USE OF THESES

This copy is supplied for purposes of private study and research only. Passages from the thesis may not be copied or closely paraphrased without the written consent of the author.
THE "BLACKFELLA WAY"

IDEOLOGY AND PRACTICE IN AN URBAN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY

by

Robert Gerald (Jerry) Schwab

A thesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

at the Australian National University

July 1991
DECLARATION

Except where indicated otherwise this thesis is my own work.

Robert (Jerry) Schwab

July 1991
FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have been especially fortunate in my academic career, to have had the benefits of studying under several excellent and inspiring teachers and I would like to acknowledge them here. Though some of them will probably never see these acknowledgements, they were all instrumental in helping me make it to "the field". Bill Lyon and Leon Swartzberg Jr. were the first anthropologists I ever met and during four years of undergraduate training they never let me rest. Bill was the first to open my eyes to other ways of thought, and deserves the credit and blame for leading me down the path of anthropology. As a graduate student at the University of Oregon I took a course from Bob Tonkinson on Australian Aborigines and immediately realized that Peruvian peasants were not for me. Over the years Bob has continued to support and encourage my efforts and has provided careful and thoughtful advice throughout this project. Mel Aikens and Harry Wolcott, both of the University of Oregon, actively supported my application for a research scholarship to study in Australia.

The Australian National University's Department of Prehistory and Anthropology is an inspiring and humbling place to learn and work, and I want to express my appreciation and acknowledge the assistance of several people there. Bob Tonkinson and Nicolas Peterson were my thesis supervisors at the beginning of my research scholarship, though Bob soon went on to become Professor at the University of Western Australia and thereby ended his official
role as supervisor. Nic has continued to be an excellent sounding board and a careful and fair critic. I feel especially lucky to have been the beneficiary of his insight and experience. Professor Anthony Forge, head of the Department of Anthropology, supported my efforts from start to finish and encouraged me to work in an urban setting. Several other faculty read and commented on drafts of this thesis during various stages of its preparation including Gill Cowlishaw, Leslie Devereaux, Don Gardner and Doug Miles. Their comments and criticisms forced me to think even more carefully about my data and interpretations. I also wish to acknowledge the cohort of graduate students who experienced the same terror and excitement of "going into the field" at about the same time I did. Several of us had decided to work in urban settings and I know that I gained an enormous amount as we shared our insights, experiences and ideas. Among this group, I especially want thank Julie Finlayson, Maggie Brady, Mary Edmunds, John Morton, and David Martin.

I want to acknowledge the assistance of several people in Adelaide who opened doors and encouraged my research there. Lee Sackett, of the University of Adelaide, was the first person I met in Adelaide and he was immediately supportive of my desire to work there. Without Lee's encouragement I may not have undertaken the research there. Rosemary Burden of the South Australian Institute of Technology's Aboriginal Task Force, actively encouraged my interest in conducting research on Aboriginal identity. Rosemary introduced me to Tony Barrett, the first Aboriginal person I met in Adelaide. Tony's support was critically important to my successful access to the Aboriginal community, and though he warned me that working with Aboriginal
people in Adelaide was not going to be easy, he was supportive throughout. Kenny Hampton, Dulcie Chantrill, Josie Aigus, Chris Larkin, Michael and Lenore Harris, Margaret Brusnahan, Andy Reyes and Doris and Cecil Graham were all very kind to me and facilitated my research in many ways. All of these people showed me great patience and were interested in "my project", though none has yet read this thesis; obviously, they cannot be blamed for my misunderstandings or be assumed to support my interpretation of "the Blackfella Way". Many more members of the Aboriginal community in Adelaide allowed me into their homes and into their lives during the period of my research and I want to express my appreciation to them here. I also wish to acknowledge the financial support of the Australian National University and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (now known as the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies).

Sylvia Hart-Landsberg and Karen Wikelund read drafts of this thesis and provided pats on the back as needed. Bev Sibthorpe, more than anyone, provided support and encouragement as I developed the ideas in this thesis. Her editorial skills, anthropological insights, unfailing patience and good humor are greatly appreciated. Finally, a special note of thanks to Gillian, Bryony, and Alexander who are sick of theses and probably wouldn't be disappointed if they never saw one again.
ABSTRACT

This is a study of urban Aboriginal ideology, conducted in Adelaide, South Australia. It addresses the issue of Aboriginal identity and argues that in order to understand the Aboriginal sense of self it is necessary to examine the tension between history, ideas, dispositions and social practice in the context of the objective conditions of daily life. The thesis is that there exists among Aborigines in Adelaide an ideational system they refer to as the "Blackfella Way". An overview of the structure and content of the Blackfella Way in terms of its two distinct and complementary dimensions, essence and style, is presented. It is argued that this system is an historical, cognitive and social construction which synthesizes the tone, texture, style, and mood of life and provides a conceptual and practical framework through which individuals formulate, think about and act in the world.

The process whereby the ideational system is translated into ideology and the structural position of Aborigines in Adelaide is also examined. Consideration is given to the ways in which social and ideological formations mediate the influence of external events and forces and shape human practice are explored. It is argued that through the process of symbolic violence, the limitations of the objective conditions become internalized and appropriated. Objective conditions thus inform and frame the ideological system which Aboriginal actors produce, reproduce and which ultimately reproduces the existing imbalance of power.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

 Declaration ii  
 Foreword and Acknowledgements iii  
 Abstract vi  
 Table of Contents vii  
 List of Tables and Figure ix  

## CHAPTER ONE. THEORETICAL ISSUES 1

An Overview of Research Among Aborigines in Urban Settings 5  
Aboriginality and Aboriginal Identity 16  
Practice, Structure and Ideology: Review of Current Issues and Perspectives 28  
The Blackfella Way 35  

## CHAPTER TWO. THE PROCESS OF HISTORY 38

A Brief Overview of Early Contact 41  
Policies of Control 51  
Traditional Divisions and Contemporary Tensions 73  
Aborigines in Adelaide Today: A Recognition of Differences 78  

## CHAPTER THREE. THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY LIFE 88

Socio-Economic Overview of the Adelaide Aboriginal Community 88  
Population 97  
Housing 102  
Income and Employment 109  
Family Structure: Accounting for the "Missing Males" 120
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER FOUR. THE BLACKFELLA WAY</th>
<th>130</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Dimension of Essence</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Dimension of Style</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociality</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Family</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disposition</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Structure of the Blackfella Way</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contradiction and Inversion</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER FIVE. THE BLACKFELLA WAY: IDEOLOGY AND PRACTICE</th>
<th>170</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From Ideology to Practice</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice: Beyond Subject and Object</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideology and History</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Exclusion</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Dissolution</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Schemas</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Constitution of the Blackfella Way: Ideology and Practice</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essence</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Style</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic Violence</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penetration, Resistance and the Struggle for Orthodoxy</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 230 |
LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURE

Table 3.1  Birthplace of Adelaide Aborigines not born in Adelaide, 1966 and 1980. 94
Table 3.2  Age by sex, Aborigines/TSI and All Persons, Adelaide. 1981. 100
Table 3.3  Aboriginal households in Adelaide by housing type. 107
Table 3.4  Income source of adult Aborigines, Port Adelaide, 1980. 111
Table 3.5  Annual household income, Aborigines/TSI and All Persons, Adelaide, 1981. 112
Table 3.6  Occupational status of adult Aborigines, Port Adelaide, 1980. 114
Table 3.7  Occupational status of Aborigines by age and sex, Port Adelaide, 1980. 116
Table 3.8  Employment by occupation of Aborigines/TSI and All Persons, Adelaide, 1981. 117
Table 3.9  Employment by industry of Aborigines/TSI and All Persons, Adelaide, 1981. 118
Table 3.10 Male to female ratios by age, Aborigines/TSI and All Persons, Adelaide, 1981. 122

Figure 3.1 Population pyramids of Aborigines/TSI and All Persons, Adelaide, 1981. 101
CHAPTER ONE

THEORETICAL ISSUES

There has been and continues to be a great deal of attention paid to the issue of Aboriginal identity and culture among Aborigines in non-traditional communities, both by Aboriginal people and by non-Aboriginal social scientists.\(^1\) In an era preceded by major political gains by Aborigines which brought them and their causes into the political mainstream, Aboriginal people -- especially those in urban settings -- see the process of change as only just beginning.\(^1\) In contrast, many other Australians would like to imagine Aborigines have received their justice and are now the same as everyone else. As an issue are struggles over perception, integrity and political power.\(^2\)

Since the 1970s much attention has been focused on the topic of Aboriginal identity under the rubric of Aboriginality, but with little result: among both Aborigines and non-Aboriginal academics, identity is occasionally questioned,

\(^1\) Identity among Aborigines has also been the subject of sometimes furious and often spurious debate in the media as well. Mary Edmunds (1989) provides a particularly insightful examination of the role of the media in shaping public attitudes toward Aborigines in Roebourne.

\(^2\) The release in 1985 of the Australian National Opinion Polls public opinion survey on Aboriginal Land Rights suggested many non-Aboriginal Australians had reservations about awarding land claims to any but "full bloods" or "tribal, rural, outback Aborigines". Though the accuracy of the poll has been questioned (Rowe 1988) it is clear that Aboriginal identity has important political implications in Australia today.
often assumed, but rarely examined. One of the central problems is that a single, specific and widely applicable definition of Aboriginality has not been agreed on. Even assuming a tacit definition, there is recognition that Aboriginality varies in configuration from place to place, yet there has been no adequate examination of the process whereby those variations have been produced. While anthropologists have focused more intently on the issues of Aboriginal identity and Aboriginality than have other social scientists, they too have made little progress.

Though possible explanations for this lack of progress are varied and complex, one issue of particular significance is methodology. Fay Gale, a geographer who has written extensively on Aborigines in South Australia and is well known for her research on Adelaide Aborigines, has been critical of anthropological methodologies and analyses. Commenting on research conducted by anthropologist Judy Inglis in Adelaide (prior to Gale's work there during the late 1950s) Gale (1972: 16) writes:

One earlier study of Aborigines in Adelaide . . . had been made by a social anthropologist, using a common anthropological technique of establishing rapport with the most communicative individuals and then obtaining data from them. Such a method yields valuable material about the society, but the information cannot be quantified and generalizations about the total population cannot be made on the basis of such a biased sample.

Though it is easy for anthropologists to dismiss Gale's comments as a theoretically unsophisticated critique and an oversimplification of anthropological methodology, implicit in her criticism is an important challenge. As I will argue in this thesis, the explanatory power of the anthropological
approach lies in its potential for anchoring the subjective arenas of daily life to the objective realities which structure and are structured by them. Issues of Aboriginal identity and Aboriginality are precisely the type of notions which are easily asserted but much more difficult to explain, and to show the connections between shared meanings and objective conditions is the challenge at the heart of Gale's criticism.

To meet this challenge, the examination of macroscopic concepts such as Aboriginal identity or Aboriginality must be grounded in particularistic case studies focused on single communities. Localized, detailed ethnographic studies have long been conducted in remote Aboriginal communities in Australia but very few have been carried out among Aborigines in settled Australia. It is only through such localized studies -- ranging from remote to metropolitan communities -- that larger patterns can be understood. Aboriginal identity and the attendant notion of "Aboriginality" are important concepts -- theoretically, from the perspective of anthropology, but practically too from the point of view of Aboriginal people -- but at the moment they remain vague and impressionistic, supported by inadequate ethnographic detail, without grounding in social theory; if these notions are ever to be fleshed out and presented as more than empty slogans, they must be based on studies which present detail of local configurations of culture and meaning.

3 The term "settled Australia", first used by Rowley (1972b: v) is a term which avoids some of the problems inherent in discriminating between rural and urban, traditionally oriented and non-traditionally oriented, and the like. As Cowlishaw (1987) has pointed out so well, the labels employed by researchers to describe differences among Aboriginal communities are problematic at best and ideologically suspect at worse. While acknowledging this problem it is not my task here to attempt to resolve this problem. I will use the terms "urban" and "settled Australian" interchangeably.
The aim of this thesis is to bring one such local configuration into sharp relief and to examine the tension between ideas, dispositions and social practice within the context of the objective conditions of daily life. I will argue that there exists among Aborigines in Adelaide an ideational system which they recognize and have named the Blackfella Way and that the elements of this system provide a particular framework and orientation through which Aborigines in Adelaide perceive and interpret the world. This system structures and is structured by those objective conditions, and in its manifestation as ideology is a critical component in the ongoing historical process whereby the social, political and economic subordination of Aborigines in Adelaide is produced and reproduced. As I will show, Aborigines in Adelaide -- and throughout the rest of the country -- are actors in the ongoing construction of their past and present, continually negotiating, reinterpreting and recreating their sense of identity and place within both the Aboriginal and the dominant European communities.

To set the stage for the ethnographic depiction and analysis presented in later chapters, it is necessary to examine the theoretical shortcomings of previous research among Aborigines in settled Australia that deals with or touches on the constitution and persistence of Aboriginal identity. Rather than attempt an exhaustive review of the literature, a task which is not pertinent to the argument presented here, I will highlight two significant waves of research: the

---

4 Throughout this thesis I am using two important concepts which, though closely related, need to be carefully differentiated. I refer to the "Blackfella Way" as an ideational system when discussing the ideational frame which underpins ideology. While the ideational system refers to a set of ideas, the Blackfella Way ideology refers to the manifestation of those ideas -- and their role in the reproduction of social relations -- in structure and practice.
first involving the implementation of governmental policies, particularly assimilationist policies which were seen to herald the end of a distinctive Aboriginal identity, and the second focusing specifically on discussions of Aboriginal identity and Aboriginality in light of its persistence. Though they are roughly sequential, and thus interesting in terms of the evolution of Aboriginal studies, they are most significant in that they illustrate fundamental flaws which have affected the majority of research conducted among Aborigines in urban areas. The earlier research concerned with assimilation was both ahistorical and atheoretical. The second wave is focused on questions of identity, and, while theoretical, errs in ignoring the articulation of ideational constructions, social practice and the particular objective conditions of everyday life. (The explication of Aboriginal identity requires a theoretical model capable of framing an analysis of ideology within the context of local history and experience.)

An Overview of Research Among Aborigines in Urban Settings

Until recently, the majority of depictions of urban Aboriginal communities have been ahistorical. This is not to say that they lack a recounting of past events within those communities: indeed, a cursory chronological representation of historical events appears to be the rule. My criticism of these accounts is directed at both their content and the nearly uniform (with exceptions to be noted) lack of analysis of the interplay of Aboriginal actors and the socio-political structures which gained increasing prominence after the arrival of European settlers. Aboriginal history has often been represented as somehow
separate from the actions and interpretations of contemporary Aborigines and
divorced from the socio-political realities of contemporary life. Cultural
continuities are portrayed as aberrations or remnants and are often noted with
surprise and then dismissed. In these accounts the history of urban Aborigines
is portrayed as a linear sequence of events, and the possibility that history is a
process and in interaction with the present is never considered. As I will argue
in more detail later, there is in anthropological studies a need for an
examination of the interplay of history and ideology if we are to make headway
in understanding contemporary configurations of Aboriginal identity and
ideology. In this light, and in contrast to earlier studies, continuities with
predecessors are a piece of the puzzle, not a curio to be noted and filed away
as quaint or sad but no longer meaningful. Recognition of Aboriginal
ideology and its implications was practically non-existent.

A second problem with early accounts of Aborigines in urban regions is the
lack of any systematic attempt to explicate the socio-cultural configurations of
the peoples described according to established or exploratory theoretical
models. Concerns with Aboriginal identity, when present at all, were more
administrative than theoretical, and most of the early research was focused on
the practical implementation of assimilation policies.

---

5 For a general overview of the historical experience of Aborigines in settled Australia see Keen
(1988).

6 I have often heard Aboriginal people in Adelaide refer to Assimilation as a theoretical model
employed by Europeans to account for recent changes in Aboriginal society. As used here it refers
to a set of explicit government policies concerned with the subsumption of Aborigines into the
dominant society.
The study of Aborigines in settled Australia held little interest for anthropologists prior to the 1930s. A.P. Elkin was one of the first to take an interest in Aborigines in both remote and non-remote communities. His publications during this period developed two major themes. One was ethnographic, focused primarily on "full-blood" Aborigines who he obviously viewed as closer to the traditional, pristine culture. Research in this stream was concerned with socio-cultural phenomena such as social organization (Elkin 1931) and totemism (Elkin 1933). The second stream reflected his concern with wider social issues and matters of government policy and included, for example, discussions of Aboriginal intelligence (Elkin 1932) and education (Elkin 1937). Writings of the latter group paid more attention to the "mixed-bloods" who he usually portrayed as cultural casualties, evidence of the urgency of the issues at hand.

In a 1935 article titled "Civilized Aborigines and Native Culture", Elkin provides a hint of interest in melding the ethnographic and policy approaches in an examination of "mixed-blood" Aboriginal communities. Drawing on his own case studies, Elkin appeared genuinely surprised to find that "mixed-blood" Aborigines were able to retain aspects of their culture under the "civilizing" influence of Europeans. This retention, however, was not thought to be permanent. This paper suggested a model of cultural breakdown as Aborigines became "civilized". According to Elkin, while economic, legal and even social elements of the culture could be replaced without fracturing the cultural underpinnings of the Aboriginal community, the loss of the religious elements was decisive in the collapse of the community. Though he cited examples from
his own research where civilizing "mixed-blood" communities had survived, he
was far from optimistic concerning the majority of cases. Indeed, Elkin's
(1935: 145) conclusion portrayed a view much the same as that which he would
later (Elkin 1951) ascribe to the earlier "protection period", when it was
believed that little more could be done than to "smooth the dying pillow":

The task, therefore, of civilizing agents is so to preserve and
modify or supplant the aboriginal view of life and the rites and
practices arising from it, that primitive man may still feel at home
in the universe, a sharer of that common life which animates all
that therein is -- including ourselves.

According to Elkin (1935: 119), the fruits of civilization for Aborigines were
bitter: "the yearly increasing proportion of civilized to uncivilized Aborigines is
a prelude to their extinction".

Elkin had few colleagues during this early period, but Caroline Kelly, one of his
students, also wrote of her experience with Aborigines in Queensland and New
South Wales in the early to mid-1930s. Like Elkin and many of those to
follow, Kelly was concerned with identifying methods whereby assimilation
could be achieved.7 Writing in 1944 of what she describes as her "sojourns on
native reserves in Queensland and New South Wales" from 1930 to 1937, Kelly
(1944: 142-153) frames her descriptions as necessary to the larger task of
Aboriginal assimilation:

The future of the Australian Aborigine is a problem which
confronts both the Administrator and the Missionary. Methods
by which assimilation is to be achieved are best improved and
made effective by the gradual accumulation of all available data.

7 And like Elkin, Kelly (1935) expresses a similar sense of surprise that Aborigines long in
contact with Europeans might retain some traditional beliefs, in this case concerning the
supernatural.
Kelly's presentation of her data is intriguing. Though she illustrates by way of anecdotal materials the cultural tensions as Aborigines in three communities adapt to the world of the Europeans, she stops short of anything more than a superficial examination of the implications. For example, a discussion of the reserve Administration's practice of removing children with light skin and light colored eyes from their mothers is portrayed in these episodes as no more than cultural misunderstandings where "the motive was good" (Kelly 1944: 147). The socio-cultural impact of such practices on the Aboriginal communities in question is ignored by Kelly in favor of a digression into her belief that "the white man" can learn a great deal from Aborigines about affection toward step-children and how "our own society" has constructed a notion of chastity "based on nothing more elevated than . . . interest in possessions" (Kelly 1944: 147).

Though Kelly (Kelly 1944: 153) raised questions and issues which would later be considered to be at the heart of "the Aboriginal problem" (i.e., self determination) she made no attempt to address the very questions she raised:

At the present time, when so much is being said of Reconstruction and of a New Deal for the natives, it seems an opportune moment to suggest that some really serious work should be done first in studying native reactions and their opinions on the efforts made, often so fruitlessly, on their behalf.

Like so many who would chronicle the plight of Aborigines in the years to follow, Kelly appeared to define that "really serious work" as description. In none of these early writings is there a careful and critical examination of particular histories and the implications of those histories for the Aboriginal people involved.

By the mid-1940s and then into the 1950s, students under the tutelage of A.P.
Elkin were being regularly dispatched to conduct research in urban communities. Though many of these students acknowledge that this early research was undervalued among professional anthropologists, with such field sites considered little more than readily accessible training grounds where budding anthropologists could hone their skills before moving on to more important areas, these early studies provide a view of communities undergoing severe stress and rapid transformation. Like those which preceded them, however, these studies were largely descriptive, atheoretical and paid no more than superficial attention to history. The result of this, however, is that Aborigines depicted in these studies are portrayed as purely reactive agents with little influence over the course of their lives.

Marie Reay conducted anthropological research under Elkin in rural New South Wales until she completed her "apprenticeship" and moved on to field work in New Guinea. Like those who preceded her, Reay's work during the mid-1940s had "practical" value, in this case in the eyes of the Aborigines' Welfare Board in the mid-1940s, from which she gained financial sponsorship. Much of Reay's research shows a level of ethnographic detail and interpretation absent from the works of earlier writers, and Reay occasionally attempted to frame these depictions with what appears at first glance to be

---

8 Cowlishaw (1986a: 8) makes the point that anthropologists working in New South Wales during this period sometimes viewed themselves as apprentices developing their craft.

9 Beckett (1964:36), whose work, even during this early period, was a notable exception to this trend, criticized Fink's (1957) approach as denying the autonomy of Aboriginal society and treating it as "a mere product of the dominant society".
social theory. She and Sitlington argue (Reay and Sitlington 1948) that Aborigines in Moree are entwined in structures of class, but the concept of class and its implications for the relationship of Aborigines to whites in Moree is never examined. Class is used as a descriptor, and related to a hodge-podge of notions whereby it is linked to "different levels of civilization" (Reay and Sitlington 1948: 181). It is possible, they write, to distinguish class "on the basis of hygiene and home-making, and to understand class position as involving "personal and social characteristics...developed largely through making concrete efforts to achieve this end". Thus Aborigines in Moree were not doomed to the lower classes, but could raise themselves (became civilized) by their own efforts and improved hygiene. The problem with this view -- besides the obvious point that it is crafted with the ideological tools of the assimilation policies of the day -- is that there is no acknowledgment of any forces, other than individual volition, at work in the equation. There is no attempt to understand the social and political implications of relations between blacks and whites in New South Wales.

It is interesting to see Reay's perceptions in action. Illustrating the point that Aborigines can change, she provides the following anecdote and sheds some light on her role in the community:

While at Walgett, Miss Grace Sitlington and I organized dances, concerts, swimming parties, etcetera on the aboriginal station and demonstrated that the formation of an active social life develops self-confidence and helps to banish apathy in these people (Reay 1945: 305).

Why they might be apathetic and what the basis for a lack of self-confidence might be are questions left unexamined.
At the same time, most of these early writers failed to grapple with the socio-cultural stresses and strains exhibited by tensions within these Aboriginal communities. (While they were almost always described as communities in turmoil,) there was little attempt to understand the basis of such turmoil in other than the most superficial terms. Ruth Fink (1957), for example, describes the economic strains of community pressures in "Barwon" for members of Mission households. Citing the example of one household in Barwon, she describes how the economic drain of feeding and sheltering the constant parade of visitors, relatives and the unemployed leaves the household impoverished:

The wage earner has to support many others besides his own individual family. His wages may have been sufficient to provide for his wife and children, but when they have to extend to much larger groups of needy and unemployed relatives there is little possibility for saving (Fink 1957: 108 emphasis added).

Driving the behavior is the sense that it is improper and therefore impossible to refuse help to others in need, and by extension, the prestige gained by assisting one's kin outweighs the loss of financial security. This pattern is still the norm for Aborigines in Adelaide today.10 Like most of the writings of the day, Fink's analysis is descriptive rather than theoretical and there is no attempt to move the discussion of patterns of behavior within the community from the former to the latter.

---

10 Had Fink examined the process more closely (an impossible demand perhaps, given that she was present in the community only four months) she may have discovered that in the Aboriginal community social prestige gained via sharing is a more dependable and satisfying form of "social security" than a bank account. The basis for such a system of social prestige is at the heart of Aboriginal notions of self, and, I would suggest were so in the 1940s and 1950s as well. This point will be explored more fully in chapters 4 and 5.
There is a significant exception to the descriptive works of this period. Beckett's early depictions of Aboriginal communities and individuals were consistently different from the writings of his contemporaries and foreshadowed an approach which would provide much richer insights. Most notably, he was careful to provide historical context for his depictions, he emphasized insights of his informants (Beckett 1958), and he paid specific attention to the ways in which social meaning linked with practice to reproduce the structure of society (Beckett 1965).

By the late 1950s anthropologists were becoming aware of the fact that assimilation for Aborigines might not be the only or best model for government administration. In the epilogue to the 3rd edition of The Australian Aborigines, Elkin (1954: 337) points out that by the early 1950s the assimilation process was perceived to be of questionable value by increasing numbers of Aborigines:

Although there are numbers of families which have taken their place unobtrusively and timidly in the general community, and although hindrances to assimilation are officially and legally being removed and aides to it provided, ... assimilation is not a simple linear process by which individuals become citizens in fact and daily life as well as in law. Indeed, an ambivalent attitude is rising towards assimilation. Although the Aborigines more and more want to be part of Australian life in their own right, they want to reach this goal as Aborigines. Prejudice against them, their own slowness and difficulty in appreciating what citizenship entails, and the "pull" of their background culture on full-bloods and part-Aborigines alike, is giving rise to a group-consciousness with an emphasis on Aboriginal tradition and solidarity.

Diane Barwick was one of the first to document the failure of government assimilation policies. Working in Melbourne, Barwick (1962, 1963) conducted the first extended fieldwork among Aborigines in a major urban setting, and
produced rich ethnographic depictions of that community. Most significantly, Barwick portrayed the continuities of Aboriginal kinship in Melbourne and showed the links between kinship and economic viability in an urban community.

But Barwick was an exception. During the late 1950s and into the early 1960s interest in urban Aboriginal communities among anthropologists waned, but other social scientists including sociologists, demographers, economists, geographers, and social psychologists quickly stepped in to fill the void. Adelaide geographer, Fay Gale, for example, was involved with the analysis and practical implementation of the South Australian assimilation policy of the 1950s and 1960s. In the introduction to her Ph.D. thesis she writes:

Any attempt to understand the problem of assimilation encounters the basic question: how best can a relatively small population of mixed bloods, no longer able to participate in the life of their indigenous forebears, find a place within the general community, which will give both satisfaction to themselves and be beneficial and acceptable to the larger community? (Gale 1964: xiv).

Gale’s early work is not only policy oriented but is illustrative of the ahistorical approach I have described above. Though she traces the development of some of the South Australian missions, she stops short of examining those histories in the light of contemporary Aboriginal perceptions of the very policies she was concerned with.11

11 Since her Ph.D. thesis was written in 1960, Gale’s writings have explored a variety of themes. Remaining central in her concerns, however, are questions relating to migration, mobility, residence patterns and poverty. As a follow-up study to Gale’s Urban Aborigines (1972) which focused on 1966, Gale and Wundersitz have published Adelaide Aborigines: A Case Study of Urban Life 1966-1981 (1982). Together with Gale and Binnion’s (1975) study of poverty among Adelaide Aborigines these publications provide an unparalleled and detailed study of economic and demographic patterns for a period of more than 15 years and will be examined more closely in chapter 3.
By the mid-1960s there was a significant expansion of research on Aborigines throughout Australia, with the establishment in 1964 of The Aborigines Project of the Social Sciences Research Council of Australia (SSRC). Privately funded by the Myer Foundation of Australia and the Sidney Myer Charity Trust and founded in 1952, the SSRC (later The Academy of the Social Sciences) undertook the first independent survey of Aborigines in Australia from 1964 through 1967, a time when "the Aboriginal situation" was stirring public conscience. Subsequently, an exhaustive analysis of Aboriginal relations with Europeans and the various federal, state and territorial governments was assembled under the authorship of the Director of the Aborigines Project, Charles Rowley (1972a, 1972b, 1972c). These three volumes on policy and practice are still of critical importance in the history of Aboriginal studies in Australia and signaled a shift in what was considered important to researchers. Suddenly, critical challenges to past and present Aboriginal policy were seen to be a key task of the social sciences.

The SSRC provided the impetus for new directions in Aboriginal studies, and with shifts in political priorities and a new sense of government responsibilities toward Aborigines, "practical" research became the norm. During the early 1970s, for example, the federal government's Commission of Inquiry into Poverty sponsored studies of the Aboriginal and Islander community in Brisbane (Brown, Hirschfeld and Smith 1974), two Aboriginal communities in country towns (Hill 1975), and the Aboriginal community in Adelaide (Gale and Binnion 1975). Though they sprang from a more critical political climate than earlier research, these studies remained basically ahistorical policy pieces.
In the background, however, there was growing concern with statements by Aborigines in urban centers concerning who they saw themselves to be, how they perceived the government and what they wanted for their futures; at the same time anthropological interest in these issues began to reemerge and accelerate.

**Aboriginality and Aboriginal Identity**

During the late 1960s and early 1970s some anthropologists began to turn their attention to the question of Aboriginal identity, particularly as it applied to urban Aborigines. An early signpost was a volume of papers published in 1973 and edited by Donald Tugby titled, *Aboriginal Identity in Contemporary Australian Society* (1973). A seminal paper in this collection by John von Sturmer includes a blunt appraisal of a postulated pan-Aboriginal identity. The very notion of one all-encompassing Aboriginality which could bind Aboriginal groups with varying needs and radically different histories is, von Sturmer notes, an unlikely prospect with no basis in history. Ultimately, he argues, "'Aboriginality' and Aboriginal 'identity' are concepts that have value only as political expedients" (von Sturmer 1973: 25). If this is the case, he continues, a pan-Aboriginal identity could only result from a social and political backlash (von Sturmer 1973: 26).

In 1974 the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies' Biennial Conference focused on the topic of Social and Cultural Change and included a section on "Identity and Urban Situations". The volume of papers published subsequent to the conference, titled *Aborigines and Change: Australia in the '70s* (Berndt
1977b), has a marked emphasis on the topic of identity. The title of the first chapter of the volume, "Aboriginal Identity: Reality or Mirage (Berndt 1977a), sets the tone for much of the subsequent discussion among the authors in the book. In the preface to the same volume, Berndt (1977b: xi) hints at the danger of the reification of Aboriginal identity and suggests the need for both Aborigines and non-Aborigines to balance analyses of what Aborigines themselves say about who they are and what they want to be with recognition of the forces and pressures of the larger socio-political and economic context within which such issues are now necessarily addressed. Though not articulated as such, the lesson to be learned from von Sturmer and Berndt is that analyses of Aboriginal identity must not stop at the level of content but must move to the deeper level of process. Identity for Aborigines is not composed merely of a set of socio-cultural "features" which can be discovered, elicited or derived, but more importantly involves a process whereby sense of self, place and community are continually created and reworked.

But the cautions of von Sturmer and Berndt have often gone unheeded. Coombs, Brandl and Snowdon (1983), for example, provide an extensive discussion (over 400 pages) of Aboriginality yet never move beyond the descriptive level. Though the book was written to inform and educate public servants, there is a striking absence of analysis. Aboriginality is reduced to a list of "enduring elements" which reflect "Aboriginal value orientations" (Coombs, Brandl and Snowdon 1983: 21):

1. being and identifying as a descendant of the original inhabitants of Australia;
2. sharing historical as well as cultural experience, particularly that arising from relations with non-Aborigines;

3. adhering to, or sharing, the Dreaming, or Aboriginal worldview;

4. having an intimate familial relationship with the land and with the natural world; and knowing the pervading moulding character of these in all matters Aboriginal;

5. basing social interaction on the mutual obligations of kinship;

6. giving importance to mortuary rituals and attendance at them; and

7. speaking and understanding more than one language.

Case studies are presented and the derivation of these seven elements are posited, but there is never any consideration that the subject of the book is theoretically problematic. Written for policy makers (the authors bill their work as a policy study), the political process is portrayed as something which can be "administered" with greater sensitivity and cultural awareness, but there is no hint that Aboriginality itself emerges from and is intrinsically part of a political process or that aspects of it could ever be contentious to various Aboriginal groups. Thus, for government officials, Aboriginality is something to be adapted to, something programs can be made compatible with. As portrayed by Coombs, Brandl and Snowdon, Aboriginality is a socio-cultural artifact, to be respected and admired but not questioned or examined too closely. Aboriginality, they would have the reader believe, is a coherent system, basic to all Aboriginal people, with an absence of internal tension,
contradiction or conflict.\textsuperscript{12}

Eckermann (1977a, 1977b, 1988) too has approached the topic of Aboriginal identity from a cultural perspective, but her approach is refreshing in its emphasis on content and meaning over form. All her work is underpinned by an emphasis on the interactions of social organization, economy and socio-cultural values among Aborigines in urban settings. Jordan (1983, 1985, 1988), on the other hand, employs a "sociology of knowledge" approach to examine identity formation among Aborigines in educational settings.

Another approach to an examination of Aboriginal identity has been to attempt to link Aboriginality and ethnicity. This alignment of identity with ethnicity is far from novel. Within the discipline of anthropology, and beginning with the work of Fredrik Barth, there has been a great deal of attention paid to the concept of ethnicity. Ethnic groups, Barth (1969)\textsuperscript{13} observes, are based on categories of ascription and identification, but the cultural content of such categories is largely ignored by Barth as are questions of how that content is generated, shaped and reproduced. Of key concern to Barth is the means by which ethnic groups maintain boundaries. Following Shils (1957), Geertz (1963) takes a different perspective in focusing on primordial bonds. While each of these approaches is concerned with the perception of "groupness" vis-a-

\textsuperscript{12} Crick (1981) has also attempted an exploration of the core values of Aboriginality which is in many ways similar to the approach of Coombs, Brandl and Snowdon.

\textsuperscript{13} Ironically, Barth (1983) has now effectively rejected ethnicity as a useful concept for understanding identity.
vis outsiders, there is no attempt to anchor such perceptions to the objective conditions or to examine the process whereby particular configurations of identity are produced.

The extension of the notion of ethnicity to the field of Aboriginal identity has been extremely problematic and no one has succeeded in applying it so that it crystallizes the critical dimensions of the issues which comprise Aboriginal identity within the context of the dominant European society. This lack of success may be the result of several factors. First, ethnicity is conceptually vague and tautological: members of ethnic groups are often described as feeling bound together by primordial ties and as such view themselves as members of a distinct group.14 This lack of theoretical precision is difficult to escape. Second, ethnicity as a concept is ideologically suspect. As de Lepervanche (1980), Hinton (1981) and Eipper (1983) have shown, the notion of ethnicity requires its own critical analysis; as commonly used, ethnicity carries with it ideological shadings which make it unsuitable as a tool for social analysis.15 At the heart of these formidable critiques is the argument that ethnicity is a mode of cultural identification, not a structural principle, and as such cannot be assumed to have the explanatory power it is often awarded. Finally, when the concept of ethnicity is applied to Aboriginal people in Australian society, they decry the validity of the term in application to themselves. This is critical to an

14 Indeed, Blu (1980: 218-235) has argued that the concept of ethnicity has been stretched to include such a wide variety of meanings that it is difficult to use with any analytical or theoretical precision without long and careful definition and qualification whenever it is called forth.

15 Some have suggested the emergence of ethnicity is linked to the search for a classificatory concept to replace race (Blu 1979 and Cowlishaw 1986b).
understanding of the constitution of Aboriginal identity for Aborigines do not see themselves as members of an ethnic group, a point that will be explored more fully below.

Jones and Hill-Burnett's "The political context of ethnogenesis: an Australian example" (1982) is an example of one attempt to join the notion of ethnicity and Aboriginal identity and to suggest a critical examination of Aboriginal identity as an emergent political phenomena. This line of investigation is significant in addressing one of the weaknesses discussed above, the equation of ethnicity with cultural classification and identification. While the concept of ethnicity is often equated with common cultural traditions, ethnogenesis involves the formation of a new sense of identity forged in conflict and factionalism. According to Jones and Hill-Burnett (1982: 235) "the development of the definition of a new social category is a creative process" (emphasis added).

The kernel of their argument is that a pan-Aboriginal ethnicity will emerge through "a continuous process of strategically negotiated identity and status" (Jones and Hill-Burnett 1982: 235), a process which involves negotiation both among the often diverse sections of the Aboriginal population and between Aborigines and the non-Aboriginal political system. Though this approach does not address the third weakness of the concept of ethnicity, and skirts the first, it does raise other important issues regarding the emergence of new forms of

---

16 Other anthropologists have suggested a similar link between ethnogenesis and emergent nationalism. See Tonkinson (1982) for an examination of Kastom in Vanuatu and Sider (1976) for a discussion of cultural nationalism among the Lumbee Indians.
Aboriginal identity. Most significantly, Jones and Hill-Burnett (1982: 238) point to structural tensions within Aboriginal communities resulting from the representation of a group-wide identity by an "ethnic elite" masking the true diversity of the larger group. Especially insidious is the potential for compromise and manipulation by the government which often provides the funding for the social and political programs which address the needs of the minority community and employment for the elite who administer those programs.17 These issues are critical to an understanding of contemporary configurations of identity among Aborigines in Adelaide and will be addressed again in chapter 5.

Sansom (1982) takes an entirely different approach in arguing that an Aboriginal ethnogenesis is impeded by the very structures and styles which link diverse groups of Aborigines. He begins with a notion of "the Aboriginal commonality". By this he refers to a widely shared set of understandings and modes of social behaviors among Aborigines throughout the country. This commonality, writes Sansom (1982: 136), "has its genesis in the repetitive reassertion of similar forms for social association on a continental scale". As a result, Aborigines in Darwin and Perth, for example, recognize a fundamental similarity in their respective social-cultural groupings. In this sense Aborigines can be said to share a distinct culture. Though this is close in some ways to what Jones and Hill-Burnett pursue in their notion of ethnogenesis, and while Sansom (1982: 135) actually uses the term "ethnic" in contrasting Aboriginal and mainstream Australian society, he ultimately argues that in fact Aboriginal

17 A case study of Aboriginal political elites in Perth is provided by Howard (1981).
commonality has defeated the emergence of a pan-Aboriginal ethrogenesis:

The trouble is that the Aboriginal commonality is posited on particularistic manifestations, consociate experience and a conception of a closed set of others who are truly and really one's Countrymen. Without such closure and limitation the system for creating Aboriginal regional communities would not work... This is to say that Aborigines limit their world to consociate involvement, and have no developed means for accommodating categorically defined contemporaries as figures who legitimately can have a place in a landscape that is more extensive than the country that the observer has himself walked and so can claim to know (Sansom 1982: 137).

