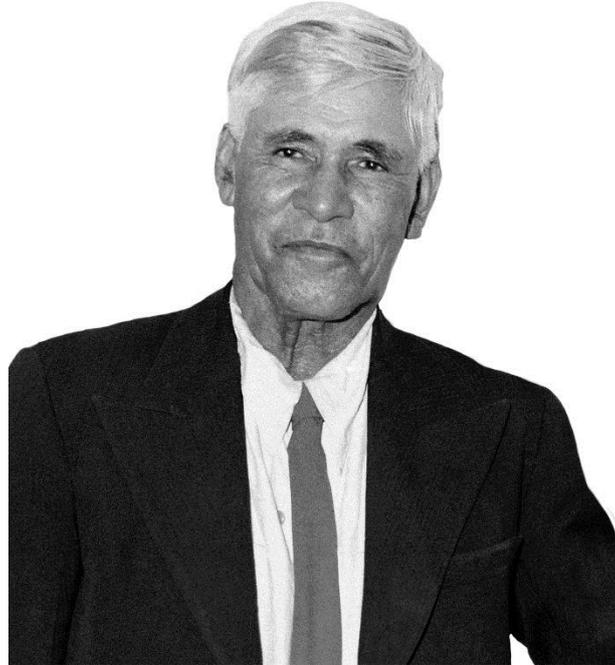


The Frank Archibald Memorial Lecture Series



1986 Lecture Notes

Future Pathways: Equity or Isolation

Professor Eric P. Willmot



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Future Pathways: Equity or Isolation

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Modern Australia began in 1802 with the defeat and death of the Eora warrior Pemulwuy.

When British ships sailed into the bay of Kamay (now Botany Bay) in 1788 they found themselves in the land of a people who believed in a transcendental creator who took the temporal form of the rainbow.

Australia at the time was peopled by a community of nations, each occupying their own part of the continent, each with their own language and culture, and each with their own dreams.

The British arrived on the east coast of Australia in 1788 then moved into the area which is known today as Sydney Harbour and established a base and township which later became the city of Sydney. This land on which the British settled themselves belonged to the Eora nation and this meeting of two peoples from opposite ends of the earth was disastrous. It eventually marked the end of the old social order of Australia.

The particular size of the land which belonged to each of these Australian groups varied greatly. In central Australia, and in other less productive areas, an Australian group's land was often larger than some European countries. On the east coast of Australia the land holdings were much smaller and Eora land was less than eighteen hundred square kilometres in size¹. Like many of the east coast groups, the Eora people tended to be subdivided along economic grounds. Some groups tended to concentrate on coastal resources, such as fish, while others were hunters and stayed mainly in the wooded hinterland of the region.

The British arrival was observed by the Eora with apparent great suspicion. The British were unable for some time to make any significant contact with the Australians and, in desperation, the then Governor Phillip captured and held prisoner an Australian by the name of Arabanu². This man was kept in close contact with the Governor and the officers of the Marines and later New South Wales Corps. Little useful contact occurred from this event as Arabanu died of smallpox a year after he was captured. The next contact was made with a number of articulate Australians including the men Colbee, Bennelong and Pemulwuy.

It appears that Eora society was split in their view of the British presence. On the one hand Bennelong was impressed with the nature of British society and did his best to persuade others to join him in a co-operative effort to coexist with the British. He was joined in this vision by the then colonial governor, Arthur Phillip. During this period Bennelong visited England for four years and would probably have persuaded the Australians to accept their lot under British rule if it had not been for Pemulwuy. This man made some early social contact with the British but remained suspicious and, in fact, determinedly hostile towards the new arrivals.

Pemulwuy managed to draw the various groups of the Eora about him and mounted a campaign of resistance against the British which lasted for twelve years,³ from 1790 to 1802. This remarkable campaign could best be described in modern terms as guerilla warfare. Only on rare occasions and towards the end of the conflict did Pemulwuy take the field openly against the British. Notwithstanding this, his resistance was remarkably successful and he was able to threaten the existence of inland towns like Toongabbie and Parramatta. He carried out determined attacks against the British maize fields. He made extensive use of fire in his attempt to destroy the British food resource and contain their expansion. In 1802 Pemulwuy was killed and beheaded. His son Tedbury continued his father's exploits until 1805 when he was captured by Governor King who was credited with ending the Australian resistance⁴.

The Destruction of Australian Aboriginal Society

Pemulwuy's campaign against the British was remarkable in that he came from a society which had no military traditions, and indeed he used weapons two generations removed from the technology of the British. His campaign set the style for later Australian resistance, particularly that led by individuals like Yagan in the Swan Valley in Western Australia. However, none of the other patriotic resistance movements survived for anything like the time that Pemulwuy's did. Pemulwuy's campaign left his own society in a state of collapse, and while some words from the Eora language are still used on the east coast there are very few descendants and painfully little is known in detail of Pemulwuy's world.

Bennelong's statesman-like approach to this situation was also extraordinary, though certainly not in traditional Aboriginal society. His approach in dealing with the British would seem to be more characteristic of modern traditional Aboriginal societies than Pemulwuy's. It is curious, however, that such an approach was not used again until late in the nineteenth century.

Previously, Europeans had placed the original Australian population at 300,000⁵. More recent analysis of archaeological evidence indicates that the population was much greater than this, and may have been in the order of a million people. Whatever the original population, its collapse was spectacular. The following graph (Figure 1), gives some idea of the apparent decimation of the fully descendent Australian Aboriginal population from the time census estimates were collected.

The causes of the collapse seem to have been a mix of diseases, massacres, and a variety of other depredations, such as the poisoning of foods. To understand some of the reasons for this bulk loss of

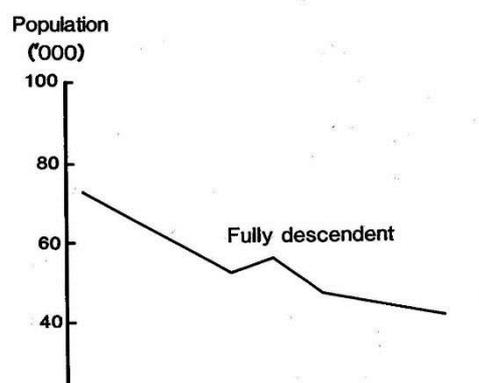


Figure 1 Australian States and Territories Estimates of the Aboriginal Population

Source: Smith, L., "Aboriginal Population in Australia". Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of New South Wales, 1975

people, and, indeed, the destruction of the traditional social order, it is necessary to understand at least two principles that operated within traditional Australian society.

