, on judgments and decisions. They also conclude that "these effects often result in subjects making

\begin{footnotes}
\item[209]Mellor 2003:483
\item[210]Pascale 2008:725
\item[211]Pascale 2008:725
\item[212]Pascale 2008:725
\end{footnotes}
judgments that they would regard as nonoptimal if made aware of the source of influence".213

In other words, race applies to the Other; our world view is the norm. As Pascale explains,

> The power of whiteness—for white people—works through virtue of its invisibility, through the ability of commonsense to erase the presence and meaning of white racial identities and to produce all other racial identities as apparently inherently meaningful—even if the meanings of those racialized identities are unclear or contradictory. In a white cultural imagination, commonsense knowledge (re)produces biological essentialism by masking or silencing the articulation of social, historical, and economic processes that make whiteness meaningful.214

As I mentioned previously, when I began this project, I determined I would not use the term, "racism", because I believed it evokes defensive responses in people – "I'm not racist" – which mitigate against productive self-examination. However, although race has no biological validity, but is a social construct, as Diana Fuss has pointed out, in social terms, it is "real". This "implicit social cognition" cannot be shrugged off, and must be examined, interrogated and challenged. Pascale also points out

> The struggle for authenticity is both possible and relentless precisely because there is no “real,” no race that resides in bodies. There is a politics to be struggled for in the representation and invocation of authenticity, which is both a means to resist, and an extension of, domination itself.215

I have addressed the subject here mainly from a perpetrator's perspective; however, the effects of this pernicious social myopia by the hegemonic culture that calls itself "mainstream", is summed up by poet Kevin Gilbert, who claimed that Aboriginal Australians "underwent a rape of the soul so profound that the blight continues in the minds of most blacks today"216. But this is not the result of the ignorance and brutality of two hundred years ago. I argue that our self-assured, complacent perception of superiority continues to this day with consequent implications for how a place like the City of Greater Shepparton might engage with Reconciliation.

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213 Greenwald & Banaji 1995:6
214 Pascale 2007:35
215 Pascale 2008:733
216 Gilbert quoted in Short 2006:1
5.9 **Lateral violence - internalised racism**

Our white-supremacist notion that white is right and Aboriginal culture is of no value, has, in many cases, insidiously infected Aboriginal people's perception of themselves. "Lateral violence" is a toxic form of racism. In a very entertaining and comprehensible narrative "conversation" with "Lateral Violence" Barbara Wingard exposes its power. She begins the "conversation",

```
Good afternoon Lateral Violence.
It's really good to meet you in person.
You usually seem to be in the shadows,
so we appreciate it that today
we can talk to you face to face.
Can I ask you some questions?

Yes, go ahead.

What do you like to do?

I do my best work destroying people.
I like to divide people and break their spirits.
I break communities and create nastiness
between families because people
don’t know how to deal with me.
I can even create violence and
big punch-ups sometimes, hurting
people and stabbing people.
But often I use words and stories
more than physical violence and
break spirits that way.²¹⁷
```

Wingard goes on to dramatically illustrate how "Lateral Violence" works through its "friend", "Gossip", to promote unforgiveness, segregation, conflict, racism within the Aboriginal community, and doubt about "real" Aboriginality²¹⁸. Although Wingard's narrative is fun and "tongue-in-cheek", it reveals that lateral violence is as much of a "construct" as white supremacy.

²¹⁷ Wingard 2010:14
²¹⁸ Aboriginal or not. Insight. SBS 07/08/12, file:///Users/user/Desktop/Deakin%20Research%20documents/Racism,%20nationalism%20&%20lateral%20violence/Aboriginal-or-not.html
In Shepparton, lateral violence is manifest within the Aboriginal community, according to Maureen and also Jason,²¹⁹ with many relationships fraught with bitterness and conflict. The fact that nastiness is also rife in the wider community, especially in the political arena does not help this situation at all. Because of internal conflict, plus the incursion of white management in Koori affairs, Maureen is pessimistic about the survival of Aboriginal culture in Australia. Older people have cultural knowledge and treasure it, but young people are often uncaring, and rejecting of the conflict, and prefer to merge with the wider community.²²⁰ It is important to note that this is not the violence and abuse that is constantly reported in the media, as Jason has observed, but it is often hidden, stemming from the sense of identity, or lack of it, that occurs in these very media reports, and elsewhere in the wider community.²²¹

5.10 Cultural safety - the wall of racism

Many Aboriginal people do not feel they can safely participate where white values dominate. Most institutions that Aboriginal people need to approach, such as local government, therefore pose a risk. Frankland, Bamblett and Lewis explain that

> Culture is essential for the spiritual, emotional and social growth and maintenance of all peoples. For the Aboriginal peoples of Victoria, culture is their spear and shield; their resistance and their resilience. A key challenge is to address the partial removal of traditional culturally-based forms of identity, belonging, stability and protection within Aboriginal communities, in addition to addressing the processes which disempower Aboriginal peoples and disable their voice and ability to practice self-determination.²²²

Frankland et al point out that culture is not safe where there is a "lack of respect and recognition of the positive aspects of Aboriginal culture and its centrality in creating a sense of meaning and purpose for Aboriginal peoples".²²³ But it is important to Aboriginal people that they are not seen as "victims" or even "survivors", but that

²¹⁹ 010811, 031011
²²⁰ 010811
²²¹ 010811, 031011
²²² Frankland, Bamblett & Lewis 2011:27
²²³ Ibid
they can make a genuine contribution to the Australian community in the third millennium.\textsuperscript{224} However,

\textit{In many respects, the social engineering of the colonisers of the past still resonates in aspects of government policy formation and implementation, if not directly, then at least at a ‘subconscious’ level as a result of cross-cultural blindness. This creates both policy confusion at the government/departmental level and socio-economic disempowerment at the community level.}\textsuperscript{225}

\subsection*{5.11 Healing from the damage}

The reason for my examination of racism in Australia is to place my research in Shepparton in context. Shepparton is not a remote community, but a regional city with an agricultural hinterland. Attitudes common to Australia in general are also found in Shepparton. I am aware that my assessment of racism in the Australian community is largely pessimistic. When common sense drives racism, what hope have we? But some writers do give us hope. Carmen Lawrence has recommended constant self-awareness. Also it is Foucault's conviction that adherence to a system of rules can only happen when reason is absent or suppressed. In other words, as long as we can think, we do not have to go along with stereotypes and common sense. We have a choice of action.\textsuperscript{226} Dean reminds us:

\textit{Government concerns the shaping of human conduct and acts on the governed as a locus of action and freedom. It therefore entails the possibility that the governed are to some extent capable of acting and thinking otherwise.}\textsuperscript{227}

Similarly, Greenwald and Banaji recommend consciousness raising as a countermeasure to stereotyping.

\textit{Research on the role of attention in weakening the effects of implicit cognition ... supports consciousness raising as a strategy for avoiding unintended discrimination. That is, when a decision maker is aware of the source and nature of a bias in judgment, that bias may effectively be anticipated and avoided.}\textsuperscript{228}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{224} Frankland, Bamblett & Lewis 2011:28 \\
\textsuperscript{225} Ibid \\
\textsuperscript{226} Macmillan 2011:21 \\
\textsuperscript{227} Dean 2010:23 \\
\textsuperscript{228} Greenwald & Banaji 1995:9
\end{flushleft}
Despite these assurances, I do not wish to go down the road of a naive hope in my analysis of racism in Australia, and in Shepparton in particular. Two Koori participants in my research have volunteered the opinion that they have no vision for Australian Aboriginal people, neither for the future nor for Aboriginal identity in this generation. To proclaim hope at this stage would be to trivialise, disrespect and dishonour the views of these people, and deny opportunity for future productive dialogue. Pessimism is half of the optimism/pessimism binary, and as such, it is the keeper of half the knowledge that is there to be learned. I cannot see how reconciliation and justice can be achieved in the community as long as racism exists, and racism will exist until the community rejects it. As yet I find few promising signs.

As I become familiar with the City of Greater Shepparton Council, I will be questioning whether these aspects of racism are present and if so, what effect they may have on policy-making.

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**Epilogue to Racism**

**A hard lesson**

I was coming to the end of my stay in Shepparton. I felt I had learned so much, and made friends, both Koori and non-Aboriginal, whom I had come to love, over the last fifteen months. We were sitting in the kitchen of my little Shepparton cottage, my husband and I, discussing what we would do with the house, now I was returning to Melbourne. We considered the alternatives: do we sell, or do we rent it out? I mentioned that if we rented, we should contact a real estate agent who would be happy to deal with Aboriginal tenants. At that moment, we both looked at each other in horror and shame. We had both had the same unbidden thought: we don’t want the house trashed. Score one for stereotyping.
Interlude

Reflection after my visit with a well-known Aboriginal Australian

I've just recovered from flu. Not sure if this is why I feel so depressed about this whole project or whether it's a reaction to learning something. I remember hearing (or reading) something about when you first learn something you feel you've lost something.

Look at that man! Can you imagine how many times his heart has been broken by what has happened to his people? Not so much what he says, though that's useful, but who he is. Why is he still standing? He has been ill as I am. A quiet giggle. He's tired.

Back home, what do I do? Why has this been such a wake-up? Didn't I know this heart-breaking reality? Of course I did. Are we guilty? Guilt is pretty useless. But I feel so ashamed that my culture could do this to another. And I feel ashamed that I haven't felt that shame before, and that my friends don't. In a way, perhaps heartbreak is contagious. But to say my heart is breaking over this seems trivial and pretentious. So maybe I'd better not call it that.

At the end of “Schindler's List”\textsuperscript{229}, Oskar Schindler realised what he had done, and was ashamed he hadn't done more. Had he known what he was doing? Of course he did. But schemes, policies and projects have a way of taking you aback and becoming flesh and blood, and then you see what you have done. Whether it's beneficial or not, I think the reaction is shame. How can it be anything else?

So, am I being self-indulgent? There is a lot to do, and I'm not living in that world. There is inertia. All right, call it self-indulgent, staring at the map of Wurundjeri country, listening to the Schindler's List evocative movie theme music, letting tears come. Not very pro-active. But I believe in reflective learning, don't I? So yes. I can allow myself a little time for rest and reflection. But not too long!

\textsuperscript{229} Spielberg, Steven 1993 (Director) \textit{Schindler's List} Universal Pictures. Producers: Steven Spielberg, Steven; Molen, Gerald R.; Lustig, Branko
Conclusion to Part 2. Australia

... any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.  

John Donne

I have painted a gloomy picture of the setting for the exploration of my research question. Before I even start my study, there is an evident precedent for governments to repeat the same flawed policies, indicating a universal lack of understanding of the problem. It is still the "Aboriginal problem": Aboriginal people are "disadvantaged", stereotyped as eternal mendicants. The solutions are considered on our terms, in our way, with only rare consultation. As McHugh points out, there is no escape from this circular history where Aboriginal people bear the obligation to become more like us. Governments appear trapped in this same vortex of dysfunctionality. Damien Short has declared Reconciliation a failure. Closing The Gap repeats many ineffective principles of Assimilation, and John Howard's "Practical Reconciliation". Social Inclusion invites Aboriginal people to join the "mainstream" culture, even though it is evident that our "common sense" racism will not accept "the Other" as equal and valued members of our community. This is the reason for my "no" answer to my overarching research question. Nevertheless, as I said in my introduction, I cannot slam that door. In my research in Shepparton I have found reason to believe that the circular trap may be able to transform to a spiral leading to better relationships. I will discuss this in later Interlocutions.

The Shepparton Chronicles

VII. Reconciliation Australia

September 2009

I visited Reconciliation Australia (RA) this morning. I was keen to find out about reconciliation action plans (RAPs). Reconciliation Australia

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230 Donne 1623
describes them as “a business plan that turns good intentions into actions. They’re about creating respectful relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians”. The RA person I spoke to said he is keen to watch the progress of the RAPs. Can my project contribute to that? RA obviously will have their own feedback/outcome research methods, however, I said that I will concentrate on Victoria, but look more broadly than simply “outcomes”. I will look at the context of change in local government, and change in community attitudes. RAPs have been around only a short time, since 2006, but at the time of writing (in 2012), this program has contributors numbering over 300, consisting of organisations, community groups, schools etc.

The RA officer is concerned that my methodology should be “bottom-up” rather than “top-down”, as am I. This gives me encouragement to stick with a Community Development style methodology. He strongly suggested Shepparton as a place to start and has suggested I contact the CEO of the Kaiela Planning Council. So much is happening!

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232 Ibid
Part 3. About Local Government – conservative institution or catalyst for change?

In Part 3, I examine the progression of local government in Victoria since its inception in the nineteenth century, but especially over the last three decades. Can local government break the cycle of repeating past mistakes? It has the advantage of being close to the community, therefore can perceive, first hand, the results of its policies. I will describe the turmoil of local Victorian politics over twenty years. Although this upheaval may at first sight appear to be devastating for localities, it may in fact be an opportunity for local government to recast democracy into a model in which Social Inclusion means including our first people on their terms.

Local government in Australia and Victoria in particular has undergone substantial changes in its lifetime. In the last two decades change in Victorian local government has been radical. Two hundred and ten municipalities were reduced to seventy-eight. A new system of management was instituted. Councils were dispensed with and administrators installed while the transformation was in progress. The present City of Greater Shepparton is an amalgamation of three shires. It did not escape the tsunami of change that swept across Victoria during the 1990s. In this next Interlocution I discuss the history and genesis of local government in Victoria, and the effect of the upheaval on municipalities such as Shepparton. I will discuss this, and the effect on Shepparton’s Aboriginal community, in more detail in Eighteenth Interlocution.
6. Sixth Interlocution: Local Government – a valuable partner?

As I have established, since European colonisation of Australia, the Commonwealth government has instituted policies aimed at providing a better deal for Aborigines, and most have missed their mark. P G McHugh argues that in the last two decades "Anglo-settler law sought to be more accommodating, and ... [although] in many respects it was, it still [was] a blunt instrument of the settler-state that in the modern world could hurt as much as help or heal aboriginal peoples."\(^{233}\) Over the past 200 years, decisions affecting Aboriginal Australians have not, for the most part, included consultation or discussion with Aboriginal people. Does this mean, then, that more and better consultation with Aboriginal Australians will produce better policy? Although there have been advisory councils and “expert" panels\(^{234}\) set up from time to time, it is questionable whether these entities can ever be truly representative of Aboriginal communities. However, it is becoming clear that local government may be a valuable partner in Reconciliation and it is regarded so by the Council of Aboriginal Reconciliation\(^{235}\). This has led me to my overarching research question:

\[\text{Can local government create conditions in which Aboriginal culture can flourish and reconciliation blossom?}\]

What follows is a story of the evolution of local government in Victoria. This story is important because it has affected the role, and indeed the psyche, of each individual local government official, therefore has implications for the success or otherwise of local government's part in Aboriginal Reconciliation and justice. I will discuss how this story plays out in the Greater City of Shepparton in *Eighteenth Interlocution*.

6.1 The Victorian local government revolution

The role of local government has changed substantially over the last two to three decades, especially in Victoria. The neoliberal changes that swept through local government with the election of the Kennett government in 1992 were swift, 

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\(^{233}\) McHugh 2004:611  
\(^{234}\) For example, CAR, ATSIC and also the expert panel on Constitutional recognition, www.recognise.org.au  
\(^{235}\) CAR 2000a, austlii website. See Appendix (7)
peremptory and radical. However this revolution in local government was not confined to Australia but has been consistent in all Anglophone and European countries, “driven largely by the widespread belief that the various tiers of government were performing the core functions sub-optimally...”\(^{236}\), as well as by the ascendency in the 80s and 90s decades of neoliberal ideology globally.

6.1.1 Setting the scene for amalgamations

Change had already been taking place in Victoria decades before the 90s revolution, even as far back as the mid-nineteenth century, when urban communities such as Fitzroy, Collingwood and Richmond, initially wards of the City of Melbourne, were agitating to secede from the mother council. Although the intended function of these Councils was mainly to coordinate infrastructure and maintenance, community identification with a particular area was often profound. The 1840s and '50s were a time of great fluidity in the new Colony of Victoria, formed after Victoria's split from New South Wales\(^ {237}\), as it had to cope with the population expansion brought about by the gold rush\(^ {238}\). The year 1855 saw many urban wards secede and become separate municipalities. During the gold rush, new rural municipalities were established\(^ {239}\), with fairly ad hoc boundaries, and continued to exist even after the colonies became States in 1901. As David Dunstan commented, "it is no wonder, given the small size of many Victorian municipalities, that for more than a century there has been a push for some greater consolidation of local government units."\(^ {240}\)

It is necessary to note that at this time, and indeed until recent times, local government had no particular connection with Aboriginal people, apart from encounters officials and outside workers may have had in the course of their daily work, which may or may not have been happy ones.

\(^ {236}\) Dollery et al 2008a:1
\(^ {237}\) In 1850, by an Act of the British Parliament the colony of Victoria was officially established, with its own Constitution, separate from the originally settled colony of New South Wales. The Murray River formed the border. The six Australian colonies were federated, again by British Law, in 1901, and a Constitution drafted. The colonies then became States of the Commonwealth of Australia. Local government is not recognised as a separate entity in the Constitution, and therefore it is an institution of the laws of each State. Aboriginal people also have been given scant recognition in the Australian Constitution. (See Appendix 3), also Museum of Australian Democracy Documenting a Democracy. Australia's Story. Australian Constitutions Act 1850 (UK) http://foundingdocs.gov.au/item-sdid-17.html
\(^ {238}\) Dunstan 1998:10
\(^ {239}\) Dunstan 1998:14
\(^ {240}\) Dunstan 1998:21
6.1.2 Local government's growing community focus “ossifies”

The change of focus of local governments from the three Rs\(^{241}\) to services to people actually took place gradually, beginning in Victoria after the Second World War. According to Alan Hunt, Victoria's longest-serving Local Government and Planning Minister\(^ {242}\) (1971–1979), post-war Councils

> learned to care for the environment and the quality of life rather than development alone. They began to recognise their role in the fields of good governance, representation, advocacy and leadership for their communities. They placed increased emphasis on community development and welfare, and the encouragement of community pride and participation.\(^ {243}\)

Local government's community focus was further affirmed when, despite its absence from the Australian Constitution, local government was included in Victoria's Constitution in 1976 at the invitation of the Australian Constitutional Convention.\(^ {244}\)

> It provided that "There is to continue to be a system of local government for Victoria consisting of democratically elected Councils having the functions and powers that the Parliament considers necessary to ensure the peace, order and good government of each municipal district."\(^ {245}\)

Nevertheless, in 1979, the Bains Report\(^ {246}\) commissioners reported that Victoria's system of local government had become ""ossified"", and had "failed to adjust to social change in the twentieth century, as has been manifested in the durability of municipal boundaries which no longer reflect either communities of interest or viable administrative units."\(^ {247}\) At that time, the moribund Hamer administration was in no political condition to implement any of the Bains Report's recommendations\(^ {248}\)

The incoming Cain Labor government in 1982 did not include local government reform in its election platform. However, both Premier John Cain and the Minister

\(^{241}\) "roads, rates and rubbish"

\(^{242}\) Galligan 1998:xiii

\(^{243}\) Hunt 1998:55

\(^{244}\) Ibid

\(^{245}\) Hunt 1998:55/56

\(^{246}\) Bains Report on the Role, Structure and Administration of Local Government in Victoria was commissioned by the Hamer government. Dunstan 1998:27

\(^{247}\) Dunstan 1998:27

\(^{248}\) Ibid
for Local Government had stated publicly that local government reform was part of the Labor government's social justice strategy. An "advocacy document" by the Chair of the Local Government Commission, Stuart Morris, outlined the reasons for, and merits of, change\textsuperscript{249}. The document pointed out that local government had changed little since the 1880s, although there had been significant changes both in the demographic of the municipalities, and role of councils, with "greater emphasis on providing human services, environmental planning and recreation."\textsuperscript{250}

\textbf{6.1.3 Restructuring local government for "efficiency"}

Premier Cain saw restructuring of local government merely "in terms of efficiency of government",\textsuperscript{251} although Morris stresses that "the Commission did not see the reform of local government as simply being about efficiency or...about encapsulation communities of common interest within a single municipality", but that "local government is the most effective sphere of government", being "closest to the people" and "more responsive and responsible", and therefore "deserved a greater role in the governance of Victoria."\textsuperscript{252}

Once again, this attempt at local government reform fell victim to strong opposition, not all of it realistic. The then Opposition, led by Jeff Kennett, who would ultimately bring in reform, vehemently opposed the changes. In 1986, the Cain government, politically injured by the community's antagonism, backed down. Morris asserts bitterly, "This is a problem with our Constitutional system. Oppositions think in terms of scalps and short-term political advantage. And some Oppositions are worse than others."\textsuperscript{253} However, he believes that although no boundaries were changed in the time he was Chair, "the Local Government Commission's efforts can be remembered for laying the groundwork for what followed."\textsuperscript{254} Paving the way for the substantial developments that were shortly to come, and after three years of consultations,\textsuperscript{255} the Local Government Act 1989 was passed. Its stated new purposes of a Council were:

\textsuperscript{249} Morris 1998:40
\textsuperscript{250} Ibid
\textsuperscript{251} Morris 1998:39
\textsuperscript{252} Morris 1998:43
\textsuperscript{253} Morris 1998:50
\textsuperscript{254} Morris 1998:51
\textsuperscript{255} Aulich 1999:15
• to provide for the peace, order and good government of its municipal district
• to facilitate and encourage appropriate development of its municipal district in the best interests of the community; and
• to provide equitable and appropriate services and facilities for the community and to ensure that those services and facilities are managed efficiently and effectively; and
• to manage, improve and develop the resources of its district efficiently and effectively.\textsuperscript{256}

6.2 The Kennett era and New Public Management (NPM)

The Kennett government was elected in 1992, with a secure majority in both Houses\textsuperscript{257}. Premier Jeff Kennett wasted no time in implementing his plans for smaller government and less burdensome restrictions on business enterprise.\textsuperscript{258} As institutions and utilities fell like tall timber to downsizing and privatisation, affected members of the public quipped that they had been "Jeffed". Alan Hunt relates the effect of this time on local government policies:

\begin{quote}
The five years following (the election) saw a series of Acts relating to local government and planning... In brief, these new Acts enabled the wholesale, centrally directed restructure of Victorian municipalities, with the provision for non-binding polls, the interim replacement of elected councillors by appointed commissioners for new municipalities, compulsory competitive tendering (CCT), rate capping, and ministerial supervision or control over many aspects of a council's activities.\textsuperscript{259}
\end{quote}

While in Opposition, Roger Hallam, Minister for Local Government in the new regime, had argued that "local government should be primarily responsible and answerable to the community rather than to the state government" but once in

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{256} Hunt 1998:60 \\
\textsuperscript{257} Australian Parliaments comprise two "Houses". The "lower" house where laws are enacted, and an "upper" house of review. In the Kennett era, both Houses in the Victorian Parliament were predominantly composed of Liberal/National Party members. This meant that Laws enacted in the lower House met no opposition in the upper House, creating a smooth path into legislation. \\
\textsuperscript{258} Hunt 1998:63 \\
\textsuperscript{259} Ibid
\end{footnotesize}
government this conviction quickly changed.\textsuperscript{260} Following reviews by the newly constituted Local Government Board, a body established to advise the Minister, the 210 Victorian councils were reduced to 78 by amalgamations, adhering to the principle that larger municipalities would be more economical.\textsuperscript{261} The two-year transition was overseen by unelected, appointed commissioners. This time was considered by local government staff and managers to be stressful and disorienting, although it was widely considered necessary for "structural efficiency".\textsuperscript{262} The amalgamations disrupted the lives of individual council personnel, many having to find alternative employment. These people and those employees whose municipal centre had moved to another location found themselves needing to travel longer distances to work.\textsuperscript{263} In addition, Van Gramberg and Teicher claim that while complying with government objectives and constraints, "this framework did not allow the necessary freedoms for entrepreneurial or strategic expression".\textsuperscript{264} They further argue that the "pace and extent of the imposed changes on Victorian local government managers clearly outstripped existing knowledge and experience" and "has contributed to an incomplete transition to the new public management model".\textsuperscript{265}

\textbf{6.2.1 The demise of democracy?}

Critics of amalgamations argue larger municipalities have not delivered the intended benefits to the community. These critics "generally claim that there are diseconomies of scale in relation to the democratic values of representativeness, with large municipal units less responsive to community needs and aspirations than smaller ones."\textsuperscript{266} Similarly, Dollery and Johnson present the view that larger municipalities "may diminish the vibrancy of local democracy and reduce participation by the citizenry." They also point out that opponents of amalgamation argue that "most of the claims made by advocates of municipal amalgamation are illusory, especially

\textsuperscript{260} Aulich 1999:15
\textsuperscript{261} Burdess/O'Toole 2004:71
\textsuperscript{262} Aulich 1999:19
\textsuperscript{263} Martin 1999:28
\textsuperscript{264} Van Gramberg/Teicher 2000:489
\textsuperscript{265} Ibid
\textsuperscript{266} Aulich 1999:19
regarding purported economies of scale ...and in any event outweighed by the heavy costs it imposes.\textsuperscript{267}

The Kennett Government's local government reform was based on New Public Management (NPM) principles. NPM is modelled on corporate-style administration, driven by market forces. Gerry Stoker describes NPM as seeking to

\ldots dismantle the bureaucratic pillar of the Weberian\textsuperscript{268} model of traditional public administration. Out with the large, multipurpose hierarchical bureaucracies, new public management proclaims, and in with lean, flat, autonomous organizations drawn from the public and private sectors and steered by a tight central leadership corps.\textsuperscript{269}

New public managers of local government were expected to guide their administration to "steer" not "row". According to Janine O'Flynn, the core principles of NPM are:

\begin{enumerate}
  \item economic markets should be the model for relationships in the public sector;
  \item policy, implementation and delivery functions should be separated and constructed as a series of contracts; and
  \item a range of new administrative technologies should be introduced including performance-based contracting, competition, market incentives, and deregulation.\textsuperscript{270}
\end{enumerate}

A major element of NPM, Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT), initially meant that inexperienced managers were expected to manage the tendering process, which comprised supervision of the provider of the service, setting assessing standards, and maintaining accountability to the community which was now regarded, not as "citizen" but as the "consumer".\textsuperscript{271}

The reign of Jeff Kennett's Liberal/National Coalition from 1992 could justifiably be described as revolutionary. With both Houses under his control, the Premier was able to install radical change, not only in local government, but in the public service as well. Public assets such as the public transport network were privatised.

\textsuperscript{267} Dollery/Johnson 2005:73
\textsuperscript{268} The Weberian model of public administration comprises political leadership, party, and bureaucracy. Stoker 2006b
\textsuperscript{269} Stoker 2006b
\textsuperscript{270} O'Flynn 2007:357
\textsuperscript{271} Van Gramberg/Teicher 2000:480
Government departments were downsized, and work contracted out. Deirdre O'Neil comments, "The effect was to create the most radical industrial relations and public service reform agendas yet seen in Australia and to make Victoria an unlikely pacesetter in these areas."273

Van Gramberg and Teicher argue that despite "hands off" rhetoric, the Kennett government played "a highly interventionist role". The apparent progression from traditional administration in local government to NPM has been at best incomplete, at worst, deceptive, because of the top-down regulatory nature of the State's reforms, combined with inconsistencies in the practice of NPM. Van Gramberg and Teicher maintain that the

paradox of the emerging "new public manager" is that, rather than gaining the greater strategic managerial control and autonomy envisaged by the private sector model, a more intense control over council managers by central government has emerged.275

John Martin agrees. He points out that "Local government managers are central to effective change in their organisations", but the fact that

many ... are unable to articulate well-thought-out strategic choices about how they manage and organise during periods of turbulence and radical change is of concern. This suggests many are still burdened by an administrative, regulatory mindset of local government which has the effect of creating unnecessary tension and conflict within organisations asked to make fundamental changes in the way they work.276

In Victoria, local government restructuring in the 1990s was more radical than anywhere else. Brian Galligan claims that democratic considerations were overlooked, and that despite the restoration of elected councillors, "the Victorian discourse of local government remains dominated by managerialism and economic rationalism."277 The Kennett government's reforms, although necessary and well overdue in many areas, were implemented with a "top-down" arrogance, breathtaking in its uniqueness in democratic societies.
6.2.2 *How does NPM affect Aboriginal people?*

There was no benefit for Aboriginal Australians in NPM, managerialism or Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT). The hardening epoch of economic rationalism, which began in the 1980s, overwhelmed the emerging discourse on self-management and self-determination that had begun in the 1970s, and the dialogue on Treaty in the 1980s, and later Reconciliation. The neoliberal approach to economics that spread through the OECD countries during the '80s, became the administrative norm in all levels of Australian government. David Harvey comments:

> Neoliberalism has... become hegemonic as a mode of discourse and has pervasive effects on ways of thought and political-economic practices to the point where it has become incorporated into the commonsense way we interpret, live in, and understand the world.\(^{278}\)

In this climate, fiscal and economic accountability dominated; social and cultural accountability had little credence. As NPM dominated the nineties, Aboriginal Reconciliation and justice succumbed to the mean spirit of neo-conservatism prevalent in the Australian community at the time. *(see Fifth Interlocution\(^{279}\))* Patrick Sullivan points out:

> Where the financial and regulatory aspect is emphasized and other aspects, such as dialogue and respectful attention to narrative statements, are ignored, accountability is reduced to an instrument of colonial control and manipulation.\(^{280}\)

NPM principles demand "bottom up" accountability by individuals, ignoring the collectivity of many Aboriginal communities. As with community service organisations in the wider community, in NPM, local Aboriginal service organisations, run by Aboriginal people, became accountable primarily to the government department that funded them, rather than to the community they were meant to serve\(^{281}\). Sullivan also makes the salient point that, at all levels of government, "[t]he unacknowledged 'client' of aboriginal development services is the non-indigenous voter and the political class that is responsive to them" and that "[o]ne of the greatest inhibitors of aboriginal development is that indigenous policy

\(^{278}\) Harvey 2007:23  
\(^{279}\) See 5.3.1  
\(^{280}\) Sullivan 2009:66  
\(^{281}\) Sullivan 2009
is formulated for the non-indigenous public."\(^{282}\) In the supra-rational environment of NPM what room is there for the three Rs of Aboriginal culture: Respect, Reciprocity and Relatedness (*see Seventh Interlocution*)\(^{283}\)?

At the 1999 election the Kennett government unexpectedly lost government to the Victorian Labor party, led by Steve Bracks. It seemed as though the Victorian community, especially the rural sector, was exhausted by seven years of radical and turbulent change. Bracks had promised during the election campaign to restore traditional values to the public service. After election he moved quickly to implement these promises, but NPM remained as a government model into the new century.\(^{284}\) It is likely that Jeff Kennett lost the 1999 election because of community reaction to local government restructuring in rural areas. If not the sole reason, this was certainly one of the factors.\(^{285}\) The incoming Premier, Steve Bracks, was a "country boy", born and bred in Ballarat, which may have had an effect on the election result.

### 6.3 Local government in Victoria after Kennett

Chris Aulich reports that in contrast to its predecessor, the new Labor administration was "a government more sensitive to traditional local democratic values."\(^{286}\) Soon after election the new government replaced CCT with a program modelled on UK's "best value", which "explicitly involves greater engagement of communities by local governments."\(^{287}\)

Comparison with UK local government policies can be problematic as UK municipalities are responsible for services such as health, police and education whereas Australian councils are not. Nevertheless, "best value" principles are broad, rather than specific, and can have a wider application. Steve Martin, from UK's Warwick Business School explains that "in marked contrast to CCT legislation, the Best Value framework establishes broad principles and processes rather than detailed

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\(^{282}\) Sullivan 2009:63  
\(^{284}\) O'Neill 2000:112/113  
\(^{285}\) Aulich 2005:206, Allen 2003:75  
\(^{286}\) Aulich 2005:206  
\(^{287}\) See Appendix (8) for "Best Value Principles" in Victorian Local Government Act 1989  
\(^{288}\) Aulich 2005:206
regulations." He quotes a government guide document as stating that "‘best value does not depend upon detailed prescription from Government... the Government will not therefore seek to prescribe a uniform approach or product’ ... and the framework will need to be ‘followed imaginatively in the spirit with which it has been designed’.”

6.3.1 Regarding Agreements

Escaping from the managerialism of NPM, surely there is now more opportunity for local government to become the partner in Aboriginal reconciliation of the CAR's vision. CAR stated that at the end of the 1990s, "Many local councils have committed to the Council's vision, formed local government agreements and undertaken actions to advance reconciliation". Langton and Palmer identified “an emerging culture of agreement-making” proliferating over the last two decades. They assert these agreements "constitute a paradigmatic step away from the colonial relationship of the past, a potent space for healing, celebrating difference and creating new joint futures, in particular those concerning culture, environment and social and economic well-being.”

The partnership Agreement with Aboriginal people for 2010 to 2020 has been renewed in Glenelg Shire. The content of the agreement is cautious, focusing on reconciliation issues rather than justice and sovereignty. My brief survey of Victorian municipalities' websites shows that other councils have similar documents, some without the commitment of a formal Agreement. However

291 Glenelg Shire is situated in the south-western most corner of Victoria. Its principal town is Portland, but includes Casterton, Heywood, Dartmoor and Nelson. It is not to be confused with the Adelaide suburb of Glenelg in South Australia.
Glenelg’s agreement contains reciprocal conditions, treating the signing parties as equals, with accountability on both sides.\(^{296}\) Some councils, such as Glenelg, acknowledge that reconciliation is a process, and are willing to learn and grow.\(^{297}\) A growing number of councils are drafting action plans for reconciliation often in conjunction with advisory committees of local Aboriginal people. More councils are employing Aboriginal liaison officers.\(^{298}\) There is no uniformity across Victorian councils, but there is a general trend toward a more pro-active approach to reconciliation. However, the "emerging culture of agreement" identified by Langton and Palmer seems not to have eventuated to the extent they anticipated. There is a variety of timelines and piecemeal action. Some councils, like Glenelg and City of Darebin are building on plans and policies implemented years ago.\(^{299}\) But East Gippsland, for example, has only recently implemented its Reconciliation Action Plan.\(^{300}\) The City of Greater Shepparton engages in partnerships with Aboriginal agencies in the city. It has no formal action plan, but in 2010 Council employed an Aboriginal Partnerships Officer. Shepparton Council will be discussed in detail in *Eighteenth Interlocution*.

### 6.3.2 Desire for dialogue

The inclination of these moves in local councils is towards a more connected community. The rising importance of genuine consultation in the form of liaison officers and advisory committees demonstrates a desire for productive dialogue. There is a flow of change, albeit fragmented, towards a return to gentler policies; to Constitutional values of "peace, order and good governance of each municipal district."\(^{301}\) However the fact that the expected thrust for agreements appears to have diminished demonstrates that change is far from predictable, possibly unsustainable, and still very fluid. As Brian Halligan argues

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297 Ibid

298 East Gippsland Shire Council, City of Darebin. Shire of Yarra Ranges Glenelg Aboriginal Partnership Agreement op cit

299 Glenelg Shire Council & City of Darebin op cit


The long-term consequences of three generations of reform can be seen to have in part gone full circle through the rebalancing of constituent features, yet there is also a sense of movement along new pathways. At this point, it remains unclear whether the emergent model represents a mainstream and durable approach that has effectively incorporated recent experience or whether it is transient and a bridge to an as yet indeterminate model.302

Despite the return to more people-oriented policies, some commentators observe that NPM still lingers. Aulich believes that along with Best Value model principles,

... the influence of managerialism has led to an infusion of private-sector techniques that have become enculturated as normal management practice. The workplace has been reshaped with an increasing emphasis on formal qualifications and performance management.303

However, Aulich argues that the effect of this detritus is not necessarily negative:

While the democratic deficit in particular has been lamented, the reform processes have led to enhancement of democratic practices such as increased accountability, equitable representation, community engagement, access and transparency.304

6.4 Local government at the crossroads

Town meetings are to liberty what primary schools are to science: they bring it within people’s reach, they teach men how to use and enjoy it.

de Tocqueville, 1834305

6.4.1 “Regimes” as the “new” institutionalism

Will local government linger in managerialism, structural efficiency and strategic planning? Will it pursue a more democratic discourse? Will it come to, not only respect local Aboriginal culture, but to value its contribution to the community? Or will this flow of change, like lava, slow, and harden into the rock of a traditional style institutionalism? Gerry Stoker, in his study of comparative local governance, argues that institutionalism, differentiated as "old" or "new", is actually crucial to local government. Indeed, any operating body without a structured system is

302 Halligan 2007:234
303 Aulich 2005:208
304 Ibid
305 de Tocqueville 1834 quoted in Lowndes 2001:1968
unstable and chaotic. Vivien Lowndes agrees that "new" institutionalism is an essential element of local governance. She observes that the shift from "old" to "new" institutionalism has moved along six identifiable continua:

1. from a focus on organisations to a focus on rules;
2. from a formal to an informal conception of institutions;
3. from a static to a dynamic conception of institutions;
4. from submerged values to a value-critical stance;
5. from a holistic to a disaggregated conception of institutions; and
6. from independence to embeddedness.306

Lowndes emphasises that institutions are not necessarily organisations, but rather sets of rules, or regimes, created by the political stakeholders, who abide by and are constrained by these regimes.307 Stoker maintains that the study of regimes has been critical in understanding institutionalism. He defines regimes as "ways of organizing power in complex societies in order to ensure outcomes in tune with particular interests".308

This discussion of "new" institutionalism describes one of the possible directions of local government in Victoria in the first decade of the new millennium. Stoker claims that "regimes" are the raw material of the "new" institution. They are the informal collaborations between public and private entities to achieve a good governance outcome.309 Although these methods are informal, they are not without order. Stoker claims,

*These newer ways of working are not assembled in some ad hoc manner; they follow patterns and can in their construction have a determining influence on access to power.*310

Stoker and Lowndes write primarily about British institutions. As Dollery Wallis and Allen 311 point out, local government in Australia delivers a very narrow range of services compared with other Western democracies' municipalities, which administer such services as education, policing and welfare. Nevertheless Stoker's and Lowndes' comments do relate to Australian municipalities. Australian academics

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306 Lowndes 2001: 1958
307 Ibid
308 Stoker 2006a:496
309 Stone in Stoker 2006a:504
310 Stoker 2006a: 503
311 Dollery et al 2006:560
Dollery et al rebuke Australia for its ad hoc approach to local government development. They claim that important changes in local government are occurring undirected and unplanned in extempore fashion. Dollery et al compare Australia's experience of change with New Zealand's, where the community engaged in debate about the role it wanted for local government. This has not happened in Australia. It could be claimed that here "regimes" emerge, rather than being created. Dollery et al argue that change has happened

> in an incremental manner, largely in an ad hoc response to community demands, the devolution of activities from both Commonwealth and State governments, technological progress, and a myriad other factors. Australian local government thus seems to be gradually changing its focus by default rather than design.\(^\text{312}\)

However, the statement that change has happened "in an ad hoc response to community demands" correlates with Stoker's definitions of "regimes" as being "in tune with particular interests", namely the community the municipal Council serves. Furthermore, Stoker attests these developments are not ad hoc, but may facilitate access to power in the community.

6.4.2 **Dollery Wallis and Allen present three models for debate**

Dollery et al present three stylised models of local government councils that they consider relevant to a debate in Australia about local government: minimalist, maximalist and optimalist.\(^\text{313}\) The NSW Local Government Inquiry's (LGI) *Interim Report (2006)*\(^\text{314}\) gives working definitions of the three models. “Minimalist councils” provide goods and services only. “Maximalist councils” foster the welfare of their whole community. Maximalist councils are most likely to be prone to “government failure”.\(^\text{315}\) “Optimalist councils” are a moderate way between the other two. They are “champions of their areas and as such should take a leadership role in harnessing public, NGO and private resources to promote particular outcomes rather than attempt to fund and operate local initiatives on their own.”\(^\text{316}\)

\(^\text{312}\) Dollery et al 2006:555/556  
\(^\text{313}\) Dollery et al 2006:553  
\(^\text{315}\) Dollery et al 2006:561/562  
\(^\text{316}\) Dollery et al 2006:561
6.4.3 What kind of municipality is the City of Greater Shepparton?

Since amalgamation with Rodney Shire, Shepparton administers a number of community services, and maintains partnerships with community agencies,\(^{317}\) therefore in terms of the City of Greater Shepparton, "minimalist" is not appropriate. Neither is it "maximalist", councils that "‘foster the welfare of the whole community even if this means duplicating work of other tiers of government’"\(^{318}\). The third model, the "optimalist" council is the most descriptive of the operation of the City of Greater Shepparton. Optimalism "may be considered as a moderate ‘third way’ between the other two models since it marries minimalism (in terms of demands on council resources) with maximalism (in terms of the scope of council objectives)."\(^{319}\)

This model combines a

‘steering not rowing’ perspective on the function of modern government ... with a ‘governing by network’ modus operandi ... Optimalism in local governance thus envisions municipalities leading and coordinating coalitions of stakeholders to secure particular outcomes, such as local economic development, using appropriate partnership instruments, like local public-private partnerships.\(^{320}\)

I will discuss the City of Greater Shepparton Council in detail in Eighteenth Interlocution.

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The Shepparton Chronicles

VIII. Getting moving

September 2009

I am trying to draft introductory letters to local governments. This is daunting. As Battiste and Henderson pointed out, I am sure local government is not going to want to relinquish power (Chronicles V). Will


\(^{318}\) NSW Interim Report quoted in Dollery et al 2006:561

\(^{319}\) Dollery et al 2006:561

\(^{320}\) Dollery et al 2006:562
they perceive my approach as wanting to judge them and tell them what to do? Use diplomacy. Say “Dear Local Government, if you're perfect you don’t need me, but if you would like to enhance the relationship with your Aboriginal community, let’s talk about it. What would you like to do?” Mention “partnership” in reconciliation. Are local governments effective partners in reconciling communities? If yes, how do they do it? If no, can they be?

I received an email back from the Ethics Committee. They reckon I should submit an application as soon as possible. The deadline is 2 November for the last meeting of the year, which is on 7 December. I don't think I can make that!

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I have set my timetable for the next few months. I need to prepare my methodology by determining my research methods, especially for case studies. I have to draft letters to local governments, and to Aboriginal Elders.

6.5 Local government's new directions

It is clear, then, that there is a new local government model emerging in Australia that is a combination of NPM practices and more democratic approaches. Whether these follow a pattern, as Stoker suggests, or are ad hoc, as Dollery et al assert, remains to be seen. A third alternative is that it is a combination of both, and patterns are emerging in response to the local culture of each municipality. Halligan also holds the view that the new paradigm developing in the mid 2000s is the result the merging of two previous models. He has termed this emerging model "integrated governance", and argues that it has "four dimensions that are designed to draw together fundamental aspects of governance: delivery and implementation, coherence and whole-of-government, and performance and responsiveness to
government policy.” He sees a whole-of-government agenda emerging with a coordinating central agency. Halligan claims that:

> Governments have experimented with new forms and found them to offer a mixed bag of benefits and deficits. Consequently, the NPM model of the 1990s has now been succeeded even though the basic ideas still underpin the new model. The main trends in the 2000s have either moderated key NPM features or represented new agendas that do not align closely with those of the immediate past.

Halligan's contention that the "resurrection of the central agency (is) a major actor with more direct influence over departments", and is one of the elements of integrated governance, resonates with Lowndes' and Stoker's remarks about the significance of institutions in the emerging model. As Stoker and Lowndes have asserted, formal institutions are necessary for the stability of local government. Lowndes claims that both "old" stable paradigms and "new" flexible regimes may not only co-exist, but can be symbiotic – or not.

> Informal institutions may provide the ‘raw material’ for the development of formal institutions (or delimit their development) or they may exist alongside formal rules, in concert or contradiction.

Andres Lidstrom disagrees with Stoker about the beneficence of institutions. He argues that institutions, once they are established, rigidify, develop inertia and become resistant to change. They are kept alive by an inner logic which limits actors' future choices. ... Institutions are path-dependent: changes tend to follow already well-established routes.

He believes the reason for the renewed attraction for local government “institutions” in Europe is “a growing sense of localism, channelling a need for local identification in an increasingly transnational world”. He argues that neo-institutionalists tend to seek continuity and path dependency, which infers that change, if it happens, never reaches the roots of the system. This concurs with Battiste's and Henderson's

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321 Halligan 2007:220
322 Ibid
323 Halligan 2007:234
324 Lowndes 2001:1958
325 Lidstrom 1999:107
326 Lidstrom 1999:97

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assertion that governments do not want to change. Lidstrom's hypotheses call into question whether any genuine democratisation of local government can be achieved. But if, as Stoker asserts, institutions are necessary for governance, and if, as Lidstrom suggests, institutions are resistant to change, does this imply that the only way significant reform could take place would be the way it occurred in Victoria: radical "top-down" action by a State government in control of both Houses? (see 6.7) Commentators such as Aulich and Halligan confirm that qualities of NPM still linger in local governance, undoubtedly sustaining "structural efficiency". Aulich echoes Lidstrom's view by pointing out that these strategies have now become accepted as normal processes of governance. However, "'market-driven new managerialism runs counter to self-governance, as it is structured around the idea of happy consumers rather than involved citizens".

Democracy in local government depends on community engagement. Representative democracy has been restored to Victorian municipalities, although elected councillors have less decision-making power, depending on advice from managers. Whether a more engaged democracy can be established depends not only on the willingness and vision of the governing institution, but also on the willingness of the community to engage. Dollery et al have cited "voter apathy" as one of five factors in local government failure. While this is inconsequential in "minimalist" councils, and disastrous in "maximalist" councils, accountability to the community in addition to a higher level of government is vital in an "optimalist" council such as the City of Greater Shepparton. This, then, requires at least moderate familiarity with Council operations by citizens. In Shepparton, contact with the community is maintained by consultation and partnerships. Whether this is sufficient will be discussed in the Eighteenth Interlocution.

327 Battiste and Henderson 2000:7
328 Aulich 2005:208
329 Box, R C quoted in Van Gramberg/Teicher 2000:489
330 Dollery et al 2006: 563
331 Ibid
6.6 "Can local government create conditions in which Aboriginal culture can flourish and reconciliation blossom?"

6.6.1 Returning to the original question

Aboriginal communities have little influence on the establishment and operations of local government. With some exceptions, Aboriginal people occupy the "other" side of governance. They are the receivers of "benefits". One Yorta Yorta Elder declared that local government was "slow to come to the party", needing a "big nudge" by community organisations before any meaningful engagement took place.