Though Sansom's paper has generated a great deal of interest, his explanation assumes a stasis and independence which clearly do not exist. His argument is dependent on a continuing strong traditional orientation which is obviously not held to the same degree by all Aborigines, especially as regards the continuance of local "social groupings defensively maintained against the world" (Sansom 1982: 136). Though he is careful to include Aborigines who have been resident in urban centers for generations, his argument does not hold up well in such cases.

Sansom presents evidence which is immediately appealing but ultimately superficial. His argument suggests Aboriginal commonality is somehow untouched by the economic and political constraints imposed by the articulation of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal society. Indeed, Aboriginal communities, Sansom (1982: 135) argues, are not articulated with the dominant European society so much as they are "parathetic" to it:

Aborigines have adopted material goods, have taken to drink and use Toyotas or motor cars but they use these things their way. They have not appropriated Western modalities and values along
with their take-over of ranges of provided goods.

This is a very romantic and popular depiction but it is both an oversimplification and demonstrably untrue. It may be the case that some Aborigines have not appropriated Western modalities and values, but it is nonsense to suggest this is an all pervasive pattern. Aboriginal communities in both remote and urban settings provide abundant examples to contradict this.

The degree to which this appropriation occurs within and between communities and the ramifications of the tensions such appropriations provoke is an extremely significant problem Sansom ignores.

The notion of an Aboriginal commonality is an intriguing starting point, but any exploration of Aboriginal identity whether of local, regional or national scope needs to delve much deeper. Most importantly it must address the articulation of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal worlds beyond the local community, taking care to examine not only ideological content but also the role played by that ideology in the reproduction of the larger web of social relations. 18

The 1980s have ushered in several new and promising theoretical approaches to Aboriginal identity which address political process and the configuration of

18 The late 1970's gave rise to several new approaches by anthropologists to the study of Aboriginal communities which, though not focused on questions of identity or Aboriginality, display a theoretical sophistication earlier studies lacked. Studies by Morris (1983, 1986) among the Dhan-gadi in New South Wales, Anderson (1983) among the Kuku-Nyungkul in north Queensland and Beckett (1982, 1987) among Torres Strait Islanders attempt to place localized socio-cultural analyses squarely within history and acknowledge and trace the active participation of Aboriginal individuals and communities in the making of their own histories. These studies are of further significance in their efforts to depict the articulation of Aboriginal and Islander communities with the economic structures of the dominant society. In all of these cases, analysis goes far beyond shallow description, highlighting the active role of individuals and communities in structuring their relations with the dominant society.
ideological systems. Whereas Jones and Hill-Burnett focus upon the negotiation of identity and hint at potential manipulation by government, Weaver (1984), Beckett (1986, 1938) and Morris (1988) confront the fundamental power of governments to constrain that negotiation and impact constructions of Aboriginal identity from above. Following Willis and Corrigan (1983), Cowlishaw (1988a, 1988b) employs the notion of oppositional culture in her examination of Aboriginal identity in rural Australia. According to Cowlishaw, Aboriginality involves an affirmation by Aborigines of cultural features deemed shameful or pathological by members of the dominant European society: it is at once a challenge and defense. Keefe (1988: 68) further teases apart the threads of Aboriginality and identifies two themes which underlie Aboriginal discourse on identity, one of persistence and the other of resistance:

The two notions underlie all Aboriginal discourse on Aboriginality but in any particular context one may be submerged or muted by the other. They are not total opposites, as the persistence of Aboriginal people is partially due to successful and ongoing resistance and contemporary political actions make use of both notions. They are in tension, and at times contradict each other.

Keefe’s recognition of internal tensions and contradictions is an important advance and a critical insight which reveals much about the nature of Aboriginality.  

But not all approaches to Aboriginality since the early 1970s have been so productive. In fact, the reification against which Berndt warned is exemplified in political scientist Colin Tatz’s essay, “Aboriginality as Civilization” (1980). In this paper Tatz simultaneously affirms and denies the concept of Aboriginality, a concept he goes to great pains to define and then claims does not exist. If nothing else, this and other essays by Tatz (1979, 1982) provoked a heated exchange between Tatz (1984), Theile (1984) and Anderson et al (1985) which increased attention to the need for a critical examination of the political and ideological implications of the term.

John von Sturmer, in reaction to Theile’s critique of Tatz, downplays the importance of Tatz’s paper and suggests that Thiele "asserts rather than demonstrates the centrality of Tatz’s writings (and) I
Aboriginal people themselves have increasingly focused on the topic of identity in recent years. Since the early 1970s there have been dozens of biographies and auto-biographies published which express the insights and experiences of Aboriginal individuals, families and communities, e.g. Perkins (1975), Matthews (1977), Tucker (1977), Müller (1985), and Morgan (1987). Kevin Gilbert's *Living Black: Blacks Talk to Kevin Gilbert* (1978), which includes transcriptions of interviews with a wide range of Aboriginal people, is often cited as one of the definitive compilations of the topic of Aboriginal identity. In fact, Gilbert's discussion with Grandfather Koorie on the topic of Aboriginality is almost invariably cited in discussions of Aboriginal identity by non-Aboriginal writers. Gilbert (1978: 304-305) quoted Grandfather Koorie:

Aboriginality, eh? You say you want your Aboriginality back? That means having some rules, don't it? And the first two orders of those rules is share and care, . . . Every person on earth can share in Aboriginality. It is a blessing you can give'em to share in. The hungry, the homeless, the poor and the beaten, all those that are unhappy or in worse circumstances than yourselves are to be welcomed around your fires but they, too, must follow the rules. You've got the power; it's just a matter of giving all and everyone your nulli. That spirit, that great spirit will give you everything you need to live. That's what Aboriginality is! (emphasis in original).

Articles by Aboriginal activists such as Bruce McGuinnes (1974) and Ken Colbung (1979) have presented self-reflective considerations of Aboriginal identity, while Marcia Langton (1981) has critically reviewed the

for one am not convinced of their "typicality" (Anderson et al 1985: 46-47). In terms of the anthropological audience von Sturmer is probably correct, but Tatz's writings remain influential and reach a much wider audience. Nonetheless, to most anthropologists, Tatz's (1980: 352) grappling with Aboriginality illustrates the "loose, woolly thinking" he himself decries and which still pervades much of the discussion of Aboriginal identity.
representations of Aboriginal identity portrayed in the social sciences. In Langton's (1981: 16) view, Aboriginality is something non-Aborigines are unwilling -- and perhaps ultimately unable -- to understand:

Many Aboriginal people living in the urban centres have refuted the logic of the terminology that has been foisted upon us by successive pieces of legislation, and now by the social scientists: 'half-caste', 'coloured', 'part-Aboriginal', 'detribalized', 'remnant' and so on. We have rejected the notion that we are assimilating into the European population and adopting white lifestyles. We are exploring our own Aboriginality and are finding that the white social scientists cannot accept our own view of ourselves.

One of the threads which runs through all their various accounts and declarations and sets them apart from the approaches of non-Aboriginal writers (with the possible exception of Tatz) is that they depict Aboriginal identity as akin to spiritual essence which exists beyond the range of the analytic tools of social science. The implications of this assumption for the academic analysis of Aboriginal identity are extremely significant and indicate the need to focus increased attention on such perceptions. Indeed, this is a major theme of this thesis.

It is clear from the approaches reviewed above, that Aboriginality cannot be separated from political context, social practice or local history. But equally important, I suggest, Aboriginality cannot be understood apart from the objective conditions of everyday life. The foregoing discussions of Aboriginal identity only begin the question: what is the process whereby Aboriginal ideational systems are shaped and the structural position of Aborigines in Australian society reproduced? Clearly, reduction of an ideational system to a
list of qualities or a tautology (ethnicity) gains no ground in reaching an understanding of this process. It is necessary to examine any such system in context, not separated from the social practice which validates and recreates that system. Taking this one step further, to understand ideology it is necessary to link social practice to objective conditions. To achieve this goal one must focus not only on ideology but also on history, for to understand social configurations one must understand that social process is precisely that, process and not stasis. To understand action in the context of existing social structures one must understand the historical process whereby those structures were produced and reproduced. In the following sections I will briefly focus on ideology so as to lay the groundwork for subsequent analysis of Aboriginal ideology in Adelaide.

Practice, Structure and Ideology: Review of Current Issues and Perspectives

As Sherry Ortner (1984) has pointed out, anthropology in the 1980s was increasingly concerned with "practice", and more specifically with the relationship between human action and structure. That concern was certainly not a newfound one given that there has been a traditional tension within anthropological writings between analyses which emphasize the material bases of human societies and those which emphasize the ideational realm of symbols and meanings. Where symbolicists have criticized materialists for their lack of sensitivity to the importance of meaning, materialists have scoffed at the ideationalists' inattention to objective conditions of social life. The symbolic approach, says Ortner (1984: 132), has been especially susceptible to such
criticism because of its "underdeveloped sense of the politics of culture; and its lack of curiosity concerning the production and maintenance of symbolic systems".

Increasingly, attention has been turned to the examination of the interrelation of objective conditions and the practice of social actors. Scholte (n.d.: 15), in a critique of Geertz's interpretive anthropology, calls for attempts to "wed Marx to Weber" and highlights the need for addressing "not meaning or praxis, but the meaning of constitutive practices and the praxis of constituted meanings". This is the challenge for anthropology through the rest of the century and the direction I follow in this analysis. At the heart of this challenge is the tension between ideas and action:

The term "ideology" indicates the frameworks of thought which are used in society to explain, figure out, make sense of or give meaning to the social and political world. Such ideas do not occur, in social thought, one by one, in an isolated form. They contract links between one another. They define a definite discursive space of meaning which provides us with perspectives on the world, with the particular orientations or frameworks within which we do our thinking (and which) enable us to make sense of perplexing events and relationships -- and, inevitably, impose certain 'ways of looking', particular angles of vision, on those events and relationships which we are struggling to make sense of (Donald and Hall 1986: ix-x).

These "ways of looking" are manifest in a system of conventions which people embody and employ throughout the routines of daily life. Actors do not simply reproduce an ideological system and thus the extant social relations, but actors act meaningfully, with purpose. In this sense one may speak not only of social reproduction but also of production and use. Ideological systems are not
simply illusions, unseen and unsuspected by human agents, which mask "the real". They are in fact

partially constitutive of what... is real. Ideology is not a pale image of the social world but is part of that world, a creative and constitutive element of our social lives (Thompson 1984: 5-6).

If ideology is not total illusion, neither does it necessarily bind all actors in a single, invariant view of the world. Indeed, given that ideology is produced, reproduced and put to use by individual actors, one would expect that ideological frameworks could be manipulated by actors to establish and maintain differential relations of power. If this is the case, as it clearly is, then one would also expect that some actors would have better understandings of the structure and function of ideological systems and would attempt to maintain or transform that system to affect the existing structure of social relations. Similarly, certain actors could be expected to have greater facility in such attempts than would others. At the same time, some actors may glimpse -- albeit to greater or lesser degrees -- the power of an ideological system to shape and constrain options within their lives and yet may find themselves politically impotent to effect any changes; or they may so radically reconstitute meanings through inversion that while individual actors view their actions as attempts to defeat the domination they see themselves as subject to, they in fact play a role in reproducing that domination (cf Willis 1977). In this way it can be seen that while human actors often act with intent, the consequences of those actions may not align with what the actor intended (cf Giddens 1979, 1984).
This suggests that the reproduction of social relations does not necessarily rely upon the blanket acceptance of an ideological framework by each and every member of the dominated group.\textsuperscript{20} It is likely, in fact, that this lack of blanket acceptance may ensure social reproduction. According to Thompson (1984: 63), a lack of consensus is not only the normal state of affairs for contemporary capitalist societies but may promote the reproduction of the society:

Oppositional attitudes do not necessarily generate a coherent alternative view which would provide a basis for political action. Hostility and skepticism are often interfused with traditional and conservative values and are commonly tempered by a sense of resignation. Divisions are ramified along the lines of gender, race, qualifications and so on, forming barriers which obstruct the development of movements which could threaten the status quo. The reproduction of the social order may depend less upon a consensus with regard to dominant values or norms than upon a lack of consensus at the very point where oppositional attitudes could be translated into political action (emphasis in original).

This view of society as constituted in divergence and contradiction is applicable no less to urban Aboriginal communities than to any other.

My analysis will draw upon elements of the theoretical approach developed most fully by Pierre Bourdieu and which he refers to as a "theory of practice" (1977a). Crucial to the analysis which follows are the concepts of habitus, symbolic violence and symbolic capital, but since I will develop them in application in later chapters, I will provide only a brief overview of these concepts here. Habitus, writes Bourdieu (1977a: 78), "the durably installed

---

\textsuperscript{20} It also suggests that a "dominant ideology" does not necessarily bring about social integration (cf Abercrombie, Hill and Turner 1980).
generative principle of regulated improvisations, produces practices". As a
generative basis of practice, habitus is adjusted to the conditions in which it is
constituted. The nature of this adjustment is critical in that it is mediated by
the subjective expectations an individual holds of his or her objective potentials
and possibilities within the social world. In other words, habitus mediates
between objective structures and practice, but while it shapes the latter it is
shaped by the former. As Bourdieu (1977a: 95) writes:

As an acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted
to the particular conditions in which it is constituted, the habitus
engenders all the thoughts, all the perceptions, and all the actions
consistent with those conditions, and no others.

Logically and practically there is for actors an alignment between that which is
objectively limited and possible and that which is considered by the subject
appropriate and within the bounds of realistic expectation. The implications of
this for Aborigines in Adelaide and elsewhere are of profound importance as I
will show later.

Of critical significance as well is the fact that habitus is a product of history and
history a product of habitus. In this sense, habitus may be viewed as history
turned into nature (Bourdieu 1977a: 78). Aboriginal actors do not live outside
history but they are firmly situated within its process: they produce, interpret
and reconfigure their own history. This is a crucial point in light of earlier
depictions of Aboriginal communities which were ahistorical in approach. If
one has no sense of the process of history and the participation of actors in the
formulation and reformulation of that history, one cannot possibly understand
how they have come to hold particular perceptions of themselves and the
everyday realities of life. As Sider (1986: 3) has remarked:

People -- even in so-called tradition-bound societies -- conduct their day-to-day lives in ways that construct and invoke a knowledge, probably quite finely tuned and constantly adjusted, of the intimate, multiple interconnections of past, present, and future. And this knowledge grows out of and becomes somewhat distanced from, and yet is situated within, the concrete and specific material and social realities of daily life.

Physical violence has long been used by dominant classes and cultures to control and oppress subjugated peoples and to impose authority, but while physical violence has wide historical precedence, it is not necessarily the most effective and rarely the only means whereby individuals and groups are controlled. Where physical violence is impossible, another form of violence is often invoked: symbolic violence.

The notion of symbolic violence is critical to understanding the way in which limited objective chances may be taken by actors to be not merely legitimate but more importantly, natural and beyond question. Through symbolic violence, relations of domination and subjugation are maintained by way of the imposition of the "cultural arbitrary" (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). This suggests that value is assigned and given weight according to criteria which do not derive from "natural law" or "universal principle" but are arbitrarily imposed by those with the political leverage to define such criteria. But this represents only half of the process, since symbolic violence requires the collusion of those upon whom such a cultural arbitrary is imposed. The acquiescence of the dominated is necessary in the legitimation of that which is imposed. This
acquiescence is not unconscious but involves what Bourdieu calls *meconnaissance* (or misrecognition) on the part of the dominated of the objective interests involved in such impositions. In other words, the dimensions of political power inherent in social relations are not necessarily masked from the dominated but they are misrecognized and through that misrecognition are perceived to be legitimate.\(^{21}\) It is in this sense that Bourdieu (1977a: 191) refers to symbolic violence as "censored, euphemized, i.e. unrecognizable, socially recognized violence".

All practice, argues Bourdieu (1977a: 178), is economic in that all practice involves economic calculation regardless of whether or not that practice involves the manipulation of material or symbolic goods. Economic calculation can be extended to

> all the goods, material and symbolic, without distinction, that present themselves as rare and worthy of being sought after in a particular social formation which -- which may be "fair words" or smiles, handshakes or shrugs, compliments or attention, challenges or insults, honour or honours, power or pleasures, gossip or scientific information, distinction or distinctions, etc. (emphasis in original).

The relationship between economic and symbolic capital can be seen in their interconvertibility, in the process whereby actors accumulate symbolic capital and turn it into economic capital and vice versa. Thus the ability to marshal symbolic capital carries with it the ability to build and maintain influence and effect change in the economic sphere.

\(^{21}\) Though much of Bourdieu's (1977b) work has focused on this process, his most influential examination of symbolic violence involves his discussion of education.
The Blackfella Way

I shall argue in this thesis that to understand the Aboriginal sense of self in Adelaide and the construction of Aboriginality it is necessary to understand the ideological implications of the Blackfella Way. The Blackfella Way is an ideological system which provides an avenue for Aboriginal actors in Adelaide to accumulate capital in symbolic form, for example, by living up to the obligations of generosity and sharing implied in that system. Later, that symbolic capital can be transformed into economic capital "at call" since the corollary to the obligation of generosity is the right to expect reciprocal generosity in times of need.

In more general terms, the Blackfella Way is an ideational matrix which exists among Adelaide Aborigines and which sets out the form and relations of the everyday world. It at once synthesizes the tone, texture, style, and mood of life for Aborigines in Adelaide today, while providing a conceptual and practical vehicle through which individuals formulate, think about and act in the social and physical world. In this sense, the Blackfella Way embodies very particular -- and historically constituted -- assumptions about the nature of the Aboriginal community, European society and Aboriginal identity. At the same time, it suggests specific, culturally appropriate modes of action in the world. This ideational system is accessible on at least two levels: as a cluster of notions, values, norms and principles shared in varying versions and to various degrees, and in the effect such notions have in structuring the actions of individual actors in the world.
As I will argue, the Blackfella Way is a pervasive ideational system, an ideology which is a product of the process of history and which addresses the nature of the individual, the nature of Aboriginal society, and the articulation of that society with the non-Aboriginal world; most significantly, this system is also implicated as ideology in the reproduction of social relations. The examination of the interrelation of ideology to social reproduction requires close attention to the interplay between the subjective and objective dimensions of everyday life. Among Aborigines in Adelaide, the limitations of objective conditions become internalized and appropriated, and the internalized limitations are taken for granted; they become "natural" and beyond conscious consideration. Objective limitations thus inform and frame the ideational system which Aboriginal actors produce, reproduce and utilize as ideology and which ultimately reproduces the existing imbalance of power.

The concepts of habitus, symbolic violence and symbolic capital are particularly powerful as conceptual tools to penetrate the process whereby the structural position of Aborigines in Adelaide is reproduced. At the same time, the Blackfella Way cannot be separated from the process of history, practice or the objective conditions of everyday life. One of the crucial advantages of utilizing these perspectives is that they accommodate and incorporate the dynamic character of the Aboriginal social system, connecting human action to objective realities and framing it in terms of political conflict and interest.

In the chapter which follows I will examine the process of history and the interplay of practice and structure for Adelaide Aborigines and their ancestors.
from initial contact to contemporary times. As I will show, Aborigines in Adelaide are active participants in the construction of their own history, and to understand their sense of self it is necessary to understand their perceptions of history.
Traditionally, the history of Aboriginal people has been portrayed as a collage of dates, European victories and Aboriginal acquiescence (e.g. Clark 1962, Blainey 1982). Such presentations provided a narrative of "what happened" to Aborigines, emphasizing processes and relations external to Aboriginal groups. For the readers of such studies, Aboriginal history is a backdrop for current conditions, a context for the problems of the day. But Aboriginal history is far more complex than these narratives would indicate. In this chapter, I will examine the processes whereby Aboriginal society in South Australia was radically transformed through contact with Europeans. I will show that contemporary configurations and presentations of Aboriginal identity and ideology are not ahistorical constructions but arise out of specific historical contexts and circumstances; Aboriginal people are active participants in this process.

While an accurate understanding of Aboriginal history must be based in part on such depictions of people, places and events history is more than that. History needs also to be regarded as a process whereby internal perceptions and individual intentions mediate and are mediated by the experience of
external forces and events, social practice and structural realities. Through this process perceptions of the past — of both Aborigines and non-Aborigines alike — are created, negotiated, interpreted and reinterpreted. Recognition of this process by historians and anthropologists has meant that Aborigines have been increasingly portrayed as actors in their own history, making decisions, resisting invasions and defending their country (Hardy 1977 and 1981, Reynolds 1981, Morris 1986).

From the point of view of Aboriginal actors the process of history is seldom self-conscious. History is most often perceived as a canvas of events where only portions of the overall image are clear. For many, history provides an anchor and a palette for identity. In the words of a Wiradjuri woman:

"was told by an historian "The past is dead" — I don't believe that. Traditional Aboriginal culture was built on the past, and it was that past that existed right up to the first invaders. The Aboriginal of today looks back to the past for a sense of belonging (Clayton 1988: 54)."

Some Aborigines, however, have a clear understanding of the dynamic process of history. James Miller is very explicit about the interpretive nature of history in the introduction to his 1955 book on Aborigines of the Hunter River valley in New South Wales, *Koori: A Will to Win* (Miller 1983: xvi-xvii):

One of my main objectives in this book is to try to interpret history from the point of view of my ancestors and this has involved the difficult process of reading between the lines of countless documents written by whites.

My determination to write this book was strengthened when I realized I would be providing my son and two daughters with a rich and permanent written heritage of which they can be justly proud. For the story of the survival of their people as a culturally
significant minority in Australian society in the face of enormous oppression is a story of triumph. Hopefully, other Kooris will trace their roots, for it is in the past that we can find the strength to fight the battles of the future.

To understand the shape of contemporary social formations, the patterns of social practice and the configuration of Aboriginal identity one must begin by acknowledging history as a process, continually recreated and reshaped; it is not merely a static depiction presented and then passed from generation to generation, nor simply a contextual web stretching backward in time within which individuals and communities are suspended.¹

The material presented in this chapter will set the stage for later analysis of some of the ways in which European political and economic structures have affected the construction of identity among individual Aborigines, and for an exploration of the ways in which social and ideological formations mediate the influence of external events and shape the perceptions and responses of Aboriginal actors enmeshed in the web of such events. As will be shown, the Blackfella Way is an ideological tool to pull the varying versions of orthodoxy into alignment and to forge a distinctive identity out of an historically diverse and fluid set of social and political alignments.

The focus of this chapter is on the collision of Aboriginal and European cultures in South Australia. First, an overview of early contact between

¹ Though not explicitly described as derived from anthropological practice theory, Beckett's (1988) and Sutton's (1988) analyses of the role of history in the construction of Aboriginality provide overviews of the interplay between history and identity.
Aborigines and settlers will be presented. Second, patterns and impacts of various government policies will be considered. Finally, in this chapter I will examine the process whereby identity was and is structured by the recognition among Aboriginal groups of geographic and cultural divisions and differences; I will then consider the effect of the disruption of such divisions by Europeans.

A Brief Overview of Early Contact

The first Europeans to explore the coastline of what was to become South Australia were the Dutch explorers Francis Thijssen and Peter Nuyts who sailed along the southern coast in 1627. Colonization however, did not become a reality until the mid 1800s. Supported by the National Colonization Society, founded by Edward Gibbon Wakefield and Robert Gouger, the colonization of South Australia was carefully considered and planned beginning in the early 1830s. Two sets of issues emerged at that time, the tensions between which were never fully resolved. First, the colony was not to be a burden to the crown. Land was to be sold to settlers and the costs of dispatching emigrants borne by the South Australian Board of Commissioners, headed by Colonel Robert Torrens. Unlike other Australian colonies, South Australia was to be

---

2 For a thorough analysis of official policy regarding Aborigines during the earliest years of the new colony, see Hassell (1966) and Gibbs (1959). Gale (1964 and 1972) provides details on South Australian government policies through the late 1960s, and Rowley (1972a, 1972b, 1972c) details the development of policies within all the various states and territories. Jenkin (1979) provides a detailed examination of the various policies with particular reference to the Ngarrindjeri. Other useful early sources include Browne (1897), Stephens (1890) and Teichelman (1841).

---

3 There are many overviews of the early history of South Australia. The best sources with regard to relations between settlers and Aborigines are Kathleen Hassell's (1966) 1921 thesis and Charles Rowley's (1972a) The Destruction of Aboriginal Society. These two works provide much of the information for this section. For a highly readable albeit less scholarly overview see Gibbs (1969).
founded by free British subjects who purchased blocks of land before leaving England. The second issue involved concerns for the well-being of the native peoples of South Australia. Hoping to shift the course of history, Charles Grant (later to become Lord Glenelg) and Sir James Stephen pressed the British Colonial Office for a more enlightened approach to the rights and needs of the native population of South Australia. Though they succeeded in calling attention to the issue, action and policy were not immediately forthcoming. In August of 1834 the House of Commons passed the Foundation Act providing more than 300,000 square miles of land available for sale to British settlers. The Aboriginal inhabitants of the new colony, however, were not only unmentioned in the Act but effectively and officially ignored; their country was referred to as "waste and unoccupied". Impatient for the colonization to proceed, the Board of Commissioners avoided the issue of native welfare altogether.

Glenelg assumed the position of Secretary of State for the Colonies in April of 1835, and he continued to press for recognition of the rights of Aboriginal people and the necessity of their protection. By this time, however, preparations for the departure of the first emigrants were well under way and the inertia and impatience of the settlers were quickly overcoming his efforts. While there was in Great Britain sincere and growing concern for the welfare of colonized peoples, the Board of Colonization Commissioners saw the issue as an impediment to the systematic colonization envisioned in the Wakefield plan.
On September 10, 1835, Captain John Hindmarsh, the newly appointed 1st Governor of the New Colony of South Australia was honored by 110 prominent Londoners. The mood of the evening was bright and optimistic. George Fife Angas, in his formal remarks to the gathering, shared his vision of the bringing of civilization to the natives of South Australia:

To treat with them for the purchase of those lands which they claim as belonging to their tribes; to make them acquainted with the habit and views of the white people; to construct a written language for them; to publish the Gospels and New Testament in it; to teach them to read; to make them acquainted with the art of raising food from the ground -- the mode of fishing in the sea, of which they are quite ignorant, having no canoes -- the method of making utensils, raising huts, the use of clothing; and in time, they might be induced, by a sufficient reward and kind treatment, to allow the settlers to take their youths and teach them to work as laborers. And what was there in the history of mankind that should lead them to the conclusion, that the lowest class of free labourers might not be raised from the aborigines of New Holland? (quoted in Mann 1835: 16).

Another of the guests was W. M. Higgins, honorary secretary to The Society for the Protection and Benefit of the Aborigines of the British Colonies. Higgins' comments reflect the hope that the new colony would overcome the deep and troubling conflicts between colonists and native peoples experienced in other parts of Australia and other British colonies:

I rejoice in the prospect which is this day opened to us, and anticipate those times in which the hard hand of oppression and injustice shall be removed from the native populations. The enlightened system of colonization to be adopted in South Australia is of itself sufficient to encourage our efforts, and still more the determination of those engaged in the execution of the plan, to protect the natives, and to aid in those efforts which may be adopted to secure their social and intellectual improvement (quoted in Mann 1835: 18).
Hindmarsh, however, was clearly not so optimistic. The settlers were held up in port, growing increasingly anxious and frustrated by the delays. His comments at the same dinner, summarized by Mann (1835: 16), indicate where his loyalties lay:

One of the points he was most anxious about, was the civilization of the natives, which he believed could be effected; at all events, he was determined to try: but the gentlemen present must be aware how impossible it was for him to say more, as a paramount duty might unfortunately lead him into a line of conduct diametrically opposite to his inclination.

In December of 1835 Glenelg made his final plea, asking that the colony limit sales of properties to unoccupied lands. Acutely aware of the distress further delay would create, a compromise was reached between Glenelg and the Board of Commissioners. A modification to the Letters Patent was made with the insertion of the following:

Nothing in these our Letters Patent shall affect or be construed to affect the rights of any Aboriginal Natives of the said Province to the actual occupation or enjoyment in their own persons or in the persons of their descendants of any lands therein now occupied or enjoyed by such natives (cited in Gibbs 1959: 15).

In addition, Glenelg and the Board agreed to the appointment of a Protector of Aborigines whose salary was to be derived from monies set aside from sales of land in the colony. Finally, Glenelg secured a promise from the Board that one fifth of all saleable lands would be reserved as an endowment of a fund for the Aborigines.

Of these three concessions, only the second had immediate impact on Aborigines in South Australia. The recognition of Aboriginal lands never
occurred and the reserve of a portion of saleable land was abused in practice. Each of these, as I will show later, has had lasting implications for Aborigines in Adelaide today.  

Finally, in February of 1836, the first emigrants bound for South Australia departed England. Governor Hindmarsh left in July of 1836 and landed at Holdfast Bay on December 28th. Reading from the Proclamation which through royal order made South Australia a Province, Hindmarsh said:

It is also at this time especially my duty to apprise the Colonists of my Resolution to take every lawful means for extending the same protection to the Native Population as to the rest of His Majesty's subjects, and of my firm determination to punish with exemplary severity all acts of violence or injustice which may in any manner be practised or attempted against the natives, who are to be considered as much under the safeguard of the law as the Colonists themselves, and equally entitled to the privileges of British subjects. I trust therefore with confidence to the exercise of moderation and forbearance by all classes in their intercourse with the Native Inhabitants, and that they will omit no opportunity of assisting me to fulfil His Majesty's most gracious and benevolent intentions towards them by promoting their advancement in civilization, and ultimately, under the blessing of Divine Providence, their conversion to the Christian Faith (quoted in Hassell 1966: 9).

Underpinning all of these discussions of native rights was the belief that the South Australian Aborigines represented a potential source of cheap labor, a theme that would continually recur throughout the history of the colony. Given the aversion to convict labor and the increasing humanitarian concerns resulting in the end of slave trade (1807) and slavery (1833) by the English, it is

As Graham Jenkin (1979: 35) points out, the land rights clause in the Letters Patent was ultimately meaningless. While well intended, when tested in the 1971 Yirrkala land rights case, Mr. Justice Blackburn ruled the clause was voided by the South Australian Colonization Act of 1834 which declared all South Australian lands waste and unoccupied.
hardly surprising that Aboriginal people would be considered a possible labor source. As early as 1833, the potential of Aboriginal labor was being discussed. In a document titled, *South Australia: Outline of the Plan of a Proposed Colony to be Founded on the South Coast of Australia; with an Account of the Soil, Climate, Rivers, &c.*, Frederick Hamborg testified as to his experience with natives during a visit to what would eventually be known as South Australia during 1843. The natives, he said, were "very numerous and peaceful, they assisted us in carrying water to the ship and in other matters. For a little tobacco and with kind treatment I am convinced they would work well (South Australian Association 1834: 71).

Indeed, the earliest settlers had few conflicts with the local natives, frequently enlisting their assistance as they sought to establish their new homes. Stephens (1839: 68) described the tone of these interactions in the early days of Adelaide:

At first, the men alone ventured to show themselves in the colony; but now they take their wives and little ones. They go with the greatest confidence, establish themselves near whatever place they like best, and remain for some days, during which time they have rations of bread supplied them. The palm of superiority, facial and mental, must be given, without the least reservation, to the men. They are ready to do any kind of work which they can be made to understand. They have already begun to adopt the civilized usages of the new comers, wearing clothing, building huts in humble imitation of the wooden cottages of the colonists, and showing a readiness for industrious labours. Their principal employment in connexion with the colonists, is fetching wood and water, and some have been occupied in sawing and building: They are paid in biscuit, of which they are very fond, or some little article of clothing. They manifest great quickness of perception, much liveliness of character, and, with few exceptions, an accurate consciousness of right and wrong.
Such romantic beginnings, however, were short-lived. In 1837 a member of a whaling party was killed at Encounter Bay in a fight over a native woman, and in 1838 a settler's body was discovered along the banks of the Torrens, the victim of a sharpened kangaroo bone plunged into his heart (Hassell 1966: 24-31). In 1839 two shepherds were killed in separate incidents only a few days apart. Though six Aborigines were eventually arrested and two convicted and put to death, the murders triggered increased fears by the settlers and spurred a drive for retaliation (Hassell 1966: 37). Tensions between Aborigines and colonists escalated as increasing numbers of settlers moved to outlying regions. Bringing with them stock which disrupted traditional hunting grounds, destroyed grasslands and exhausted water supplies, the colonists' activities began to threaten the Aboriginal cultures more severely than ever before. In return, traditional Aboriginal patterns of land tenure, range management involving grass burning, and hunting infuriated the settlers. From the viewpoint of the European settlers, claims by Aborigines of ownership of traditional lands were ridiculous, field burning wasteful and disruptive, and hunting of sheep and cattle acts of theft and aggression.  

The single event which brought the increasing tensions between colonists and natives to a head was the "Maria" massacre of 1840. There are several possible interpretations of the events leading up to the massacre, but it is likely the conflict arose as a result of cultural misunderstanding and culturally

5 Aboriginal resistance continued unabated for decades. Though most writers have ignored this significant facet of history until very recently, the records of correspondence of the Colonial Secretary's office are replete with tales of Aboriginal resistance, violent and otherwise. When tribal groups were decimated by disease and violence, resistance became less overtly violent, a pattern which has continued to today.
inappropriate responses. The Maria was a ship travelling to Adelaide from Hobart along the southern coast of South Australia which was wrecked off the Coorong near the mouth of the Murray River about June 28, 1840. According to Henry Reynolds' (1981: 79) interpretation of the event, the survivors had been rescued by Aborigines who helped the whites travel by carrying their children and providing them with fish and water. When they came to the end of their own country they tried to explain that they could go no further and demanded clothes and blankets in recognition of the trouble taken up to that point. The Europeans refused to give them anything, saying that when they reached Adelaide the blacks would be fully rewarded. They probably did not understand what the Aborigines were trying to tell them. The blacks attempted to help themselves. The whites resisted. Scuffles ensued, tempers flared, and the weaponless Europeans were killed. Their deaths were not inevitable. With a little luck the survivors might have reached Adelaide full of praise for the friendly blacks of the Coorong.

According to Graham Jenkin, the explanation handed down in Ngarrindjeri tradition is significantly different. The versions of the events leading to the massacre are similar to the point the killings occurred. In the Ngarrindjeri version, when the party reached the boundary of the Milmenrura territory, the white survivors "began to interfere" with the native women and in the conflict which ensued the settlers were killed (Jenkin 1979: 57). Val Power, a prominent figure in the Adelaide Aboriginal community, provides yet another version of the event:

I don't know if you ever heard of the brigantine, the Maria? My great-grandmother was around then. She was only a little girl but she could remember what they called the redcoats. They came down there and they hung eleven blackfellows, every day, for a week. Eleven every day because them blackfellers from that area had the shipwrecked people's clothes on. They ate 'em. They were supposedly being charged with eating them because they
seen the blackfellows with their shirts and beads and watches. Well to teach them a lesson, they hung them to set an example. They were charged with eating them but the Aborigines tried to tell them that they didn't like white feller's meat, you know? The flesh is supposed to be too salty. They liked the Chinamen’s (Gilbert 1978: 31).

When news of the murders reached Adelaide a special meeting of the Executive Council was called. Though calls for retribution were loud and forceful, the Colonial Judge indicated that punishing the natives was going to be difficult. First, there was no evidence against specific individuals, but second and most important, the natives implicated in the crime were from a remote region with little experience and interaction with European settlers. The Judge gave the opinion that only those natives who had submitted to British rule could be held accountable to British law. The group involved had little or no experience with colonists and could therefore not be subject to British law (Hassell 1966: 54).

Lacking the formal legal authority to try the suspects, Gawler was placed in an untenable position. The colonists were demanding punitive action but a legal trial was apparently impossible. The Governor instructed the Commissioner of Police to form a detachment of men to return to the Coorong, apprehend suspects, assess their guilt or innocence and execute summary justice on the spot. In due course, two natives were hung over the graves of the victims at the scene of the murders. There ensued in Adelaide and eventually throughout the country lengthy public debates concerning the legality of the executions, and Gawler was widely condemned for his actions. Colonist Mary Thomas
described the incident in a letter to her brother written on December 27, 1840:

Governor Gawler most unadvisedly ordered the execution of two natives over the graves of their supposed victims, and two more were shot by the police without trial, judge, or jury, or any proof of their guilt. In fact, there was no investigation of the matter further than by Major O'Halloran and his party, whose only authority was under the Governor's orders. On this occasion His Excellency assumed to himself power which even the Sovereign does not possess, that of taking the lives of British subjects without formal conviction. For this he has been most justly called to account not only by The Register, but by almost all the papers of the neighbouring colonies, and he stands a fair chance of being dismissed from his office as Governor, or perhaps being tried for his life (Thomas 1925: 168-169).

Ultimately, Gawler was recalled as Governor and departed for England on June 22, 1841. As Mary Thomas anticipated, the Law Officers of the Crown eventually ruled that the natives could have been brought to trial and that the summary executions meted out by Gawler's officers were themselves acts of murder. Though never charged or brought to trial, the matter remained unresolved and Gawler lived the rest of his life under the shadow of the Maria incident.

6 Though the colony was at the time of his recall in dire financial straits and Gawler was ultimately responsible for economic management, it seems likely that the Maria incident was a key factor in the government's decision to remove Gawler from office [cf. the editor's comments and the passage from Forster's 1866 book regarding Gawler's problems with the colony's financial affairs (quoted in Thomas 1925: 173-175)].

7 Ultimately, the colonization of South Australia was no different from the colonization of the other states. As historian Graham Jenkin (1979: 36) has written, the fact that in South Australia the colonists took the land whilst professing concern for the spiritual well-being of the Aborigines had little real effect in achieving a more satisfactory solution from an Aboriginal point of view.
Within four years of its establishment, the colony's relationship with Aborigines had deteriorated and levels of tension between settlers and natives increased. From its inception, the colony had attempted to reduce the tensions through various governmental policies. In the next section I will examine the trends in policy and discuss the issues and attitudes which determined them.