Australian Aboriginal society had a broad connected economic base. Their main food producing activity was that of hunting and gathering. This included, of course, fishing. They had developed an interesting continent-wide system of trade routes⁶. These are shown in Figure 2. These trade routes provided a means of exchange both of goods and a variety of intellectual property, including extensive cultural exchanges. These trade routes were

most likely responsible for the remarkable cultural similarities between groups from one side of the continent to the other. This is particularly true of religious beliefs. These trade routes also assisted in spreading the new European diseases for which the original Australian population had little resistance. Major diseases which appeared to affect the Australians were smallpox, a variety of upper-respiratory infections, measles and venereal diseases.

Traditional Australian Aboriginal people used a curious method of exchange. This method involved a kind of beholdenness. There are three ways in which commercial transactions can be carried out. The first of these is, of course, the no-debt exchange. The goods are directly exchanged or money is exchanged for goods leaving those carrying out the transaction bearing no debt to each other. The second is equitable debt exchanges. These are common in modern societies and require that the goods involved in exchange are valued, agreements are made to acquit debts incurred in exchange at some future date. A third interesting method of exchange is that of non-equitable debt. In this case, when goods were exchanged, no value is placed upon them, and the exchange results in each of the parties becoming "beholden" or "in debt" to the companion in the exchange. Such exchange systems were not understandable to Europeans and prevented the Aborigines from initially becoming involved in any kind of commercial enterprise comprehensible to the British. Vestiges of this exchange system mediate against Aboriginal business operations even today.

The second important feature in traditional Australian society was a religious belief, which intimately connected people to land. Land for Aboriginal people had a spiritual quality. It was indeed a source of the spirits which gave rise to children. Land was the fount to which one's spirits returned at death. This involved a denial of spiritual singularity, which, again, was not understandable or acceptable to the Christian Europeans. But the most devastating effect of this particular religious belief was that if persons were dispossessed of their own land, and forced onto the land of another group, they not only became economic, or political, refugees, but they became spiritual refugees, and this seemed to cause a trauma, and a lowering of birthrate⁷.

Combining all of these things, the original Australians found themselves without the means of economic pursuit, spiritually ill at ease and persecuted and harassed by the strangers and their diseases. It appeared that the race would become extinct. In fact, fully descended Aboriginal people did become extinct in Tasmania, and in regions within the eastern states of modern Australia. They survived, however, in the more remote parts of the country, being the major desert areas of central Australia, and the far north tropical regions.



Figure 2 Trade Routes of Old Australia

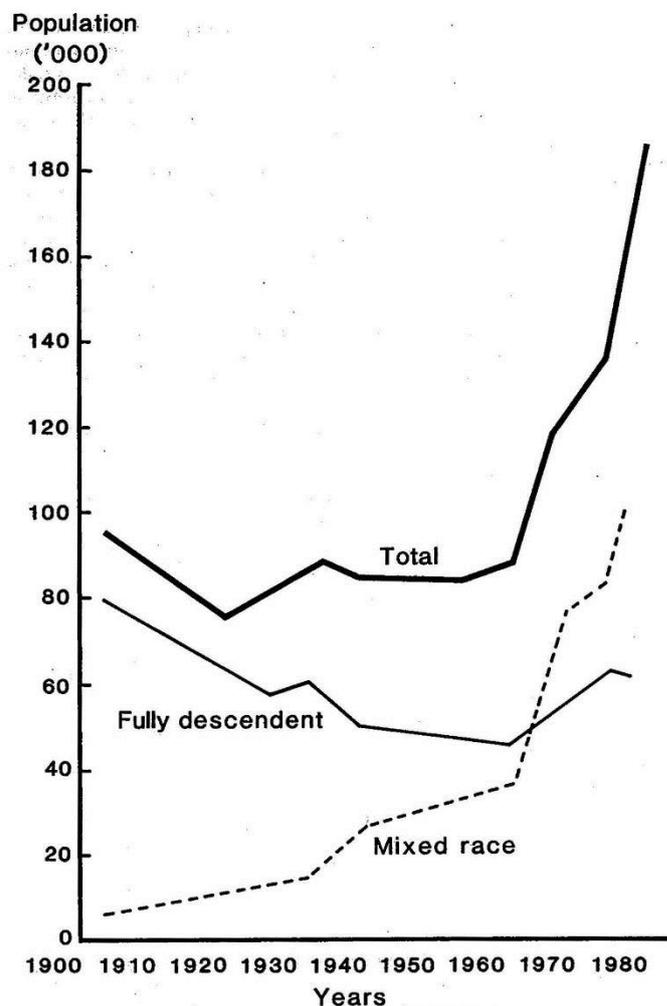
Source: Willmot, E., *Trade Routes. The Rainbow Serpent Series (Film)*, S.B.S., Sydney, 1985

Protection

The prevailing theory among the new Australian population, which was essentially European, was that the Australian Aborigines would become extinct. This resulted in a policy adopted throughout the country known as "protection". Aboriginal people were brought into reserved places with the

view of protecting them from further depredations of the non-Aboriginal population. This was done, ostensibly, in the hope that some at least would survive, but with the expectation that this was a process of smoothing the pillow of a dying race.

Aboriginal people would no doubt have disappeared from the eastern seaboard, Tasmania, the southern part of the continent and the southern part of the State of Queensland, had it not been for miscegenation. During the period of collapse many mixed-race children were born to the Aborigines. Professor Bernard Smith has proposed that the struggle for the possession of the Australian continent was fought over the bodies of Aboriginal women⁸. These mixed-race children, unlike their Aboriginal ancestors, had the genetic make-up necessary to survive European diseases. They lived usually in a state of abject poverty, on reserves, and on the fringes of rural towns, many in a state of what has been described as "intelligent parasitism". But they survived. The following figure (Figure 3) shows the rise in the mixed-race population during the same period that the fully-descendent population was still in decline.



(Source: Willmot, E., *Trade Routes. The Rainbow Serpent Series (Film)*, S.B.S., Sydney, 1985.)

Figure 3 Australian States and Territories Estimates of the Aboriginal Population

Source: Willmot, E., *Trade Routes. The Rainbow Serpent Series (Film)*, S.B.S., Sydney, 1985

During this period, Aborigines remained out of sight, except for a few exceptions. One such man was David Uniapon⁹. He became well known on the east coast of Australia. He was an inventor, and a philosopher. He toured the eastern states as a lecturer and a writer and was the first statesman-like

figure since Bennelong. Uniapon was born in 1876 in Point McLeay reserve and it is remarkable that such a man could overcome the enormous impediments to intellectual development which confronted Aboriginal people of the day but Uniapon was not alone in expressing the genius and determination of this race.

Most of the fully-descendent population that remained in the desert regions and in the far north of the country became involved as cheap labour in the pastoral industry. Some still lived on religious missions. In 1902, at Hermannsburg Mission in central Australia, Albert Namitjirra¹⁰ was born. Unlike David Uniapon, who barely touched white Australia with his intellect, Albert Namitjirra's tragic life changed forever the world image of the Australia's Aboriginal people.