In the progressive political climate of the seventies, "Self-determination" replaced "Assimilation" as government policy. In the eighties, policy discourse included Aboriginal voices. When the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) was formed in 1990, despite constant concerns about corruption, Aboriginal people had at least a representative body to amplify their voices. The 1990s Kennett revolution that reshaped local government in Victoria, plus the Federal Coalition government's abolition of ATSIC in 2004, have done nothing to assist Aboriginal people's struggle for justice. Nevertheless, Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people together continue the struggle, as the proliferation of agreements, partnerships and Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with local governments and other bodies has demonstrated. In Northern Territory, Queensland and South Australia there are small, self-governing, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander local governments, although these still exist at the whim of settler governments who can make or break them at will. Also, Rolf Gerritsen reports that West Australia and New South Wales "have inadequately incorporated their Aboriginal people into mainstream local governments." Victorian Aboriginal people have not been able to participate in self-governing communities because of

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333 100310

334 Sanders 2002

335 Shain et al 2006

336 Gerritsen 1998

337 Gerritsen 1998:236
their small number. The lack of any cohesive national policy on Aboriginal self-governance, or even productive participation in local governance, plus the fact that local government acts only after a "big nudge" is not encouraging. A brief examination of the City of Greater Shepparton's website shows that Aboriginal concerns take second place to multicultural issues. Council administration considers its Aboriginal community part of "cultural diversity", consistently including Aboriginal culture in the same paragraph as migration to the area.

In the late 1990s the Howard government Minister Herron rejected "the politics of symbolism" in favour of "practical measures leading to practical results". This attitude appears to have since settled into a comfortable norm in local government.

6.6.2 Aboriginal Australians are not just another minority group

In local government interface, Aboriginal matters are limited to addressing disadvantage, and "culture", which usually refers to artistic projects. However, to regard Aboriginal Australians as just another minority group is, I believe, to miss the point entirely. Issues surrounding European colonisation, and the dispossession of Aboriginal peoples cannot be included in policies of multiculturalism. Issues such as sovereignty, spirituality, connection to the land, reparation and cultural safety that are relevant to Aboriginal people, but do not apply to newcomers, are not addressed to any depth in public or political discourse in Victoria.

The answer to the overarching research question, then, seems to me to be sliding towards "no". The hegemonic Western-style government has no entry point for Aboriginal culture per se. To be effective on any level in local government, Aboriginal people must adopt Western practices (see Fourth Interlocution). Yet even so, as evidenced in my brief scan of Victorian municipalities, any Aboriginal representation on local councils is unusual. Nevertheless, the wheel of change is still spinning. While the fiscally tight institution of the recently moderated NPM

338 Ibid
340 Ibid
341 Sanders 2002:3
343 Council websites op cit (see above)
maintains the existence of "optimalist" councils, the Local Government Act simultaneously provides for "equitable and appropriate services and facilities for the community". In other words, now, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, local government has the freedom and flexibility, within reason, under the Act to shape its own community. Stephen Cornell's ideal of beneficent governance,

\[...] an expression of the people's vision of what kind of community they are, of the relationships within that community that they value and want to sustain, of the ways they feel decisions should be made and people should be treated, of their place in the world around them.\]

should be the mantra of all governments, especially local government. Dollery et al advocate a debate such as the one carried out in New Zealand, regarding the kind of local government suitable to Australia. A debate on such a scale seems daunting, bearing in mind the extent and variety of communities in this nation. Debate also seems difficult in this climate, when the paradigm being sought is so non-specific, emerging after the institutions of traditional management and NPM. Stoker insists that

\textit{Debates are not technical disputes about what works best, although they are often framed in those terms. They are about differences around the fundamental understanding of human motivation that narratives imply and the desirability of the emphasis placed on the often competing values of efficiency, accountability, and equity.}\]

This may be the very time to engage in productive debate, when the restoration of democracy is an important element in virtually all of the proposed paradigms, as engagement itself is the essence of democracy.

\textbf{6.7 The return of politics to local government}

\textit{Steering toward public value is an emerging new management paradigm. In contrast to traditional public administration and new public management, it does not seek to confine politics but rather sees it as central to the management challenge.}\n
\begin{flushright}
Gerry Stoker
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{345} Cornell 2008
\textsuperscript{346} Stoker 2006b:43
\textsuperscript{347} Stoker 2006b:46
\end{flushright}
In this discussion, the term "politics" partners the word "democracy". Both refer to a government's engagement, on equal terms, with its community. Politics and democracy are ancient concepts. Aristotle's democracy refers to the city, its citizens and rule of the people. Although Aristotle condemned "extreme democracy", he rejected "oligarchy" more emphatically, as being the rule of the wealthy, "like a business". Andrew Lintott argues that "Aristotle's conception of the city as a community conceived for the active pursuit of the good life not only has negative implications for oligarchy, but may have positive implications regarding democracy."

*If the purpose of those who joined in a city was merely living, or mutual defence (summachia) or the protection of economic exchanges in order to avoid injustice, then the oligarchic view, according to which the status of the participant depended on his contribution in resources, would have some force, since society would be no more than a guarantor for the protection of the participants' just interests. However, it is a different matter if the purpose of a city is happiness and moral life or, to put it another way, to make citizens good and just. This is what characterises the true polis and differentiates it from an alliance of peoples according to a suntheke (compact) or a geographical conglomerate.*

Politics, in this sense, is the art of governance, democracy in action; and good politics is governance that creates and maintains a happy community. We are now in a post-NPM era, not that it has been abandoned, but NPM is no longer the master, rather it serves the people with its resources for responsible economic management and accountability. Politics in Aristotle's terms, is dialogue, whereas in economic rationalism it is not. Economic rationalism (or managerialism, or neoliberalism) is quantitative and cannot be expected to deal with complex human issues. As we explore more human avenues of governance, Tony Bovaird and Elke Löffler predict a revolution; "as local contexts become more differentiated in the future, the variety of approaches to local community reforms may well be greater than in the ‘New Public Management’ (NPM) era."

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348 Lintott 1992:117
349 Lintott 1992:116
350 Bovaird and Löffler 2001:11
Janette Hartz-Karp has worked with the Western Australian government on ways of implementing deliberative democracy for community engagement. The *Dialogue with the City* project in 2005 "trialled, modified and adapted a variety of community engagement techniques including citizens’ juries, consensus conferences, consensus forums, multi criteria analysis conferences, televotes, deliberative surveys and ... 21st century town meetings"351. Hartz-Karp asserts that from this trial

> [...] we have learnt that true deliberation is the key to effective community engagement. The end result of effective deliberation is not only good governance, but also the opportunity to remind participants what it means to be a citizen.352

For Gerry Stoker the revolution is "public value management", that offers

> a new paradigm and a different narrative of reform. Its strength lies in its redefinition of how to meet the challenges of efficiency, accountability, and equity and in its ability to point to a motivational force that does not rely on rules or incentives to drive public service reform. It rests on a fuller and rounder vision of humanity than does either traditional public administration or new public management.353

However, a revolution depends on that vision being shared. As I quoted Dollery et al previously, *voter apathy* is a factor in local government failure354, both in accountability and in democratic practices. If any kind of deliberative policy is to succeed, voters, in their role as citizens, must not only be free to express opinions, but must also be willing to be informed about the issue at hand, and, if necessary, to act. Gifted, strong leaders will be necessary to inspire voters to participate, although, as Stoker argues, the vision itself suggests that people are already "motivated by their involvement in networks and partnerships, that is, their relationships with others formed in the context of mutual respect and shared learning."355 In addition Hartz-Karp reports that the *Dialogue with the City* deliberative democracy project

> [...] gave the community a sense of ‘ownership’ of the strategy – to the point where many took action to defend it against negative commentaries

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351 “21st Century Town Meetings”: a methodology used in the search for common ground, Hartz-Karp 2005:5
352 Hartz-Karp 2005:2
353 Stoker 2006b:56
354 Dollery et al 2006: 563
355 Ibid
being made about it. Most importantly, it provided participants with an experience that reminded them of the importance of being a citizen.\textsuperscript{356}

While local government scholars agree that we are now experiencing a "third generation"\textsuperscript{357} in terms of an emerging hybrid NPM/democratic governance, there are a number of interpretations of its direction. John Halligan suggests that

\begin{quote}
  system integration and performance are central to the prevailing approach of the mid-2000s. Where once reinventing was part of the lexicon, the indicators point now to an emergent model that is perhaps best represented in the mid-2000s as reintegrating governance.\textsuperscript{358}
\end{quote}

Halligan explains that this emerging form of governance involves a "rebalancing of the centre"\textsuperscript{359} and a "new whole-of-government conception [that] is potentially ambitious with high-level commitment to a multi-layered approach that has at its core a focus on cultural change".\textsuperscript{360}

\section*{6.7.2 Policy networks: democratic solution or an unmanageable mess?}

Could this "reintegrating governance" be the key to local government's contribution to Aboriginal Reconciliation and justice? Peter deLeon and Danielle M Varda present "collaborative policy networks" that "are purported to have discursive properties" and include

\begin{quote}
  ... political support, mutuality of goals, reciprocity (shared resources), representation/diversity, flattened power structures, participatory decision making, collaborative leadership, shared experiences and norms, frequent interaction, the requirement of trust, and conflict resolution.\textsuperscript{361}
\end{quote}

de Leon and Varda argue that rather than draw participants of similar views, deliberative or discursive democracy "requires a diverse set of participants, whose opinions are voiced, considered, and argued, all set within an institutionalized structure".\textsuperscript{362} They propose that

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{356} Hartz-Karp 2005:11
  \item \textsuperscript{357} Halligan 2007
  \item \textsuperscript{358} Halligan 2007:219
  \item \textsuperscript{359} Halligan 2007:231
  \item \textsuperscript{360} Halligan 2007:225
  \item \textsuperscript{361} deLeon & Varda 2009:65
  \item \textsuperscript{362} deLeon & Varda 2009:62/63
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
in a collaborative policy network, network ties will tend to form, regardless of the similarities among the participants; that is, the emergence of ties will be based on the policy topic at hand, with a tendency to draw together a diverse group of stakeholders.\textsuperscript{363}

For the cause of Aboriginal justice I find it heartening to witness these emerging discourses whose values so richly correspond to the Respect, Reciprocity and Relatedness of Indigenous research paradigms. However, despite the promise in these paradigms, they may also include impediments to effective governance. For example, Michael J. Christie, Patricia A. Rowe, and David Pickernell identify problems in the "triple helix network system" of regional engagement: institutions, industry and government.\textsuperscript{364} These obstacles appear to arise from lingering elements of managerialism, such as a competitive environment, which stifles reflexivity, inflexible structures, and "a narrow focus on routinisation, adhering to norms, conventional management practices and low sharing of tacit knowledge".\textsuperscript{365} In this way, Christie et al's findings support Lidstrom's assertion regarding the rigidity of institutions once established. On the other hand, Christie et al do suggest appropriate "enablers" to overcome these obstructions, enablers that rely on competent and creative management practices to facilitate an environment of trust and innovation.\textsuperscript{366} Stoker also points out the importance, as well as the difficulty, of effective management in networking:

\textit{The dilemma for public value management arises from the expectation embedded within it for managers to manage democracy. Such management can push politicians and citizens onto the margins. Legitimate democracy is often too demanding and unpredictable to be subject to the full disciplines of management. Moreover, management cannot be entirely democratized, or if it is it runs the risk of becoming a deformed management—all talk and no action. ... Vigilance and regular critical review by all the partners in the system is central to ensuring that the promise of both stakeholder democracy and management is delivered.}\textsuperscript{367}

\textsuperscript{363} deLeon & Varda 2009:67
\textsuperscript{364} Christie et al 2009:83
\textsuperscript{365} Ibid
\textsuperscript{366} Ibid
\textsuperscript{367} Stoker 2006b:56
Local government in Australia is still in transition, and I would argue that its ad hoc character\textsuperscript{368} identified by Dollery and Allen is an indicator of the flexibility and autonomy needed for this transition. But whether the pendulum reaches its zenith and begins to swing back, or whether the transformation is a permanent new direction towards the needs of the local community rather than a top-down management style, is as yet unpredictable. Within the lifetime of the present young generation, the government of Australia may decide, rightly, to hold a Referendum to include local government in the Constitution. This will define the functions of local government much more closely than is the case today. Now is perhaps the time for the community to debate the desired change, preferably with Stephen Cornell's recommended criteria for good governance in mind\textsuperscript{369}.

6.8 How to proceed?

The public value management paradigm ...argues that legitimate democracy and effective management are partners. Politics and management go hand in hand. One must involve many stakeholders to make good decisions and to get a grip on delivery and implementation. The public value paradigm places its faith in a system of dialogue and exchange associated with networked governance. It is through the construction, modification, correction, and adaptability of that system that democracy and management are reconciled and delivered.\textsuperscript{370}

Gerry Stoker

Policy networks, deliberative democracy methodology, Indigenous research paradigms, and action research methods all consist of values fundamental to Stoker's "system of dialogue and exchange"\textsuperscript{371}. Listening deeply is an essential element of respectful dialogue. Paulo Freire, in his classic work, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, has some profound and sometimes startling comments about dialogue between human beings; that we are "not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection".\textsuperscript{372} Freire maintains that, "Dialogue cannot exist...in the absence of a profound love for the world and its people."\textsuperscript{373} Nor can it exist without humility, and

\textsuperscript{368} Dollery & Allan 2006
\textsuperscript{369} See Cornell's quote at the beginning of this thesis.
\textsuperscript{370} Stoker 2006b:56
\textsuperscript{371} Ibid
\textsuperscript{372} Freire 1970:69
\textsuperscript{373} Freire 1970:70
"an intense faith in humankind."\textsuperscript{374} The result of this foundation is that "dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of ... mutual trust"\textsuperscript{375}.

Stoker acknowledges that issues of how to manage efficiency, accountability and equity\textsuperscript{376} are important in the new models, but argues they can be handled by negotiated setting of goals. He also maintains that management has a significant place in this democracy, but that managers need

\begin{quote}
among other things, to manage through networks, to be open to learning in different ways, and to draw in resources from a range of sources. But ... they need something more. They need a vision of an alternative paradigm, an overarching framework in which to put their new practices.\textsuperscript{377}
\end{quote}

Community networks comprise fallible human beings, with different personality traits, and each with their own version of "common sense". Yet these practices may provide the much needed connection between Aboriginal people and local government. Managers or facilitators will need to be able to inspire a network group to reject stereotypes, and to adhere to the dialogic foundation of love, humility, faith, hope, respect and reciprocity.

**Conclusion to Part 3. Local Government**

Victoria has endured more than two decades of upheaval in local government. It has not returned to its previous status before amalgamations and New Public Management principles were imposed upon municipalities in the '90s. Over the post-war decades, local government focus has become more community oriented. In the 21st century, the more concentrated community focus plus the residue of NPM providing competent and accountable financial management, are steering local governments towards emerging productive partnerships with their communities. The dominant framework for this has been the "Best Value" model. However, if local councils adopt the trend towards "policy networks" as a democratic device in policy creation, a new, as yet unpredictable role for local government may emerge.

\textsuperscript{374} Freire 1970:71
\textsuperscript{375} Freire 1970:72
\textsuperscript{376} Stoker 2006b
\textsuperscript{377} Stoker 2006b:2
My examination of local government in Victoria, then, will provide the structure for evaluation of the City of Greater Shepparton, which I will discuss in the Eighteenth Interlocution. Based on this investigation of Victorian local government, I will examine these issues:

- In what ways is Shepparton an "optimalist" council?
- How is policy created in CoGs?
- How does it engage with its community? Does it have connections with any policy networks or similar?
- What policies does CoGs have that involve Aboriginal people?
- What partnerships has it formed? With whom? Are they successful? Why?
- What plans does CoGS have for advancing its relationship with its Aboriginal community in the future?

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**The Shepparton Chronicles**

**IX. Stumbling Around And Learning By Doing**

*September 2009*

I have received an amazing answer to my probing email to Ian Hughes at University of Sydney. He talked to me about his own PhD project in an Aboriginal community, and referred me to his thesis and some articles he has written on action research.\(^{378}\) I have more or less settled on “action research" as my methodology, especially after reading Ian Hughes' writings. It's risky and difficult, and I know hardly anything about it. I have no idea how I will present it to the Ethics Committee. But here goes!

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I have been reading Rory O'Brien's paper on *An Overview of the Methodological Approach of Action Research*. He describes the essence of action research as "Put simply, action research is 'learning by doing' – a

group of people identify a problem, do something to resolve it, see how successful their efforts were, and if not satisfied, try again." This doesn't seem too hard! However in his article he does identify other attributes that distinguish action research processes from problem-solving in everyday life. These are, "its focus on turning the people involved into researchers, too - people learn best, and more willingly apply what they have learned, when they do it themselves. It also has a social dimension - the research takes place in real-world situations, and aims to solve real problems. Finally, the initiating researcher, unlike in other disciplines, makes no attempt to remain objective, but openly acknowledges their bias to the other participants." 379 Once again O'Brien's description supports my inclination to follow this path for my research project which includes Aboriginal people.

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**Conversation With Vicki**

This was my first meeting with Vicki. I hope it is not the last. Her depth of understanding of Aboriginal life and culture is something I need to bring *life* to my project. And I need it to *live* if it is going to have any beneficial effect at all in the community. She agreed with the directions of my thinking. And we agreed that for me it's a journey – with hardships, pitfalls and challenges. I must find my role – my identity in this work. She understands that better than others I think.

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I have been reading about massacres in Victoria. I am appalled. It turns my stomach. Once again I feel the shame. My family was here in the 1840s and 1850s. Did they know what was happening? I don't know. If they had known, what would they have done? What would I have done had I been there? My forebears were good, compassionate people, and courageous, coming to a new life in a far-away country from England, Ireland and Wales. But they were part of the invasion. I hope I can use

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379 O'Brien 1998. html
file:///Users/user/Desktop/Deakin%20Research%20documents/Action%20research/o%27bri en%20overview%20AR

380 Vicki is the pseudonym I have given to an Aboriginal mentor who is also an academic.
their legacy to me of social conscience and creativity to contribute to a
good future for all.

One thing Vicki confirmed for me – there is a spark of hope—if local
government can make it work, can we translate what works to a larger
arena? This is what I have hoped all along in beginning this project.

I have prepared an introductory letter for local councils. Now I need one
for Aboriginal communities.
Part 4. My (love) Story: Shepparton and me

My experience is that many supervisors and students take a strategic approach to tasks like preparing a proposal, applying for ethics committee approval, writing up data collection and analysis and presenting the story of the research project in the final thesis. Research is often written up as an ordered sequence of events with logical deduction based on empirical observation, when events on the ground and the actual construction of knowledge was much more messy, complex and disorganised.381

Ian Hughes

In Part 4 I present a montage of my affair with Shepparton, from the search for the right methodology, not only in theory and literature, but inside myself as well, to the dilemma of how to leave when I had learned to care. Hughes uses the word "messy". It has become one of my favourite and most reassuring expressions over the time of my research. Wanda Pillow believes that

The qualitative research arena would benefit from more “messy” examples, examples that may not always be successful, examples that do not seek a comfortable, transcendent end-point but leave us in the uncomfortable realities of doing engaged qualitative research.382

As my project has unfolded, it has indeed been "not always successful", very "uncomfortable" at times, but definitely "engaged". This untidy patchwork of story and discussion reflects my preparation and subsequent experience in the field, when my carefully researched plan of action, approved by the Ethics committee, in reality seemed to bear no relation to the literature research I had done over the previous year. In this section I describe my dilemmas in searching for the right methodology, applying the methodology, which seemed to

381 Hughes 2005:209
382 Pillow 2003:193
disintegrate before my eyes, my disorientation, and my reconstituted methodology. I also discuss my findings regarding the City of Greater Shepparton Council, and I describe the major Aboriginal agencies in Shepparton, which have a significant impact on Aboriginal life in the city.

I begin my journey with exploration of myself as researcher. However, I shall take to heart Tomaselli et al's caution that

"When the auto is used without the ethnographic (method), then what results is not autoethnography but biography, unproblematised diarization, and description."383 Other writers384 urge researchers to keep a self-critical awareness, which I will try to do to counter any self-indulgent tendency. In my Chronicles I have included some personal events because I believe these have affected my research enough to include them. Despite these cautions, Tomaselli et al maintain that "Ethnographic – and more specifically, autoethnographic – research is characterized by its robust, messy nature, and the implications of this should be embraced and documented in the field."385

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383 Tomaselli, Dyll and Francis 2008:369
384 Gaventa & Cornwall 2008, Mertens 2009
385 Tomaselli et al 2008:369
7. Seventh Interlocution: Fixing things is the problem

The unremitting and solicitous national discourse about Aborigines is imbued with urgency and instrumentalism and replete with competing theories of cause and remedy. This discursive field is an unstable mix of the romantic and the statistical, a surface imagery that mirrors the nation's desires and fantasies. The surface does not follow the contours of what lies beneath, that is, the relationship between Indigenous people and the white officials, scribes, and multitude of others they interact with in remote, rural, and urban communities. 386

Gillian Cowlishaw

From the beginning of European occupation settlers have regarded Aborigines as a problem to be fixed. First, how to live with the dark-skinned people of New Holland, and later, how to move them out of the way, either by, at best, misguided attempts at relocation, or, at worst, punishment and brutal force. Some early humanitarians worried about the morality of the occupation, but obviously not enough to leave. 387 Missionaries worried about the immortal souls of these poor wretches, and took it upon themselves to "save" them, although some wondered if they were indeed human. 388 I wonder what my ancestors thought. Were they on the side of those who maintained that Aboriginal people were "lords of the soil"? Or were they like the squatter who remarked that he would "not give in...’ because it was never intended that 'a few miserable savages were to have this fine country.” 389

I cannot agree with Geoffrey Blainey's opinion as expressed in his 1987 Weekend Australian article, "Not as Aboriginals, but as Australians", that because the treatment of Australian Aborigines has not been unique in the world's history, past misery should be left in the past, that "there normally has to be a kind of statute of limitations – a limiting of the time during which long-gone events can be revived and turned into litigation." 389 This directly opposes Gilbert's statement of how Aboriginal grief still influences lives today, and certainly does not constitute the "fair go" we Australians pride ourselves in giving. Blainey overlooks the fact that many cruel government policies of the past, and indeed the present, have directly affected Aboriginal people living today. For Blainey, the level playing field,

386 Cowlishaw 2003:104
387 Reynolds 1998: xi to xvii
388 Reynolds 1998: 23
389 Reynolds 1998: 50
390 Blainey 1991:123
equality, begins now, regardless of disadvantage. To provide reparation for past injury would be to give "special treatment" to a minority group. Blainey, however, ignores the vital need for identity and a sense of worth. Patrick Dodson, in the 2000 Wentworth lecture commented:

If we lose our sense of value and meaning in the Aboriginal world, then we become a successful clone of what the assimilation policies and strategies sought to achieve. If we become no more than what the white man has tried to make us into since his control of this land and our affairs, then what value do we add to the nation in our assertion as the first peoples of this land?  

Gillian Cowlishaw has delivered the unkindest cut of all to those of us who want to "fix" the problem. She asserts that even the historians' recent revelations of the dark underside of European settlement in Australia, was not without its sting. Her point is not unfamiliar, and we are used to hearing similar statements in connection with the "neo-conservative" sections of the community. However Cowlishaw contends that the "new" history revealed since the 1970s has been as shocking to the Aboriginal communities as to the whites, and has had as much effect on remaking the way Aboriginal people see themselves as it has with the white community:

The new history presents a persistent challenge for its Indigenous subjects. Emancipatory possibilities are shadowed by fears of further vulnerability. How does one take pride in a heritage that others judge to be characterised by injurious encounters with invaders? How does one relate to the nation's discursive sympathy when it threatens to reduce one's being to the status of abject victimhood?

Linda Tuhiwai Smith agrees that history has been kidnapped by a colonialist view, Under colonialism indigenous peoples have struggled against a Western view of history and yet been complicit in that view. We have often allowed our 'histories' to be told and have then become outsiders as we heard them being retold.

What, then, is the way forward? We settler Australians cannot leave, despite Bobbi Sykes' acerbic exclamation at an academic Post-colonialism conference "What?

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391 Dodson 2000:9
392 Cowlishaw 2006:192
393 Smith 1999:33
Post-colonialism? Have they left?" 394 That the good work of historians may have changed our outlook, and caused discomfort, does not mean that its implications are any less important. Historian Graeme Davison supports Kevin Gilbert's belief that the past continues to shape the lives of people living today, no matter what ethnic origin.

The past may be past but our beliefs about it are powerful, for good or ill. Living without some sense of the past is not an option. Studying it critically and rationally, in the arena of open debate, is a kind of insurance against the prevalence of prejudice and hate.395

For the sake of those who have been hurt by history, we cannot leave the situation to fester further into morbidity. Despite whites' woeful record of dealing with the problem, there is still work to be done, and possible solutions must be researched.

Returning to my overarching research question "Can Local Government create conditions in which Aboriginal culture can flourish, and reconciliation blossom?" an Aboriginal friend asked me what I meant by "Aboriginal culture". Early in my research I found it hard to answer her. The word brings to mind traditional ways of living that we may regard as primitive, Aboriginal art and artefacts, and storytelling. However Stephen Cornell, in his Closing The Gap speech in 2008 provides a link to the concept of "culture" in his definition of "governance" as:

...an expression of the people's vision of what kind of community they are, of the relationships within that community that they value and want to sustain, of the ways they feel decisions should be made and people should be treated, of their place in the world around them.396

In other words, the concept of culture as I refer to it in this research, is what we value in our lives, how we communicate with each other and the wider world. For one culture to impose its worldview on another is oppression. Also, as I have said earlier, the term "reconciliation" is inadequate, as there has never been a happy and productive relationship between Aboriginal and settler Australians to "re-concile" to.
This is my quest, to answer my research question, but the thought that I might do damage while investigating this is, at the very least, paralyzing.

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**The Shepparton Chronicles**

**X. Sorting things out**

*October 2009*

*Problems that need sorting out*–

Jim suggested five local governments, which means that with the Aboriginal community connected with each, that would be **ten groups** to study. Surely too many for participatory action research (PAR).

I can't sort out problems, work my way around them, add some good research questions, and get it to the Ethics Committee by 2 November!

What if all ten say yes? What if all ten say no?

*Danny's and Pat's suggested solutions*–

- Only do one case study
- Begin with interviews, in-depth or informal, then proceed with PAR if communities want this. (Ian Hughes did this in his doctoral research).  

  397 Hughes 1997

- If the first Shire says no, move onto the next on the list.

This was very useful and showed the breadth of options available under PAR. At the moment though, it's simply overwhelming. At present I am inclined to accept these suggestions. It's a relief to have the problem solved. I will concentrate on investigating PAR as much as I can and composing my Ethics application for one case study only.

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397 Hughes 1997
November 2009

For the last two weeks I have been preparing to approach my chosen case study Shire, Riversea.\textsuperscript{398} I have emailed one or two people who were referred to me. I have not received a response.

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Sadly this balloon seems to have burst. I learned from a confidential source that another researcher is recruiting people from the same organisations and communities I was intending to approach. This already over-researched population does not need another researcher running after them. I can't confirm this situation yet, but it would not be right to ask questions, as my information was confidential. I could wait until I know from some other source, but that could take a while, and the door would be just as shut, so why waste my time? Time to look for Plan B.

I had also emailed the CEO of the Kaiela Planning Council in Shepparton around the same time. He wrote back, suggesting also that the local council might be amenable to a case study. This happened while I was still focused on the previous Shire, so it wasn't what I had in mind. However, never reject an offer, so I responded saying I would like to talk about it.

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I visited Kaiela Planning Council in Shepparton last Friday. It was a good meeting. Do I want to work with Shepparton? Yes perhaps.

There are pros and cons. The pros are, that they seem to be lovely people to work with, they have a highly proactive attitude, and there is still plenty to do in Shepparton – racism seems a problem. Points against would be that they have achieved so much already, would I have to rewrite my research questions, and will they accept me?

Despite the "cons", I still lean towards the "pros". I have put out a feeler, so we'll see what happens.

\textsuperscript{398} A pseudonym
8. Eighth Interlocution. Seeking Shepparton

8.1 Yorta Yorta Nation

Greater Shepparton was established and grew on Yorta Yorta country. The Yorta Yorta are river people. Their country crosses the Murray River, or Dungalah,\textsuperscript{399} (the border between Victoria and New South Wales), and includes the Goulburn River, or Kaiela.\textsuperscript{400}

\textit{The people of the Yorta Yorta Nation comprise eight different clan groups, where the Yorta Yorta language is spoken by all of the Yorta Yorta clans, including the Kailtheban, Wollithiga, Moira, Ulupna, Bangerang, Kwat Kwat, Yalaba Yalaba and Ngurai-illiam-wurring clans. The Yorta Yorta Nation comprises peoples with undeniable bloodlines to the Original Ancestors of the Land of the Yorta Yorta Nation. These bloodlines link our past, present and future to one another, with traditional laws, customs, beliefs and sovereignty intact.}\textsuperscript{401}

\textsuperscript{399} Yorta Yorta name for the Murray River
\textsuperscript{400} Yorta Yorta name for the Goulburn River
\textsuperscript{401} Yorta Yorta Nation spokesperson, June 2012
8.1.1 The Yorta Yorta people

Wayne Atkinson describes the people's traditional activities: "Being river based people ... most of our time was occupied by fishing, as the majority of food that was provided came from the rich network of rivers, lagoons, creeks, and wetlands which are still regarded as the life source and the spirit of the Yorta Yorta Nation". Over the last century, many Yorta Yorta people have been noted for their achievements. These include a State Governor, Pastor Sir Doug Nicholls; William Cooper, a political activist and advocate for justice for his people; (In 1938 Cooper also took a petition to the German embassy protesting against the persecution of the Jews after

402 Map: Yorta Yorta website. "This map was part of the claim which sought confirmation of the continuation of native title over forests and other public lands along the Murray and Goulburn Rivers. Yorta Yorta Traditional tribal lands, covers some 20,000 square kilometers".

Kristallnacht); also musicians, ranging from country musicians like Jimmy Little, to opera, for example Deborah Cheetham, and many talented sports people.  

The European invasion had a devastating effect on Yorta Yorta and Bangerang peoples. According to Atkinson, the Yorta Yorta population was reduced from between five and six thousand to barely one thousand within the first generation. Atkinson sees the survival of the Yorta Yorta people as an indication of their strength and courage. Two incidents have been notable in Yorta Yorta's recent history: first the 1939 "Cummeragunja Walk-off" when a large group of residents courageously walked off the mission on the Murray River in protest at the poor living conditions and betrayal by the authorities. Many of these people at the time settled on "the Flats", along the banks of the Goulburn River between Shepparton and its satellite town, Mooroopna. In the event of floods, which were frequent, they would move to higher ground to the area that is now called "Kids' Town". There is a local story that when the young Queen Elizabeth II visited the area in 1954, a hessian screen was erected along the causeway so that the sight of the Aboriginal people going about their business would not offend the royal eyes.

The second event was the heartbreaking failure of the Yorta Yorta Native Title Claim in 1998. Justice Olney of the Federal Court ruled that

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\text{the facts in this case lead inevitably to the conclusion that before the end of the 19th century the ancestors through whom the claimants claim title had ceased to occupy their traditional lands in accordance with their traditional laws and customs. The tide of history has indeed washed away any real acknowledgement of their traditional lands in accordance with their traditional laws and any real observance of their traditional customs.} \]

This ruling was ratified by the High Court in 2002. The ruling makes sense when viewed from a Western perspective, but is in fact indicative of a lingering colonial

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404 Ibid
406 Ibid
407 100311
409 Moreton-Robinson 2004:1
outlook that still permeates Australian governance and legal systems. Australia's inherited legal system cannot accept non-empirical evidence. Aileen Moreton-Robinson argues that this ruling was given because "the possessive logic of patriarchal white sovereignty works ideologically to naturalise the nation as a white possession". Noel Pearson believes this ruling is due to a serious misinterpretation of the Native Title Act. This Court decision now means

white fellas do not only get to keep all that they have accumulated, but the blacks only get a fraction of what is left over and only get to share a coexisting and subservient title where they are able to surmount the most unreasonable and unyielding barriers of proof ... To the Australian courts charged with the responsibility of administering the historic compromise set out in Mabo, the Yorta Yorta Peoples were not sufficiently Aboriginal to get one square metre of what was left over after the whites had taken all that they wanted.

I first encountered the Yorta Yorta people when, early in my fieldwork, I was summoned to an Elders' meeting to discuss my research. The challenging questions of the Elders revealed to me their mistrust of white researchers, and deeper anger and mistrust of government at all levels. I also perceived that these were strong, proud and resilient people, determined to continue the struggle for the right to live as traditional owners of their country.

Further contact with Yorta Yorta confirmed my first impressions. Contemporary Yorta Yorta people have achieved much. For example: Deborah Cheetham wrote, composed, directed and performed in her opera, *Pecan Summer*, based on the story of the Cummeragunja Walk-off. The production, which premiered in Mooroopna in 2010, has since toured Australia. Paul Briggs OAM, who during my research time was Chair of the Kaiela Planning Council (KPC) and the Koori Resources and Information Centre (KRIC), now Chair of the amalgamation of those bodies, the Kaiela Institute (KI). He is the founding and continuing President of his beloved Rumbalara Football Netball Club. He also is a member of a number of other Boards, including the Council of the University of Melbourne. Yorta Yorta Nation and its (then) Chair, Neville Atkinson, and CEO, Jade Miller, have been tireless advocates for their people. Felicia Dean is CEO of Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative that has

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410 Ibid
411 Pearson 2003:5
been providing health and family services to the Aboriginal community since the early eighties. Rumbalara Co-op is also involved in Aboriginal health research and policy creation. These are a few of the many Yorta Yorta men and women working for the benefit of their people. There are also Aboriginal people who have moved into the area from elsewhere, working in the Shepparton Aboriginal service agencies. Yorta Yorta Nation, particularly Lee Joachim, is also involved in actively caring for country, and researching and promoting environmental and climate change issues from an Aboriginal perspective. Yorta Yorta Nation co-manages Barmah State Forest on the Murray River (Dungala) with the State government.

This is a fraction of the work, and only a few of the people engaged in creative projects in the area. University departments from Melbourne and Monash also collaborate in various projects with Aboriginal people in Shepparton. Yorta Yorta Nation and other Aboriginal organisations would appear then, to be a valuable local resource for the Council to use for the benefit of the whole community. Unfortunately this is not recognised, as I will discuss later. Aboriginal culture is not seen by the general population as having anything valuable to contribute. This is powerful "commonsense".

8.1.2 Yorta Yorta and Bangerang

There is some disagreement among the local Koorie community regarding the relative status of Yorta Yorta and Bangerang peoples, a dispute that causes anguish for many families. The Bangerang Cultural Centre reports that "the Bangerang people lived in the Murray Goulburn" and that their country extended from "near Shepparton across to Echuca, up to Deniliquin (N.S.W.) back across to Finley, down to Katandra and finished back near Shepparton". Yorta Yorta regard Bangerang as a clan of that nation, whereas the Bangerang people dispute that. A Shepparton Councillor commented that this conflict is a big issue, blocking communication. He observes that the situation has reached a stalemate that must be resolved by the

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414 e.g. the LEAD project with University of Melbourne and Shepparton Council, and sustainability research with Monash University. YYNAC http://www.yynac.com.au
415 Aboriginal people in Victoria and New South Wales prefer the term "Koorie" to "Aborigine"
parties involved lest the State government steps in with legislation. A member of Council claims that "the Yorta Yorta-Bangerang divide is causing heartache in the community, and that has been exacerbated by the State Government's official recognition of Yorta Yorta Nation as the Recognised Aboriginal Party (RAP) in this area. This has made it easier for the government to communicate with Aboriginal people, but has caused unhappiness in the Community". Yorta Yorta Nation's status of Recognised Aboriginal Party (RAP) by government authorities, means it is locally "the voice of Aboriginal people in the management and protection of Aboriginal cultural heritage".

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The Shepparton Chronicles

XI. Liking Shepparton

December 2009

Since my last entry Shepparton has been looking more and more promising. Even though they are far more proactive than many other shires, and have many programs already operating, they are far from being "there".

Jonathan encouraged me to arrange a meeting with the mayor, Geoff Dobson, which I did last Thursday. Geoff is a dynamo, a former real estate agent, passionate about justice for Aboriginal people. It was very easy to get caught up in his enthusiasm. I think it makes him a good mayor – he inspires people with his vision – though I expect his fire could make him some enemies as well. He has been on the Council for only two years, and has been mayor most of that time.

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417 060911
418 180411a
420 See Second Interlocution Racism – "Lateral violence"
We agreed that I would write a formal letter to the CEO of the City of Greater Shepparton, cc'd to Geoff requesting expressions of interest and permission to conduct research. I have since done this.

Apparently there is friction between the two Aboriginal groups in the Shepparton district – the Yorta Yorta and the Bangerang people. This causes some confusion for Council, but as Jonathan points out, they have every right to have political squabbles. We do.

January will need to be reading and writing month. (I don't expect to hear back from Shep until the end of January). I need to trace the history of “reconciliation”, whatever it has been called in the past.

Will my energy hold out? I don't know. With the warmer weather this illness worries me less. But I have a feeling that I am working beyond my fatigue boundary. Also there is the worry of whether Dad may have another fall. He's nearly 93. My brothers would help if they were here, but they live interstate.

January 2010

The City of Greater Shepparton CEO emailed back before Christmas to say "yes", and for me to contact the Community Development manager. I'm going to Shepparton to meet with him next week. It's important, I think, to talk to him before I receive a reply from the Kaiela Planning Council. He seems quite keen to have me do research in Shepparton. He feels it has the potential to benefit Shepparton greatly. All a bit daunting! I'll have to do a good job!

Where is my thinking at present?

Well, I like the energy in Shepparton, and the proactive attitudes. But is it reconciliation? It is certainly focused on "Closing The Gap" and social justice, and you really can't have reconciliation without these things. Justice is the element that has been lacking over the years, decades, centuries. But reconciliation is surely about relationships between humans. More than justice – it is about love. Justice will come if love is present, but can we sustain justice without love?
On his walk from Melbourne to Canberra in 2004, Michael Long cried out, “Where is the love, Prime Minister? Where is the love for my people?” I have been a relationships counsellor, and I know that reconciliation takes much often-painful soul-searching on the part of each party, as to how you have contributed to the love breakdown. When love is not present it is impossible to sustain those essential qualities, like respect, tolerance, justice, beneficence etc, because they will fail. Then what? Love forgives, and allows a new start. Racism manifests as hatred. How can we overcome this? How can we foster good relationships?

Much has been said about Aboriginal people – the “Aboriginal problem”. The disadvantage, disposition, poverty, domestic violence, etc, and some of us beat our breasts and blame ourselves. But we need to find out more about the “white problem”. What drove us to commit this devastation on another people?

Why did my people need to invade other countries and build big empires? Why are we so competitive? Why do we feel we have to always be “achieving”. Why do we have to burst in and “fix things”? Why can't we live with imperfection and rejoice in it? I am like that, too. That's probably the reason I quit relationships counselling. People didn't want me to put everything right in their relationship.

Maybe I'm the wrong person for this project. I always want to “fix” what's wrong. On the other hand, I'm old enough now to know myself, and my foibles. I have insight into “whiteness” because I live it. So perhaps I am the right person.

8.3 European history of Shepparton

Shepparton is a regional city in northern Victoria, Australia, situated in the fertile Murray-Goulburn district, the traditional country of Yorta Yorta Nation. Approximately 200 km from Melbourne, it occupies 2,421 square kilometres on the lush floodplain at the confluence of the Goulburn and Broken Rivers.

Rintoul 2004
The Shepparton Heritage Centre records that the first European resident of the area was an Irishman, Paddy Maguire, who operated a punt across the Goulburn River in the 1850s. For some time in the mid nineteenth century, the place was referred to as "Maguire's Punt". The township itself began as a sheep station, "Tallygaroopna", run by a squatter, Sherbourne Sheppard, in approximately 1855. The community became known as "Sheppard town" or "Shepparton", later Shepparton. It was proclaimed "Shepparton Township Reserve" by the Governor of Victoria in 1860. The community became the Shire of Shepparton in 1879, with an annexe being declared the Borough of Shepparton in 1927. In 1949 the City of Shepparton was formed. During the Victorian local government amalgamations of the mid 1990s, the City of Shepparton joined the Shire of Shepparton and the Shire of Rodney in 1995 to form the present day City of Greater Shepparton.

8.3.1 Shepparton today

Shepparton today is a fine, prosperous-looking regional city of nearly 62,000 people in north-eastern Victoria, Australia. It is a remarkably heterogenous community, comprising professionals, academics, trades people, shopkeepers, engineers, artists, journalists etc, as you would expect to find in any regional Australian city. In addition, Shepparton has the largest percentage of Aboriginal people in Victoria, along with the "mainstream" population of Anglo-European settler descendents, including Italian and Greek. It presents as proudly multicultural, and has been

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willing to accept refugees. Consequently, in the streets you will see, along with the early settler population of European heritage, more recent arrivals from Africa, India and the Middle East. Many ethnic communities contribute to the general community, and are happy to exhibit aspects of their culture at any opportunity.

The region is the centre of one of Australia's major fruit-growing and dairying areas, with a developing wine industry. It is home to a large fruit and vegetable canning industry, a major source of employment in the city. The internationally known brands SPC (Shepparton Preserving Company) and Ardmona were established in the district early last century. These two companies underwent a number of changes in the first decade of this century, merging in 2002, and buying the jam brand IXL in 2004. The company continues to operate locally despite being acquired by the US-based international corporation, Coca-Cola Amatil, in 2005.423 In 1999, in a study conducted for the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, Katherine Gibson et al reported, "The Shepparton region provides an example of (regional) restructuring ‘success’, with agricultural and food processing practices responding to altered world markets, international investment patterns and technological developments"424. Since then, however, Greater Shepparton suffered through the long drought of the 1990s and early 2000s, the first global financial crisis of 2007, and recently a high Australian dollar, which has affected export markets. Consequently, jobs have been lost because of downsizing and industry closures425.

424 Gibson et al 1999
b) AMWU News website "SPC closure another devastating blow for Goulburn valley" Aug 09, 2011 "A decision by SPC to cut 150 jobs across its three Goulburn Valley operations today will be a devastating blow to the local community".
Nevertheless, when drought-breaking rains brought floods to the district in 2010, although they caused some further damage, the relief in the rural community was palpable, and a measure of prosperity has returned at least in some quarters. The cultural presence of the Yorta Yorta and Bangerang people is presented in such places as the Bangerang Cultural Centre, an Aboriginal museum, in the Kaiela Art Gallery. There is a strong artistic presence, most obvious in the tongue-in-cheek "Mooving Art" painted cows, but also in the Shepparton Art Gallery, and the performing artists who visit the well-equipped auditoriums in Shepparton and Moorooroo. The Kaiela Art Gallery exhibits and sells the work of local Aboriginal artists, notably the internationally-known Clive Atkinson.

The city hosts campuses of at least two tertiary institutions, and attracts research and other initiatives in a spectrum of fields, perhaps because of its cultural diversity. It is a politically conservative area. State and Federal representatives are members of either the Liberal Party or National Party. Jeanette Powell, member for Shepparton in the Victorian State Parliament, has held the portfolios for Local Government, and also Aboriginal Affairs, first in Opposition, and subsequently as a Minister in the Victorian Liberal-National Coalition Government.

426 Dairy farmers enjoy boom in industry 7pm ABC TV News VIC September 02, 2011 08:10:16 http://www.abc.net.au/7pmtvnews_%28vic%29/2864752.html/
427 ABC Goulburn Valley 2011/12 Latest Food And Beverage stories on ABC Goulburn Murray, A home for the Goulburn Valley Cooperative, Growing demand leads to milk company expansion http://www.abc.net.au/goulburnmurray/topics/business-economics-and-finance/industry/food-and-beverage/?page=1 Access 12/12/12
428 e.g. the "LEAD" program (Localities Embracing and Accepting Diversity), a project funded by VicHealth to investigate and combat discrimination in City of Greater Shepparton, evaluated by University of Melbourne,
So far I have presented the proud and handsome face of Shepparton, but like all human communities, it has its not-so-pretty underbelly. Shepparton has its less prosperous suburban areas. It has its share of poverty, racism and criminal activity. Crime rates are higher than the Victorian average\(^{429}\), and despite what I have observed, the Federal Government has identified Shepparton as a disadvantaged area\(^{430}\), with a higher than average unemployment rate, particularly among Aboriginal people,\(^{431}\) and lower mean income\(^{432}\).

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**Email**

From: gln@deakin.edu.au  
Sent: Friday, 22 January 2010 11.51 AM  
To: Danny  
Subject: Hi

Hi Danny,

Yes, I've been beavering away here since beginning of January.

I went up to Shepparton again last week and had a chat with the Community Development Manager in the Council. Conversation didn't flow as easily as it did with others. But it's early days. I haven't heard back from Kaiela Planning Council (KPC) yet. I'm anticipating a yes, (interesting if it's not!!) but can't really plan anything until it's official.

As for methodology - I really don't know which method(s) I am planning to use. I suspect I'm making up my own, or else it's a mish-mash of everything else. I see there is an ALARA conference in Melbourne in September. Might be worth going to. I will investigate the Bob Dick

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\(^{430}\) Macklin 2011

\(^{431}\) National Centre for Vocational Education Research Ltd. (NCVER) 2003

course as you suggest.

I like the idea of creativity in research reporting, still retaining the rigour. I think my subject is too important to bore people to tears. Talking methods... I've been thinking "hospitality". Well I am going to have to find a little place to stay for a year, so maybe I could use it to invite people for a meal - relationship building to ease my way into the community, yes, but also building relationships between those who wouldn't normally socialise with each other. No it's NOT a social experiment! It's hospitality, which is part of love, part of reconciliation. I keep thinking of Michael Long's cry. Also the members of the CAR433 I interviewed for my Honours, who brought painful experiences to the table (one member said there was always someone quietly sobbing), but would not have missed the experience for the world. Can we bring this method in? Is this sufficient "action"? To take it further may be "activism".

My overarching question is changing, although it's still focussed on local government. But I think the nature of reconciliation and how to achieve it is much more important. I think what Shep is doing with their pro-active approach and programs is excellent, and is definitely social justice. But is it reconciliation, and does it matter?

I am reading Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed and I am being mightily inspired by it. So I am having a nice time!

I have made a time with Ethics to help me put my application together. So I'd better have a plan by then!

Anyway, welcome back to work, happy new year and all that, and I look forward to catching up soon.