**Policies of Control**

From the time of the earliest arrivals of Europeans in what was to become the colony of South Australia through to the late 1960s -- and even to the present -- government policy regarding Aborigines has been concerned with political control. Initially, political concern was with access to and control of land but ultimately that control was expanded and extended into every facet of Aboriginal life. Writing in 1837, Robert Gouger (1838: 56-57) provided a common view of South Australian Aborigines and their potential:

They are not incapable of advancement; they are very observing and attentive, and have a degree of shrewdness which might serve as an indication of higher talent. They are, moreover, very obliging, and they very willingly perform works for those settlers of whom they form a good opinion. A little sugar, biscuit, or bread, is a sufficient inducement for them to bring wood, water, or stone for building, and several instances have occurred of ten or twelve of these poor fellows working during six hours consecutively for an individual for biscuit. With good usage they are exceedingly docile, and fortunately we have yet but once had experience of them under other circumstances.

Means should be at once adopted to render the good feeling permanent, and if possible, to make them useful. The course recommended by Captain Maconochie, private secretary to Sir John Franklin, appears to me to be the most easy and sure way of attaining the end desired. He suggests that the natives of New Holland should be enlisted in our public service, and regimented like the Sepoys in India or the Hottentots of the Caffre frontier, and thus formed into field-police. He suggests that they would
require to be officered by white corporals and serjeants, who should be made as deeply interested as possible in the successful management of their charge; that a convenient, light, and ornamental dress should be given them; that they should be kept in small parties, and always on the move . . . Their families meanwhile, he suggests, should be encouraged to settle in native villages under our protection. The adoption of this plan would, I am convinced, be with facility carried into effect: kindness of manner, firmness, and a moderate share of common sense are alone required.

No legal provision, by way of purchase of land on their behalf, or in any other mode, has been yet made; nor do I think that with proper care it is at all necessary. I can see no reason why they should not, in a comparatively short time, be made to understand our notions, and to depend upon their own exertions for a livelihood. The field-police would be a good introduction to civilization; and I have no doubt but that it would be succeeded by their adopting, to a great extent, our habits and modes of life. At any rate, until it and other means shall have been tried and found fruitless, the enervating effect of specific legal protection should not be tried.

Gouger's suggestion turned out to be prophetic, foreshadowing the theme of tight control over the movements and lifestyles of Aborigines in South Australia which pervaded legislation for over 140 years. In particular, his suggestion of "native villages" became the policy of succeeding governments. The government eventually did attempt through law to set aside land for Aborigines, but as we will see, that land never provided the compensation and incorporation the early colonists envisaged. Most of the early concern by government, however, was with the practical problem of dispossessing the indigenous people of their lands and the control over valuable resources, especially water (Rowley 1972a: 81).

As shown in the earlier section of this chapter, the government's policies
toward Aboriginal people during the establishment of the colony were considered at the time to be uniquely enlightened and progressive and, interestingly, many Aborigines today share this view. On closer examination, however, the policies were progressive in theory but not in practice. While the colony was settled with the expressed intent of providing rights and protection for the indigenous population, including the reservation of land for Aboriginal use, these good intentions were quickly compromised or ignored in the need to develop the colony. Various political leaders voiced concern throughout the early years of the colony over the need to implement the intended protection of the rights of Aborigines, but practical expediency and later legislation carefully controlled the forms which that protection of rights would take.

Among the majority of settlers, a progressive policy for dealing with the "natives" was soon the furthest thing from their minds. The European occupation of South Australia involved a land development and settlement scheme whereby colonists bought or leased parcels of "unoccupied" land, and in theory settlers and natives would live side by side. That various laws and policies of the new colony set aside land and set percentages of profits from land sales for Aboriginal use was of little significance to the majority of settlers -- at least until later. The majority of new settlers in South Australia had little interest in "native welfare" and were only concerned with peaceful and profitable establishment of their own economic concerns.

For some of the colonists, however, the indigenous population became a problem that seemingly would not go away. In many areas, Aborigines resisted
their displacement, damaging property, killing stock, and on occasion attacking the settlers. The reaction on the part of the colonists was one of swift and often violent retribution and there was increasing demand for more control over Aborigines.

Though conflict between settlers and Aborigines in the immediate vicinity of Adelaide had all but disappeared by 1840, tensions in surrounding areas were mounting. More than anywhere the overland stock routes were the scene of violent confrontation. Following an attack on an overland party by Aborigines along the Murray in April of 1841, the tensions peaked. The attack had left one person dead, another injured and 5000 sheep dispersed over the countryside. Governor Gawler dispatched the Police Commissioner with instructions to take a group of men to the Murray, round up the sheep and bring the natives responsible to Adelaide for trial. As the party neared the site of the attack, they were unexpectedly recalled to Adelaide. Angry and frustrated that their mission had been stopped short so near its goal, the party returned to Adelaide to discover that Governor Gawler had been recalled from office and replaced by Governor Grey.

The colonists in Adelaide were enraged at the recall of the Police Commissioner’s party and took matters into their own hands. Within days, an unofficial group of 14 volunteers set off to recover the sheep and bring the guilty parties to justice. Upon reaching the site of the attack, the group of 14

---

8 Robert Clyne (1981) provides an excellent description and analysis of conflicts between overlanders and colonists during this period.
colonists were confronted by 500 Aborigines. A violent skirmish was cut short by the hasty retreat of the volunteers, but only after 5 Aborigines were killed. Frustrated by their failure, the colonists were more insistent than ever that the Governor protect their lives and livelihoods.

Much to the chagrin of colonists in Adelaide, Grey refused to be pressed into exacting retribution. Instead, he ordered a party under the direction of the Police Commissioner and accompanied by the Protector of Aborigines to arrest the perpetrators, gather the sheep and make peace with the tribes along the Murray.

The Police Commissioner's official party arrived at the site of the original attack but were unable to locate the alleged perpetrators. Apparently the phalanx of 68 members appeared formidable enough that the people along the Murray remained in hiding. Though the guilty parties could not be found, a great deal was learned from locals and friendly Aborigines about the tensions in the region. First, violence was increasing. While on this mission the body of an overlander who had succumbed to native attack was discovered along the Rufus River and another overland party was met which had just been attacked and four Europeans killed. Second, it was clear that the overlanders and settlers had brought much of the grief upon themselves. Locals reported that Aboriginal people were being shot indiscriminately by colonists and that overlanders had regularly "abused" Aboriginal women and failed to fulfill the expectations of reciprocity in the form of food, clothing and other gifts. The party returned to Adelaide, unsuccessful in their mission. Anger, frustration
and demands for retribution continued unabated.

Only a few weeks later a large overland party departed from Sydney for South Australia, and Governor Grey was petitioned to provide police protection for the men and stock as they passed through the dangerous Murray region. Grey dispatched a group of 29 Europeans on July 31, 1841 under strict instruction that the party was to protect the overlanders and their stock and to establish friendly relations with the Aborigines in the region. Weapons were not to be fired except in self defense. When the overlanders were met on the banks of the Rufus, they reported an attack by 300 Aborigines the previous day in which at least 5 Aborigines had been killed. Soon after, the party was confronted by 150 Aborigines and a violent battle ensued. The Protector later reported that their lives were in imminent danger and he surrendered authority to the Police officers who made the decision to fire upon them as they approached with spears in hand. After twenty minutes, 30 Aborigines were dead while only one colonist was injured.

Though the confrontation of July 31, 1841 ended major attacks against the overlanders along the Murray, conflict between settlers and Aborigines continued. Most significantly, Aborigines in more remote regions attempted to protect the resources of their lands which were being devastated by the settlers' stock. Anthony Forster (1866: 431), Member of the Legislative Council at Adelaide, described the continuing tensions in 1866:

Some severe affrays between the natives and the settlers have lately occurred in the northern districts of the colony, chiefly arising out of the state of destitution in which the former were
placed by the long continued drought, which deprived them of their ordinary means of subsistence, and led them to commit depredations upon the sheep and cattle of the squatters.

Where part of the original intention behind the setting up of reserves had been the hope that Aborigines could become farmers and fit, eventually, into the European community as useful productive members, this intention was quickly overridden. Most of the small reserves were eventually leased back to colonists and few were utilized for the "benefit" of the Aborigines.

In response to the escalating violence between colonists and Aborigines, the pleas of small but vocal groups of European colonists who were concerned for the physical and spiritual protection of the Aborigines, and the adverse criticism from Europe, the government made new attempts to deal with the growing "Aboriginal problem". In essence these new attempts at resolution involved escalation in control over the lives of Aboriginal people, initially over those closest to the areas of settlement but later over those in more remote areas as well. The increased control took form in the setting up of "schools" where Aboriginal children could be educated and civilized and made ready to take their places in European society. The first of these "schools" was Native Location in Adelaide, a tract of 13 acres on the Torrens River, established in 1838. Though most of these schools were affiliated with and operated by various Christian missionary movements, they were in a real sense practical political solutions to the "Aboriginal problem".
Essentially, and most importantly as far as the government was concerned, these early schools and reserves provided an expedient, physical containment of the problem. However, this early policy addressed several significant political dilemmas and created a framework for government policy which endured for over 100 years. First, by luring Aborigines to these schools and reserves and supporting them with rations of tea, sugar, flour and tobacco, there was some relief from the violent conflict. Second, as Christian institutions, these schools provided opportunities not only for the instillation of Christian values—a prerequisite, according to most colonists, for entry and participation into civilized society—but also for the saving of souls, a common rationalization of Western colonial expansion. Third, they provided a means for more effectively providing relief to and removing from sight the increasing numbers of diseased and destitute Aborigines. Fourth, it was hoped that the reserves and schools would provide some control over miscegenation, a problem the government found particularly unsettling. Finally, the schools and reserves provided an efficient means to control a pool of potential cheap labor, an integral part of the colony's capitalist economic system. The significance of this fact is more apparent in light of the fact that South Australia, unlike other Australian colonies, could not draw on convict labor.

This early policy of containment and control was, not surprisingly, extremely successful. Coupled with continued outbreaks of violence by colonists and the ongoing decimation of Aboriginal populations through disease and starvation, the problem was at last under control. The schools and reserves did manage to create a handful of Christian Aborigines, some of whom were paraded to salve
the conscience of Europeans, but, in fact, many of these newly civilized
Christians soon learned that Christianity did not open the doors of opportunity
for Christians with dark skin. As succeeding generations of Aboriginal people
would learn, increasing involvement with Europeans went hand in hand with
increasing control by Europeans over every facet of their lives. The
containment policy did provide a more efficient means for the dispensation of
rations and medicine, but it is probable that the poor conditions on the
reserves as well as the physical damage caused by the introduction of the
rations themselves took a great toll on the health of Aboriginal people.
Indeed, the psychological, social, and physical trauma of dispossession in South
Australia and elsewhere remains a major concern in Aboriginal health
programs today9.

By 1856 the "Aboriginal problem" seemed far less pressing. The popular
impression was that Aborigines were dying out and would be gone within a
matter of years. Accordingly, the Office of Protector was ended and
responsibility for Aborigines transferred to the Commissioner for Crown Lands
who saw his role as providing for the dispensation of flour, blankets and
medical attention to the dwindling Aboriginal population. The assumption that
Aborigines would soon be gone was exemplified in the attitude of Matthew

9 The linkage of Aboriginal Land Rights to Aboriginal health programs is an obvious example. Aboriginal organizations such as the National Aboriginal and Islander Health Organization (NAIHO) argue that only when Aboriginal people have control over their own land will problems of Aboriginal physical, mental and spiritual health be overcome. A similar argument is put forth in The Report of the Committee of Review into Aboriginal Health in South Australia (1984), commissioned in November 1983 by the South Australian Minister for Health, John Corawall. Such positions, equating health with land rights, have been effective in alternately generating sympathy and cynicism among non-Aborigines.
Moorhouse, Protector of Aborigines for eighteen years, who advised the government in 1860 that no further reserves should be set aside for Aborigines because of the problems which would arise when the Aborigines became extinct. By this time 42 small reserves had been set aside but only Poonindie was being utilized for the welfare of Aborigines; of the remaining reserves, 35 were being leased to Europeans (Gale 1964: 90-91). Though the office of Protector was reestablished in 1861, for the rest of the century most government involvement with the Aborigines was limited to the distribution of rations, limited assistance to the existing missions, and the encouragement of further missionisation (Rowley 1972a: 105). Gaining momentum with the publication and almost inevitable general misunderstanding of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, "Native Welfare" policy in Australia in the latter half of the nineteenth century, (as in the rest of the colonizing world), was based on the assumption that the extinction of "primitive" peoples was not only inevitable but part of some natural law.¹⁰

Most attention to the "Aboriginal problem" in the later half of the nineteenth century and well into the middle of the twentieth century had to do with the fourth of the political dilemmas, miscegenation. Intertwined with this concern was the question of the economic role -- if any -- the offspring of such unions might play in European society. Indeed, the majority of legislation and official policy dealing with Aborigines from the turn of the century up to the 1960s was

---

¹⁰ See Rowley (1972a: 102) for a discussion of this perspective and (1972a: 137) for a specific examination of the impact of social darwinism in Queensland.
concerned with these issues. 11

From the earliest periods of settlement, the sexual relations of Aborigines and Europeans were unsettling to both Aboriginal and European groups, and much of the rationale behind the establishment of the early schools and missions had to do with the protection of Aborigines from the "interfering" of Europeans (Hassell 1966: 26). It was almost immediately obvious to all concerned that the physical containment of Aborigines for their own protection provided little insurance against sexual mixing, especially when those schools and reserves were in close proximity to centers of European occupation. In any case, by the time the government acted it was already too late; there was by then a high proportion of "mixed race" individuals among the Aboriginal population of southern South Australia. According to Rowley (1972a: 138):

The numbers of Aboriginal people were so rapidly replaced by part-Aborigines that special theories about it were common on both sides of the cultural frontier. Some whites maintained that Aboriginal women were far more likely to conceive from sexual activity with whites than with men of their own race. Some Aborigines had theories about the effects on the next generation of parents eating white flour. Both are in accord with what was possibly dominant sentiment. Here the white man saw the effects of contact with the superior race; and the black, the bitter fruits of having to depend on the food of strangers who had displaced him.

From the earliest days of the colony, the evolution of policy to deal with the "problem of the 'half-caste'" involved, most significantly, increasing control over them. At the same time, the economic potential of retaining Aborigines,

11 Patricia Jacobs' (1986) discussion of official approaches to miscegenation details both the Western Australian legislation and the Policy of Absorption developed during the Initial Conference of the Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities in Canberra in April of 1937.
especially those of "mixed blood", on reserves was not lost on the government or potential employers. While the "full blood" people were thought to be a "dying race", the "mixed blood" Aborigines came to be seen by some as a pool of potential laborers. The idea that Aborigines could perhaps serve as laborers was voiced by some powerful officials, including George Fife Angas, a member of the new colony's Board of Commissioners. Angas envisaged the Aborigines' potential as "the lowest class of free laborers" (quoted in Mann 1835: 16). In practice, however, the potential of that labor force was never fully exploited.

With the passage of the Aborigines Act of 1911, South Australia tightened control over Aboriginal people to a degree previously unknown. The Act provided for the creation of an Aborigines Department and a Chief Protector. The Chief Protector had unprecedented legal control over the lives of South Australia's Aboriginal population, and for the first time legal categories were established defining Aborigines and half-castes. In addition, the Act enabled the legal segregation of Aboriginal people on reserves. As Rowley (1972a: 219) points out, the Aborigines Act of 1911 is also noteworthy for what it omits: whereas the Northern Territory Aborigines Act of 1910 had included instructions on the conditions of employment of Aborigines in order to protect them from exploitation, pressure exerted by vested interests in South Australia ensured that such restrictions were left out of the South Australian Act.

By this time the pattern was evident: the "Aboriginal problem" was to be handled through increasingly tighter control over movement. Indeed, the very definition of who was Aboriginal and thus subject to the direction of the Chief
Protector was expanded to include individuals who had not been previously classed as Aboriginal according to the law. This point is especially important in that it highlights the fact that the legal identification of Aborigines was not based on biological category but was controlled and manipulated by the state. Behavior was increasingly restricted, legal status was eroded, and the control of Aboriginal children was assumed by the government. With time, the policies became even more extreme as "full blood" Aborigines were moved to isolated reserves while "half castes" were groomed for assimilation at some unspecified point in the future.

All of these controls had economic ramifications. Indeed, it seems clear that government policy toward Aborigines was shaped from the very beginning by economic considerations. Increasing control over Aborigines meant increasing control over their labor. As Aboriginal populations were consolidated on reserves and legal definitions of "Aboriginal" expanded to include increasing numbers of individuals, there was an expansion of the pool of potential labor. As populations effectively confined to the reserves and legally exempt from the protection of legislation governing working conditions and wages, Aborigines provided a source of extremely cheap labor, especially on pastoral stations in remote areas.

The potential of such a labor force had long been recognized, but so too had the limitations. The relationship of Aborigines to colonists in South Australia is described by T.P Stow (1883: 133):

The natives are very useful to the squatters and agriculturalists,
especially to the former in new country. The skill of the savage in following the tracks of stray beasts makes his services of great value in the bush. The boys learn to ride easily, and become good stockkeepers. They are excellent shepherds, and in some parts of the colony do a great deal of the shearing; there are grazing farms on which all this work is performed by them. They are like children, however, in all their ways, and have no idea of settled, continuous industry.

A similar perception was shared by James Woods (1879: 395-396) at the close of the century:

Blackfellows are generally well treated by the settlers and are often employed on stations. They make excellent stock riders and careful shepherds whenever they are engaged in that work. They are, however, uncertain in their habits. They may remain in their employment for many months, often for two, three, or even four years, when suddenly their wandering instincts, after being dormant for a period, reassert themselves, and they as suddenly return to their original courses of life. After their appetite for change has been satisfied they almost always go back to the places where they had previously been at work. At the time of the census of 1891, 352 adult males were employed on stations in South Australia, and 420 in the Northern Territory.

As Rowley (1972a: 221) points out:

It is interesting to see the logic of economics operating to produce a truly colonial labor situation. The reserves were inevitably to become enclaves where the Aboriginal family produced in safety the laborers of the future. From here they were to go into rural employment, and here they were to return when not required. To the extent that they left their families on the reserve, they could be paid the wage of a single man, since the government or government-subsidised mission management was there to ensure that the family was maintained. The system could thus operate as a subsidy to the pastoral and other industries.

Even as government restrictions increasingly constrained the lives of Aboriginal people, it was widely believed that at some point in the future some Aborigines could find a place in European society, provided, of course, that those constraints were effective. Woods (1879: 419), commenting on the effectiveness
of missions, states:

The real difficulties which beset those who endeavor to ameliorate the condition of the blacks are, in the first place, the influence of the old men of the tribes over those who are brought within the scope of the mission, and the next is the intercourse they are certain to have with the white settlers. Unless these two destructive causes can either be obviated or neutralized, no greater (success) is likely . . .

Over forty years' experience has not shown to the writer much difference between the blacks as they were and as they are. Well managed they go on very well; without management they take an opposite direction. It is impossible to manage or control them all; and, if they die out, it may be some consolation to those who have interested themselves on behalf of the aborigines [sic] to find that human agencies, however much they may strive for good, have not been able to conquer that tendency which asserts itself whenever civilization and barbarism are brought on one common ground.

Woods' statement was typical of the day and reflected the increasingly widely held view that in order for Aborigines to be incorporated into the dominant society it was necessary that they be carefully and completely controlled. As Woods suggested and as we will see later, the influence of the old ways could best be curbed through the separation of Aboriginal children from older relatives. This separation would take two forms: the removal of children from the influence of parents, whether merely out of the parents' homes and into a dormitory on the same mission or off the mission all together, and the separation of "full-bloods" from the rest of the community and their transfer to other reserves.

It was generally accepted that the "half caste" was an improvement over the "full blood" and that eventually those negative qualities of the "half castes"
ancestors would yield to the superior European attributes. The transcripts of the Royal Commission on the Aborigines in 1913 (Royal Commission on the Aborigines 1913: 11), show the testimony of William Garnett South, Chief Protector of Aborigines, and the questions of the Royal Commissioners, to reflect this belief:

Commissioner:

In your experience have you not found that all a native wants is plenty to eat and drink, sufficient clothing, and as little work as possible?

Chief Protector South:

Yes; but the people I am concerned with are not really natives; they are a rising people.

Commissioner:

But even with half-castes it is as I said, is it not?

Chief Protector South:

I do not think it is at present. The half-caste is a better man than the blackfellow. I think it would be a disgrace if he were not.

Commissioner:

You think the cross is an improvement on the aboriginal [sic]?

Chief Protector South:

Undoubtedly, both physically and mentally. And as time goes on the second cross will be still better. The quadroon is almost as white as we ourselves.

Before the same Royal Commission, the testimony of Walter Edwin Dalton, accountant and honorary Secretary of the Aborigines Friends' Association, reflects a similar belief that with time "half castes" can overcome the disability of their Aboriginal blood (Royal Commission on the Aborigines 1913: 18).
Dalton’s testimony also illustrates the condescension and paternalism which were so prevalent among those who dealt with Aborigines at this time:

Commissioner:

Do you think that the members of the rising generation are different in character from their parents on the maternal side?

Secretary Dalton:

Yes; but those people are the children of natives who were more or less animals 60 years ago, and their fathers were possibly the lower class of whites. As a rule, it is a low class of white who cohabits with a native woman, and their children have not the stamina and the proper conception of right and wrong that other children have.

On the heels of a rapidly spreading movement to assimilate Aborigines into the wider society, South Australia introduced the Aborigines Act of 1939. Like previous pieces of legislation concerned with Aborigines, this one sought to ensure the protection and control of Aborigines. Unlike earlier legislation, however, the Act of 1939 made possible the "exemption" of individuals from the conditions and powers of the Act. Under this new legislation, all individuals of Aboriginal descent were classed as Aboriginal unless legally exempted from the Act; percentages of blood were suddenly no longer at issue. According to the Act, a person could be exempted if, in the opinion of the Aborigines’ Protection Board, that person was considered capable of living within the wider community. In deciding changes in status, the Board was to consider individual character, standard of intelligence and development (Rowley 1972b: 47).

The Act was a double-edged sword in that it potentially provided freedom from the restrictions imposed through the various Acts and Ordinances applicable to
individuals of Aboriginal heritage while at the same time legally revoking a person's status as Aboriginal. The absurdity of the exemption was of course apparent to all Aborigines involved. Yet exemption created several complex conflicts. A person who desired exemption had to apply to the Aborigines' Protection Board. In effect a person needed to apply on behalf of him or herself (and for children in the family), for membership both literally and symbolically of white society: once granted membership, the exempted persons were not permitted to live on Aboriginal reserves. While many viewed the exemption as an opportunity for themselves and their families, an escape from the poverty and degradation of the reserves, many who remained behind tended to view exemption as an act of betrayal. The social ramifications for those exempted were profound. No longer Aboriginal, an exempted person was no longer eligible for any of the special forms of assistance from the government intended for Aborigines. This shift in status created real hardship for many. In addition, as an exempted person a "former" Aborigine was allowed to purchase alcohol. This resulted in pressure from non-exempted friends and relatives to provide alcohol. Banished from the company and support of relatives and friends on the reserve, viewed as traitor by many, it was extremely difficult for those exempted to deny the requests for alcohol. Finally, even those who genuinely desired the exemption remained at the mercy of the government since, unlike their white counterparts, exempted Australians could lose that status: the Protector or his designated authority (usually the police) could revoke the exemption at any time. As anyone who lived under the Act will attest, this was a threat which was held over the heads of those exempted.
Perhaps most disturbing, the exemptions were used to control and punish Aborigines. One woman, Elizabeth Peterson, describes her forced exemption in the late 1950s.\textsuperscript{12}

When I met my husband and we'd been going together about a year, we decided to get married. In that case you had to inform them, the Protection Board, that you were getting married and who you were marrying -- would it be Aboriginal or white?

So I went down and I said, "Look, I'm going to get married."

"Oh, who to?"

"Graham Barnes."

"Well, you come back here this afternoon."

I said, "Why? Why do I have to come back to you this afternoon?"

They said, "just do as we ask you. Come back this afternoon."

So they made an appointment for me at 2 o'clock. I went back.

Mrs. Nordbye said, "Come in and sit down, Elizabeth". So I sat down. I said, "Why did you want me back here this afternoon?"

She said, "The man you are marrying, Graham Barnes," she said, "he's a white."

I said, "No he's not, he's Aboriginal! He's got an Aboriginal mother and a white father."

She said, "He's a white man, so go ahead and marry and you will be exempt for the rest of your life from being an Aboriginal, from entering your reserve, from having anything to do with you mother and father, or your brothers and sisters."

She said, "I'll give you time to think about it and then you can let me know if you still want to marry or not."

And then two minutes, I reckon, I thought all about what the Protection Board had done before, how they had treated me, and

\textsuperscript{12} The following is a transcription of a segment of an interview conducted in Adelaide in 1986. The name Elizabeth Peterson and all other proper names are pseudonyms.
I said, "Look, I'm getting married. If I get exempted, I get exempted."

She said, "OK, if that's your attitude then you go ahead and marry this white man. You will be totally exempt and you will receive a letter stating that."

So I received my letter after I got married. I went ahead and got married. I received my letter stating that I was now a white person, I was totally exempt from anything that was there for Aboriginal people. If I'm found having contact with my family or found meeting them or having them in my home, I would be subject to 6 months in prison and, I thought, "well stuff you, you're not going to beat me on this one."¹³

Shortly before the Second World War, the Commonwealth and States developed a policy that "half-castes" should be absorbed into the general population. After the war, policy was implemented which began the removal of "full bloods" to distant locations. The "half castes", it was hoped, could be trained and groomed so as to eventually enter the European population where the offensive Aboriginal traits could be bred out (Rowley 1972a: 139). Ironically, this about-face on the evils of miscegenation was bolstered by a great deal of scientific research into the questions of throwbacks and hybrid vigor (e.g. see Tindale 1940b). Many individuals within the non-Aboriginal public, however, were uneasy with the prospect of actually breeding out the Aboriginal traits. In 1953 the Police Offences Act was brought into law in South Australia. This Act included a clause under which a person could be prosecuted for consorting with natives without reasonable cause. According to John Cleland (Cleland 1960: 28), the University of Adelaide's eminent

¹³ See Mattingley and Hampton (1988), chapter 6, for additional discussion by Aboriginal people who lived through this period of South Australian history.
anatomist and staunch promoter of the Act (and defender after its repeal):

The term "consorting" in the Police Act has, of course, a sinister meaning. Unless married to native women, it is obviously undesirable that white men of loose morals should be allowed to cohabit with them. This is an offence under the Aborigines Act; but it is extremely difficult to catch such a rascal in flagrante delicto. To enable the situation to be controlled, especially in the far interior, where undesirable diggers and swagmen may take native women as temporary mistresses, this clause was inserted. If a white man was found living with natives, in a position to supply them with alcohol or to cohabit with their women or to exploit them for some financial gain, he could be prosecuted under this provision, unless he could show, as an honest man easily could, that his behavior was beyond reproach. Even saints have succumbed to temptation and should be led away from it.

Though Cleland makes the clause sound quite noble in its intention to protect Aboriginal people from the predations of unscrupulous whites, the intent of such legislation was and still is unanimously interpreted by Aborigines who lived under it as clearly restricting the freedom of Aboriginal people and protecting whites from contamination by Aborigines.

By 1958 public attitude seemed to be shifting. A group of young Aboriginal activists led by Charles Perkins enlisted the support of South Australian MP Don Dunstan and the Aborigines Advancement League. They succeeded in having the consorting clause of the Police Offences Act repealed (Dunstan 1981: 70).

The Aboriginal Affairs Act of 1962 brought about the first significant easing of restrictions on Aboriginal people in South Australia. This act, while effectively repealing much of the earlier legislation, still retained significant restrictions
pertaining to the management of reserves, alcohol, health inspections, and the care and education of Aboriginal children (Rowley 1972b: 409). With this act, exemptions became null and void. Elizabeth Peterson, who described her forced exemption above, describes the day she received notice from the government that she was Aboriginal once more:

About 1959 or 60 . . . I got this letter sent to me and my little dog ticket with my photograph in it. And if I wanted to go into the Pub and get served, I could show the card to state that I was a white person and it identified me as Elizabeth Peterson and the barman would serve me a drink, and I lived with that.

I had Shirley (Elizabeth's daughter). When she was, I guess Margaret would have been about three, two or three. I got a letter in the mail stating that "Elizabeth Pauline Peterson, you are now an Aboriginal."

I had already heard the news, you see, that the exemption law was finished. I just went up there (to the office of the Aboriginal Protection Board); they said that anything that was there for Aboriginal people I was entitled to, my daughters, my two daughters were entitled to, my husband, he was Black also.

So we went up there, and I just looked at Mrs. Nordbye and I said, "Here is your piece of paper," and I tore it up. I said, "All those years you thought you exempted me, you forgot the colour of my skin was black! You didn't change me at all. I still had my family and my home."

The most dramatic changes, however, resulted from new legislation introduced during Don Dunstan's tenure as Attorney General and, later, Premier of South Australia. Under Dunstan, the Aboriginal Lands Trust Act of 1966 opened the door for Aboriginal control of the reserves. Symbolically, this was the most significant legislative act to ever affect Aborigines in South Australia and as I will show in chapter five it has significant currency today.
Dunstan (1981: 111) now laments much of his Aboriginal program, suggesting that the "results were anything but spectacular". The Aboriginal Lands Trust Bill, for which he provided the impetus, only passed into law after it had been watered down from the form he had originally envisaged. Though the Bill eventually enabled actual ownership of Aboriginal reserve land, with the exception of the North-west Reserve, the section of the Bill which retained rights to minerals by Aborigines on those lands was strongly resisted by the Opposition and eventually deleted in order to ensure the Bill's passage into law. This Act, together with the Prohibition of Discrimination Act of 1966, is remembered by Aborigines today as a landmark in their relations with Europeans. At the same time, Don Dunstan is perceived as a veritable folk-hero, wholly atypical, in the experience of South Australian Aborigines, of government officials.

**Traditional Divisions and Contemporary Tensions**

The nature of early contacts between Aborigines and Europeans varied greatly throughout South Australia. Given these differing contexts and intensities of contact, the responses of such groups have differed as well. Though none has survived unscathed, some Aboriginal groups have managed to hold themselves together, again with differing degrees of success, while others have ceased to exist altogether. For Aborigines living in Adelaide the differential experiences of their ancestors have been significant to the configurations of their identities as Aboriginal people today.
Between the time the first official European migrants arrived in South Australia in 1836 and the establishment of self-government and independence of the colony in 1856, there were five separate religious missions established in what was to become the state of South Australia: Native Location in Adelaide (1838), Encounter Bay (1839), Port Lincoln (1842), Walkerville (1844), and Poonindie (1850). In addition, through the progressive efforts of governors Gawler and Grey and the advent of the Waste Lands Act of 1842 this early period also saw the establishment of dozens of small parcels of Crown Lands set aside as reserves for Aboriginal people. Ultimately, however, the potential of the Waste Lands Act was never fulfilled. With the exception of Poonindie which was established on one such parcel of reserve land, most of these reserves were on tiny, all but useless blocks and were eventually sold or leased to Europeans (Jenkin 1979: 40).

For those Aboriginal groups which are represented today by living descendants, the numerous missions and reserves established throughout the state during the first century of European occupation often provided the only avenue for survival. Forced, lured, impounded, protected, or saved (the explanation differs depending upon point of view and regional circumstances), Aboriginal people very quickly found themselves in worlds structured by Europeans.

---

14 Christobel Mattingley and Ken Hampton (1988) have assembled a rich collection of historical materials pertaining to all the major reserves in South Australia.

15 These small reserves, though all but gone today, continue to be of symbolic importance to Aboriginal people, a point which will be developed more fully later.
Since 1865 South Australian Aborigines have witnessed the establishment of numerous other missions. Point McLeay was founded in 1859, followed by Kopperamanna and Killalpaninna near Lake Eyre in 1866, and Point Pearce in 1868. The turn of the century saw missions established at Koonibba and Manunka, both in 1901, and missions opened at Oodnadatta in 1924, Swan Reach in 1925, and Quorn in 1927. The 1930s saw the arrival of missions at Nepabunna (1930), Ooldea (1933), Umeewarra and Ernabella (1937), and Finniss Springs (1939). In 1945 a mission was opened at Gerard and in 1952 Yalata mission was established. In addition to these mission stations, there were also several "homes" for Aboriginal children set up in a variety of locations, Colebrook Home and St. Francis Boys' Home in Adelaide being perhaps the best known of such institutions. Such institutions had a collective impact in structuring notions of Aboriginal identity in Adelaide at least equal to and probably greater than that of the missions.

Established in the homelands of the Ngarrindjeri people on the lower Murray, Point McLeay has remained relatively homogeneous in comparison to many other missions and reserves in the south of the state (Jenkin 1979 and Mawingley and Hampton 1988). The families of some Adelaide Aborigines have lived at Raukkan (the Ngarrindjeri word for the place Europeans named Point McLeay) for generations, and can state with confidence that it is the country of their ancestors. Said one old woman from Point McLeay: 

I'm the last of the old ones from Point McLeay mission and when I'm gone it will be the end of an era. My people lived on the shores of Lake Alexandrina for hundreds of years, long before Taplin and his mob showed up, and I know that's my home, my real home. They've been shifting us over there for 150 years,
doing their best to 'help' us and get rid of us, but here we are still. I can remember people living in wurlies there, I remember from when I was just a girl. Our people come from that place, we're part of it and it's part of us.

It's hard for me to get around now and so I don't get back there very often. I was away for 40 years at one time, like Moses in the desert, but I always knew where home was, all Ngarrindjeri people do. We've got history there.

The original mission on Yorke Peninsula, before ultimately being established at Point Pearce, shifted from Moonta to Godduttera to Wallaroo Bay to Kadina, following Aboriginal people as they moved over the countryside (Archibald 1915, Inglis 1964, Hill and Hill 1975). Initially the population of Point Pearce Mission included Narungga people from the Yorke Peninsula, many from within the general vicinity of Point Pearce, but in the years after its establishment in 1868 the Point Pearce Mission saw the arrival of Aboriginal people from a variety of distant locations. Perhaps the most significant influx came in 1889 when the Poonindie Mission closed and Aborigines were moved from there to Point Pearce. Among those new arrivals were families and individuals who had earlier been moved to Poonindie from Adelaide, the Murray River (including Point McLeay) and even from Eyre Peninsula. The result of this is that while the ancestors of many who today consider Point Pearce home were not actually Narungga, over time, and with the intermarriage of people there, many have come to claim tribal affiliation with the Narungga.

One older woman, born on Point Pearce, spoke of growing up on the Mission:

We're a bit different to those Point McLeay fellas since Point Pearce isn't really our home, not really like Point McLeay is for them. The Narungga people, that's us, that's our tribe, we come
from lots of different places really. Not many of us there at the start but we was shifted from other places by the government or just shifted there on our own. But it's our place now, we built it ourselves, Whitefellas didn't build it, but they like to take credit for it. No, it's home to us.

I can remember when I was just a little girl (at Point Pearce) mum sent me out of the house to fetch some water and there was these old fellas camping there by the water. They come from somewhere up north. They was real dark and had long white beards and only talked in their language, which none of us could understand, of course. I was real scared of those old fellas and when I saw them there I ran back home and told mum I wasn't goin' out there. They was so different, those old ones. But they just mixed in with the rest after a while.

Point Pearce was not the only South Australian mission or reserve to have accommodated the arrival of groups with different tribal backgrounds.

Established in 1945 by the United Aborigines' Mission (UAM), Gerard reserve, near Berri, received Aborigines from Swan Reach in the same year and from Ooldea in 1952 when, because of a political dispute between the state and federal organizations, the UAM mission there closed. Most of the people from Swan Reach were from the upper Murray area, including families which had been transferred from Manunka when Mrs. Matthews, the founder and sole benefactor of that mission, died and it was closed in 1911. The Ooldea Aborigines, however, were sent in different directions, most to Yalata and a few to Gerard. For those moved to Gerard, conditions changed from bad to worse, since the Ooldea people found themselves in a radically different environment among Aboriginal people with vastly different ways.¹⁶ According

¹⁶ For a description of conditions at Ooldea not long before the closing of the Mission, see Berndt and Berndt (1951: 138-142).
to Gale (1964: 182-184), Gerard mission in the late 1950s was a grim place, revealing

the same lack of incentive, slum conditions, gambling and drinking which seem an inherent part of segregation. Idleness, not so noticeable at Nepabunna or Finniss Springs, is as common here as on the Government stations. The UAM has no money to employ the men on the orchard and apart from the grape picking season, the majority of them have nothing to do for eight months of the year.

Gale goes on to point out that the problems facing Aborigines at Gerard were a result both of inadequate, untrained and continually changing staff and the inevitable tension and conflict among Aboriginal groups of such diverse background.¹⁷

Aborigines in Adelaide Today: A Recognition of Differences

Variations in the locations of missions and reserves, as well as their differing histories, are contextually important elements in the construction and portrayal of identity among Aborigines in Adelaide today and must be considered in any examination of that identity. Though it is possible to find a range of individuals who have ties to dozens of different tribal groups from all over the country, the majority remain descended from Aboriginal people who came to Adelaide from Point Pearce and Point McLeay (see chapter 3). As Gale and Wundersitz (1982) have shown, the descendants of Aboriginal people from

¹⁷ Then as now, however, the problems facing Aborigines on missions and reserves were in fact far more fundamental than styles of management or dissention between dissimilar Aboriginal groups. In reality, Aboriginal people were held in missions and reserves without choice. Though, in later years anyway, people were "free" in some circumstances to leave such places, in actuality the opportunities for Aboriginal people off missions and reserves were practically non-existent, a perception which continues to be expressed by individuals living on reserves in South Australia today. This lack of control, together with the fracturing of tribal boundaries within the reserve system, has had a significant effect on the constitution of contemporary Aboriginal notions of identity.
other missions and reserves are represented in the population but the Adelaide Aboriginal community sees itself as dominated by groups from Point Pearce and Point McLeay.

The very limited amount of ethnographic detail concerning pre-contact differences between the original inhabitants of the Lower Murray and the Yorke Peninsula indicate that those differences were quite pronounced (e.g. Taplin 1879b), but because the tribes of the southern section of South Australia were dramatically disrupted and decimated so early in the settlement of Australia, there are few details of the social, political, economic, or religious systems of the indigenous peoples. The major sources for Ngarrindjeri ethnography are the journals and writings of George Taplin (n.d., 1879a, 1879b), the first missionary at Point McLeay and Dresden missionary H.E.A. Meyer (1846). Other ethnographic insights come from the writings of various early administrators, settlers and historians, e.g. Stephens (1839), Angas (1847) and Bull (1884). Little of this material gives any indication of the relationship between the various tribal groups prior to the arrival of Europeans, and even less pertains specifically to the relationship, infrequent as it may have been, between the Narungga and the Ngarrindjeri.