Albert Namitjirra was a fully-descendent man of the Aranda people, a people whose total humanity had sprung from the vast deserts of central Australia. He grew to manhood influenced both by the Christian faith of the missionaries and the ancient religion of his own people.

The Aranda people had a long artistic tradition, but its understanding was hidden from the Europeans by its extreme symbolism. Namitjirra applied his genius to master the art forms of the Europeans. His work became world famous. He created for western society an image of his land that they could comprehend. But he created another image, a compelling vision of the eternal Aboriginal man, locked in a prison of an alien society with a vision of a world which he could never accept: a ward of the state in his own native land. This was a portrait of shame that the newcomers could no longer bear. In 1957, at the age of 55, Albert Namitjirra was made a full citizen of the Commonwealth of Australia. This cleansing act for white Australia destroyed Namitjirra. It forced him into an impossible position in his own society and yet not part of the other.

Namitjirra's life deteriorated and in 1958 he was tried, convicted and imprisoned for supplying liquor to one of his people who was, of course, still a ward of the state.

Albert Namitjirra died on 8th August, 1959. His epitaph:

"By the grace of God, I am what I am".

The Creation of Modern Aboriginal Society

By the 1930s a new part of Aboriginal society had begun to take action about their plight. These were the diaspora, the mixed-race people. Many of these, such as William Cooper in Victoria, were assisted by sympathetic European groups. In N.S.W. a mixed-race man, William Ferguson, prepared a document known as "The Aboriginal Manifesto"¹¹. The document was published in 1938.

"The Aboriginal Manifesto" was at once a plea for humanitarian consideration and a proposal to put an end to the disastrous relationship which lay between the old and the new Australian population. In summary, the document asked for three considerations: The first was that miscegenation be legalized. The second was that Aboriginal people should be allowed, if they wished, to assimilate into the European population and, thirdly, that Aboriginal children should be educated in the same way as non-Aboriginal children. It should be borne to mind that, at this stage, a policy of exclusion existed which prevented Aboriginal children attending state schools. The only education offered to Aborigines was usually on mission stations and in reserves, and this was of the poorest quality, and usually conducted by some reserve manager's wife.

During the period, and well through the forties and into the fifties, mixed-race Aboriginal children were commonly removed from their parents and trained for various forms of domestic service and other menial work. In 1940, N.S.W. responded to at least one demand of the manifesto. In that year

Aboriginal children were formally permitted to enter state schools. In an attempt to overcome the enormous difficulty that children, who had never been to school, faced in the system, an annexe was set up at Collarenebri in northern N.S.W.¹². N.S.W. led the other states by this event. By the 1950s the idea of assimilation was well accepted. In 1952, at a meeting of State and Federal Ministers in Darwin in the Northern Territory, a policy of assimilation for Aboriginal people was formally adopted by all states in the Commonwealth Government. It is interesting that this policy of assimilation was proposed by Aborigines of the 1930s and 1940s. In the near future it would be rejected completely.

The scene was set for the great changes of the next decades. The tragedy of Namitjirra had touched all white Australians but not all were moved. Some people like Xavier Herbert,¹³ and Charles Rowley¹⁴ reacted and remained committed to Aboriginal Affairs until their deaths. Don McLeod¹⁵ was instrumental in the Aboriginal stockmen strikes in Western Australia. Frank Hardy¹⁶ led another segment of white Australia into the conflict. These were the growing socialist elements in the union movements of the east coast. There remained, however, implacable enemies among white Australia, but their opposition was virtually swept aside by the great conscience and goodwill that had arisen and remained with white Australia for two decades.

Modern Aboriginal Politics

The 1960s saw the rise of the international liberation movements and, in particular, the Black American movement. Australia, like every nation on earth, was affected by these events, and indeed during the 1960s. Four linked events formed the springboards of change in Australia, and gave rise to the beginning of modern Australian Aboriginal politics.

The first of these was the formation of an organization known as FCAATSI. This was the Federal Council for Associations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. This organization in its early days involved both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, but towards the end of the 1960s tended to be entirely Aboriginal. FCAATSI was also the springboard for the formation of the modern Aboriginal organization, such as "The National Aboriginal Islander Health Organisation", the Medical Services, the Legal Services, and indeed the Land Councils.

The second event occurred early in the 1960s when the Guringi people who, ever since the Europeans arrived on their land, had worked on an enormous cattle station in the Northern Territory known as Wave Hill. They walked off Wave Hill station and returned to the place that they regarded as their own at Wati Creek. Most of Australia at the time saw this as some kind of an industrial action but it was, in fact, the beginning of the modern land rights movement. What the Guringi people were demanding was the return of the lands which had always been theirs.

As a result of the new political forum, FCAATSI, and the growing support of segments of white Australia a new kind of Aboriginal political figure appeared. These tended to be young mixed-race men and women who often adopted the style of overseas black politicians. Some arrived quickly and disappeared equally quickly. But from among them arose a number of durable and long-term modern Aboriginal leaders. Charles Perkins¹⁷ was clearly the most important of these. He was descended from the same group as Namitjirra. In the 1960s he led the freedom rides through N.S.W. This was not in itself such an extraordinary event, but its power in raising the consciousness of Australia's younger intellectual world created the basis for the most profound advance of the period.

This last important event of the decade was the 1967 referendum. In this referendum Australia voted unanimously to place the responsibility for passing laws about Aboriginal people in the hands of the Commonwealth Government.

The happenings of this decade had caused changes not only among Aboriginal people, but among non-Aboriginal Australians. The referendum caused the first official recognition of the need to re-address the situation of Aboriginal people in Australia. This was to be done at a Commonwealth Government level. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs came into being with the formation of an office at the end of the 1960s. As well, during this period, the famous tri-part definition of Aboriginal people was created by the Honourable William Wentworth, the then Minister assisting the Prime Minister in Aboriginal Affairs. He was a descendant of Pemulwuy's old enemies. He was reluctant to accept mixed-race people as Aborigines, yet he created a definition of an Aboriginal society which holds today and is remarkable in the world of polygeneric¹⁸ nations. The definition describes an Aboriginal person as one who is:

- (a) of Aboriginal descent;
- (b) is identified by an Aboriginal community as being an Aborigine;
- (c) a person who identifies her/himself as an Aborigine.

This definition has had a profound effect on the nature, economics and politics of Aboriginal affairs in Australia. It has set Australian Aboriginal affairs apart from Aboriginal affairs in other nations.

Racial descent definitions have always tended to divide populations, and eventually part of the descent population must face the asymptotic situation where the racial descent of one of the miscegenated groups predominates the other to the extent that the minor descent is no longer of consequence. Such definitions associated with mixed descent can lead to debilitating population splits. This has occurred in Canada, U.S.A. and New Zealand. The Australian definition is almost a cultural one and allows a person of any degree of Aboriginal descent to be totally identified as Aboriginal. This has provided a powerful unifying effect across the total population. It has made the word "diaspora" make sense in Australia, for the modern Aboriginal population consists today of a diaspora, a descent diaspora, surrounding a traditional centre. The population consists of people of a great variety of appearances, linked essentially by a pan-Aboriginal identity.