Best regards

Gillian

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The Shepparton Chronicles

XII. Being a tourist

February 2010

VicHealth launch of the LEAD project

I've just noticed that I have not written any comments after my meeting with the Community Development Manager at CoGS, on 13 January. It may have been because he seemed a little guarded – the conversation didn't really flow. I was surprised, as his email had expressed enthusiastic

approval for my research in Shepparton. I met him again yesterday, smiling proudly at the success of the launch of the program he had organised.

The program is quite an achievement. VicHealth has chosen Shepparton and Whittlesea to trial "Localities Embracing and Accepting Diversity" (LEAD), a new program aimed at the integration and leadership in the community of Indigenous and migrant groups. Shepparton is focusing on Indigenous, African and Muslim sectors. The mayor talked a lot about "cultural diversity". A ministerial delegation was there from Western Samoa, interested in the program.

At the function I managed to renew my association with the local people I had met so far and was introduced to one of the co-chairs of the Shepparton Region Reconciliation Group. I also had a brief conversation with the (then) Victorian Shadow Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Jeanette Powell, of the National Party434.

The launch ended with a spectacular a cappella performance by a group of Congolese youngsters, still in their school uniforms, called "Angel Voices". They were amazing. I believe they are now getting gigs all around Victoria.

While I have been here this week, I've been a tourist. I visited Bangerang Cultural Centre and added the note in the guestbook, "a precious history, beautifully presented", which summed it up well, I think.

I'm also going home to Monbulk with a boot-load of canned fruit and Campbells soups from the factory stores.

So it has been a most productive couple of days.

434 National Party: A conservative political party that is the junior party in a coalition with the Liberal Party, which has similar aims and vision. Since writing, this coalition has been voted into government in the state of Victoria.
9. Ninth Interlocution: From Paralysis to Purpose

For an Anglo-Celtic Australian woman researcher about to embark on a project involving Aboriginal participants, the landscape is not very encouraging. For example, “Every Time Research is Done a Piece of My Culture is Erased” was a topic that had been discussed during the Indigenous Research Forum held at the University of Newcastle in 2004. Discovering this was a disheartening way to begin my exploration. Furthermore, Christopher Dunbar Jr, reporting on that Forum, wrote that “[t]he prevailing consensus [was] that research is conducted to benefit the researcher, interpretations are often incorrect, there is little feedback after the research is completed, and outcomes often create more harm than good for those studied.” He quotes a participant: “‘We’ve been studied to death… If you want something dead, research it’.”

Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes in Decolonising Methodologies, “…it is surely difficult to discuss research methodology and indigenous peoples together, in the same breath, without having an analysis of imperialism, without understanding the complex ways in which the pursuit of knowledge is deeply embedded in the multiple layers of imperial and colonial practices”. Smith is not hesitant in condemning the common validations purported by non-Indigenous researchers of Indigenous peoples: “…belief in the ideal that benefitting mankind is indeed a primary outcome of scientific research is as much a reflection of the ideology as it is of academic training”. She accuses researchers, journalists, film-makers and others of “‘taking’ Indigenous knowledge” at their own whim, and declares that there is “no difference…between ‘real’ or scientific research and any other visits by inquisitive and acquisitive strangers.”

Smith describes Western research of Indigenous knowledges as "stealing" from Indigenous peoples and using this knowledge for the benefit of those who "stole" it. She refers to Said's concept of "positional superiority", in which "knowledge and culture [are] as much part of imperialism as raw materials and military strength"

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435 Dunbar in Denzin et al 2008:91
436 Ibid
437 Smith 1999:2.
438 Ibid
439 Smith 1999:3
440 Smith 1999:56
and are "there to be discovered, extracted, appropriated and distributed". Battiste and James (Sa'ke'j) Youngblood Henderson accuse Western Eurocentric culture of maintaining a two-dimensional worldview, perceiving nature as surrounding humans, rather than humans being part of the whole ecology. They argue that Eurocentric thought demands definitions and classifications, seeking "precision and certainty". Research is an unknown concept in Indigenous cultures. As Smith writes: “The term, ‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, ‘research’, is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary.” She argues that

From an indigenous perspective Western research is more than just research that is located in a positivist tradition. It is research that brings to bear, on any study of indigenous peoples, a cultural orientation, a set of values, a different conceptualization of such things as time, space and subjectivity, different and competing theories of knowledge, highly specialized forms of language, and structures of power.

Is Indigenous knowledge so different from European knowledge? Battiste and Henderson's description of "Indigenous knowledge" contrasts with Western ideas of "research" to the point where it is hard to find any points of connection:

In Indigenous ways of knowing, the self exists within a world that is subject to flux. The purpose of these ways of knowing is to reunify the world or at least to reconcile the world to itself. Uniting these ways of knowing is necessary, as each can contribute to human development and each requires its own expression. Indigenous ways of knowing hold as the source of all teachings caring and feeling that survive the tensions of listening for the truth and that allow truth to touch our lives. Indigenous knowledge is the way of living within the contexts of flux, paradox and tension, respecting the pull of dualism and reconciling opposing forces. In the realms of paradox, "truthing" is a practice that enables a person to know the spirit in every relationship. Developing these ways of knowing leads to freedom of consciousness and to solidarity with the natural world.

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441 Smith 1999:58
442 Battiste and Henderson 2000
443 Battiste and Henderson 2000:36
444 Smith 1999:1
445 Smith 1999:43
446 Battiste and Henderson 2000:42
As an Anglo-Celtic student researcher, how can I relate to these statements? I find Battiste and Henderson's summary attractive. It is spiritual and creative. It offers liberation from constraining positivist ways of thinking. But my Western university education has inculcated in me the research process of defining terms and concepts, reviewing literature, questioning assumptions, rigorously investigating relevant circumstances and drawing well-reasoned conclusions. Is this to be abandoned if I elect to study Aboriginal people's relationship with local government? Smith has written her book specifically for Indigenous researchers. There is little if any encouragement to be found in it for would-be non-Indigenous researchers of Indigenous matters. I can see that the resentment expressed by Indigenous writers, of the arrogant proprietary attitude of the hegemonic culture to pry into their affairs is justified. New Zealander Smith states that now Maori researchers are increasing in number, white researchers of Indigenous concerns are not essential, and many communities are now "off-limits" to non-Indigenous researchers.447

Battiste and Henderson declare that

> Ethical research must begin by replacing Eurocentric prejudice with new premises that value diversity over universality. Researchers must seek methodologies that build synthesis without relying on negative exclusions or on a strategy of differences. At the core of this quest is the issue of how to create ethical behavior in a knowledge system contaminated by colonialism and racism.448

This was my moment of paralysis. I thought, I am contaminated by my own thinking. I have no right to research Indigenous people. I have no right to be attracted to "Indigenous knowledge"—it is not mine to know. To use its ideals would be stealing. But there was a peculiar satisfaction in this self-flagellation. It seemed to imply that if I only confessed my sins, absolution would be mine, and I could somehow lose my inherent "whiteness", and be accepted, and acceptable. I wrapped myself in Australia's past history of shame like a cloak of nobility.

I realise now that I had dropped out of research mode into panic and self-pity. It was not a constructive self-reflexivity, rather a non-productive self-absorption. I became

447 Smith 1999:178
448 Battiste and Henderson 2000:133
aware of how futile this self-indulgence was as I read Wanda S Pillow's paper, "Confession. Cartharsis or Cure?" Pillow argues:

Reflexivity as a form of "confession" and "absolution" situates it firmly within the Enlightenment ideals of "truth and understanding" which require "the transcendence of one’s web of situated positionality" – to "free oneself" (Ilter 1994). Self-reflexivity can in this way perform a modernist seduction – promising release from your tension, voyeurism, and ethnocentrism – release you from your discomfort with the problematics of representation through transcendent clarity. 449

In addition, Uma Kohtari writes that according to Foucault, power seeks to mask itself, and that a person's "behaviour, actions and perceptions are all shaped by the power embedded and embodied within society", 450 "...that even when individuals think they are most free, they are in fact in the grip of more insidious forms of power which operate not solely through direct forms of oppression, but often through the less visible strategies of normalisation". 451 Wanda Pillow continues, echoing my thoughts: "However, if as Patia (1991) notes we accept that “in an unethical world, we cannot do truly ethical research”, how do we do research knowing this?" 452

There seems to be no escape from this dilemma.

Epiphany finally manifested in the form of a fellow student and family member, who suggested that as an Australian it is my responsibility to research social justice, that it is the interaction I am studying, which would involve including in the study, the white person I know the best, myself. While I would be conducting research with Aboriginal people, the other half of the relationship would also be researched. Alison Jones, along with collaborator, Kuni Jenkins, clarify this position effectively in their book chapter on "Rethinking Collaboration. Working with the Indigene-Colonizer Hyphen" 453 At the outset Jones states her own "White/settler enthusiasm for dialogic collaboration" and considers "how this desire might be an unwitting imperialist demand – and thereby in danger of strengthening the very impulses it seeks to combat." 454 Jones does not advocate abandoning collaboration, but suggests "a less

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449 Pillow 2003:186/187
450 Kohtari 2001:144
451 Ibid
452 Pillow 2003:187
453 Jones & Jenkins 2008
454 Jones & Jenkins 2008:471
dialogical and more uneasy, unsettled relationship, based on learning (about the difference) from the Other, rather than learning about the Other.\textsuperscript{455}

I am inspired by the obvious sense of this perspective, and can envisage it as a creative structure on which to base my study of the relationship between local government and Aboriginal people. Beyond that, it also is inspiration for the ideological base for my own methodology. Jones refers to Levinasian philosopher Sharon Todd, making the point that "The Other is necessarily not knowable, being what 'we' are not. Rather than learning about the Other on our terms and therefore failing because we are obliterating the Other, what we can do... is attempt to learn more obliquely from the Other."\textsuperscript{456} Jones then returns to the space between, the "hyphen", "the stroke that both enforces difference and makes the link between. The hyphen's space does not demand destructive good understanding; indeed, it is a space that insists on ignorance and therefore a lack of clarity and certainty."\textsuperscript{457}

But does not this last statement of Jones' contradict all that research is supposed to accomplish? Should not research aim for deeper understanding? It would seem a very strange research outcome to attain "ignorance" and "a lack of clarity and certainty." However Jones is adamant that the "hyphen" is the only possible point of contact between white researcher and Aboriginal people:

\begin{quote}
To those colonizer researchers who would dissolve/consume/soften/erase the indigene-colonizer hyphen into a sharing collaborative engagement between "us", there is one, harshly pragmatic, response: It does not work. Indigenous peoples and others who resist their disappearance into Western stories about us either remain focused elsewhere ...or echo the words of Tonto, the Lone Ranger's "faithful Indian companion": "What do you mean 'we', white man?" However hurtful, perplexing, frustrating, and disappointing this response might be, colonizers interested in joint work with indigenous subjects as indigenous subjects have little choice but to work with that sharp, shocking difference named by Tonto...rather than deny, ignore or condemn it or wish it away.\textsuperscript{458}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{455} Ibid
\textsuperscript{456} Jones & Jenkins 2008:482
\textsuperscript{457} Ibid
\textsuperscript{458} Jones & Jenkins 2008:475
The imprecision of this approach is indeed perplexing to me. How can there be a positive finding from the chaos this literature implies? My earlier paralysis has given way to confusion about the direction my research project should take.

From Nancy Taber I learned that "stumbling around" is permissible for a while. Taber embarked on "auto-ethnography" when her original aim to study women in the Canadian military was thwarted by regulatory restrictions. At that point she decided to use her own experiences of being brought up in a military family as the basic "narrative" of her research.459 Her "central question" resonates with me. Quoting Wanda Pillow460, she asks, "how does who I am, who I have been, who I think I am and how I feel affect the data collection and analysis?"461 This question echoes advice given to me previously by an Aboriginal academic to "know who I am in my research".

Pillow's paper about reflexivity has now become highly relevant to my research design. For my purposes the terms, "self-reflexivity", "auto-reflexivity" and "auto-ethnography" are interchangeable and can be defined by Taber's "central question". It means that I am both a subjective insider, and an objective outsider in this project, depending which side of the "hyphen" I find myself. I return to my overarching research question: "Can Local Government create conditions in which Aboriginal culture can flourish, and reconciliation blossom?" The thought that it is the "hyphen" I am studying, rather than each culture specifically, and that "understanding" is not a requirement for relationship is liberating. I am also encouraged by the concept of auto-ethnography. It is a satisfying thought that, as a representative of the dominant Australian culture, with all my inherent neo-colonial reactions and assumptions, I am available reality for my research.

459 Taber 2010:18
460 Wanda S Pillow is Associate Professor of Educational Policy Studies at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Her paper is entitled Confession, catharsis, or cure? Rethinking the uses of reflexivity as methodological power in qualitative research.
461 Pillow quoted in Taber 2010:18
I've just finished reading two articles that have set me thinking – about "auto-ethnography" and "auto-reflexivity". One is *Institutional ethnography, autoethnography, and narrative: an argument for incorporating multiple methodologies* by Nancy Taber, an Associate Professor with the Faculty of Education, Brock University, Canada.

I was attracted to the title because, as I emailed Danny, my methodology should be called "smorgasbord". He wrote back that I am "bricoleur". I had to look that up, but I think it's a compliment as it means something like a "jack-of-all-trades" or, doing great things with a few tools. I like the idea of "narrative". All cultures have stories to be told. In many instances they are the basis of the culture – even in the capitalist West.

Also, I wrote in an email to KPC that my methods have been called "emergent", which I think means that I am making it up as I go along. I also told them that I think I am the absolute right person to be researching reconciliation. After all, I am your quintessential white woman with entrenched colonial ideas of the way things are. I have never known any Aboriginal people despite being born in this country. I am a person of considerable goodwill, a strong sense of social justice and an outrage against our treatment of Aboriginal people. But all this means that, typical of whitefellas, I act with the certainty of knowing what's needed; so I'm in danger of hopping in with my big boots and making everything worse, as we whiteys have done before.

From Nancy Taber I've learned that "stumbling around" for a while is beneficial – that's how ethnography develops. Is what I am doing ethnography? I guess it is because "reconciliation" is between two diverse cultures. But where is that interface, that point of "reconciliation", or

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Taber 2010:17
probably more correctly, "conciliation"? Where do they touch, and love each other? A question: those people who are passionate about reconciliation and justice – WHY are they? Those who are not, WHY are they not? Why am I?

Taber writes that she began with a very specific research question and plan, but without a predetermined outcome. "By engaging in an active and dialectical inquiry, I was then able to adapt my research as applicable as I progressed". She asks her "central question", "how does who I am, who I have been, who I think I am and how I feel affect data collection and analysis?". These are questions that I feel I need to continually ask myself.

Sometimes I wonder how important it is to define a term. If you reduce it to a single statement, much of the complexity is ignored or lost. "Reconciliation", for example. Pillow takes four pages to answer the question, "What is reflexivity?" but does not narrow it down to a succinct definition. Her most definitive discussion of the question is where she talks about reflexivity as "producing research that questions its own interpretations and is reflexive about its own knowledge production towards the goal of producing better, less distorted research accounts".

These texts are very important to me... To describe the results of reflexivity as “messy” is a great relief to me. Words like “stumbling”, “messy”–yes! It means that “rigour” does not have to mean that it's all tied up in nice tight little definitive packages.

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**The product of the interpretive bricoleur’s labor is a complex, quiltlike bricolage, a reflexive collage or montage, a set of fluid, interconnected images and representations. This interpretive structure is like a quilt, a performance text, a sequence of representations connecting the parts to the whole.**

Norman Denzin

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463 Ibid
464 Pillow quoted in Taber 2010:18
465 Pillow 2003:178
466 Denzin 2012:6
10. Tenth Interlocution: Kaiela Planning Council

10.1 The genesis of KPC

My first point of contact in Shepparton was through the Kaiela Planning Council, formerly the "Aboriginal Community Strategic Planning and Policy Unit", established in 2004 by the COAG (Council of Australian Governments) Trial in Shepparton, to evaluate and integrate the provision of services to the Aboriginal community of Shepparton.\(^{467}\) In 2003 the City of Greater Shepparton was chosen as the only Victorian site of the COAG Trial. Shepparton's experience of the Trial demonstrates how governments in Australia at all levels are constrained, not by laws and regulation, but by lingering colonial thinking that our concept of governance is the only way. The Trial, beginning with a "Compact", signed by the Federal, State and Local Governments and the Shepparton Aboriginal community, had a mission to provide "Strong social, economic and cultural sustainability and equity for the Aboriginal people of Greater Shepparton".\(^{468}\) Its emphasis was to be on "develop[ing] and test[ing] both new ways of working between Indigenous communities and Governments, and, whole of government approaches to finding

\(^{467}\) Before the intervention of the Trial, there were already agencies successfully and efficiently servicing the Aboriginal community.

\(^{468}\) Morgan Disney 2006:4
shared solutions".\textsuperscript{469} In 2004 the Steering Committee established an Aboriginal planning unit later entitled the Kaiela Planning Council (KPC), to evaluate and integrate the provision of services to the Aboriginal community of Shepparton. I found this puzzling because before the intervention of the Trial, there were already agencies successfully and efficiently servicing the Aboriginal community. I have summarised these below.

Although the formation of the KPC and "goodwill and good intentions" were seen as successes of the Trial, many errors were made, due mainly to a lack of understanding. Two years into the Trial, a number of Aboriginal Community Facilitation Group (ACFG) members had withdrawn, including the influential Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative. A very serious mistake was that the Steering Committee did not initially consult with the local Elders or even inform them that the Trial was taking place. Tony Cutcliffe reported in 2005 that "the COAG Trial in Shepparton was yet to deliver on its potential, leaving in its wake exhausted and confused Aboriginal people frustrated by the consumption of scarce resources, goodwill and time."\textsuperscript{470}

In other words, the Trial's goals of sustainability and equity were not being realised, but the stereotype of disadvantaged Aboriginal people was confirmed. Paul Briggs commented,

\begin{quote}
There is a penetrating sadness in the consequence that Indigenous people in communities such as Shepparton are constantly portrayed as groups which have not made a contribution to the economic and social fabric of the wider community.\textsuperscript{471}
\end{quote}

This view is echoed by Stephen Cornell in his 2008 Reconciliation Australia lecture, "Closing The Gaps",

\begin{quote}
...the message that keeps going out to the world is about the dysfunctionality of Aboriginal communities. I have to say...this looks very much to me like the dysfunctionality of Government continually changing the rules of the game, unable to sustain community engagement, unable
\end{quote}
\textsuperscript{469} Morgan Disney 2006:4
\textsuperscript{470} Cutcliffe 2005:15
\textsuperscript{471} Briggs in Cutcliffe 2006:3
to recognise or take advantage of Indigenously-generated solutions, and uncertain how to cope with diversity in those solutions.472

Sadly, Cornell’s statement reflects the failure of albeit well-meaning government initiatives in Australia over the last 220 years. Governments still regard Aboriginal communities as "disadvantaged", in need of "services", too often ignoring those already established by the community itself, and ignoring the valuable knowledge and abilities inherent in Aboriginal communities.

10.2 The life of KPC

Nevertheless, the COAG Trial's progeny, the Strategic Planning and Policy Unit, continued as a partnership between the Aboriginal Community, comprising existing Aboriginal service agencies (see below), and the Federal473, State474 and Local Governments475. Its report on the two years’, 2006 and 2007, progress is positive, yet cautious, acknowledging the time it takes to establish productive partnerships. The report's conclusion states:

It also takes time to change policies and cultures of organisations so they can work easily together and can create solutions that are tailored to individual community needs (rather than “one size fits all”). Despite the frustrations, partnerships have been shown to concentrate resources and create better solutions and services. Some partnerships have demonstrated that they can create significant change in communities including measurable improvements in community wellbeing.476

Over the two years, the Aboriginal Community Strategic Planning and Policy Unit (SPPU) had conducted surveys within the community, successfully trained and encouraged some young Aboriginal people for work in the wider community, and had moderate success in encouraging youngsters to finish school.477 The SPPU Partnership, as its incarnation as Kaiela Planning Council, continued to focus on

472 Cornell 2008
473 Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.
474 Department of Planning and Community Development
475 The City of Greater Shepparton
476 KPC Report to Community 2007. Select achievements of the Aboriginal partnership with the Council of Australian Governments, Shepparton. This report was prepared by the Research Manager of the Department of Planning and Community Development in collaboration with the Aboriginal Community Strategic Planning and Policy Unit and the State Outcomes Broker, Department of Planning and Community Development. December 2007:17
477 Ibid
monitoring services in the community, youth, education and employment until its merger with Koori Resource and Information Centre (KRIC), forming Kaiela Institute, in 2011. The national Closing the Gap and Social Inclusion (SI) campaigns have been the basis for much of KPC's work.

10.3 Kaiela Institute

The Kaiela Institute (KI) was formed by the merger of the two organisations, KPC and KRIC, at the end of my fieldwork period, therefore my description of it will be minimal. The nascence of KI reduced costs and expanded the capacity of the two blending organisations. The merger was overseen by a secondee from Wesfarmers, recruited by Jawun Indigenous Corporate Partnerships to facilitate the process. The University of Melbourne is a foundation party to the partnership, signing a Memorandum of Understanding on October 7 2011.

According to NGO official, Robert, "social inclusion" is the driver of Kaiela Institute's focus, and that "despite the unpredictable nature of government funding, there is funding for the SI framework"478.

(My question to Robert) What is the Institute's focus?

[Kaiela Institute] is a think tank for regional/urban community, and evaluation and/of policy. Evaluation is informed by the community and follows University processes. It is looking for better outcomes in education, employment and social inclusion. [Its aim is] to embed these outcomes in the curriculum framework at all educational levels in the City; also to act as consultants for health services.

(My question) Where will the Institute be in five years time?

It will have a national reputation for expertise in policy developments and program evaluation. National recognition will be important.479

However a similar question to Jason revealed a more critical view:

[One person's] focus is economic, [another's] is community governance. There is not much emphasis on community development. Shepparton does not have a commercial focus like communities in mining areas do. Jawun [Indigenous Corporate Partnerships] that has been instrumental
in setting up the Institute, has not been a good influence because it is an outsider. Yorta Yorta Nation should be the controlling body for Kaiela Institute and other agencies such as Ganbina, ASHE etc.480

10.4 Has KPC been successful?

I was given permission to observe KPC meetings in 2010 with the condition my participation was for familiarisation only, and that I would not report on either business or process. Therefore it should be noted that my remarks are general and broad observations and not specific to any meeting or project. The Aboriginal community and the City of Greater Shepparton, as local partners in Strategic Planning, delegate representatives to attend monthly meetings, along with those from the Departments of the Federal and State governments. These out-of-town members would travel to Shepparton for a meeting, often driving back the same day, or staying overnight in the town. This behaviour raised the question for me, "How can government officials who spend so little time in Shepparton, know the community sufficiently to be able to make critical policy decisions that affect the lives of so many people?" Jonathan, an NGO official, agreed this is a problem.

Politicians tend to be too narrow in their thinking. Government at all levels has not yet come to terms with the inherent power structures in white privilege. Higher-level decision-making processes do not deal with the core of the problem. Outcomes still produce overly simplistic answers. We are not taking responsibility for OUR side; it's still the "Aboriginal problem".481

Jonathan asserts that although Kaiela Planning Council at present works in an environment of goodwill and good intentions, which is fertile ground for progress, it needs to be backed up by "rational planning and costing processes and adequate resources".482

On the other hand, Mark, a senior local government official, doubts whether these processes will come to pass. He claims that KPC's progress has been minimal.

It only appears to be in the last six months that there has been a recognition of the fact that they can't do everything and so therefore they need to understand what [are] priorities, and then target the priorities to

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480 080312
481 131010
482 Ibid
get outcomes. I think some of that now has perhaps been lost, but the momentum has again moved from the outcomes, which they were looking for, to the framework, to take it forward with the move from KPC to the Kaiela Institute. ...They really needed to get some points on the board, some real outcomes in relation to what they were doing to engage the broader community.483

Governance processes in Shepparton (including local government) are thoroughly Western. The pace is rapid, as busy bureaucrats hurry from one meeting to another. Deadlines are tight. Action plans rigid. There is little time for personal or group reflection, nor even for the consideration that reflection may be necessary. Evaluation is done by professional survey. Personal relationships are formed only for the purpose of the business at hand. If any fragment of doubt or question arises that "this is the only way", it is rare, and there is no time to take the question seriously. Although Aboriginal people comprise a large segment of Boards and Committees convened for their supposed benefit, there is no concession in the processes to the Aboriginal "ways of doing, being or knowing" that I discovered in my methodology research.

The likelihood that this neglect of cultural differences is a major impediment to progress in government ventures such as KPC, needs to be acknowledged and investigated. I also noted that although Mark observed KPC's underperformance, in his evaluation and offered solution, he still uses "management" words such as "target", "priorities" and "outcomes". One Elder commented on the management of KPC and KI, "They are driven by 'outcomes'. This is an alien concept in the Aboriginal view, where if a project is 'good', then it's good, regardless of outcomes"484. However, Ruth, a Council officer, maintains that Shepparton Council supports the "outcomes" focus of the Kaiela Institute as well as rigorous evaluation of those outcomes.485

Leaders of Aboriginal communities have no choice but to acquiesce to Western methods if projects and programs are to be funded by government. Despite government rhetoric about "visions for the future" and "partnerships" this is not a means of empowering local communities, nor can governments boast of equality in
partnerships with Aboriginal people. Instead it is, in essence, an example of Foucault's concept of "governmentality", the "conduct of conduct" as I discussed in Second Interlocution, methods that attempt to "shape self-regulating citizen behaviour in order to manage a racially and culturally diverse population".  

I enquired of some Aboriginal people why they allowed themselves to be involved in Western government processes. The responses, usually accompanied by a wry smile, ranged from "I need the job!" to "government reps need teaching, and not to be involved is to give them free rein".  

This is not to infer that the energetic and good-hearted people who attend meetings that are ultimately intended to improve policy for Aboriginal people, are deliberately unheeding of cultural difference. Carmen Lawrence spoke about this in her oration, The Prejudice of Good People that I discussed earlier. Lawrence advocates constant self-awareness to combat these unwitting attitudes, but for that you need time out for reflection.  

10.5 Membership of KPC – agencies that serve the Aboriginal community  

A number of Aboriginal organisations have been represented on the KPC, and subsequently on the Kaiela Institute Board of Directors. They also constituted the "Aboriginal Community Facilitation Group" during the COAG Trial. The Group comprised the Bangerang Cultural Centre, Ganbina Koori Economic, Employment and Training Agency, Goulburn Valley Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, Rumbalara Football and Netball Club, and Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative.  

Bangerang Cultural Centre is an Aboriginal museum that uses a unique octagonal layout to create an enthralling experience of traditional Aboriginal life for the visitor. Inside, on the perimeter wall of the octagon, traditional artefacts and utensils are exhibited in glass cases. But the most engaging element of the exhibit is a series of George Browning's superb dioramas on the opposite wall, depicting aspects of Aboriginal life. The Centre is the brainchild of Elder, John Atkinson (Uncle Sandy)
who envisaged it as a "keeping place" for Aboriginal history, and an enjoyable place of education for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal visitors alike.\footnote{Bangerang Cultural Centre website http://www.bangerang.org.au/about-bangerang.html Access date 23/4/2013}


\begin{quote}
It is a fact that many young indigenous people in Australia today are caught up in an education, training and employment crisis. Thousands of indigenous youngsters each year do not complete their schooling, undertake training or find jobs, which in turn leads to a continuous cycle of social and economic disadvantage.\footnote{Ganbina website http://www.ganbina.com.au/#content_05 Access date 24/4/2013}
\end{quote}

Ganbina shepherds young Aboriginal people through to completion of secondary school, then helps them find employment, and in making the transition. Its aim is to break the intergenerational welfare dependency\footnote{Ganbina Annual Report 2011-2012 http://www.ganbina.com.au/publications/Annual%20Report%202011-12.pdf Access date 24/4/2013} cycle, and reports show that the process has been successful. The CEO, Adrian Appo, reports that in 2011/2012, "Participation and completion numbers are up with 87 individuals gaining paid employment (the highest number to date in Ganbina operations)"\footnote{Ibid}.

Carol, a Shepparton Councillor, describes Rumbalara Co-op as "a Shepparton success story, planning and operating services for Aboriginal people by Aboriginal people". The word "Rumbalara" means "rainbow". Conceived by Aboriginal people, Rumbalara Co-op has been operating medical services since 1981, caring for the health of the local Koorie population. The present site of Rumbalara in Mooroopna was settled by people from the Cummeragunja Walk-off in the 1940s. In the 70s, after a tug-o'-war with State and Federal governments over ownership of the site, the Co-op was able to buy the site. With the title in hand, the community was free to develop Rumbalara to their own benefit and design. Now, besides health services, the Co-op provides assistance to Aboriginal families for childcare and parenting, housing, finance, justice and aged care. Recently the Co-op, in conjunction with Yorta Yorta Nation, established a Traditional Healing Centre "to provide traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, resources and healing services" in conjunction with existing conventional medical services. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation has funded this project.

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500 Ibid
The City of Greater Shepparton Council is represented on the Rumbalara Co-op Board of Directors, a relationship that the Co-op CEO, Felicia Dean, regards as beneficial and supportive, although she points out that the success of this partnership depends on the people involved, especially those in high positions in Council, the Mayor, CEO or Councillors.\textsuperscript{502}

**Rumbalara Football Netball Club and ASHE**

RFNC has the mantra, "Proud, strong family... that's Rumba!" The Club was born in the 1970s, but throughout its history has had to constantly battle racism to win its present recognised legitimacy in the Murray Football League. It is the beloved "child" of Paul Briggs who has been the Club's President since 1997, shepherding and defending it through recent difficult times. The sporting ground and club rooms are on Koori-owned land. It has become a focal point for community life of the local Aboriginal population, and "with the support of friends and partners like VicHealth, Doxa Youth Foundation, Department of Human Services, The University of Melbourne, Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, Essendon Football Club, VISY and many others, we have created, in the words of co-founder John Murray, ‘a place of spiritual healing’".\textsuperscript{503} Nevertheless, the racism continues, which I will describe in detail in *Seventeenth Interlocution*.  

**ASHE**, or Academy of Sport, Health and Education is an initiative of Rumbalara Football Netball Club and the University of Melbourne, under the Directorship of Justin Mohamed, a Goreng Goreng man from Queensland. The Academy uses sport as a basic model to provide a culturally safe and encouraging environment for students to undertake education and training towards a personally fulfilling career.\textsuperscript{504} ASHE curriculum is focussed on Indigenous students. However, non-Aboriginal students can also apply for enrolment. The partnership is based on complementary areas of expertise. The ASHE website records that

\textit{RFNC is at the hub of community leadership, with a proven record of delivering community programs. The University of Melbourne brings its academic expertise, organisational capacity and long-term commitment}

\textsuperscript{502} 140711  
\textsuperscript{503} Rumbalara Football Netball Club website, \url{http://www.rumba.org.au/history.html} Access date 1/5/2013  
to engagement with the region through its Goulburn Valley Initiative. This partnership, in collaboration with Goulburn Ovens TAFE and its culturally-friendly and flexible programs, forms the foundation of ASHE.

Judging by accounts included on the website, ASHE has been very effective in guiding students into the career paths or employment suitable for each individual. These organisations are not fly-by-night affairs. They all have been successfully operating for many years, serving the Koori community of Greater Shepparton. Why were they not included as partners in the planning stage of the COAG Trial? Why was their expertise in Aboriginal life and culture not recognised as valuable by Australian governments at all levels? This "dysfunctionality of government" as Cornell calls it, must be addressed if justice for Aboriginal people in Australia is to be attained.

505 The Ovens River is a tributary of the Murray River as is the Goulburn River. Major towns on the Ovens include Wangaratta, Beechworth, Myrtleford and Bright. TAFE is an abbreviation for Technical And Further Education. Goulburn Ovens TAFE, or "GOTAFE", has a campus in Shepparton


508 Cornell 2008
The Shepparton Chronicles

XIII. Shepparton: The Willy-Willy\textsuperscript{509} Of First Impressions

March 2010

In Shepparton

My husband and I arrived here on Sunday and had just booked into the motel when the Big Storm hit. It did a lot of damage, and the main topic of conversation here over the last couple of days has been "Where were you when the storm hit?"

We went to Riversong at the Performing Arts Centre last night – part of the SheppARTon arts festival. It was lovely. The Aboriginal opera singer, Deborah Cheetham, a Yorta Yorta woman, organised the event and was the main performer. Glorious voice. I found out later she is the niece of Jimmy Little. Jonathon Welch was involved as well, and lots of Aboriginal kids singing like angels, so it was all a bit weepy.

Today I called in to KPC to "show face" and was immediately invited in to an informal staff meeting. I felt very privileged to be included.

It seems that the VicHealth/Melbourne University LEAD project has hit the ground running. It makes my head spin. Its intention is to combat racism in the community, but has only a two-year life. How much can be achieved in that time? My first impression is that it is a Big White Project. I have not met any Aboriginal people directly involved in this. To be fair, it does involve multicultural communities as well. But I'm wondering how it will continue after two years, or will it have impact, then die? They are talking about "sustainability" and a "business plan" for continuing action. Is this "reconciliation"? Does it matter?

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Actually, I think those were my second impressions.

\textsuperscript{509} Small but potentially damaging whirlwind
On reflection, I was at first highly excited by the project, and its thrusting pro-active nature. But I think my impressions after consideration were probably right or more nearly right.

Today I was introduced as a researcher to a well-respected Yorta Yorta Elder. We met with a group of people at Friars, a trend-setting cafe in the heart of Shepparton. I was greeted with the same guarded politeness I have come to expect from Aboriginal people at first meeting. The conversation centred around the importance of establishing Aboriginal identity and self-respect. We discussed how Aboriginal unemployment in Shepparton is higher than the wider population, but not as high as the 80% that Jeanette Powell had stated at the LEAD Launch. Most Aboriginal employment centres around repairing disadvantage, for example a Centrelink officer, teaching, health etc. Another perplexing problem is under-employment of Aboriginal people. There is a perception that employers tend to shun Aboriginal applicants for “customer service” positions, (such as Friars) because they don’t want to attract an Aboriginal clientele.\footnote{100310}

Local government has been slow to join the effort to address Aboriginal unemployment. They have needed persistent encouragement from Aboriginal agencies.

The word, Treaty, entered our discussion more than once. The Elder suggested that Kevin Rudd should have apologised to the whole Australian community, as policies of the last decade have diminished us all. The word “reconciliation” seems to be regarded as fairly meaningless or even obsolete.

My impression after this and other conversations in Shepparton, was that “action research” as a methodology may be overkill. There seems to be a lot of “action” going on, not a lot of sitting and thinking.

Also, I have been reflecting on the term, “reconciliation”: perhaps this is when the settler community, especially local government, makes it possible for it to happen, i.e. creates the right conditions.
I attended three meetings today as an observer. There is so much happening here. So many good people working their hearts out. One of the participants says it's always like this. So strongly top-down. Where is the reflection time? Even one of the members queried whether the work plan was too much. But it is early days and I don't want to rush to judgement too early.

I feel as though I'm struggling for acceptance. By whom, I'm not sure.
11. Eleventh Interlocution: Ways of Knowing

"How does who I am, who I have been, who I think I am and how I feel affect the data collection and analysis?" 511

Wanda S Pillow

John Gaventa and Andrea Cornwall have advocated non-Indigenous researchers find "spaces of self-critical investigation and analysis of their own reality, in order to gain more authentic knowledge as a basis for action or representation to others". 512 I shall not only analyse my own reality, but I shall take Alison Jones' advice and learn from, rather than about, the Other. White researchers in Indigenous matters have a sad history over the past two centuries of continuing the "invasion" paradigm. I am determined to avoid this trap. Shawn Wilson, an Opaskwayak Cree from northern Manitoba, Canada, has referred to Indigenous research methods as "ceremony". This vision goes deeper than a mere metaphor for a research project. As Karen Martin, a Quandamoopah woman and researcher from the Noonuccal People in Queensland, describes it:

In ceremony whilst a number of phases are discernable this can occur with the involvement of one person, five or two hundred People. The major purpose is to prepare for and acknowledge change, establish its effects and make necessary adjustments and reparations. Certain protocols are to be observed and certain responsibilities must be respected and fulfilled for the ceremony to be a strong one. 513

Wilson, who now lives in the Northern Rivers district of New South Wales, 514 maintains that research as "ceremony" should be respected as such. 515

It is...the many ways and forms and levels of listening. It is, in Martin's (2003) terminology, Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being and Ways of Doing. It is the knowing and respectful reinforcement that all things are related and connected. It is the voice from our ancestors that tell us when it is right and when it is not. Indigenous research is a life changing ceremony. 516

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511 Pillow quoted in Taber 2010:18
512 Gaventa & Cornwall 2008:182
513 Martin 2008:19
514 Wilson 2008: cover note
515 Martin 2008
516 Wilson 2008:61
This metaphor captivates my thinking. It speaks of care and respect for, not only the participants, but the whole research process. It also speaks of reverence for truth, and where our story is situated in the Earth's Story. Martin relates how her preparation for her first research (ceremony) phase involves acknowledgement of "two sets of conventions and expectations", those being firstly her "own being and reality as an Aboriginal woman"; and secondly, her academic and literary commitments in her research study.\textsuperscript{517} Once again, Martin's preparation resonates with my own preparatory questioning of who I am in my research, and how it relates to my academic obligations. "Ceremony" also implies a creative approach to the work, extending beyond the intellect to intuition and spirit.

Evelyn Steinhauer refers to the three "Rs" that guide Indigenous research, Respect, Reciprocity and Relatedness:

\begin{quote}
Respect is more than just saying please and thank you, and reciprocity is more than giving a gift. .... Respect regulates how we treat Mother Earth, the plants, the animals and our brothers and sisters of all races... Respect means you listen intently to others' ideas, that you do not insist that your idea prevails. By listening intently you show honour, consider the well being of others, and treat others with kindness and courtesy.\textsuperscript{518}
\end{quote}

Both Martin and Veronica Arbon tell that "relatedness" is the core of Aboriginal life, and therefore of Indigenous research theory. Steinhauer asserts that \textit{listening} is its key. As a dweller in the "hyphen", I do not feel I can do justice to the depth and detail of the knowledge that Karen Martin, Veronica Arbon, Shawn Wilson, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Oodgeroo Noonuccal and many other Indigenous writers and poets have spoken. Suffice to say, "listening" to these writers has informed my thinking, and as a researcher in partnership with Aboriginal people, it is important I hear what they say.

According to Martin, the term "relatedness", in her study, refers to "the sets of conditions, processes and practices that occur amongst and between the Creators and the Ancestors; the \textit{Spirits}; the Filter and the Entities.\textsuperscript{519} This relatedness occurs

\begin{footnotes}
517 Ibid
519 The \textit{Spirits} ... encircle the Ancestors and Creators ... (and) circulate and relay messages from here and amongst seven Entities that are: People, Skies Land, Waterways, Animals, Plants and Climate. They filter the power of the Creators and Ancestors to ensure their messages are received by the Entities as they are intended. This occurs as a matter of
\end{footnotes}
across contexts and is maintained within conditions that are: physical spiritual, political, geographical, intellectual, emotional, social, historical, sensory, instinctive and intuitive".520

Veronica Arbon, who introduces herself as "an Arabana Udlyurla521 with links and affiliations with other groups of the desert in Australia",522 explains that

Relatedness exists within and between all entities in the Arabana world.
So to be is not only to be embodied and reciprocal, but is also about relatedness. This is conscious identity; that is, a conscious identity who knows of relatedness and also of reciprocity within relatedness.523

This sense of the relatedness of all things has been lost from Western "civilisation" over the centuries. Arbon briefly traces the continuum of Western knowledge development from pre-Socratic times when "there existed an 'interconnectedness, reverence for existence and a symbiotic reciprocity between male and female", 524 through philosophers such as Aristotle, who placed "humankind at the top of the chain",525 and Descartes, arguably the father of modern philosophy, whose period of influence was "characterised by a mechanistic and reductionist approach to knowledge, which purported to be values free."526 Similar exploration of scientific knowledge continued into the 19th and 20th centuries. The work of Charles Darwin legitimised the "survival of the fittest" theory, which provided the scientific rationale for "the continuing domination and subjugation of the lives of Indigenous Australians through policies and practices directed by Australian state and federal governments."527

These European-based thinkers...heralded a new wave of epistemological and ontological assumptions, which brought deep division between mind and matter, humans and nature, spirituality and knowledge, science and values, and people and authority. ... It [Western philosophy] was characterised by the separation of mind and matter,
hierarchical subordinations, mechanistic and fragmented views on
nature, and legitimised external control over the individual and all other
aspects of social life, including land acquired through invasion.\textsuperscript{528}

Arbon's statement reflects the depth of division at the "hyphen's" core. But Alison
Jones has referred to the “hyphen” as "the stroke that both enforces difference and
makes the link between".\textsuperscript{529} Where is the link? In my eagerness to find the link, I
warn myself against my Anglo-Celtic haste to interpret what I may perceive are
shared ontological and epistemological entities. Arbon, Martin, Tuhiwai Smith,
Battiste and Henderson, have all argued that Indigenous peoples must maintain
control and ownership over their own knowledge. But this right has been violated so
many times by non-Indigenous researchers that it is little wonder that these writers
appear reluctant to encourage participation by non-Indigenous researchers in
Indigenist research.

Please knock before you enter, is based on Karen Martin's own doctoral thesis. It
implies that entrance into Aboriginal knowledge is in fact possible for the Outsider,
but there are protocols. Her subtitle confirms that impression: Aboriginal regulation
of Outsiders and the implications for researchers. In the "Overview" to her book,
Martin reminds her readers that "The regulation of Outsiders to Aboriginal Country
is theorised by scholars as invasion and contact, race relations, frontiers and
acculturation. In these theories Aboriginal People are represented as powerless and
hopeless in the face of inevitable assimilation."\textsuperscript{530} Therefore Martin's intention is the
"development of an Indigenist research paradigm founded on the principles of
cultural respect and cultural safety and embedded in Aboriginal ontology,
epistemology and axiology". Martin's "theoretical framework...relatedness theory, is
comprised of three conditions, Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being and Ways of
Doing."\textsuperscript{531} Martin describes these conditions in detail throughout her book. In my
limited understanding, Ways of Knowing are the Stories that connect, Ways of Being
means the respect for and internalising of that Knowing, and that Ways of Doing
entails the living of that Knowing. Oodgeroo relates that these methods of
relatedness "were shared amongst the many nations through clan gatherings, family

\textsuperscript{528} Ibid
\textsuperscript{529} Jones & Jenkins 2008:482
\textsuperscript{530} Martin 2008:9
\textsuperscript{531} Ibid
gatherings, message stick carriers, story tellers, songs, dance and paintings. In other words, these qualities of relatedness are to be lived, and are the basis of every aspect of the lives of Aboriginal people.

In her study, Martin found that the people of her research site, the Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji have always maintained authority in the regulation of Outsiders. By processes of "'coming amongst' and 'coming alongside' the Burungu, Kuku-Yalanji as 'another'", the status of "stranger" becomes temporary.  

Outsiders achieve this in fulfilling conditions of honesty, co-operation and respect, and at the same time, maintain their own identity and autonomy so that relatedness is expanded and not diminished or replaced.

In relation to the implications for Western researchers, Martin concludes, "This stronger dialogic and self-reflexive researcher role works towards addressing, if not neutralising, issues of power of researcher over researched. When research is transformed in this way, it is itself, transformative and works towards achieving Aboriginal sovereignty in research."  

To return to the original question of who I am in this research: I am moved by the depth and beauty of this culture that is not my own; but I cannot be anything but an Outsider. My inherent worldview is different. I am also aware that my identity as "student" is important. I can learn from (not about) my participants. I am also an Outsider, and student, in the other side of the “hyphen” of my study, local government. I see no reason why the listening qualities of respect, reciprocity and relatedness should not apply to my engagement with people from the City of Greater Shepparton. How will who I am and how I feel affect my data collection and analysis? Asking myself this question makes me realise that I am not completely an Outsider. As I will show in my next chapter, the "ceremony" of respect, reciprocity and relatedness has drawn me into an emotional engagement with my participants to the extent that it has caused me some ethical and methodological dilemmas. The objectivity of an Outsider is fractured by my relatedness to community. Therefore,

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532 Oodgeroo Noonuccal quoted in Martin 2008:79
533 Ibid
534 Ibid
535 Martin 2008:10
who am I? I am also an Insider, a co-participant with others in my own project. However, as Bahira Sherif has pointed out:

_The traditional methodological assumption that the researcher should remain distant from the research participants and site to maintain objectivity is increasingly being replaced by the recognition that the ethnographer's self affects every aspect of the research process, from conception to final interpretation... [and that] the constant shifting of boundaries between people becomes an important part of the research process._

Sherif has also pointed out that "It has become increasingly obvious that the relationship between the 'Self' and the 'Other' is not a distinct binary opposition and that it is no longer clear who is who and what is being studied."

I believe I have now answered the question of who I am in my research. I am now ready to design my research methods. In this task I have been richly inspired by this array of metaphors: Wilson, Martin and Arbon's illustrations of research as "ceremony", comprising respect, reciprocity and relatedness; Jones and Jenkin's "hyphen", being both the point of difference and the link between Indigenous and settler; and Sherif's "constantly shifting boundaries", which blur the distinction between "Self" and "Other".

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### The Shepparton Chronicles

#### XIV. Running hard to keep up

_April 2010_

Three weeks later, I'm in Shepparton for the Reconciliation Group meeting. I have now joined the group. They're having meetings with some interesting people. I still feel I am "pushing in". Do I need to, I wonder? I was hoping to have a leisurely coffee with someone I had met, but it ended up being a long walk with her while she did her shopping. I did not find out anything new. I then walked back to my next appointment. He

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_Sherif 2001:437_  
_Sherif 2001:438_
could only give me ten rushed minutes. He doesn't think I'll have much luck in getting an Aboriginal group together. The bluntness of his assertion shocked me. In the long run my friend was proved right, but in the beginning I was not yet prepared to relinquish the fruits of months of work, the structure on which my chosen methodology, action research, depended. I assured myself that only time was needed to form the trust necessary to gather a group together.

But the in/out nature of the contacts I'm having is leaving me frustrated and stressed. No time to talk about alternatives. I left there feeling very much an outsider trying to break into this whirlpool of activity. Do I really want to? I wonder how much can be achieved at this pace. I wish I had not let my frustration show. But then, I am human.

Somehow, I need to arrange a long meeting with the CEO and Chair of Kaiela Planning Council to work out just how I can co-operate with KPC. At least I now have an email from the CEO formally accepting my research proposal.

It's Maundy Thursday and at 4 pm I couldn't find any bakeries selling Hot Cross Buns so I bought some at the supermarket. No smoked cod left anywhere.