These sometimes sketchy and fragmentary sources suggest tribal differences were pronounced in many areas before the arrival of Europeans -- and those differences must have persisted for some time after the establishment of the various reserves -- but the tendency among researchers has been to imply that as Aborigines have left those reserves for Adelaide, such differences have been
distilled to what appear to be simple abstractions where geographic origin, and
not tribal affiliation, is the main reference point in relations between different
groups. Gale, for example, refers primarily to regional groupings and all but
ignores the significance of tribal and language groupings. While geographic
references are important, they are not primary; identity among Aboriginal
people in Adelaide today often includes a geographic referent, but tribal
referents are equally and perhaps more important to that identity.
Identification as *Ngarrindjeri* or *Narungga* today obviously does not have exactly
the same range of meanings it had two hundred years ago. It is wrong to
assume, however, that identification as *Ngarrindjeri* or *Narungga* today is merely
a geographic identification with some vague recognition of a forgotten past.

The current inattention by social scientists to the existence of tribal identity
among urban Aborigines is probably the legacy of early research -- not
specifically focused on the nature of Aboriginal identity -- which appears today
at best incomplete and at worst a superficial product of a political climate
where it was believed that Aborigines could and would assimilate. The basis
for this perception most certainly lies in research conducted among urban
Aborigines in the 1940s, 50s and 60s, when assimilation seemed the obvious
and inevitable pattern for Aboriginal people (see chapter 1). The Berndts, for
example, predicted in 1951 that Aborigines in Adelaide would eventually be
absorbed into "white" society, indistinct from other social groups and trapped in
positions of economic disadvantage. Speaking of the majority of Aborigines in
Adelaide, they comment:

There is no group solidarity and cohesion among these people . . .
any attempt to organise them on the basis of their common aboriginal descent can hope to meet with little success. The main trend of their behaviour is towards assimilation into white society. Most of them, except for newcomers from outlying regions, have little if any knowledge of aboriginal life and culture, and retain only a few unrelated fragments which have no serious significance except that they represent some association with the past.

As they intermarry and their offspring become progressively lighter, it seems likely that they will in time merge into the white community, but particularly into that section of it . . . living at present in sub-standard houses, and often in restricted economic circumstances . . . their aboriginal background, with all its valuable as well as its dispensable traits, will in time become to them no more than a fantastic echo of the long-ago past (Berndt and Berndt 1951: 262-268).

Gale’s early writings had a similar tone. Speaking of the Aboriginal population of the central region of the state, including Adelaide, Point Pearce and Point McLeay, Gale (1964: 377) comments:

None of the mixed bloods of this Central Region has any tribal affiliation nor does any remember the culture of his Aboriginal forebears. For such people integration or acculturation is not possible. Nothing remains of their Aboriginal traditions. Eventual absorption seems the only likely future for these remnant people. It is merely a matter of time.

Obviously, since those passages were written there have been dramatic changes in the political climate as well as strong and vocal assertion by Adelaide Aboriginal people of their continued identification as Aborigines, both of which were unforeseen in the 1950s and 1960s. Aboriginal identity in Adelaide today invariably has a strong tribal component; this has a powerful symbolic currency. Even in the case of Adelaide Aborigines who identify themselves, for example, as Narungga, yet through historical circumstance have few or no actual Narungga descent ties, that tribal component of their identity as Aborigines remains vital and meaningful.
The identity of Aboriginal people in Adelaide cannot be understood except in the light of local history. The Ngarrindjeri are perceived by other Aborigines in Adelaide to have retained more of the essence of their tribal identity than other southern South Australian Aborigines because they were allowed to remain in the vicinity of their traditional homelands and because they experienced little cultural disruption in the form of the entry of other tribal groups into the Point McLay Mission. However, while they are seen to have retained a more vital tribal identity, they are also seen to have been the victims of an especially unproductive and poorly managed mission. In contrast, the Narungga, who are seen to have a less vital tribal bond, are credited with having made the Point Pearce mission productive, though it is widely assumed that their aspirations for self control were thwarted at every turn by the government and mission administrators. Said a former resident of Point Pearce, now in his seventies:

The native people made that place you know. My word. It's good country up there, took hard work but it's good country. Not like Point McLeay where the people didn't really have much to start with, you know, land's no good for working. But Point Pearce, it was a wonderful place. Good to farm, good for sheep, good for fishing, we even had a piggery there! Was all the Aboriginal people that made it a goer, not those Whitefellas (station managers) though they took all the credit. Whenever the native people looked like they were going to make something work, like the co-op and the bakery, the Whitefellas would ruin it somehow. You know, shut it down or more often just push us aside then take the credit.

Said a young man whose family was from Point McLay:

In the old days before the garinks (Ngarrindjeri for Europeans) showed up, our people was doin' just fine over there. But then Taplin and them showed up and shifted us all to Raukkan and tried to make us into farmers. That was it! That ain't farm country there. No bloody way people could make a living farming, specially nungas. Them old nungas didn't have a clue about farming, 'specially there. It's not like up at
Point Pearce where the country was farm county. It was different for them _mungas_ up there.

Aboriginal people from the two communities, it is often said, are physically different. The _Ngarrindjeri_ people are said to be shorter, heavier, and have thicker beards and more body hair than the Aboriginal people to the north, the _Narungga_ included. The _Narungga_, specifically, are said to be quite tall, have less pronounced Aboriginal physical features, and are as a group far more diverse in appearance. According to one _Ngarrindjeri_ man, the Aborigines from Point Pearce and Point McLeay refer to one another as butterfish and mud monkeys respectively, the names being illusions to physical features (_Ngarrindjeri_) and local habitat (_Narungga_). The explanations Aborigines in Adelaide provide for these differences are quite varied, although it is widely recognised that such differences exist.

The most common explanation invokes the differing histories of contact with Europeans among the various Aboriginal communities throughout the state. The _Ngarrindjeri_ are likened to the Aboriginal communities of the northern part of the state who experienced less contact with the Europeans and with each other than did the Aborigines at Point Pearce. In addition, several Aboriginal families from Point Pearce are said to have significant amounts of Chinese and Afghan "blood", amounts which are manifest and recognizable in the features of particular individuals. In contrast, the _Ngarrindjeri_ people, while not excluded from such mixing, are said not to have been affected to the same degree and look, as one man from Point Pearce said jokingly, "like proper Blackfellas".
Other interpretations of the differences between the two groups are given less frequently. On two occasions individuals explained patterns of physical distinction in terms which suggest a model of environmental determinism. The physical differences, these people said, are the result of adaptations to the differing environments. Being nearer to the cooling influence of the Southern Ocean, the Ngarrindjeri were heavier and hairier, where the Narungga, being closer to the desert people of the northern part of the state, where taller, thinner and had less hair. These characteristics, it was said, were better suited to that warmer environment. In contrast, another interpretation is much more categorical and explains the physical differences as the result of God's creation. "God", said one older woman, "made different kinds of Blackfellas just like he made different kinds of Whitefellas. It's simple as that".

The recognition of differences and similarities among Aboriginal groups is not limited to the differences and similarities of Aboriginal people from Point Pearce and Point McLeay. There is wide recognition that other Aboriginal groups, referred to in both tribal and geographic terms, differ and are similar in significant ways. In conversations in Adelaide today one can hear references, for example, to Pitjantjatjara "red bands" (initiated men) and "featherfeet" (sorcerers), more general references to "nungsas from the southeast" (of South Australia) as well as disparaging remarks concerning "interstaters" (a term applied almost exclusively to Aboriginal people from outside of South Australia, but especially from Queensland, Victoria and New South Wales). People in Adelaide are always interested in hearing about Aboriginal people in other places and visitors from outside the state are often asked about the
Aboriginal people in other areas. The recognition of differences and similarities among Aboriginal groups plays a significant role in the identities of contemporary Adelaide Aborigines.

On some occasions the differences were said to be nonexistent, on other occasions of little importance to the larger issues at hand. According to one middle aged man originally from Point Pearce:

We're all mixed up now. There's no real difference between any of us in Adelaide anymore. You Whitefellas have seen to that. The only difference that's important now is that you mob have got what's not yours. The only difference that's important now is between Aboriginal people and Whites, the haves and the have nots. You've taken everything away from us and you're still not satisfied. The difference? How can there be any difference anymore when you Whitefellas have cut our balls off?

Aborigines in different regions of South Australia have sometimes had markedly different experiences in their relations with Europeans. Because of differences in location, shifts in political policy, and changes in public perceptions, Aboriginal communities have experienced varying degrees of disruption to their indigenous forms. The result today is what sometimes appear to be a wide variety of slightly different cultural configurations among members of those different communities. Still, as perceived by the majority of Aboriginal people in Adelaide, those differences result from both essential differences which existed between distinct tribal groups before the arrival of Europeans, and their unique historical experiences.
From the point of view of individuals, conceptions, depictions and perceptions of history portray much more than the march of time and events; they comprise the process whereby the tensions and contradictions of contemporary life are illustrated, cast and recast in discourse. From this point of view, history for Aborigines in Adelaide is not some remote legacy, but a living link to other Aboriginal groups and a lens for the interpretation of contemporary social relations. Thus Aborigines construct, reconstruct, and impose meaning through a process involving the integration of the past with the present. Using history as an anvil and ideology as a hammer, they forge understandings of and models for the social formations of contemporary life. This dynamic integration of the past with the present has at least three serious consequences: it validates the notion of an Aboriginal history writ large in a world where urban Aborigines are most often seen to be separated from any but the most abstract and academic connection with the past; it draws fluid boundaries of meaning and action in a social field which allows room for interpretation and lateral movement, movement so necessary for survival in a world of shifting alliance; and finally, and paradoxically, it creates a frame for a particular orthodox view of the world.\(^{18}\) As I will show in chapter 4, in order to understand contemporary configurations of Aboriginal identity and ideology in Adelaide, all of these factors must be taken into account. In addition, it is necessary to understand the objective conditions of everyday life which underpin identity and ideology. In the next chapter I will examine the legacy of government

\(^{18}\) As we shall see in chapter five, this is not to suggest that there is no disension over what constitutes the orthodox view. On the contrary, there is an ongoing struggle within the Adelaide Aboriginal community concerning orthodoxy.
policy as manifest in the lives of Adelaide Aborigines. Specifically, I will sketch the socio-economic context of contemporary life for Aborigines in Adelaide today.
CHAPTER THREE

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY LIFE

Though socio-culturally distinct in many ways, Aborigines cannot escape interaction with the dominant society, and more than anywhere else, they experience that interaction through the economy. In this chapter I will explore the interface of Aborigines with the economy of the dominant society, focusing on demography, housing, and income and employment in Adelaide. As I will show in later chapters, this interface helps frame and shape the ideational system Aborigines in Adelaide refer to as the Blackfella Way.

Socio-Economic Overview of the Adelaide Aboriginal Community

Aboriginal people populated what was eventually to be named the Adelaide Plains long before the arrival of Europeans and even cursory readings of early accounts by settlers, and the records of the early government Protectors of Aborigines, clearly indicate that since the arrival of Europeans there has never been a time when Aboriginal people have been entirely absent from the Adelaide area. The contemporary Aboriginal population of Adelaide is composed of a range of peoples from various locations with differing languages, histories and often differing interests, who arrived in Adelaide under conditions and for reasons which were themselves diverse.
Research of anthropological interest conducted among the Aboriginal people resident in Adelaide has been limited until relatively recently. Work tangentially focused on Adelaide was conducted by N.B. Tindale and J.B. Birdsell as part of the Harvard-Adelaide Universities Anthropological Expedition of 1938-39 (Tindale 1940a). Tindale and Ronald Berndt have both recorded some Narungga ethnography, but the quantity is very limited and not unexpectedly much of their material has been in the vein of "salvage ethnography", collected second hand or dependent upon single informants. Tindale's (1936) material on the Narungga, for example, was primarily linguistic and relied heavily on the memory of a single, aged informant. Berndt's (1940a) material on Narungga mythology was collected from a Ngadjuri speaker since no living Narungga knew the myths, and with the exception of a single paper (Berndt 1940b) his data on the Ngarrindjeri, collected during this same period, have never been published (Berndt n.d.). Elkin's (1945) classic study, Aboriginal Men of High Degree includes a discussion of Ngarrindjeri "clever" men, but much of this material is drawn from Berndt's unpublished studies.

Ethnographic work was also carried out by Ronald and Catherine Berndt during the early 1940s as a part of a general survey of the Aboriginal population of South Australia. The major publication from this project was their book, From Black to White in South Australia (Berndt and Berndt 1951), wherein they devote 35 pages to a discussion of Aboriginal people of Adelaide.

---

1 Tindale's genealogies from this period have potential application to a contemporary study of Adelaide Aborigines, and to my knowledge no one, with the exception of Inglis (1964), has explored this area.
There were no further major anthropological publications until 1961 when Judy Inglis published her article "Aborigines in Adelaide". In this brief paper, Inglis describes divisions within the Aboriginal community based upon a dichotomy between "insiders", those Aborigines embedded within the Aboriginal community, and "outsiders", Aborigines who had through circumstance or choice been separated from the local Aboriginal community. While Inglis' paper addresses issues which are still pertinent, her death prevented her from pursuing the questions her work raised. The only major ethnography resulted from the research of James Pierson who, beginning in 1969, worked among Aborigines in Adelaide for eighteen months. Pierson (1972: 1-3) describes his research as focused on

Black Australian (Aboriginal) adaptation to an urban milieu in which many Aborigines are excluded from utilization of economic, social, and political resources generally available to whites. Social, psychological and economic marginality seem to characterize many Aborigines in this situation.

I maintain in this thesis that these forms of Aboriginal marginality lead to two methods of Aboriginal adjustment in Adelaide: an adaptation to frequent reliance on resources provided through personal relationships with other Aborigines (i.e. networks), and an increasing reliance on voluntary associations.

While Pierson's work provides useful ethnographic material, like much other research of this period it is primarily descriptive: questions and issues which are of theoretical interest today were then unnoticed or ignored.

Though the works of Tindale, the Berndts, Inglis and Pierson exhaust the list of major anthropological works among Adelaide Aborigines, this body of material obviously does not represent the limit of research data of import to contemporary analyses of the Adelaide Aboriginal community. In fact, through
the efforts of Adelaide geographer Fay Gale there is available an unparalleled compilation of data on Aboriginal migration, mobility, economy and demography in Adelaide, going back nearly 30 years. Gale's major publication, *Urban Aborigines* (1972), written with the assistance of Alison Brookman, is a sweeping study of the history of Aboriginal affairs in South Australia, of migration, settlement and demographic structure of Aborigines in Adelaide, and of the key institutional structures which affect their everyday lives in the city. The research upon which this book is based was generated by the Social Science Research Council of Australia's "Aborigines in Australian Society" project, which also sponsored Rowley's (1972b) research in New South Wales.

Aborigines in Adelaide do not fit easily within the constraints imposed by common assumptions of "community": geographic, economic or political boundaries cannot readily be drawn to indicate and define all members of the Aboriginal population of Adelaide. Though there are patterns of history and experience which provide them with a common context, there exist enduring divisions which have been generated by differing historical circumstances (see chapter 2). Further, there is an absence of striking visual indicators demarcating the Aboriginal community from the larger non-Aboriginal community within which it is embedded. Differences in physical appearance, language and cultural style are often so subtle as to be all but invisible to casual observation and Aboriginal housing and consumption patterns are not always obviously different from those apparent in the non-Aboriginal population. Still, Aborigines in Adelaide see themselves as members of a distinct and separate community, not in the geographic sense but in terms of
shared interests, values and experience; the majority share a pervasive and powerful sense of identity as Aborigines.

What is perhaps not immediately obvious to the casual or even the practiced observer is the very real diversity of lifestyle among Aboriginal people in Adelaide. While for many members of Adelaide's non-Aboriginal population Aborigines in the city are typified and symbolized by homeless drunks on park benches or shouting Black activists, in truth, the majority of them fit neither of these cliches. As this chapter will show, the Aboriginal community in Adelaide is constituted from a diverse and dynamic population and while park bench drunks and shouting activists are certainly a part of that community, they are in many ways peripheral to it.

The majority of Aboriginal people in Adelaide today trace their origins to one of a handful of South Australian missions and reserves. While some of the early missions, such as Point McLeay and Point Pearce, were established on or near the traditional homelands of many of their Aboriginal residents, most were established in non-traditional and often remote locations and Aboriginal people were moved to them. The majority of Aborigines living in Adelaide today were born on -- or their parents were born on -- reserves that were close to their traditional homes. In particular, the majority were born or have parents who were born at Point McLeay on the lower Murray river or Point Pearce on the Yorke Peninsula. According to Gale and Wundersitz's (1982: 2

---

2 See chapter 2 for a brief sketch of some of these reserves. For more detail, see Mattingley and Hampton (1988).
surveys in 1980, individuals from Point Pearce and Point McLeay constituted 44.4 per cent of the Adelaide Aboriginal population born outside of Adelaide. The remaining population, not including those born in Adelaide, included individuals, in decreasing proportion, from the west coast of South Australia, northern South Australia, the upper Murray, central South Australia, southeastern South Australia, and the Northern Territory. In addition, 17.2 per cent of the population surveyed in 1980 was born in other states, a remarkable increase considering that according to the 1966 survey, individuals born in other states comprised only 1.9 per cent of the total population surveyed (see Table 3.1).

Gale and Wundersitz (1982) have also shown that in recent years the majority of new Aboriginal migrants to Adelaide have come from interstate, in particular from New South Wales and Victoria. Nevertheless, migration to the city has dropped dramatically since the 1950s and 1960s (Gale 1972). The Aboriginal population of Adelaide today appears to be relatively stable, with the majority of individuals firmly established in the city. Where Point Pearce and Point McLeay once acted as bases for migration to Adelaide by significant numbers of Aboriginal people, this is no longer the case. Describing the interrelationship of reserves and the city in the 1960s, Gale (1972: 163) wrote

---

3 This pattern is similar to that reported by Gale for 1966 (Gale 1972: 81). On closer inspection, however, it appears that since 1966 there has been an increase in the percentage of individuals surveyed who were born on the Yorke Peninsula offset by a proportional decrease in the percentage of individuals surveyed who were born on the lower Murray.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birthplace</th>
<th>1966 (percent)</th>
<th>1980 (percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=1,459</td>
<td>n=198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern South Australia</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Coast</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central*</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorke Peninsula**</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>24.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Murray</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Murray***</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>19.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Territory</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other states</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>17.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* not counted separately in 1966 as few Aborigines lived in this area.

** includes Point Pearce

*** includes Point McLeay

The presence of relatives in the city is important as a stimulus to migration and is likely to remain so for some time. Those who have left a reserve keep in close touch with relatives who remain. They like to feel that the reserve is available to them, either as a retreat from the city in times of hardship or as a holiday place where they can see their relatives. They are always delighted to return home. The fact that contact with relatives is very frequent, establishes for some Aborigines a kind of orbit within which they can move from the reserve to their city relatives, and vice versa.

At the same time, those Aborigines who have remained upon a reserve feel that every relative who has moved to Adelaide carries a piece of his homeland with him. A house in Adelaide where a relative lives is thus a haven where visitors from the reserve will feel secure, and where they will meet friends and relatives. Such a house often becomes a local centre for a group, whose members are thus continuously in touch with those still located on the reserve.
In the 1980s, Gale and Wundersitz (1982: 83-84) argue, the positive interrelationship of reserve and city remains:

Interestingly, school holidays also play a valuable role in maintaining these ties and in ensuring that the kin identities of city-born people are clarified and strengthened. It is common for children to be sent back to the reserve to spend their holidays with relatives. In fact, so strong is this pattern of returning children to Point Pearce for their vacations that holiday camps are now organized at Point Pearce for Adelaide children. Through such measures, the ties which mean so much to the parents are fostered amongst the children.

Where the reserves may have functioned as places of economic refuge twenty years ago, they are not so today. For most Aboriginal people in Adelaide the reserves have little but sentimental value and are viewed with a combination of affection and sadness. For many people the affection comes from the deep sense of home, place and history that the reserves continue to provide. Ironically, the reserves are viewed with sadness for the same reasons. No one can overlook the fact that these places, while they were home for generations of Aboriginal people, were not places where Aboriginal people had, nor some would argue have, control over their own lives. Though referred to as "home", and still populated by dwindling numbers of relatives, for people in the city, the reserves have come to represent a kind of backwater, a place, in practical terms, with little to offer; what attachment remains seems to be most meaningful in a symbolic and emotional rather than a practical sense. In any case, it appears that today neither Point Pearce nor Point McLeay are significant bases for migration to Adelaide.
In general, the Aboriginal population of Adelaide appears firmly entrenched in the city. This fact is borne out by the comments of one middle-aged woman who had grown up on Point Pearce:

No, we don’t get back home (Point Pearce) too much anymore. It’s a sad place nowadays, all broken down and the kids tearin’ everything up. My old Aunties say ‘you never come home anymore. You’re forgettin’ about us. Seems some poor fella’s gotta die before we see you.’ I guess that’s true too, funerals about the only thing sure to bring people home. I try to get my old Aunties to come down here but even that’s not so easy anymore. They’re gettin’ old and don’t always want to leave home. Ah, yeah, it’s sad. Truly it is.

Given the patterns of migration, it is not surprising that the Adelaide Aboriginal community has long been dominated politically by individuals and families from Point Pearce and Point McLeay (Inglis 1961 and 1964, Gale 1964, and Pierson 1972). To a significant degree this remains true today though it appears the situation may be changing. As increasing numbers of individuals have migrated to Adelaide from interstate, some of them have taken high level positions in Aboriginal and Aboriginal-oriented organizations. Consequently, the political influence of these two groups appears to be lessening. Still, the majority of Aborigines in Adelaide retain close links to one of these two reserves, whether through their own births or through one or both parents’ births on those reserves. As I will show later, even those individuals born in the city tend to show a strong affiliation with the reserve and much of the content of their identities is molded by that affiliation. Each reserve, however, has its unique history and provides a particular context within which those identities are constructed.

---

4 This pattern is a complex one which I will address in chapter 5.
Population

From the first days of colonization, the city of Adelaide has attracted Aborigines and the government has tried at various times to discourage their settlement (or more accurately, perhaps, resettlement) in the city. At the outbreak of World War II vacancies appeared in the labor pool and Aborigines were encouraged to come to Adelaide to take up employment, especially in factories, on wharves or on the railroads (Berndt and Berndt 1951: 238). At the end of the war, however, workers returned to reclaim their jobs and Aborigines were displaced. There was unrest among the European population of Adelaide over the suddenly unemployed Aborigines who refused to return to the country once their labor was no longer required, and the government actively encouraged and even forced some to leave the city (Rowley 1972b: 373-374).

It is very difficult to estimate growth or decline of the Aboriginal population of Adelaide during these early periods because of both the changes in the legal definition of "Aboriginal" as well as the practical consequences of identification. For those not easily recognizable as such, identifying oneself as Aboriginal during certain periods of Adelaide's history was sometimes done at great cost. According to Inglis (1961: 201), the "half-caste" population of Adelaide (defined as persons having one European and one Aboriginal parent) was listed in the

---

5 For most data sets, the Australian Bureau of Statistics' 1981 census figures refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as a single group. The number of Torres Strait Islanders recorded in the Adelaide major urban area was 213 (about 6.6% of the total). Unless otherwise indicated, the statistical information presented in this thesis will include both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, though the groups may be collapsed for statistical purposes under the category "Aboriginal".
census of 1921 census as 30, of 1933 as 95, and of both 1947 and 1954 as 241. Though one might question the accuracy of these census figures, they do give some indication of the relatively small numbers of individuals involved.

There was, however, a rapid growth in the Aboriginal population of Adelaide coincident with the formal adoption of the assimilation policy by the Aborigines Protection Board. During this period Aboriginal people were actively encouraged to move off the reserves. The population increased again with the decision in 1964 by the South Australian Department of Aboriginal Affairs to purchase housing for Aboriginal families in Adelaide to further promote the assimilation process. By the early 1960s, Gale's (1972: 20) survey of the Aboriginal population of Adelaide indicated a population of 2039.6

Adelaide's total population according to the 1981 census was 882,520 and of this number 3,217 were identified as Aboriginal (approximately 0.4%). Somewhat lower was Gale and Wundersitz's (1982: 288) estimate for 1980 of 2,900. Though I did not attempt to conduct a census as part of my research during 1983 and 1984, my impression was that these figures represented a significant under-enumeration by at least several hundred for 1980 and 1981.7

6 Gale and Brookman conducted surveys between July 1962 and January 1966 (Gale 1972:15).

7 Gray and Smith (1983), in their reexamination of the 1981 census, also suggest that the Aboriginal population of Adelaide was under enumerated. As Gray and Smith have shown, there are many reasons why the figures must be considered suspect; however, from my own experience I would suggest that the general mistrust of any researcher by most Aboriginal people coupled with the common practice of adjusting the reporting of household composition to protect the household against rent increase and pension reduction would inevitably skew the results of any survey of population size. A similar point is made by Bryant (1981) in her examination of the under enumeration of the Victorian Aboriginal population.
Opinion among Aboriginal people on population size varied. While many clearly had no idea what the Aboriginal population of Adelaide might be -- some estimated "a few hundred", others "several thousand" and on a few occasions it was suggested that there were "at least twice as many as the government says" -- most guesses ranged between 2000 and 5000.8

As so often reported for Aboriginal communities throughout Australia, the Adelaide Aboriginal community is young in comparison to the wider population of Adelaide (Table 3.2). Within the Aboriginal community children between the ages of birth and 9 years represent over 26.7% of the population while children within this range comprise only 14.1% among the general population. When the range is expanded to include youth to the age of 19, that segment of the Aboriginal population represents 55.2% in comparison to 31.6% for the wider population. As might be predicted from demographic data in other Aboriginal communities, the other end of the continuum is starkly different. Individuals 50 years of age and older comprise 26.7% of the wider population but only 6% of the Aboriginal population. When presented as an age pyramid and contrasted with the wider population (Figure 3.1), the differences are even more striking. It is clear that the Aboriginal population in Adelaide shows the potential for significant growth as younger persons begin to have children of their own. At the other end, the high mortality for Aborigines after 40 years of age is chilling.

8 The figures for the 1986 census, though post-dating the period of my field work, indicate a total Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of 5696. Of this total, 2429 were Aboriginal males, 2670 were Aboriginal females, 289 TSI males and 308 TSI females.
Table 3.2 Age by sex, Aborigines/TSI and All Persons, Adelaide*, 1981. (Australian Bureau of Statistics).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Aborigines/TSI (percent)</th>
<th>All Persons (percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Males ( n=1,539 )</td>
<td>Females ( n=1,678 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( 0-4 )</td>
<td>( 6.0 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( 5-9 )</td>
<td>( 6.7 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( 10-14 )</td>
<td>( 7.4 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( 15-19 )</td>
<td>( 8.0 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( 20-24 )</td>
<td>( 5.4 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( 25-29 )</td>
<td>( 4.2 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( 30-34 )</td>
<td>( 3.0 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( 35-39 )</td>
<td>( 2.2 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( 40-44 )</td>
<td>( 1.6 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( 45-49 )</td>
<td>( 1.0 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( 50-54 )</td>
<td>( 0.8 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( 55-59 )</td>
<td>( 0.5 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( 60-64 )</td>
<td>( 0.3 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( 65-69 )</td>
<td>( 0.3 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( 70-74 )</td>
<td>( 0.2 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>( 75+ )</td>
<td>( 0.1 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>47.7</td>
<td>52.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Aborigines/TSI are for Adelaide Major Urban, All Persons are for Adelaide Statistical Division.
Figure 3.1 Population Pyramids of Aborigines/TSI and All Persons, Adelaide*, 1981. (Australian Bureau of Statistics)

* Aborigines/TSI are for Adelaide Major Urban, All Persons are for Adelaide Statistical Division.
Housing

The distribution of the Aboriginal population of Adelaide in the mid-1980s is neither confined to a single area of the city nor spread randomly throughout every suburb and has to be understood as a product of historic, economic and social processes. When Ronald and Catherine Berndt worked in Adelaide in the early 1940s they found that while small numbers of Aborigines lived scattered throughout the suburbs, the majority were restricted in their choice of residence to the West End, an economically depressed section of the inner city. Describing the conditions there, the Berndts (Berndt and Berndt 1951: 237) wrote:

Rents in the West End are low, but the houses are squalid and usually in bad repair; bathrooms are rare, and sanitation is in many cases provided by outdoor unsewered closets. But native residents are accepted in this quarter; and since the houses are usually close together, they are less isolated and approximate more nearly to communal living conditions than is the case in the suburbs. Their homes are similar in type, structure and general furnishing to those of white residents in the area. And there is no special block or district set aside for them; they live scattered among white households, in various streets and lanes.

By the time Inglis began her studies in Adelaide in the late 1950s, most of the Aboriginal families in the West End had moved out of the inner city.

Commenting on the Berndts' earlier work, Inglis (1961: 200) wrote:

since that time, the west end of the city has been emptied of dark people, and of the thirteen families that used to live there, only three of the original couples are still alive and together. Of the fifty offspring of these families, seventeen are married and living in the suburbs, ten are married and living in the country and five have returned to bring up their families on the government reserve from which their parents originally came.

Both the Berndts' and Inglis' writings reflect and portray the popular and government assimilationist attitudes of the day: Aborigines in Adelaide were
not limited in their choices of housing by policy or prejudice but only by their economic choices and potential. My own conversations with Aboriginal people resident in Adelaide since the 1950s suggest that, while it was true that people were limited in choice to what they could afford, in fact policy and prejudice did play a part in housing patterns. Even today, very few Aboriginal people in Adelaide have control over where they live; they are dependent on subsidized housing and subject to continuing discrimination and prejudice on the open market.

By the early to mid-1960s there were, according to Gale (1972), three residential foci of Aboriginal households; within the inner suburbs west of the city, around Port Adelaide and in the cities of Salisbury and Elizabeth to the north of Adelaide, a pattern still evident in 1970 (Pierson 1972). By 1980 there was a much broader distribution of Aboriginal households throughout all but the most affluent suburbs to the southeast of the city.

The distinct drift of Aborigines out of the West End and into the outer suburbs, Port Adelaide, and later to Salisbury and Elizabeth coincided with an expansion of the Adelaide Aboriginal population as a result of migration from rural areas. Movement to these suburbs appears to have been related to two factors: the existence of low rent housing in these areas and the inability of most Adelaide Aborigines to afford anything but low rent accommodation. Much of the housing within the inner suburbs as well as the Port Adelaide area was and continues to be close to commercial and industrial sites. As such, the private rental housing tends to be old and dilapidated since, until recently
anyway, there was little chance that renovation of these units would attract middle or upper income tenants.

The establishment of the South Australian Housing Trust in 1937 marked the state's intervention into the housing market. Established to ensure the availability of affordable housing to low income families through the control of rents and the provision of new houses and units at low rental rates, the program has had a marked effect on Aboriginal housing in subsequent years.

In 1964 the South Australian Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA), later subsumed under the Department for Community Welfare (DCW)) began a program whereby housing was purchased within Housing Trust areas for the exclusive use of Aboriginal tenants.

In 1973, 63 of the DAA/DCW houses were transferred to the recently established Aboriginal Housing Board, a branch of the South Australian Housing Trust with predominantly Aboriginal management. By 1980 the Aboriginal Housing Board's stock had risen to over 400 dwellings (Braddock and Wanganeen 1980: 13). While low income households are eligible to apply for accommodation to both Aboriginal Funded Housing and the South Australian Housing Trust, there is an overwhelming preference among Aborigines for the Funded Housing. The most obvious reason for this marked preference is that Aboriginal Funded Housing is administered largely by Aboriginal people and operates with policies and guidelines which are more flexible than those of the Housing Trust or private market. Funded Housing, for example, provides a security of tenure which is lacking in other programs, a
simple transfer program wherein the members of one household may trade houses with another, and a flexible and patient policy on rental arrears. For most tenants this means cheap (16 to 20 percent of household income in the early 1980s or on average $20 per week), adequate housing from which a family cannot be capriciously evicted. Most important, however, members of the Aboriginal community see Aboriginal Funded Housing as a community resource which they control through elected Board members. In contrast, Housing Trust housing provides low rental accommodation but is generally perceived by Aborigines to be a white organization and thus less understanding, sympathetic and flexible in meeting the special needs of Aboriginal tenants.

During the early years of the Aboriginal Housing Board, homes were purchased which met the demands of tenants as well as the limited budget of the Board. Consequently, much of the current stock is comprised of large, older homes located west and northwest of the city in areas where property values are low in relative terms. Only since the late 1970s has the Aboriginal Housing Board begun to purchase significant numbers of homes in the northern and southern suburbs, purchases which reflect the changing preferences of tenants and applicants who are more likely now than in the past to express a preference for areas other than those in which most of the older stock is located (Braddock and Wanganeen 1980: 14). In addition, the condition and location of Funded houses varies. Houses in the Port Adelaide area, for example, are often larger

---

9 The emerging desire for housing away from areas which have higher concentrations of Aboriginal households is indicative of significant changes within the Aboriginal community. I will look more closely at the ramifications of these changes in chapter five.
and older than houses in Salisbury to the north or Port Noarlunga to the far south. Houses in the Port Adelaide area will be close to many other Funded houses, whereas those in the suburbs to the south may be kilometers away from one another.

In Adelaide today the majority of Aboriginal households rely upon Aboriginal Funded Housing for accommodation. According to Braddock and Wanganeen (1980: 13), research conducted by the University of Adelaide suggests that 80 percent of the population lives in Aboriginal Funded Housing, though they believe this figure may be an over-estimation. Gale and Wundersitz's (1982: 55) 1980 survey in Port Adelaide indicated 72.3 percent of the 94 households sampled were in Funded Housing while their 1981 Salisbury/Elizabeth survey revealed 64.2 percent of the 106 homes sampled were Funded. Whatever the exact numbers, there is a clear preference for Aboriginal Funded Housing as indicated by the two to four year waiting period. In 1980 there were 220 applications "in line" for housing. In addition, there are many more who would prefer Funded Housing yet fail to apply because of the long waiting period. Those who do not meet the requirements or who are unable to wait must make alternative arrangements.

An accurate analysis of household distribution by housing type is extremely difficult. Braddock and Wanganeen's figures for Adelaide, for example (see Table 3.3), need be heavily qualified. First, they represent an estimate of minimum numbers of households, a unit which is not strictly comparable between housing types. Household units within Funded housing, for example,
Table 3.3 Aboriginal households in Adelaide by housing type. (Adapted from Braddock and Wanganeen 1980: 37)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Housing</th>
<th>Number of Households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Funded</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private purchase</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private rental</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hostels</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency housing/shelters</td>
<td>10-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>900-910</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

are often composed of large numbers of individuals and the accommodation itself is typically a three or four bedroom house. In general, Trust housing is limited to double units, maisonettes and small units, which are ill-equipped to meet the demands of a large household.

Private rental accommodation, on the other hand, is often the choice of households composed of a childless couple or single people who do not qualify for Funded or Trust housing; where a single person resides alone in private rental, that person would appear in these figures as a single household equivalent to a household composed of sole parent with five children, two grandchildren, nieces and nephews, etc. Similarly, households identified here as residing in hostels are rarely ever anything other than single individuals since none of the hostels in Adelaide during this period were equipped to provide accommodation for family units.
Second, households choosing to purchase accommodation are often structurally very different from households in other types of accommodation. As Braddock and Wanganeen (1980) and Gale and Wundersitz (1982) have shown, households which choose to purchase their homes tend to be small nuclear families, often including a non-Aboriginal spouse and located away from areas with high Aboriginal populations. Further, these figures give no indication of the individuals and households who had no permanent accommodation at the time of the survey, who were "in line" and waiting for Funded housing, or who were resident but not counted within surveyed households. Finally, these figures mask, as do most other quantitative survey results, the dynamism of the Aboriginal community: households fission and fuse for a variety of reasons.\(^{10}\)

Read with caution, these figures suggest that a majority of households reside in Aboriginal Funded housing. There are, however, many individuals living in homes which they have purchased, others residing in private rental accommodation, and individuals dependent upon hostels and emergency shelters. While the majority of Aboriginal households are large and located in Funded housing in areas with relatively high concentrations of Aboriginal households, there is also the rare individual who has no home, visits a shelter or hostel on occasion for a meal but spends most nights outside.\(^{11}\) It is misleading, however, even given the fact that the majority of Aborigines do live

\(^{10}\) This pattern will be examined more closely below.

\(^{11}\) One man I met late in my fieldwork claimed he had been sleeping under trees and bridges for weeks. Though he lived in hostels for short periods of time, he said he preferred to live outside on his own where he was accountable to no one but himself.
in Funded Housing, to suggest too strongly that there is such a thing as a "typical" Aboriginal household within this community of perhaps 3500-4000 individuals. Even in Aboriginal Funded homes, the composition of households may vary greatly: from single mother and single child, to small nuclear family, to large multi-generational extended family including affinal, consanguinal and putative kin as well as a constantly changing stream of boarders and visitors. Any of these households may include non-Aboriginal spouses or defactos.

Income and Employment

Attempts to examine the Aboriginal component of the Australian economy have been relatively rare, with the works of Sharp and Tetz (1966), Altman and Nieuwenhuysen (1979) and Fisk (1985) providing the most ambitious overviews. Economic surveys of urban Aboriginal communities are even more rare, with the research of Gale and her colleagues in Adelaide being among the examples. Australian Bureau of Statistics census records, however, provide a general overview of Aboriginal income, employment and occupational status. In this section I will draw heavily upon these sources.

Income among Aborigines in Adelaide may come from a variety of sources. Among these are wages and salaries, various forms of social security payment including unemployment and supporting parents' benefits, invalid, widow's and age pensions, worker's compensation, child endowment, fostering allowance, as well as various education grants, some of which are only available to Aboriginal students. There is, as one would expect, a great deal of variation in the sources of income among individual beneficiaries. In addition, irregular income may be
derived from other sources such as gambling, gifts, loans or payments by boarders. The pattern I observed in 1983-1984 confirms Gale and Wundersitz's research in Port Adelaide in 1980 where men tended to derive more income from wages and salaries than did women. Women on the other hand appeared to derive more income from social security benefits such as supporting parent benefits while men were more likely to draw upon unemployment benefits (Table 3.4).