A Decade of Response

The 1970s represented a decade in which Aboriginal people responded to a very new environment in which they found themselves. People who had for so long been suppressed now found a political voice, unity and a new economic possibility. The younger active elements of the population moved quickly in two separate directions.

Political activists in Aboriginal society focussed immediately on land, although it had been a human rights movement which had changed the lot of Aboriginal people in the 1960s. The major event among the political movements was the establishment of the "tent embassy" in Canberra. Aboriginal people in 1974 erected a tent on the lawns in front of Parliament House in Canberra. This tent became the focus of both the human rights but, more predominantly, the land rights issue. It was a rallying point for the young activists who had found their feet in the movements which had sprung from FCAATSI in the 1960s.

The other active members of the society moved into the socio-economic areas, and concerned themselves predominantly with health and education. The groups involved in health quickly took on the more current political approach in establishing the Aboriginal medical services and the national organization, known as The National Aboriginal and Islander Health Organisation. The educationists tended to be somewhat different and varied, both in the backgrounds and their aims. These were men and women who had either by chance or determination acquired a considerable degree of European education. They now focussed their energies on developmental educational ideals and

were instrumental in bringing to bear pressure upon education authorities to establish programmes which have led to great change in the society. Their cause was readily supported by a circle of non-Aboriginal educationists who now saw the opportunity to design and establish educational strategies which would improve the immediate lot of Aboriginal people. It was during this period that the National Aboriginal Education Committee was established. This was a committee of all Aboriginal people attached to the Commonwealth Department of Education and which became progressively more influential in education thinking, and indeed in Australian Government and state government educational policies relating to Aboriginal people. Many of these new educational strategies were supported by two major student assistance schemes established by the Federal Government. These were established in the late 1960s and formed the economic base on which most educational innovations began. These programmes were the Aboriginal Study Grant Scheme, a scheme designed to allow Aboriginal people to attend tertiary education, and the Aboriginal Secondary Grant Scheme which provided assistance for Aboriginal secondary students.

In the late 1970s the National Aboriginal Education Committee (NAEC) commissioned a study of teacher training for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people throughout the country. This study focussed on a new found belief that the teaching profession provided the best major professional path for Aboriginal people to follow. Early in the 1970s broad systemic support had been gained for the employment of Aboriginal teaching aides within schools. The NAEC in 1979 presented a submission to the National Inquiry into Teacher Education which called for the training of a thousand Aboriginal teachers by the year 1990". This ideology has led the way in creating a major tertiary education success for Aboriginal people. During this period Aboriginal people had entered many professions, including Medicine and Law, but it is the teaching profession which has created for Aboriginal people the professional path which Australian experience has previously demonstrated as the path best followed for indigenous people. This was discovered in Papua New Guinea a decade before.

These two streams of Aboriginal thought can be said to have coalesced to some extent in the formation of the Aboriginal Development Commission. This body, supported by the Commonwealth Government, has provided the basic capital base for general Aboriginal economic development. It is not possible at this stage to evaluate the success of this venture but it is important to observe that the ADC has assisted Aboriginal people to at least obtain a substantial interest in the Australian cattle industry. This was the industry where the major elements of the traditional society were able to survive during the Australian Holocaust.

There were also important Aboriginal political figures of great influence. These were people of both traditional and non-traditional background. Charles Perkins remained through all of these changes the major Aboriginal driving force. Notwithstanding these other changes the most important political achievement of Aboriginal people was the various land legislative actions which have occurred in states such as the Northern Territory, South Australia and New South Wales.

Again two important non-Aboriginal characters were instrumental in these achievements. They were two successive Prime Ministers of the 1970s. The Right Honourable Gough Whitlam and the Right Honourable Malcolm Fraser. Men of very different political persuasion, but both with a personal commitment to Aboriginal Affairs. These land acts have not only provided useful economic bases on which Aboriginal land-based societies may survive, they have also gone a long way towards an Australian recognition of the ancient sovereignty of Aboriginal people.

This overall movement culminated in the creation of the ideology of Makarrata. This is an Aboriginal Australian word which relates to the ending of a dispute. It arose initially from the work of a non-

Aboriginal group known as the Treaty Organisation²⁰. This group was led and constructed by notable non-Aboriginal Australians. The response from Aboriginal Australia came from the Aboriginal political organization known as the National Aboriginal Conference. This is a body formed in the 1970s, by the Commonwealth Government. It consisted of an elected nation-wide membership which was able to provide a voice and forum for Aboriginal people in the national political sphere. It also provided guidance to government in policies associated with Aboriginal affairs. This body constructed the idea of Makarrata.

New Winds of Change

The two decades of the 1960s and 1970s saw the most dramatic changes in Aboriginal society in two hundred years. The 1960s was the decade which initiated the change. This was the time in which not only did a new stream of Aboriginal political thinking emerge, but a new place for Aboriginal affairs within Australian political and economic thinking become firmly established. The 1970s was the decade of construction, or perhaps, reconstruction. It saw very important changes in government policy away from assimilation towards self determination and self management. It saw vast improvements in services provided for Aboriginals. These were special services over and above that normally provided by state governments. This was particularly true in the areas of education and health. Figures 4 and 5 tell the story graphically of this vast change. Figure 4 gives a description of the Aboriginal population since contact, and this parabolic curve almost recites the history of change