Back at the motel, I couldn't be bothered going out for take-away so I made do with a cup of tea, biscuits and cheese, and a bun. I read an article in "Shepparton News" about an external Youth Survey upsetting Shepparton Aboriginal organisations. It hasn't made me feel any better.

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GOOD FRIDAY

I went to the 9 am service at St Augustine's Shepparton. In some ways it was revisiting the past – definitely a lot of show.

The Hayes Street cottage that we want to buy still has the "For Sale" sign out the front. Have we secured the sale yet?

The family was together in the kitchen when I arrived home in Monbulk. They didn't understand why I should feel like an outsider. As they rightly
pointed out, I am an Australian. Reconciliation affects me, therefore I have a right to research it. It was such a liberating thought, countering the guilt I have accumulated from my exploration over the last few months. It also concurs with the point made in the Friars conversation that the policies of the last decades have diminished all Australians. So guilt has fallen off me like dead skin, and I feel I can continue with confidence. I am an insider as well as an outsider. Thanks family!

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I think "reconciliation" is dead. That is why it's not sitting easily in this project. It was killed by the inertia of the Howard Government. The round-table meeting of lives that was the Council of Aboriginal Reconciliation's methodology has gone. Now there's just more programs and policies. And are these policies the right ones?

But if reconciliation has gone, what is there now?
12. Twelfth Interlocution: The Meeting Place?

*The hyphen's space does not demand destructive good understanding; indeed it is a space that insists on ignorance and therefore a perpetual lack of clarity and certainty.*

*Alison Jones and Kuni Jenkins*

Writers such as Smith, Wilson, Martin and Arbon have been speaking primarily to fellow Indigenous researchers. Despite being inspired by the research paradigms they propose, I cannot adopt them fully, as my own ontological and epistemological history is too different to be able to integrate their precepts into my ways of being, knowing and doing. Once again, I find myself straddling the “hyphen”. But, like the creature, "Hope", at the bottom of Pandora's box, the “hyphen” also gives me the link. Therefore, my task is now to create my own methodology that can come to that meeting point.

12.1 Searching for my own methodology

In the early weeks of my project I came to the essential realisation that my research was not merely academic, but intervened in the lives and stories of real, sentient people, for whom I therefore had a duty of care. It was a limenal and compelling part of my decision to use "action research" as my methodology.

As I embark on planning my fieldwork, I begin to realise that my preliminary period of anguished self-examination was, and continues to be, an integral part of my methodology. As Donna Mertens points out, "self-knowledge is an essential part of establishing effective partnerships and relationships, as well as for clarifying worldviews". But Mertens also argues that, "self-knowledge alone is not sufficient, however; personal transformation is a necessary part of social transformation".

Merten's statements draw me back to the question of who I am in this research. My own worldview has been shaped as much by my family relationships, friendships and inherent personality traits as by Western values and perceptions. According to Mertens, my constant self-evaluation will be essential to the most basic research design and methods:

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538 Mertens 2009:71
539 Ibid
Combining self-knowledge with cultural knowledge and skills in effective partnering facilitates (1) the development of the research or evaluation focus and identification of questions; (2) the development of interventions; and (3) making decisions about design, measures, samples, data collection, analysis, interpretation, and use that are in keeping with the philosophical assumptions of the transformative paradigm.540

In other words, research involving different cultures cannot be conducted remotely, but must effectively become part of the everyday life of the researcher. Research is then not only intellectual, but intuitive and sensate as well.

12.1.1 Establishing trust

In my search for a methodology, I was inspired by two projects by non-Indigenous researchers; firstly, Gillian Cowlishaw's book, *The City's Outback*, an ethnographic participant observation study with, rather than of, the Mt Druitt Aboriginal community in Sydney. Cowlishaw's work involved a deep engagement with her participants.

*The essential qualities of ethnographic research consist of practices that many forms of enquiry pride themselves on avoiding. Ethnography entails immersion and intimacy with a particular social domain over a long period of time. Personal relationships are at the core, with all the risks and responsibilities they entail.*541

While Mertens argues that self-knowledge is a vital component of research relationships, Cowlishaw advocates a virtual sacrificing of self to achieve the same result.

*The ethnographer willingly experiences a destabilisation of her familiar everyday world and some loss of self. Experiences of projection, transference, identification and alienation are all part of the process or method. By participating in dense, complex, extended sociality, the ethnographer is able to forge an account of a social domain using a wide range of interpretive and analytic tools.*542

540 Mertens 2009:71
541 Cowlishaw 2009:9
542 Cowlishaw 2009:9
Both non-Indigenous writers' words resound with the essence of the Indigenous writers' work, expressing the necessity for a commitment which percolates through the researcher's whole way of being, knowing and doing.

In the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* the NHMRC states, "The relationship between researchers and research participants is the ground on which human research is conducted. The values set out (in NHMRC Guidelines) – respect for human beings, research merit and integrity, justice, and beneficence – help to shape that relationship as one of trust, mutual responsibility and ethical equality".\(^{543}\) In addition, in *Values and Ethics: Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research* the guidelines state:

> Working with difference in a research context takes time, care, patience and the building of robust relationships....Research involves groupings of people in a collaborative exercise. The soundness of trust among its stakeholders is essential to a successful and ethical outcome. Trust has to function at all levels of the research enterprise — between participant and researcher, ... and perhaps most importantly, with the wider community. Where trust persists, research can be sustained.\(^{544}\)

**12.1.2 Cultural values in harmony**

Clearly, it is important that the methodology I chose should not only be able to be applied to my research question, but it should also take into account:

- the three Rs, Respect, Reciprocity and Relatedness
- research merit and integrity, justice, beneficence and respect

These two sets of values, from either side of the “hyphen”, do not mix, but are in harmony. They are the link, the meeting place of two methodological paradigms. As Jones and Jenkins have pointed out, removing the “hyphen” is counter-productive.\(^{545}\) Understanding the Other is not necessary for a productive partnership, therefore each can preserve their own identity. Self-knowledge is part of respect; friendship and trust are part of relatedness. Benefit to the community entails reciprocity and beneficence. Social transformation is linked to justice.

\(^{543}\) NHMRC 2007:11  
\(^{544}\) NHMRC 2003: 3  
\(^{545}\) Jones & Jenkins 2008: 475
Cowlishaw asks, then answers, the question,

How can respectable research rely on, and indeed privilege, subjective, emotional engagements with other social subjects? The answer is...that subjectivity, affect and complexity can be the objects of methodological analysis.... Systematic observation and rigorous analysis can be undertaken without being limited to what is quantifiable, predictable, precise and independent of other phenomena. This approach rejects the fantasy of "finding order in events by putting events in order" and accepts "the inseparability of knowledge from its knower".546

Similarly, Mertens argues that the concept of "validity" is a "culturally constructed construct"547 and can be defined as

"an overall judgment of the Self, Partnerships, and Relationships adequacy and appropriateness of evaluation-based inferences and actions and their respective consequences"548... In relation to this inclusive definition, validity is strengthened by critical self reflection, especially directed at assumptions that emanate from a position of majority privilege.549

With this approach it appears possible that the methodology itself may become the meeting place between two cultures. I come to the “hyphen” from the "majority privilege" side, bringing my worldview with me. As a participant in my own research, my way of relating is as open to evaluation as any other information I acquire, giving me insight into attitudes in government circles, where policy is created by real, sentient people, as I am.

12.1.3 A reflexive, flexible, emergent methodology

The second project I found significant was Ian Hughes' doctoral thesis and later writing, which became a model for my methodological structure. Hughes' PhD project, spanning the years 1992 to 1995, was entitled Self-Determination. Aborigines and the State in Australia.550 It involved a case study of a community development project where an action group, comprising mostly Aboriginal people, but some non-Aboriginal as well, succeeded in establishing an Aboriginal Health

546 Cowlishaw 2009:9
547 Mertens 2009:73
548 Kirkhart (2005) quoted in Mertens 2009:73
549 Mertens 2009:73
550 Hughes 1997
Centre in a remote New South Wales town. Hughes describes himself as "participant observer" in the study. His role was initially as convener and facilitator of the group, although this role was subsequently assumed by other members of the group.\textsuperscript{551} He asserts

\begin{quote}
Well designed and implemented action research is the most appropriate approach ..., where situations are truly complex or it is not possible to control many variables. We should recognize that statistical methods are often not the best way to measure complex social change. Guidelines to informed choices about the quality and rigour of action research... based on sound evidence, have been published and need to be tested, and further refined.\textsuperscript{552}
\end{quote}

My task is to choose and implement a methodology appropriate to the “hyphen”; one that values relationships, that will accommodate the three Rs of the Indigenous research paradigm, Respect, Reciprocity and Relatedness, and will have merit and integrity, justice, and beneficence, and will satisfy Western academia's requirement of rigorous evaluation. In Ian Hughes' project I found a shape for my research. After reading his account of his "action research" project, I became certain that this reflexive, flexible, emergent methodology was right for my research.

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The Shepparton Chronicles

XV. Going feral?

May 2010

When I began this venture, they told us at Deakin, “Hang on to your hats! You're in for the ride of your life!” I think they were right. If I get through the next month with my project intact, I'll be fine.

Firstly, there's the Ethics Committee. They liked my application, but want me to attend the meeting. Well I knew they would. They're concerned about me using my Shepparton home for participants' meetings. But I'm sure I can explain that well enough for them although in the end they will

\textsuperscript{551} Ibid
\textsuperscript{552} Hughes 2008:391
have to trust me. They are also worried that I am too personally and emotionally involved. But how can you not be passionate about this kind of research?

I've finished my Colloquium document, and have to front that panel on 11 June. But before that happens, the Yorta Yorta Elders want to see me at their meeting. If I get through that one, I'm no longer an outsider. I hope.

Last weekend we went to Shepparton to a Rumabalara Footy Club home game. They lost to Tongala. I thought they looked good, although my husband was more critical. But I caught up with the same person I had met at Friars and happily, his manner was warm. I introduced my footy-loving husband to him and let the conversation flow from there.

Last Friday I had a short meeting with Jonathan. Two important points were raised. Firstly, he advised me to be cautious about local Aboriginal politics, especially the issues between Yorta Yorta and Bangerang. I take his point but I don't see how I can ignore this situation. Secondly, he suggested that in my study I look at how CoGS incorporates research findings and program results into official policy.

Today I attended a Deakin School seminar about Kojève and the “end of history”. We started with Hegel, proceeding through Marx. I must say I find this theory rather dry. But the second part of the seminar was Professor Baogang He giving a talk on how research projects “evolve”, giving as an example his own research into deliberative democracy in China. It was very reassuring. It sounded a lot like my research process.

And I had a light bulb moment during his talk:

I have been thinking of my theoretical context as having to be from Western sources. But of course, this is not necessarily so. I don’t know why I thought it had to be. My reading from now on will be from Indigenous writers as much as possible.
13. Thirteenth Interlocution: Action research

The decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples (1994 – 2004...) has ended. Non-indigenous scholars have yet to learn from it, to learn that it is time to dismantle, deconstruct, and decolonize Western epistemologies from within, to learn that research does not have to be a dirty word, to learn that research is always already moral and political. It is time to chart a new decade, the Decade of Critical, Indigenous Inquiry.553

Norman K Denzin and Yvone S Lincoln

Good action research emerges over time in an evolutionary and developmental process, as individuals develop skills of inquiry and as communities of inquiry develop within communities of practice. ... In action research knowledge is a living, evolving process of coming to know rooted in everyday experience; it is a verb rather than a noun. This means action research program is less defined in terms of hard and fast methods, but is ... a work of art emerging in the doing of it.554

Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury

As I have come to know more about action research, I have joked that its definition should be "making it up as you go along". This is not such an unrealistic interpretation. Rory O'Brien describes the essence of action research as "'learning by doing' - a group of people identifies a problem, do something to resolve it, see how successful their efforts were, and, if not satisfied, try again."555 However, O'Brien goes on to say that this could easily describe every day living, and suggests a more comprehensive definition:

Action research...aims to contribute both to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to further the goals of social science simultaneously. Thus, there is a dual commitment in action research to study a system and concurrently to collaborate with members of the system in changing it in what is together regarded as a desirable direction.556

Definitions by other practitioners are similar. Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury define action research as

553 Denzin et al 2008:ix
554 Reason & Bradbury 2008:5
555 O'Brien 1998
556 Thomas Gilmore, Jim Krantz and Rafael Ramirez quoted in O'Brien 1998
... a participatory process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice in participation with others, in pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities.\textsuperscript{557}

Both O'Brien and Reason and Bradbury argue then that the "doing" of the methodology not only collects data, but builds knowledge and understanding of the methodology itself and its place in social science.

Similarly, Kemmis and McTaggart contend that action research is

\begin{quote}
  a form of collective, self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out.\textsuperscript{558}
\end{quote}

Kemmis and McTaggart point out that the three important foci in this passage for observation and potential transformation are "practices", "understanding" and "situations".\textsuperscript{559} Action researchers should aim for a "dialectical perspective", that is, to see things from both dimensions – us/them, insider/outsider and individual/social.\textsuperscript{560}

Jean McNiff and Jack Whitehead also assert that the influence of action research extends beyond the immediate project. "Action research is a form of enquiry that enables practitioners everywhere to investigate and evaluate their work." In this they not only learn to improve their own practices, but may formulate theories that could possibly help others improve their work.\textsuperscript{561}

According to Dorothy Valcarcel Craig, action research is "systematic and structured", and "focuses on problems, issues, or concerns present in the practicing environment".\textsuperscript{562}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
  \item[557] Reason & Bradbury 2008:4
  \item[558] Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) quoted in Kemmis 2008:122
  \item[559] Kemmis 2008:123
  \item[560] Ibid
  \item[561] McNiff & Whitehead 2006:7
  \item[562] Craig 2009:4
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Craig points out that although definitions of action research are many, "most have common threads that illustrate the key theoretical points of the method."\(^{563}\) These are:

- "typically conducted by teachers for teachers", or "by practitioners for practitioners"
- it "focuses on practice in order to improve practice"
- "may result in positive change in the form of action"
- "It is participatory in nature and involves the community of learners, the community of the environment, and the community of practice"\(^{564}\)

However, Reason and Bradbury see action research as emergent, starting with "everyday experience and ... concerned with the development of living knowledge, [in which] the process of inquiry can be as important as specific outcomes."\(^{565}\) They sum up its principles, stating that action research

- is a set of practices that responds to people's desire to act creatively in the face of practical and often pressing issues in their lives in organizations and communities;
- calls for engagement with people in collaborative relationships, opening new "communicative spaces" in which dialogue and development can flourish;
- draws on many ways of knowing, both in the evidence that is generated in inquiry and its expression in diverse forms of presentation as we share learning with wider audiences;
- is values oriented, seeking to address issues of significance concerning the flourishing of human persons, their communities, and the wider ecology in which we participate;
- is a living, emergent process that cannot be predetermined but changes and develops as those engaged deepen their understanding of the issues.

\(^{563}\) Ibid
\(^{564}\) Ibid
\(^{565}\) Reason & Bradbury 2008:5
to be addressed and develop their capacity as co-inquirers both individually and collectively.\textsuperscript{566}

It is a characteristic of action research that it is always cyclical in nature and may not have any definitive end. McNiff and Whitehead describe the cycle as "observe, reflect, act, evaluate, modify" then "move on to the next cycle."\textsuperscript{567} Findings of each cycle will be open-ended, informing the next. Cycles are more an upward spiral than a flat plane, the process building more knowledge, leading to more productive action.

The term "action research" was first coined by Kurt Lewin in about 1944. Stephen Kemmis relates that Lewin's concept of action research "consisted in analysis, fact-finding, conceptualisation, planning, execution, more fact-finding or evaluation; and then a repetition of this whole circle of activities; indeed a spiral of such circles."\textsuperscript{568} Clem Adelman records that during the late 1930s Kurt Lewin, with his students, "conducted quasi-experimental tests in factory and neighbourhood settings to demonstrate, respectively, the greater gains in productivity and in law and order through democratic participation rather than autocratic coercion."\textsuperscript{569} According to Adelman, Lewin was concerned about minority groups and believed that action research could be an instrument of liberation from exploitation and colonialisation.\textsuperscript{570}

\textit{Action research gives credence to the development of powers of reflective thought, discussion, decision and action by ordinary people participating in collective research on "private troubles"... that they have in common. That was how Kurt Lewin (1890-1947)..., came to describe its characteristics after a series of practical experiences in the early 1940s. "No action without research; no research without action", Lewin concluded.}\textsuperscript{571}

Lewin emphasised participation and process rather than outcomes. He was adamant that "action research could inform social planning and action."\textsuperscript{572} He maintained that

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{566} Reason & Bradbury 2008:3/4
\item \textsuperscript{567} McNiff & Whitehead 2006:9
\item \textsuperscript{568} Lewin quoted in Kemmis 1980:4
\item \textsuperscript{569} Adelman 1993:7
\item \textsuperscript{570} Adelman 1993:8
\item \textsuperscript{571} Ibid
\item \textsuperscript{572} Adelman 1993:14
\end{itemize}
action research may be only part of a process of social planning, reconnaissance (evaluation of the action giving the planners a chance to learn the strengths and weakness, so informing the next step and contributing to a basis for overall modification of the planned change, or what has been latterly identified with a cycle of action research), followed by review and iteration of this overall cycle. 573

Lewin's action research spiral, (see Figure 1) 574 has survived virtually unchanged to this day. Kemmis points out that Lewin's "plan" meant "a plan for a program of social action", that is, although knowledge may be gained on which to base principles for later action, programs must be designed to directly address social needs. 575

![Figure 1](image)

Having reviewed the literature on action research, I can summarise the characteristics of the methodology as:

- collaboration with stakeholder group
- cyclical or spiral plan/action/evaluate
- emergent – issues arise from the community

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573 Ibid
574 Kemmis 1980:5
575 Kemmis 1980:6
• values laden
• critical reflection
• self-analysis
• open-ended
• gains knowledge to improve the methodology itself while fact-finding
• a legitimate paradigm to apply to my research
• *Systematic observation and rigorous analysis can be undertaken without being limited to what is quantifiable, predictable, precise and independent of other phenomena.*

This is my understanding of action research. I will therefore design my research project using these principles as my basis. By this methodology I believe I will gain knowledge in a truthful, profound sense, in accordance with the ethics and values of Indigenous Research Paradigms.

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576 Cowlishaw 2009:9
14. Fourteenth Interlocution – The Plan

Indigenous peoples’ knowledge and heritage are not commodities, nor are they the property of the nation-states and their researchers. Indigenous knowledge and heritage are sacred gifts and responsibilities that must be honoured and held for the benefit of future generations. Unless researchers are aware of and act consistently with the laws of Indigenous peoples, any attempts to learn or to use Indigenous knowledge and heritage are unlawful, illegitimate and unethical.\(^{577}\)

Marie Battiste

Often their research simply affirms their own beliefs.\(^{578}\)

Linda Tuhiwai Smith

14.1 Encountering Shepparton

I must acknowledge that a factor in my choice of Shepparton as research site was that my first encounters with the people of the city were enjoyable. Early in my project, the response to my approach to the CEO of Kaiela Planning Council was warm and encouraging. On my first visit to Shepparton, I asked directions to KPC from a very friendly and obliging woman in the street. She actually walked with me to show me the way. I loved the "cows", "Mooving Art", pieces of whimsical artwork by local artists, inhabiting public spaces. I ordered Irish coffee at a very cosmopolitan cafe that could have been in Brunswick or Carlton.

I was introduced to people I "should talk to". My first conversation with the Mayor, Geoff Dobson, was welcoming and enthusiastic. I left after my first visit feeling that these were people I could work with. I subsequently received permission to conduct research in both Kaiela Planning Council and the City of Greater Shepparton.

My impression of Shepparton was of a welcoming, friendly town. "That's because you're not Aboriginal", remarked Eileen\(^{579}\). "You don't look Aboriginal". I had yet to see the racism hidden behind Shepparton's conservative friendliness. One local Koori person believed that the cosmo cafe I had admired would not employ Aboriginal people because they did not want to attract an Aboriginal clientele. Another (non-Aboriginal) person commented that I should try taking a Koori friend

\(^{577}\) Battiste & Henderson 2000:144
\(^{578}\) Smith 1999:92
\(^{579}\) 130101
for coffee, and observe whom the waitress approached to take the order. (I did not take up this challenge).

14.2 Laying out the Plan

Shepparton was an appropriate case study site for my project because it has the highest proportion of Aboriginal people to settler population in Victoria. In fundamental terms "case study" could be defined as "a study and analysis of a person (or persons) or place over a period of time". An action research case study will add to this definition "...involving issues that arise from the community, the immersion of the researcher, and the element of change; where analysis and evaluation take place concurrently with action". I would argue that any action research project is essentially a case study where, according to Bob Dick, researchers "[d]uring or after the action ... identify what worked and what did not, and draw conclusions for future thought and action from that".

14.2.1 Additional research methods

I realised as I reviewed my research design that I would not be able to begin an action research project, working on community issues, until I had formed relationships with the people concerned. I had envisaged hospitality would fulfil this role, but became aware that a more immediate approach would be necessary to make contact. I therefore obtained permission from the executive of KPC to observe their meetings. We agreed that this arrangement was to be strictly confidential, for familiarisation only, not for data-gathering, and that I would not report on any business discussed or enacted. The stringency relaxed somewhat as we got to know each other, as I describe in The Shepparton Chronicles XVIII. Nevertheless the obligation of confidentiality remained. Although including "observation" in my research methods, I believe the design and practice of my work was too fluid to fall into any of the "widely used typologies" of "participant observation" cited by Paul Atkinson and Martyn Hammersley, namely "complete observer, observer as

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580 Bouma 1984–2000:90–95
581 Dick 2003
participant, participant as observer and complete participant." However, as Atkinson and Hammersley further argue, in some sense

all social research is a form of participant observation because we cannot study the social world without being part of it. From this point of view participant observation is not a particular research technique but a mode of being-in-the-world characteristic of researchers.

It became clear also that I would need to conduct face-to-face in-depth interviews with Council officers and other officials who would not be part of the action research regime. I intended these would be conducted as informally as possible in a reflexive mode. Andrea Fontana describes "traditional" interviewing techniques as being permeated by the "language of science", where the interviewer "is not unlike a highly trained instrument and remains substantively detached from the situation and the respondent". Fontana goes on to describe the influence post-modernism has had on this interviewing, "loosening it from ... its traditional moorings". She perceives that now "both the interviewer and the respondent negotiate and work together to accomplish the interview". This is the approach I have been determined would inform my in-depth interviews.

It is important to note that I do not regard these additional methods as discrete from my whole methodology. In my view my chosen methodology, action research, blends with the additional methods to become a whole because the same "bottom up" approach to listening to the community applies to all.

14.2.2 Preparing for fieldwork

I believed it was essential for me to spend most of my time in Shepparton, getting to know the community, therefore began to look for not-too-expensive places to stay. Serendipitously, my family received an inheritance around this time, and we decided to invest it in a small cottage in Hayes Street to provide accommodation for me while I was working there. The house came equipped with a comfortable bungalow with an ample workroom and a small office in the backyard. For fifteen months I spent the week in Shepparton, returning to my home in Monbulk on the weekends.

582 Atkinson & Hammersley 1994:248
583 Atkinson & Hammersley 1994:249
584 Fontana 2003:53
585 Fontana 2003:61
586 Hughes 1997
My grand vision was to use my very convenient set up to provide hospitality for my participants as we discussed local issues. I was adamant that hospitality would play an important part in this process, providing warmth and equity to gatherings. Yet paradoxically my enthusiasm for my "perfect" set up actually blinded me to the fact that my easy access to these resources was due to my privileged status as a white person, and therefore my intended gatherings could not be equitable.

14.3 Values and Ethics

Having searched the "spirit" of Indigenous Research Paradigms and action research methodology, and resolved to base my research design on these paradigms, it is time to evoke the "letter" and begin to plan the practical aspect of my project. My research plan was presented to the Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee in May 2010, and was approved by them in June 2010. The "National Statement" identifies six core values when working with Aboriginal people:

587 Martin 2008
588 National Statement On Ethical Conduct In Human Research NHMRC 2007:69
Reciprocity, including benefit
Respect
Equality
Responsibility
Survival and protection
Spirit and integrity.

The "Values and Ethics" guidelines illustrate the first five core values being bound together with the last, "Spirit and Integrity". 589 Both these editions of the official guidelines for research involving Aboriginal people encapsulate these values as "research merit and integrity, justice, beneficence and respect". 590 These principles form the foundation of my plan for ethical research in Shepparton.

Following is a summary of how I intended to carry out my research in Shepparton, as I had submitted to the Ethics Committee. Here, I encountered a dilemma. Although I had been inspired by my research into alternate ways of gaining knowledge, in practice it became apparent that the emergent element of my initial intentions was not compatible with the requirements of a University Ethics process. It required me to be more specific about my methods than I felt ready to be at that stage. It occurred to me then that perhaps action research is not suitable for a time-critical PhD study. The consequence of attempting to apply my planned methods has since confirmed this for me. The linear quality of my academic demands was apparently unrealistic when applied to reality. The reasons for this and the subsequent transformation of my methodology will be discussed in later Interlocutions.

14.4 My Research Plan as submitted to DUHREC

My research will involve a case study in the relationships between local government and Aboriginal communities in the northern Victorian city of Shepparton. The City of Greater Shepparton (COGS) is actively involved in programs designed to further the well-being of Aboriginal people in the

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589 Values and Ethics: Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research NHRMC 2003:9
590 NHRMC 2007:70/71
community. This municipality has been chosen, after careful consideration, for many reasons. It comprises the highest Indigenous percentage of the population of any municipality in Victoria. There is the unique involvement of the Kaiela Planning Council (KPC), an Aboriginal planning and coordination group in the community partnering many projects with COGS and other levels of government. Both CoGS and KPC have agreed to support my research.

14.4.1 Aims

My overarching research question is to test the statement contained in the final report in 2001 of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, that "Local Government is a valuable partner in Reconciliation". An important qualifying question is how Local Government can create conditions in which Aboriginal culture can flourish in its community, which includes how Council embeds information from research and consultation into official policy. This will be a major component of the examination.

In addition, I intend to explore the notion of reconciliation itself, constructing and testing a definition, and determining how relevant the term is still to the pursuit of social justice in communities.

Thirdly, it is important, because of the theme of "reconciliation", that the research directly benefits the Shepparton community. In other words, the research process itself will be reflexively/reflectively keeping the spirit of reconciliation, contributing positively to the community, by establishing equal, trustful, collaborative relationships with participants, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. For this
reason, I have chosen to use collaborative "action research" methods for the "community" portion of my fieldwork.

14.4.2 Research methods

Duration of fieldwork: June 2010 to May 2011

**Observation** of the activities of CoGS and KPC, attending meetings when permitted. These may serve to keep me abreast of activities, or data may be gathered. Any notes taken for data-gathering purposes will be vetted by the Chair and/or CEO.

**Regular in-depth interviews** with key players in both organisations. I propose that these serve as information exchanges (subject to ethical and privacy principles), where both I, as researcher, and the organisation receive an update on each other's activities. This will create a spirit of cooperation between the parties.

**Action research:** In order to explore the nature of reconciliation and the role of local government, two groups will be recruited, one from CoGS, mainly non-Aboriginal, and another comprising Aboriginal people recruited through KPC (or Yorta Yorta Nation). These would be more than "focus groups" although they would fulfill some of those functions. The main role of these participants would be as "co-investigators" of reconciliation. Processes would be emergent. Issues and action will arise from discussion within these community groups, collaboratively with the researcher where appropriate, with the researcher acting as facilitator in the early stages. Methods will be drawn from "action research"
principles of the "plan, act, observe, reflect" cycle, (not necessarily in that order). 591

Meetings will be informal, using hospitality to promote friendship and trust. Reconciliation is organic and personal, therefore this is the only appropriate method to employ. 592 The emphasis of the meetings would be on hospitality, enjoyment, "round table" discussion and respect. Reconciliation involves change, therefore the groups will be encouraged to seek ways of bringing this about. The two groups will merge during the year's work if both agree. I anticipate this may create a model for reconciliation in community neighbourhoods.

14.4.3 Benefits

This research will directly benefit community of Greater Shepparton, and indirectly all Australian local governments, by providing information on the effectiveness of strategies (or lack thereof) that have so far not been tested over time. My research six years ago, as well as the work of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation in the 1990s and other projects since then, has identified the promise of local government as a leader in reconciliation. This research will investigate its continuing leadership potential, and reveal to what extent it is fulfilling that potential.

In addition, I anticipate the greatest benefit will occur in two ways:

The summary and report handed to relevant organisations will provide information on which to base grass-roots level

592 See NHMRC 2007 National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research, Chapter 4.7, also NHMRC 2003 Values and Ethics. Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research.
reconciliation programs, from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants.

My research process is designed to encourage friendships and greater understanding between participants. This will mean that official contact between CoGS staff and Aboriginal clients, in future will be business between friends. Whether this beneficial relationship is sustainable, and if so, how to sustain and grow this relationship, will be a subject for discussion and possible action in the community groups. If it is found that lasting and enjoyable friendships are established during the research, then the process itself may provide a model for future reconciliation projects.

I believe the action research methodology itself will benefit participants, and subsequently the wider community, in the same way the "round-table" discussions of sensitive issues were of benefit to the members of CAR during the nineties.

For the community groups: participants will gain understanding, establish new friendships and learn skills for creating and sustaining reconciled communities. These skills can be subsequently used in further reconciliation programs or informally in participants' neighbourhoods.

If CoGS and KPC so desire, I will report the progress of my research (within bounds of privacy) to them in at least two face-to-face interviews. This will provide a meter of their work in the community. At the end of my fieldwork (12 months), in collaboration with the community groups' participants, I will write a report for both organisations using aggregate data from all phases of my study.
There are two parts to the City of Greater Shepparton's relationship with the Aboriginal people who live in its local area. Firstly there is the official part – programs, special events, policies – and the Councillors and senior staff who create and implement them. Secondly is the direct interface with the community through the lower eschalon, the counter staff, cashiers, planners, etc. To find the answers to our research questions, to be developed in unison with these communities, it is necessary for me to be familiar with action on both levels, therefore my research design comprises both a qualitative approach, using interviews and observation of meetings to keep abreast of changes of policy, changes in government regulation, new initiatives on the official level etc, and a more participatory approach for the staff and Aboriginal clients who experience the relationship daily. As explained above, efforts will be made to ensure the methods used at this level will be as near as possible to those acceptable to Aboriginal peoples.

There is great diversity in culture and knowledge systems in Shepparton, not only between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people, but also between the local Yorta Yorta and Bangerang peoples. I have read carefully and become familiar with the NHMRC and the AIATSIS guideline documents on research with Aboriginal people. I have noted particularly that "Working with difference in a research context takes time, care, patience and the building of robust relationships....Research involves groupings of people in a collaborative exercise. The soundness of trust among its stakeholders is essential to a successful and ethical outcome. Trust has to function at all levels of the research enterprise — between participant and researcher, ... and perhaps most
importantly, with the wider community. Where trust persists, research can be sustained.\textsuperscript{593}

That is why I have chosen to use collaborative and negotiated approaches, and to use hospitality to facilitate growth of trusting, equal relationships. Being a resident in the town,\textsuperscript{594} there will be more opportunity for informal meetings. Gaventa and Cornwall state that, "Power and knowledge are inextricably intertwined."\textsuperscript{595} My study will aim to avoid (or reflect on) the inherent power relationship between researcher and researched by the respectful sharing of knowledge. I have made initial approaches to senior staff in the key representative organisations in the municipality. The research will be done in consultation with these people. We have discussed potential collaborations, and how we might match our needs and constraints to achieve a mutually beneficial outcome. I have allowed time (several months) to build a relationship in order to reciprocally reach agreement. Paul Briggs, Chair of Kaiela Planning Council, is one of Victoria's most respected Aboriginal leaders. He, along with its CEO, is guiding me on what is culturally appropriate. When ethical approval is granted, we plan to meet regularly for mutual feedback sessions. Furthermore I am seeking permission and advice from the Yorta Yorta Nation and the Bangerang people regarding conducting research in their country.

I have also established working relationships with Geoff Dobson, the mayor of Greater Shepparton, its CEO, and its Community Development Manager. All three executives have been residents of Shepparton for many years and have deep

\textsuperscript{593} NHMRC 2003:3
\textsuperscript{594} My family has invested in a small cottage in Shepparton, which is available for me to use during my fieldwork.
\textsuperscript{595} Gaventa, J. & Cornwall, A 2008
local knowledge of CoGS bureaucracy and reconciliation processes. The City’s pro-active attitude to Reconciliation was a major part of the reason I approached it for a case study. The CD Manager has expressed the belief that my research will significantly benefit the Shepparton Community.

I have deliberately not referred to the community groups as "focus groups". Unlike classic "focus groups", both the Aboriginal group and the COGS group will follow a collaborative process that evolves in conjunction with participants.596

In the spirit of reconciliation, the Indigenous participants, the non-Indigenous participants and I will be co-investigating a process of "proper" ethical and respectful interaction. The topic of the research reflects its methods. We will be mutually finding a way to understand and care for each other across our cultures, worldviews and experiences. At the same time, the research will be substantively investigating the processes of reconciliation going on in CoGS.

14.4.5 Duty of care

Reconciliation implies two or more unhappy parties being brought together to sort out their differences. Reconciliation involves forgiveness, a return to harmonious relationships, and an enjoyment of each other. But before that can happen, negative issues may need to be aired. Aboriginal reconciliation will involve feelings of grief, anger, frustration, guilt and resentment. Therefore there may be a risk of hurtful exchanges which are hard to control. To mitigate against this, the two community groups will meet separately say, once a month until both feel able to meld without animosity.

Nevertheless, the "round table" approach as used by the CAR in the nineties is the essence of reconciliation. This will be a large part of the anticipated model of reconciliation. A "safe" social atmosphere will be maintained using hospitality, and a method of dealing with heated exchanges will be discussed and agreed upon at the outset of each meeting. In accordance with ethical principles, participants may withdraw at any time. (If necessary, further recruiting may need to take place).

To facilitate the growth of friendship and enjoyment of these encounters, I will be personally offering hospitality, including a simple meal, at my Shepparton house. This will be the venue for the meetings, offering an informal environment in which to discuss issues, some of which may be sensitive. However, it is possible for emotions to become heated, and the following is the procedure for ensuring the security of the participants, including myself:

I will conduct the initial meeting with potential participants individually or in small groups on neutral ground e.g. coffee shop. This informal meeting should provide enough time for potential participants and researcher to assess whether they wish to collaborate with each other on this project. I do not intend to exclude any person who wishes to be involved, who meets the criteria. However, if I have any reason to feel uneasy about a potential participant, we will continue to meet on neutral territory, and I will confer with my supervisors, until the situation is resolved.

The CoGS group and Aboriginal group will meet separately until it is certain they can meld without animosity. Information about each group, including what is said, will be kept confidential, and not revealed in any way to the other.
A method of dealing with possible conflict will be discussed at the beginning of each meeting, along with a reiteration of the importance of respect for each other's point of view. I will ensure that there are always more than five people in the house at the time, either as participants, or members of my family. If an encounter becomes hurtful in any way, time out will be called, e.g., a coffee break. Participants will be reassured and reminded of the agreed process.

I have experience in relationship counselling, so therefore can recognise when a situation needs to be "defused" by taking a break, or rephrasing the comment in a more positive manner, etc. The purpose of providing personal hospitality for these meetings is to create an atmosphere of friendship and cooperation that reduces the possibility of conflict.

14.4.6 Regarding the ethically problematic use of my house for hospitality.

The use of hospitality is integral to my research. According to the NHMRC Statement (2007), and also the NHMRC's "Values and Ethics: Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research" (2003), trusting relationships are essential in research projects involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders:

"Trustworthiness of both research and researchers is a product of engagement between people...These guidelines are based on the importance of trust, recognition and values. The guidelines move away from a sole reliance on the quasi-legal consideration of compliance with rules. They promote a more flexible approach that encourages research to reposition itself to incorporate alternate perspectives, and exercise judgement as to its ethical implications." 597

597 NHMRC 2003 1.3.2 p4
In the light of these statements, I believe that if I am going to form trusting relationships with participants, I cannot withhold access to my hearth and home, especially as food and hospitality are so important to many Indigenous cultures. "...it is just not possible to contemplate a negotiation without the offering and taking of food".598 There may also be the possibility of reciprocal invitations.

Many authors refer to the power relationships inherent in research with Indigenous people by non-Indigenous researchers.599 Smith says, "When undertaking research, either across cultures or within a minority culture it is critical that research recognise the power dynamic which is embedded in the relationship with their subjects".600 My chosen research method in this instance will follow Graham Smith's "power sharing model".601 In this model the intent is for power to be equal, and participants become co-researchers, and researcher becomes co-participant, as together we explore the subject of reconciliation in the context of local government. This will take time, getting to know each other. Providing hospitality will facilitate this process. The non-Indigenous COGS group will be treated the same way.

14.4.7 Summary

This research project is designed to not only gain information from the grass-roots level of the community regarding the role of local government in reconciliation, but to actively seek ways of improving the relationship between Aboriginal people and local Councils. Shepparton provides an excellent case

598 Barret & Parker 2003. (Barret and Parker were referring to their research among the Iban people of Sarawak, Malaysia).
600 Smith L T 1999:176
601 Smith G in Smith L T 1999:177
study because its Council is proactive in implementing programs and projects to further the cause of reconciliation. My investigation will reveal not only the effectiveness of these initiatives (through observation and interviews with key players), and whether local government is indeed a valuable partner in reconciliation, but also whether it is possible to achieve reconciliation using "top down" methods. Using action research methods at a grassroots level will provide information to enable comparisons of methods, and may provide a model for future effective and lasting community reconciliation.

The Shepparton Chronicles

XVI. Hang On To Your Hats!

June 2010

Well, “The fun starts now. Officially.” Now I have to DO it. DUHREC has approved my application. So today I have emailed the good news to all the people who have helped me so much over the last few months. I shall now also begin to set up formal meetings. I have sent a copy of the Ethics approval letter to Yorta Yorta as they requested.

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I wrote to Yorta Yorta Nation requesting permission to research in the community. I was summoned to an Elders meeting at the Overlander Hotel Conference Room, Benalla Road, on the coldest day in June. My appointment was at 12 noon, but because of lunch and other agenda items, I did not get to meet them until 2:30 PM. They gave me a good roasting, asking questions such as what would I do with the cultural knowledge I collect. The main impression I came away with was that they did not trust white researchers or government at any level. They advised
me to look up the court ruling on the Yorta Yorta Native Title Claim. This rejection had hurt them deeply.

At the end of the meeting they asked me what I wanted from them. After an hour of being challenged, already my thinking was changing, so I asked if I could get back to them on that question. Subsequently I wrote to them respectfully (I hoped) requesting collaboration in my research. I did not receive a reply.
At present, in my view, we are spending much too much time wading in the morass of our own positionings.\textsuperscript{602} Daphne Patai

Action research then seems a truly appropriate avenue to explore my question, "Can local government create conditions in which Aboriginal culture can flourish?" Action research is both "systematic and structured"\textsuperscript{603} and flexible enough to be designed and molded to suit the community, the participants and the research project.

Using this methodology to design my project now means I intend to

- allow issues to emerge from both local government and the Aboriginal community
- in collaboration with these two groups plan action and evaluate the results
- acknowledge the moral reason for the research as the lack of a "fair go" for our First Peoples which inspired me in the first place
- allow critical reflection to set the direction for the next cycle (spiral)
- assess continually my own role in the project, and my influence on the outcomes
- assess continually the value of this methodology in this project, and also for a possible model for local government relationships with Aboriginal people
- undertake rigorous evaluation of the findings and document it towards a PhD degree.

By using participatory methods I will avoid the invasive quality of much non-Indigenous researchers of Indigenous concerns. Comparing the essential elements of action research with the Indigenist paradigm described in \textit{Fourth Interlocution 4.4} and 4.5.1, there is scope in this approach for the deep listening required to fulfil Steinhauer's "Three Rs" requirements of Respect, Reciprocity and Relatedness. Nevertheless, I am nervously aware that I cannot guarantee that my work will not...
slip back into the "colonialism" paradigm. Wanda Pillow states that “Embedded within the research process are relationships of power that all researchers must face". 604 This is disheartening for me. It infers that I can never be totally in control of my own intentions. Uma Kothari, also, is concerned that the progress of participatory research will be biased towards the normative, and that "the more 'participatory' the enquiry the more its outcome will mask the power structure of the community". 605 However Laura Ellingson uses “the confessional tale”, “to reassure the reader that my findings are thoroughly contaminated. This contamination with my own lived experiences results in a rich, complex understanding of… those whom she is observing and of her own experiences". 606

Linda Tuhuiwai Smith challenges non-Indigenous researchers using "cross-cultural methodology":

- Who defined the research problem?
- For whom is the study worthy and relevant?
- Who says so?
- What knowledge will the community gain from this study?
- What knowledge will the researcher gain from this study?
- What are some likely positive outcomes from this study?
- What are some possible negative outcomes?
- How can the negative outcomes be eliminated?
- To whom is the researcher accountable?
- What processes are in place to support the research, the researched and the researcher? 607

To respond to Smith's challenge, I will try to answer each point she has made:

Who defined the research problem?

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604 Pillow 2010:182
605 Kothari 2001:148
606 Ellingson quoted in Pillow 2010:183
607 Smith 1999: 163 – 182
I did, for reasons I have already addressed, i.e. my outrage at the lack of justice afforded our Aboriginal people, and the statement by the CAR that "Local government is a valuable partner in reconciliation".

For whom is the study worthy and relevant?
The study will work towards my attainment of a PhD degree. It will be useful to the municipality studied, and also the local Aboriginal community.

Who says so?
These assessments have been made by me under supervision from Deakin University, and consultation with eminent Aboriginal people.

What knowledge will the community gain from this study?
Clarification of the relationship dynamics between local government and Aboriginal communities, and possible action based on that knowledge.

What knowledge will the researcher gain from this study?
As above, plus awareness of self and my role in Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relationships, especially how my white worldview influences me. Can this self-knowledge legitimately be extended to interpret white behaviour in cross-cultural relationships? As I have a "developmental history" in common with a large proportion of settler Australians, it is fair to conclude that I will share attitudes with many with similar backgrounds.

What are some likely positive outcomes from this study?
The acquisition of knowledge. Also the possible establishment of a model for partnership based on action research methodology.

What are some possible negative outcomes?
The possibility of perceived exploitation: e.g. the forming of close relationships for the purpose of gathering knowledge may have to be forsaken when the fieldwork period at the research site has ended.

How can the negative outcomes be eliminated?
I do not believe these can be avoided. However, if I am open about my intentions and demonstrate in some way my appreciation at the end of the time, this may help qualify the relationship.

*To whom is the researcher accountable?*

Firstly, to the people I work with, who must be treated with respect and never harmed; secondly to Deakin University in whose name I am conducting my research.

*What processes are in place to support the research, the researched and the researcher?*

Mainly, supervision and regular reviews from Deakin University, and ethics guidance and approval from the Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee (DUHREC).

This does not seem to be a good start. In my responses to Smith's challenge, I can see that I have not fulfilled the first point of my project design, to "allow issues to emerge from both local government and the Aboriginal community". The project is mine, I have identified the problem, and the main beneficiary is me.

I am aware that I have now spent a long time in self-examination; not self-reflection, but a tense examination approaching self-censure. Yet despite my inadequacies, I am convinced this is a worthy project and that collaboration will happen as I get to know the community. Later, an Aboriginal friend laughingly counselled me, "Look, just be yourself. We'll soon tell you if you're wrong."

Of course.

Once again, I had heedlessly assumed the role of the stereotypical "powerful" researcher, attributing powerlessness to my "vulnerable" co-participants. False humility can mask an inherent attitude of white supremacy.

It must be time to stop worrying and just *do it.*
The Shepparton Chronicles

XVII. Things are going very slowly

June 2010

Next week KPC and Melbourne University are presenting an Oration in Shepparton. The eminent Aboriginal academic, Professor Marcia Langton is one of the keynote speakers. Unfortunately I can't attend as I have my Colloquium at the same time. Pity. But I believe the papers will be available.

I will meet with Jonathan next week, same week as my meeting with the new Community Development Manager at CoGS. So I have time to work out what I am asking of both organisations, to start the discussion going. So far I have had suggestions from Jonathan regarding the formation of CoGS policies, and also from the Yorta Yorta Elders recommending I look at the legislation which affects them, also research their Native Title Claim process.

********

I am back in Melbourne from Shepparton to attend the Centre for Citizenship and Globalisation seminar by Dr Steve Tupai Francis at Deakin. Following that seminar I have resolved to have a stronger connection with theory.

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Recommendations from my Colloquium:
Write methodology chapter.
What do participants want? Keep “good faith”.
How can we get things into policy?

July 2010

July has been difficult because of a series of time-consuming and stressful medical tests. An episode of disorientation at the gym led to me having an MRI that revealed "white spots" in my brain. I was given a provisional
diagnosis of multiple sclerosis. Thankfully this was found later to be a misdiagnosis. But it was distressing at the time.

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I had a brief but encouraging meeting with the new Community Development Manager at COGS. She seems keen about my project and has promised to set up another meeting to plan what I can do. A new Aboriginal Partnerships officer is to start soon.

Other meetings seem to go around in circles. Not much has progressed. How can I be more specific in what I can offer? I don’t really know what KPC and other agencies actually do! Discussion is laboured.

“Reconciliation” is not the right word. It hangs in the air like a bad smell. We talk about the pernicious quality of neo-assimilation, how it pervades all policy-making and that to get local government to recognise Indigenous concerns, you have to keep the pressure on, that if you take your foot off the accelerator, everything stops.

I’m finding it hard to break in. Yorta Yorta have not yet got back to me and things are going very slowly. One thing I observe is that it is so easy to talk with people who are like me, such as Council officers. We seem to understand each other instantly. Aboriginal people are suspicious of me. And who can blame them? But it makes it hard. I need to find a way in.
16. Sixteenth Interlocution: The Plan goes awry

*The best-laid schemes o’ mice an’ men*

*Gang aft agley,*

*An’ lea’e us nought but grief an’ pain,*

*For promis’ed joy!*

*Robert Burns*

I became acutely conscious of my own blinkered worldview when my carefully-planned, ethically-approved methodology quickly came unstuck. The *coup mortel* came from a mentor to whom I was describing my proposal to form research groups. Laughing, he exclaimed, "You'll never get Aboriginal people to do that!" I was devastated, but he was proved right. There was no refusal to collaborate with me, simply "no way in". On reflection it became clear that expecting local Aboriginal people to agree to form "groups" at the instigation of an unknown white researcher revealed my lack of foresight and understanding, and my inherent assumption of power, despite my previous careful research. For me to try at this stage to install my planned methodology would involve coercion. Ethically, and under the politics of love, I could not do this. I now realised that becoming known and trusted by the Aboriginal community would take much more time than my year's fieldwork.