The most striking aspect of these figures is the heavy reliance upon unemployment and social security benefits among individuals in this sample, and the relative lack of income from wages and salary. One of the features of this pattern is a markedly lower household income than that of the general population. Though specific data are not available for the period of my fieldwork, the figures for 1981 provide some indication of the pattern of household income for both Aborigines and others (Table 3.5). While the sample sizes are vastly different, the apparent contrasts are of great interest.

The percentage of Aboriginal households reporting no income is double that of All Persons while the percentage of households reporting incomes over $26,000 is over twice the percentage of Aboriginal households so reporting; this supports Gale and Wundersitz's (1982: 169) conclusion that far more Aboriginal households fall below the poverty line than do households in the general population. Considering the distribution of Aboriginal households over
Table 3.4. Income source of adult Aborigines, Port Adelaide, 1980.  
(Adapted from Gale and Wundersitz 1982: 108).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income source</th>
<th>Males (percent) n=90</th>
<th>Females (percent) n=131</th>
<th>Total (percent) n=221*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wages</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment benefits</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>26.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal Study Grant / NESA** Grant</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPB*** / WP# / DWP### / special benefits</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>41.2</td>
<td>24.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invalid pension / sickness benefits</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age pension</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No income source</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplementary income only</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(family and/or fostering allowance)</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Does not include 4 persons for whom income source was not known.
** National Employment Strategy for Aborigines.
*** Supporting Parent Benefit.
# Widows Pension.
### Disabled Workers Pension.

the range of incomes, it appears that over 50% of the households report incomes of less than $12,000 per annum; the figures for the general population are obverse to the Aboriginal percentages with nearly 55% of the households reporting annual incomes over $12,000. These figures, however, are even more interesting for what they do not show: the number of families within individual
Table 3.5 Annual household Income*, Aborigines/TSI and All Persons, Adelaide**, 1981. (Australian Bureau of Statistics)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household income $</th>
<th>Aborigines/TSI (percent) n=824</th>
<th>All Persons (percent) n=304,485</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>none</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt; 1000</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1000 - 2000</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001 - 3000</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3001 - 4000</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4001 - 6000</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6001 - 8000</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8001 - 10000</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10001 - 12000</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12001 - 15000</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15001 - 18000</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18001 - 22000</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22001 - 26000</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 26000</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.7***</td>
<td>100.1#</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Household income combines the income of all persons 15 years or older in the household.

** Aborigines/TSI are for Adelaide Major Urban, All Persons are for Adelaide Statistical Division.

*** Total more than 100% due to random adjustments to cells within small samples to avoid release of confidential information.

# Rounding error.
households which together contribute to the household income. Gale and Wundersitz's (1982: 171) research in Port Adelaide in 1980 suggests that, in general, Aboriginal households are more likely than households within the general population to be multiple income unit households, and that multiple income unit households tended not to live below the poverty line.

Extrapolating from these data, it appears that at least some of the Aboriginal household income levels have been raised as a result of contributions by more than one income unit within the individual household. When this factor is taken into account it is clear that the discrepancy between Aboriginal household incomes and the incomes of households within the general population is even greater than these figures indicate. As indicated above, wages and salary comprise a relatively small portion of income for the Aboriginal community in general, reflecting a high unemployment rate. Comprehensive figures are not available for the Aboriginal population of Adelaide as a whole for the period of my field work, but Gale and Wundersitz's 1980 survey of Port Adelaide is useful in indicating patterns (Table 3.6). What is immediately striking about these figures is the high unemployment rate: 41.1% among males, 16.0% among females or 26.2% for the total sample. Even more striking, however, are the figures for employment: 24.5% for males, 10.7% for females and 16.3% for the total sample. According to Gale and Wundersitz (1982: 107), unemployment among the general population in Adelaide at the time of their study was 5.3%, while employment was reported at 54.8%. One disturbing aspect of these figures is the trend which is apparent when they are compared with earlier studies of the same
Table 3.6 Occupational status of adult Aborigines, Port Adelaide, 1980. (Adapted from Gale and Wundersitz 1982: 108)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational status</th>
<th>Males (percent) n=90</th>
<th>Females (percent) n=131</th>
<th>Total (percent) n=221*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed**</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>26.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home duties</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pensioner</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>48.1</td>
<td>33.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student - adult education</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- secondary school</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other ***</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Does not include 4 persons for whom occupational status was not known.

** To be classified as unemployed, respondents had to be in receipt of unemployment benefits.

*** Refers to 3 respondents 15 years of age who had left school but had not found a job and were not eligible for unemployment benefits.

area. It is clear that the number of Aborigines in Port Adelaide who are employed has decreased since Gale and Binnion’s 1973 study of poverty among Aborigines in Adelaide:

the hard fact is that, in 1973, persons directly dependent on government payments such as unemployment benefits, supporting parents benefits, widows and invalid pensions, accounted for 44.2 per cent of the adult survey group but, by 1980, this proportion had grown to 65.7 per cent, with an additional 7.6 per cent receiving a tertiary study allowance or job training grant (Gale and Wundersitz 1982: 111-112).
These trends are all the more remarkable when occupational status is examined according to the variables of sex and age (Table 3.7). As these figures indicate, there is a fourfold increase in percentages of males employed, from 7.7% for 15-19 year olds to roughly 30-35% for older age groups. In contrast, unemployment steadily increases from a low of 34.6% of 15-19 year-olds to a high of 53.8% of 30-39 year-olds. At 40 years of age the percentage of men claiming pensions increases almost fivefold over pensions drawn by younger age groups. This acceleration, according to Gale and Wundersitz (1982: 115-117), can be attributed to the rapid deterioration of the health of adult Aboriginal males, a pattern I observed in my own research.

The figures for females reveal different trends altogether. Employment levels fluctuate across all age groups, reaching a high of 16.7% of women aged 30-39 and a low of 6.7% of women aged 40 and above. Percentages of unemployed females within each age category drop from a high of 43.7% for 15-19 year-olds, to 11.1% for 20-29 year-olds, 4.1% for 30-39 year-olds and 3.3% for females aged 40 and above. This steep drop in unemployment after age 19 is offset by a dramatic increase in female pensioners among the 20-29 year-olds, with percentages rising nearly fivefold from 9.4% of 15-19 year-olds to 57.8% of 20-29 year-olds. This level decreases only slightly for 30-39 year-olds and then peaks at 70.0% of females aged 40 and above. Gale and Wundersitz (1982: 117) attribute the steep increase in female pensioners after age 19 to the fact that once a woman has a child she is more easily able to obtain social security benefits.
Table 3.7 Occupational status of Aborigines by age and sex, Port Adelaide, 1980. (Derived from Gale and Wundersitz, 1982:116)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupational status</th>
<th>Age in Years</th>
<th>15 - 19 (percent)</th>
<th>20 - 29 (percent)</th>
<th>30 - 39 (percent)</th>
<th>40+ (percent)</th>
<th>All Ages (percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M n=26</td>
<td>F n=32</td>
<td>M n=33</td>
<td>F n=45</td>
<td>M n=13</td>
<td>F n=24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>48.5</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>53.8</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home duties*</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pensioner</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>57.8</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>54.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student/other</td>
<td>57.7</td>
<td>34.4</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* According to Gale and Wundersitz (1982:111), the occupational category "home duties" includes those who were being financially supported by a spouse and not in receipt of independent income.

** Rounding error.
The 1981 census lists 583 persons out of a total employed labor force of 911 persons identifying as Aboriginal in Adelaide (Table 3.8). When these figures are examined closely, several interesting patterns emerge. Keeping in mind that the census data on occupation and industry represent percentages of an extremely small group, employed Aborigines are under represented in all but the categories tradesmen and armed forces. In addition, they are markedly under represented in the sales and administrative classifications.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Aborigines/TSI (percent) n=583</th>
<th>All Persons (percent) n=371,611</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional, technical</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative etc.</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical workers</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sales workers</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers, fisherman etc.</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miners, outrymen etc.</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport, communication</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tradesmen etc.</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>29.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service, sport, recreation</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Members armed forces</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequately described / not stated</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>99.5</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Aborigines/TSI are for Adelaide Major Urban, All Persons are for Adelaide Statistical Division.

** Total less than 100% due to random adjustments to cells within small samples to avoid release of confidential information.
When employment is examined by industry (Table 3.9), a pattern emerges which complements the view of employment from the perspective of occupation. These data indicate that Adelaide Aborigines are markedly under represented in the manufacturing, wholesale and retail trades, and in the finance, property and business sectors. In comparison to the general

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Aborigines/TSI (percent)</th>
<th>All Persons (percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity, gas, water</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale &amp; retail trades</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>19.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport and storage</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance, property, business services</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public administration, defence</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community services</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreation, personnel, other services</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-classifiable</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not stated</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not-classifiable/not stated</td>
<td>n.a</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Aborigines/TSI are for Adelaide Major Urban, All Persons are for Adelaide Statistical Division.

** Non-classifiable and not stated categories are not separated for All Persons.
population, Aborigines appear to be over-represented in the public administration and community services spheres.

These figures depict a common pattern of employment for Aborigines in Adelaide. When workers gain proportional parity -- again, the percentages are derived from a very small group of employed persons -- with other Australians in terms of industry or occupational grouping, they tend to hold jobs as unskilled laborers. While jobs for those in skilled professions tend to remain relatively stable, unskilled and semi-skilled workers tend to be the most vulnerable to job loss and are thus the last hired and first to be let go. This is in line with Gale and Wundersitz’s (1982: 140) study of Port Adelaide Aborigines in 1980 in which they found that the vast majority of employed Aborigines held semi-skilled (33.7%) or unskilled (53.3%) jobs. Alternatively, employed Aborigines tend to assume positions in some sector of the public service, most often in positions serving Aboriginal clients. These are typically highly specialized jobs and while there is a great deal of movement of individuals between departments and programs which serve Aborigines, there is little movement to positions not specialized to the service of Aboriginal clients.

In addition, many Aborigines hold short-term positions funded by various specialized employment and training programs. As Aborigines often complained, many of these programs offered incentives for employers to take on Aboriginal workers for short periods of time but once the incentives expired the workers found themselves back on the streets with few new skills. Consequently, these data on employment by industry must be viewed with
caution; for many of the industries there is a high turn-over of individual workers as the incentives expire.

**Family Structure: Accounting for the "Missing" Males.**

The socio-economic position of Aborigines in Adelaide is a complex one. As even this brief sketch suggests, life can be difficult and frustrating; that which many other Australians take for granted appears beyond the reach of many if not most Aboriginal people. It has long been noted that extended kin networks and their attendant economic benefits are pervasive among Aborigines throughout the various urban and country areas (e.g. Barwick 1963, Beckett 1950, Fink 1960, Reay1951, Bell 1956, Howard 1981) and the Adelaide Aboriginal community is no exception (Inglis 1961, Gale 1964, Pierson 1972). Focusing on their value as economic strategies crucial to the economic viability of many household units, many writers have viewed extended family networks among Aborigines in settled Australia as a carry-over from forms of social organization which were present on reserves, missions and among traditional groups.

One of the features of Aboriginal extended family networks in the urban setting which is often discussed is the apparent dominiance of women and the relative absence of men. Gale and Wundersitz (1982: 27,38) argue that their studies show that Aboriginal males are often "missing", having suffered "displacement" and "alienation from the household and family". As a result there are substantial numbers of men who are "homeless", "floating" and "rather loosely attached to Aboriginal homes". This pattern, I would argue, is not as pervasive...
as they report and even to the extent to which it does exist, the limited economic explanation they advance is inadequate for understanding the forces which give shape to and reproduce the Aboriginal extended family. I will focus briefly here on the problem of "the missing male" in order to highlight some of the forces which shape both the structure of the Aboriginal community and contemporary constructions of identity and ideology.

Evidence that Aboriginal males are "missing" emerges most clearly, Gale and Wundersitz (1982: 24) argue, from data portraying Aboriginal masculinity ratios, marriage patterns and family structure. In simple terms, masculinity ratios refer to the proportion of males to females. The results of their 1980 household survey reveal a masculinity ratio among Aborigines of 74.8 which they compare with a ratio of 101.4 for the general population of the study area according to the 1976 census. The results of the 1981 census, which were not yet available when they prepared their data are shown in Table 3.10. When calculated for the overall population, these data yield masculinity ratios for Aborigines and the total population of the study area of 79.5 and 100.3 respectively. As these data indicate there is an apparent and unexpected decrease in the ratio of males to females, beginning with the 20-24 age cohort. Gale and Wundersitz's 1980 survey of Port Adelaide indicates an even greater difference in numbers of males. For the 20-29 cohort, their data reveal a male to female ratio of approximately 3 men to 4 women, and in the 30-39 cohort a
Table 3.10 Male to female ratios by age, Aborigines/TSI and All Persons, Adelaide*, 1981. (Australian Bureau of Statistics).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Aborigines/TSI n=3,218</th>
<th>All Persons n=882,520</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-4</td>
<td>87.3</td>
<td>104.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-9</td>
<td>95.6</td>
<td>106.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-14</td>
<td>110.8</td>
<td>105.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>121.3</td>
<td>101.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>101.7</td>
<td>97.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>74.4</td>
<td>95.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>73.6</td>
<td>96.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>69.3</td>
<td>96.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>83.9</td>
<td>96.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-49</td>
<td>76.7</td>
<td>99.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-54</td>
<td>76.5</td>
<td>100.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-59</td>
<td>48.4</td>
<td>97.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-64</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>89.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-69</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>82.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-74</td>
<td>45.4</td>
<td>73.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75+</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>49.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Aborigines/TSI are for Adelaide Major Urban, All Persons are for Adelaide Statistical Division.

ratio of nearly 1 to 2 (1982: 20). They interpret the low numbers of males in these post-19 cohorts in terms of what they describe as the problem of "the missing males". They venture the opinion that the men are not missing but homeless, and

---

12 Gale and Wundersitz (1982:20) collapse the 30-39 and 40-49 cohorts, presumably because the sample size is so small (n = 405 for the total population sample). The estimated ratio I have provided was derived from their breakdown of the sample based on age and sex presented in Table 3.1.
that the 'homeless' men are now, to a large extent, rather loosely attached to Aboriginal homes. They form a somewhat 'floating' population as they move from household to household (Gale and Wundersitz 1982: 27).

They also cite data on marriage patterns which they interpret as further evidence of the displacement of the Aboriginal male. Not only did the Aboriginal population show a lower proportion of individuals living in legal and de facto marriages in 1980 when compared to the marriages reported by the general population of the same area as indicated in the 1976 census (17.4% for the former and 45.6% for the latter), but among those Aboriginal respondents who indicated they were currently living in a stable de facto or marriage relationship, slightly more than half (52.1%) had non-Aboriginal partners. Further, of those reporting marriage and de facto relationships, the majority were women (41 out of 71), and slightly more than half of these women had non-Aboriginal partners (53.7%). Commenting on these statistics, Gale and Wundersitz (1982: 39) write that "the seeming unacceptability of the Aboriginal male as a partner to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women has significantly contributed to his alienation from the household and family".

Finally, Gale and Wundersitz draw upon data concerning family composition which, they argue, provides further evidence of the displaced Aboriginal male. Of the 112 families identified for analysis in their 1980 survey, half were headed by single parents. Of these single parent families, 91.0% were headed by females. They write that:

females thus predominate to quite overwhelming proportions at both the family and household level of analysis. Males show up in a total
population count . . . but are missed out in household studies like those made in 1973, 1980, and 1981 because these did not survey gaols, hospitals, hostels, etc. (Gale and Wundersitz (1982: 72).

At the same time, their data on the makeup of dual headed families (Gale and Wundersitz 1982: 74) indicate that the majority (64.7%, n=33) of 51 dual-headed households included one partner who was not Aboriginal and of these, a greater proportion (63.6%, n=21) included non-Aboriginal males as one of the dual heads than non-Aboriginal females (36.4%, n=12).

Taken at face value, this collection of statistics provides a persuasive image of an Aboriginal community where most males have no real place within the family structure; women tend to head the families and, when men are present in dual headed families, they are more often than not non-Aboriginal. This image, however, is misleading and distorts the reality of family organization among the majority of Aborigines in Adelaide. Though I would not deny that by comparison there are in fact fewer Aboriginal males than females, proportionately fewer marriages and fewer dual headed households among Aborigines than among the general population, and that among Adelaide Aborigines there is a higher incidence of female headed single parent households, I would argue that the differences are greatly exaggerated and misinterpreted.

This exaggeration results from several factors but most significantly from the conscious efforts of many respondents when confronted by census takers, Aboriginal Funded Housing clerks, Social Security staff and assorted
researchers to provide information which is least likely to further threaten their precarious economic position. Rents charged for Aboriginal Funded homes, for example, are based on household income and the number of adults residing in the house, and it is recognized by Aboriginal Funded Housing staff that their own rent structure encourages misreporting of household and family makeup:

The high proportion of single parents and low proportion of families with children over 16 years probably reflects the rules of the welfare payment system and the rent policy, rather than being a real indication of family structures (Braddock and Wanganeen 1980: 21).

At the same time, the scales for pensions and eligibility for supporting parent payments encourages the reporting of female headed single parent households. Given a sample population where over 72% of the dwellings in which Aborigines reside are provided by Aboriginal Funded Housing (Gale and Wundersitz 1982: 55) and where only 16.3% of income is derived from wages with the remainder coming from assorted benefits and pensions (Gale and Wundersitz 1982:108), it is not at all surprising that a demographic survey of the population raises questions about "missing males"; "reporting" males as household members raises the prospect of increased rent and decreased pensions and benefits, a prospect which would have grave economic consequences for families of marginal means. Gale and Wundersitz (1982: 73), however, while noting the possibility of an under-reporting of adult males, conclude nonetheless that "it is clear that in general the Aboriginal population of Adelaide contains a relatively high proportion of multiple-unit households and single parent families, with most of the latter headed by single females".
The reported low incidence of marriage and de facto relationships can also be explained, I would argue, by purposeful under-reporting on the part of respondents. As for the displacement of Aboriginal males by non-Aboriginal marriage and de facto partners, I would suggest that much of this displacement is illusory. Given the increased opportunities and incidence of employment among non-Aboriginal males and their consequent increased economic security, one would predict that for families headed by non-Aboriginal males there would be far less concern over the economic effect of identifying the number and relationship of household members. Again, there is a very real disincentive in reporting male Aboriginal marriage and de facto partners and an even greater disincentive to report those partners as residents of households.

Contrary to Gale and Wundersitz, I would argue that there are not substantial numbers of "missing" Aboriginal males in Adelaide. They are neither "displaced" nor do they form a "floating" population, which is only "loosely attached". I believe it is misleading to interpret low numbers of reported young adult males as "missing" or "floating". I think, instead, that many of these men were resident in the homes surveyed but not reported as such for the very reasons suggested above. Fluctuations in household composition are not nearly so simple as Gale and Wundersitz suggest; few of these "missing males" are homeless transients, shifting from one home to another as welcomes expire.

Rather, my observations of Aboriginal households indicate that many Aboriginal men are vital parts of households and families -- whether noted on the survey sheets of researchers and bureaucrats or not -- and the wider social structure. Though an objective assessment is practically impossible for the
reasons mentioned above, I believe that differential masculinity ratios and reported patterns of marriage and household composition are not by themselves sufficient to explain the actual structure of Aboriginal families.

Bound together by a common experience of history and a limited set of choices, Aboriginal people in Adelaide today form a group which appears in many ways homogeneous. For most, unemployment is high and income is derived largely from public pensions and unemployment benefits. When employment is available it is restricted to a limited set of choices and is more often than not of short duration. Of those jobs available, almost all are unskilled or semi-skilled; in comparison skilled or professional level positions are practically nonexistent. For most Aboriginal people affordable housing is scarce, houses are crowded and options are few. While many say they prefer to live close to kin in areas with other Aboriginal people, in fact their choices are severely circumscribed should they desire other arrangements.

For a small portion of Aboriginal people in Adelaide, however, life is different. Some bounce back and forth between jails and the street, sometimes staying briefly with friends or relatives, other times living on the street. Some gain qualifications as teachers and Aboriginal community workers and leave the community. Others make a career of education, getting by on a combination of Aboriginal study grants and pensions, taking "practical" courses in hairdressing, landscaping, and other vocational areas; if they are fortunate they may succeed in arranging a placement in which they can employ their skills, but too often these placements are subsidized and run out when the government subsidies
expire. Some find steady employment with Aboriginal organizations or
government agencies such as the Commonwealth Department for Aboriginal
Affairs, the State Department for Community Welfare, the Aboriginal Health
Organization, the Aboriginal Sobriety Group, and the like. For many of these
individuals pressure in these positions is intense (their clients tend to be their
friends and kin) and their tasks are often grim, applying triage to fractured lives
in the midst of social distress.

At the same time, increasing numbers of Aborigines are coming to Adelaide
from other states. Many come as students, some transfer from government
offices and agencies in other states, and others come to the city actively seeking
work. As strangers to the community, many lack the necessary social capital of
long-term residents and find themselves outside the support network provided
by kinship. For many of these the transition is extremely difficult. Over time
some of these begin to blend in. Among these, some assume well paying jobs
and a few gain significant political influence over local resources and their
distribution. These "interstaters" and their local counterparts become brokers
between the local community and government bureaucrats and bureaucracies
(cf Howard 1981). Their role and position, as I will show, is critical to
understanding Aboriginal ideology in Adelaide today.

Underpinning all of these factors is the pervasive experience of prejudice and
discrimination among Aboriginal people in Adelaide; very few Aborigines view
their life styles and life choices as free and beyond the touch of racism. While
there are some for whom racism provides an excuse for their own failures, it is
for all a phenomenon which colors and shapes every facet of daily experience.

In this chapter I have sketched some of the key dimensions of the socio-economic context of day-to-day life for Aboriginal people in Adelaide today. And it is in the context of these material conditions that one must interpret the subjective experience of these people. In the next chapter I will sketch the ideational system Aboriginal people in Adelaide refer to as the Blackfella Way.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE BLACKFELLA WAY

While diversity, divergence and contradiction are social facts of life for Adelaide Aborigines, it is possible to identify and describe a coherent set of notions which represents a common store of knowledge about the world in which they reside. This set of notions is manifest in something Aboriginal people in Adelaide often refer to as the Blackfella Way.

The Blackfella Way provides an ideational frame for interpreting and engaging in social action. It is an historical, cognitive and social construction which synthesizes the tone, texture, style, and mood of life for Aborigines in Adelaide today and provides a conceptual and practical design through which individuals formulate, think about and act in the social and physical world. Inherent in it are specific sets of ideas and assumptions regarding the nature of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal society, the relation between these two systems, and the nature of individual identity. The Blackfella Way provides a framework for interpreting what is, what can and what should be and a reference for making choices concerning possible courses of action. In this sense, the Blackfella Way is a complex construction which shapes and is shaped by history, practice and meaning. It is, as I will show, sometimes unconsciously assumed, at other times carefully conceived and invoked, and at still other
times contested, disputed, inverted or denied.

Even when contested or denied, the vast majority of Aboriginal people in Adelaide are capable of describing the key features of the Blackfella Way, though they may not be able to fully and exhaustively articulate all of its dimensions. Further, like members of all social groups, Aboriginal people in Adelaide are skilled and knowledgeable actors and many are able to grasp, though sometimes in only a partial and incomplete way, the nature of their position within both the Aboriginal and wider societies and the significance of the Blackfella Way in the routine and drama of their everyday lives. Though a few Aboriginal people deny that a Blackfella Way exists, even those who deny it can articulate many of its features, and all live their lives in a social world enabled and constrained by this system.

The goal of this chapter is to tease apart the strands of the Blackfella Way, relying largely on the words and interpretations of Aboriginal people to illustrate what I perceive to be the structure and features of this system. In the chapter which follows I will examine the factors which shape this particular configuration. The Blackfella Way integrates two distinct yet inseparable dimensions: one of essence, and a second of style. Of these two dimensions, the first reflects what Aborigines in Adelaide perceive to be primary and basic about themselves and their culture. The second, observable in the realm of practice, is seen to spring from and is given impetus by the first. The following two comments from Aborigines in Adelaide touch on these two dimensions. The first, by a middle-aged man, highlights the first dimension of essence, the
second, by a middle-aged woman touches on the dimension of style:

The Blackfella Way is the Aboriginal way. It’s a spiritual way, not a material way. It’s not just something you find here in Adelaide, but something that’s common to Aborigines all over. It’s in our blood. Forever. It’s like the Rules, our Law.

The difference between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people? I’ll tell you what the difference is! You Whitefellas see somebody lying on the street you just walk around him, most often you walk right on top of him! Us Blackfellas can’t do that. We see somebody on the street we’ve gotta stop and help him. We can’t just walk away, we’ve gotta stop. It’s our way, it’s in our blood. We’re different that way.

The Dimension of Essence

The key to the dimension of essence is spirituality, and spirituality, Aboriginal people say, is closely linked with blood. This linkage of blood and spirit is largely metaphorical, but is said by Aboriginal people to be of fundamental importance and to be expressed in terms of physical and psychological strength, resilience, and continuity.

Aboriginal people in Adelaide often say that they are not "merely" different from non-Aboriginal people, but fundamentally and essentially so. At the heart of this difference is what Aboriginal people describe as a spiritual relationship to the world, passed through generations according to a process which might be described as a kind of spiritual determinism. "Spirit," one man said, "is passed from parent to child in the blood".

The constitution of this spirituality is complex, but is said by Aboriginal people to be manifested in a range of qualities and characteristics including a special
sensitivity to the environment, keen awareness of the needs of other Aboriginal people, a sense of responsibility to help in meeting those needs, and a wide range of metaphysical potentialities and capabilities which are said to be beyond the understandings of non-Aboriginal people. It is said that this spirituality is shared by all Aboriginal people, and while urban people may more easily lose touch with their spiritual nature than more traditionally-oriented people in remote areas, that basic spirituality itself can never be lost.

As noted above, inherent in this view is the notion that Aboriginal spirituality, whether in remote, more traditionally-oriented or urban communities, is transmitted from parent to child. This concept of the passage of spirituality from parent to child portrays the perception of a close association of blood with spirit; blood is seen to be both avenue and vehicle for the transmission of Aboriginal spirituality and thus forms the foundation of Aboriginal identity for succeeding generations. While it is possible to find Aborigines in Adelaide who verbalize the nature of identity in precisely these terms, the significance and relationship of blood and spirituality are revealed in other ways as well. Most significantly the intertwining of blood and spirit are apparent in the metaphorical meanings attached to everyday discussions of blood and descent.

1 It is significant that the physical expression of that identity is said to be based on blood, a characteristic which is not visibly expressed in the way that skin color, for example, might be (Schwab 1988). This is an important point to which I shall return.

2 While the symbolic linkage of blood and descent appears to be widespread and well documented (e.g. Schneider 1968 and 1972), in the case of Aboriginal people in Adelaide, this concept is partly structured in the specific historical and political tension between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultural systems, a point I will explore later.
Notions of identity, descent, blood and spirit are often invoked in the interpretation of the relations between and contrasts of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. "Black blood", for example, is often said to be stronger than "white blood". By this is meant, in part, that all those characteristics in some way associated (metaphorically again) with blood, such as vitality, stamina and "life force", are even more pronounced among Aboriginal people. Thus, Aboriginal people often say they have greater physical capacity for work and play than Europeans. For example, in Adelaide nearly all of the South Australian Football League clubs have Aboriginal players, but there has never been a team which competed on the professional level composed entirely of Aboriginal players. If such a team was formed, Aboriginal people often say, they would be unbeatable. The reason, said one well known Aboriginal football player, is that Aboriginal players are quicker, more agile and better able to "see" the game in terms of the best moves. This "natural advantage", he said, was a direct consequence of the "strength of black blood", which results in the superior physical and mental capabilities not only of Aboriginal athletes but of all Aboriginal people.

The spiritual aspect of Aboriginal blood is said to be recognizable to other Aborigines. On one occasion a small group of Aboriginal people was discussing an episode of the television series, Women of the Sun, which had been broadcast in Adelaide a few nights before. The episode concerned a girl whose mother was Aboriginal and whose father was of European descent.

---

3 First written as a television "mini-series", Women of the Sun was later published as a novel (Maris and Borg 1985).
After her birth, the child was given up for adoption by her Aboriginal mother and raised by the father and his non-Aboriginal wife. The child had been told that she was adopted and that her parents were Tahitian. The storyline involved the mother's re-entry into the daughter's life and the girl's subsequent confusion and adjustment to her "real" identity. At one point in the story, before the Aboriginal mother reveals her identity to her daughter, another Aboriginal woman meets the girl and, recognizing "something" in her, asks her if she is Aboriginal. She replies that she is Tahitian, but the Aboriginal woman comes away from the encounter convinced that the girl is Aboriginal.

When I raised the question of whether or not one Aboriginal person can recognize another, even if the second is unknown to him or her, the consensus among the group was that, yes, it is not only possible but, in fact, happens all the time. When I asked how that recognition works, there was an outburst of laughter when one person remarked that "the black skin gives them away every time". I then asked how an Aboriginal person whose skin is not black is recognized. This question drew a variety of responses all describing physical characteristics which are "Aboriginal", ranging from shape of nose to style of walk. Referring to the *Women of the Sun* series I asked how the Aboriginal woman might have known that the young woman was Aboriginal when no one else had ever recognized who she was on the basis of her physical features:

"That's easy," replied one man. "She'd see it in her eyes."

"See what?" I asked.

"I don't know, a kind of sparkle," he said.

"What do you mean, a sparkle?" I asked.
"I don't know how to describe it," he continued. "There's just something there. A person may be trying to hide it or may not even know they're Aboriginal, but other Aboriginal people can see it straightaway. Whitefellas can't see it but we can."

"It happens", he continued, gesturing toward the window. "I've seen people walking by right out here in the mall who I knew were Aboriginal but who were trying to hide it. You know, keeping their head down low, trying not to look at anybody. Aboriginal people usually acknowledge each other if only with a glance, even if they've never met. It's plain as day, we can't help but see each other.

But you do see people sometimes who obviously don't know who they are, like the girl in the film. Poor buggers haven't a clue. But that sparkle's there, even if they only have an ounce of Aboriginal blood, it's there."

That sparkle, said to be recognizable to Aboriginal people but not to others, is one manifestation of what some Aboriginal people in Adelaide have described as spirituality. Significantly, in this conversation it was associated with Aboriginal blood, which aligns with many other comments I heard which suggest the connection between blood and spirit. Also reflected in this conversation, and frequently articulated by Aborigines in Adelaide, is the important notion that "the sparkle" of spirituality is inherited, unalterable, and undeniable.

Blood and spirit are often cited by Aborigines in Adelaide as the most basic -- and still vital -- link among Aboriginal people, not only among those in Adelaide but also between those in Adelaide and in other parts of Australia as well. Blood and spirit are cited as fundamental to the interconnection of all Aboriginal people. Even where such connections are not so explicitly verbalized, their significance is highlighted in the pervasive perception by
Aborigines of the basic elements of an Aboriginal culture which is shared by Adelaide people with Aboriginal groups throughout the country. This is not to suggest that Adelaide Aborigines do not recognize important differences between themselves and Aborigines living, for example, in the far North, or even among the different groups of Aboriginal people within Adelaide; they have always recognized those important differences. However, for most Aboriginal people in Adelaide, identity is seen to be qualitative and undiluted, and the basis for that perception lies in the belief that Aboriginal identity is both physical and spiritual.

Where blood and spirit lie at the base of what many view as an age-old bond of all Aboriginal people, the lack of that bond between Aborigines and Europeans is perceived to underlie and explain the often seemingly irreconcilable differences between the two. Thus, they are also basic to the differentiation of Aboriginal from non-Aboriginal people.

Blood and spirit are spoken of as having an almost timeless depth, imparting what many Aborigines perceive as a mystical quality of Aboriginal personal and cultural identity. In the sense that blood and spirit are seen to be matters of essence, they are conceived of as especially powerful and meaningful, and as qualities of essence they are beyond human manipulation. This is particularly important, for where other aspects of identity may be flexible and malleable, blood and spirit are immutable. A woman, long active in local Aboriginal politics and widely recognized by other members of the community to have had long experience with and keen understanding of Europeans commented on the
immutability of "spirit":

Aboriginality is spirituality. Aboriginal people are spiritual people, not like Whitefellas. Whitefellas climb that ladder of success and when they do they lose their spirit. Blackfellas won't climb that ladder, won't leave our spirit behind. It's awful dear, that climb, and what do you get for it? Big car, big house, no soul.

The affinity of Aboriginal people to one another is often extended to include an affinity of Aborigines with nature and the land. These connections between blood, spirit and land were drawn by an Aboriginal man who had lived most of his life in Adelaide. He recounted a trip to a Pitjantjatjara community:

I felt right at home with those people. Lots of those fellas from the College (the Aboriginal Community College in Adelaide) were real nervous, worried that those tribal fellas wouldn't accept 'em. But it wasn't like that at all. They were real good to us, friendly and that. I felt so at home there.

I used to have trouble sleeping, right? Well some of the fellas from the college stayed up all night, worried that those old fellas were going to grab 'em and put 'em through the rules. Not me though, I slept like a baby, first time in years. I felt real peaceful, felt at home. I could just feel it, right? I was with my own people, not the same tribe, but the same blood.

I really felt close to the land up there. All *nuw3as* got that special way with their own country, but even those of us whose country got taken away long ago can still feel that link. A Blackfella's country's in his blood, you know? And I could feel it more than ever up there. And not just the land, right? The plants, birds, kangaroos, everything is close to Blackfellas. All people are from the earth, right? It's just that Blackfellas haven't forgotten that, haven't let themselves stop feelin' that.

One old fella was tellin' us about kangaroos talkin' to him. Same as what some of the old fellas at Point Pearce used to talk about when I was a lad. We're all close to our country that way, we don't have any choice. We belong to the country, the country.

---

4 This perceived affinity with the land has become a powerful symbol in the wider struggle for Aboriginal land rights, a struggle which Aborigines in Adelaide view to be of critical interest to all Aboriginal people, not just those in remote, traditionally-oriented communities.
doesn't belong to us.

This matrix of blood, spirit and land forms a powerful bond among Aborigines in Adelaide. Said another man:

Our country's our spirit, mate. You might take our country away but you can't steal our spirit. Like they say, you can take the *nunga* out of the country but you can't take the country out of the *nunga*.

Another attribute of the Blackfella Way which appears to be concerned with the essence and state of the Aboriginal self, is a strong will; Aboriginal people, it is often said, can do anything they set their minds to. An elder of the *Narrunga* people sees major changes ahead as a result:

We've got that drive, really. Blackfellas have got it in them, you know, strength and drive to overcome the hard times. Like in the early days those old ones had to have that will to live, that drive to survive. Even before the whiteman came, times could be hard, especially for those Blackfellas up north, around Oodnadatta, Yalata. All that country up there's real hard. People had to have strength to survive. Then after the whiteman came and people were being shot and poisoned and driven away from their homes and onto the reserves, they survived, we survived. And today, here we are, after 200 years we've hung on because of that strength, that drive. We're still *Aboriginal*.

We're not done yet. Just look at where Aboriginal people are going, and look close. Not at the drunks in the Victoria Square or out in Glenelg, but look at the Blackfellas making lives for themselves and their kids. Look at the young people standing up and taking the lead. Aboriginal people can do it all. We're not waiting to be given a chance anymore, we've tried that. Now we're making our own chances. Whitefellas had better watch out. Soon we'll be taking those top paying jobs, not because the government says we should but because we're the best ones for the job. We've been our own worst enemy for years. Now I know a lot of *nungas* would disagree with me on that, but I reckon it's true. We let Whitefellas tell us we were doormats and we started to believe it for a time. We almost forgot about who we are, about that strength hidden inside. But now more and more of us are drawing on that strength and we're standing up. We're remembering who we really are and we're acting like who
we really are."

Discussions of visitations from ghosts, "signs" from spirits and the natural world, and Aboriginal spirituality are common among Aborigines in Adelaide. While most Aborigines do not believe such phenomenon are unique to the world of Aborigines, they see themselves as predisposed to notice them while white people tend to ignore them. These predispositions, it is commonly said, are manifest for most Aborigines in a powerful sense of intuition and a highly developed sensitivity among kin. A young woman recounted receiving a sign at her Aunt's death:

I was in hospital having baby and Auntie was in the intensive care, really crook, right? I knew she was bad but Mum and Uncle hadn't told me how bad. I'd been really crook all day and so I didn't walk over to see her that day but mum told me I should go see her in the morning. I could tell she must have been getting worse.

I was really cold all night and couldn't get warm. The Sister kept piling blankets on but I just couldn't seem to warm up and she was getting worried after the fifth blanket. About one in the morning I got up to go to the toilet. I got in there, you know, when all of a sudden there was this big gust of cold wind, icy cold, blew my hair and all. Now, all the windows were closed, right? I know that 'cause I looked to see since it was such a shock. And the toilet was warm when I first walked in. I looked at my watch and it was just after one. I was really scared then and went back to bed. I didn't really know it was a sign then but I was really upset. You know, couldn't sleep at all, and was so cold all the rest of the night.

Well, in the morning I walked over to intensive care to see Auntie first thing 'cause of what Mum said. I just walked up to her bed, right? And the bed was all made up. I thought maybe she'd gone home but then I saw her slippers still on the floor, kind of under the bed. The Sister came up and had this funny look on her face. I said 'where's Auntie?' The Sister took my arm and walked me over to the chair and says 'sit down, dear,' and I knew. 'Your Auntie passed away during the night,' she said.
I found out later that it was just after one when she went, and then I knew straight away I'd had the sign. Nobody was surprised that I'd had it. They all said Auntie and I had been so close, and she was probably checking that me and baby was alright."

Aboriginal people often say that they also have a high level of "natural" intelligence or common sense, made apparent in a number of ways. An Aboriginal man studying at the Aboriginal Task Force said:

Aboriginal people are much smarter than Whites. Not in formal education, necessarily, though that’s certainly not far off, but in common sense. We’ve got human wisdom, we know the difference between right and wrong. How intelligent are a group of people who are so greedy that they let half starve while the other half has more than they could ever need? That makes no sense at all. It’s just bloody stupid and everyone can see that. Aboriginal people just can’t help but look after each other. It’s a way of life for us. We’ve grown up with caring all around us, and it’s something we learn from the start. There’s nothing magical about it, it’s just common sense, something Whites don’t seem to have much of anymore.