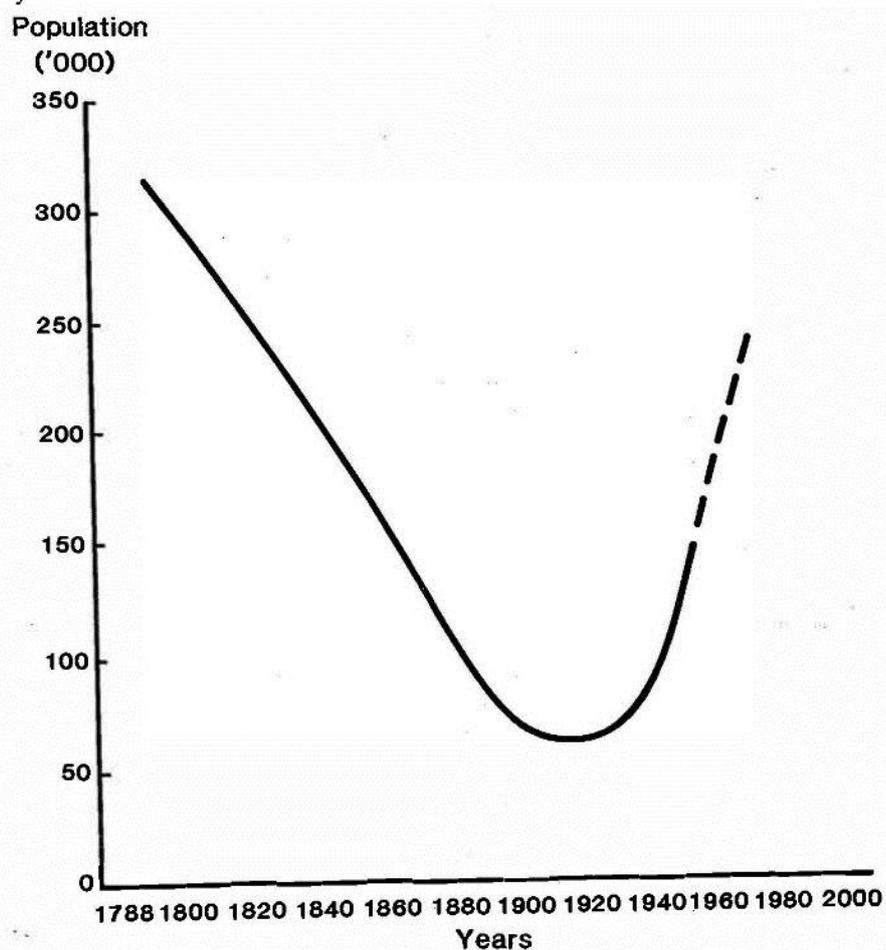
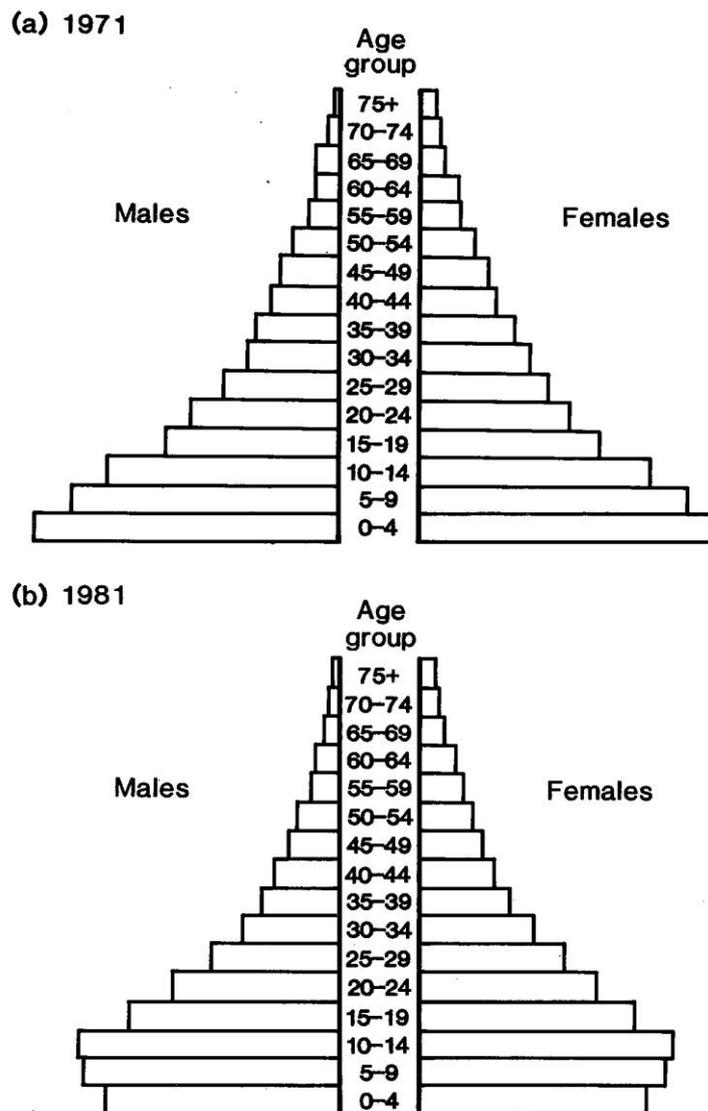


Figure 4 Population since European settlement. Estimates of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Population 1788 to 2000

Source: Smith, B., *The Spectre of Truganini* Table 8.2.7., Boyer Lecture, A.B.C., Sydney, 1980

described in this paper. Figure 5 is even more interesting. Graph (a) indicates that in 1971 the Aboriginal population was clearly that of a third-world people with a greater proportion of the population being young and a very poor survival into old age. Graph (b) on the other hand describes the Aboriginal population in 1981 and the change is truly remarkable. Here, we see a shape far more like that of a Western society, turning under at the bottom as the birthrate slows down and survival rates improve throughout the system



(Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Population and Housing. Counts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, Australia, States and Territories*. 30 June, 1971, 1976, 1981 (Catalogue No. 2164.0).)

Figure 5 Age Structure. Population age structure by racial origin.

Figure 6 illustrates the dramatic change in the determination of Aborigines to make use of European education. This is reflected in Aboriginal people making use of study grants, to study in areas of tertiary education. This includes universities, colleges of advanced education, TAFE areas or areas of adult education. Aboriginal health and economic problems are far from solved, and while they are now lifted beyond that of poorer third-world nations, Aboriginal health, Aboriginal employment levels and Aboriginal poverty remain far below that of the rest of the Australian population.

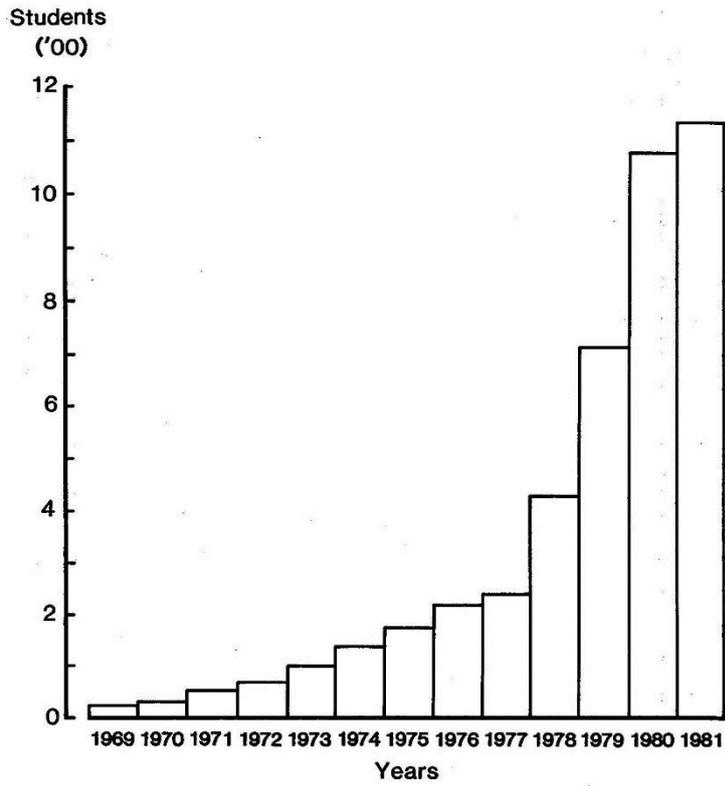


Figure 6 Aboriginal Study grants Scheme. Students assisted during the years 1969 to 1981