Although I had apparently lost the opportunity for collaboration the way I had designed it, I aimed to continue to follow the action research cyclical principle. I had planned, I had acted. I was now reflecting and evaluating. Abandoning the project was not an option, therefore, planning and acting anew, I set out to join in Shepparton community life as much as possible. At the time I viewed this as the only way to rescue my project. Also I was convinced that to gain the depth of knowledge I was looking for I must become part of the life of the community. This then became the shape of my reconstituted methodology. I took the advice of one Elder, who recommended I "show face", observing, participating, growing in knowledge, conversing and making friends with local people in both the Aboriginal community and City of Greater Shepparton Council (CoGS). Two Elders must have sensed my frustration, as they (separately) kindly reassured me that as we got to know each other, it would be alright.

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608 Burns, Robert "To a Mouse, on Turning Her Up in Her Nest with the Plough", November, 1785. http://www.robertburns.org/works/75.shtml Access 10/1/13
I joined the local Shepparton Region Reconciliation Group and felt privileged to assist in organising one significant event, a Reconciliation Week Forum of local organisations focussing on ways to improve their relationships with Aboriginal people. I enjoyed working with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people on this project.

Although I was permitted to observe the activities of KPG and CoGS, a specific role for my participation in these organisations never eventuated. However, over time, I was accepted as part of the community for who I was, and as I now see myself – a white woman researcher, with white ways of thinking. I grew to know and befriend people, and they came to know me. I am now convinced that the knowledge I gained from this reconstituted, messy, very emergent, methodology was deeper and more truthful than anything I could have gathered in the more structured methodology I had previously planned. My methodology was now more like Cowlishaw's model than Hughes'. I participated in many "conversations" with people rather than "interviews". I did not audio-record most of them after I became aware that Aboriginal people were uneasy with this procedure. I did not take many notes, but concentrated on "listening", writing my account at the end of the time and allowing my conversation partner to check my version. I applied this method to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants. By the end of my time in Shepparton I felt I had become part of the community, and that the boundary between my research and every day life had become disconcertingly indistinct.

It is important to note that the people who shared my research with me in Shepparton, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, were professional people of goodwill, committed to the cause of exploring the perplexing question of finding the right way, the right program, the right policy to close the disadvantage gap between Aboriginal people and the settler population. These people are easy to make friends with. Any racism I encountered was more likely to be lack of understanding, thoughtlessness, stereotypical assumptions and lack of respect, than overt or violent. I must also acknowledge that I have been shocked by my own racist reaction in various instances.
The Shepparton Chronicles

XVIII. Searching For The Way In

July 2010

I finished reading Damian Short's book.\(^{609}\) It is an important commentary, although I don't agree that all reconciliation has been a dismal failure. I do agree that the final CAR documents were rather tame, but if Howard had been supportive, the final report may have led to something good. I wonder what would have happened if the Apology had been given in 2001! Short writes from the University of Essex. It's a very thoroughly researched book, although a couple of glaring errors (e.g. confusing Noel Pearson and Aden Ridgeway)\(^{610}\) betray the fact that he does not live in Australia.

August 2010

I have a dilemma. If I give someone an invitation, or request a meeting, and received no response, how many times can I ethically contact that person? Or do I just wait? I am emailing people trying to set up times to meet; leaving phone messages, promising to follow-up. I have decided that this means that if there is no initial response, I can follow up with one gentle reminder, and if that bears no result, look elsewhere.

Friends are trying to be helpful, recommending people I should talk to. Mostly I politely thank them for their advice and do nothing. But there is one person I would like to meet. He may be able to help with advice on how to break through the barrier between me and the Aboriginal community.

********

As arranged, last Thursday I attended two meetings at KPC. I am delighted that I seem to be able to keep up with what is being talked about and understand most of it. But I do feel like a fifth wheel just sitting there.

\(^{609}\) Short 2008
\(^{610}\) Short 2008:138
I had a most enlightening meeting today with the Aboriginal “friend of a friend” I thought maybe able to help me. He is based in Melbourne but knows Shepparton well. I had told him the reason for the meeting was that I need (or felt I needed) all the Aboriginal input I can get. He was very affirming. I’m on the right track, he says, though he did point out (with a laugh) that I was being disrespectful talking to him about the Shepparton Yorta Yorta mob. This set me back on my heels because one of the things I was really concerned about was being disrespectful. But he loves the people I have been talking to in Shepparton, and recommended I contact some others. Get to know them, he said, and build trust. This is encouraging as he is confirming the research design I worked so hard on last year.

**September 2010**

I flew to Brisbane to attend a CARN (Collaborative Action Research Network) study day, at Griffith University. I was definitely an outsider as most people knew each other from work, but I was able to talk a lot with Trish about her research. The facilitator was Eileen Piggott-Irvine, an action research practitioner, who ran the workshop along AR lines. I felt at the end of the workshop that I AM already doing action research—planning, acting, observing, reflecting. I felt better about the contact with Yorta Yorta being so slow after that.

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Last week (6–9 September) I attended the ALARA 8th World Congress. It's very hard to say, in a single description, what you have “brought away" from such a rich experience. Firstly, it was a difficult experience for me, being an introvert, especially as many people had come in groups and knew each other well. The people I did know seemed too busy to talk to me. Nevertheless I encouraged myself to be brave, and I did some productive networking.

I enjoyed the keynote speakers very much, especially Linda Tuhiwai Smith. She was nowhere near as scary as she sounds in her book. She's

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very funny actually. I met with many lovely, funny Aboriginal people from all over Australia.

Although I didn't learn anything “new” to me, I did have a feeling of being at home with the subject. Even though I was an outsider in some ways, I did feel I shared philosophies and goals with these people. It has given me confidence.

Lastly, interestingly, I'm wondering if I should “paint” my vision and methods, the way Indigenous people all over the world do. Alan Rayner, the first speaker, does this, and his paintings are quite impressive. I used to be artistic, so maybe I should give it a go.

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Back in Shep, the first person I approached seemed reluctant to commit himself to our conversation despite assurances of confidentiality in my Plain Language Statement, so we postponed the meeting for two weeks. Meanwhile, I suggested we “collaborate” on our conversation, and both edit the transcript. I haven’t heard whether or not he likes this idea.

October 2010

I attended another meeting at KPC today as an observer. I mentioned to the CEO that I felt like a fifth wheel sitting there, not doing anything, so he suggested that I take minutes for them. I hate taking minutes. However it gives me a function in the meeting and therefore a certain status. It also allows the CEO to participate in the discussion.

The action is intense. It appears to me that there is far more work involved in KPC’s research than it has the resources for. Existing data seems hard to access. I get the impression that government departments guard their databases with flaming swords.
17. Seventeenth Interlocution: Proud, strong family... that's Rumba!

Rumbalara Football Netball Club plays Australian Rules Football, affectionately known as "Aussie Rules", or simply "footy". This is a popular code nationally in Australia, but where it began, in the State of Victoria, it is more than sport, more than entertainment, and could be described as a social obsession. The game evolved some time in the early 1800s, but its origins are vague. It is possible that it originated from English Rugby, Gaelic football, or a similar game the Wurundjeri people of the Melbourne area played, called Marn Grook,\(^{612}\) or a combination of some or all of these, or a completely new game. However, the first Australian Rules were set down formally in 1858. The first match was played between two private schools, Scotch College and Melbourne Grammar School, and matches continued "as a way of keeping the cricket players fit through the winter".\(^{613}\) From then the code grew in popularity in the infant colony of Melbourne, and new clubs formed.\(^{614}\) An entertaining characteristic of the game is its spectacular athleticism, with high leaps to catch or "mark" the ball. Points are scored by players kicking the oval-shaped ball through the centre posts (a goal, worth 6 points) or through the side posts (a behind, worth 1 point). But the most remarkable aspect of this code is the quasi-religious fervour of each club's supporters. Some families have a tradition of supporting a


\(^{613}\) Ibid

\(^{614}\) Ibid
particular club which goes back generations. Woe betide any family member who
switches allegiances!

The major national league is the Australian Football League (AFL) now comprising
eighteen elite professional teams. However, there are many amateur leagues. The
Victorian Country Football League oversees four regional areas in the State, each
comprising a number of leagues, and each league comprising about twelve clubs.
Rumabalara belongs to the Murray Football League of the North East region of
Victoria. Thirteen clubs make up this league.615

The Rumbalara Football Netball Club was formed to "stimulate unity and pride
within the community", and is a project of the heart for its President, Paul Briggs.616
But the history of Rumbalara Football Netball Club consists of constant struggles
with racism, in the community, in the players, and in the local football leagues, who
were reluctant to accept Rumba into their fellowship, with some football
administrators who believed Rumbalara should join an all-Aboriginal football
league.617

There have been Aboriginal football teams in country Victoria for over 100 years. In
1898 the "Cummera Invincibles" from Cummeragunja Mission were part of a
mainstream league. However, they were "considered as 'unfairly strong' and their
league voted in 1932 that no player over 25 would be permitted to play. With most
of its champion players over 25, Cummeragunja resigned from the League".618 From
1946 Aboriginal football players struggled to find a place in a mainstream country
league, experiencing expulsion from one league, and repeated rejection from others
despite their proven ability.619

Rumba now has a place in the Murray Football League in North-East Victoria
region. However, at the time of joining there were protests to the controlling body,
the Victorian Country Football League (VCFL), that the inclusion of RNFC would
"upset the apple cart" of teams already involved. The situation was resolved in 2006

Access date 7/5/2013
616 160611
617 Ibid
618 Tynan 2007:278/279
619 Ibid
when Worksafe\textsuperscript{620}, a sponsor of Murray League, strongly advocated to VCFL that Rumbalara should be accepted.\textsuperscript{621} Rumbalara did well in the 2011 season, achieving second place on the league's ladder, but one Rumbalara member felt that its achievement earned no status for the club in the eyes of the other clubs in the league.\textsuperscript{622} However, the CEO of Rumbalara at the time claimed the club did gain some respect for the smooth running of the canteen at the Tocumwal Grand Final of Murray League.\textsuperscript{623} Small gains.

In an article published in 2007, Michael Tynan uses a study of racism in Rumbalara Football Netball Club and its opposing clubs as a litmus test of attitudes in the wider community, and beliefs about Australian identity and egalitarianism. Tynan draws on data gathered in 1997 to 1999. RFNC provides a pertinent case study, embedded as it is in the major rural Victorian social fabric of Australian Rules football. Tynan found that the normal, but sometimes violent, push and shove of football, and the passionate "barracking"\textsuperscript{624} of Rumba supporters could be interpreted different ways depending on the viewpoint of the respondent. On the one hand, some respondents questioned why Rumbalara had been rejected by so many leagues, inferring that the reason was the excessive aggression of the Rumba players.\textsuperscript{625} This group confessed to being reluctant to bring their families to matches, and related incidences of players who refused to participate in games with Rumbalara because of a "bad experience".\textsuperscript{626} Tynan argues

\begin{quote}
the overarching characterisation of Rumbalara in negative terms ...was strongly influenced by the existence and power of such subconscious iconic images associating Aboriginal people with drunkenness and violence...The unquestioning belief that Rumbalara's exclusion had been justified all these years, and the expectation of violence if they didn't
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{620} Worksafe: a Victorian government agency concerned with occupational safety and welfare. It operates an insurance scheme to compensate injured workers, and runs an inspection program for workplace safety.
\textsuperscript{621} 131011
\textsuperscript{622} 160611
\textsuperscript{623} 131011
\textsuperscript{624} To barrack: an Australian expression meaning to shout loudly and passionately in support of your team, and against the opposing team.
\textsuperscript{625} Tynan 2007:279
\textsuperscript{626} Tynan 2007:283
hold back their competitive aggression in matches, all indicate the existence of such underlying beliefs.627

On the other hand, another group regarded some aggression as part and parcel of the physically competitive game of football, not necessarily related to Aboriginality. Tynan contends that these respondents

can be seen to be drawing on the inclusive and social bonding nature of football—and accepting Rumbalara into the egalitarian community of those that love football and have it as a central part of their daily social identities. Within this context violence is not primarily a negative iconic attribute of Aboriginal people; rather it is an integral part of a sport, which is, in part, relished because of its physical contact and contestation. Thus there is a far more balanced analysis of the inappropriate violence in a match with Rumbalara, a recognition that such incidents are regular (if regrettable) occurrences within the sport across all teams and do not serve as a specific marker of a Koori club.628

The Shepparton Chronicles

X1X. Go Rumba

October 2010

I became a member of Rumbalara FNC in 2010, proudly wearing my new bright blue guernsey with its black, yellow and red stripe, to Home games at the Mercury Drive grounds, yelling "Go Rumba" with my fellow supporters, and tooting my car horn every time the Home Team scored a goal. It was a good old traditional country footy match, with a sumptuous afternoon tea served in the club rooms by the ladies' auxiliary at half time. Ginger fluff sponge was a specialty. However, we629 noticed that at tea, the Rumbalara supporters and the visitors tended not to mix. We experimented, deliberately choosing to sit at a table with Aboriginal supporters. While we were initially welcomed, we were soon left alone on the table. Then, we would be joined by visiting team supporters, non-

627 Tynan 2007:281
628 Tynan 2007:286/287
629 My husband accompanied me to these matches
Aboriginal people, despite the fact I was wearing Rumba colours. This pattern happened more than once. I do not know whether this behaviour was consistent with other clubs and their visitors, but I suspect not. I mentioned this to others. One (Aboriginal) person agreed that "There is little if any socialisation in the club rooms between Rumbalara members and other teams." However, Jason, a sporting club official, agreed with my account of awkwardness between Rumbalara Aboriginal supporters and supporters of visiting teams, but asserted that this is not so between the teams. He noted that racist jibes in football were mainly in the junior ranks, and suggested that it may be an extension of attitudes accepted at school. One of Michael Tynan's participants also agrees that racism concerning Rumbalara is "more the younger brigade trying to live up to something" but that it was being curtailed by "last year's support staff... they were on the ball". A Shepparton Councillor suggested that Rumbalara should make a greater effort to be hospitable at Home games, deliberately sitting with the visitors and making conversation. This would indeed be a positive move as I noticed that neither side appeared to attempt social contact with the other. On the other hand, Jason noted the absence of the Council at Rumbalara. He claims that although the Mayor has attended many events, senior staff members of CoGS have been conspicuously absent at RFNC games. Consequently opportunities have been missed to promote Rumbalara Football Netball Club to the wider community. This criticism of Shepparton Council is supported by Tynan's study, which has found that many of the stereotyped beliefs by members of Aussie Rules football clubs, and by implication, the wider community, stems from ignorance; and this ignorance "provides a major barrier to understanding the complexities of the situations on which they are passing judgment". Jason maintains that Shepparton mainstream community needs to be proud of their Aboriginal people and their
achievements, of which Rumbalara Football Netball Club is a prominent example.\textsuperscript{636}

### 17.1 A healing experience

In his study, Tynan revealed "how much more comfortable Kooris are playing for Rumbalara in contrast to mainstream clubs where, while welcome because of their skills, they are often marginalised socially, including becoming the targets of unsubstantiated allegations when problems arise."\textsuperscript{637} Tynan's participants also believed that the female netballers prefer to play for Rumbalara in a comfortable and culturally safe environment.\textsuperscript{638} In mainstream clubs in this league Kooris were not invited to sit on committees.\textsuperscript{639} Another Rumbalara official pointed out that this is the culture of Australian Rules football. He maintains Aboriginal players are also exploited in the AFL. Their playing skills are celebrated, but after their playing career is over, there is no secondary career in areas such as coaching or executive.\textsuperscript{640}

Jason sees Rumbalara as an important healing environment. He claims that an alarming number of Aboriginal families in Shepparton live with violence. Jason attests that these families have no vision for the future. There is long-term, sometimes life-long unemployment. The children of these families seek the company of their peers for support, which sadly can sometimes be a source of criminal activity. Transitions from primary to secondary school and then University are problematic. Jason has observed that RNFC is a place of respite from this distress. Young men preferred to play for Rumba as they feel they are valued. In other clubs they are valued for their playing ability, but are excluded socially.\textsuperscript{641}

Tynan concluded that "it is clear that within contemporary Australian society there remains significant antagonism and ambivalence to the expression of contemporary Koori identity" but that RFNC "has become a significant cultural site from which to make conscious and challenge some of the more destructive aspects of Australian

\textsuperscript{636} 080312
\textsuperscript{637} Tynan 2007:289
\textsuperscript{638} Ibid
\textsuperscript{639} Ibid
\textsuperscript{640} 160611
\textsuperscript{641} 080312
egalitarian and white nationalistic values". RFNC has partnerships with private and government bodies. The City of Greater Shepparton is one of these partners.

The Shepparton Chronicles

XX. Getting To Know People

October 2010

Harold is a hard man to pin down, but when you get him, his insights are gold. We talked for about half an hour this morning with the promise of more later, if I could find him (which I couldn't). Nevertheless, he gave me plenty to reflect on.

We talked about assimilation; how education and jobs, while necessary for survival, and for self-respect, absorb young Aboriginal people inexorably into the white culture. White governments dole out the benefits of “our” culture. Democracy doesn't work for Aboriginal benefit. Co-management of Barmah forest is still under control of government. Governments try to “fix” Aboriginal disadvantage–family violence, substance abuse–by “intervention”, without considering that its cause is the absence of vision for the future. Harold sees no vision for the future for Aboriginal people in Australia. Elders may be angry and outspoken, but without vision they have little power.

The relationship between Aboriginal people and governments at all levels is still based on welfare and granted rights. Inherent human rights are not considered a priority. A Treaty would recognise those rights and the sovereignty of all Aboriginal people over their land. A Treaty would acknowledge the value of Aboriginal people. For Aboriginal culture to survive, it must have economic viability, spirituality and social cohesion.

642 Tynan 2007:290
The white community is considerably prejudiced against Aboriginal people, some openly hostile, most well-meaning, but relying on stereotypes to define Aboriginality.

I ask Harold can local government play a useful role? He replies that local government would need to recognise Aboriginal sovereignty. Policies and opinions need to be constantly challenged.

All that in half an hour!

**November 2010**

While I was talking to Harold last Monday week, my 93-year-old Dad had another fall. He was trying to help Taffy, his beloved elderly Cardigan corgi, whose back legs had collapsed on their regular walk. Instead of calling for help, he tried to lift Taffy onto his walking frame, but fell onto a rockery. “A grazed elbow” was all they told me, but he is in hospital again. I left Shepparton immediately, and by the time I arrived at the hospital in Mulgrave the physician had decided to do a skin graft. Despite my warning, they have been giving him the wicked painkiller, Endone, which once again has sent his brain into a tail-spin. Then they have given him another drug to stop him being aggressive. Last week I was having rational conversations with him, but what I encountered when I walked in that day was an incoherent zombie.

Why do we humans always believe the superficial, the stereotypes? The nurses and doctors do not see the retired manager of a large city bank branch, or a competent musician, organist and choirmaster. They just see a cantankerous old man who keeps undressing and getting out of bed because he doesn't know where he is. Dad's physician says he will not discharge him into anything but high care. My brother and I have been searching for a place for his future. They are all depressing. I am trying to find a place in Shepparton so I can keep a close eye on him.

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When I finished talking to Harold, I had all sorts of reflections running through my mind. Sadly, the events of the last week have supplanted them. If I keep writing, I hope they will come back. I am considering
volunteering to do a presentation at Deakin University Summer School in February. I don't really want to, but I think it will focus my thoughts again. Meanwhile:

_I realise that present government policies originate in neo-assimilationist thinking. What can we do to change this?

How can CoGS move towards recognising Aboriginal sovereignty? Or sovereign “rights” as Harold put it. How can we encourage this to happen?

This, I think, is the question that needs to be raised again and again with local government representatives.

Sadly, Harold's comment about his lack of vision for Aboriginal people confirms the sinking feeling in my heart that I've had since I started this research. I don't have a vision either; and being a whitey, I immediately want to “do” something about it. But it needs to sit in our consciousness for a while. It will certainly inform my thinking and questioning. Damien Short, in *Reconciliation and Colonial Power*, declares that he does not believe any of the efforts towards reconciliation Australia has made have had any effect at all. I have now taken the "R" word out of my thesis title. I no longer believe that Reconciliation is possible. In fact it's a shibboleth—is that the right word? The Truth you have when you're not having the Truth. A "Clayton's" Truth.

One thing I have noticed is my tendency to say “we” in regards to my relationships with KPC, and the Aboriginal people of Shepparton. It's sometimes embarrassing to hear myself say it around people like Harold. Danny says I have gone feral!

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A casual conversation has started me thinking. I was talking to a person who has a very common attitude to Aboriginal people by white people—benign, sympathetic, significant goodwill, but little understanding of what's at stake.
The conversation began with comments about the move by the Federal government to set up a panel to prepare a proposal to include Aboriginal rights in the Constitution. I believe that though this is a positive move, lasting results cannot be achieved in one short term of government. Three years is not enough to change the thinking of the white population.

The person I was talking to queried whether white people have a vision for their culture either. I concede this may be so, but Western culture is individualistic, competitive and acquisitive. Goals and vision would be what ever the most people want. (This is not necessarily democracy. Democracy seeks the common good).

What sort of addition to the Constitution would it be? For only three years' work how could it be more than something toothless and meaningless? I doubt a referendum would support anything more radical. Aboriginal people want a Treaty, with its terms embedded in the Constitution. I can't see this being achieved in three years.

Sovereignty was never ceded, but “land rights” and "native title" are handed down from some government. They can just as easily be taken away by the next government. Policies to benefit Aboriginal people are the same –changeable at the whim of the powerful. Although there are many people of goodwill in government, the policies are largely assimilationist, because whites are blind to cultural difference.

Questions:

Can local government lead the way in designing non-assimilationist policies? Harold says they must acknowledge sovereignty. Is this possible?

How can local government create conditions that allow Aboriginal people to live within the community as Aboriginal people?
The Shepparton Chronicles

XXI. Climbing Out Of The Black Hole

November 2010

My work has stumbled. Over November Dad's condition deteriorated, and he died in the wee hours of Tuesday 16 November. I was with him. It was a release, for him, and me. For him, because he would not have to endure the indignity of high care in a nursing home. For me, because it had been heart-breaking to see that sharp-as-a-tack brain slide into dementia, and also I now know that I won't be getting that call in Shepparton that Dad's had another fall. The funeral, last Monday, was a good send-off, full of the music he loved. I feel satisfied that I gave him all the love and care that was possible in his last months.

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Now I have to find my vision again. I'll start by rephrasing my research question:

What role does (or can) local government play in achieving justice for Aboriginal people in Australia?

Points to consider:

• Does local government have the freedom to be innovative? Or is it bound by fear of consequences, as it appears to be in other levels of government?

• Is Stephen Cornell’s\textsuperscript{643} definition of governance relevant to i) the Aboriginal community, ii) the mainstream community

• What does “justice” mean in this context?

We can never be “postcolonial” in the sense that India and some African countries are, where the invaders left and handed over governance to the locals.

\textsuperscript{643} Cornell 2008
Action research is not only about collecting and analysing data. But it is about change. What if we cannot change anything?

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December 2010

I had a gentle two hours with Maureen, a Yorta Yorta Elder, today. We drank tea on the verandah in the mid-morning warmth, almost, but not quite, hot. Dungala, the River Murray, was looking fat, about to break its banks. One or two mosquitoes buzzed, gently hovering, but they weren't bothersome.

Maureen had not set a time – just roll up, she said. "I'll be there." So I rolled up about 10.15. She introduced me to some other people who were there. I learned that it is already known in the Aboriginal community that someone called Gillian is doing research in the area. I was pleased.

I had met Maureen at various events in Shepparton and was keen to get to know her. My visit with her today was for that reason. I did not want to delve for information or opinion. We chatted about general things and about the work that she does for the community. She impressed me as being amazingly talented. She encouraged me to try to get to know people and let them know me. She promised to help me meet people and keep me up-to-date with events etc as much as she can.

We talked a little about the death of parents. I had been feeling a bit fragile. The early summer warmth, the river, Maureen's gentle humour and even the mozzies were a balm. At the end of the visit, as we hugged each other, I felt I had found a friend.

January 2011

REFLECTION

I wasn't expecting such a devastating sense of loss after Dad's death. I felt like I'd fallen into a tomb-like black hole. I felt as though I was losing my life. Even my beloved research seemed to lose the radiance it once had. I had to whip myself to do anything. I've revised my timelines, and given myself some tight deadlines to get me going, but it hasn't helped. Dad's
pride in me, and his encouragement, seems to have been a big part of the energy I needed. But I guess it’s a process I have to work through. I feel a little better now I have admitted to myself that I am grieving deeper than I thought I would.

My reading this last week or two has stirred my excitement and outrage again. In my black hole I couldn’t remember anything I’d read, so I began to read again the literature that inspired me to do this project in the first place. I’m glad I did. There were things I missed the first time around. I’ve read again Henry Reynolds’ *The Other Side of the Frontier*[^644], and *Why weren’t we told?*[^645] In re-reading these, I found that the ill-treatment of Aborigines over the last two and a bit centuries was not committed by a few rogue racists, but it was a calculated political policy of annihilation, not from Britain, but from the local Colonial authorities. The intention was not only to steal the land from the inhabitants, but to wipe out any impediment to that goal. This does put a new perspective on "reconciliation".

The other book I’m reading supports this view. It is an amazingly comprehensive tome entitled *Aboriginal Societies and the Common Law*[^646] by P G McHugh. Its subtitle is *A History of Sovereignty, Status and Self-Determination*. It focuses mainly on law, but it’s very readable, and follows in detail the changes in political attitude to Indigenous peoples from the 17th and 18th centuries through to the present day. It contains what I believe to be a linchpin quote about Reconciliation. I have used parts of it elsewhere in this dissertation, so I will not repeat them here, but for me McHugh’s most significant statement is that

> aboriginal peoples remained locked inside a history that still kept the onus of adjustment on them. It was the hard reality (and history) from which escape was not possible.^[647]

So here is a good place to start. Reconciliation is not possible. Damien Short agrees the attempt has failed. Harold has no vision for Aboriginal

[^645]: Reynolds 1999
[^646]: McHugh 2004
[^647]: McHugh 2004:323
people. Jonathan says the government representatives “don't get it”. And P G McHugh says it's all locked up.

Great.

I will find out what kind of vision local government and other levels of government have. I am seeing two senior officials from Shepparton Council later this month. I hope that there is not a meeting scheduled for that day. I am learning a lot by taking minutes for these meetings, such as how chaotic and difficult this work can be.

The action research methodology is taking a lot of time to get going, especially with the Aboriginal community. I am halfway through my fieldwork year and have not yet joined the community enough, or formed the trusting relationships, to recruit the action research groups I had intended. Therefore I think it is probably a good idea to get some basic qualitative-style interviews of council officials under my belt.

**February 2011**

It is very hot here in Shepparton. 42° today. I am very tired. I slept 9 1/2 hours last night. Maybe it's the heat, or it may be that I haven't been sleeping well. My mind still replays Dad's last months/weeks/days/hours as soon as I get into bed, no matter how sleepy I've been in the armchair.

But I am reasonably happy with the way my research is going, although I would like a burst of energy so I could catch up. I am nowhere near the stage I wanted to be eight months into fieldwork. But things are moving. I am getting to know people, and I seem to be accepted by most.

I want to tell a story about what happened last week. I bought three beautiful Clive Atkinson\(^{648}\) prints with my inheritance money from Dad, from the Kaiela Gallery. Les, who staffs the desk, is a real salesman and an enthusiastic advocate for his culture, which he does with no guile, or any trace of contrivance. He is a very attractive personality. He urged my

\(^{648}\) Acclaimed Yorta Yorta artist and graphic designer. He signs his work with his Koori name, “Bidja”. 
husband and me to come along to a children's community show, called “Ghost Gum High”. So we did. And it was great fun.

Les's mate, Eric, was playing the didgeridoo for the show, and I was struck by the beauty of the sound. I have heard white people play the didge, and it was nothing like this. A couple of days after this I called into the Gallery. Les was there and so was Eric. I complimented Eric on his playing, and Les immediately grabbed a yellow didgeridoo that was on display and handed it to Eric. For the next few minutes I received a personal recital of the didgeridoo from Eric, a haunting, floating, uplifting sound like I've never heard before. I learned also that Les used to be a didgeridoo maker.

Les then pointed out that Eric was also an artist. Both of them took me on a tour of Eric's, and others', paintings, explaining the symbols, the narratives, the humour. I was transported by their passion and their delight in their stories. I was honoured – no, too heavy a word – "tickled" by their obvious enjoyment of teaching me.

Talking about words: Formal "Reconciliation" words such as “honoured" and "culture" should be replaced by fun words like “tickles" and “dance" and "story". You don't say to a child “come and I'll tell you about our culture". It's the stories that attract.

I have lived in Australia for nearly 67 years. I popped my head out of the womb and breathed Australian air into my lungs in my first breath. Shepparton is a mere two hours' drive away from where I was born. I did not have this delightful experience in a foreign country. Why was this the first time in my life I had happened upon such fun and beauty with Aboriginal people?
18. Eighteenth Interlocution: The City of Greater Shepparton Council (CoGS)

18.1 Defining CoGS

Three municipalities merged in the mid-nineties flurry of amalgamations to form the City of Greater Shepparton: the Shire of Shepparton, the City of Shepparton and Rodney Shire. In Dollery's Wallis' and Allan's scale Shepparton is neither "minimalist" nor "maximalist" therefore would appear to fall into the "optimalist" category by default. However, Dollery has offered these categories as an instrument of debate, rather than as a positivist taxonomy. Therefore I shall use the features of Dollery's "optimalist" councils as a defining, albeit flexible, framework to describe and assess the City of Greater Shepparton Council. This will not be an "in-depth" study of the operations of the municipality, but will help define the "hyphen", the relationship between local Aboriginal people and the Council. This part of the assessment will draw significantly on the way the Council presents itself through its website.

Firstly, to place "optimalism" in context, I shall reiterate Dollery et al's descriptions of their other two categories. Minimalist councils are

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\text{based on the presumption that 'local authorities should adhere to their traditional 'services to property' functions and avoid branching out into either more complex 'services to people' functions characteristic of} \]

\[649\] Dollery, Wallis & Allan 2006

\[650\] Dollery, Wallis & Allan 2006:566
higher tiers of government or any commercial activities that could be undertaken by the private sector'.651

Maximalist councils assume that

local councils represent authentic governments of their defined spatial jurisdictions in their own right and consequently ‘should foster the welfare of the whole community even if this means duplicating work of other tiers of government’.652

Dollery et al point out that this is the category most susceptible to failure653. However, it has comparative advantages, including

‘strong democratic legitimacy, capacity to foster local “social capital” and develop “trust” and co-operation with their manifold “communities”, superior knowledge of local needs, and better ability to “network” with other public agencies, nonprofit organisations and private firms’.654

A comparison of both these modes implies that a combination of the two would create the ideal local government model, and indeed Dollery et al describe "optimalism" as "a moderate ‘third way’"655. Does the City of Greater Shepparton qualify for this category? I shall assess this question in the following paragraphs.

18.1.1 Optimalist municipalities are defined as ‘champions of their areas...

...and as such should take a leadership role in harnessing public, NGO and private resources to promote particular outcomes rather than attempt to fund and operate local initiatives on their own’.656

Launched in 2009, the three-year LEAD project (Localities Embracing and Accepting Diversity) was a coup for the then Community Development Manager at CoGS after an intensive competitive tendering process. Its aim is to understand and eventually eliminate racial discrimination in communities. Shepparton was chosen because of its culturally diverse population. VicHealth657 funded the project for two Victorian municipalities, City of Whittlesea, and the City of Greater Shepparton. The

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651 Dollery, Wallis & Allan 2006:560 Internal quotes are from the NSW Interim Report
652 Dollery, Wallis & Allan 2006:561 Internal quotes are from the NSW Interim Report
653 Dollery, Wallis & Allan 2006:566
654 The NSW Interim Report quoted in Dollery, Wallis & Allan 2006:561
655 Dollery, Wallis & Allan 2006:561
656 Ibid
657 Victorian Health Promotion Foundation
LEAD project emerged from research which demonstrated that racism has a negative impact on health, and that good health is determined by "a number of socio-economic factors which include education, employment, social inclusion and a sense of belonging".\(^{658}\) The project was developed in partnership with the Australian Government Department of Immigration and Citizenship, beyondblue: the national depression initiative, The Victoria Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC), Whittlesea City Council, Greater Shepparton City Council, the University of Melbourne and the Municipal Association of Victoria. A team from University of Melbourne will evaluate the results. These have not yet been made available.\(^{659}\) Ruth, a senior Council officer, attests that LEAD project will provide information on which to base policies (programs) projects, although in itself it is not designed to bring about change.\(^{660}\)

Shepparton Council also works in partnership with the Department of Justice on the Safer City Camera Project, and for a Street Rider Night Bus Service with Victoria Police. The Council has many partnerships with volunteer community groups to produce benefits for the community. It also engages consultants to produce such things as a Heritage Study, and to design a concept for the moribund Dookie Recreation Reserve.\(^{661}\) In the LEAD project, and its willingness to collaborate with other organisations, Shepparton Council demonstrates it has the capacity to be a "champion of its area", and to operate beyond its internal jurisdiction.

18.1.2 Optimalism may be considered as a moderate ‘third way’ ...

...since it marries minimalism (in terms of demands on council resources) with maximalism (in terms of the scope of council objectives). It builds on the solid twin conceptual foundations of contemporary public administration by combining a 'steering not rowing' perspective on the function of modern government\(^{662}\)


\(^{659}\) Ibid

\(^{660}\) 250511


\(^{662}\) Dollery et al 2006a:561
In accordance with the Victorian Local Government Act 1989, Council has drafted a "Council Plan" (2013 to 2017), incorporating their "Strategic Resource Plan" (2013/14 to 2022/23). Council is required to develop a plan every four years, and update it regularly.663 The City of Greater Shepparton's projected financial statement for the next four years is conservative and responsible.664 Its assessment benchmark is the Australian Local Government Association's (ALGA's) definition of financial sustainability:

*A Council's long-term financial performance and position is sustainable where planned long term service and infrastructure levels and standards are met without unplanned increases in rate or disruptive cuts to services.*665

The Draft Strategic Resource Plan is detailed and specific and appears to adhere strongly to the principles of the ALGA's statement.

The Council Plan was developed in collaboration with residents, community group representatives and members of the business community who participated in workshops, feedback via CoGS website, Council staff and Shepparton Councillors.666 An overview of its contents reveals a predictable community responses to questions about its preferred future: rural lifestyle, quiet, pleasant areas, friendliness, no violence or defacing property, parklands and clean public toilets, more shops with better access.667 Its administration and management pattern reflects corporate practice. The CEO's office comprises five directors of portfolios, who oversee eighteen (in all) managers with sub-portfolios. CoGS continues to administer under its own auspices, its library, swimming pool and other sporting facilities, Art Gallery, Museum, and two performing arts spaces. Shepparton Council does not appear to have a specific policy for using public-private partnerships as such, but its


665 Draft Strategic Resource Plan:11

666 Draft Council Plan:2

667 Draft Council Plan:17
activities demonstrate a willingness to enter into partnerships, not only with private concerns, but with volunteer organisations, NGOs and government departments as situations arise. Council consults with its community by various methods, depending on the complexity of the decision. In addition, Council convenes several "Advisory Committees". Councillors are members of these committees.

Shepparton Council's vision for the next decade affirms its classification as Dollery et al's "moderate ‘third way’". Fiscally, it is cautious. Socially, it is engaged with its community. It is not adventurous in either perspective, and although it claims "leadership", it appears to align itself more with its conservative community's preferred quiet life than to embark on any radical place-shaping projects. The slogan "steering not rowing" does apply to Shepparton to a certain extent, with its external partnerships, but Council still administers and "rows" many of its operations.

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668 For example:
1) the "Maude Street bus interchange" requested online feedback only.
2) With the "Ferrari Park Masterplan" feedback was invited on the draft plan by mail or email. Representatives were also available to discuss the plan at a local Farmers Market.
3) The "Tallygaroopna Community Plan", asked for online comments initially, then a survey followed by a community forum. After the Plan was formulated, the community had the opportunity to sight the Plan by supplying contact details. (See following notes for references)

674 Draft Council Plan: 10
18.1.3 **Optimalism in local governance thus envisages municipalities leading and coordinating...**

... coalitions of stakeholders to secure particular outcomes, such as local economic development, using appropriate partnership instruments, like local public-private partnerships.675

The vision for Aboriginal people in the Council's Plan is minimal and vague. Although worded in positive rhetoric, the subject is restricted to sections headed "Cultural Diversity" which includes Shepparton's migrant and refugee settlers. The Plan's emphasis for Aboriginal people is on social inclusion and well-being, but Council shows no inclination to wrestle with the difficult issues such as sovereignty and cultural recognition. It is these last issues that are pertinent to Aboriginal justice. Shepparton Council has the capacity to be a "champion" and a leader in this area, but there is no evidence that this is being considered to any great extent.

However, the appointment of an Aboriginal Partnerships Officer in 2010, a new position, indicates that change is still possible. The stated aims of this position are:

- Create and maintain strong and vibrant relationships between Council and Aboriginal community members and service providers
- Continue to promote and celebrate Aboriginal culture and heritage to the wider community through significant events and programs
- Ensure the Aboriginal community is consulted and represented within Council initiatives.

These aims are too broad to be guidelines, or even a framework, for the incumbent's position. However they can be parameters enclosing the sphere in which he can create his role. This can be beneficial if he regards his role as emergent.676

As yet Shepparton Council does not have a strong "'governing by network’ modus operandi"677 that Dollery et al attribute to an optimalist local government. Nevertheless, its conservative administrative policy, partnered with its growing

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675 Dollery et al 2006:562
677 Dollery et al 2006:562
community engagement, earn its inclusion in this category, rather than either of the other two. However, it is worth noting, as do Dollery et al, that

the Interim Report warns that this approach could ‘simply represents cost shifting by local government onto other players, especially NGOs’. Moreover, it would necessitate granting local authorities ‘far more autonomy in their range of activities, methods of raising revenue and capacity to enter into partnerships’.678

Yet this caution seems hardly necessary when considering the thorough Plan created for Shepparton Council’s future.

The Shepparton Chronicles

XXII. So far, so good

February 2011

Lunch with Ruth from the City of Greater Shepparton was not so much an “interview” as a “conversation”. I am starting to see that words are extremely important; they can block communication as easily as they can enhance it. As Maureen said, “What do you mean by ‘Aboriginal culture’?” I don’t know! Perhaps just the way you want to live. I don’t know. She doesn’t like the word, “collaboration”, but prefers

678 Dollery et al 2006:562
“partnership”. I don’t know that I like that word much either. Maybe it comes down to “friendship”. I really like these people.

Ruth came to my place for lunch. Although I was talking to her in her official capacity, I believe that hospitality is still important to form the right kind of connection with the people I want to work with. It was hot so we had to sit inside. I made an effort to present the kind of lunch I thought she would like: antipasto with a specialty bread from Yea bakery, and a fruit platter. Iced water to drink. I was setting the scene, and I believe it worked. As we enjoyed eating the food in the cool kitchen, we relaxed.

During the course of the conversation we noted that Ruth has a personal policy of working with the community to create policy, not imposing “top-down” propositions. Although she is new, her team already has a “Partnership Plan” (working title) that is not about adding more services, rather it intends to draw existing fragmented services together. The plan entails consulting with the community on a “what do you want from us?” basis, and including the community in the implementation of any ensuing policy.

Ruth reports that her department already engages with KPC, Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative and the local Shepparton Region Reconciliation Group, aiming to create and sustain good working relationships with all agencies and groups concerned with Aboriginal well-being, including for example Ganbina and ASHE679. Her team will be urging CoGS to formulate an official “Reconciliation Statement”. Ruth anticipates her work and the work of her team will complement, rather than overlap, the work of the agencies.

During the course of our conversation I also shared with her some of my thoughts, observations and philosophies. I hope this time with Ruth will be the beginning of a productive working relationship. I like her personally and I think it is reciprocated. I’m impressed with her vision.

21 February. Dad would have been 94 today.

679 See Tenth Interlocution 10.5, also footnote on The Shepparton Chronicles XXVI
Deakin HDR Summer School 2011

My presentation itself was not very satisfactory. But that’s okay, I guess. This was my first major presentation and I misjudged the time. Consequently my major points were either rushed or missed. But a lot of other people made the same mistakes I did, and I learned a lot from watching them and the successful ones, so now I am eager to have another go.

I loved the “metaphor” workshop. I think this may be the way to go when working with Aboriginal people. I will do what I was intending, and buy some watercolours to “paint” my research. The facilitator asked what the metaphors were. Mine is definitely “river”, fat, about to break his banks, the spirit flowing silently but powerfully in the background, no matter what structures are in front of it.

While I was at the Summer School, I heard news that Stephen Iles has been appointed CEO of the new Kaiela Institute. I looked him up on the internet and found he has a background in Economics. I wonder if this is an indication of the direction the Kaiela Institute will be taking.

18.2 How is Council policy made?

A senior Council officer, Mark, explains the process of policy making in City of Greater Shepparton. Because it is so detailed, I have presented this conversation verbatim (with some minor paraphrasing for clarity.)

(My question) Can you give me a rundown on how policy goes through the processes?

Well I guess the first thing is the identification of the need, and that can be through many ... Councillors saying "what about this?" Officers saying "what about this?" Or even coming from the community saying "do this". If it's a recurring type activity or function, then it really should be covered by some form of policy. So I guess there's the initiator for the need for policy. It would then go to the appropriate officer to manage that process and in developing the policy, we would generally have a
discussion with Council in relation to the broader aspects of how they would see that operating; or conversely, there might be other areas where we may not have sufficient expertise..., either within the staff or within Council. So we could actually work with outside assistance, whether it be through consultants or others, to give us some guidance and work with us to put that draft policy together. Once we have a draft policy we would normally then bring that back the Council for discussion, getting their views on the content of the policy – whether they believe that its appropriate, they believe we can resource it. And then once we have satisfied Council with the content of the policy, we would normally go out to public consultation and incorporate the formal consultation... Now just go back a little further to the development of the draft policy – the Council at community level (would) be going to people who have an interest in that policy, whether directly from the Council officers or the consultants having conversations with people who may be interested...

(My question) Does that depend on how major the policy is?

It does. We are talking here significant policy of Council. We are not talking about decisions around individual issues, or something along those lines, which could very well be done under delegation, and may be done with in an existing policy or it's a one-off. ... It's ... about ongoing policies, ongoing matters that Council would deal with, and therefore need a policy in place so as they have consistency of ... moving forward.

So once it's been through that community consultation process – and that may involve individuals coming in and talking to Council if they have a specific view on the policy, which they want to hear (from) Council, (or) they want the Council to hear directly from them. It may involve simply saying that this policy is available for review, come and give us your thoughts. It may involve running community consultation sessions. They are engaging with key stakeholders. There are many forms of community consultation. Once all of that has been finished, the draft and the comments ... are returned to Council for consideration. ...Discussion occurs, the draft is amended accordingly. Then, it is forwarded to ... a formal Council meeting, and Council will then formally adopt the policy. Once it's adopted ... it becomes a Council policy.

(My question) When it's formal policy how does the implementation take place?

It's then returned to the officers. The structure of Council is such that the Councilors form policy and the officers implement policy... Policies might be a policy, it might be a strategic plan. It might be a master plan
for development of a facility. For want of a better word they're all policies of Council and then we make our decisions accordingly. In relation to the KPC, for instance, Council formally adopted (a motion) to support the establishment of the KPC. The Mayor and CEO were identified to be on the KPC Committee. The implementation of that is done through, basically, me. Any actions go through the Community Development Manager and then go through our organisation. Where there are issues of note, I'll report those to Council when we get together on an informal basis, or if it's a significant issue, it would go back to Council via a Council report.

(My question) How does Council policy relate to Local Law?

Local Law ... Local laws are more stringent policies, shall we say, where there are penalties attached to it. So therefore if a council has a local law, it's generally to enforce something, and there's a penalty incurred with that. Now, it's not only restricted to local laws. The same applies under the State Planning Scheme, for instance, the Building Regulations. Where Council wants to enforce a policy with a penalty attached, then it needs to adopt that as a Local Law, and the Local Law then goes through a statutory process in relation to how its developed opposed to a policy. ...If we want to bring in a Local Law, say, to stop people having alcohol on the streets after hours, say after eight o'clock at night, we have to draft up the policy, ...apply what we think are reasonable penalties. We are then statutorily required to put that on public exhibition for a minimum period of time ... Then Council must hear from anybody who wants to be heard on the matter. It then has to go back through the Council meeting. And it becomes part of our regulatory system, which is enforceable under law.

(My question) Who polices it?

We do. Council polices its local law, but we can empower others, and we do empower the local police to enforce some of those local law, particularly in relation to alcohol and also ... to some locations for parking, things along those lines.

(My question) How much autonomy and flexibility does local government have to run its own community considering that you still are fairly locked into State legislation and Parliamentary Acts?

I think there is significant flexibility there. There is no doubt that we work under the rules of the land, ... whether they be State or Federal, but I think they are broad enough to allow us to have great flexibility. There are things that we do at a local level, which actually add value to State
policies. ... The State will look across the state when it is developing its policies. We will then look at how we can build our community in accordance with the State, but perhaps seek ... State assistance to do unique things in our area which are within the context of their policy, but are far more detailed in ... their concept and implementation than the State could ever be. So I think it's still fairly flexible. The limiting factor ... is we have no ability to raise revenue other than rates, so we are still dependent on the State and Federal government for a lot of our funding. About 40% of our funding comes from State and Federal governments.

(My question) So if you wanted to do something really innovative, the State could say absolutely no way, and if you persist with it they can throw you out?

No I don't think they will, I think it would be a long bow to draw that conclusion.

I think where the State looks at getting rid of local governments is when they are completely irresponsible in relation to the financial management of the organisation, and more completely irresponsible (when) a council (is not) listening to the community and the community loses faith completely. I don't think I've seen a local government go for the latter, I have seen a couple go to the previous. No, I think that if the State didn't like what we were doing, ... they wouldn't fund us. But I don't think they would go that far to say stop, no, don't do that, because I think before we went down that track we would have researched what we were going to do, and fully understood what we were going to do and why we were going to do it. Then had the conversation with the State as to why that was the case, and they may disagree with it and not fund it, but again, I think that, I'd like to think that the logic behind whatever it was that was being done was reasonable.