A similar point is made by an Aboriginal prisoner awaiting trial in Yatala Labour Prison:

I reckon nungas are heaps smarter than you garinks (Europeans). You mob got teachers, books, schools, universities and that, but you don’t got no natural intelligence. Garinks know that nungas are smarter so you work hard to see that we’re kept in our place, right? Just look around you at these fellas (a group of Aboriginal prisoners in Yatala Labour Prison). Some of these fellas are crims but most don’t belong here, they’re only here 'cause they're nungas, here 'cause garinks are scared of em. It's like a conspiracy, right? Keep the nungas in gaol and no worries, right? Garinks know that given a chance nungas gonna be the ones in control. That's 'cause nungas got more intelligence. Nungas got that over the Whitefellas. Whitefellas got control for now, but nungas will rise up, nungas will be the ones drivin' them big flash cars and that. It's gonna happen some day 'cause nungas are just naturally smarter than the garinks, more clever like.
A middle-aged woman reflects on her personal experience as an Aboriginal child in a white school and describes how cultural differences combined with prejudice to mask Aboriginal intelligence from whites:

White teachers think all Black kids are stupid. I know the teachers thought I was. Teachers think that 'cause a kid's quiet and shy he's got nothin' in here (pointing to her head), but that just shows how white teachers completely misunderstand the Blackfella way of doing things. Aboriginal people are smarter than Whites, but we don't show it off like Whites, especially those kids in school. I reckon it's just that so many Aboriginal people were killed off by the White man that only those that were really clever survived. So, we got the smartest ones today, but also the ones who are ashamed to let it show in front of the White man. Aboriginal people have learned that Whites don't like cheeky blacks and that's what a clever Blackfella has always been to the whites. In the old days that was enough to get you killed and people learned to be real careful in showing the whiteman too much. Better he thinks you're stupid, 'cause if he knows you're smart he'll try to destroy you.

As I was sayin', it's not easy for a Black kid to show he's smart in the same way that a white kid does. When the white teacher asks a Black kid a question he usually shrugs and says 'I don't know' 'cause he feels ashamed. The teacher and all the other white kids think he's thick and that makes him even more ashamed. Still, most Black kids are really very smart. They've been hurt by being forced into schools with Whitefellas who don't understand our ways and lots of those kids never will be a success in the white sense of the word. That's why a nunga school with nunga teachers is so important. When we get nunga schools and nunga teachers who understand how to cultivate those little Black minds there'll be no stopping us. We'll be leavin' the White man far behind. I reckon big changes are comin'.

While not exhaustive of insights into the nature of Aboriginal identity, essence or the Blackfella Way, these perceptions and conceptions are representative of widely held views concerning the essential basis of that identity. The majority of Aboriginal people in Adelaide share the view that all Aboriginal people are bound together in both a physical and spiritual sense, that they share a special
affinity with one another and the land, that they retain dramatic intuitive abilities, and that they share a powerful natural intelligence. Even where notions of spiritual linkage are denied by some, most recognize that Aboriginal people are, as one woman stated,

held together in some way. Not spiritually. I don't believe that. But maybe through history, through death and destruction at the hands of the white man.

This perception of history as portrayed in this and some of the earlier comments highlight the critical role of history in the construction and representation of Aboriginal identity.5

The Dimension of Style

The second dimension of the Blackfella Way relates to conceptions of style. This dimension is an indirect reflection, a refraction of the dimension of essence.6 Whereas the features of essence are perceived to be essential, given and immutable, style is manifest in the everyday behavior, manner and actions of individual actors. While style is grounded in essence, it is less focused and the possibility of variation is more likely. In this way essence may be conceived

5 It is important to note that much of what comprises the domain of essence in the Blackfella Way is in polar opposition to Aboriginal perceptions and beliefs concerning the essence of non-Aboriginal and particularly European society, thus it might be tempting to dismiss the comments presented here as merely examples of politically inspired rhetoric, of comments made to an intended end. While I do not deny that this sometimes occurred (indeed, some of the material seems to quite obviously suggest this interpretation), most of these comments represent sentiments widely shared throughout the Adelaide Aboriginal community. That many of these comments have political implications raises important questions about the operation of the role of the Blackfella way in daily life. These are questions which will be addressed in depth in the next chapter.

6 The nature of this refraction is itself an important issue which will be addressed in the next chapter. As I will argue, social action is a complex phenomenon which shapes and is shaped by structural factors.
to be manifest in style only indirectly, refracted through a particular set of personal, social and moral potentialities. Though not conceived of by Aborigines as fundamental, given and immutable in exactly the same way that essence is, neither is style seen to be strictly learned. The behaviors, manner and action of individuals are seen to be malleable; they are akin to social and psychological dispositions or potentialities, derived from the dimension of essence, yet subject to some degree of molding and shaping through the processes of maturation and experience, or to disruption and distortion through contact and conflict with the dominant society. Among the most pervasive features which comprise Aboriginal style are emphasis on sociality in terms of a focus on social over material concerns, attention to the concept of family, and a set of personal, social and orientations which manifest in a particularly Aboriginal disposition.

Sociality

An emphasis on social rather than material security is one of the most prominent features of the Blackfella Way. Unlike non-Aborigines, members of the Aboriginal community, it is often said, have chosen to focus their attention on the cultivation of social relationships and have ignored the drive for material gain which dominates the lives of non-Aboriginal people.

Reflecting on this contrast, one woman explained the costs of materialism:

Proper Blackfellas don't worry about "things", they worry about each other. Those who are climbing the ladder to swimming

---

7 The degree to which Aboriginal people actually have control over access to material gain is examined in detail in the next chapter.
pools, big houses and big cars have lost their culture. Aboriginal culture is built on caring, sharing and loving. You can't care, share and love and climb that ladder too. Just wanting things changes you. Aboriginal people gave things away to get that great spirit all you Whitefellas are after. You can't put "things" before people and get that spirit, and a lot of Blackfellas have forgotten that now.

Other Aboriginal people see the contrast in simpler terms and perhaps with some degree of resignation. One middle-aged man, once active in local Aboriginal organizations but now on a disability pension, said:

We live pretty simple here, like typical Blackfellas you might say. Don't have no flash house or nothin'. We've had hard times but I guess that's to be expected, you know? Some Blackfellas got them flash houses and I say good on 'em, but we never worried about that too much, we been comfortable here. All these kids would probably tear it up anyway. But I think you'd find most Blackfellas don't worry about that too much.

The emphasis on caring, sharing and reciprocity emerges repeatedly in the way in which Aboriginal people define both themselves and, by contrast, non-Aboriginal people. The importance of the concept of caring and sharing is apparent in the way in which the concept of reciprocity is continually invoked, expected and acted out in day-to-day life. An older man talked about the obligation of sharing among Aboriginal people:

Sharing's just a way of life for Aboriginal people. Probably in our genes or something. Might be left over from the old days when we was hunters and that. I don't know, maybe it's 'cause all Aboriginal people know what it's like to be hungry. We just can't turn someone away who says he's hungry. My word, we all know what it's like to really be needing a feed. I guess white people have a hard time understanding that one.

One of the senior women in the community discussed the concept of caring and sharing in the context of her own life:
We're just on the pension now, and me and Dad don't have a lot left at the end of the week. Still, we'd never turn somebody away who asked for help. We'd go short before we'd do that. Now Dad's not Aboriginal like me but you wouldn't find a better man. He understands about how Aboriginal people have got to help each other and he doesn't mind a bit. You see, it always comes back to you, 'whatever ye shall sow, so shall ye reap'. That about sums it up now, don't you think? You see, we understand that, we live that. I know that if Dad and me are ever in strife somebody will lend us a hand because we've lent our hands lots of times. It's a bit like banking in reverse, you know, a bit like investing in people instead of banks; yeah, that's it. And you can live off those investments when times are tough.

Now I've always tried to live that Blackfella Way, sharing, looking after my own people. I've been like a stray dog, here, there and everywhere, but I've never felt there was nowhere to go, I never worried that I was going to starve or live in the gutter. I always had my people.

Now I hate to say it but it's different with white people. White people don't really care about people, even the Christian ones. I've been on this earth a long time now and I've seen it all. White people have no religion except the almighty dollar. 'You're Jesus' little lamb,' they say. Well you feed a lamb and look after him, you don't kick him and abuse him! These Christians come around here all the time. 'Yes, how are you and Dad, dear?' 'How are you feeling today?' 'We'll say a prayer for you, luv'. Oh well, they're not all bad, but there aren't many good ones either. Some are absolute demons, they want you to be a real doormat.

Now I'm not saying Aboriginal people are perfect, not at all. We've got more than our share of trouble and I don't think the future of Aboriginal people is bright. But we've always looked after each other, always shared what little we've got. I reckon if we lose everything else, and it may just come to that, if we can hang on to that then all's not lost.

Another woman comments that sharing is something which is learned:

Sharing is something we teach our kids, they don't just automatically want to do it, no kid does. But it's part of our way. Blackfellas have always had to share since there's never been enough to go round. 'The other day my youngest boy, Timmy, came running out of the bedroom screaming 'John,' that's his older brother, 'where are my new jeans?' Well, John told Timmy that he saw his uncle Peter wearing new jeans that morning. Timmy comes cryin' to me then sayin', 'Mum, did Peter pathen (a
The Family

One aspect of a wider stress on the value of people and human relationships over material concerns is an emphasis on family and the rights and responsibilities of family to one another. In fact, the social world for most Aboriginal people is primarily a world of kin, and daily life is often a cycle of interaction with one's closest kin.\(^8\) Even for those active outside this close network, the family or at least the symbolic reference point "the family", exerts a powerful influence on daily life. The importance of the family is expressed by a young man:

> When a nunga meets another nunga for the first time, his first question is always 'who's your people?' Sometimes he might ask 'where ya from?' or 'where's your country?' but what he's really after is that other fella's people. It's the same that way all over. Nungas think in terms of family, always trying to make some connection, and most times they do. This is a bloody big country, Australia, but you'd be amazed at how often you meet another

---

\(^8\) This is a point which has been discussed by anthropologists for years and it is certainly one of the most obvious characteristics of Aboriginal communities both in remote and urban settings. Barwick's (1962) research among Aborigines in Melbourne was the first careful examination of the importance of kinship among Aborigines in an urban center. For a recent discussion of the significance of family for Aborigines in an urban setting see Birdsall (1988).
A middle-aged man, taken from his family as a boy, spoke of the loss of his family:

I grew up in a boys' home here in Adelaide: St. Francis House. I was taken from my people by the welfare in Alice Springs because I was light-skinned, and it's taken me years to understand who I am. It's crippled me for life, being taken away from my family. There's no worse thing you can do to a Blackfella. Blackfellas will always tell you that family's everything, that family is what has held us together. But what about those of us torn away from our people as children? It's bloody awful. Sure, people here accept me as Aboriginal but I'm like a boat adrift without my own family. Got no anchor.

A middle-aged woman describes the effect of her son's estrangement from her:

It's the worst thing a nunga can do, turning away from his own. My boy, young Tommy, he won't have anything to do with us now. Gone Christian and won't have us, too good for us now. He says he won't bring the grandchildren round here 'cause there's too much drinkin' and swearin'. Now I ask you, is that right? Aren't Christians supposed to accept and not judge? Can you imagine? He's hurt me badly, he has. Not allowing me to see my own grandchildren. How can a nunga do that? And what about those kids, how can you raise children without their cousins and aunties and uncles? It goes against nature. What kind of person will they grow up to be? It just tears my heart, my own flesh and blood.

Much of the family orientation of Aboriginal people involves a responsibility to and for one's family. One woman described this responsibility:

It's our way to look after family. Take my two nephews there. Whenever they come down from Whyalla they stop here with me. Now, I don't charge them to stay here but I know that they will help out as much as they can. Just last night I came home and found the house all tidied up and then they came home later with two big bags of food from the shops. I didn't ask them to do that but they just know how to behave properly.
Same way with my niece Sherry's little fella, if she's got netball and wants to go out after with the other girls, she knows that I'll take him for the night. Most important, he won't be with strangers and she knows he'll be safe. Now she wouldn't think of leaving him with a stranger, that's what family's for.

My dear old brother Tommy, he was quite a piss pot (heavy drinker) in his younger days, poor old dear. He's been in and out of hospital and needs a lot of attention. Now, he could go into one of those homes, I suppose, but me and my sisters wouldn't hear of it. He stays with my sister over in Woodville and when he wants a change he stops here with me and the kids for awhile. Aboriginal people look after their own, couldn't be otherwise.

A similar point was made by a young woman who, as part of her practical training in social work, did a placement in a nursing home in Adelaide:

I got the shock of my life when I first started working there, true. I just couldn't believe it. All these old people alone and forgotten just counting the days till they die. It just breaks my heart. Nungas look after their old people, keep them at home and look after them. Not like Gunias (whites). Nungas would never send their old people away to be alone to die, even if they were a bother. It's just not our way. Nungas have to look after each other, babies, old people, whatever.

Disposition

The Blackfella Way also incorporates a particular personal, social and moral disposition which is considered by Aborigines to be normal and natural for them. Grounded in the components of essence, these features are played out in a unique disposition. Key elements of this Aboriginal disposition cluster in a set of features incorporating demeanor, morality, cultural stoicism, and leadership.

Demeanor. Much of what can be identified as a unique Aboriginal style results from a cultural process whereby symbols are created, appropriated and
revitalized. Through the cultural raw materials and tools of language, the body and dramatic forms, Aborigines produce a unique and recognizable "nunga style". Speaking "the lingo", walking the walk, and recognizing the images provide a sense of meaning, participation and security for Aboriginal people in Adelaide. A young man originally from Point McLeay talked about nunga language and demeanor:

I don't really know if there's a Blackfella Way or not but I do know there's a big difference in the way a nunga goes compared to gunias. For example, gunias always worrying about appearances like, but that's the last thing's going to worry a nunga. Nungas are relaxed, informal like. We don't worry so much about how a fella looks or how pretty he talks, we're more worried about what he's saying. Like for example, nungas don't like to have to speak for other nungas, makes them real uncomfortable. That's not to say you won't find nungas claiming to speak for other nungas, but most times a fella who claims to speak for the rest is foolin' himself. That's just not on, not the way we operate.

And clothes and that too. Yellow, red and black. Even the lingo, like we've still got our own language. Like if I say 'nucken that kourny's boogadies,' that's our way to say 'look at that fella's shoes'. We still got our language, other nungas in Melbourne and Sydney haven't got any language left. Not many of the young

9 Dick Hebdige's book, Subculture: The Meaning of Style (1979), provides one of the best analyses of the concept of style. Drawing on the insights and theories of Barthes, Althusser, Marx and Gramsci, Hebdige examines of the evolution of youth subcultures in post-war Britain, focusing on clothing, music, grooming, and the like.

10 Willis (1990: 21) makes a similar point in his powerful and penetrating analysis of the culture of contemporary British youth when he refers to "grounded aesthetics".

11 There is a great deal of interest among Ngarrindjeri people in and around Adelaide in revitalizing the Ngarrindjeri language. Several individuals from Point McLeay are involved in the project, but according to some of these people, there are only a handful of old people left who have anything close to a full understanding of the language, and the most knowledgeable of these are unwilling to allow their knowledge to be taken. According to linguist Brian Kirke (personal communication), who has assisted the group with the project, Ngarrindjeri speakers today speak a version of Ngarrindjeri which involves the placement of Ngarrindjeri words in sentences constructed according to English syntax rules. Thus, individuals who claim to speak Ngarrindjeri today speak a version which, in view of linguistic evidence collected in the last century, is very different from the version spoken at the time of the arrival of the first Europeans.
ones know all the language nowadays but the old people still know it. And even those who don’t know it all know a little ‘cause they hear it all the time.

It’s other things too, nungas are always a bit shy, soft spoken, at least when we’re not with our own people, we got respect for the old people too. And jokin’, nungas really got the sense of humor, always laughin’ and jokin’, muckin’ around all the time. Nungas are funny that way, always jokin’, most the time makin’ fun of ourselves.

Aboriginal style is often framed in terms of cultural expression. Not only do the Aboriginal colors -- red, yellow and black -- provide an emblem of Aboriginality, but particular styles of music provide both solace and anthem. One young man described Aboriginal style in particular reference to the power of music:

*nungas* got that special way about em, right? It’s in our talk and in our walk, in the way we live. Take music, nungas got to have country music, it’s got to be country. Or reggae, sometimes. But country music speaks to us. It is us, the pain, the suffering, ‘somebody done somebody wrong songs’, right? You know, you been to nunga parties. Somebody always gets out a guitar and the singin’ starts. Never happy songs but always the sad, sorry ones. Gets people, you know? Fellas be singin’ and tears comin’ down. Never fails, true, always end up cryin’.

It’s commonly said by Aborigines that they are comfortable with and not afraid to express their emotions, that Aboriginal people are essentially emotional people. In the words of one Aboriginal man:

*Nungas* run hot, you might say. We’re an emotional race. Now, I don’t mean that in any bad way. I reckon that’s healthy, that’s how people are supposed to be. We don’t bury our anger or our sadness like Whitefellas do, and when we’re happy we’re not afraid to show it. Whitefellas are funny that way. I’m not saying you, mind you, but Whitefellas as a race. They gotta be in control, like. Control of their money, control of their kids, control of nungas, control over their feelings.
A Whitefella can smile and say 'G'day,' and 'how ya goin,' and you can see in his eyes that he thinks you're dirt. Whitefellas act polite all day, always in control, right, then they go home, close the door and give the wife a good bashing. Nungas aren't like that at all. If a nunga's angry with another nunga he won't hide it and say 'have a nice day'. Most likely he'll lit right into him, 'who do you think you are you Black so and so,' and he may give 'em a good hiding right then and there.

Same like when nungas are sad. We don't worry about how we look to somebody else. We go ahead and cry or, when we're happy, we laugh. Whitefellas are too busy thinking about what that other fella really means. I guess that makes some sense since Whitefellas never talk straight anyway. Not with nungas though. Nungas say what they mean.

Now all this looks pretty strange to a Whitefella. Looks like nungas are pretty wild, always yellin', cryin' and laughin'. Still, I reckon that's why we're still here. We've let ourselves laugh and let ourselves scream and that's the only way we've been able to survive. I'm not saying nungas are wild and that we got no self control, I'm not saying that at all. In fact, I think you'll find that most nungas aren't wild at all. It's just that we're not afraid of letting our true feelings show, something Whitefellas seem to be scared to death of. That's just how Blackfellas are.

Morality. The Blackfella Way is also based on a set of expectations concerning appropriate behaviors and responsibilities. Often these expectations are articulated in terms of Aboriginal morality. The following observations were made by a middle aged man on honesty and responsibility:

Aboriginal people are honest people, sometimes I think too honest for their own good. If one person tells another "yes" he'll do so and so, that person's got to do it. It's not like with Whitefellas who say "yes" just because they know that's what you want to hear but have no intention of doing what they say -- you just can't do that with Aboriginal people. If you tell a Blackfella you're going to do something you've got to do it. Whitefellas don't understand that and it causes a lot of strife. If you tell a Blackfella you're going to do something, you can't just not do it. People count on you.

It's the same way with saying "no" to someone. Aboriginal people just can't say no to one another. Like when one fella wants to
have a feed but doesn't have any money, he might say "Hey cousin, can you let me have a couple bob so I can get a feed?"
That other fella's got to give him some money if he's got it. Can't say "no". Or like when one of your relations shows up on your doorstep in the middle of the night lookin' for a place to sleep, you can't turn him away, can you? That's just how Blackfellas are. You might not want to give that fella a couple bob or you might not want to answer the door, specially if he's on the grog and playin' up a bit, but you've got no choice. We got to look after our own, its our way. May not be the best way, I don't know, but its our way.

A young man, a student at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies in Music (CASM), provided his view on the relativity of morality:

We got our own Black morality, just like Whitefellas got morality for themselves, hey? Like a Blackfella will never stab another Blackfella in the back. We look after each other 'cause we're all brothers and that. Sure, there's some might take advantage of another Blackfella but that fella'd be the exception, probably on the piss or something. Like we all grow up being told to 'share with your brother' and 'don't be cheeky to your auntie' and we really learn from the start about morals and that.

This comment was countered by a second person participating in the discussion:

Black morality? There's no such thing, mate. There's only morality. Morality's got no color. Every group of people in the world got the same morality. Be honest, look after each other, don't kill, don't steal, have respect for people, all the same rules, really. It's just that some people don't follow the rules anymore.

Now gunias got to be the most immoral race of all, not you of course, but gunias in general. The only morality gunias know is selfishness, look out for number one. On the other hand nungas are still trying to follow those rules, maybe not always to the letter, but we're trying.

Cultural Stoicism. Patience and tolerance are additional attributes which are mentioned as qualities which Aboriginal people express and cultivate. Though Aborigines conceive themselves to be in touch with their emotions, there is at the same time a perception that they are resilient and stoic in the face of
ongoing adversity. One young man remembered old people on the mission where he grew up:

They could sit for days and wait, those old fellas. Never got stirred up and aggro unless there was good reason. Used to be they'd wait for rations, wait for the chance to work a bit, wait for whatever, but never got stirred up. I reckon that's how Blackfellas are down deep inside, you know? Might not be so obvious today 'cause we're all rushin' here and rushin' there since we come to the cities, but in the early days Blackfellas had to be patient. How could you be a good hunter if you was always in a hurry and that?

We still got that kind of relaxed way about us even today. I mean all you have to do is look at the way a Blackfella raises his kids. Not like Whitefellas, sayin 'do this' and 'do that,' we let kids have some freedom. Like in the early days, a baby wasn't held every minute. They didn't say, 'stay away from that fire' and 'put down that spear.' They let those kids run free. If the little bugger burns himself then he's learned the lesson, hasn't he? No need to be watchin' him every minute. Kids are heaps smarter than we give em credit for. Besides, if you don't treat em in a relaxed way you make em crazy.

But, like I was sayin, Blackfellas got a patient way about 'em. Now, that's not to say we'll just sit and smile while somebody shits on us, or that we don't get wild when somebody cheats us or treats us badly, but in most ways Blackfellas are pretty good at waiting.

A similar point was made by a middle-aged woman:

The Aboriginal people have been able to tolerate a lot over the past two hundred years. It's our way I suppose, in our makeup. Probably has something to do with the fact that we've had to be tolerant in order to survive. When you think of all the things that Aboriginal people have had to put up with, murder, rape, having our children stolen, having our land pulled right out from under our feet, it's no wonder that only the very strongest survived.

Only those of us who had a tolerant side have made it through to today. But that toleration was a survival mechanism. In the old days Aboriginal people had to tolerate the heat, drought, famine, you name it: it's the life of the hunter. Only those who could stand the strain survived it. Made us stronger for it, living in a harsh environment. Today, that toleration still acts as a survival mechanism. It gives us the ability to go on in a world where the odds are against us. But times are changing now. Aboriginal
people can take a lot but today people can smell the change coming and they’re not so tolerant anymore. People want the compensation and respect that’s due them. That same spirit that saved us and made us stronger has prepared us for the fight of our lives, the fight for our lives.

Aboriginal "leadership". Aboriginal style is seldom as apparent as in the political arena where the ideal and the real conflict. The notion of Aboriginal leadership is oxymoronic in the view of many Aborigines yet is vital to the ongoing process of social change in a society dominated by people of European descent. In the political arena, Aboriginal style creates complex problems both within the Aboriginal community and between Aborigines and members of the dominant society. These comments come from a conversation with a middle-aged woman concerning what she sees as features of Aboriginal leadership and their relation to personality:

We’re a funny lot, really. Its hard for us to really get going on something cause Blackfellas get shamed real easy. It’s real hard for one Blackfella to stand up and make things happen, you know? Blackfellas can do wonderful things, we’ve got the ability, but we need to be pushed sometimes. That’s just how Blackfellas are. We’re not lazy, that’s not it. Most Whitefellas reckon we’re lazy, but that’s not it. We’re different that way, you know? A Whitefella can just stand up and say "right, lets go" but a Blackfella just can’t do that. We’d be shamed, you know, embarrassed, to do that. Blackfellas have always been real uncomfortable about taking the lead. But I think its changing now with the young ones who are willing to stand up and say "right!"

A similar point is made by a man in his mid-30’s on the subject of Aboriginal politics in Adelaide:

Its bloody hard for Blackfellas to achieve political change. For thousands of years we’ve had a system where people make decisions by consensus, and Blackfellas still think in those terms. Now we’ve got to try to live in a world where Whitefellas write the rules and control the game, but the consensus model is too
slow for the Whitefella's game. Sure, Whitefellas talk about consensus, look at old Hawke, but Whitefellas don't operate that way. In the Whitefella game you need presidents, directors, officers, one bloke to "represent" the rest. That just goes against the Blackfella way. That's why the NAC (National Aboriginal Conference), DAA (Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs), and even the Aboriginal Community Centre down on Wakefield Street are in such a mess. Blackfellas just can't have one person represent them. Anytime one Blackfella stands up alone and says "Aboriginal people want this..." or "Aboriginal people don't want that..." all the other Blackfellas say "hey, hang on". Its bloody ironic but as soon as one Blackfella stands up in public and claims to be speaking for the rest, you can be sure that he's not. It doesn't matter if what he's saying is right, just the act of one bloke standing up and saying he represents the concerns of Aboriginal people means he's stuffed it up right from the start.12

A middle-aged man, greatly respected throughout the community, commented on what he called "Blackfella politics":

Blackfellas got to work from the grassroots to achieve change. It's just not going to happen through the bureaucracies like DAA (Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs), Legal Aid, or even the Community Center. All those places are dependent on the government and all the people working there are dependent on the government for their livelihoods. There's no way those people are going to take a chance on ruining a good career by paying attention to what people in the community are saying. The only way to get things done, and I've seen both sides of the fence, is to work from the grassroots. To work in small groups, outside of the bureaucracy. Some of the MPs and even some of the Ministers are impressed by that and are willing to give advice and assistance. But to change the system you've got to work from outside. No matter what they say, you just can't change the system from the inside. If you're silly enough to try you just end up just another cog in the wheel, ineffective as the rest.

---

12 There is an old joke which is told by native Americans pertaining to the uncomfortable notion of leadership: 'If you have a group of Indians meeting with white men, how do you tell which of the Indians is the leader? He's the one with the arrows in his back'. Anyone who has listened to Aboriginal people discuss their frustration with the tensions surrounding leadership (Aborigines included) will have heard similar jokes.
But that’s our strength. Blackfellas have always worked that way, slowly, from the grassroots, consulting the proper people then making the change. DAA doesn’t work that way, sure they make a lot of noise about ‘consultation’ with the people but they always end up doing it the way the boss in Canberra had wanted to do it all along.

The Structure of The Blackfella Way

At once pragmatic and visionary, the Blackfella Way blends philosophy, rhetoric and metaphor; it combines the ideal and the real. So far I have been highlighting the features of what I am arguing are two dimensions of the Blackfella Way. While they are in many important ways quite different and have been separated here for the purpose of analysis, as I have noted, they are not strictly dichotomous or unrelated. For Aboriginal people in Adelaide the Blackfella Way incorporates ideas about both who Aboriginal people are (what I have described as essence) and how Aboriginal people do/should act (what I have referred to as style). The emphasis on family, concern with people over objects, and the recognition of a particularly Aboriginal disposition are perceived by Aborigines as grounded in the primordial linkages of blood and spirit. Yet, while those linkages are seen to be stable and immutable, in the cycle of day to day activity there is ample evidence of variation and manipulation of what most recognize as the idealized behaviors of the Blackfella Way. The dimension of essence is in this sense primary, and the dimension of style secondary, style being a tangible -- though refractive -- expression of essence in the physical world.

While the system is clearly widely shared among Aborigines in Adelaide,
individual descriptions vary. I will now touch briefly on the epistemological and ontological basis of the Blackfella Way, focusing on those varying representations. I will consider the correspondence between how members of a social group represent their understandings of the world and how they put those understandings into action. I will argue that while variations in such representations exist, they are grounded in a core configuration of cultural knowledge which provides an interpretive framework which shapes and is shaped by action.  

In 1974, Peter Caws provided an interpretation of social structure in terms of mental models held by members of a society. The kernel of Caws' (1974: 3) argument is that mental models are comprised of two parts:

The representational model corresponds to the way the individual thinks things are, the operational model to the way he practically responds or acts.

This theory has, however, been criticized by Jenkins (1981) who suggests the analytical distinction between representational and operational models, which assumes a difference between "thinking" and "doing", is illusory. Jenkins argues that all models include representational and operational elements and that there exists reciprocal feedback between the two. However, his argument that "thinking is doing and doing is thinking" (Jenkins 1981:109), and that what he sees as the analytically false distinction between operational and

---

13 I am not positing any sort of causal relationship here. Indeed, I would argue that meaning structures and at the same time is structured by practice.

14 Caws' paper deals with both the models created and shared by members of a society and the models constructed by anthropologists (explanatory models) in the process of interpreting constituted social realities. For the purposes of this discussion, I will emphasize the former and only acknowledge the latter.
representational elements can be overcome through his admittedly tentative "model of cognitive practice", are more problematic. While it serves no purpose here to enter into this age-old philosophical debate, I would argue that Jenkins is in danger of oversimplification: to state that thinking and doing are interrelated or even interdependent is widely accepted, but to say that they are the same is easier to assert than demonstrate. Caws' argument is attractive, not least because of its simplicity. It has made an important contribution to discussions of what have been described as folk and, more recently, cognitive or cultural models (Keesing 1987), and has become the conventional platform for discussions of mental models among anthropologists (Holy and Stuchlik 1981:52).15

Though Caws focuses on individuals, his basic distinction between operational and representational models remains a useful starting place for discussions of the structure of ideational systems. Following Caws, any ideational system might be conceived of as having a representational domain corresponding to the conceptions actors have of the way things are. At the same time, that system might be conceived of as having an operational domain corresponding to the way the actors respond in practice to the contingencies of daily life. Such a system would thus involve a complex set of social or cultural theories held by actors which inform practice and frame perceptions and conceptions of

15 There is a vast and fascinating literature on cognitive models I will not attempt to address here. The edited volumes by Holy and Stuchlik (1981) and Holland and Quinn (1987) provide useful background for entrance into the complexities of cognitive models.
how the world is or was, and how it should be.\textsuperscript{16}

But how does one gain access to this set of social and cultural theories? Caws provides a set of conceptual tools to begin the task. In Adelaide, Aboriginal people spend an enormous amount of time and energy discussing the Blackfella Way. A constellation of strategies, rules, and common sense, it is objectified by Aboriginal people and thus shapes conception, perception and practice (cf Berger and Luckmann 1966, Giddens 1979, 1984). Though individuals represent that constellation in varying ways, there is a common core of knowledge which is recognized by all. Common recognition does not, however, imply a lack of variation; individuals may profess or describe that common knowledge in different terms and from quite different perspectives.

The Blackfella Way can be usefully conceived of as a palette of cultural common sense from which individuals choose colors to create the murals of their daily lives. Though they share a recognition of a common Aboriginal style of painting (one could say they were trained in the same school and employ the same technique) they are free to experiment and create. Free, that is, to a certain point, for they share, as a result of their training, particular standards of what constitutes good art and good taste. When those standards are stretched or violated it is immediately and sometimes uncomfortably apparent both to the individual actor and to the wider Aboriginal community.

\textsuperscript{16} Obviously, ideational systems are historical products. The interrelationship of history, meaning and practice is a critical consideration to which I shall return in the next chapter.
Returning to Caws, individual actors can provide their own unique versions and depictions of their understandings and theories of the world, what he refers to as the actor's representational model. This knowledge is explicit, easily elicited and as such can be readily recorded; it is after all, merely one person's version of reality, a personal statement of one's beliefs, perceptions and understandings. Other aspects of the constellation of cultural common sense are less accessible. In many cases, actors provide edited versions of their insights and understandings, crafting for the observer a version appropriate to a particular political agenda. In this sense, any actor's comments must be seen as embedded in social context: verbal statements are made with purpose, between actors of sometimes very different positions of power. On the other hand, while one actor's version may share much with those of other actors, it remains only a partial depiction (Holy and Stuchlik 1981); actors may be uninterested in rendering a more full and comprehensive depiction. In no case, however, is an individual actor able to provide a comprehensive overview of all the rules and understandings which underpin his or her behavior. While I will not digress further into this philosophical tangle, suffice it to say that cultural knowledge is inherently incomplete, dynamic and contingent, and much of it is so deeply ingrained in perception and action and so firmly embedded in the realm of common sense that the actor cannot recognize or articulate it. Indeed, much of what comprises an actor's sense of culturally appropriate behavior is implicit

---

17 Similarly, the position of the anthropologist in the field cannot be assumed to be perceived as neutral or objective by his or her informants. These are points of particular importance which will be considered in detail in the following chapter.

18 In the words of Bourdieu (1977a: 167), this knowledge is so much a part of everyday life that it cannot be spoken of, it truly "goes without saying because it comes without saying". This process and its implications for the Blackfella Way will be examined more closely in the next chapter.
in practice, and not verbalized except in statements of strategy or propriety. Thus parts of this complex of knowledge are only accessible through inference - and even then only incompletely -- by careful and particular attention to patterns of practice. These patterns of practice, in combination with the actor's understandings, comprise what Caws calls the actor's operational model.

The Blackfella Way is an objectification of a set of rules, meanings, and strategies. In attempting to sketch its structure I have focused on what I have referred to as the domains of essence and style, a mapping which has obvious parallels to Caws' notion of representational and operational models. While Caws focused on a theory of how individual conceptions and models for action are constructed, I am attempting to account for the structure of a pervasive ideational system which is shared among individual members of a specific community. My focus has been on eliciting not a set of rules but rather the larger ideational frame, as an historical and social creation which sets the stage for practice; a stage on which action is both scripted and improvised.

My representation of the Blackfella Way as an ideational system is intended as a heuristic tool. I am not suggesting or proposing a model of cognitive organization; on the contrary, my depiction of the Blackfella Way is an attempt to explore the ways in which knowledge -- not the mind -- is organized, providing both a shared context within which actors enjoy some degree of predictability and shared understanding, and a situational context within which action may be played out in terms of contingency and unexpected occurrence.
As I have argued above, an ideational system cannot accurately be said to be shared completely and without variance by all actors within a group. Rather, any such system has a core of meanings which are widely shared, but alternative or partial versions may be invoked by individuals at different times and in different contexts. In some sense this is paradoxical in that ideational systems are able to inform and coordinate social action, yet because they are ideational and therefore non-concrete, they are inherently flexible and are able to accommodate variation, contradiction and creativity. The key to this, of course, is that an ideational system is a social phenomenon as well. While they may be pervasive and enduring, such systems provide frames of knowledge both within and between the minds of individuals, and are continually though perhaps subtly constructed, deconstructed and changed in the on-going process of social life. If carried no further, however, this line of argument is of limited value. Though it does provide some insight into why different versions of knowledge exist within a social system, it does not account for particular configurations of ideational systems and their relationships to ideology and thus the larger socio-economic systems within which they are embedded. In the chapter which follows, I will address this problem and show how the Blackfella Way structures and is structured by the objective conditions of everyday life.

Contradiction and Inversion

The Blackfella Way is in many ways an oversimplification -- a caricature of an idyllic society where integrity reigns and all people are generous and caring. Yet there are other representations from within the same community which
contrast markedly with and even contradict this neat package of perceptions and understandings. Even these critiques, some of which are effectively meta-analyses of the ideational system, illustrate the pervasiveness of the very structures they deny. The four segments which follow illustrate the process whereby critiques or denial of the Blackfellas Way are framed in the context of that very system.

As I have shown, considerable energy is expended demarcating the differences between blacks and whites, and one of the differences is in the realm of morality, but for Aboriginal people to assert that a system of "Black morality" exists is not to say that immorality is absent among Aboriginal people. One man talked about the power of loyalty and its potential for abuse:

Aboriginal people got a real strong rule about sharing and loyalty. One of my cousins comes round and asks for a couple of bucks and I've got it I'll probably give it to him 'cause that's the way Aboriginal people are. But some fellas abuse that, you know? Sometimes a fella will come into the office asking for money and I know if I give it to him he'll be straight out onto the street with a flagon. Now I don't care if he wants to kill himself with the piss; well, not really, I mean I do care, but when he lies and says he's going to buy something to eat and spends it on grog, that makes me wild. Sometimes I take him down to the shop and buy him a couple of pies instead of giving him the money.

But some fellas really abuse the Aboriginal way, you know, saying, 'come on brother'. One time my cousin came up here pissed out of his head asking for money, said he hadn't had a feed for days. I offered to take him down to the shop but he said no, he just wanted the money. I said I knew he'd just drink it up and I wasn't about to give him any money, especially since he lied to me about needing a feed. So he starts getting really cheeky with me. He says, 'what's the matter, brother, you too good for your relations now, or what? You got your big job and you don't care about your people anymore? You tryin' to be like a Whitefella now?' Well I told him to piss off, that I wasn't wasting any more of my time on him.
He got really wild then. He grabs a chair and holds it up. 'Give me some money you Black bastard', he says, 'or I'll throw this through the f*ckin' window.' That made me really wild then and I shouted, 'you do and you'll follow the cunt'. Well, he got the message 'cause he knew that I'd do it, and I would've too. So, he makes a joke of it then sayin' 'I was only muckin around brother, I wouldn't do that'. And he leaves.

Now that's the kind of thing that makes me really angry, trying to turn a person's Aboriginality against him. And it works too. A lot of people know that you can get almost anything you want from another Blackfella if you tell him he's acting like a Whitefella. I mean our ways is just about all we've got and people will do almost anything to show it's not true. Aboriginal people are loyal to each other above all else. It makes me bloody ashamed when we use that against ourselves.

Kevin, an Aboriginal teenager, commented on the planned redecoration of the hostel in which he lived. While the Blackfella Way emphasizes the importance of social over material concerns, Kevin's flippant dismissal of the need for material comforts touched a raw nerve:

I reckon it's stupid to fix this place up for a bunch of dirty Blackfellas. They ought to leave it how it is, all dirty and that. That's how Blackfellas like it anyway. Why bother?