Source: D.A.A. Aboriginal Social Indicators. A.G.P.S. (Canb.), 1984

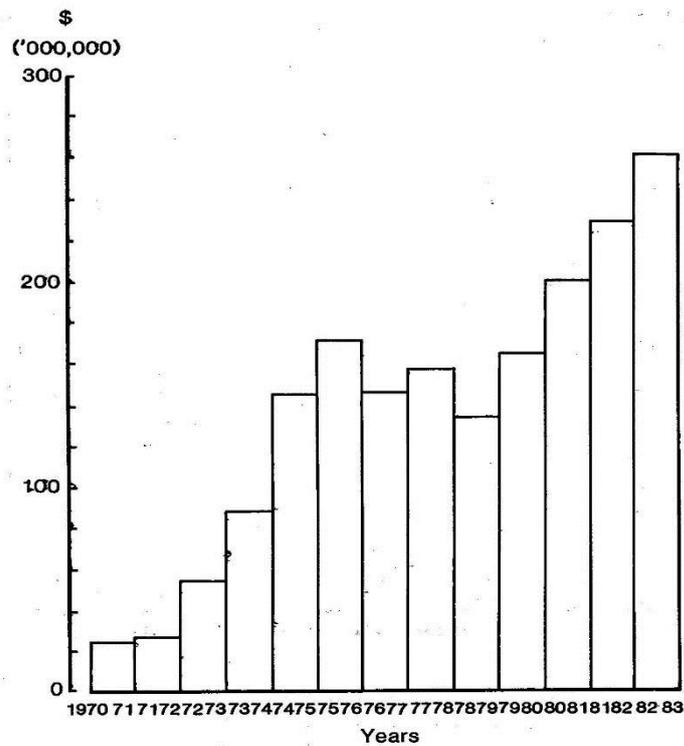


Figure 7 Commonwealth Expenditure on Aboriginal Assistance

Source: D.A.A. Aboriginal Social Indicators. A.G.P.S. (Canb.), 1984

Nevertheless, to accomplish the positive changes required an enormous rise in government funds directed towards Aboriginal affairs. Figure 7 indicates the extent of this rise in Australian government spending on Aboriginal affairs.

The consequences of these changes have not all been good news for Aboriginal society, and the 1980s saw something of a reversal, at least in political fortunes. Pressure now came upon the Commonwealth Government to reconsider its entire directions in Aboriginal Affairs. Two important events brought this situation into sharp focus.

The first of these was the land-rights proposals for Western Australia. Legislation was placed before the Western Australian Parliament following a long and extensive investigation of the land needs of Aboriginal people. This Legislation was attacked concertedly by a campaign led by the Western Mining Corporation in Western Australia. It was the most overt and politically successful campaign waged against Aborigines for one hundred years. It not only succeeded in having the Legislation defeated and withdrawn from the Western Australian Parliament, but also being completely abandoned in the next state election.

The second event was the commissioning by the Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs of a piece of research which was reported in a document known as the ANOP Report^{t21}. This document sought to analyse the views and attitudes of Australia towards Aboriginal people in relation to land rights. It has been influential in setting the political agenda of the day. The ANOP Report indicated that while there was a proportion of Australians who were strongly in favour of land rights, and, in fact, Aboriginal affairs issues generally, there was an equal number implacably opposed to both of these things. But more important, between these two groups was that part of the population which has since been referred to as "Middle Australia", which, to say the least, was softly prejudiced and easily turned against the Aboriginal cause.

In the late 1970s and early 1980 forces antagonistic to Aboriginal aspirations began to affect both the electorate and the political parties. This could be viewed simply as a public reaction to questions about rights and equity of citizenship associated with economic downturns. Such questions were certainly not helped by the failure of some Aboriginal organizations to cope properly with financial responsibilities. But this did not really explain the sudden nature of the reversal, and some of its characteristics. Pemulwuy's enemies had virtually expunged any public memory of his exploits by the way in which Australian history was portrayed. Now, the people antagonistic to the Aboriginal movement began to attack modern historians and writers who had been trying to revise history and create a better understanding of what had happened during the first century of European occupation of Australia. Pemulwuy's old enemies appeared to have been reborn.

A newly-elected Labor Federal Government had entered the scene. This Government presented a platform of strong policies on land rights. This quickly drew violent opposition from some state governments. The Commonwealth Government appointed Charles Perkins to the position of Head of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, and then turned its immediate focus on heritage issues.

In the early 1960s a research body known as the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies had been established. This institution had moved more and more into the area of Aboriginal Heritage. By 1980 it had become virtually the custodian of knowledge of the extraordinary heritage of Aboriginal people. Its activities had done much to alert Australians to this heritage and the dangers of its loss. Pressure was applied to the Federal Government to act.

The Commonwealth Government enacted the interim Aboriginal heritage Legislation²². In 1984 this Legislation was bitterly opposed by the same social forces which have opposed moves in Aboriginal

land rights. The determination of the Federal Government has nevertheless secured for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people a much needed protection for this oldest and most important part of Australia's man-made heritage.

Against this background the Commonwealth Government went ahead with the handing over of an ancient Aboriginal symbol of sovereignty and religious traditionalism: Uluru. Uluru is a large monolithic geological feature in central Australia hitherto known as Ayers Rock. Despite bitter opposition from the Northern Territory Government, the Commonwealth Government went ahead with a handover of this rock and its surrounding area to the traditional Aboriginal owners. These people in turn leased it back to the Commonwealth Government to be used as a national park. The official handing over was carried out by the Governor-General, Sir Ninian Stephen. This was a remarkably symbolic achievement for Aboriginal people and, under the circumstances, a historically courageous act by the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the Honourable Clyde Holding, and the Governor-General. These two men will not be forgotten by Aboriginal historians.

A Balance of Weaknesses

If the 1970s were the decade of construction, the 1980s have become something of a standoff. The forces opposing further changes in Aboriginal affairs have not succeeded but neither has the goodwill of the current Commonwealth Government succeeded.

The Aboriginal Affairs portfolio of the Commonwealth Government has continued to pursue its policies, but the changing view of the electorate has tended to slow outcomes down.