(My question) So there could be a good stoush?

Oh, and there are often robust discussions between the State and ourselves, the Feds and ourselves, local government in general, not only ourselves, in relation to funding of programs and things along those lines.

(My question) I asked one Aboriginal person about what do you want from local government – the answer was "recognise our sovereignty". Now sovereignty is difficult because it involves ownership of land. There is, of course, acknowledgment of traditional owners, but that's symbolic.
So if local government was to say, say about the flats\textsuperscript{680}, OK we want to return that to the Yorta Yorta, Bangerang people? How would you go about something like that?

Well, ... we are not the land owners. The Crown controls the flats, and most of the areas of land that you would be talking about would be Crown Land, although we might own small pockets of it. I think that, I don't think you'd get too far with freehold land anyway. And that's the problem we've got – we don't have any jurisdiction. Now I think the Yorta Yorta has proven how it needs to be done, They need to take a strategic approach. They need to recognise the pockets of land that they would like returned or have management over, and then they need to work with the State Government to identify those. Then much the same as we develop policy, the State Government, I would assume, would do something along those lines and then come back to the community and say, hey listen this is what we're thinking of doing. Would we support it? We'd have to have a look at the land in question and who had a stake in it. ... But we've been very supportive of the Yorta Yorta in relation to the river park, RiverConnect, that's been put in place to look at how to better manage that more strategically and that involves ... Elders from the Yorta Yorta community in developing those plans. I think that it's a matter of where our jurisdiction lies in relation to what we can and can't do.\textsuperscript{681}

\section*{The Shepparton Chronicles}

\textbf{XXIII. Can white people escape our own oppression?}

\textit{March 2011}

Today I gained a first hand look at the “minefield” I learned about last year. I now know that this “minefield" has a name: “lateral violence". As I understand it, this could be defined as "internalised colonialism" where hostile and racist attitudes in the wider community are accepted as valid by the Aboriginal community and used as weapons against each other. I

\textsuperscript{680} The Flats: the Goulburn River (Kaiela) floodplain on the causeway between Shepparton and its satellite town, Mooroopna. The area was occupied by Aboriginal people after the Cummeragunja Walk-off, and accommodates the present site of the Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-op campus. Aboriginal people have a historical connection with this land.

\textsuperscript{681} 270111
talked to a person who has experienced this anguish personally in the Yorta Yorta/Bangerang conflict existing in the region. Sadly, we of the settler community must take much responsibility for this stand-off, having in the past created policies which disrupted family ties and stripped away culture and country. The damage to Aboriginal identity has been immense. In a Romeo and Juliet scenario, my friend and her partner have had difficulties in their family and workplace because each identifies with a different group. Her story brought tears to her eyes and mine.

My friend believes that in the Shepparton region, this delicate political situation has been aggravated by the Victorian State Government’s selection of Yorta Yorta Nation as the Registered Aboriginal Party (RAP). The State Government will deal only with the authorised party. Jeanette Powell is now the relevant Minister in this area since the election of the Liberal/National government. It is anticipated Minister Powell intends to review this arrangement. Whether that will be beneficial or not remains to be seen.

I also learned today that one of the Catholic schools in Shepparton has a program for teaching Aboriginal history and culture to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. However one non-Aboriginal person I spoke to believed that this approach, although praiseworthy, brings no guarantee of producing racial harmony among young people and their parents.

I attended the Reconciliation Group meeting today. I’ve volunteered to be on the committee to plan Reconciliation Week activities. I don’t know how much use I’ll be, but at least I will be involved, I’ll be part of things.

I'm supposed to be writing, but I can't. Something is wrong; more than the fact that I am not feeling well.

I had the brilliant idea yesterday of portraying the British invasion as a tsunami. I guess I was inspired by the disastrous events in Japan. Poor Japan. Well, the metaphor lasted for 199 words then petered out. It sounded so lame and contrived. Not only that but my dictation computer program thought I said, "The British invasion swept in like a salami"!
As Mark recommended, I downloaded the CoGS Community Development Framework. Certainly an impressive document. It doesn't mention Aboriginal people particularly, but the plans and strategies in the document will surely benefit the whole community if it is followed in the way it's described. It has the usual terms, “best practice” and “excellence” and all the corporate lingo, a result, I guess, of how NPM now drives local government policy-making. Mark's comments make me think that Council’s attitude is very similar to that conveyed in the Community Development Framework document, that is, that if you have good community policy, all sections will benefit. Perhaps there is some truth in that.

I also went back to reading (skimming) Edwards Said’s Culture And Imperialism written in the early '90s. The more I read of Said, Bhabha and those guys writing about post-colonialism, the less relevant they seem to what I am doing. I guess they are useful for giving an idea of what the colonial powers were “thinking”, but their “post-colonialism” refers more to India and the African colonies than Australia, Canada, US and New Zealand where the invading cultures still have the power and the government. Issues of colonialism are vastly different in those countries, from those where the colonising power has left.

All these writings don’t seem to gel with what I see here. I admire the policies of KPC and I think the merger with KRIC to form Kaiela Institute will be good. I like the CoGS CD framework despite its flaws.

But you know what’s wrong? It's all too neat! Life is not like that. Life is chaos, with love and hate and anger and rubbing up and down on each other. I know that in the community there is racism, overt and covert. The LEAD program, I believe, will help. But what will happen when it finishes? It's too big a problem for one single program anyway. There is also the Yorta Yorta/Bangerang conflict. How is that going to be resolved?

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682 Said 1994
683 Bhabha 1984,1996
This is why I can't write. My head is chaos. I can't bring it down to neat just yet.

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I was talking to a friend last week, who has lived in Shepparton all her life so knows where the bodies are buried. She said there used not to be such a divide in the district (between whites and Aboriginals) as now. I'm not sure whether this indicates an improvement or not. In more peaceful days it may have been more accepted that Aboriginals were second-class citizens and therefore overlooked.

Kaiela Institute is now operating, although the final steps in its existence have yet to be taken. There have been staff changes. This means my arrangement with KPC would need to be renegotiated with KI. Perhaps that door is now closed.

I have talked further with Jonathan and it is worth noting that he is sceptical about Council being able to formulate policy as the community wants. He believes CoGS is tied up with legal constraints684. At least two people have previously told me that agencies have to keep driving Council for action. I wonder if this is related to the fact that CoGS really has no definite policy regarding Aboriginal people. Policies are lumped in with the general community development and "cultural diversity".

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Today I'm another year older.

As I have been writing, I felt there has been something "wrong" in what I found out so far. My research seems "lop-sided", focused on local government and KPC/KI and their policies and programs that are frequently inclined to be rather self-congratulatory in nature. The CoGS CD department policy of "asking what they want" is promising, and worth following, but can slide into the old "we know best" ways of thinking.

But I have encountered something that feels "right". A meeting was held last Monday night at "Kids' Town" on the causeway to workshop and talk about setting up the "Healing Centre", with traditional healing methods. It
will be established by Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative under the auspices of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Healing Foundation. This was an initiative of Jenny Macklin’s Department after the 13 February 2008 Apology by the then Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd. It is now run by Aboriginal people.

The workshop was facilitated by Aboriginal presenter, Karen Milward. She asked questions of the audience and the various headings, e.g. what should the centre look like? Where should it be? What kind of traditional healing would you like to see there? etc. There were a few of us white people there, and I was pleased we all had the good sense to keep our lips buttoned.

Those present seemed quietly pleased by this venture, acknowledging their need for deep healing. It was a major concern to the audience that the young people were slipping away. Some youngsters did a dance at the beginning of the meeting, but sadly I missed it. I was late.

The most significant thing for me was the observation that most did not know very much about their own traditional healing. Only the older ones remembered remedies such as emu oil. One younger audience member sighed, “We need teaching, too."

I renewed my acquaintance with the “friend of a friend” whom I talked to in Melbourne last year. He is involved in this initiative nationally. It was good to catch up with him briefly again. He has such a sense of humour. I said I hope this venture could be sustained. He reassured me that it would because it was being supported by the Foundation.

Being there made me ache to be part of it, but of course I can't. If they can achieve healing in their Community, perhaps they can teach us how it’s done. God knows we need healing, we whiteys. The oppressors need liberating as much as the oppressed. As Paulo Friere says, "It is only the

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685 Jenny Macklin MP was then Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs in the Australian Government

686 The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation
oppressed who, by freeing themselves, can free their oppressors. The latter, as an oppressive class, can free neither others nor themselves.\textsuperscript{687}

18.3 **Community Development Framework**

*Council and Community: Working in partnership to build strong, vibrant and engaged communities that value and support people in Greater Shepparton.*\textsuperscript{688}

Community Development Framework

Aligned to the Council Plan\textsuperscript{689} is CoGS' *Community Development Framework*, a proud initiative based on a model developed in Seattle titled "Asset Based Community Development" (ABCD)\textsuperscript{690} in which the "assets" are the people and their knowledge and skills.\textsuperscript{691} It is one of several strategic plans, but relevant because it "forms a starting point for Greater Shepparton City Council where further consultation and decision-making can be planned and implemented."\textsuperscript{692} However, the term "consultation" needs constant redefining. As Hartz-Karp expresses it

*Community consultation—often regulated in Australia, particularly in the areas of planning and the environment—has fallen into disrepute,*

\textsuperscript{687} Freire 1970:38
\textsuperscript{688} Greater Shepparton Community Development Framework 2010:1
\textsuperscript{689} Greater Shepparton Community Development Framework 2010:9
\textsuperscript{690} Greater Shepparton Community Development Framework 2010:30
\textsuperscript{691} 270111
\textsuperscript{692} Greater Shepparton Community Development Framework 2010:10
maligned because it is a ‘DEAD’ (Decide, Educate, Announce, and Defend) process. She maintains that the community may regard substitute terms such as "community engagement" as simply more of the same, with little opportunity to genuinely contribute to policies that affect their lives. However, Shepparton Council's Community Development Framework seeks to address this.

A "framework" is not a set of guidelines or rules. A frame by nature provides boundaries, and definition, or like scaffolding, supports and shapes the practical work being done. The Community Development Framework is a visionary, rather than a statutory, document, and should be evaluated as such. The introductory quote (above) shows that, in common with other Victorian municipalities, Shepparton Council is now embracing more human values than local government has in the past, especially in the NPM era. It is not a major concern at this stage that the community may not share the vision of being "strong", "vibrant" and "engaged". Council has a leadership role, and can and should operate strategically within the spirit of the Framework document. However, the City of Greater Shepparton's Community Development Framework is such a "blue sky" document, it is in danger of being irrelevant. Its objectives appear unrealistic within the set timeframe of four years. Its text is hyperbolic to the point of meaninglessness, and language such as "leading edge" and "best practice" reveals its lingering corporate, rather than democratic, basis.

18.3.1 ABCD methodology

It is questionable whether the ABCD methodology is appropriate for a community like Shepparton. The strategy is purported to be an alternative to a "needs-based approach" to Community Development. Alison Mathie and Gord Cunningham claim that "the appeal of ABCD lies in its premise that people in communities can organise to drive the development process themselves by identifying and mobilising existing (but often unrecognised) assets, thereby responding to and creating local economic opportunity." However, even if the Development strategy emphasises the positive

693 Hartz-Karp 2007:1
694 Hartz-Karp 2007:1
695 Greater Shepparton Community Development Framework 2010:29
696 Mathie & Cunningham 2003:474
rather than the negative, there must be a specific "need" in the community to prompt the project in the first place. Mathie and Cunningham refer to ABCD cases in poor neighbourhoods, and those by NGOs in communities in developing countries.\textsuperscript{697} Their circumstances are far different from Shepparton's.

The Asset Based Community Development strategy relies on social capital, defined by Mathie and Cunningham as "the store of goodwill and obligations generated by social relations"\textsuperscript{698}, to drive development. In this aspect its approach corresponds to post NPM trends towards more community-based governance. It is also in accord with the optimalist principle, "leading and coordinating coalitions of stakeholders to secure particular outcomes"\textsuperscript{699}. However, the application of this methodology will not necessarily achieve its own aims, and I believe this to be the case in Shepparton.

ABCD advocates:

- \textit{Appreciating and mobilizing individual and community talents, skills and assets (rather than focusing on problems and needs)}.
- \textit{Community-driven development rather than development driven by external agencies}.
- \textit{Mapping the capacities and assets of individuals, associations and local institutions}.
- \textit{Building a community vision and plan}.\textsuperscript{700}

I will address these points in turn.

18.3.1.1 \textit{Appreciating and mobilizing individual and community talents, skills and assets (rather than focusing on problems and needs)}.

Greater Shepparton is a conservative community. Its elected representatives in both houses of Federal and State governments are all from conservative political parties. Their seats are in no danger. Judging by the response to the Council Plan's community surveys, the people of Shepparton use the same criteria to elect local Councillors. Change is not high on the agenda of the mainstream Shepparton community. Peaceful suburbs, well-maintained infrastructure and access to shops are

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{697} Mathie & Cunningham 2003:477 \\
\textsuperscript{698} Mathie & Cunningham 2003:479 \\
\textsuperscript{699} Dollery et al 2006:562 \\
\textsuperscript{700} Greater Shepparton Community Development Framework 2010:30
\end{footnotesize}
Questions arise: What "development" is needed? What are we mobilizing talents, skills and assets for?

18.3.1.2 **Community-driven development rather than development driven by external agencies.**

For development to be community-driven, it must be community-engendered. Any other strategy is an imposition. Questions that arise from this point are: Whose project is this? The community's, or the Council's? What need was perceived?

18.3.1.3 **Mapping the capacities and assets of individuals, associations and local institutions.**

The term, "mapping", originally referred to a diagram of part of the Earth's surface. Recently the term has been kidnapped by the corporate sector to refer to graphic presentations such as a flow chart that depicts an organisation's resources and activities. In this case, without due care of the humans being "mapped", "individuals, associations and local institutions" may be reduced to an "asset" on a flat, dehumanised chart.

18.3.1.4 **Building a community vision and plan**

Mathie and Cunningham declare that, "If ['community'] is used casually, ... the term can create the illusion that people in a particular location, neighbourhood, or ethnic group, are necessarily cooperative, caring, and inclusive. The reality may be very different, as power differentials in gender, race, and class relations may result in exclusion, and threaten the apparent cohesiveness of the group in question".\(^{702}\)

Nevertheless, despite my criticisms, a municipality that does not have a vision and a plan for its people is letting its community down. Even if the community is happy with the status quo, an optimalist Council must have a vision of how this could be sustained, or better, and take a lead on how this can be done, or at least provide opportunities for further exploration. Shepparton Council has done this with its Council Plan, the Community Development Framework and its other future-focused documents. However, these must be under constant review in praxis to be truly engaged with the community. If this is not undertaken, it becomes the Council's own project, a gentler, but none the less toxic, version of governmentality.

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\(^{701}\) Draft Council Plan:17

\(^{702}\) Mathie & Cunningham 2003:475
18.4 **Does the Community Development Framework benefit Aboriginal people?**

Shepparton is a pro-active "optimalist" Council, but there has been little specific attention to the Aboriginal community in City of Greater Shepparton policy. As with other CoGS documents, the Aboriginal community hardly rates a mention in the *Framework*. In its thirty-five pages, a search revealed no incidences of the word "Aboriginal" and only one "Indigenous". There were five references to "cultural diversity".703 As one Council official maintained, if good policies are made for the whole community, they will benefit the Aboriginal community as well.704 He pointed out that Aboriginal people must make their own decisions. However, other Council staff believed it is important to work with the local Aboriginal community to know "what they want" 705.

18.4.1 **Paternalism in government practices**

In their 2005 study of government health practices in a remote Northern Territory Aboriginal community, Danielle Campbell, Paul Wunungmurra and Helen Nyomba question whether government departments are able to practise community development, and I interpret this to include local government as well.706 The study revealed the inherent belief held by non-Aboriginal professionals that Aboriginal people were incapable of contributing to the resolution of their own problems, despite the fact that one of the aims of the project was empowerment of Aboriginal people.707

A similar paternalistic mindset is evident in a recent "top-down" initiative by Federal and State government. In its 2011-12 Budget, the Australian Federal government announced a "Place-based Income Management" program to be trialled at five centres, of which Shepparton is one.708 Although the program does not specifically target Aboriginal people, the terms of reference make it clear (e.g. people "vulnerable to financial crisis"), that Aboriginal involvement is unavoidable. In the

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703 Greater Shepparton Community Development Framework 2010
704 270111
705 250511
706 Campbell et al 2005
707 Campbell et al 2005
708 Centrelink website
program, portion of welfare payments are channeled into accounts and can be used only for essentials such as food, clothing etc. According to an article in "The Australian" newspaper, this trial comes as a surprise to the Shepparton community.709 The mayor and the CEO of the Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative are quoted as saying they were not opposed to the project per se, but that "it needed to be done in 'a respectful manner' and Centrelink should partner with community agencies".710

The happy outcome of Campbell's et al project was that the Aboriginal people subsequently acted without the non-Aboriginal professionals and as a result, "Aboriginal participants designed and implemented a health action strategy that has been sustained several years after project completion". Campbell et al conclude

The power inequalities inherent in the relationship between government departments and marginalized groups means there are intrinsic challenges when they seek to do community development in partnership. However, the evidence of the futility of top-down government-led interventions means they cannot simply opt out of doing community development.711

Campbell et al believe that rather than abandon attempts at community development, governments can learn how to do it properly, by,

i) (being) willing to share power in decision making, not just responsibility.

ii) training staff in community development.

iii) funding and facilitating community development processes over adequate timeframes and by providing resources to implement community solutions.712

This approach shows respect for the skills and knowledge of local people, treating their attributes as "assets", similar to the ABCD method, as governments focus on

710 Felicia Dean CEO Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-op quoted in Rintoul 2011
711 Campbell et al 2005:164
712 Campbell et al 2005:163/164
what can be done, rather than on a "needs-based", hand-out solution. However, Mathie and Cunningham caution that if the practice of ABCD is co-opted by the NGO sector and delivered to communities, there is a real danger that the strategy will be discredited as a self-serving initiative for external agencies\(^{713}\).

This implies that ABCD strategies, if successful in practice, are in danger of being accepted as canon, and harden into the "old" inflexible, inwardly-focused institutionalism.

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**The Shepparton Chronicles**

**XXIV. Getting it together**

*March 2011*

I am now three quarters of the way through my fieldwork year, and it is obvious to me that although I have made some genuine friendships with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Shepparton, I will not be able to carry out the research as I had planned it. There is simply no motivation in the community to join formal groups arranged by a white researcher, a stranger to the community. However, I believe I have gained extensive knowledge in the work I have been doing. Can I call it action research? I doubt it, although I am still using the principles of the "plan, act, reflect and analyse" cycle. The reason I don't think I can call it action research any longer is that AR is essentially collaborative, and my research seems to have become predominantly auto-ethnographic. Nevertheless, despite the fact my methodology has changed, my default research methods have been effective. This is not "data-gathering", nor do I want to call what I have accumulated "information". Over the last year, my life and my research have melded together. What I have gleaned is "knowledge", but deeper than head knowledge. Can I call it "understanding"? I have had a few "aha" moments, but how can I

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\(^{713}\) Mathie & Cunningham 2003:484
"understand" what I have not lived all my life? Sharon Todd says, “When I think I know, when I think I understand the Other, I am exercising my knowledge over the Other, shrouding the Other in my own totality. The Other becomes an object of my comprehension, my world, my narrative, reducing the Other to me.” Jones and Jenkins say understanding is not necessary in the “hyphen”. So what is this knowledge that I have gained? I am reluctant to define it, except to say that when you make a friend your knowledge grows. I have made friends in Shepparton. I have made friends with Shepparton. Shepparton has been my second home for almost a year now.

But I return to Jones and Jenkins and the “hyphen”. I take their writing to heart as a validation of my emerged methodology, yet to be defined. As a dweller at the “hyphen” I am still an outsider, but I am also now an insider, with an insider's knowledge. I'm encouraged.

April 2011

I think my head is finally taking shape. Here's what I'm thinking:

1. Reconciliation: not possible to re-concile, when the relationship was distracted from the start. We need to start from scratch. "Peace-making" may be a better expression.

2. Closing the gap: Okay as a remedial policy. Restores equity in health, education, employment, housing and justice. This is the focus of most Shepparton organisations–KPC, KL, and even Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative. Even the local Reconciliation Group focuses on this. But how is it different from Howard's “Practical Reconciliation" which was not reconciliation at all? These things are the right of every Australian by virtue of citizenship. Presenting it as “Reconciliation" is avoiding the issue.

3. CoGS has the attitude that if we develop the whole community, Aboriginal well-being will improve. This is partly true, but not enough. Its inclusiveness policy lumps Aboriginality in with multiculturalism. They

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714 Sharon Todd quoted in Jones & Jenkins 2008:479
715 Jones and Jenkins 2008
assert that they have a good relationship with the local Aboriginal community, but have (as yet) no particular policy for Aboriginal people.

4. **This is not enough.** This is not reconciliation. This is not peace-making. Patrick Dodson has said Reconciliation must be spiritual. Aboriginal people do not deny spirituality in the way white people do. At stake are issues of

- Sovereignty, and relationship to country
- Social Inclusion and Identity, what it means to be Aboriginal in a predominantly white society. Where does the community and culture fit in, not just individuals?
- These issues have not been addressed in relation to policy-making.

5. "Whiteness", how the invasion is continuing, mainly because there are so many of us. This issue has not been addressed in relation to policy-making.

**May 2011**

Richard's (CoGS) *modus operandus* is similar to mine – start by forming friendships and trust relationships. Then what? Well, he's only been in the job for a short time. Richard's aim is to "strengthen relationships" (which is part of his brief). His approach is pretty much what I think he should be doing. Is he going to be allowed to continue in this way, or will there be pressure for him to produce "outcomes"?

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It's been over a month since I last recorded my reflections. My last reflection in this journal was the belief that I had it all together. Well, looking at that now, the edges are already blurring. I think I have to look closer at *Closing The Gap*, as well as what is beyond. I think I have fallen into the trap of prejudice i.e. pre-judging. I have been reading a 2001 paper by Peter Sutton, an anthropologist from University of Western Australia, whose take on, say, the NT Intervention is very much this: if child abuse is allowed to continue in Aboriginal communities but not in

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716 Dodson, P. 2000:13
mainstream Australia, that is discrimination. He perceives the family violence that exists in remote communities may have its roots in pre-colonial times, although then it would have been controlled, but then distorted through dispossession and later policies up to the 1970s. He sees this as the root of the violence rather than poverty, alcohol and drugs, although these have exacerbated the problem. He believes, as does Noel Pearson, that the solution is economic.\footnote{Sutton 2001}

I do not agree with much of what Peter Sutton writes. The alternative to failed self-government or self-management projects is not more of the same government policies or intervention, it is surely collaboration or “partnership”. But it pulled me up to have my assumptions contradicted. Government policies have not worked up until now, so I have assumed that Closing The Gap won't either. I have been sure that friendship is the answer, that we are here together in a situation not of our own making (for the most part), so how do we make it better? I still hold this view, but now I realise I must delve deeper to support my view.

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A few weeks ago I volunteered to be on the committee organising Reconciliation Week for the SRRG (Shepparton Region Reconciliation Group). Not so much a marathon as a sprint! My experience working on this project with these amazing people was a highlight of my fieldwork in Shepparton. Unfortunately I have not been given permission to record the operations of this group. Suffice to say I was working with highly intelligent, professional people, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. I believe by working together we achieved respect and love for each other that we could not have found any other way.

I've decided I would like to finish the bulk of my fieldwork by the end of August, leaving a few months until the end of the year to tie off some loose ends. I now have a broad “overview”. It is an interesting situation – so many new things. Kaiela Institute is new. Three senior members of staff in the CoGS Community Development Department are new. Is this good for progress towards Aboriginal justice?
18.5 Day to day Community Development in Shepparton Council

Each Council is different in commitment to Community Development. CoGS has the benefit of a good CEO and engaged Mayor and Councillors.

Ruth, Council officer

18.5.1 The Arts as community builders

The CD department uses artistic projects to enhance and consolidate community spirit. In 2010/11 this involved a multicultural arts festival supporting newly emerging artists, and commissioning local artists from all communities for special arts projects. Projects span all arts areas—visual art, music and performing arts, installations etc. The current project aimed at broadening community relationships is RiverConnect, in which a representative of CoGS joins members of the community on a working party to bring it to realisation.\(^{718}\) RiverConnect aims to promote the Goulburn and Broken Rivers as "the life and soul of the Shepparton-Mooroopna communities".\(^{719}\) Carol, a Shepparton Councillor, maintains that there is "a burgeoning recognition of the value of the local [Aboriginal] culture". She believes that tourism is a way of raising the status and the confidence of the Aboriginal community. She would like to see Mooroopna as "an Aboriginal town", full of art, performance and other community arts, although she acknowledges she has met with "some reservation within the Mooroopna community".\(^{720}\)

18.5.2 Community Development staff

Officers of the CD department are concerned that the workforce profile of CoGS does not reflect the community profile. However, they intend to work with ASHE, under the LEAD project, to engage training providers especially in the “outdoor” and children's areas, with a view to encouraging true pathways to employment in both the Aboriginal and the new communities in Shepparton.

In my conversations with various CoGS senior officers, I found them to be highly competent, caring people. The Community Development Manager found it difficult to define her role, and she was hesitant to be specific about her Department's operations. I did not interpret this as the CD Manager being evasive or inept, rather I

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consider it indicated a willingness to be flexible, not tightly defined. She describes her team's focus as “broadening” partnerships—with the Bangerang people as well as Yorta Yorta Nation and especially the Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative.

The newly appointed Aboriginal Partnerships Officer's approach is similar – start by forming friendships and trust relationships. I asked what was the next step? His answer also was vague and understandably so; he has been in the job for only three months. He is observing, waiting for issues to arise. He explains, "In the past a lack of trust has come from lack of involvement and interaction between the two parties". He says his aim now is to "strengthen relationships", which is part of his duty statement. He is aware there was controversy over the lack of consultation with the Aboriginal community regarding his appointment. As one Elder claimed, "It was a mistake to appoint a young non-Aboriginal person as Aboriginal Partnerships Officer, but this is an example of the short-sightedness of CoGS. He is a likable and intelligent young man but has no idea what he is getting himself into". Another Elder pointed out that he is also "at a disadvantage in not having inherent knowledge of Aboriginal culture", although paradoxically, being non-aligned may be an advantage.

I asked the CD Manager, "what will be the benchmarks when I ask about progress at the end of the year?" She declined to answer immediately, promising to think about it and get back to me. When allowing a relationship to develop, is progress measurable? Perhaps this question is better answered in hindsight. However, the Community Development Framework nominates the annual State Government Local Government Annual Survey – Indicators of Community Strength as a reliable measure of the success of community initiatives. The Survey conducted in 2008 shows that the Shepparton community is mostly satisfied with the operations of Council, although only about half responded that they participated in community

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724 Greater Shepparton Community Development Framework 2010
activities. There were no questions regarding the relationship with local Aboriginal people in the survey.

Community Development as a policy in the City of Greater Shepparton appears to be still in its formative phase. The Community Development Framework was drafted as recently as 2010. Adhering to the spirit of the Framework, these Council officers seem determined not to be tempted to impose a "top-down" policy short-cut, but are prepared to do the important but time-consuming groundwork of relationship-building, from where initiatives are expected to arise. Because of the non-prescriptive nature of the Framework, and the flexibility of the ABCD strategy, Council has the freedom to design programs and policies pertinent to the Shepparton community. Once again, I enquired about legislative limitations on the liberty to develop as the Community wants. The answer from Council officers was that "there are ways of working around State legislation." Jason, however, disagrees, "Government has made a big investment in Shepparton, and wants to see a return for its money. The constant need to account for every penny limits initiative and innovation".

18.6 The Treasure on the Edge of Council: The Shepparton Library

The Library is part of the Council but works independently. There are a number of projects and proposed projects at the Library, one being "Words on Wheels" run by the two Aboriginal staff at the Library who work one day a week each. This project involves stories being taken to housebound Aboriginal people to provide cultural context and connection. Kathy, one of the Aboriginal staff, says that her work at the library can be lonely when she is the only Aboriginal person there. She remarks that there is a lot of work to do, to bring people together with stories, or take the stories to the people.

Mary, a Librarian, maintains that the local Council is the only level of government that can have a personal relationship with the community. She explains that the focus of the Library's work with Aboriginal people in the Library is “partnership”, as with

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other Council departments. Partnerships can be enhanced by Library policy. Shepparton Library has an extensive collection of local history texts, and a section devoted to books dealing with Aboriginal issues. A major function of the Library's partnership with the Aboriginal community is that books for the Aboriginal section are purchased in consultation with Aboriginal Elders of both Bangerang and Yorta Yorta communities.

Mary reports that there are proposals in process for new projects. One such plan is for regular morning teas in the Library, like the "Bush Tucker Morning Tea" that I attended in NAIDOC week\textsuperscript{728}, where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people mixed for "just hanging out", eating crackers with bush tomato dip, and scones with jam made from native fruits. A regular “yarning/story circle” is being considered, where Aboriginal people could meet for informal conversation, and non-Aboriginal people could join in if they wish. This informal contact is the essence of the dialogue of equals. It creates friends. Mary remembers bus trips to places like Koori Heritage Centre in Melbourne, where sitting beside people in the bus led to deeper friendships. But "it costs money".

My conversation with Mary has inspired me to think that it could be a Library-led Reconciliation. The fly in the ointment is that it is still white organisations doling out benefits. We have the money. Can we get away from that?

\textbf{The Shepparton Chronicles}

\textbf{XXV. Love}

\textit{May 2011}

I had coffee with Liam\textsuperscript{729}, a non-Aboriginal officer from Shire of Riverfield, a suburban/rural community that has a significant Aboriginal population. This conversation was enlightening because it's about two years since I first went to see him, just before I began my PhD project. At that time his

\textsuperscript{728} NAIDOC, "National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee" was formed on Australia Day 1938 in Sydney by a group of Aboriginal people to protest against the treatment of Aboriginal people around Australia.

\textsuperscript{729} 090511
Council's policy was heavily informed by the *Closing The Gap* campaign of WHO/Oxfam/COAG. Now he has come to a "where to from here?" point of looking at what direction to head, and what role local government can play. He has an Aboriginal advisory group to assist him in this exploration. His approach is similar to mine in my research. I am impressed that both he and Richard have similar methods – listening, getting to know.

Liam and I discussed how we live now. Past events and policies have brought us to this point but we have to decide what to do in the twenty-first century, whether Reconciliation is possible, and what is it anyway? We agreed that CTG is a beginning but it leaves unfinished business. What is this business? We can't give back the country, yet country is a large part of Aboriginal identity. Liam and his Aboriginal advisors are exploring artistically where they are now. They have engaged the community to construct a "Roadmap of Songlines", using artwork to record cultural and spiritual history. Also, to help repair fractured family and community structures, they have created new categories of belonging – "mountain people", "freshwater people", "saltwater people" and "desert people". These obviously do not replace traditional "mobs", but can be used artistically to heal rifts between groups of Aboriginal people. It may also be useful for healing the bitterness between white and black, or should I say, non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal (very cumbersome terms)

We agreed friendship is important, love, even. Liam said something very important – that when Council makes policies with an open heart, i.e. with love and friendship, it works, or if it doesn't it can be easily changed. If policies are made through fear, they do not have a good effect, and may be detrimental.

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### 18.7 The City of Greater Shepparton Council in 2010

Shepparton Council, like many Victorian municipalities, is in transition, therefore the question arises, "transition from where to where?" Carol believes that
there have been a lot of changes in attitude in these last years. There is not the denial of Aboriginal heritage these days that there was in days gone by. I believe that there are still inequalities there but things are slowly changing.

Mark describes in detail the changes he has experienced in the fifteen years he has worked in local government:

(My question) What changes have you seen over the times from a Council that just collected rubbish and everything?

I think that is a change. I came into local government just after amalgamation, about six months after amalgamation, not to a CEO's position, but in those days local government was your typical roads, rates and rubbish. They didn't have, in my opinion, an understanding of strategic planning. They didn't have an understanding of long-term... (and again it is strategic planning) but more focusing on the financial side of the house. They didn't understand community building or capacity building within the community. They didn't understand about place, and building place, and that's evolved I think in the fifteen years I've been in local government. Certainly it accelerated probably, say eighteen years ago, particularly in relation to that understanding of place and community. I think that strategic planning started to evolve not long after amalgamation so it's been around for a little bit longer. But I think only now are we starting to realise the long-term strategic financial planning side... So I think that the amalgamation of local government brought about revolutionary change. Then there has been evolutionary change in my time over the last fifteen years...where now, I think local governments in general... Serving [in Shepparton] I have been looking ... to make us more strategically focused to better understand place, and to be more focused on our long-term sustainability financially and environmentally.

(My question) So the change from roads rates rubbish to place-shapers, ... came about beside the amalgamation, or as well as the amalgamation?

I think it's an understanding of the importance of place and community capacity. (As) it grew, so did initiatives in those areas, and no doubt a lot of this came out of the north-west of the United States. We currently are working with some people from Seattle to help us understand place better. Now our Community Development Framework is based on Asset-Based Management which is asset being the people, and that's an initiative which was formulated in Seattle.

Just go back to amalgamation – again personal opinion, ... if it hadn't have been undertaken then local government would have been
completely different from what they are now and you wouldn't see the communities developing as they are now, because the organisations wouldn't have the capacity to do some of the programs and run some of the activities that we are running now. I think you only have to have a look at some of the smaller municipalities and see where they are limited in what they can achieve.

(My comment) Yes I think that there were other models that could be considered, but as far as I can see with Shepparton, it seems to be working well?

Yes, look, I think it's working reasonably well throughout Victoria. Now you had that emotional hang up to it\(^{730}\), but at the end of the day, you can argue that the outcome was the right outcome. ...[but] at the time the process could have been much better than ... it was.

\(^{730}\) Referring to the reaction to the amalgamations of municipalities in the 1990s

19.1 On vision for the future

(My question to Mark) One Aboriginal person said to me that he had no vision for the future for Aboriginal people. I would like you to comment. Also, this is a very conservative community, how can CoGS be an advocate for the Aboriginal community with mainstream community here?

I'm sure there are many, many people in the broader non-Aboriginal community that don't have a vision for their community as well. So I don't have a real comment to make, I think that's just the society we live in, where people at times look to others to form those visions. I guess ... it would be improper for me to develop a vision for the Aboriginal community other than the fact that they shouldn't have any disadvantage when compared to the broader community. But how they shape that, that's very much [up to] them.

Which takes us on to the second part of your question. I think that I've indicated now that we have a Community Development Framework which looks at social disadvantage irrespective of who's suffering social disadvantage. But we recognise that the Indigenous community is different to the broader community and we [have] different needs and different history. We are now employing someone to work directly with that community. Getting across to the broader community – we certainly have the acknowledgement now whenever we have a form of public meetings or anything along those lines. The Mayor is very up front in talking about Aboriginality.

Harold, a Yorta Yorta Elder, maintains that

*Democracy does not work to benefit Aboriginal people; neither does corporate governance. Co-management of a forest is "granted" by government, and is still under its control. Governments try to "fix" Aboriginal disadvantage – family violence, child abuse, substance abuse – by "intervention" without considering that its cause is the absence of a vision for the future.*

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731 I have identified Elders. All other participants are non-Aboriginal.
732 Cr Geoff Dobson
733 Refers to the recent agreement between the Victorian State Government and Yorta Yorta Nation regarding management of the Barmah State Forest.
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Christine, a Yorta Yorta Elder whose work includes the well-being of young people, is critical of the Council for having no perceivable employment policy for Aboriginal youth.

A few years ago they were ten traineeships for Aboriginal youth but these did not continue after a year. There were no permanent jobs. One young Aboriginal person was employed in finance sector, but left after a short time, saying he felt isolated. An official said that after the traineeships they could apply for jobs, which they would get if they were good enough. There had been complaints about time off for cultural and family commitments. The attitude was “you can't change the system!”

Similarly, Jason reported that, "Regarding work experience with Aboriginal kids, one Coles executive inferred that 'if it doesn't work, it's your fault'. In other words, we don't intend to change our work methods, no matter how obvious the need is.”

**Summary:** Council has a "hands-off" approach that may or may not be beneficial. Council shows respect by not pretending it can speak for its Aboriginal community, but on the other hand it shows ignorance of Aboriginal issues, expecting policies designed for the general population to be sufficient to cover the needs of the Aboriginal community as well.

### 19.2 On consultation

There have been some significant errors in protocol by governments' lack of consultation with the Aboriginal community regarding matters that affect their people. The implementation of the COAG Trial, the Place-based Income Management scheme, and the appointment of an Aboriginal Partnerships Officer without consultation are some incidences I have mentioned here. Furthermore, there is little recognition that Aboriginal culture has any value in the wider community in twenty-first century Australia. Therefore, opportunities are missed to plumb ancient knowledge about such things as caring for the environment, despite the fact that Aboriginal expertise in this area has been proven beyond doubt over thousands of years. Shepparton Council is as heedless of this invaluable resource as
other levels of government. Joan, a Shepparton Councillor, remarked, "The richness of Aboriginal culture in Shepparton is a cultural goldmine. But it is not valued by the broader community, who appear to be ashamed of anything Aboriginal". She added, "Aboriginal people also may carry a sense of shame".739

**Summary:** The lack of esteem in which Aboriginal people are held by all levels of government, and hence the wider community, is demonstrated by governments' failure to consult on matters in which the Aboriginal community are major stakeholders, or have specialist knowledge. This lack of esteem extends to the way Aboriginal people regard themselves.

19.3 On Partnership

Bill, a Shepparton Councillor reports, "The Joint Working Party (JWP) was formed between Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative and the Greater Shepparton City Council to foster a cohesive working relationship between the Indigenous community and the Greater Shepparton City Council."740 He commented that at least one meeting with the CEO, Chair and Board, "would have been more productive and revealing if they could have had an informal conversation with the Elders who were meeting in the next room". The Working Party has made changes in the Council, for example, the flying of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags, *Acknowledgement of Country* both in meetings and on Council signs at the borders of the city. The JWP also encourages leadership in the Indigenous community and works towards providing opportunities for employment. Bill acknowledges that the Aboriginal community is sometimes frustrated with the slow progress.741

Jonathan, an NGO official, points out that Shepparton Council is indeed engaged with its community, having extensive representation on the Boards of Directors of many organisations, including Kaiela Institute.742

**Summary:** Although the process is not perfect, Shepparton Council has productive partnerships with various Aboriginal organisations. Its
focus is not only the well-being of Aboriginal people, but also increasing cultural awareness in the wider community.

19.4 On what happens when the Gap is closed?

Francis, a Shepparton Councillor, claims that the Closing The Gap campaign has "missed the target", that

*most people on the street would not have a clue what you are talking about. Closing The Gap is for the true believers who are already involved in services to Aborigines.*

Harold does not regard the Closing The Gap campaign as the solution to Aboriginal "disadvantage". The stigma of being a "burden to the taxpayer" remains. Instead, he advocates that the settler community pays a percentage of their rates as "rent" to the traditional community, to be accrued in a "futures fund" for investment in Aboriginal initiatives, scholarships etc. This would shift the focus of accountability from government departments to the Aboriginal community itself.

**Summary:** The Closing The Gap campaign is still welfare-based, not rights-based, and therefore reinforces the perception of Aboriginal people as mendicants.

19.5 On unfinished business?

Both Robert, an NGO official, and Lynette, a Yorta Yorta Elder, believe that the "unfinished business" is social exclusion, although Robert refers to the issue as social inclusion. Not only are Aboriginal people overlooked in the community, but as Lynette points out,

*This exclusion extends to the Koori community itself. Rather than the community being a whole, it is fragmented into family groups who have little connection with each other. This is also reflected in the agencies, which can be little islands of nepotism, and often run by people not from this area. Agencies also tend to employ white people in management roles. That means that they are run as mainstream organisations.*
Lynette claims this applies to Kaiela Planning Council and Kaiela Institute as well as the other agencies.

Carol believes that, in the name of *Social Inclusion*, Aboriginal people are often put in positions that they are not ready for.

> *Consequently, when the result is less than successful, it gives rise to the stereotypical reaction from the mainstream community, "well, what can you expect?" The solution is more and better education, not only formally, but a fostering of an attitude of constantly aiming to be better.*

Jason maintains that "Social Inclusion policy is vital to address these issues [of Aboriginal justice]. *Social Inclusion* is more than assimilation; it must include cultural integrity and confidence." But he adds that "CoGS does not contribute much to the struggle. Some Councillors such as [Mayor] Geoff Dobson work for justice, but are dominated by those who do not want it."

(My question to Robert) What will social inclusion look like?

> *The Aboriginal community would share in the sense of belonging to the Shepparton wider community. There would be deep respect and engagement with the First Nations' presence. This would be reflected in all institutions. This Social Inclusion may be the model for all national policy-making and program development.*

**Summary**: *Social Inclusion* will mean that Aboriginal people will be respected and valued for their cultural difference, and honoured for their status as Australia's First Peoples and traditional owners of the land. They will be invited, not expected, to participate in mainstream Western culture. Council can be a leader in this regard.

19.6 **On what could be the function of local government in achieving justice?**

(My question to Bill) How can local government improve relationships with Aboriginal communities? What does a good relationship look like?

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• Encourage a broader knowledge of Aboriginal history in the mainstream community, so that they embrace and value the local Aboriginal community.

• Guilt is counter-productive. Present Indigenous history in a positive way.

• Terminology is sometimes problematic: "integration" and "assimilation" are not generally understood by mainstream community.

• In New Zealand, Maori culture may be a good example: visibility, sense of pride, control of their own community and tourism enterprise.

• Indigenous studies in schools (for all students) from early years.

(My question) Is it possible for local government to create these conditions?

Local Government can lead by example, shape the environment in which change can occur. It would be most helpful to have a legislative framework on how to handle diversity, giving clear indication whether a situation does or does not comply. The appointment of an Aboriginal Partnerships Officer is not necessarily an advantage as matters that should concern the whole of Council may be streamlined into one channel merely because it may have an Aboriginal component749.

Harold, however, has no faith in the ability of local government to be an effective partner in restoring Aboriginal well-being. He is quick to point out that he is not necessarily critical of the people, but the system makes it difficult: the protocols and procedures that must be followed. Elders may be angry and outspoken, but without vision they have little power in the Aboriginal community, and none in wider Australia. I ask Harold whether local government can play a useful role. He replies that policies and opinions would need to be challenged. Local government would need to recognise Aboriginal sovereignty750. Jonathan points out that regional governance for Aboriginal communities is a priority for Yorta Yorta Nation and challenges Council to respond751. Could Yorta Yorta and CoGS work together to realise this dream?

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Harold sees the best role for local government is to "prepare the people", to take the lead in rejecting stereotypes, and to structure their workforce to include Aboriginal staff members. CoGS should also approach the (Aboriginal) Community to together design a strategy for a workable partnership. Francis, however, disagrees that Councils should "prepare the people", maintaining that local government should be a partner, not a facilitator, in other words, that Council should "steer" rather than "row".

Maureen suggests municipal councils establish an Aboriginal unit, in the same way Universities have. This unit would be staffed only by Aboriginal people and would be a separate department in its own right. It would not be part of any other department. It would be run along Aboriginal lines, without interference. Executives would regularly report to Council, but without the pressure to produce "outcomes". Koori people would then feel comfortable approaching this unit when dealing with local government issues.

Robert espouses the idea of brainstorming the direction of local governments. He extends Maureen's idea of a separate unit for Aboriginal people in local governments, suggesting that

> [the remnant] KPC could be constituted as a formal committee of the Council supported by Council officers who would vet the cultural safety of Council policy. In this capacity, KPC would comprise Aboriginal community representatives who would receive a sitting fee. All policy would go through this Council committee. This would be possible as the Local Government Act allows municipalities to be semi-autonomous in setting up special committees. Aboriginal people would then be accountable to their own community and the wider community.

Francis, however, argues that KPC is important to communication between Aboriginal people and CoGS, but should stand alone, and not be affiliated in any

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755 At this time, when the merger between KPC and KRIC to form Kaiela Institute was in the planning stages, a possible new role for KPC had been suggested.
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way with local government. Aboriginal people need a voice, but not through local government. Like Harold, Jonathan has a vision for a "future fund", but with contributions from Federal and State governments and private sources in one-third shares. He envisages that this could be a five-year commitment for contributors, and the funds used for such enterprises as business initiatives, scholarships and developing organisations such as Rumbalara Football and Netball Club.

On the other hand, eminent economist, Saul Eslake, warns against trying to close the gap with injections of cash from a resource such as a "future fund". In his 2011 Dungala-Kaiela Oration at Shepparton, referring to the experience of Aboriginal people of royalties paid by mining interests in northern Australia, he declares

*I am not suggesting that the ‘gap’ should or indeed can be closed simply by handing over large amounts of cash from a sovereign wealth fund to the Indigenous population. Indigenous land-owners are of course entitled to negotiate royalties for access to resources on land which they own. But, as the experience of Indigenous people in northern Australia demonstrates only too clearly, large royalty streams have done little to alleviate the condition of those Indigenous communities on whose behalf those incomes have accrued – and some would say they’ve had as detrimental an impact as what Noel Pearson calls ‘sit down money’.*

However, Eslake points out that Aboriginal people have the same aspirations for a fulfilling life as non-Aboriginal Australians, and if well-managed funds from the resources boom can be used to help close this gap, it is something to celebrate.

Here in the Goulburn Valley, it's been estimated that "closing the gap" in terms of life expectancy, labour force participation and labour productivity by 2030 would boost the economy of the region by $61 million per annum (in constant 2008 prices) or 1.3% in that year, or in net present value terms by a total of $216 million between now and then. And it would increase total employment in the region by around 300.
Summary: Firstly, local government is well-placed to help educate the wider community about Aboriginal culture, presenting it in a positive light. There was disagreement about the role of local government in this regard. Secondly, there were suggestions about how Aboriginal concerns could be incorporated into the operation of Council. Once again, there was argument against this, claiming that Aboriginal entities should stand alone. Finally there was a cautionary note regarding "closing the gap" with ill-managed money. However, the local economy will receive a substantial boost if the gap is closed by 2030.

19.7 What should the Aboriginal community do?

Bill maintains that one of the most positive advances has been the demonstration of football skills of Aboriginal players, both in the AFL and local leagues. This gives status to Aboriginal people to counteract the "disadvantaged" and "non-productive" stereotype image. However, he points out that some opportunities have been lost for State Government funding because the local Aboriginal community has not presented a specific request.