The other teenagers laughed and then became silent, seeming to realize I was present and listening to the conversation, and they suddenly appeared uncomfortable. In reply to Kevin's remark, one of the Aboriginal residential care worker stared in disbelief and then shouted at Kevin, "Don't be bloody stupid". Without pause, Kevin continued,

No, true! Just look at Blackfellas' houses. You don't see no flash carpet, or no new paint on the walls. What would you want to go and do that for? It would just be dirty and torn the next day. We like it like that. I reckon if they want to do this place proper Blackfella way they ought to bring in a few empty flagons and a bunch of mangy dogs. Make it like home. No, really, just look at Blackfellas' houses, can't take care of anything so why give us anything nice. That's how we like it anyway.
While the Blackfella Way provides a public face of Aboriginal people united by culture and common values, in private there is always room for criticism. An elderly woman, greatly admired throughout the Aboriginal community, discussed with her niece a recent article in the local paper. Many of the individuals interviewed by the paper were well known and high profile local Aboriginal activists:

They call themselves 'spirit people'. See them on the television or read about them in the paper sayin' 'Aboriginal people are spiritual people, we don't operate on the same level as the whiteman. We want our land back, we want the museum to return our old people, we want our sacred objects because they're our life'. Now I ask you, have you ever heard anything so foolish? Adelaide people left that life generations ago and to claim that we still have the ways of the tribal people is just silly. We've got so much important work to do and here's these silly people, some of them clever too, with good training, being bloody stupid. They should be helping their people, that's the true Blackfella Way, not standing up there embarrassing all of us with all this silliness about being spirit people.

As we have seen, one of the key concepts of the Blackfella Way is caring and sharing, yet even this is not beyond challenge by members of the Aboriginal community. A middle-aged man dismissed the concept of caring and sharing: I reckon this business about mungas sharing all the time's a bit of a joke. I go out of my way now to avoid Victoria Square (a public reserve in the center of Adelaide which was frequented by Aboriginal drinkers during the time of my field research). Every time I went through there somebody'd say 'brother, can you give me a couple a bob?' One time I got real tired of it and said to this fella, 'I'm not your fuckin' brother. Why don't you get off your bloody backside and make something of yourself. You're the type gives mungas a bad name.'

Well you can guess what he thought of that. 'You fuckin' coconut', this bloke says,'you're the bloody one gives Blackfellas a

---

19 A reference to the public revelation in the mid 1980s that the South Australian Museum held in storage the preserved bodies of several Aboriginal people.
bad name. I may be down on my luck but it's not my fault,' he says, 'it's the white man put me here on the street. And here you go, you fuckin' uptown black, puttin' the blame on me. You reckon you're too fuckin' good for your own people.'

Well, that was enough for me. I just walked away. 'Stuff you,' I said and walked away. I don't need that. So I just stay clear of them and don't worry about what they think. I've got no patience with those bludgers. This 'Blackfellas share' business is something the bludgers invented.

These four individuals' comments represent views which diverge from and contradict the views of a majority of Aboriginal people in Adelaide, yet each expresses something important about the nature of the ideational system I have sketched in this chapter. In the first case, the expectation of sharing is so pervasive that an individual attempts to turn his knowledge of that expectation to his own advantage. The frustration of the speaker stems from his realization that the Blackfella Way is being turned around and used as a tool for personal gain, its antithesis. I suspect that the speaker's anger stems both from the manipulation of the system of shared knowledge and the public betrayal of the unwritten rules of that system, according to which the negotiations for resources should remain subtle and indirect. In this case, the man asking for money violated the rules by refusing the alternative offer of food. To make matters worse, he then attempted to humiliate the host by calling his Aboriginality into question. His final mistake was in misjudging his host's response. Enraged rather than humiliated, the speaker refused to be intimidated or manipulated and threatened the man who then left the building.
Second, comments such as that by the teenage boy about "dirty Blackfellas" were not uncommon within the community. Though most often treated as jokes,20 such sentiments serve as wry commentary on the realization that the contexts of many Aboriginal people's lives are determined by factors largely beyond their control. Though Kevin was not joking (at least not obviously), I suspect that his comments, as well as a host of related negative notions about Aboriginal people which occasionally surfaced to contradict the ideals of the Blackfella Way, represent an inversion of the operational domain of the Blackfella Way. In this way Kevin points out a fundamental contradiction, much to the discomfort of others around him.

Third, the comments by the elderly woman on "spirit people" seem to represent a denial of the core feature of spirituality, yet her remarks indicate an affirmation of the principle of sociality. This pattern, wherein some individuals emphasize one aspect of the system yet deny another, was common. Similarly, the comment on the fallacy of Aboriginal "caring and sharing" reflects the views of one who might appear to stand outside the community with little or nothing invested it (the ideational system which binds other Aboriginal people) yet he has not fully escaped the power of the system; though he rejects one of the key premises of the model -- reciprocity -- he understands the premise and feels the gravity of his decision to reject the expectations of other Aborigines. These examples of inversion, variation, and occasional rejection provide important insights into the relationship of ideas and action. Though the Blackfella Way

20 I commonly heard joking statements such as "you know how us Blacks are, can't hold a job, got to go walkabout" or "typical Blackfella, can't handle the grog or the money".
remains powerful and pervasive, guiding and shaping perceptions and interpretations, as I will show in the next chapter, it also plays a significant role in structuring opportunities and choices for action.

In this chapter I have provided an overview of the structure and some of the content of the Blackfella Way, arguing that it is comprised of two distinct yet inseparable dimensions: one of essence and the other of style. I have also examined the ontological and epistemological status of the Blackfella Way with particular attention to the problem of varying representations of the system among actors on the ground. Finally, I explored the occurrence of inversion and rejection within it among Aborigines in Adelaide. In the next chapter I will examine the Blackfella Way as ideology, focusing on its relationship to structure and practice.
CHAPTER FIVE

THE BLACKFELLA WAY: IDEOLOGY AND PRACTICE

The Blackfella Way portrays what is in many ways a caricature of an idyllic society where integrity reigns, and where all are generous and moral. It is forged partly in contrast and opposition to a caricature of the dominant non-Aboriginal society conceived of as pervaded by avarice, isolation and amorality. Obviously, both are stereotypes, but there are also political and economic explanations for the production and reproduction of an ideational system such as the Blackfella Way which frames the world so clearly in terms of black and white, good and bad and which operates as an ideology.

In this chapter I will shift my focus from the Blackfella Way as an ideological system to the Blackfella Way as ideology, focusing on its relationship to structure and practice. First, and as background for my analysis, I will examine key theories of ideology and social reproduction. Next I will focus on the interplay of history and ideology, and then begin an analysis of the constitution of the Blackfella Way, looking closely at the domains of essence and style and accounting for the particular configuration I sketched in the previous chapter. I will then employ the concept of symbolic violence to sketch the process whereby the existing relations of domination are reproduced. Finally, I will examine the struggle for orthodoxy in the Aboriginal community. Though as
orthodoxy the Blackfella Way provides Aborigines in Adelaide a set of presuppositions, what Bourdieu (1990) calls "a sense of the game", that version of reality is not perpetuated without struggle. As I will argue, the Blackfella Way is contested terrain and the struggle to define and map it is at the heart of Aboriginal identity and social action and has much to do with the production and reproduction of socio-political relations with the dominant society.

From Ideology to Practice

Practice theory . . . is in itself a theory of translation between an objective world and a subjective one, between a world constituted by logics beyond actors' perceptions, and a world constituted by logics spun by thinking and acting agents. Practice theory has two moments, one largely objectivist and one largely subjectivist. In the first, the world appears as system and structure, constituting actors, or confronting them, or both, and here anthropologists bring to bear all their objectivist methodologies. But in the second, the world appears as culture, as symbolic frames derived from actors' attempts to constitute that world in their own terms by investing it with order, meaning, and value (Ortner 1989:18).

The interplay between action and structure, between subject and object, is the key to understanding the role of ideology in any social formation. In this chapter, the challenge is to explicate the process whereby the Blackfella Way moves from the realm of ideas to ideology, to understand the role ideology plays in constructing Aboriginal identity, and to account for its role in the process of social reproduction. To understand where one is going, it is often said, one needs to understand where one has been. In this section I will look briefly at the critical orientations in theories of ideology as groundwork for setting out the theoretical assumptions and frame I will use in interpreting the Blackfella Way.
The separation of action from structure has a long history in social theory. Marx (1972), promoted the duality when he defined ideology partly in relation to Engels' notion of false consciousness, while Althusser (1969) referred to a system which is profoundly unconscious, comprised of representations which act on humans in a process they cannot perceive. For both Marx and Althusser, ideology is grounded in the material relations of everyday life; human subjects are inactive in its construction. This perspective relies on a theory of domination in which ideology always pre-exists, unassailable and impenetrable. In contrast, Durkheim (1964) and later Parsons (1949) and Merton (1957) promoted a focus on individual action, largely avoiding a careful analysis of its relationship to larger objective structures.

More recently, theorists have followed one of two approaches to the problem of social reproduction, emphasizing either culture or structure. Williams (1963), in a critique of orthodox Marxism, claims Marx failed fundamentally to recognize the meaning and significance of culture. The traditional Marxist model of base-superstructure relations shifts the focus from ideas and meanings to class and power; culture becomes merely an artifact of the economic structure of society. History, within the frame of this model, he argues, is constituted in a flow of events largely beyond the approach or influence of individual actors. In contrast, Williams (1963) has emphasized the study of culture and experience, focusing on the relations between all the various elements in a way of life. E.P. Thompson (1966) takes an approach which is similar to Williams' but focuses on class struggle with particular attention to history and specific events, conflicts and transformations. In conducting social
and class analysis, Williams and Thompson both emphasize the notion of human action in history, and the importance of attention to human agents and their experiences.

Cultural theories of ideology such as those of Thompson and Williams assume a view of class which is interpersonal rather than structural. According to Williams (1965, 1977) different classes experience different patterns and "structures of feeling", and experience class struggle differentially through patterns of relations unevenly structured by the dominant class and culture. In this way, class domination must be viewed in a different light. Unlike the orthodox Marxist view of the imposition of domination by the ruling class, domination is dynamic, contextual and historically specific, never tied inflexibly to some set of predetermined consequences. The implications of this view for a theory of action are significant; neither human agency in general nor resistance in particular are submerged by domination.

In contrast to these cultural theories of ideology are those which are derived in large part from the structuralist theories of Saussure (1974). The structuralist orientation contrasts with that of the culturalist by positing that experience and meaning is secondary to the material practices and underlying economic and political structures of the society. Thus the structuralists focus on the relations of structures within society rather than consciousness, culture or experience in their attempts to understand the process of social reproduction. A corollary of this view -- and a key contrast with the culturalist theories -- is that human agents move from the foreground to the background of history; they become
stand-ins, occupying positions and roles determined by the structure of the relations of production (Althusser 1970).

From the structuralist view, power is seen to be held and enacted by structures and not individuals. Thus this perspective leaves no room for individuals or groups to recast the structures which comprise society through raising their consciousness and putting ideas into practice. From this point of view, actors are incapable of perceiving the true nature of -- let alone transforming -- social structures; intentionality too is a product of ideology which deceives actors into thinking they are subjects (Appelbaum 1979). But this view does not necessarily insist on a model of the state as a unified force. As Poulantzas (1973, 1978) has argued, while the state is crucial to the maintenance of class relations, it both mediates and embodies the contradictions and tensions inherent in the ruling class. In this sense it is more than an instrument of control over the masses.

Where the culturalists view class as interpersonal experience, the structuralists emphasize the objective positions of individuals and groups as defined by the structures of ownership. Thus the concept of class struggle displaces the culturalist notion of individuals within classes who shape their own histories through action. Class struggle refers to the conflicts between and among social processes which are situated in objective relations of ownership and the division of labor.

While there are flaws in both of these approaches I will not attempt to examine
them all here. Instead, I want to touch briefly on what I see to be the key weaknesses of each before moving on to a discussion of ideology.¹

More than anything, the culturalist models of social reproduction tend to overemphasize the shared experience of actors while ignoring the powerful constraining influences of both material practices and history. Similarly, the influence of powerful structures such as the state tend to be ignored in favor of a careful analysis of the experience of class conflict. By not focusing directly on these factors, theorists neglect the key issues of conflict and power within society. Consequently, little attention is paid to contradiction and tension within social classes, phenomena which are key to understanding the process whereby individuals and groups act against their own interests.

Where culturalists are guilty of overemphasizing subjective experience at the expense of understanding objective conditions, structuralists have placed so much emphasis on the process of domination that human subjects are reduced to little more that automatons operating in predetermined and inflexible arenas of activity, unaware of the true conditions of their existence. Most troubling about this approach is that the process of domination tends to be too simple: domination is inescapable, and all encompassing. There is no role for human agents in the process of history. Individual action, whether in struggle, resistance or active participation in the process of domination, is ignored by structuralists or considered illusory.

¹ Giddens (1979, 1984) provides an extended analysis of many of these issues, while Ortner (1984) covers some of the same theoretical ground with an anthropological lens.
Practice: Beyond Subject and Object

At the base of the tension between these two perspectives is the illusion that action, subjective experience and objective conditions are separable, when in fact they are not. Indeed, they can be effectively joined in the theory of practice (Bourdieu 1977a). Ortner (1989) argues that practice, in the traditional sense, can be seen to have three main facets: as routine, repetitive activity and interaction; as intentional action wherein actors enact interests, desires and goals; and as praxis in the Marxian sense involving the dialectic of theory and action in political context. Practice always takes place within, and must therefore be considered within, the context of structure. Structure, on the other hand, incorporates the whole of the social and cultural order, it is lived and lived-in, practiced, and often contested. It both constrains and enables practice. From the perspective of practice theory, there is nothing to gain in simply attempting to find the inner logic or construction of structures since they are themselves dynamic, continually shaping and being shaped by practice.

Practice presupposes a relationship with structure and vice versa (Giddens 1979). As Giddens (1979: 69-70) has written:

Structure is both enabling and constraining, and it is one of the specific tasks of social theory to study the conditions in the organisation of social systems that govern the interconnections between the two . . . Structure thus is not to be conceptualised as a barrier to action, but as essentially involved in its production.

Ideology and practice are critical concepts for understanding the nature of the Blackfella Way, the construction of identity, and the process of social reproduction. In terms of the analysis I will present here, ideology both limits
action and enables it, providing a view of what is possible and appropriate -- it shapes and is shaped by practice. This assumes a view of ideology as comprised of two dimensions: as both a practical, interpretive frame through which actors view, question and attempt to make sense of the world, and as a system which sustains, conceals, and legitimates domination.

Thus it is argued that although actors all participate in the production and reproduction of ideology, few are seldom aware of the factors which constrain or enable their perceptions and options to act in the context of it; similarly the actors rarely understand how these constraints are imposed and structured by the process of history. Thus ideology is a matrix of structures, conceptions, representations and practical strategies actors may not fully understand. It may both incorporate critical discourse and mask the reality of social and economic relations. Ultimately the goal of practice theory, and of this thesis, is to understand

the ways in which culture constitutes practice, and thus the ways in which people react to the world, (as well as) the ways in which such culturally constituted practice in turn reproduces or changes the world, and thus makes or remakes history. The theoretical issue here is largely the issue of "hegemony" and of the possibilities of alternative perspectives. Reproduction takes place either because people cannot see alternatives, or do not have the power to institutionalize the alternatives that they see. Change takes place because alternatives become visible, or because actors have or gain the power to bring them into being (Ortner 1989: 200-201).
Ideology and History

History is not a stream along which individuals or groups are swept, floating peacefully or bouncing off the rocks. Rather history is a process within which events are initiated, experienced, interpreted, and reinterpreted. Aboriginal people in Adelaide have been anything but passive actors in their own history and are actively involved in the ongoing interpretation and mediation of historical events. From this perspective, external events are internally mediated and made sense of. Much of the time, external events "fit" with the existing ideology and can be easily understood in the context of existing practice and structure, but at times events create or exposed fundamental contradictions which must be addressed or ignored. For Aborigines in the pre-contact period one might imagine that few such fundamental contradictions emerged, but with the arrival of Europeans all that changed -- forever. Suddenly a previously unimaginable range and number of challenges emerged, shaking and eroding the foundations of daily life. Traditional economic, religious, political and social structures were disrupted and crushed. The new structures which displaced the old required new interpretations and new cultural and social configurations.

In chapter 2, I traced out the main details of Aboriginal history in South Australia, and now I wish to focus briefly and in more general terms on the process of history. Relations between Aboriginal and European people in South Australia have always been and continue to be shaped by violence.

---

2 Tonkinson (1978) argues persuasively that pre-contact Aboriginal communities were internally consistent and essentially conservative.
Though it has become less overt and more subtle with the passage of time, violence continues to wreak havoc among Aboriginal people in Adelaide today. I want to explore two key themes in the violence which have pervaded the experience of Aboriginal people since the arrival of Europeans: economic exclusion and social dissolution. These themes need to be examined closely in order to make sense of Aboriginal identity and ideology in Adelaide today.

**Economic Exclusion**

As described earlier, the early contacts between South Australian Aborigines and the newly arrived colonists were on some occasions cordial and on others violent. As I have shown, though many of the early accounts stress the calm acceptance by Aborigines of the new arrivals, especially among those near the settlements of Glenelg and Adelaide, there is ample evidence to indicate that Aborigines in outlying areas were far less patient and often quite violent in resisting the incursions of White settlers and their stock. Disease, the continuing expansion of European settlement, devastation by stock of food-gathering areas and especially water holes, and the effective policy of "native pacification" through violence, set the stage for rapid and radical breakdown in the lifestyles of all but the most isolated groups. Political and religious structures were fractured and the economic base eroded. Through this combination of direct and indirect physical and economic violence, the foundation of Aboriginal social life was so severely shaken that the traditional Aboriginal economies could never recover.
Faced with the erosion and then virtual disappearance of the traditional economic base, some Aborigines, through necessity, attempted to adjust themselves to the objective requirements of the economy of the Europeans. Where traditional subsistence skills were vital in the pre-contact period, in the new world of the Europeans they held little value. As a consequence, some Aborigines cultivated and attempted to market the skills which best fitted the occasional opportunities of the emergent capitalist system. From the earliest years, a few found partial and temporary incorporation in the radical new economy of the Europeans as stockmen, trackers, domestic help and the like, but full economic participation remained elusive.

Various missions and reserves were established throughout the state, but few of these approached economic self-sufficiency; most were only marginally productive. By 1860, 42 small reserves had been set aside for Aborigines, but of these 35 were leased to Whites (Rowley 1972a: 84). By the latter half of the nineteenth century Aborigines in the southern portion of the state were entirely dependent on government and church funding and care for their survival. Though there is evidence to suggest that many were prepared and willing to participate in the European economy, they were seemingly frustrated at every turn. At Raukkan on lake Alexandrina, for example, Aborigines attempted for many years to engage themselves with the European economy but on every occasion they were impeded (Jenkin 1979). A promising fishing industry was stalled when local Europeans stole live fish from the holding ponds and used violence against outside buyers, ensuring the lowest possible price for the fish from Point McLeay. On occasion, when the Aborigines were paid for the fish,
they were cheated on the amounts and sometimes paid with counterfeit currency. Distance from the major markets further compounded problems and even the relatively low cost of labor could not overcome that impediment.

Marginal in production, the Aboriginal economy at Raukkan was all the more vulnerable to disruption. In the early 1880's a successful wool washing industry was established. Because clean wool was lighter, there was an incentive for wool producers to wash wool before sending it by ship to market, and the Aboriginal community at Point McLeay, with available labor and resources (fresh water from lake Alexandrina), was able to provide the service. By the turn of the century, however, periods of drought, coupled with decreased flow as a result of upstream irrigation projects on the Murray river, dropped the level of the lake and the increased salinity ruined the industry. By the time a weir was built to protect the mouth of the Murray from the Southern ocean, motor transport eliminated the need for lighter bales of wool and producers chose to have their wool washed at the market (Jenkin 1979: 206).

Such failed attempts at local industry, coupled with an expanding population and the small and largely unproductive parcels of land allotted to the community to work as farm and pastoral property, forced Aborigines at Point McLeay to rely upon the Aboriginal Friends Association (which itself relied on the government when debts reached crisis point) for rations. Though Point Pearce Mission had some slight advantage in the allocation of larger blocks of land and a lower population, the majority of Aboriginal people there, too, remained frustrated in their attempts to participate fully in the European
economy. Though Point Pearce was at times productive, most of the property was worked by European farmers engaged by the Mission administration (Archibald 1915: 23). As transcripts of the 1913 Royal Commission on the Aborigines indicate, Aboriginal witnesses from both Point Pearce and Point McLeay expressed their frustration with the system of share farming wherein White farmers worked the Mission farms. They asked for more and viable plots of land and control over that land by Aboriginal people. These pleas, however, remained unheeded. Though the Commission recommended increased participation by Aborigines in Mission farming activities, it discredited their efforts:

The success of the Point Pearce Mission, however, is not due to the work of the aboriginal population, which, by the way, consists largely of half-castes ... The Commission are of the opinion that more use might be made of the natives in farming operations, even though the financial results might not be so satisfactory, and that the employment of whites in share farming should be discontinued (Progress Report of the Royal Commission on the Aborigines 1913: vii).

Since the earliest contacts, Aborigines in South Australia have experienced only very brief periods of anything approaching full economic participation, most notably during the gold rushes of the mid-1800's and the First and Second World Wars. Employment, even during these periods, continued to be restricted to the pastoral and related industries. The second World War is an event which is remembered by Aboriginal people today with a mixture of fondness, pride and bitterness. Ironically, for Aborigines it was a time of sudden but short-lived equality and opportunity. While some served in the armed forces, others stayed behind and filled in positions left vacant by those
serving over seas:

During the year under review (1943-1944), able-bodied male aborigines not actually engaged in active service, or in some other branch of defence work, were employed on farms and dairies, and in pastoral enterprises, flax production, vine dressing, grape picking, railway maintenance work, wood cutting, charcoal burning, etc.

A number of female aborigines were also employed in dairies, vineyards, flax mills, and factories. In addition, a considerable number have been engaged as domestic help, the demand for such workers greatly exceeding the number available. The aborigines are undoubtedly making a notable contribution to the war effort (Report of the Aboriginal Protection Board 1945).

As the war came to a close, all but a handful of the Aboriginal workers were displaced by the returning service men. One elderly man described the change as "like being in a dream. One day we're all mates, working for our country, the next we're boongs and back on the street." Few Aborigines who lived through that period failed to learn the lesson, and most had no choice but to return to the missions and reserves (sometimes with the added encouragement of the police). As late as the 1950's, Point Pearce, Point McLeay and Koonibba remained impoverished and intensely over-crowded, with nearly universal unemployment (Gale 1964).

As the socio-economic data presented in chapter 3 indicate, little has changed in terms of opportunities for Aborigines to enter the economy. Unemployment is still exceedingly high, and families rely on government pensions and benefits. For most, the exclusion from the economy is imagined to be a product of history and discrimination. Employers are seen to be prejudiced, inflexible and unwilling to give an Aboriginal worker an opportunity to prove him or her self.
When jobs are available most are seen to be undesirable (unskilled or at best semi-skilled), short-termed, or inconvenient. Though some White business owners are known to make opportunities for Aboriginal workers, many Aborigines complain they are uneasy and uncomfortable when having to work with Whites. For many the experience brings out deep anxieties. "I couldn't work with all them Whitefellas. No way, mate. Too much history there," said one young woman. Others complain that the only jobs available are service jobs. When told that a local take-away restaurant was willing to hire Aboriginal teenagers, one boy remarked, "Nah, I couldn't. Make me 'shamed. All them Whitefellas'd be lookin' at me. 'What's that nunga doin' here?' they'd be sayin'." While some harbor dreams of starting their own businesses, Aboriginal owned businesses are all but non-existent.

Social Dissolution

As I discussed in chapter 2, coincident with the frustrated attempts by some Aborigines to enter the European economy was the expanding legal definition of who was Aboriginal, and the increasing restriction of the physical movements of those so defined. By the turn of the century this manipulation and control was extended and the government was also actively involved in the separation of Aboriginal children from the allegedly disruptive influence of their seniors. W.G. Smith, Protector of Aborigines, reported on such activities during 1910:

During the year several half-caste children have been removed from the blacks' camps and placed under the care and control of the State Children's Department with most encouraging results; the children are thriving and happy and will, I feel confident, grow up self-supporting members of the community, as they will know nothing of the habits of the aborigines and will be given an occupation.
Smith goes on to describe the rapid increase of "half-castes" and refers to the need to convert these half-caste children into useful members of the community, instead of allowing them to grow up in the camps, where they acquire the lazy habits of the aborigines which unfit them for any regular occupation; and I am still firmly of opinion that the very best way is to treat them as neglected children, and have them placed under the care and control of the State Children's Department until they reach the age of 18 years, by which time they should be able to earn their own living and should no longer be considered nor treated as aborigines (Report of the Protector of Aborigines 1910: 1).

In 1912, the Chief Protector of Aboriginals provided an updated report on the children "rescued" from their families and communities:

The half-caste and quadroon children rescued from the aborigines' camps and placed under the control of the State Children's Department are doing well, and have apparently forgotten their former wretched surroundings. They give promise of developing into useful members of the community instead of growing up vagrants . . . I think the good work of rescue should be vigorously continued, especially in regard to the young girls (Report of the Protector of Aborigines 1912: 1).

These activities continued into the 1960s and have come to symbolize one of the key features of the history of relations between Aborigines and Europeans in Adelaide. A handful of Aboriginal people remember their time in various "homes" and orphanages as positive experiences, where they gained the skills to raise their standards of living. Some of these individuals have bittersweet memories of leaving their families to attend school in the city, only to return later to find themselves "educated" but uncomfortable and unable to fit in with their families and communities. Some of these people believe their parents were coerced into letting them go, others that their parents made difficult choices in hopes of providing a better life, which they could never provide.
But those who look fondly at those times are few, and every Aboriginal person in Adelaide is able to recount with terror the experiences of families which were touched by more violent "rescues" in which children were taken forcibly from their families. Though the official version of these removals declares the duty and responsibility of the government to care for neglected children, it is clear even to the most tolerant Aborigines that government officials often went beyond the limits. As the comments of the Protector of Aborigines suggest (above), "neglect" was sometimes arbitrarily defined.

Some adults remember officers of the Aboriginal Protection Board threatening to remove children from their families. One woman recalled hearing an officer of the Protection Board threaten her mother: "She said there were too many people stoppin' at the house and if Mum didn’t get rid of ’em she was goin’ to take us girls away from her. Scared her to death, that did". Others recalled offers of increased pensions or welfare payments if the parents would assign custody of their children to the state.3 Some were able to ignore the harassment, others picked up and moved in hopes of escaping the threats. Oftentimes, however, the children were taken with little or no warning. One woman described the day a car drove up and she and her sisters were literally torn from the arms of their screaming mother. Another described being trained by his mother to run into the bush whenever a car appeared so that he couldn’t be "stolen".

---

3 Inglis (1961: 10) describes a similar situation whereby parents were coerced into relinquishing custody for economic assistance.
Classified as "neglected", these children became Wards of the State and were usually initially placed in institutional homes. Some, like Nindee and Colebrook (operated by the United Aborigines Mission) were established to care solely for Aboriginal children, others such as the Glandore Boys' Home (Department for Community Welfare) and Fullerton Children's Home (the Salvation Army) took in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children. Later, some were placed in foster homes while others were sent to work in private residences throughout the state. According to many of the adults who were institutionalized as children, conditions in some of these institutional and foster homes were abhorrent and many of them now speak of neglect, physical and sexual abuse, and exploitation. While some are angry and willing to speak or write about their experiences as "state wards", others find it too painful to remember. Some are still so traumatized by the experience that they privately express deep anxieties that they (or their children) may still be vulnerable to capricious decisions by the government regarding their personal welfare.

---

4 Helen Kewal's unpublished thesis, Aboriginal children in institutions in Adelaide (1972), contains some interesting case study material on individual children as well as physical and administrative descriptions of the homes. Mattingley and Hampton (1988) also document some first hand descriptions of life in these institutions.

5 After long and careful consideration, one woman consented to an interview about her experience as a state ward. With the door closed and the microphone on a hot summer's evening, several times over the course of the evening she asked me to turn off my tape recorder. She was worried that the people she named might someday hear the tape and bring harm to her or her family. In the end we agreed that while I could talk broadly and generally about her experience in any of my writings, I was not to use surnames of any of the people she discussed or write anything which could identify her. We also agreed that the tape should be made available as a valuable piece of oral history, but only, she insisted, after she was no longer alive.
Cultural Schemas

In this section I want to look more closely at the links between history and ideology. A key to this linkage is to be found through viewing economic exclusion and social dissolution as examples of what Ortner calls "cultural schemas" (1989:14). Cultural schemas can be thought of as structural themes which recur and reemerge in a variety of places, times and forms. In Adelaide they cast the Aborigine as both hero and victim, and provide a lesson in history and a model for action. Thus, writes Ortner (1989:14), in cultural schemas, structure exists in and through its varying relations with various kinds of actors. Further, structure comes here as part of a package of emotional and moral configurations, and not just abstracted ordering principles.

The attempts by Aboriginal people to "succeed" in the European economy, their brushes with success and almost inevitable failures as a result of interference or sabotage by Whites is a cultural schema which is pervasive: an older woman describes a successful bakery built up with the hard labor and sacrifice of Aboriginal people but ultimately taken away by Whites; an old man talks of days of productive farming on Point Pearce before the White administrator took control and ruined the mission; and parents discuss their frustrations with White teachers who, they believe, crush the self-esteem of their children and cripple their futures.

---

6 Ortner (1989: 60) notes that versions of the notion of cultural schemas appear in a number of important books (Schieffelin 1976, Geertz 1980, Sahlins 1981, 1985). Like Ortner's work, these approaches are in the vein of practice theory.
Economic exclusion is a story which is repeated again and again in the Aboriginal community. It is a cultural schema with a lesson that is lost on no one: Aboriginal people will get few opportunities, and even when they do, the White world will be against them. There is thus a pessimism and frustration which colors perceptions of and expectations about opportunities for Aborigines to participate in the larger economy. Many see for themselves only two options. One can resist and refuse to participate in the labor market, "making the Whiteman pay" for the oppression of Aborigines, or one can choose to "work for my people". Either way fits with the Blackfella Way, but each raises its own set of problems. If one refuses to enter into the larger economy, one is destined to suffer to some degree. For many this suffering is minor (many Aboriginal people insist they can easily get by with far less than "Whitefellas" can), for others it is more serious given that one cannot easily escape the costs involved in living in the larger society ("I don't mind going without," said one Aboriginal mother, "but the kids have to go to school, want to go out with their mates and that. It's hard").

The cultural schema of economic exclusion brings to the surface one of the key contradictions in the contemporary Aboriginal community in Adelaide: the enormous differences in power between Aborigines and the dominant society. While the schema suggests strategies and options, it cannot easily resolve the fundamental inequalities in power. As I will show later, there is but one option available to those who would bridge this gap, and the costs have shown themselves to be enormous.
Aboriginal people in Adelaide see all about them the outcome of 150 years of social disruption and dissolution. The stories of harassment and degradation under "the Act", children stolen from their mothers, and fractured families are all elements of a larger cultural schema continually played and replayed in movies, books, and around kitchen tables over cups of tea: with tears in his eyes, a middle-aged man describes the pain and anger he feels in having been taken from his family and raised in an institution; a young man sits in silent rage listening to a former Aboriginal Protection Board officer justify the "rescue" of Aboriginal children from their mothers; and an Aboriginal grandmother walks Hindley Street on Saturday night looking for her runaway grandson among the crowds of Aboriginal street kids.

According to Ortner, cultural schemas are enacted by actors in a variety of ways. Some appear to be guided by them; others employ them strategically; some are unconscious that their action is driven by them (though others may recognize the underlying structure of the schema and react appropriately); still others use them as a lens for interpreting action. Through cultural schemas, structure is fused with practice, "being transformed by actors from part of the problem to part of the solution" (Ortner 1989: 196). Through these cultural schemas, and through the Blackfella Way, Aboriginal culture is portrayed as morally and spiritually separated from what Aborigines in Adelaide commonly view as the pathological culture of White Australians; indeed, as I will argue below, the Blackfella Way effectively ensures that this moral and spiritual separation remains a structural separation as well. The Blackfella Way is produced and reproduced so effectively because it is more than simply a system
of ideas, more than a prescription for action: it is practiced structure. The merging of subject and object, it is ideology embodied and enacted.

The Constitution of the Blackfella Way: Ideology and Practice

As an ideational system, the Blackfella Way is comprised of two domains which I have called essence and style. The domain of essence provides the ontological base of the Blackfella Way and describes both the symbolic linkages of Aborigines with one another and the critical distinctions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal persons. As such it provides the base from which Aborigines themselves may derive explanations of and for their own actions, what I have called style. In this section I will explore the linkage between ideology and practice in the conversion of the Blackfella Way from ideas to ideology. As I will show, history and experience are actively interpreted and cast and recast as part of this process.

Essence

The heart of the domain of essence is the conception of blood and spirit. As I showed in the previous chapter, the Blackfella Way is anchored in the belief that Aborigines share this physical and metaphysical bond. Though most Aboriginal people in Adelaide accept this bond of blood and spirit as self-evident, natural and not in need of explication, I will argue that blood and spirit are constitutive and constituted symbols which are implicated in the reproduction of the existing pattern of objective relations; a careful examination of the ideological implications of these symbols provides important insight into the objective relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in
Adelaide today. I will again emphasize the point that the implementation of such ideology is not simply imposed from above by the dominant society but involves the active participation of those under domination, and that the outcomes of this mutual participation need not necessarily be achieved through the conscious intention of the actors involved. In fact, and as I have discussed earlier, this collusion is most effective when the process is invisible to the actors and the consequences of their actions are different from those intended (Giddens 1984:293).

The relations between Aborigines and Europeans in South Australia have always pivoted around the power to impose classificatory schemes. In Adelaide, Aboriginal people class themselves as fundamentally and essentially different from Europeans -- different physically and spiritually -- and attribute to themselves qualities and capabilities different not just of degree but of kind. At the same time, European society also conceives and classifies Aborigines as fundamentally and essentially different, but the qualities and capabilities ascribed to them are obviously very different from those which Aborigines ascribe to themselves. Thus both groups participate in the process of classification. The question still remains of why Aborigines have chosen the specific basis of differentiation -- blood and spirit -- for demarcating themselves from members of the dominant society. The answer lies in part in the particular historical relations between the two groups.

As I have shown in chapter 3, the history of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations in South Australia has involved a continuing manipulation of "official"
definitions of Aboriginal, all of which were based, until 1966, upon
classifications of descent. Aboriginal identity, in the eyes of White lawmakers
at least, was not necessarily absolute but was often a matter of degree. Thus
the history of legislation and government policy in South Australia dealing with
Aborigines reveals a tension between attempts to legislate and define a
quantitative disintegration of Aboriginal culture. The government attempted to
ensure this disintegration through the division of families, the control of
children, differential offerings and denials of opportunities based upon
classificatory status, and constraint and control of those groups and individuals
who refused or who were considered by the government to be unable to
cooperate in the government's vision. This tension is an important one and
clearly highlights the "official" perceptions of the governments of the day: the
greater the percentage of Aboriginal blood, the less the potential of the
individual to contribute to the European society. The practical solution to this
problem was to control and constrain the freedoms of Aboriginal people,
isolating those with greater percentages of Aboriginal blood from those with
lesser amounts.7

Because persons legally defined as Aboriginal did not always conform physically
to the expectations of authorities (some Aboriginal people legally defined as
quarter-caste, for example, were not as light skinned as others so defined) the
implementation of policy was often uneven and sometimes capricious. The

7 John McCorquodale's (1986) paper on the legal classification of race addresses the process
whereby Aboriginal people were variously classified as special subjects of special laws based on race.
Focusing on "blood" in this process, Myrna Tonkinson (1990) provides another useful overview and
analysis of the history of the complex interplay of race, politics and definitions of Aboriginality in
Australia.
result of this for Aborigines in South Australia was, at least until the mid-1960s, a largely arbitrary and often unpredictable arena of interaction with non-Aboriginal individuals and institutions, in which lighter-skinned individuals were urged and often forced to assimilate into the dominant society, while the darker-skinned were separated and excluded from participation.

One of the legacies of this process has been the diffusion of the classificatory terminology into everyday usage, the classifications being invoked and employed, not only by Europeans but also utilized on occasion by Aborigines. As a result it is possible even today to find Aboriginal people sometimes classing themselves not only as Aborigines or nungas or as specific "tribal" groups such as the Narungga or Ngarrindjeri, but also as "full-bloods", "mixed-bloods", "half-castes", "quadroons", "full blacks" and "part-Aborigines". It is even possible to hear occasional references to "dark people", "native people", "tribal people", "urban Blacks", "urban Aborigines" and even "wild Blackfellas", though the use of the terms Aboriginal, nunga, Ngarrindjeri and the like are far more common. However, the use of the other terms, though restricted in most cases to the older members of the community (who were adults during the time of the assimilation policy), is frequently reacted to with anger and some embarrassment by younger, politically active Aborigines.

In spite of the occasional reemergence of such terminological divisions and discriminations, there remains a pervasive sentiment -- expressed in the Blackfella Way -- that while Aboriginal people may recognize differences among themselves in terms of tribal or language groupings, those differences
are less significant than the underlying similarities. Thus I argue the emphasis on metaphysical linkages among all Aborigines, based on spiritual rather than strictly genetic criteria, emerges from the engagement of two distinct socio-cultural systems. While the differences among Aboriginal groups are recognized and valued (and even devalued in some cases) by Aborigines themselves, in the context of history those differences are subsumed by a common struggle for survival; in many cases Aboriginal groups have been forced together, under the domination of the non-Aboriginal society, with the result that the rich cultural detail which differentiated them from one another has been suppressed or dissolved.

Through this process there has evolved among the various Aboriginal groups an ideology anchored in notions of a shared spirituality. After generations of opposition, incarceration, social dissolution, and practical exclusion from participation in the European economy, an ideology has emerged which is based upon and supported by that which is less easily assailed by the dominant society: the metaphysical. Spiritual linkages, which escape oppression and are not subject to dilution through intermarriage with non-Aborigines, provide an evasion and refutation of decades of policy and practice aimed squarely at breaking down Aboriginal culture so that Aborigines may be more easily absorbed by the dominant society. Spiritual linkages also provide a base upon which an elaborate and coherent system of behavioral style, disposition and attitude has been built. The simultaneous emphasis on blood, I would also argue, is a product of the history of relations between Aborigines and the dominant society. The latter's apparent obsession with the mixture of
Aboriginal and non- Aboriginal blood and its driving conviction that the
"Aboriginal problem" would only be overcome once the weaker Aboriginal
blood had been so diluted that Aboriginal culture would fade with the
lightening skins of succeeding generations, provides much of the context for the
elaboration of an ideology which inverts the logic of policy and attributes a
vitality and resistance to Aboriginal blood itself.8

Much of the symbolic power of blood and spirit lies in its ability to invert the
continuing emphasis within the dominant society on skin color. As all
Aboriginal people are acutely aware, a person's experience of racism and
discrimination is often a function of the color of their skin and it is common
knowledge that lighter-skinned Aborigines meet, at least in some circumstances,
with less blatant racism than do those of darker skin (Schwab 1988). By
anchoring identity in the metaphysical, where it is invisible, two important
effects are achieved: the dominant society's major criterion of Aboriginality --
dark skin -- is denied while the "real" meaning -- spirituality -- is affirmed. In
denying the dominant society's criterion for differential treatment, those so
treated are bound. Most Aborigines see the policies of government as failed
attempts to annihilate the majority of Aborigines and absorb the rest.