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Australia have, for two hundred years, been involved in a strange cultural, and at times physical, contest for survival. The original Aboriginal resistance was defeated on the basis of their own weakness not the British strength. Their weakness at the time was a society without military traditions: a society without social or economic constructions or the technology to enable them to defend their land successfully against the British invasion. The British weakness was that they were not able to completely defeat the Australians. They were not prepared to practice official genocide, and products of miscegenation created an enemy of their own descent. As Australia's need for population grew, it imported from Europe and Asia other people who were not a part of that terrible original conflict. Many of this group have become allied with Aboriginal people in their struggle to survive as a cultural entity within the polygeneric processes of Australia. These processes were beyond the power of the original British invaders to prevent or even effectively oppose.

Now, in the 1980s, we face another balance of weaknesses. Aborigines are not in any position to force the issue of their political ideals. Aborigines have no real electoral strength and, like other Australians, are substantially divided on political issues. At the same time, non-Aboriginal Australians are too weak politically, in the international sphere, to completely oppose Aboriginal political designs, and there are many white Australians who support the Aboriginal cause. A new waiting balance is struck.

This balance is by no means static and Aborigines have tended to be the ones to take the initiative in other areas while the land issue simmers.

These movements are focussed mainly on economic, heritage and communications areas.

During the 1970s Aboriginal society faced a number of disturbing decisions. The major one concerned effective Aboriginal entry into tertiary education. Aboriginal society at that stage possessed only a handful of accidental university graduates.

Educators were faced with almost no starting point and an urgent need to reverse the situation. The only advantage lay in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educationists working together. Many things that were tried were not successful, particularly in the schooling area. Little was really known about human learning, so educators finally focussed on the only variable understood well: the System. The only system which it was practical to alter significantly was that of tertiary education. Aboriginal people with virtually no secondary school outcomes were admitted into these tertiary programmes. Tertiary education structure was then modified to create different patterns. These are now what we call enclave systems. One of these systems alone at James Cook University of North Queensland has produced some 70 graduates.

Student success rates in these programmes are now equal to or better than non-Aboriginal students.

The provisions created for Aboriginal people in tertiary education, particularly the higher education sections, has been a remarkable event. I believe this has been the most productive and successful innovation in Australian education this century.

Australia is not alone in adopting such an approach and some of the early ideas were brought to our shores from North America, particularly Canada. No systematic comparative evaluation of such related programmes has ever been carried out, but I would be surprised if, taking comparative conditions into account, the Australian programmes were not superior.

Separatists, Integrationists and Evolutionists

Aboriginal educationists today are divided into three ideological camps—separatists, integrationists and evolutionists.

The separatists argued characteristically from a "difference" position. They absorbed the political philosophy of nation within a nation, and formed the phalanx of the people, who argued for independent education, separate systems, and separate tertiary institutions.

The second group, or the integrationists, generally supported systems development. This group tended to favour a "debilitation" theory and believed that Aboriginal people could integrate quite successfully in the mainstream Australian education systems, provided that the systems which they first encountered were sufficiently modified and developed to cope with their particular educational needs. This school of thought reached its highest and most successful development in the state of Queensland. It should be noted that during the 1980s it became clear that the outcomes of Aboriginal people from Queensland state schools exceeded in success, not only any other state, but almost all other states put together.

The final group, the evolutionists, disregarded both theories of difference and debilitation.

Fundamental to the evolutionists' thinking is that what is occurring in Aboriginal society today, is the evolution of a new part of the society that has never existed before. This element in the society has evolved in response to the challenges and difficulties that the society faces, and is made possible by education. Most evolutionists support strategic separatism. Strategic separatism simply proposes that separatism ought to be practised in order to overcome certain system problems, or else students reach a level of competence in dealing with the other system. In many ways this group appears very similar to the integrationists. In this respect, some evolutionists have been accused of being little more than intellectual elitists. It is true that most evolutionists, particularly in Aboriginal society, take the view that unless the path of social evolution is followed, Aboriginal society will become either assimilated or become so socially marginal as to be not worth the difficulties of existing as an entity.

The very successful tertiary enclave systems are promoted by the integrationists and the evolutionists although, in the past and presently, the evolutionists tend to be gaining ascendancy in this movement.

Both the separatists and the integrationists have varied political support. The integrationists have the broadest support and considerable non-Aboriginal support. The evolutionists have gained some political support during the early 1980s, but still remain marginal in this area. It should be pointed out also that the political fortunes of the separatists tend to be failing along with their politicians and their independent institutions. It is interesting to note that the early rapid rise of educational