Francis argues that there are challenges in the relationship between Council and Aboriginal people that need to be tackled with optimism, and Aboriginal attitude is pessimistic. The Aboriginal approach to issues is still "crisis intervention". He believes education is most important for Aboriginal kids, although some parents are reluctant to encourage advanced education for their children. Education is crucial for social inclusion. Francis would like to see Elders speaking to community groups. He recommends Aboriginal agencies have a marketing plan for mainstream. Aboriginal people are mainly employed in agencies that provide services to Aboriginal people. He asks, "Why are there no Aboriginal businesses in Shep? Aboriginal culture is not well-marketed. 'Perception is everything.' Employees in service agencies are still surviving on government money."

Harold points out that the relationship between Aboriginal people and government at all levels is still based on welfare and granted rights. Inherent rights of First Peoples
are not considered a priority. He advocates that "a Treaty that would recognise these rights and the sovereignty of Aboriginal people over their land. A Treaty would acknowledge the value of Aboriginal people". Harold concludes that "For Aboriginal culture to survive, it must have independent economic viability, spirituality and social cohesion."\textsuperscript{764} Maureen commented that Western-style agencies are driven by "outcomes" and that this is an alien concept in Aboriginal culture.\textsuperscript{765} Furthermore, she maintains that "the incursion of white management in Koori affairs, is eroding the hope of survival of Aboriginal culture in Australia."\textsuperscript{766}

**Summary:** The Aboriginal community needs to be more pro-active.

Education is crucial, for Aboriginal children, as well as for the mainstream community. Elders are best placed to do this. Inherent rights must be acknowledged, perhaps through a Treaty, rather than a continual "hand-out" approach. White managers should not interfere. The Aboriginal community needs to identify its strengths and market them.

19.8 PLENARY

There is general agreement that educating the general public, "preparing the people", is an important step towards achieving justice for Aboriginal people. However there is disagreement over who should do this. Some say this is local government's role, while others believe Elders should undertake the task. The aim of this education would be social inclusion. It is to be hoped that our understanding has increased to the point where Social Inclusion would not be mistaken for Assimilation. However, clumsy implementation of policies by government, and lack of consultation is evidence that this may not be the case. None of the participants were prepared to endorse Closing The Gap principles, despite Saul Eslake pointing out its substantial economic benefits to the local community. Shepparton Council's partnerships with Aboriginal organisations were generally thought to be successful. There is a strong conviction that programs, projects and policy concerning Aboriginal people should be based on inherent rights rather than welfare. One participant was adamant that the Aboriginal community needed to be less pessimistic and crisis oriented, but needs to

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market its strengths to gain its place in the economy. Others agreed that economic stability is crucial for survival of Aboriginal culture, along with spirituality and social cohesion. Overall, Councillors and Council officers tended to believe that the Aboriginal community should not be connected to Council, but stand on its own. Both criticism and approval of Council was spread throughout the participants, but criticism was more prevalent among Aboriginal people.

The Shepparton Chronicles

XXVI. How do I leave?

June 2011

I am still not sure that I understand "Aboriginality" any better, but from my last conversation with Harold I got a sense of the anger, frustration and sheer weariness of dealing with the white Leviathan. I can feel the danger of assimilation, of thousands of years of precious culture being sucked into the maw of white "civilisation" never to be seen again. In this scenario, there is no vision. I am amazed at the spiritual stamina of this advocate for his people. I have never encountered him being anything but calm and cheerful. I hope he is wrong about local government. Here we are in Australia, in the second decade of the twenty-first century. We are stuck with each other. We have to find a way to make it work.

Closing the Gap Forum

12 Noon to 4 pm, 10 June at Rumbalara Football Netball Club Rooms
Keynote speaker: Richard Frankland
Organised by Shepparton Region Reconciliation Group

The Closing the Gap Forum brought together approximately 80 community members from all fields. It was remarkably well-organised and stimulated productive discussion on how to "close the gap" among those who attended. The experience of helping to mount this successful event was one of the highlights of my fieldwork. I am unable to give details of
my time on the Planning Committee as I have not been given permission
to do so by the SRRG. Nevertheless, I can certainly tell my own responses
as I worked on this project. I had volunteered for this Committee mainly
for my own learning, as I felt that as an outsider to the community, I didn't
really have the local knowledge and network to contribute substantially.
Therefore I took on the job of arranging T-shirts and show bags, and
making soup, leaving the selection of speakers and panel members to
those who knew the people.

It was certainly a ride in a whirlwind, and just as exhilarating. It was
exciting to work with these committed locals, both Aboriginal and non-
Aboriginal. Only two of us on the Committee were not born in the area.
What was the experience for me? I felt I made friends. I felt I was accepted
as part of the team. At the end of the Forum when we all gave each other
“high fives”, it was such a “we achieved this" moment. It came from
working together. We had a common goal, and of course there were
arguments, and disagreements, but that's what humans do. I wonder if this
is reconciliation, a way forward?

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Learning to live on polychronic time

My appointment was for 9 am, but the venue was changed to the Stadium,
where he was working at the ASHEletics Carnival\cite{767}. There was frost this
morning in Shepparton, minus 2°! I turned up at 9 am to a freezing cold
stadium, to find the event wasn't expected to start until 10 am, and Harold
wasn't expected until 9:30 am. So I waited outside in the weak winter
sunshine. I'm glad I had my warm gear and gloves – I've experienced
being an audience member in a basketball stadium before!

The event began with an exhibition of dance by the Dunghala Dancers,
led by Josh Wanganeen (from ASHE). The dancers were mainly young
kids, some very young, but they were very talented, and danced from the

\footnote{ASHE (Academy of Sport and Health Education) is one of Shepparton's success stories. It is a College mainly for Indigenous students although they do take non-Indigenous students. This event was organised for Indigenous primary school students (and some non-Indigenous) to participate in traditional games and dancing. There must have been about twelve schools participating.}
heart. In his opening speech, ASHE Chair, Paul Briggs emphasised how these dances, and the games the children were about to join in, were thousands of years old. The schoolchildren then went to various stations to participate in a Round Robin of activities. Each activity was led by one of the ASHE students or staff.

The ubiquitous dignitaries were there. They, including Harold, all had a lovely morning tea in a warm anteroom, while I drifted around watching the kids. This was very interesting, if cold. Most of the games were ones I've played in my childhood, which makes me wonder if all cultures have similar sorts of competitions.

We finally caught up with each other at about 11:30 am. In his car we drove across the road to McDonald's for coffee and half a lamington each. And it was warm!

July 2011

NAIDOC Week 3–10 July.

I went to the Bush Tucker morning tea at the library – wattle seed scones and native plum jam, bush tomato chutney and dip. I sat at a table with mostly Aboriginal women, and talked about getting old, doctors that don't listen, and how lateral violence is rife in the whole community, led by the Federal Parliament. I sat next to an Aboriginal woman from Tasmania, obviously intelligent, but really hasn't been given much of a chance. We mentioned meeting for coffee but at this stage I don't think I will follow that up. I'm intending to leave at the end of August so establishing new relationships now seems a little exploitative.

On the same day I went out to a BBQ at the Bangerang Cultural Centre. Another troop of dancers performed. Bangerang Elder Uncle Sandy was playing his pedal steel guitar. A young rapper performed as well. His passion rather outdid his skill! But these performances were joyful. The gathering was mostly Aboriginal people so I felt a little awkward. I found my Tasmanian friend and we outsiders sat and talked together. Richard was there, as he had been at the library. He is obviously getting around, becoming known.
On Thursday, Rumbalara had a family day at Kids Town. Dunghala Dancers performed again. Richard was there too, seeming to be in the company of some very good-looking young women. He had obviously helped to organise this event. Another young Yorta Yorta woman whom I know facilitated the event efficiently and well. Felicia Dean, CEO of Rumbalara Co-op spoke beautifully as usual. One thing I noted was that she said how much she loved NAIDOC Week, just sitting around with people, enjoying the company, and next week she would be back to the meetings and deadlines. These wonderful people work so hard to improve the living standards of the people. Do they leave enough time just to sit and be themselves?

I'm coming to the end. I am sad to leave Shepparton, but I am tired of the to-ing and fro-ing. I feel I want to keep talking to people but the effort of organising this is irksome when people do not respond to email or phone contact, even though they've said they are willing to talk to me.

I feel I know this community now, but most of that knowledge has come from just being here and being involved. It doesn't feel like research. It feels like just my life, and I don't really know how to write it.

August 2011

Next week I am officially back on campus at Deakin Melbourne. I have talked again with Jonathan and Maureen just to wrap up my time in Shepparton. Jonathan seems much more optimistic than before. Maureen came and spent the afternoon at my place. We talked warmly and informally. I'd made a cake. With this conversation I came closer to my original vision of my methodology using hospitality than I had in the previous fifteen months. It takes time to form trusting relationships, and trusting relationships are vital for participatory action research. I did not have this time. Nevertheless by living and joining in the community and coming to love the people I worked with, I have gained a deeper knowledge than if I had used a straight-forward methodology, with interviews and surveys.
I now have an ethical dilemma: having formed these relationships, how do I leave? I have never made any secret that my presence in Shepparton was for the purpose of research. I believe everyone understands that. Nevertheless I am uncomfortable with coming into a community and then leaving when I’ve got what I want. I have no answers to this conundrum.
Part 5. Looking back. Time for Reflection

20. Twentieth Interlocution: What happened to my Plan?

You'll never get Aboriginal people to do that!768

20.1 My planned research methodology

Having evaluated the other players in this project, sometimes severely, I acknowledge that I, as a participant in my own research, must endure the same examination. I will therefore look closely at both the preparation and the implementation of my methodology to see where it went wrong. Did it go wrong? There are two ways of looking at this. Firstly, I was not able to recruit the groups in the way I had planned, therefore could not go ahead with my chosen methodology, action research. Yes, it went wrong. However, secondly, from a different perspective, this loss propelled me into a situation where I had to "think on my feet" with a heightened awareness of the reality around me. In hindsight, this liberated me to allow the "truth" to find me rather than me searching for truth within my own preconceived worldview.

20.1.1 My preparation

In the Seventh, Ninth, Eleventh and Twelfth Interlocutions, I have told my story of how I came to select action research as my proposed methodology. I learned that Indigenous knowledge is different from Eurocentric knowledge, and that in the past, European research of Indigenous cultures has often been destructive. I needed therefore to search for a methodology that would satisfy both the flexibility of Indigenous knowledge and academic rigour. After reading the literature on Indigenous research, I became fearful that my research may inadvertently damage my participants. However, once I had clarified in my mind that I was studying the relationship between Aboriginal and settler Australians, the "hyphen" as Jones and Jenkins769 refer to it, action research seemed the logical methodology to choose.

768 Comment from a participant
769 Jones & Jenkins 2008
20.1.2 *The question of Ethics*

The Ethics Review process for research involving humans and animals is an essential standard for those embarking on such research, and a protection for participants from exploitation, either deliberate or inadvertent. The administration of this process in Australia is by the Commonwealth Government agency, the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC). The review process began in the 1960s for medical research, and in 1986 for non-medical projects.\(^{770}\) All institutions conducting research higher than low risk must have access to an Ethics Review process, whether within the institution or outside.\(^{771}\) The Ethics process is based on an assessment of whether the project is "low risk" or "not low risk". Low risk is assessed as being no more harmful than slight discomfort or the inconvenience of an interview. Any research that has greater risk of harm than low risk needs to be examined for the level of risk, and the adequacy of the procedures in place to deal with this.\(^{772}\) The NHMRC's "National Statement" nominates ethical values for research as "Research merit and integrity", "Justice", "Beneficence" and "Respect".\(^{773}\) These guidelines shaped my research design as I prepared my project for submission for approval from the Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee (DUHREC). I found the NHMRC's National Ethics Application Form required an extraordinary amount of detail, some of which I felt I could not provide until my fieldwork was underway, if not completed. Having to answer these questions, I believe, moved me to a new place in my thinking. This was both beneficial and obstructive. Beneficial because it compelled me to organise my thinking into a practical reality, but obstructive because my answers then tended to be what I considered the "correct" response to be.

I have heard the term, "risk averse", used as a criticism of Ethics Committees, and I found this to be the case, not necessarily with the DUHREC itself, but rather the whole review process. I am including this discussion about the approval process because I, like all researchers of human beings, was subject to its requirements, and I


\(^{771}\) NHMRC 2009. National Statement On Ethical Conduct In Human Research:80

\(^{772}\) NHMRC 2009. National Statement On Ethical Conduct In Human Research, Chapter 2.1: 15 – 18

believe the experience definitely affected the way I designed my research. Paradoxically, I believe some aspects of the process serve to exacerbate the inequality between Aboriginal people and the academy. Aboriginal people are listed in the "not low risk" category because of the cultural difference. While I accept that difference must be acknowledged and cultural protocols observed, the fact that Aboriginal issues are included in the same section of the National Statement as children, those with cognitive disabilities, and people involved in illegal activities infers a vulnerability not inherent, but imposed on Aboriginal people by the dominant culture. It implies that we are the strong ones, who must look after the "weaker" Aboriginal citizens. I have to acknowledge my original plan contained elements of this worldview.

20.1.4 Institutionalism again?

Institutionalism is as evident in universities as it is in local governments. Reminiscent of NPM in local government, Ian Hughes maintains that there is "a shift in the organisational culture of universities away from the community of scholars towards the university as a corporation". I would define Australian institutionalism as "a worldview within a worldview". Institutional "common sense" is formed by tradition and jargon. Compounding this is the outer encapsulation of the institution by the "nation" construct. Both local government councils and the academy are institutions orbiting within their own realm. Outsiders can find these fortresses virtually impossible to penetrate. However, institutions, being an "imagined community", can be changed if their members so will it. There is evidence that local government is beginning to adopt this approach, becoming more aware of its services to people. The trend towards deliberative democracy, the development of policy networks and genuine dialogue rather than two- or even one-dimensional "consultation" demonstrates this. Similarly if the "community of scholars" is to remain alive and well in social as well as academic discourse, researchers must remain aware, in our search for truth, of how critical it is to turn outward and listen, rather than being satisfied with the

774 Hughes 2005:209
775 See Fifth Interlocution
776 See Fifth Interlocution
777 Bill, Fifth Interlocution, 180411b
778 Anderson 1983
answers we expect. Essentially, my project stalled because I had stopped listening. Institutions are composed of people, and as Carmen Lawrence claims, we need to "constantly observe ourselves, to look at the ideas and values that underpin our institutional and public policy, to test it constantly and to test ourselves for prejudicial and racist attitudes."779 During my research I came to realise the wisdom of her statement.

20.1.6 How action research and I came unstuck

Action research is essentially "insider" research, but as I wrote in Eleventh Interlocution, I cannot be anything but an outsider in this project. I am a stranger in and to the community. Action research is, in principle, collaborative within a community that knows each other, such as a teaching/learning community, where the awareness of the need for change emerges organically, not from among volunteers randomly convened for a focus group as I was attempting. In his evaluation of participatory research and action research, Randy Stoeker defines "community" as "a group of people who reside closely enough to each other that they can maintain face-to-face relationships, interact across multiple roles (they don’t just see each other as activists, for example, but also share social events, and do favors for each other) and cooperate in trying to create social change."780 Although Stoeker's definition may be limited in its scope, its succinct portrayal is pertinent to my research, because this is the kind of community to which I did not have access. Action research's purpose is not simply data-collection, but is intended to be an agent of change; and who was I, as an outsider, to identify the need for change in the Shepparton community? Stoeker concludes that the problem is one of conception, and that social change needs to be conceptualised before the research is designed. This, he concedes, is not easy for academy-trained researchers.781 His evaluation uncomfortably reflects the planning and design of my own research. Hence the blunt statement by my Shepparton mentor showing me that I had completely misread the community I was ostensibly intending to work with.

779 Lawrence 2009
780 Stoeker 2009:5
781 Stoeker 2009:16
20.1.7 The power trap

Stoeker argues that power and knowledge are part of a "single intra-dependent system".\(^7\) He maintains that

> Preventing others from accessing the power–knowledge loop, by preventing them from having the power to act on their own interests and the knowledge skills that would inform their action, prevents them from accessing either of its knowledge and power components.\(^8\)

While Stoeker's point infers that at least one of the parties is aware that they are engaged in conflict, the absence of overt conflict is the basis of Steven Lukes' more subtle, therefore more sinister, "three-dimensional" version of power. Lukes queries whether

> the most insidious exercise of power [is] to prevent people...from having grievances by shaping their perceptions, cognitions and preferences in a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they can see or imagine no alternative to it, or they see it as natural and unchangeable...?\(^9\)

In other words, the political agenda and decision-making control remains with the hegemony, and both sides accept that this is the way things "are".\(^10\) This attitude has appeared many times during my research: creation of government policies from Assimilation to Closing the Gap and Social Inclusion without consultation or collaboration; common sense thinking contributing to racism and Carmen Lawrence's observation regarding the prejudice of good people; a promising discourse on Treaty replaced by a decade long ineffectual "Reconciliation" campaign; recent Federal government initiatives involving Shepparton Aboriginal community, such as the COAG Trial and the Income Management Scheme, implemented with no consultation; City of Greater Shepparton plans and frameworks for the future which contain minimal reference to Aboriginal people, and when they are mentioned it is in terms of welfare rather than a contribution to the community.

Also, as I mentioned in Tenth Interlocution, Aboriginal communities are given the

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\(^7\) Stoeker 2009:14

\(^8\) Ibid

\(^9\) I encountered this loop in my observation that gaining access to information from government departments is a lumbering process, even for other government departments and NGOs (see The Shepparton Chronicles XVIII: Searching For The Way In)

\(^10\) Lukes 1974/2005:28

\(^11\) Lukes 1974/2005:29
role of mendicant, and have no choice but to acquiesce to Western methods of application and implementation if vital projects and programs are to be funded.

Gaventa and Cornwall affirm Foucault's view that power resides not in individuals but "in the positions that they occupy and the ways in which discourses make these positions available to them". Both Wanda Pillow and Linda Tuhiwai Smith maintain that non-Indigenous researchers working across cultures must "recognise the power dynamic which is embedded in the relationship with their subjects." In the planning of my project, I was motivated by an unconscious belief that I was more accountable to the University than the people I was proposing to work with. The action research paradigm, although it was designed to promote equal relationships, is no shield against this power trap, especially when deployed in a situation such as mine, which demands "findings" and a "conclusion" within a finite timeframe. Robert Chambers maintains that projects constrained in this way should be restricted to things, not people. I argue also that the more that anxiety to achieve "results" is generated in a student researcher, for whatever reason, the more the researcher will resort to rigid planning, and the less she will listen and be accountable to her participants.

20.2 My reconstituted methodology

...for activism and organizing, the power to act and to act in concert with others ("power to" and "power with") is fundamental to transformational social change. And in some cases, power is seen as growing from within oneself, not something which is limited by others. This "power within" is shaped by one's identity and self-conception of agency, as well as by "the Other".

John Gaventa and Andrea Cornwall

To those colonizer researchers who would dissolve/ consume/ soften/ erase the indigene-colonizer hyphen into a sharing collaborative engagement between "us", there is one, harshly pragmatic, response: It does not work.

Alison Jones, with Kuni Jenkins

787 Gaventa and Cornwall 2008:177
788 Pillow 2010:182
789 Smith 1999:176
791 Chambers 1994:13
792 Gaventa & Cornwall 2008:175
793 Jones & Jenkins 2008:475
I entered the Shepparton community with an established way in my mind to deal with the "problem". I ignored the evidence that there were already many ways of dealing with the problem of disadvantage, communication and lack of cultural awareness in Shepparton. I did not see existing moves to promote healing in the Aboriginal community.

In Sixteenth Interlocution, I described my reconstituted methodology. On rereading my account, I noticed that, unlike the first version of my Plan, there were no dot points. I perceive my methodology now as fluid, rather than a rigid list of things to be achieved. Despite feeling I had lost control of my project, the flow of knowledge seemed to find me, rather than me seeking knowledge. The power inherent in being a researcher, as Pillow and Smith describe it, then did not appear relevant.

Hospitality was reversed. Instead of me doling out spaghetti and homely warmth as I had planned, I became the recipient of the greater hospitality of the whole Shepparton community as they accepted me as a member. I was forming trust relationships, as I had planned, but it involved me first learning to trust their acceptance of me, as people came to know me and I them. Gaventa and Cornwall maintain that "feeling and action are as important as cognition and rationality in the knowledge creation process", therefore I would argue that there can be a positive relationship between knowledge and power, that knowledge can counteract the unwitting but detrimental power inherent in government and other institutions.

However in this assertion I need to clarify that I am not necessarily referring to cognition, meaning acquiring factual knowledge, but recognition, that is, a connection, the knowledge of a true reality, gained by person-to-person, face-to-face, respectful dialogue.

20.2.1 Defining my reconstituted methodology

In Sixteenth Interlocution I explained that I continued to follow the action research paradigm of "plan, act, reflect, evaluate", albeit alone. I was still permitted to observe operations of KPC and CoGS. I also still intended to carry out the face-to-face interviews with "stakeholders". However, the spirit of these interviews changed, as an alternative model to "question and answer" emerged the more I talked with

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794 Smith 1999:176
795 Gaventa & Cornwall 2008
Aboriginal participants. The traditional Q&A interview technique is a quest for information, in which the questioner controls the discourse, and the respondent responds only to the questioner's questions. Apart from the unequal power relationship this evokes, there is little opportunity in this model for lateral or unexpected information to be revealed. My aim in conversations then was to explore the subject (admittedly usually selected by me) collaboratively and interactively with my conversation partner, so that the knowledge revealed or created belonged to both of us. As Kirin Narayan and Kenneth George claim, "being a good interviewer may involve responding to questions from an interviewee, and so entering into a reciprocal exchange". In this model my role could be described as "convener" or "facilitator" of the conversation.

After some months into my fieldwork, I accepted I must abandon my plan to form groups, seeking instead to have in-depth conversations with relevant people. I also sought day-to-day contact with those same people, with the intention of getting to know them in their everyday life. I became aware early in the process that Aboriginal people were uneasy about being audio-recorded. As I had been ambivalent about using this device, suspecting it changed the nature of the conversation, I decided not to use it except when collecting factual or quantitative information. Similarly I found that copious note-taking during the conversation tended to interrupt the narrative flow, therefore I also jettisoned note-taking. This was risky. However, immediately following the conversation, I wrote the story of the encounter. Sometimes I did not even leave the venue where the conversation took place. I then promptly forwarded my version to my conversation partner for verification.

My immersion in the community had its benefits and difficulties. As I noted in Twelfth Interlocution, Gillian Cowlishaw believes that personal relationships are the essence of ethnographic research. She also points out that "The ethnographer willingly experiences a destabilisation of her familiar everyday world and some loss of self". She concludes that by participating "in dense, complex, extended sociality, the ethnographer is able to forge an account of a social domain using a wide range of

796 Narayan & George 2003:137
interpretive and analytic tools.” In this statement Cowlishaw has summarised acutely my renewed methodology. Her description carries that sense of disorientation which I certainly experienced as I joined the Shepparton community.

Being so immersed in the community that research blurs into everyday life has advantages, but also risks. One of these is the dilemma of how to leave when I had formed so many rewarding personal relationships, as I have written about in *The Shepparton Chronicles XXVI*. Another risk is similar. My request for permission to report a significant experience in my thesis was denied by the people involved. The main reason given was that I had confused my roles as researcher and community member. I was hurt by this explanation as I felt it implied that I had been deceptive and had exploited privileges given to me. I had no such intention, but I acknowledge that the interpretation was valid. The situation was resolved with an apology and an explanation. As far as I am aware, our relationship has not been irreparably damaged. However, the incident demonstrated to me how important self-awareness is to the duty of care researchers must hold for their participants, and that constant vigilance is essential to counter the seep of institutional power into the relationship.

20.2.2 If it's not action research, what is it?

If I am to define my new methodology adequately, I need to identify it by name. It retains remnants of participatory action research. Although strongly autoethnographical and "messy", I have still used the action research cycle as a framework. Cowlishaw classifies her *City's Outback* research as "participant observation", which could apply to my research also. My project has been a critique of racism, governmentality, institutionalism and local government in Victoria, as well as a participant study of City of Greater Shepparton and its relationship with the local Aboriginal community. I have also been a critic and reconstitutor of my "self", not particularly as an individual, but as a part of the society, and the academy, that has shaped me. Although Stephen Kemmis warns of the dangers of self-deception in auto-reflexivity, he explains that in what he calls "critical participatory action research",

797 Cowlishaw 2009:9
798 Cowlishaw 2009
799 Kemmis 2008:127
the self must be understood as a situated and located self. Each self is formed through a particular and unique developmental history;...

"Subjectivity" and "identity" ... must thus be viewed as fluid and dynamic, and as continually reconstructed in cultural-discursive, social and material-economic dimensions of interaction.\footnote{Kemmis 2008:126}

My research methodology, then, has comprised critique, participation, immersion, and observation, constructed on the framework of action research. Consequently, I find it difficult to choose a nominal definition of my methodology. In an assessment of action research, Stoeker points out that "Participatory research emphasized grassroots participation and critical analysis, while action research focused more on action outcomes and less on participatory processes and critical stances".\footnote{Stoeker 2009:3}

Although in my initial Plan I was aiming to achieve change, the former description now more closely applies to my project, therefore I have devised the term, "critical participatory research" to define my reconstituted methodology.

20.3 Conclusion: What happened to my Plan?

The disintegration of my planned methodology was a significant finding in my research project. It has led me to evaluate not only my own prejudices, but has revealed to me the machinations of the institutionalism within the academy. Foucault was questioned about the role of intellectuals in the pursuit of "truth". In his reply he states

\begin{quote}
It's not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power (which would be a chimera, for truth is already power) but of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time.\footnote{Foucault 1972 – 1977:133}
\end{quote}

Foucault is correct in identifying the perceived ownership of "truth" by the hegemony. However, he advocates that intellectuals should ascertain "the possibility of constituting a new politics of truth", maintaining that the problem "is not changing people's consciousness–or what's in their heads–but the political, economic, institutional regime of the production of truth."\footnote{Ibid} In this statement he seems to be taking us back to seeking political solutions to the "problem", a philosophy that has
been ineffectual in seeking justice for Aboriginal people in Australia. Institutions, including all levels of government, are in essence human. We humans are not obliged to adhere to the set precepts of old style institutionalism or racism constructs. If we have the will to change, change is possible, however, as Lawrence points out, constant awareness is vital. Contrary to Foucault's assertion, although creative and inclusive policies are essential, they can only work with the cooperation of human beings.
21. Twenty first Interlocution: The Dance of Opposites

I felt that we were working out of a Zen state. But it wasn’t Zen, so we took the word Nez. Sometimes I would say things as contrasts, like apple-green. It would come out of a sudden image, or a need, for tartness or for something as plain as a color. There’d be long dialogues, and a lot of juxtaposition.  

Simone Forti, dancer and choreographer

Life is dance and to experience it fully one must not stand outside it.  

Sally Banes paraphrasing Deborah Hay, dancer and choreographer

I participated in a drama workshop once. The leader taught us an exercise where we danced with a partner. Our task was to hold our partner's hand, and move extemporarily, giving and taking leadership, feeling the dynamic of our own and our partner's movements in the space. We were encouraged to venture out of our comfort zone, experimenting with weight, gravity and spatial level. It became an exhilarating act of creativity as we explored movements that emerged seemingly out of nowhere, aided by our own and our partner's giving and taking of weight. We laughed with delight. The second part of the exercise was to repeat the task, but this time each of us holding the end of a piece of fabric, still feeling the weight and movement of our partner at the other end. The final part was to dance "feeling" the same weight, gravity and balance, but not touching our partner except for eye contact, from anywhere in the space, even from across the room. The effect was liberating, our performances amazing. I have always remembered this experience of being truly creative, collaborating in the dance of opposites.

21.1 Optimism and pessimism in Shepparton

Political scientist James Tully remarked that "the imperial demand for uniformity is obsolete and unachievable in the (ethnically, linguistically, racially) diverse social and political communities characteristic of modern states." In my time in the

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805 Banes 1977–1987:113
community I noted that this is certainly so in the City of Greater Shepparton, where the relationship between Yorta Yorta Nation and Bangerang people, and the Shepparton Council manifests in an evident optimism/pessimism dichotomy. Understandably, the division is mostly down settler/Aboriginal lines, but this is not necessarily consistent. Local government officers, predominantly non-Aboriginal, tend to be confident and optimistic about outcomes of programs, while Aboriginal participants are likely to be more cynical, as is particularly apparent in the Forum presented in Nineteenth Interlocution. However, as this Forum shows, there were occasions in my conversations when Aboriginal participants praised the work of CoGS, and non-Aboriginal people lamented its shortcomings. I observed that one participant appeared to drift from one pole to another over the period of my fieldwork. The progress in establishing the Kaiela Institute was a source of optimism for its stakeholders. In general, the optimistic view was the public face, while the pessimistic views were more apt to be expressed in one-to-one conversations. It is fair to say in summary that among my group of participants dwelt both optimism and pessimism that ebbed and flowed and circled during my time with them.

Yet despite this apparent dichotomy, I found there was a perceivable awareness among participants in my research, Councillors and officials of CoGS, organisations, agencies, Yorta Yorta Nation and some concerned members of the community, that they need to work together, and need to treat each other with respect. They are the community that Stoeker defines. They are known to one another, they share the problems, and share the responsibilities to work it through, despite different viewpoints. There is no easy road. Nevertheless, I would argue that this optimism/pessimism dichotomy, uncomfortable though it may be, can be the foundation of productive dialogue and more equal power, the "power to" rather than "power over". In fact, "dichotomy" is a misnomer. "Dichotomy" by definition refers to opposites that do not engage with each other, and this is not the case in Shepparton. I believe optimism and pessimism can be partners in creating a new perspective. Optimism without tempering pessimism is shortsighted, arrogant and narrow, characteristic of much "top-down" policy making. Pessimism alone is inert, obstructive and hopeless. But when considered together, they present a whole picture, a fertile environment for dialogue.

807 Stoker 2006:504
21.2 The "hyphen" – the "tension of difference"

Throughout my research a recurring theme that has emerged has been "deep listening" to forge a genuine connection between opposites. But this kind of listening is difficult, involving a spirit of giving. Jones and Jenkins offer a pattern of collaboration they term the "indigene/colonizer hyphen" that is "based on the tension of difference, not on its erasure". Jones and Jenkins question the validity of "dialogue and mutual engagement across difference". Their main concern is that the "erased, denied, dissolved, or softened hyphen" means that Western researchers "ignore the indigenous-colonizer hyphen as they write across it, recolonizing as they go"; or the "colonizer researcher who gives voice to the oppressed indigenous person" bridging the “hyphen” in a romantic "self-effacing" attitude.

Jones' and Jenkins' position however appears to contradict that of Cowlishaw, who advocates "immersion and intimacy...over a long period of time" for ethnographic researchers. Nevertheless, I believe the contradiction is illusory. Jones and Jenkins qualify their statements by affirming that "collaborative research relationships are essential to insight...; the hyphen...joins as well as separates" and they clarify the point that "'us' cannot stand in place of the hyphen". I argue that both points of view are valid. "Immersion" implies concentration, deep listening, without distraction, learning from (not about) the Other; whereas the "hyphen" reminds us that identification with the Other is fraudulent and self-gratifying, forcing us to "make the Other in my own image". The "hyphen" is important to the evaluation of my research. The metaphor of the “hyphen” as both a barrier and a bridge between two collaborative parties clarifies not only my own relationship with Aboriginal participants in my research, but also Shepparton Council's interface with its Aboriginal community. Unity and understanding are not necessary for successful collaboration, but mutual respect is.

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808 Jones & Jenkins 2008:473
809 Jones & Jenkins 2008:474
810 Ibid
811 Cowlishaw 2009:9
812 Jones & Jenkins 2008:475
813 Ibid
814 Jones & Jenkins 2008:479/482
815 Jones & Jenkins 2008:479
816 Jones & Jenkins 2008:473
21.3 The "ethical space"

In similar vein to the "hyphen", and the "dance of opposites", Canadian academic Willie Ermine, a Cree man from the Sturgeon Lake First Nation in Saskatchewan, proposes the *Ethical Space of Engagement*,817 "formed when two societies, with disparate worldviews, are poised to engage each other. It is...the space in between them that contributes to the development of a framework for dialogue between human communities".818 As with the "hyphen", the space between is not empty, but dynamic. However, Ermine points out that a superficial encounter will not produce the desired relationship, rather a deeper engagement should be sought. The major impediment to equal engagement and one of the "festering irritants for Indigenous peoples, ... is the brick wall of a deeply embedded belief and practice of Western universality."819 My research confirms how stubbornly entrenched this worldview is, and how the pattern is endlessly repeated despite its constant failure. As Ermine states

> So we continue the posturing and the status quo remains as it always has because we lack clear rules of engagement between human communities and have not paid attention to the electrifying space that would tell us what the other entity is thinking...820

Ermine describes the "ethical space" as a "meeting place" or "neutral zone", which offers "a venue to step out of our allegiances, to detach from the cages of our mental worlds and assume a position where human-to-human dialogue can occur."821 Nevertheless, it is hard to envisage such an arrangement being successful. Ermine himself acknowledges that at the start, "it will require a protracted effort to create a level playing field where notions of universality are replaced by concepts such as the equality of nations" and that this must be achieved through a "cooperative spirit". It would also involve sacrifice on the part of Western partners. As Tully has said, "Creating a legitimate post-colonial relationship means abandoning notions of European cultural superiority and adopting a mutually respectful stance".822

Unfortunately, as I have shown throughout this dissertation, many Anglo-European

817 Ermine 2007
818 Ermine 2007:193
819 Ermine 2007:198
820 Ermine 2007:197
821 Ermine 2007:202
822 Tully quoted in Short 2008:179
Australians are not aware of the influence that this pervasive worldview has on their actions and decisions. Importantly, too, Aboriginal people must claim their inherent rights. For the settler side to "grant" rights, is to perpetuate cultural supremacy and injustice with "false generosity" as Paulo Freire points out. Ermine maintains that, for Aboriginal partners in the space,

This ... means enabling Indigenous Elders, knowledge keepers, in concert with Indigenous lawyers and allies, many of whom are already committed to the challenge, to articulate, assert and define Aboriginal rights... Only then will there be a level and ethical playing field in Indigenous-West jurisprudence.

21.4 Dialogics, Love, Democracy and Conflict

Dialogue with the people is radically necessary to every authentic revolution. This is what makes it a revolution, as distinguished from a military coup. One does not expect dialogue from a coup – only deceit (in order to achieve "legitimacy") or force (in order to repress).

Paulo Freire

The ideals of communication that have arisen repeatedly in this project are listening and dialogue. Dialogue, in fact, is listening and responding. Susan Bickford quotes Hannah Arendt in her conception of politics as the "'acting and speaking together' of equals". In Sixth Interlocution I argue that politics and democracy are related concepts, referring to a government's engagement, on equal terms, with its community. Gerry Stoker contends that his Public Value Paradigm "places its faith in a system of dialogue and exchange associated with networked governance. It is through the construction, modification, correction, and adaptability of that system that democracy and management are reconciled and delivered." Freire raises the standard of dialogue by declaring that it "cannot exist...in the absence of a profound love for the world and its people."

However, these ideals, plus the "meeting places" of "ethical space" and the "hyphen", may sound so unattainable that it would seem easier to shrug and continue

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823 Freire 1970 – 1996:26, 27
824 Ermine 2007:202
826 Bickford 1996: 56
827 Stoker 2006b:56
828 Freire 1970:70
with the status quo. As Bickford points out, "listening' tends to immediately evoke ideas of empathy and compassion". But while listening you may not like what you hear, and dialogue may lead to conflict rather than harmony. Is this still good communication? Bickford asks, "what keeps us from being doomed to war, anarchy, or the relentless clash of unyielding wills?" Also as Mark Bevir points out, some critics suggest that "self-interest and negotiated bargains" play a role in policy creation and that "dialogue and deliberation are as likely to lead to adversarial relationships as to greater understanding and solidarity."829 Yet these "meeting places" are not necessarily comfortable places. On the contrary, this is why they are crucial to communication. Bickford maintains that these spaces are where conflict can be dealt with equally.

This...interaction...does not necessarily resolve or do away with the conflicts that arise from uncertainty, inequality, and identity. Rather, it enables political actors to decide democratically how to act in the face of conflict, and clarify the nature of the conflict at hand.830

Bickford declares that listening is "a central activity of citizenship", and stresses that listening and responding is an actual, distinctive activity "or a general 'openness to being'"831 and not metaphorical such as with reading, writing or interpretation.

In earlier Interlocutions I have argued that most settler Australians are apathetic toward Aboriginal justice, especially if it involves any level of sacrifice. Nevertheless, in Shepparton I have met many people who are passionate about justice, and spend much of their lives working to achieve it. I believe that this circumstance interprets Freire's astonishing statement about dialogue requiring a "profound love" for the people of the world.832 In this sense, love is not a sentimental affection for another, but a deep yearning for justice, regardless of the call for personal sacrifice.

Conclusion: The Dance of Opposites

...dialogical practice is not only about listening and finding shared agendas. It is also about practitioners eliciting a mandate from the people they are engaging with: a mandate to do analysis together.

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829 Bevir 2009:70
830 Bickford 1996:2
831 Bickford 1996:3
832 Freire 1970:70
pushing the boundaries of how we together interpret our shared world—into "other" spaces of awareness and possible action. Dialogue requires a process of questioning.\textsuperscript{833}

Peter Westoby and Gerard Dowling

The "Dance of Opposites" metaphor defines dialogue articulately, "respecting the pull of dualism and reconciling opposing forces."\textsuperscript{834} In dialogue, not only is the requirement of uniformity of attitude "obsolete and unachievable"\textsuperscript{835} as Tully maintains, but dialogue appears pointless where there is agreement. Consequently, opportunity for creative solutions is absent. In \textit{Sixth Interlocution} I have described movements towards more human governance such as policy networks and Public Value Management. While I find it heartening to observe the burgeoning of these more democratic methods of governance, formal arrangements run the risk of falling into the traps I have described in \textit{Twentieth Interlocution}, or simply failing because of human frailty – apathy, resentment, or simply distraction. However, in Shepparton I see that productive dialogic relationships already take place. This is evident in the respect and caring I have observed, despite the emphasis on agendas, outcomes and time limits.

\textsuperscript{833} Westoby & Dowling 2009:11
\textsuperscript{834} Battiste and Henderson 2000:42
\textsuperscript{835} Tully (2000) quoted in Short 2008:179
Part 6. Returning to where we started

When Council makes policies with an open heart, i.e. with love and friendship, it works, or if it doesn't it can be easily changed. If policies are made through fear, they do not have a good effect, and may be detrimental.  

Liam, a senior Council Officer

22. Twenty-second Interlocution: "Yes"

My story has been an "exploration", rather than a "journey", and certainly an adventure. It has been experiential, chaotic and messy. It has changed me, and also made me realise I cannot change. I have gained considerable knowledge since my encounter with Aboriginal people and the Shepparton community, and much of that knowledge has been about myself: my prejudices revealed, my "whiteness" exposed. My dilemma now is how to draw these messy strands together into a coherent conclusion. But I do not want to destroy the chaotic character of my research by giving it a "neat" ending. Therefore I hope what follows is both coherent and vague, decisive and also infinite.

22.1 The "meeting places" in my research

In Twelfth Interlocution I discussed "who I am" in my research. My experience has confirmed my role for me. I am a white Western woman researcher from a Western academy. Despite gaining knowledge, I have not changed my identity or worldview. I admit this discovery is a disappointment to me. However, I believe that through engagement and dialogue, I have entered the "hyphen", the "ethical space" where two worldviews can meet. I am now more familiar with Aboriginal culture than before, but I still cannot claim understanding. I doubt I even completely understand my own outlook. Nevertheless I now am able to see with more clarity, the space between, the interface, the relationship between Aboriginal and Western culture. According to Jones and Jenkins, this is the crux of the "hyphen". In Australia in the present political era, dialogue, listening and responding, is not conducted on equal terms. As I found in during my time in Shepparton, the hegemony still sets the agenda and controls the timeframe.

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836 090511 (paraphrased)
837 Jones & Jenkins 2008:482
22.2 The Question

Can local government create conditions where Aboriginal culture can flourish and reconciliation blossom?

For Aboriginal culture to survive, it must have independent economic viability, spirituality and social cohesion.838

Yorta Yorta Elder

Local government is one of Council's most valued partners in achieving reconciliation. Local governments, because of their on-the-ground presence, their potential for local leadership and their role as managers of social and physical infrastructure, are of critical importance to nation-wide reconciliation.839

Council of Aboriginal Reconciliation

Since this statement was made in the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation's Final Report in 2000, torpid local government has shown signs of awakening to the cause, but progress is very slow, as some of my participants have attested. Coetzee's assertion that "empires", do not want to die840 has truth. Battiste and Henderson also pointed out governments' reluctance to change841. In addition, governments may be unwilling to relinquish power, but also their employees, anxious to retain their jobs, will not risk their employment by non-compliance with the regime; nor will elected representatives be likely to take any action that may jeopardise their chance of re-election. As I have demonstrated above, power is distributed in everyday acts.

22.2.1 Can local government change?

My own experience in the field demonstrates that a well-meaning plan or policy formed in an institution's office will not necessarily work in practice. Yet, as I found, immersion in the community as Cowlishaw recommends842, and the surrendering of control can bring knowledge one may not have been expecting. Arbon843, Martin844, Smith845, Steinhauer846 and Battiste and Henderson847 all describe the Indigenous

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838 CAR Final Report Chapter 5 PARTNERSHIPS - WORKING TOGETHER


840 Coetzee quoted in Battiste and Henderson 2000:1 (See 5.6)

841 Battiste and Henderson 2000:7 (See Shepparton Chronicles V)

842 Cowlishaw 2009:9

843 Arbon 2008:34

844 Martin 2008:19

845 Smith 1999:43

way of knowing as being one of flux, relatedness and respect for another's position. All refer to Western research and governance as blindly Eurocentric\(^{848}\), and, as Tully declares, Western institutions will need to give up "Eurocentric notions of cultural superiority" to achieve a "just post-colonial relationship"\(^{849}\).

Can I apply my own experience of changing, while not changing, to local government? My outlook is as Eurocentric as Western institutions, but this has not precluded me from entering the "meeting place". Local government, an institution composed of individuals, can be as communally aware of its own Eurocentrism as I, an individual, can be. It is the notion of *supremacy* that Tully condemns, rather than the innate Eurocentric focus of Western epistemology. A belief in "supremacy" excludes the "Other". Lawrence urges her health system colleagues to be constantly aware of this potentially racist tendency, and the same principle applies to the local government system. If an institution can acknowledge and accept its own elemental worldview as a cultural construct, *equal in worth* to the culture of the "Other", it is ready to learn *from* the "Other". However, the City of Greater Shepparton has yet to more fully realise the value of the contribution of its Aboriginal community in this regard.

22.2.2 **Consultation, partnerships, CD Framework: is this enough?**

*The problems currently faced by Indigenous people do not emanate simply from laws, structures of government, modes of economics, or philosophical views of relationships between humans and the rest of the earth, but from within us.*\(^{850}\)

Adam Barker

If local government is to be an effective instrument for "Reconciliation" and justice, it must venture further into dialogic engagement with Aboriginal communities. Stoker, Halligan, de Leon and Varda present a vision for local government of networked governance, "public value management"\(^{851}\) and "collaborative policy networks"\(^{852}\). In the third century BC Aristotle professed similar values\(^{853}\), yet in

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\(^{847}\) Battiste and Henderson 2000:42  
\(^{848}\) See Ninth Interlocution  
\(^{849}\) Tully quoted in Short 2008:179  
\(^{850}\) Barker 2010:327  
\(^{851}\) Stoker 2006b  
\(^{852}\) deLeon and Varda 2009  
\(^{853}\) Sixth Interlocution 6.7, 6.8
this capitalist age they reappear new and revolutionary. "Dialogue and exchange"\textsuperscript{854} and "flattened power structures"\textsuperscript{855} marry efficient and responsible management to create the happy city of good and just citizens envisaged by Aristotle\textsuperscript{856}. This resonates with Stephen Cornell's definition of governance as "an expression of the people’s vision of what kind of community they are"\textsuperscript{857}. Is local government, and particularly Greater Shepparton, part of this new revolution? Is Shepparton moving towards Lowndes' concept of a "new" institution, informal, dynamic, value-critical, disaggregated and embedded?\textsuperscript{858} I cannot answer these questions at present. There is some evidence that CoGS is becoming a more community-conscious Council. However, this depends substantially on the commitment of individuals. Also, as some participants have pointed out, "when you take your foot off the accelerator, everything stops"\textsuperscript{859}. But the process of institutional change is emergent, as Halligan describes\textsuperscript{860}, therefore necessarily slow. It is slow also because dialogue is a revolution, rather than a coup, as Freire contends\textsuperscript{861}.