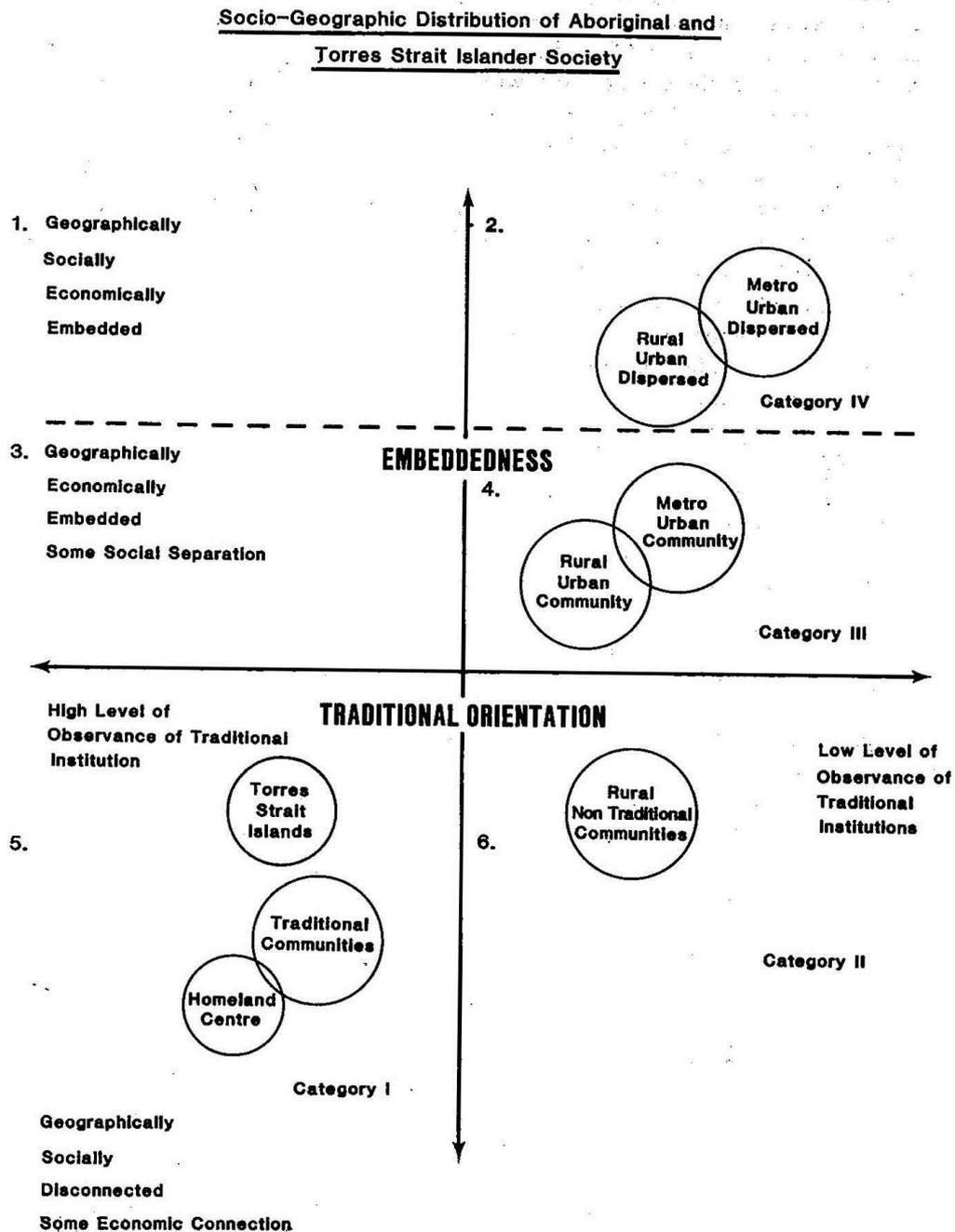


Figure 8

(Source: Willmot, E.P., 1979 in Hughes, P. and Willmot, E.P., "A Thousand Teachers by 1990". *Education News*, 17(4), 1980.)

development among the Maori people of New Zealand can be directly related to the use of a series of independent Maori secondary schools, such as Te Auta. The Australian independent schools tend to be all primary schools and, in a sense, rather revolutionary in their approach to education. There is one Aboriginal tertiary institution, Koori College in Victoria. This institution must be described as ineffective as far as modern Western educational outcomes are concerned. The Koori College, however, does not aspire to producing simple Western education outcomes, it adheres to a Freirean revolutionary curriculum.

It should be noted that the very successful tertiary enclave programmes could be, and have been, criticised in terms of the target groups within Aboriginal society from which they are gaining their success.

Figure 8 is a sociological model developed specifically for an education study by Willmot and others in 1979. Figure 8 shows this description of the society and its implications for education. The model very much describes the diasporic nature of the society, and while it has certain deficiencies, it has not yet been seriously challenged as the best description to use for educational purposes. This model is based on the recognition that Aboriginal society consists of a mix of different kinds of communities which can be described in terms of two dimensions: traditional religious observance, and the degree to which Aboriginal people are embedded socially, economically and geographically into non-Aboriginal society.

It is with the Group 4 people that enclaves have had most success. However, in states like Queensland, a good deal of success is being gained from both Groups 2 and 3. The one enclave focussing on and dealing entirely with Group 1 people, that is Batchelor College in the Northern Territory, is not having anything like the successes of the other enclaves. The education of this group, notwithstanding the findings of research, still defies Australian education systems to achieve anything like acceptable outcomes. Traditionally-oriented people have a distinctive cognition, and live in a situation even further complicated by language.

None of the three current philosophical positions has suggested a real solution to the problem of Group 1 or traditionally-oriented people. It appears that both the integrationists and the evolutionists would proceed to achieve success where they could in the hope that bolstering part of the society educationally would eventually contribute to overcoming the intense educational difficulties suffered by traditionally-oriented Aboriginal people. This position would be particularly true of some Aboriginal educationists who have finally reached a new position ideologically, which has placed them into deep conflict with other parts of the society. It was initially non-Aboriginal psychologists and educationists who proposed both theories of acculturation and of cognitive dissonance. This has certainly been very much picked up by most of Aboriginal society and, more recently, the separatists. Their view is that European-styled education, or rising competence and ability to deal with the culture of non-Aboriginal people, in fact produces acculturation, and eventual assimilation. There appears to be no support for the idea of cognitive dissonance any longer, but there is considerable support remaining for acculturation theories. This is particularly true among the separatists' Aboriginal position. The evolutionists bitterly contest this point and some are prepared to go so far as to argue that acculturation is a phenomenon only of children and does not affect adults. When all is said and done there is very little evidence to indicate that the phenomenon does apply to adults. The evolutionists take the position that European education simply provides Aboriginal people with empowerment in another cultural system, and it does this without detracting from the Aboriginality or cultural base of the student. They would further argue that these educated Aboriginal people may appear different to the others but not because they have lost something, but simply because they have gained something. There is a strong view among this group that, for

people in categories 3 and 4, the only real solution to maintaining a level of Aboriginality, or cultural base, is to intellectualize culture. This, of course, involves acquiring a comprehensive understanding of culture and being able to exhibit and enjoy it intellectually, but not necessarily at any sort of emotional level.

These arguments tend to be conducted almost entirely among Aboriginal people. Very few non-Aborigines dare to enter this part of inter-Aboriginal intellectual conflict.

The conflict between these two opposed Aboriginal schools of thought, and the remaining uncertainty about the education of traditionally oriented Aboriginal people, are more likely to be resolved by history rather than discourse.

Meanwhile, the effective entry of other Aboriginal people into tertiary education in the 1970s and 1980s will have a lasting effect on the society. In fact, there are two factors which will ensure that Aboriginal society in the immediate future will be different from any situation in the last 200 years. The two new factors are, firstly, that the next generation of Aboriginal Australians will have among them a significant body of tertiary-educated people, at least 2,000 by the year 2000. The 1990 target of 1,000 teachers may not be achieved in terms of teachers, but there will be close to 1,000 higher education graduates.

The second changing factor will be the presence, in the next generation, of a group of elder statesmen and women different from anything that has existed before. These will be articulate people of power and influence who have status in both societies.

This is an empowering process. There are both gains and costs. The gains are equity. In my view, this is the only non-political way to gain equity in modern Australian society. Aborigines took this step when there was nothing else to lose. Now, some fear a cultural cost. But, whatever that might be, the alternative is isolation and its consequence—economic, political and social marginality.

Notes

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11. Ferguson, W., *The Aboriginal Manifesto* in Willmot, E., "An Experiment in Accomodation: Recent Trends in Aboriginal Education". *Survival International Review*, Vol. 3, No. 4, 1978.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Xavier Herbert was a novelist, he wrote an important work on Aboriginal Affairs, *Poor Fellow My Country*.
14. Charles Rowley. Well-known scholar, known particularly for his work on Aboriginal Affairs. In particular for his book, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*.
15. Don McLeod. Became known during his involvement in the Western Australian stockmen strike. Led an Aboriginal group to establish a homestead on Strelbey Station in the Pilbara region.
16. Frank Hardy. Author and industrial activist, wrote the novel *The Unlucky Australians* which was made into a film. In relation to the Gurinji walk-off from Wave Hill Station.
17. Charles Perkins. Aboriginal activist, politician, bureaucrat and author, wrote the biography *A Bastard Like Me*.
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