22.3 Dreaming Shepparton

*Ethical research must begin by replacing Eurocentric prejudice with new premises that value diversity over universality.*\textsuperscript{862} 

Marie Battiste and James (Sa’ke’j) Youngblood Henderson

It seems as though my research project has been a montage of dichotomies. Yet my experience has demonstrated that this does not matter. Dichotomies can dissolve into cooperative dualities when difference is acknowledged and respected. In Shepparton the struggle towards justice for Aboriginal people continues among people who care, despite diverse opinions on how this should proceed. Productive dialogue is not hindered by disagreement, rather it is more likely to be impeded by agendas controlled by the hegemony. That deep listening is the key to creative dialogue cannot be disputed. But dialogue's respectful listening methods can also exist alongside "business as usual", enhancing it, and may be incorporated in it. In

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{854} Stoker 2006b
\item \textsuperscript{855} deLeon & Varda 2009:65
\item \textsuperscript{856} Lintott 1992:116
\item \textsuperscript{857} Cornell 2008 (see Part 1)
\item \textsuperscript{858} Lowndes 2001: 1958
\item \textsuperscript{859} See *The Shepparton Chronicles XVII. Things are going very slowly*
\item \textsuperscript{860} Halligan 2007:219
\item \textsuperscript{861} Freire 1970 – 1996:109
\item \textsuperscript{862} Battiste and Henderson 2000:133
\end{itemize}
practical terms, this means that no procedures or structures in local government and NGOs need to immediately or radically change to accommodate a dialogic approach; rather, profound communication may be the catalyst, bringing about dynamic change to the benefit of all. Respectful and unhurried listening should be at the heart of every partnership agenda.
23. Twenty-third Interlocution. "No"

In the telling we assert the validity of our own experiences and we call the silence of two hundred years a lie. And it is important for you, the listener, because like it or not, we are part of you. We have to find a way of living together in this country, and that will only come when our hearts, minds and wills are set towards reconciliation. It will only come when thousands of stories have been spoken and listened to with understanding.863

Sally Morgan

The generation of Aboriginal Elders who hold the cultural knowledge are nearing the end of their lives. There is concern among the Elders that younger people are often reluctant to learn traditional ways, preferring to join mainstream Australia864. Can Australia Aboriginal culture survive, let alone flourish? Campaigns such as Closing The Gap and Social Inclusion focus on Aboriginal Australians' rights as citizens, not rights as Australia's First Peoples. These programs' heavy emphasis on eliminating disadvantage may actually reinforce the stereotypical image of an inferior culture contributing nothing, socially or economically865 to the Australian community in the twenty-first century. Whether it is by unavoidable circumstances such as disease, by racism866, or by the attempted genocide of our recent history, the image of a downtrodden people persists867. Despite our well-intentioned efforts, and our goodwill, a colonial "Orientalism" lingers in our consciousness. This perception has also permeated Aboriginal communities as "lateral violence"868. Neo-colonialism manifests in the wider community in the fact that Aboriginal people are overlooked, in employment, housing, or simply being served in shops. It may explain why young Aboriginal people would prefer to join the mainstream community rather than learn their ancient culture. It is demonstrated in the fact that City of Greater Shepparton planning documents contain miniscule reference to Aboriginal people, and then in the context of welfare. This pernicious colonialism is a serious impediment to respectful dialogue between local government and Aboriginal people. In fact, it makes it impossible. Dialogue in the "hyphen" or "meeting place" is an engagement

863 Sally Morgan in Commonwealth of Australia RCIADC Vol 5 38.31
864 See The Shepparton Chronicles XXIII. Can white people escape our own oppression?
865 Briggs in Cutchliffe 2006:3
866 See Fifth Interlocution
867 Cowlishaw 2006:192
868 See 5.9 Lateral violence - internalised racism
of equals. While local government regards Aboriginal people as "disadvantaged", to be called on for "consultation" but not advice, in "partnership" but only in Aboriginal concerns, sponsoring Aboriginal art but not engaging Aboriginal creativity in the community, it will continue to dominate any discourse involving the two groups. In this way "No" rejects my hypothesis that duality can enhance dialogue. When one party regards the other as inferior, regardless of their goodwill towards them, this is a true dichotomy, and any product will be superficial.

23.1 The City of Greater Shepparton

In answering my research question, the case for "no" is substantial. "No" draws on the widespread presumption of white supremacy. As I said in my introduction, the "yes" answer simply leaves the gate open for possibilities. The dominance of "no", and the fact that "yes" is a mere possibility, is an indictment on the whole Australian community. For the bulk of the Australian population who live day to day by "common sense", the "yes" case of careful listening, dialogue, and a "meeting place" of equals is regarded as irrelevant or foolish. Sequential governments have created policies to deal with the "Aboriginal problem". None of these have been particularly successful. I would contend that the absence of effective dialogue has been the cause of most failures. I also argue that future policies will also fail unless a dialogic approach of deep listening, respect and love as many commentators present it, and as Liam869 articulates it so succinctly, is part of the creative process.

Now, at the end of my project, I cannot leave a "model" to fix the "Aboriginal problem", but rather I offer a "paradigm", a way of approaching the problem of continuing colonialist thinking that permeates all Australian governments; and the way the two cultures should "meet" each other. I suggest my story is one whose lessons are universal. I believe they can be applied to any individual or institution, including local government, working in partnership with Aboriginal people. In Australia Aboriginal people have not been given the status and respect they can rightly claim as the region's first peoples, and custodians of the land for millennia870. Therefore, for local government to categorise an Aboriginal community as simply another disadvantaged minority group is essentially racist; neither should Aboriginal

869 090511. See The Shepparton Chronicles XXV. Love
870 261010
people be included in "multicultural" categories, where issues of assimilation are fundamentally different to those of Australia's first peoples.

In addition, government must accept two other important points before any meaningful exchange can take place. Firstly, governments cannot grant justice, because justice involves the recognition of inherent rights of Aboriginal Australians. Secondly, governments must surrender any notion of white supremacy. I will give the City of Greater Shepparton only one specific recommendation. Shepparton Council should draft an amendment to the Community Development Framework, adding a section dealing specifically issues pertaining to the Aboriginal community, drafted in conjunction with the State Government's Registered Aboriginal Party, the Yorta Yorta Nation, and also include representatives of the Bangerang people. The focus of this amendment should be Council's role in "the meeting place", defined, planned and implemented in equal partnership and respect. It should be drafted with care and awareness to avoid "more of the same". I believe this is a small, achievable step.

23.2 Alliances

Aborigines have never wanted to be the same as the white man. What we have sought is to have substantial equality so that as human beings there might be a quality of life that we can enjoy in keeping with our own values and societal ways. Lives for our peoples, similar to that of the majority in Australia but lives uniquely ours, not ones that governments wished to impose upon us. Lives where we meet our obligations as citizens but where we are accommodated also as Aborigines. Lives where our human and cultural rights are respected by the governments that have told the world they would respect them.872

Patrick Dodson
Wentworth Lecture – Beyond the Mourning Gate 1998

Over the last decade, local government in Victoria has demonstrated some flexibility despite its institutional status. It has shown it has the propensity to be a leader in place-shaping, molding the community to the common good, rather than "what they want"873. The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation in the 1990s saw the possibility

871 See Eighteenth Interlocution
872 Dodson, P 1998:18
873 See The Shepparton Chronicles XXIII. Can white people escape our own oppression?
of local government being effective in "Reconciliation" where other levels of
government cannot. But Reconciliation is not justice. As Harold\textsuperscript{874} pointed out,
democracy holds no advantage for Aboriginal communities. The percentage of
population is too small. Aboriginal communities therefore must form alliances –
with international Indigenous communities, and also locally with white people of
goodwill. This is where local government may be most effective, but the incentive
must come from Aboriginal people. Although a Treaty is not possible at the local
level, with a dialogic approach, local agreements regarding sovereignty may be, and
have been in some instances,\textsuperscript{875} forged that can pave the way for a Treaty at
Commonwealth level. Within the foreseeable future the Federal Government of
Australia may choose to hold a Referendum to include local government in the
Constitution. This will define the functions of local government much more closely
than is the case today. Therefore, it is urgent that Aboriginal communities and local
government meet to form an alliance that will benefit both parties, and work towards
bringing justice to Aboriginal people. When justice is achieved in Australia, perhaps
we can talk about Reconciliation.

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\textbf{The Shepparton Chronicles}

\textbf{XXVII. Leaving Shep – Epilogue}

\textit{August 2011}

My cottage is packed up in boxes, and my little car is stuffed to the roof.
The dog has just enough room to breathe, but that's all. I'm sad to leave. I
need to take Jolie the poodle for a walk before we head down the
highway. There is a good place down behind the Council offices, so I
bump through the puddles on the dirt road around the sports ground to
the levee beside the river. Jolie is glad to be set free, and runs barking into
the bush. In the morning sun after last night's rain, the eucalypts glisten. I
follow the dog down the wallaby path, but my way is suddenly blocked

\textsuperscript{874} 261010
\textsuperscript{875} Shain et al 2006
by a huge spider web, spanning the gap between two trees. I halt! The web is jewelled with raindrop diamonds, and in the middle is the most beautiful spider I have ever seen. Black, red, yellow, with spectacular black spikes on its back and abdomen. I find out later it is a "jewelled spider". The spider, the web, the morning sun, the eucalyptus trees, and fat, brown Kaiela, flowing silently and swiftly in the background, suddenly all combine to transport me somewhere else. I feel a stab of pure happiness.

I call Jolie and head back to the car. Not sad anymore. I don't have to say good-bye. Now I know you, Shepparton, and you know me. We're friends.
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APPENDICES
Appendix 1

A) Barunga Statement

\textit{presented to Prime Minister Bob Hawke in 1988}

We, the Indigenous owners and occupiers of Australia, call on the Australian Government and people to recognise our rights:

- to self-determination and self-management, including the freedom to pursue our own economic, social, religious and cultural development;
- to permanent control and enjoyment of our ancestral lands;
- to compensation for the loss of use of our lands, there having been no extinction of original title;
- to protection of and control of access to our sacred sites, sacred objects, artefacts, designs, knowledge and works of art;
- to the return of the remains of our ancestors for burial in accordance with our traditions;
- to respect for and promotion of our Aboriginal identity, including the cultural, linguistic, religious and historical aspects, and including the right to be educated in our own languages and in our own culture and history;
- in accordance with the universal declaration of human rights, the international covenant on economic, social and cultural rights, the international covenant on civil and political rights, and the international convention on the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination, rights to life, liberty, security of person, food, clothing, housing, medical care, education and employment opportunities, necessary social services and other basic rights.

We call on the Commonwealth to pass laws providing:

- A national elected Aboriginal and Islander organisation to oversee Aboriginal and Islander affairs;
- A national system of land rights;
- A police and justice system which recognises our customary laws and frees us from discrimination and any activity which may threaten our identity or security, interfere with our freedom of expression or association, or otherwise
prevent our full enjoyment and exercise of universally recognised human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We call on the Australian Government to support Aborigines in the development of an international declaration of principles for indigenous rights, leading to an international covenant.
And we call on the Commonwealth Parliament to negotiate with us a Treaty recognising our prior ownership, continued occupation and sovereignty and affirming our human rights and freedom.


B) Eva Valley Statement

Date:
5 August 1993

Location:
Eva Valley, near Katherine, Northern Territory, Australia

Summary Information:

In the first week of August 1993, more than four hundred Indigenous people from around Australia gathered at Eva Valley, near Katherine in the Northern Territory. The meeting was called in response to concerns about Commonwealth proposals for legislation on native title in the wake of the Mabo decision (3 June 1992). The participants insisted on a national standard of rights to be given to all Aborigines and issued the Eva Valley Statement.

Detailed Information:

The Statement insists that any proposed legislation should advance Aboriginal rights to land, and that the Government should only move on the issue with the full support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It demanded that:

• the Commonwealth take full control of native title issues to the exclusion of the States and Territories to ensure a national standard for all Aboriginal peoples;
• the Commonwealth honour its obligations under international human rights instruments and international law; and

• the Commonwealth agree to a negotiating process to achieve a lasting settlement recognising and addressing historical truths regarding the impact of dispossession, marginalisation, destabilisation and disadvantage.

The Statement set out principles under which the Commonwealth should take actions in response to the Mabo decision and nominated a representative body to put forward the Indigenous position on these matters.

Appendix 2

The Redfern Park Speech (Year for the World's Indigenous People)

Delivered in Redfern Park by Prime Minister Paul Keating, 10 December 1992

Ladies and gentlemen

I am very pleased to be here today at the launch of Australia's celebration of the 1993 *International Year of the World's Indigenous People*. It will be a year of great significance for Australia. It comes at a time when we have committed ourselves to succeeding in the test which so far we have always failed. Because, in truth, we cannot confidently say that we have succeeded as we would like to have succeeded if we have not managed to extend opportunity and care, dignity and hope to the indigenous people of Australia - the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people.

This is a fundamental test of our social goals and our national will: our ability to say to ourselves and the rest of the world that Australia is a first rate social democracy, that we are what we should be - truly the land of the fair go and the better chance. There is no more basic test of how seriously we mean these things. It is a test of our self-knowledge. Of how well we know the land we live in. How well we know our history. How well we recognise the fact that, complex as our contemporary identity is, it cannot be separated from Aboriginal Australia. How well we know what Aboriginal Australians know about Australia.

Redfern is a good place to contemplate these things. Just a mile or two from the place where the first European settlers landed, in too many ways it tells us that their failure to bring much more than devastation and demoralisation to Aboriginal Australia continues to be our failure.

More I think than most Australians recognise, the plight of Aboriginal Australians affects us all. In Redfern it might be tempting to think that the reality Aboriginal Australians face is somehow contained here, and that the rest of us are insulated from it. But of course, while all the dilemmas may exist here, they are far from contained. We know the same dilemmas and more are faced all over Australia.

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877 Keating 2000
This is perhaps the point of this Year of the World's Indigenous People: to bring the dispossessed out of the shadows, to recognise that they are part of us, and that we cannot give indigenous Australians up without giving up many of our own most deeply held values, much of our own identity - and our own humanity.

Nowhere in the world, I would venture, is the message more stark than it is in Australia. We simply cannot sweep injustice aside. Even if our own conscience allowed us to, I am sure, that in due course, the world and the people of our region would not. There should be no mistake about this - our success in resolving these issues will have a significant bearing on our standing in the world.

However intractable the problems seem, we cannot resign ourselves to failure - any more than we can hide behind the contemporary version of Social Darwinism which says that to reach back for the poor and dispossessed is to risk being dragged down. That seems to me not only morally indefensible, but bad history.

We non-Aboriginal Australians should perhaps remind ourselves that Australia once reached out for us. Didn't Australia provide opportunity and care for the dispossessed Irish? The poor of Britain? The refugees from war and famine and persecution in the countries of Europe and Asia? Isn't it reasonable to say that if we can build a prosperous and remarkably harmonious multicultural society in Australia, surely we can find just solutions to the problems which beset the first Australians - the people to whom the most injustice has been done.

And, as I say, the starting point might be to recognise that the problem starts with us non-Aboriginal Australians.

It begins, I think, with that act of recognition. Recognition that it was we who did the dispossessing. We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life. We brought the diseases. The alcohol. We committed the murders. We took the children from their mothers. We practised discrimination and exclusion. It was our ignorance and our prejudice. And our failure to imagine these things being done to us.

With some noble exceptions, we failed to make the most basic human response and enter into their hearts and minds. We failed to ask - how would I feel if this were
done to me? As a consequence, we failed to see that what we were doing degraded all of us.

If we needed a reminder of this, we received it this year. The Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody showed with devastating clarity that the past lives on in inequality, racism and injustice. In the prejudice and ignorance of non-Aboriginal Australians, and in the demoralisation and desperation, the fractured identity, of so many Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders.

For all this, I do not believe that the Report should fill us with guilt. Down the years, there has been no shortage of guilt, but it has not produced the responses we need. Guilt is not a very constructive emotion. I think what we need to do is open our hearts a bit. All of us.

Perhaps when we recognise what we have in common we will see the things which must be done - the practical things. There is something of this in the creation of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation. The Council's mission is to forge a new partnership built on justice and equity and an appreciation of the heritage of Australia's indigenous people.

In the abstract those terms are meaningless. We have to give meaning to "justice" and "equity"- and, as I have said several times this year, we will only give them meaning when we commit ourselves to achieving concrete results. If we improve the living conditions in one town, they will improve in another. And another. If we raise the standard of health by twenty per cent one year, it will be raised more the next. If we open one door others will follow.

When we see improvement, when we see more dignity, more confidence, more happiness - we will know we are going to win. We need these practical building blocks of change.

The Mabo Judgement should be seen as one of these. By doing away with the bizarre conceit that this continent had no owners prior to the settlement of Europeans, Mabo establishes a fundamental truth and lays the basis for justice. It will be much easier to work from that basis than has ever been the case in the past. For that reason alone we should ignore the isolated outbreaks of hysteria and hostility of the past few months.
Mabo is an historic decision - we can make it an historic turning point, the basis of a new relationship between indigenous and non-Aboriginal Australians. The message should be that there is nothing to fear or to lose in the recognition of historical truth, or the extension of social justice, or the deepening of Australian social democracy to include indigenous Australians. There is everything to gain.

Even the unhappy past speaks for this. Where Aboriginal Australians have been included in the life of Australia they have made remarkable contributions. Economic contributions, particularly in the pastoral and agricultural industry. They are there in the frontier and exploration history of Australia. They are there in the wars. In sport to an extraordinary degree. In literature and art and music. In all these things they have shaped our knowledge of this continent and of ourselves. They have shaped our identity. They are there in the Australian legend. We should never forget - they have helped build this nation.

And if we have a sense of justice, as well as common sense, we will forge a new partnership.

As I said, it might help us if we non-Aboriginal Australians imagined ourselves dispossessed of land we had lived on for fifty thousand years - and then imagined ourselves told that it had never been ours. Imagine if ours was the oldest culture in the world and we were told that it was worthless. Imagine if we had resisted this settlement, suffered and died in the defence of our land, and then were told in history books that we had given up without a fight. Imagine if non-Aboriginal Australians had served their country in peace and war and were then ignored in history books. Imagine if our feats on sporting fields had inspired admiration and patriotism and yet did nothing to diminish prejudice. Imagine if our spiritual life was denied and ridiculed. Imagine if we had suffered the injustice and then were blamed for it.

It seems to me that if we can imagine the injustice we can imagine its opposite. And we can have justice. I say that for two reasons: I say it because I believe that the great things about Australian social democracy reflect a fundamental belief in justice. And I say it because in so many other areas we have proved our capacity over the years to go on extending the realms of participation, opportunity and care.
Just as Australians living in the relatively narrow and insular Australia of the 1960s imagined a culturally diverse, worldly and open Australia, and in a generation turned the idea into reality, so we can turn the goals of reconciliation into reality.

There are very good signs that the process has begun. The creation of the Reconciliation Council is evidence itself. The establishment of the ATSIC - the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission - is also evidence. The Council is the product of imagination and good will. ATSIC emerges from the vision of indigenous self-determination and self-management. The vision has already become the reality of almost 800 elected Aboriginal Regional Councillors and Commissioners determining priorities and developing their own programs.

All over Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are taking charge of their own lives. And assistance with the problems which chronically beset them is at last being made available in ways developed by the communities themselves.

If these things offer hope, so does the fact that this generation of Australians is better informed about Aboriginal culture and achievement, and about the injustice that has been done, than any generation before. We are beginning to more generally appreciate the depth and the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. From their music and art and dance we are beginning to recognise how much richer our national life and identity will be for the participation of Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders. We are beginning to learn what the indigenous people have known for many thousands of years - how to live with our physical environment. Ever so gradually we are learning how to see Australia through Aboriginal eyes, beginning to recognise the wisdom contained in their epic story. I think we are beginning to see how much we owe the indigenous Australians and how much we have lost by living so apart.

I said we non-indigenous Australians should try to imagine the Aboriginal view. It can't be too hard. Someone imagined this event today, and it is now a marvellous reality and a great reason for hope.

There is one thing today we cannot imagine. We cannot imagine that the descendants of people whose genius and resilience maintained a culture here through fifty
thousand years or more, through cataclysmic changes to the climate and environment, and who then survived two centuries of dispossession and abuse, will be denied their place in the modern Australian nation. We cannot imagine that. We cannot imagine that we will fail. And with the spirit that is here today I am confident that we won't. I am confident that we will succeed in this decade.

Thank you
Appendix 3

The 1967 referendum – Fact sheet 150

On 27 May 1967 a Federal referendum was held. The first question, referred to as the 'nexus question' was an attempt to alter the balance of numbers in the Senate and the House of Representatives. The second question was to determine whether two references in the Australian Constitution, which discriminated against Aboriginal people, should be removed. This fact sheet addresses the second question.

The sections of the Constitution under scrutiny were:

51. The Parliament shall, subject to this Constitution, have power to make laws for the peace, order, and good government of the Commonwealth with respect to:-

...(xxvi) The people of any race, other than the aboriginal people in any State, for whom it is necessary to make special laws.

127. In reckoning the numbers of the people of the Commonwealth, or of a State or other part of the Commonwealth, aboriginal natives should not be counted.

The removal of the words ‘... other than the aboriginal people in any State...' in section 51(xxvi) and the whole of section 127 were considered by many to be representative of the prevailing movement for political change within Indigenous affairs. As a result of the political climate, this referendum saw the highest YES vote ever recorded in a Federal referendum, with 90.77 per cent voting for change.

It is interesting to note that because the majority of parliamentarians supported the proposed amendment, a NO case was never formulated for presentation as part of the referendum campaign. Copies of the YES case can be located on files identified below.

The Constitution was changed, giving formal effect to the referendum result, by the Constitution Alteration (Aboriginals) 1967 (Act No 55 of 1967), which received assent on 10 August 1967.

Source: National Archives of Australia, Australian Government
However, there is a further movement for change, to include Aboriginal people in the Constitution in a positive way:

Constitutional Recognition 2014

Why do we need change?

The public discussion about Constitutional Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples has focused on three main problems with our nation’s founding document:

There is no mention of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the Constitution.

- Section 25 contemplates laws that ban people from voting on the basis of their race. This power was last used to exclude Aboriginal people from voting in Queensland, up until 1965.

- Section 51(xxvi) is a ‘races power’ which allows ‘special laws’ to be directed at the people of a particular race. While this power allows laws to address disadvantage, it leaves open the possibility that future governments could unfairly target the people of any race for negative treatment.

What could change look like?

1. The Federal Government appointed an Expert Panel to consult with people around the country about what changes they wanted to see to the nation’s founding document to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

2. In January 2012, the Panel presented its report to the Australian Government. It unanimously endorsed a specific proposal to amend the Constitution. If adopted, this amendment would:

3. Recognise the prior occupation and continuing cultures, languages and heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

4. Acknowledge the continuing relationship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to these lands and waters.

5. Remove the ability of States and Territories to bar certain races from voting [section 25].
6. Remove the capacity of governments to make laws to the detriment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples or the people of any race [section 51(xxvi)].

7. Insert a protection against discrimination on the basis of race, colour or ethnicity.\textsuperscript{878}

Further Information

http://www.recognise.org.au/about/expert-panel


\textsuperscript{878} http://antar.org.au/constitutional_recognition
Appendix 4

CLOSING THE GAP
Indigenous Health Equality Summit

 Canberra, March 20, 2008

PREAMBLE

Our challenge for the future is to embrace a new partnership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The core of this partnership for the future is closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians on life expectancy, educational achievement and employment opportunities. This new partnership in closing the gap will set concrete targets for the future: within a decade to halve the widening gap in literacy, numeracy and employment outcomes and opportunities for Indigenous children, within a decade to halve the appalling gap in infant mortality rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children and, within a generation, to close the equally appalling 11-year life gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous when it comes to overall life expectancy.

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, Apology to Australia’s Indigenous Peoples, 13 February 2008

This is a statement of intent - between the Government of Australia and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples of Australia, supported by non-Indigenous Australians and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous health organisations - to work together to achieve equality in health status and life expectancy between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians by year 2030.

We share a determination to close the fundamental divide between the health outcomes and life expectancy of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia and non-Indigenous Australians.

We are committed to ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have equal life chances to all other Australians.

We are committed to working towards ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have access to health services that are equal in standard to those enjoyed by other Australians and enjoy living conditions that support their social, emotional and cultural well-being.

We recognise that specific measures are needed to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ access to health services. Crucial to ensuring equal access to health services is ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are actively involved in the design, delivery and control of these services.

ACCORDINGLY WE COMMIT:

- To developing a comprehensive, long-term plan of action, that is targeted to need, evidence-based and capable of addressing the existing inequities in health services, in order to achieve equality of health status and life expectancy between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians by 2030.
- To ensuring primary health care services and health infrastructure for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples which are capable of bridging the gaps in health standards by 2018.
- To ensuring the full participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their representative bodies in all aspects of addressing their health needs.
- To working collectively to systematically address the social determinants that impact on achieving health equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- To building on the evidence base and supporting what works in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, and relevant international experience.
- To supporting and developing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled health services in urban, rural and remote areas in order to achieve better improvements in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing.
- To achieving improved access to, and outcomes from, mainstream services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- To respect and promote the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including by ensuring that health services are available, appropriate, accessible, affordable and of good quality.
- To measure, monitor, and report on our joint efforts, in accordance with benchmarks and targets, to ensure that we are progressively realising our shared ambitions.

WE ARE:

SIGNATURES

Representative of the Australian Government

National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation

Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses

Australian Indigenous Doctors Association

Indigenous Dental Association of Australia

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission

Signature Redacted by Library
CLOSE THE GAP

Indigenous Health Equality Summit

STATEMENT OF INTENT

This Statement of Intent is supported by:

Signature Redacted by Library
Appendix 5

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

APOLOGY TO AUSTRALIA’S INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Speech by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd to the Parliament of Australia

Wednesday 13 February 2008

Mr Speaker, there comes a time in the history of nations when their peoples must become fully reconciled to their past if they are to go forward with confidence to embrace their future.

Our nation, Australia, has reached such a time.

That is why the parliament is today here assembled: to deal with this unfinished business of the nation, to remove a great stain from the nation’s soul and, in a true spirit of reconciliation, to open a new chapter in the history of this great land, Australia.

Last year I made a commitment to the Australian people that if we formed the next government of the Commonwealth we would in parliament say sorry to the stolen generations.

Today I honour that commitment.

I said we would do so early in the life of the new parliament.

Again, today I honour that commitment by doing so at the commencement of this the 42nd parliament of the Commonwealth.

Because the time has come, well and truly come, for all peoples of our great country, for all citizens of our great Commonwealth, for all Australians—those who are Indigenous and those who are not—to come together to reconcile and together build a new future for our nation.
Some have asked, ‘Why apologise?’ Let me begin to answer by telling the parliament just a little of one person’s story—an elegant, eloquent and wonderful woman in her 80s, full of life, full of funny stories, despite what has happened in her life’s journey, a woman who has travelled a long way to be with us today, a member of the stolen generation who shared some of her story with me when I called around to see her just a few days ago.

Nanna Nungala Fejo, as she prefers to be called, was born in the late 1920s.

She remembers her earliest childhood days living with her family and her community in a bush camp just outside Tennant Creek.

She remembers the love and the warmth and the kinship of those days long ago, including traditional dancing around the camp fire at night.

She loved the dancing. She remembers once getting into strife when, as a four-year-old girl, she insisted on dancing with the male tribal elders rather than just sitting and watching the men, as the girls were supposed to do.

But then, sometime around 1932, when she was about four, she remembers the coming of the welfare men.

Her family had feared that day and had dug holes in the creek bank where the children could run and hide.

What they had not expected was that the white welfare men did not come alone.

They brought a truck, two white men and an Aboriginal stockman on horseback cracking his stockwhip.

The kids were found; they ran for their mothers, screaming, but they could not get away.

They were herded and piled onto the back of the truck.

Tears flowing, her mum tried clinging to the sides of the truck as her children were taken away to the Bungalow in Alice, all in the name of protection.

A few years later, government policy changed.
Now the children would be handed over to the missions to be cared for by the churches.

But which church would care for them? The kids were simply told to line up in three lines.

Nanna Fejo and her sisters stood in the middle line, her older brother and cousin on her left.

Those on the left were told that they had become Catholics, those in the middle Methodists and those on the right Church of England.

That is how the complex questions of post-reformation theology were resolved in the Australian outback in the 1930s.

It was as crude as that.

She and her sister were sent to a Methodist mission on Goulburn Island and then Croker Island.

Her Catholic brother was sent to work at a cattle station and her cousin to a Catholic mission.

Nanna Fejo’s family had been broken up for a second time.

She stayed at the mission until after the war, when she was allowed to leave for a prearranged job as a domestic in Darwin.

She was 16. Nanna Fejo never saw her mum again.

After she left the mission, her brother let her know that her mum had died years before, a broken woman fretting for the children that had literally been ripped away from her.

I asked Nanna Fejo what she would have me say today about her story.

She thought for a few moments then said that what I should say today was that all mothers are important.
And she added: ‘Families—keeping them together is very important. It’s a good thing that you are surrounded by love and that love is passed down the generations. That’s what gives you happiness.’

As I left, later on, Nanna Fejo took one of my staff aside, wanting to make sure that I was not too hard on the Aboriginal stockman who had hunted those kids down all those years ago.

The stockman had found her again decades later, this time himself to say, ‘Sorry.’

And remarkably, extraordinarily, she had forgiven him.

Nanna Fejo’s is just one story.

There are thousands, tens of thousands, of them: stories of forced separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their mums and dads over the better part of a century.

Some of these stories are graphically told in *Bringing them home*, the report commissioned in 1995 by Prime Minister Keating and received in 1997 by Prime Minister Howard.

There is something terribly primal about these firsthand accounts.

The pain is searing; it screams from the pages.

The hurt, the humiliation, the degradation and the sheer brutality of the act of physically separating a mother from her children is a deep assault on our senses and on our most elemental humanity.

These stories cry out to be heard; they cry out for an apology.

Instead, from the nation’s parliament there has been a stony and stubborn and deafening silence for more than a decade; a view that somehow we, the parliament, should suspend our most basic instincts of what is right and what is wrong; a view that, instead, we should look for any pretext to push this great wrong to one side, to leave it languishing with the historians, the academics and the cultural warriors, as if the stolen generations are little more than an interesting sociological phenomenon.

But the stolen generations are not intellectual curiosities.
They are human beings; human beings who have been damaged deeply by the decisions of parliaments and governments.

But, as of today, the time for denial, the time for delay, has at last come to an end.

The nation is demanding of its political leadership to take us forward.

Decency, human decency, universal human decency, demands that the nation now step forward to right an historical wrong.

That is what we are doing in this place today.

But should there still be doubts as to why we must now act, let the parliament reflect for a moment on the following facts: that, between 1910 and 1970, between 10 and 30 per cent of Indigenous children were forcibly taken from their mothers and fathers; that, as a result, up to 50,000 children were forcibly taken from their families; that this was the product of the deliberate, calculated policies of the state as reflected in the explicit powers given to them under statute; that this policy was taken to such extremes by some in administrative authority that the forced extractions of children of so-called ‘mixed lineage’ were seen as part of a broader policy of dealing with ‘the problem of the Aboriginal population’.

One of the most notorious examples of this approach was from the Northern Territory Protector of Natives, who stated:

Generally by the fifth and invariably by the sixth generation, all native characteristics of the Australian aborigine are eradicated. The problem of our half-castes—

to quote the Protector—

will quickly be eliminated by the complete disappearance of the black race, and the swift submergence of their progeny in the white ...

The Western Australian Protector of Natives expressed not dissimilar views, expounding them at length in Canberra in 1937 at the first national conference on Indigenous affairs that brought together the Commonwealth and state protectors of natives.
These are uncomfortable things to be brought out into the light.

They are not pleasant.

They are profoundly disturbing.

But we must acknowledge these facts if we are to deal once and for all with the argument that the policy of generic forced separation was somehow well motivated, justified by its historical context and, as a result, unworthy of any apology today.

Then we come to the argument of intergenerational responsibility, also used by some to argue against giving an apology today.

But let us remember the fact that the forced removal of Aboriginal children was happening as late as the early 1970s.

The 1970s is not exactly a point in remote antiquity.

There are still serving members of this parliament who were first elected to this place in the early 1970s.

It is well within the adult memory span of many of us.

The uncomfortable truth for us all is that the parliaments of the nation, individually and collectively, enacted statutes and delegated authority under those statutes that made the forced removal of children on racial grounds fully lawful.

There is a further reason for an apology as well: it is that reconciliation is in fact an expression of a core value of our nation—and that value is a fair go for all.

There is a deep and abiding belief in the Australian community that, for the stolen generations, there was no fair go at all.

There is a pretty basic Aussie belief that says it is time to put right this most outrageous of wrongs.

It is for these reasons, quite apart from concerns of fundamental human decency, that the governments and parliaments of this nation must make this apology—because, put simply, the laws that our parliaments enacted made the stolen generations possible.
We, the parliaments of the nation, are ultimately responsible, not those who gave effect to our laws.

The problem lay with the laws themselves. As has been said of settler societies elsewhere, we are the bearers of many blessings from our ancestors, and therefore we must also be the bearer of their burdens as well.

Therefore, for our nation, the course of action is clear, and therefore, for our people, the course of action is clear: that is, to deal now with what has become one of the darkest chapters in Australia’s history.

In doing so, we are doing more than contending with the facts, the evidence and the often rancorous public debate.

In doing so, we are also wrestling with our own soul.

This is not, as some would argue, a black-armband view of history; it is just the truth: the cold, confronting, uncomfortable truth—facing it, dealing with it, moving on from it.

Until we fully confront that truth, there will always be a shadow hanging over us and our future as a fully united and fully reconciled people.

It is time to reconcile. It is time to recognise the injustices of the past. It is time to say sorry. It is time to move forward together.

To the stolen generations, I say the following: as Prime Minister of Australia, I am sorry.

On behalf of the government of Australia, I am sorry.

On behalf of the parliament of Australia, I am sorry.

I offer you this apology without qualification.

We apologise for the hurt, the pain and suffering that we, the parliament, have caused you by the laws that previous parliaments have enacted.

We apologise for the indignity, the degradation and the humiliation these laws embodied.
We offer this apology to the mothers, the fathers, the brothers, the sisters, the families and the communities whose lives were ripped apart by the actions of successive governments under successive parliaments.

In making this apology, I would also like to speak personally to the members of the stolen generations and their families: to those here today, so many of you; to those listening across the nation—from Yuendumu, in the central west of the Northern Territory, to Yabara, in North Queensland, and to Pitjantjatjara in South Australia.

I know that, in offering this apology on behalf of the government and the parliament, there is nothing I can say today that can take away the pain you have suffered personally.

Whatever words I speak today, I cannot undo that.

Words alone are not that powerful; grief is a very personal thing.

I ask those non-Indigenous Australians listening today who may not fully understand why what we are doing is so important to imagine for a moment that this had happened to you.

I say to honourable members here present: imagine if this had happened to us.

Imagine the crippling effect.

Imagine how hard it would be to forgive.

My proposal is this: if the apology we extend today is accepted in the spirit of reconciliation in which it is offered, we can today resolve together that there be a new beginning for Australia.

And it is to such a new beginning that I believe the nation is now calling us.

Australians are a passionate lot. We are also a very practical lot.

For us, symbolism is important but, unless the great symbolism of reconciliation is accompanied by an even greater substance, it is little more than a clanging gong.

It is not sentiment that makes history; it is our actions that make history.

Today’s apology, however inadequate, is aimed at righting past wrongs.
It is also aimed at building a bridge between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians—a bridge based on a real respect rather than a thinly veiled contempt.

Our challenge for the future is to now cross that bridge and, in so doing, to embrace a new partnership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians—embracing, as part of that partnership, expanded Link-up and other critical services to help the stolen generations to trace their families if at all possible and to provide dignity to their lives.

But the core of this partnership for the future is the closing of the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians on life expectancy, educational achievement and employment opportunities.

This new partnership on closing the gap will set concrete targets for the future: within a decade to halve the widening gap in literacy, numeracy and employment outcomes and opportunities for Indigenous Australians, within a decade to halve the appalling gap in infant mortality rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children and, within a generation, to close the equally appalling 17-year life gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous in overall life expectancy.

The truth is, a business as usual approach towards Indigenous Australians is not working.

Most old approaches are not working.

We need a new beginning—a new beginning which contains real measures of policy success or policy failure; a new beginning, a new partnership, on closing the gap with sufficient flexibility not to insist on a one-size-fits-all approach for each of the hundreds of remote and regional Indigenous communities across the country but instead allowing flexible, tailored, local approaches to achieve commonly-agreed national objectives that lie at the core of our proposed new partnership; a new beginning that draws intelligently on the experiences of new policy settings across the nation.

However, unless we as a parliament set a destination for the nation, we have no clear point to guide our policy, our programs or our purpose; we have no centralised organising principle.
Let us resolve today to begin with the little children—a fitting place to start on this
day of apology for the stolen generations.

Let us resolve over the next five years to have every Indigenous four-year-old in a
remote Aboriginal community enrolled in and attending a proper early childhood
education centre or opportunity and engaged in proper preliteracy and prenumeracy
programs.

Let us resolve to build new educational opportunities for these little ones, year by
year, step by step, following the completion of their crucial preschool year.

Let us resolve to use this systematic approach to building future educational
opportunities for Indigenous children and providing proper primary and preventative
health care for the same children, to beginning the task of rolling back the obscenity
that we find today in infant mortality rates in remote Indigenous communities—up to
four times higher than in other communities.

None of this will be easy.

Most of it will be hard—very hard. But none of it is impossible, and all of it is
achievable with clear goals, clear thinking, and by placing an absolute premium on
respect, cooperation and mutual responsibility as the guiding principles of this new
partnership on closing the gap.

The mood of the nation is for reconciliation now, between Indigenous and non-
Indigenous Australians.

The mood of the nation on Indigenous policy and politics is now very simple.

The nation is calling on us, the politicians, to move beyond our infantile bickering,
our point-scoring and our mindlessly partisan politics and elevate this one core area
of national responsibility to a rare position beyond the partisan divide. Surely this is
the unfulfilled spirit of the 1967 referendum.

Surely, at least from this day forward, we should give it a go.

Let me take this one step further, and take what some may see as a piece of political
posturing and make a practical proposal to the opposition on this day, the first full
sitting day of the new parliament.
I said before the election that the nation needed a kind of war cabinet on parts of Indigenous policy, because the challenges are too great and the consequences too great to allow it all to become a political football, as it has been so often in the past.

I therefore propose a joint policy commission, to be led by the Leader of the Opposition and me, with a mandate to develop and implement—to begin with—an effective housing strategy for remote communities over the next five years.

It will be consistent with the government’s policy framework, a new partnership for closing the gap.

If this commission operates well, I then propose that it work on the further task of constitutional recognition of the first Australians, consistent with the longstanding platform commitments of my party and the pre-election position of the opposition.

This would probably be desirable in any event because, unless such a proposition were absolutely bipartisan, it would fail at a referendum.

As I have said before, the time has come for new approaches to enduring problems.

Working constructively together on such defined projects I believe would meet with the support of the nation.

It is time for fresh ideas to fashion the nation’s future.

Mr Speaker, today the parliament has come together to right a great wrong.

We have come together to deal with the past so that we might fully embrace the future.

We have had sufficient audacity of faith to advance a pathway to that future, with arms extended rather than with fists still clenched.

So let us seize the day. Let it not become a moment of mere sentimental reflection.

Let us take it with both hands and allow this day, this day of national reconciliation, to become one of those rare moments in which we might just be able to transform the way in which the nation thinks about itself, whereby the injustice administered to the stolen generations in the name of these, our parliaments, causes all of us to reappraise, at the deepest level of our beliefs, the real possibility of reconciliation.
writ large: reconciliation across all Indigenous Australia; reconciliation across the entire history of the often bloody encounter between those who emerged from the Dreamtime a thousand generations ago and those who, like me, came across the seas only yesterday; reconciliation which opens up whole new possibilities for the future.

It is for the nation to bring the first two centuries of our settled history to a close, as we begin a new chapter.

We embrace with pride, admiration and awe these great and ancient cultures we are truly blessed to have among us—cultures that provide a unique, uninterrupted human thread linking our Australian continent to the most ancient prehistory of our planet.

Growing from this new respect, we see our Indigenous brothers and sisters with fresh eyes, with new eyes, and we have our minds wide open as to how we might tackle, together, the great practical challenges that Indigenous Australia faces in the future.

Let us turn this page together: Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, government and opposition, Commonwealth and state, and write this new chapter in our nation’s story together.

First Australians, First Fleeters, and those who first took the oath of allegiance just a few weeks ago—let’s grasp this opportunity to craft a new future for this great land, Australia. Mr Speaker, I commend the motion to the House.879

Appendix 6

The Policy of Assimilation

An extract from a speech, *The Policy of Assimilation*, given by Paul Hasluck in Federal Parliament in April 1961. Mr Hasluck (later Sir Paul Hasluck), as Minister for State and Territories, was reporting on "A conference of Commonwealth and State Ministers was held at Canberra on 26th and 27th January, 1961, to consider the advancement of the welfare of Australian aborigines."

(b) METHODS OF ADVANCING THE POLICY

..., the conference gave attention to methods of advancing the policy. They are:

i) Extension, where applicable, of government settlement work to encourage nomadic and semi-nomadic natives to adopt a more settled way of life and to make health services, better standards of housing and nutrition, schooling, vocational training and occupation available to them and their children, as a first stage towards their assimilation.

ii) Provision of health services including particularly child welfare services.

iii) Provision of education in normal schools and pre-schools to the extent possible otherwise in special schools and pre-schools for all aboriginal and part-aboriginal children.

iv) Continual improvement in housing and hygiene standards on government settlements, missions, rural properties, in towns and assistance towards provision of and training in the use of improved housing facilities particularly in town areas.

v) Vocational training (including apprenticeship) and employment, particularly in ways which will assist aborigines and part-aborigines to make a contribution to the advancement of their own people by employment—teaching assistants, nursing and medical assistants, patrol officers, welfare officers, and so on.

vi) Encouragement of social and sporting activity both among aborigines and part-aborigines and participation by them in general community activity.

vii) Extension of welfare work, particularly to assist those people living in or near towns to adjust themselves to the life of the community.
viii) Welfare services provided for other members of the community to be available to aborigines and part-aborigines, for example, child, family and social welfare services.

ix) A liberal approach to the removal of restrictive or protective legislation as soon as the capacity and advancement of the individual makes this possible.

x) Positive steps to ensure awareness in the general Australian community that implementation of the policy of assimilation is not possible unless advanced aborigines and part-aborigines are received into the community and accepted without prejudice, and to ensure, as far as possible, that the Australian community plays its full part in this programme.

xi) Further research into special problems associated with the native welfare programme.

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880 Hasluck 1961: 2/3
Appendix 7
Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Final Report

*From Chapter 8 OUTCOMES - MARKING THE MILESTONES*

Commitments and Actions by Local Government

Local government has made a very significant contribution to reconciliation, as outlined in Chapter 5.

From early in the Council's life, the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) and State and Territory peak local government bodies have provided support and leadership to the local government sector in reconciliation issues. It is clear that many local government councils and associations have recognised the importance and benefits that reconciliation can bring to their communities.

Many local councils have committed to the Council's vision, formed local government agreements and undertaken actions to advance reconciliation. These include taking a leading local role in promoting and staging National Reconciliation Week activities as well as appointing Aboriginal liaison and policy officers in areas where most needed. Local council involvement in the reconciliation process has also been evident in their rate of acceptance of the Council's documents and strategies and the many other activities and initiatives they have implemented which provide specific benefits to their local communities.

It is clear that the local government sector recognises that there is still much to do to maintain the reconciliation process. ALGA has made firm commitments to continue to work towards reconciliation beyond the Council's final term. In particular ALGA committed to support the Council's proposals for improved outcomes in Government delivery of services at COAG.

ALGA recognised the important role local government has played in promoting and organising National Reconciliation Week events in the last few years. It agreed to propose to its constituents that local government play a coordinating role with State
and Territory Reconciliation Committees and Local Reconciliation Groups in ensuring that National Reconciliation Week continues successfully in 2001. 881

881 CAR 2000a, austlii website. Final Report Chapter 8 OUTCOMES - MARKING THE MILESTONES Commitments and Actions by Local Government
Appendix 8

Local Government Act 1989 No. 11 of 1989 Part 9—Specific Functions, Powers and Restrictions\textsuperscript{882}

Division 3—Best value principles

208 A Best Value Principles to be followed

A Council must comply with the Best Value Principles.

208B Best Value Principles

The Best Value Principles are——

- all services provided by a Council must meet the quality and cost standards required by section 208D;
- subject to sections 3C(2)(b) and 3C(2)(e), all services provided by a Council must be responsive to the needs of its community;
- each service provided by a Council must be accessible to those members of the community for whom the service is intended;
- a Council must achieve continuous improvement in the provision of services for its community;
- a Council must develop a program of regular consultation with its community in relation to the services it provides;
- a Council must report regularly to its community on its achievements in relation to the principles set out in paragraphs (a), (b), (c), (d) and (e).

\textsuperscript{882} Local Government Act 1989 No. 11 of 1989 Part 9—Specific Functions, Powers and Restrictions, pp 289 – 293
208C Factors that may be looked at in applying the Principles

In applying the Best Value Principles, a Council may take into account, among other factors——

a) the need to review services against the best on offer in both the public and private sectors; and
b) an assessment of value for money in service delivery; and
c) community expectations and values; and
d) the balance of affordability and accessibility of services to the community; and
e) opportunities for local employment growth or retention; and
f) the value of potential partnerships with other Councils and State and the Commonwealth governments; and
g) potential environmental advantages for the Council's municipal district.

208D Quality and cost standards

A Council must develop quality and cost standards for the provision of any service it provides for its community.

• A quality or cost standard must set out the performance outcomes determined by the Council in relation to each service.

• In developing quality and cost standards a Council must take into account the factors listed in sections 208C(a), (b), (c), (d) and (e).

• A Council may develop different quality and cost standards for different classes of services.

208E When the Best Value Principles are to be implemented

A Council must, on or before 31 December 2000, develop a program for the application of the Best Value Principles.

• A Council must ensure that the program required by subsection (1) is available to the public.
• A Council must apply the Best Value Principles to all of the services it provides on or before 31 December 2005.

• Despite subsection (3), if a Council was providing a service on the commencement of the Local Government (Best Value Principles) Act 1999 and the service was provided under an agreement between the Council and another person, body or group of people, the Council need not comply with the Best Value Principles in respect of the provision of that service until the expiry of the agreement.

S. 208D substituted by No. 59/1999 s. 4.
S. 208E substituted by No. 59/1999 s. 4.
s. 208F
S. 208F substituted by No. 59/1999 s. 4.
S. 208G substituted by No. 59/1999 s. 4.
S. 208H substituted by No. 59/1999 s. 4.

208F Standards to be publicly available

A Council must ensure that any quality or cost standards it adopts are available for inspection by the public.

208G Report on Best Value Principles compliance

At least once every year a Council must report to its community on what it has done to ensure that it has given effect to the Best Value Principles.

208H Ministerial Codes

The Minister may publish in the Government Gazette one or more Codes in relation to how Councils are to give effect to the Best Value Principles.

• Without limiting the matters a Code may deal with, a Code may—

  (a) specify how often the Best Value Principles are to be applied to a service;

  (b) specify the minimum details that quality and cost standards must contain;
(c) specify what records are to be kept in relation to the application of the Best Value Principles;

(d) specify maximum periods for agreements entered into in accordance with the Best Value Principles.

• A Council must comply with any obligation imposed by such a Code that applies to the Council.

• Any agreement or arrangement entered into by a Council in contravention of subsection (3) is not void only because of that contravention

208I Ministerial guidelines

S. 208I substituted by No. 59/1999 s. 4.

The Minister may publish in the Government Gazette guidelines for Councils in relation to the Best Value Principles.

• If a Council deals with a matter in accordance with an applicable guideline, it is to be taken to have complied with the Best Value Principles in respect of that matter.

208J Minister must consult

Before publishing a Code under section 208H or a guideline under section 208I, the Minister must consult with any local government body that the Minister thinks it appropriate to consult with.

• In this section local government body means—

  (a) a Council;

  (b) an organisation that the Minister considers represents local government interests and that the Minister has declared, by notice published in the Government Gazette, to be a local government body.