According to the logic of Blackfella Way, while the skins of past generations

---

8 Jordan's (1983, 1985, 1988) examination of Aboriginal identity in South Australia attempts to
explore the influence of European ideas on Aboriginal perceptions and conceptions of themselves. Though I believe this process was and is significant for Aborigines in Adelaide today, I disagree with
the deterministic flavor of her argument: "A particular identification (via census category, for
example)... located Aborigines in a psychological world of meaning" (1985: 30). Jordan's basic
thesis is that Aboriginal identity is most importantly constructed out of the perceptions of others and,
to borrow a well worn concept from sociology, those "significant others" are Europeans. This is no
doubt true for a few Aborigines, but oversstates the case. Clearly, for the majority of people, those
whose perceptions are most important are other Aborigines.
may have progressively lightened after contact with Europeans, the truth of the matter is that, contrary to the beliefs of Europeans, Aboriginality is not simply a matter of skin color after all, but endures, unadulterated, in the blood and spirit of all Aborigines.

Clearly, the essence of Aboriginality is not a set of objective characteristics, visible in the physical makeup of individuals. Yet neither is it only a matter of the metaphysical, for Aboriginality is also defined, constituted and reconstituted in terms of cultural knowledge, in terms which translate into symbolic and cultural capital. Throughout the Aboriginal community there is respect and reverence for "the old ways". Knowledge of language ("nunga lingo"), marriage rules, handicrafts, food gathering and hunting techniques and knowledge are appreciated and sought after. In addition, the majority of Aboriginal people now resident in Adelaide, even those long separated from the traditional cultures of their forbears, have grown up in a social world which values, accepts and cultivates, albeit in varying degrees, beliefs in the realm of the supernatural. These beliefs are conceived to be part of the heritage of all Aboriginal people. Visits by spirits, the interpretation of signs and omens, and beliefs in the power of "clever men" are a part of life for most, and references to "pointing the bone", "going through the Rules", and "kadaitja men" are
common. Many Aborigines believe, in the words of one man from Point McLeay, "the world is full of signs, always telling you something. All you have to do is open your eyes and your ears."

This cultural competence comes through experience; it is reconstituted Aboriginality — Aboriginal essence as subjective content rather than objective form. Like blood and spirit it is largely beyond the reach of objective definition. For those who possess it, it provides respect and recognition within the Aboriginal community. In this sense, cultural competence constitutes symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1977a, 1984).

Where prior to the arrival of Europeans, cultural competence was only available through experience, that is no longer the case. Some of the accumulation of symbolic capital has been possible through the appropriation (or reappropriation) of knowledge concerning the histories and traditions of the ancestors of contemporary Aborigines, especially the knowledge gained and recorded by historians and anthropologists: one man, highly placed in a Commonwealth department, talked of "men of high degree" living among the

---

9 These terms all refer to the realm of traditional knowledge, much of it conceived to be secret and powerful. "Clever men" are variously defined as healers, sorcerers, and medicine men. Typically, these are Aboriginal men who have been initiated in traditional ceremonies and who have been given or who received additional training and powers. The initiation of young boys into manhood is referred to as "going through the rules". "Pointing the bone" is described as a curse or spell which is delivered by pointing a special bone (made from a woman's forearm) at the intended victim who then rapidly weakens and eventually dies. An older woman claimed to have seen "an old fella" point the bone at a white man in Victoria Square in the center of Adelaide, only a few years ago. "Kadaitja men", or "feather feet" are Pijantjatjara sorcerers who are thought to steal souls. They wear special shoes covered with bird feathers to hide their tracks. Initiated men from the northern part of the state are sometimes seen in Adelaide wearing red headbands, a sign of their status as initiated men. I have seen Aboriginal teenage boys who were absolutely terrified of these men, fearing both their presumed powers and the possibility of the red bands might take them north and "put them through the rules". 
Ngarrindjeri during this century, and made reference to Elkin's (1945) classic book of the same name; Judy Inglis' study (1964) of six Aboriginal couples born in the mid 1800s -- the ancestors of a large number of Aborigines living in Adelaide today -- was mentioned during the course of my fieldwork by several people in Adelaide as an important piece of Aboriginal history; a man was clearly angry and disappointed to learn that the Anglican church had recently released files from the Poonindie Mission to a well known White historian, files which he claimed were rightfully the property of Aboriginal people.

With the introduction in recent years of Aboriginal Studies in the public schools and the establishment of the Aboriginal Community College, the South Australian Institute of Technology's Aboriginal Task Force, the University of Adelaide's Centre for Aboriginal Studies in Music, and the various TAFE and CAE programs incorporating courses on anthropology and Aboriginal ethnography, increasing numbers of individuals have gained access to material they would possibly otherwise never have seen or read, including detailed ethnographic accounts of secret/sacred knowledge. In addition, many of these programs have incorporated field trips which bring students for the first time into direct contact with other Aboriginal groups, often in the remote communities of the north of the state.

The broadened availability of means to acquire symbolic capital has raised additional contradictions. While cultural knowledge has always been a means

10 Several Aboriginal people expressed serious concern about the danger these materials posed for uninitiated persons who did not understand the power of the photographs of secret/sacred objects they were viewing and reading about in their own attempts to expand their cultural knowledge.
for the acquisition of symbolic capital within the Aboriginal community, it undergoes a transformation when that cultural knowledge moves into the sphere of marketable cultural resources. This occurs when knowledge and competence which was traditionally experiential and from an oral tradition becomes an object which can be measured, assessed and certified:

Just as economic wealth cannot function as capital until it is linked to an economic apparatus, so cultural competence in its various forms cannot be constituted as cultural capital until it is inserted into the objective relations between the system of economic production and the system producing the producers (Bourdieu 1977a: 186-187).

Along with various tertiary programs emphasizing Aboriginal studies in whole or part have come various certificates, diplomas and degrees. Though much of the curricula which comprise these courses of study are standardized and largely technical, a great deal of emphasis in these programs is on cultural studies. One of the outcomes of this is that what was once purely symbolic capital in the Aboriginal community suddenly becomes certifiable cultural capital. Where symbolic capital involves the acquisition of recognition and respect, cultural capital involves the objectification of knowledge through the means of appropriating that knowledge (a recognized academic credential). In other words, with a diploma in Aboriginal studies, a person's knowledge is certified and its value guaranteed. He or she is guaranteed access to an avenue for the accumulation of income from which those without academic credentials are barred. Though scholastically uncertified competence and knowledge is still of value as symbolic capital, its conversion to money is not guaranteed.
It is well known throughout the Aboriginal community that any of the students in Adelaide who complete a certificate, diploma or degree in one of these tertiary institutions is virtually guaranteed a job, and usually one which pays very well. Once employed, these individuals' cultural capital is so highly valued that they can pick and choose positions that interest them. Over time and with experience, the value of that cultural capital continues to increase and with that increase comes even higher income.

The convertibility of symbolic to cultural capital raises several complex problems for these individuals and increases both pride and tension within the Aboriginal community. Through this process, fundamental contradictions are uncovered which have to be addressed; the implications of these contradictions are profound. I will return to this issue at the end of this chapter.

Style
Having considered the ways in which history and the institutional structures of the dominant society have played a part in shaping the domain of essence -- the metaphysical linkage of Aboriginal people through the bond of blood and spirit inherent in the Blackfella Way -- I will now turn to the ways in which practice is enabled and constrained for Aboriginal people in Adelaide by the second domain, style, which provides the guidelines for action. As I will show, these guidelines are themselves shaped by the objective conditions of everyday life.

As I attempted to show in the previous chapter, the domain of style is complex and multi-faceted. Yet there is one aspect of this domain which is especially
prominent and significant for understanding the Blackfella Way and its role as ideology: the notion of caring and sharing. As I have shown, caring and sharing is a gloss for a range of behaviors and values which underpin and give form to practice through the Blackfella Way. Like economic exclusion and social dissolution, caring and sharing is a cultural schema, but it is a cultural schema which seems especially powerful. Caring and sharing is an enduring frame (probably one of the most enduring), grounded in practice, and transferable across a range of contexts.

For Aboriginal people in Adelaide, caring and sharing functions to order interactions between Aborigines, setting out rules and expectations. It also portrays a symbolic and metaphoric opposition to Europeans, highlighting the contrast between the two groups. According to this schema, Aborigines are oriented toward the group, Europeans toward the individual; Aborigines are selfless, Europeans selfish; Aborigines are moral, Europeans amoral. Like ritual, it is rich with meaning and cultural information, representing and resolving a structural contradiction (scarce resources). Though enacting the cultural schema, the contradiction can be temporarily resolved and the individual actor enriched (with social capital). Thus within the cultural schema of caring and sharing one may see actors responding to, and resolving (from their own point of view), the central contradictions of the culture (Ortner 1989:)

More than any other feature of the Blackfella Way, "caring and sharing" is continually cited by Aborigines in Adelaide as the behavioral characteristic
which sets Aboriginal people apart from others and acts as one of the most accurate barometers by which the social fit of any individual within the community can be assessed. Though caring and sharing is most often perceived within the Adelaide community as an age-old cultural trait, common to Aboriginal groups throughout the continent, I will argue that, to the contrary, caring and sharing as constituted among Aborigines in Adelaide is more accurately explained as a feature of Aboriginal social life which has been shaped by the necessities and contingencies of life among a dominated and economically oppressed group. Where sharing is certainly a widely reported phenomenon in the ethnography of urban Aboriginal groups, I would argue that the pattern is best explained in reference to their shared oppression and economic exclusion.

According to Gale and Wundersitz (1982), Aboriginal migration from outlying reserves began to increase dramatically in the mid-1950's and continued to rise until the mid-1970's. Employment prospects during the early years were marginally better than they had been on the reserves but actual employment has remained poor in comparison to the rates for non-Aboriginal persons. Comparing employment figures collected among Aborigines in Adelaide in 1966 with figures collected in 1980, shows that employment rates had dropped dramatically from 24.1% in 1966 to 8.9% in 1980 (Gale and Wundersitz 1982: 125). Further, according to their 1980 survey, wages accounted for only 16.3% of income for adult Aborigines in households while the remaining income was derived predominantly from unemployment and other types of social security benefits (1982: 108).
Noting a decline in employment rates between 1966 and 1980 Gale and Wundersitz (1982: 182) proposed that Aborigines in Adelaide had responded to deteriorating economic circumstances through "a return to Aboriginal identity and values, to a re-emphasis upon kinship and family support", specifically by pooling and redistributing available income and resources within kin networks. By this, they seem to be suggesting that Aborigines in Adelaide are reactivating some dormant socio-economic strategy in the face of increasing economic pressures. This seems unlikely and overly simplistic. Rather than being forced to "return to Aboriginal identity and values", it seems more likely that in the face of the increasing attention to their predicament which Aborigines have demanded from the government, academicians and the public in general, Gale and Wundersitz have in fact mistaken a long established pattern for a new or returning one. Though Gale and Wundersitz are most certainly correct in suggesting that the sharing Aborigines cite as a key feature of their society is an economic necessity, it seems important to explore the relationship between the economic necessity of the pattern and the cultural explanation for that pattern which Aborigines themselves provide. As I have shown, sharing is seen by Aborigines as fundamental and inflexible, a key feature of Aboriginal life. Still, it is important to ask why such strategies are articulated so explicitly and pervasively in terms of the Blackfella Way?

The Blackfella Way includes a fundamental prescription regarding sharing, and the pattern of sharing is indeed essential for many families during difficult times, but in practice actors sometimes choose to violate the rule and withhold
that which "should" be shared. Money, for example, can be easily denied by simply stating that one has no money at the moment, has lost it on the horses, has already loaned someone else the money, or that an expected check is late. On one occasion, among a group of men in a city pub, I witnessed a man, Johnny, open his wallet to show he had no money when asked by his cousin, Peter, for a loan. Later, after Johnny left, Peter remarked in a low voice that he knew Johnny had money -- he always carried money in his boot. When I asked why Peter hadn't said that at the time, he replied, "No, couldn't do that, would've made me 'shamed". When I asked why Johnny went to the trouble of opening up his wallet, Peter explained that it was necessary since "nungas can't just say no, that wouldn't be right". In this sense, refusal is considered inappropriate, while having nothing to share, on the other hand, is not.

In day-to-day practice a person can only really depend for assistance on close kin, or close friends (almost without exception one in the same) and then only when that person has not abused their hospitality. While in the field I heard numerous complaints regarding particular individuals who chronically abused the hospitality of others and on several occasions I witnessed denial of assistance to some of them. It was extremely rare, however, for such denials to be direct. Almost invariably individuals were rebuffed indirectly through reference to situations or conditions beyond the refuser's control. In one case a ride was refused by claiming a prior commitment to "take old Auntie to the

---

11 An elaborate system of sharing avoidance strategies has been described by Carter (1984) in an Aboriginal community located in coastal New South Wales.
doctor'. In fact, no such commitment had been made. In extreme circumstances, quite elaborate evasive strategies are used. On one occasion a woman packed her belongings, collected her children and moved to a distant town complaining that the constant demands and disruptions caused by her relatives had reached the point where she had to flee. It was easier, she said, to pick up and go than to turn her own people away. Though not a common strategy, this woman's decision allowed her to escape the pressure of economic and social demands while not denying their validity and propriety.12

It seems clear that, in contrast to the rule, some forms of withholding are acceptable. The social acceptance of withholding, however, hinges on the actor's ability to veil the act so as not to disturb the illusion of reciprocity. When it does occur, withholding is rarely significant in terms of allowing individuals to accumulate large amounts of wealth, for to spend ostentatiously on oneself is to publicly flaunt the violation of the sharing ethos.

Sharing among Aborigines in Adelaide, as many of these examples indicate, is seldom an active response to the perception of need; rather, sharing is often prompted by the demands of others.13 This fact contradicts the common representation of sharing so often promoted by Aboriginal people themselves.

---

12 When I returned to Adelaide for a period of fieldwork in 1986 I learned that this woman had since returned to Adelaide complaining that she missed her people.

13 For a critical review of sharing and reciprocity among hunter-gatherers see Peterson (1986). A case study of sharing and the impact and incorporation of cash into a remote Aboriginal economy see Altman and Peterson (1986).
In day to day life, however, the actions of individuals are geared to the accommodation of this contradiction. As I have shown, there are particular techniques for actively evading demands which place undue strain on individuals and households. There are also passive evasions through which demands can be escaped by anticipation of them. Groceries, for example, may be purposefully kept in short supply; rarely is a stock of items accumulated. Though there is in such practice a form of economy in that only by shopping for food on an "as needed" basis can one ensure that food is available every day; since what is stored in the refrigerator or cupboard is soon gone, it is more commonly said that such stockpiling is "not necessary" and "not how Aboriginal people do things". Though it is a long established fact of life in capitalist economies that families on fixed and low incomes lack the cash to buy larger and thus cheaper quantities of foodstuffs or to purchase quantities of sale items and thus save money in the long run, such explanations were never forthcoming among Aborigines in Adelaide. Taking advantage of sales and stocking up on particular goods is perceived of as going against the grain of the Blackfella Way in that it smacks of hoarding and selfishness and is considered something which Whites, not Aborigines do. A woman who says she long ago separated herself from her Aboriginal relatives complained bitterly that if they saw her well stocked cupboards they would help themselves while deriding her with comments like, "What do you have all this for? You don't need all this for yourself! Who do you think you are?"

14 This pattern contrasts to some degree with that described by Sibthorpe (1988) among Aborigines in Kempsey. According to Sibthorpe shopping patterns were shaped by the receipt of fortnightly welfare payments, and "pension day" saw Aborigines purchasing major foodstuffs for the fortnight. In Adelaide, on the other hand, there was less of a tendency for a "big shop" at the beginning of the pension period.
It is important to emphasize that while sharing is structured by the objective conditions of daily life and is constrained by often unspoken cultural rules, it is of vital economic importance to many Aboriginal families. For many Aborigines, sharing may provide the only elasticity for meeting the economic contingencies of day to day life. On the one hand the ideology of sharing and caring is an effective mechanism for Aborigines living in marginal economic circumstances; it introduces a culturally valued means for pooling resources and meeting shortfalls. On the other hand it provides a matrix of rules and values which are effective in large degree in leveling differences in wealth by discouraging the diversion of resources into single households. Of crucial importance is the fact that the ethos of sharing and caring is seen by Aboriginal people as a mode of economics which is unique to themselves, which is natural and normal and is in fact integral to their definition of themselves as Aborigines. For anyone to blatantly resist the demands of their kin or to flaunt differences in material wealth is to risk alienation and to be drawn into the vortex of the dominant society, to "forget who you are".

The social orientation of Aboriginal life is perceived in Adelaide as fundamental to the Aboriginal sense of self. In contrast to Whites who are seen by Aborigines to be obsessed with the accumulation and conspicuous display of material wealth, Aborigines, according to the Blackfella Way, "invest" in people and value the functional, regarding material possessions as tools, as means not ends. One of the results of emphasis on the social is a deep seated attitude that purchases should be functional and practical and that purchase of expensive items should be avoided since large amounts of money could be put
to better use. Home ownership, for example, is extremely rare among Aborigines in Adelaide. Though very few could qualify in terms of income and down payment in the private market, as was pointed out in chapter 2, avenues for purchase of Aboriginal funded houses are available and in many cases the repayments are lower than the rents currently paid. Yet few Aborigines appear to be interested in low cost home ownership and few seriously consider the prospect. One man expressed a common sentiment when he commented, "I got better things to do with what little money I got than buy this old humpy. Blackfellas aren't interested in that. No, owning homes is not for Blackfellas."

While it is rare for Aborigines to purchase Aboriginal Funded Housing, the research by Braddock and Wanganeen (1980: 28) sponsored by the South Australian Aboriginal Housing Board revealed that in 1980, "the majority of funded tenants who have purchased are people who have married Whites and/or are in good professional and semi-professional jobs". The fact that most of those who purchase Funded homes would qualify for loans on the open market suggests that those individuals are wholly atypical of the average occupants of Funded homes, and that those for whom the program was initiated, individuals or families who could not otherwise purchase a home, were not taking advantage of the opportunity. Within the general community there appears to be little interest and little expectation that homes can or should be "owned". Indeed, on several occasions individuals expressed doubt that more than a tiny handful of Aborigines in Adelaide could afford to own a home and those who were mentioned were always treated with suspicion.

"Uptown Blacks and Whitefellas own homes," said one woman, "the rest of us
proper Blackfellas just get in the queue for funded". This comment is particularly telling in that it implies that those who might own a home are not typical Aborigines and that they are somehow out of place, that such behavior is pretentious. This concern with pretention is a particularly significant pattern to which I shall return.

Similarly, Aborigines who purchase expensive and luxurious cars are singled out, or perhaps single themselves out, for attention. Invariably, when criticism is leveled at Aboriginal bureaucrats, comments are made about "big, shiny cars". While there is an appreciation for stylish and attractive cars, especially among the young, there is a pervasive attitude that cars need only be functional and that money spent on cars which are more than functional is wasted. One man had a large win at the horse races and purchased a late model car which was quite luxurious. Though a less expensive car would have been functional, he admitted in low voice that he thought he deserved something special for himself. Nonetheless he was extremely sensitive about the expense and on several occasions I heard him explain his purchase to other Aboriginal people as "necessary" for driving family around and that he'd gotten a "good price" on the car. This explanation was always prefaced by a long list of other "practical" expenditures he had made with past wins: payments on rental arrears, electricity payments, new television for the kids, birthday gifts for relatives, all for the good of others and not just himself. Likewise, expensive clothing and home furnishings are often the focus of criticism and as a consequence those who acquire such goods are often extremely self-conscious about them.
Buying a home, or spending money on an expensive car, extravagant clothing, or home furnishings is clearly contrary to the values expressed in the Blackfella Way and the pervasive criticism of Aborigines who expend their incomes on such items is framed in such terms; one is subject to accusations such as "forgetting who you are" or "thinking you're better than the rest of us". While Aborigines say that it's not their way to pursue the material and that those who do have lost touch with their people, I would argue that much of the force of this sentiment is related to the hard fact that the majority of Aborigines are structurally excluded from avenues whereby such "luxuries" might be obtained. In a world where what is possible and obtainable is limited to what is minimally necessary, that which is beyond the grasp of the majority is devalued and denigrated. The pursuit of that which is beyond the practical or functional is in fact the pursuit of and investment in a form of capital for which in some sense there is no market within the Aboriginal community; the only form of capital appropriate to the Blackfella Way is symbolic capital, amassed through cultural competency and knowledge, through doing things the Blackfella Way, through investing in the social and cultural and renouncing the material. This form of symbolic capital is uncertifiable capital and, unlike academic training, cannot be converted so readily to economic capital. The tension between the two forms is obvious.

The Blackfella Way's explicit emphasis on sharing and the primacy of social over material concerns appear to be linked to privation. Where people have

---

15 The exception to this pattern is income obtained through symbolic capital embodied in material form: Aboriginal arts and crafts. These may take the form of literature, painting, acting, music, carvings, feather sculptures, and the like.
been forced into dire economic circumstances it is not surprising that one finds
an elaborate ethos based upon sharing. What is surprising, perhaps, is that
when Aborigines in Adelaide discuss the Blackfella Way, there is a clear de-
emphasis on the economic necessity of sharing and a pervasive emphasis on the
cultural basis of such prescriptions. The sentiment is rarely "we share because
we are forced to" but most often "we share because we're Aboriginal and
Aboriginal people share". Sharing is seen as a pervasive and natural pattern of
behavior for Aborigines, a pattern which would be followed whether or not it
was economically advantageous to do so. There is much evidence to indicate,
however, that this is not necessarily the case in day-to-day life.

Contrary to general representation, sharing, when it does occur, is carried out
within fairly strict limits. Though sharing is a fundamental feature of the
Blackfella Way, in day-to-day life there are specific unspoken rules regarding
the implementation of sharing which are discordant with the ideal. Though an
Aboriginal person may express the view that he or she can always depend on
other Aborigines, especially in times of need, in actuality that person
understands that not all Aboriginal people will in fact recognize a responsibility
to provide for that person. Requests for assistance from individuals outside a
particular network are, in contradiction to what is usually expressed, considered
abuses of the system and are most often (though not always) met with awkward
and uncomfortable evasion on the part of the person being pressed for
assistance.
In extreme and flagrant abuses of the unspoken etiquette of sharing, where for example an unknown Aboriginal person attempts to elicit money from another, or a person has chronically abused the good will of kin, an individual may feel less compulsion to respond to the request and will sometimes flatly refuse. Such outright refusals are rare, however, given that Aboriginal actors share a belief in their basic impropriety. When they do occur they are unsettling for the individuals being asked for assistance since such requests bring to the surface the contradiction between the real and ideal dimensions of the Blackfella Way. As described earlier, when individual actors use this contradiction as leverage to their own advantage in demanding assistance, the subject of the demand is brought face to face with the extreme discomfort of this contradiction. But this raises another issue: given what is clearly strategic action, it appears that Aboriginal actors are conscious of the full significance of their practice. This, I believe, is only partly true. To understand why, one needs to understand the process of symbolic violence.

**Symbolic Violence**

The notion of symbolic violence has been developed in various studies by Pierre Bourdieu in which he has drawn attention to the process whereby the existing relations of domination are sustained through the collective misrecognition of the process of domination by the dominated. Though symbolic violence appears in many forms, Bourdieu (1990) differentiates between societies in which there are no objectified institutions though which the relations of domination are sustained, and those in which such objectified institutions exist. In pre-capitalist societies, relations of domination must be
continually renewed and sustained:

In such a universe, there are only two ways of getting and keeping a lasting hold over someone: debts and gifts, the overtly economic obligations imposed by the usurer, or the moral obligations and emotional attachments created and maintained by the generous gift. (Thus) symbolic violence, gentle, invisible violence, unrecognized as such, chosen as much as undergone, that of trust, obligation, personal loyalty, hospitality, gifts, debts, piety, in a word, of all the virtues honoured by the ethic of honour, presents itself as the most economical mode of domination because it best corresponds to the economy of the system (Bourdieu 1990: 126-127).

Illustrating the notion of symbolic violence with examples from Kabyle society, Bourdieu (1977a:190-191) shows how the economic interests of the dominant Master are secured and at the same time masked through the "pact of honor", the system of moral and affective obligations which arise out of a series of ongoing "symbolic" exchanges between Master and Client. In this example, the domination of the Master is sustained through the collusion of all parties who collectively misrecognize the economic reality of the exchange. In contrast, in Western capitalist societies the relations of domination are maintained by objectified institutions; the active involvement of individuals within the dominant group is no longer required since the violence is built into the institution itself. Under these circumstances symbolic violence takes its toll by the imposition of the "culturally arbitrary", by creating the illusion of the naturalness of the existing systems which underpin social, economic and political relations. Western systems of institutionalized education are prime examples of such objectified institutions, functioning to reproduce the established order (Bourdieu 1973, 1977b, Bourdieu and Passeron 1977).
For Aboriginal people in Adelaide today, symbolic violence was and is built into a range of objectified institutions which reflect and mirror the existing structures of power and authority: the Aborigines Protection Board, the Welfare Department and, later, the Department for Community Welfare, State and private systems of education, the Commonwealth government, and indeed, a plethora of Aboriginal organizations funded by local, state and federal governments. The reality of this can be illustrated by returning to an earlier discussion of Aboriginal disinterest in home ownership. The lack of home ownership places Aborigines in Adelaide in a position whereby they are bound to and dependent on the dominant society for shelter.

Housing is obviously a basic necessity and everyone has to make some arrangement to secure it. As I indicated earlier, there is a pervasive desire to secure Aboriginal Funded Housing. There are many reasons given for preferring this type of rental accommodation, but most insist they want it because "its Aboriginal" and is administered by Aborigines. Thus one doesn't have to interact with Europeans. Still, I would argue, there remains a binding obligation; in this case, however, the members of the Aboriginal Funded Housing Board act as arbiters of the act of symbolic violence, further veiling the process whereby Aborigines are dependent on the dominant society. Because the Housing Board is not self-sufficient, the monies necessary to purchase additional stock and to operate the subsidized rentals are provided by the government. Thus renters tend to misrecognize the true nature of the arrangement and the pervasive sense that the homes are "Aboriginal" screens the economic basis of the rental/landlord relationship from the renters. From
one perspective, it makes little difference that the Board contains Aboriginal representatives, indeed, there were not Aboriginal representatives the reality of the arrangement may be more transparent. As it is, Adelaide Aborigines feel an ownership for the Funded Housing program, and one of the perceived benefits of the current arrangement is that by having friends and relatives on the board, one can expend one's symbolic capital to secure special treatment from the board in the form of quicker transfers, suspended waiting periods, and the like.

As a result of this perceived nepotism, there are constant personal and factional disputes among Aboriginal Board members and various members of the Aboriginal community, disputes which further disguise the true nature of the existing arrangement. Following Bourdieu (1990: 133), the funding of Aboriginal organizations and enterprises can be viewed as a means whereby the dominant class converts economic capital to symbolic capital (by appearing to show "good faith", cultivating the perception or belief in government concern for Aboriginal welfare, and promoting the image of Aboriginal self-determination). This process conceals and disguises the nature of the true relationship between the dominated and the dominating. The degree to which such funding results in a fundamental realignment of the structures of social, political and economic relations would appear to be minimal.

The masking of the process whereby dominated actors participate in the reproduction of the objective structures of their own domination is achieved through the process Bourdieu (1977a:164) labels *meconnaissance* or
Every established order tends to produce (to very different degrees and with very different means) the naturalization of its own arbitrariness. Of all the mechanisms tending to produce this effect, the most important and the best concealed is undoubtedly the dialectic of the objective chances and the agents' aspirations, out of which arises the sense of limits, commonly called the sense of reality, i.e. the correspondence between the objective classes and the internalized classes, social structures and mental structures, which is the basis of the most ineradicable adherence to the established order. Systems of classification which reproduce, in their own specific logic, the objective classes, i.e. the divisions by sex, age, or position in the relations of production, of which they are a product, make their specific contribution to the reproduction of the power relations of which they are the product, by securing the misrecognition, and hence the recognition, of the arbitrariness on which they are based (emphasis in original).

The practical knowledge actors draw upon in their daily lives is shaped by their internalization and embodiment of the objective structures within which they live their lives. Social practice thus involves the implementation of a classificatory system, i.e., a system of evaluative perceptions and appreciations, which is itself a product of the objective social divisions (Bourdieu 1984:468). The legitimation of those objective social divisions is provided through the actors' misrecognition of the arbitrary nature of those divisions and the actors' appropriation and naturalization of that system of classifications.

16 Thompson is critical of Bourdieu's notion of misrecognition, suggesting that Bourdieu "relies too heavily on a consensual model of social reproduction" and that differing degrees of misrecognition are not only likely but probable (1984:59). Thompson's criticism appears unfounded given Bourdieu's explicit discussion of this very problem in his description of hysteresis (1977a:78).

Willis' discussion of partial penetrations is a thorough examination of how one group exhibits varying degrees of what Bourdieu would describe as misrecognition (1977).
is my contention that the Blackfella Way itself acts to mask the existing system of domination. In other words, doing things the "Blackfella Way", acting in a way which is seen to be at once "proper" and "natural", from the Aboriginal point of view, implies seeing and evaluating action in the world in terms of a very specific system of classes and categories, which promote the reproduction of the objective conditions which give rise to those same classes and categories; though actors may decry their lack of opportunity and recognize they are allowed strictly limited possibilities, the belief in and insistence on the propriety of the Blackfella Way operates to obscure the fact that the Blackfella Way is constituted in a classificatory system which itself constrains opportunity and enables a strictly limited range of objective options. This misrecognition (and thus recognition) of the legitimacy of the existing relations of domination is promoted through the process Giddens (1979: 195) refers to as the "naturalisation of the present". Bourdieu (1977a: 78), describes the same process as "history turned into nature", while Marcuse (1955: 69) refers to ideology as "second nature" in describing the process wherein history turns into habit.

It will be recalled that a major tenet of the Blackfella Way is, indeed, its

---

17 I wish to emphasize, however, that I am not suggesting a simplistic cultural model of poverty wherein Aborigines in Adelaide should be seen to be themselves solely responsible for the economic privation the majority suffer, but that through the experience of a particular history and through the process of symbolic violence Aborigines have come to hold particular conceptions, perceptions (or misperceptions) and beliefs which are in large part the product of the structures which constitute the objective conditions of daily life.

The debate concerning the nature of poverty is a complex one which it is not necessary to enter into here. The best known albeit least understood of the cultural theories of poverty is Oscar Lewis' Culture of Poverty (1966). One of the better discussions of the issue of poverty is provided by Waxman (1977) who provides a critical examination of various theories and approaches.
implied sense of naturalness. While the Blackfella Way refers in one sense to
the essential spiritual (and thus natural) interrelation of Aboriginal people, the
behavioral prescriptions contained within it are also seen by Aboriginal people
to be natural rules for human groups. It is this natural and "common sensical"
character of the Blackfella Way which allows Aboriginal actors who follow its
dictates to collaborate in their own oppression. Indeed, to the majority of
Aboriginal people in Adelaide, the Blackfella Way is common sense and it is
precisely this "taken-for-grantedness" and "matter-of-factness" which masks the
true nature of social relations. As Geertz points out,

There are a number of reasons why treating common sense as a
relatively organized body of considered thought, rather than just
what anyone clothed and in his right mind knows, should lead on
to some useful conclusions; but perhaps the most important is
that it is an inherent characteristic of common-sense thought
precisely to deny this and to affirm that its tenets are immediate
deliverances of experience, not deliberated reflections upon it
(1983:75).

It is exactly this sense of the "immediate deliverance" of Aboriginal experience,
coupled with notions of naturalness, which, for most, places the Blackfella Way
beyond the bounds of question. But only for most, not all. As Gramsci (1971)
points out with his notion of contradictory consciousness, common sense
includes not only the unquestioned assumptions, distortions and mystifications
about the nature of the world, but may also include insights and penetrations
which uncover the contradictions of daily life. This is an important point to
which I shall return.

The immediate deliverance of common sense is amplified by its incorporation
in bodily hexis. Thus the objective reality of social life is internalized by actors
and, through internalization, it structures and is structured by the habitus, the embodiment of the objective relations in a set of enduring dispositions which structure the practice of actors. Material conditions, writes Bourdieu (1977a: 72), produce habitus,

systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively "regulated" and "regular" without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor (emphasis in original).

One of the features of the habitus is that it is embodied, observable in ordered action, speech, posture, rhythm, motion, taste for music, appreciation of art and the like. In the previous chapter I presented a sketch of the Blackfella Way and focused in part on style. The components of style I discussed, indeed, the "nunga style" which Aborigines in Adelaide recognize so readily as part of the Blackfella Way, is content given form in the habitus. Thus Aboriginal actors not only recognize and know the naturalness of the Blackfella Way, they experience and embody it. They make sense of it, they construct it, by turning that which is objectively allowed into that which is subjectively allowable. In this way Aborigines have their own set of principles and practices. They see themselves as having their own "way": of walking, talking, and thinking; their own sense of propriety, morality, and taste; and their own goals, attitudes, and values.

Though Aboriginal actors often acknowledge that the range of social
opportunity is severely limited for Aboriginal people in Australia today, they share a pervasive belief that they do and should retain a qualitative separation from and independence of the dominant society. The distinctive history, attributes, values, and attitudes crystallized in the Blackfella Way, are seen by the majority of Aborigines to at once affirm, express and ensure their survival as a distinct people.

Yet, as I have shown, the limitations historically imposed by the objective realities of daily life have so long inscribed the sense of the possible that the very practices of Aborigines in Adelaide today, mediated through the habitus and formulated most explicitly in the Blackfella Way, provide for the continuation of those objective limitations. Further, the seeds of misrecognition are so deeply embedded that most Aboriginal actors see in the Blackfella Way not their own participation in the reproduction of their own structural oppression, but a set of oppositional attitudes and a uniquely Aboriginal style which they believe secures their freedom from that very domination.

Penetration, Resistance and the Struggle for Orthodoxy

As I have shown, though the Blackfella Way ideology is pervasive and does contribute to the reproduction of existing forms of domination, it is not accepted by all Aboriginal people without question. If the Blackfella Way was simply an extension of a dominant hegemonic ideology, one would expect to see the views of the dominant society frame and shape the worldview of all Aborigines in Adelaide, veiling the conflicts and contradictions inherent in the existing relations of domination. If this were the case, Aborigines as a whole
would have to be seen as unknowing collaborators in their own victimization.

As I have shown, Aboriginal ideology is not nearly so simple as this.

Aboriginal people recognize some of the structural contradictions and experience the social and cultural tensions which result. Thus, to greater and lesser degrees, all Aboriginal people in Adelaide are capable of penetrating (Willis: 1977) the structures of domination and glimpsing some of its fundamental contradictions.

But these penetrations are far from uniform. Aborigines invest their interpretations with different configurations of meaning. As James Scott (1985: 319) points out in his analysis of resistance penetrations of "official" realities among Malaysian peasants:

> The penetration of official platitudes by any subordinate class is to be expected both because those platitudes are unlikely to be as cohesive or uniform as is often imagined and because they are subject to different interpretations depending on the social position of the actors. Such divergent understandings are, in turn, rooted in daily experience (emphasis in original).

The social position of actors, as Scott notes, is one of the keys to understanding the impact of penetrations on practice. One of the elderly Aboriginal men I interviewed was the head of one of the first families moved off the Reserve as part of the assimilation policy of the 1950s. While he viewed the process as one which was positive and necessary, his grandson viewed the experience as degrading and ultimately damaging. According to the grandson, the government had consciously and carefully attempted to break down Aboriginal culture and further dilute what little political power Aborigines had as a group by isolating families and forcing their absorption into the dominant society.
The grandfather, on the other hand, viewed the policy as an opportunity which allowed him to free his family from the poverty and hopelessness of the Reserve.

Similarly, the perceptions, understandings and interpretations of some of the members of the emergent Black middle class are often very different from those who describe themselves as "Black activists". Many of the former are among the cadre of relatively young Aboriginal bureaucrats -- who jokingly refer to themselves as "the Black mafia" -- whose skills and knowledge have been "certified" through credentials gained in one of the tertiary education programs in Adelaide. For each of these individuals, there is the potential for a unique interpretation of what is possible, a unique set of penetrations, but as I have argued above, that potential is severely constrained. To understand the process through which those penetrations are constrained, one needs to understand the process whereby cultural knowledge is reproduced.

I argued earlier that the constitution of common sense was far more simple for Aboriginal people before the arrival of Europeans. The range of what was considered (and considerable) was more clearly defined and readily agreed upon. According to Bourdieu (1977a: 165-166):

   in a determinate social formation, the stabler the objective structures and the more fully they reproduce themselves in the agents' dispositions, the greater the extent of the field of doxa, of that which is taken for granted.

In contemporary Aboriginal society, the objective structures are no longer stable, and it is possible for individuals to choose from a wide range of options
and thus experience a new set of possibilities. These new opportunities and ideas shook the foundation of that which was once taken for granted, doxa.

For Aborigines, the alignment between subjective and objective structures was fractured with the arrival of Europeans and the unspoken, natural and taken for granted was suddenly and irreversibly thrown into question and open to discussion.

Over time, in recasting knowledge and experience in a new definition of common sense, the Blackfella Way was constituted as an ideological system. This reconstitution of reality is what Bourdieu (1977a: 169) refers to as "orthodoxy, straight, or rather straightened opinion, which aims, without ever entirely succeeding, at restoring the primal state of innocence of doxa". Thus, as I have shown, the Blackfella Way attempts to reframe social action and social structure and provide a template for social life. It provides an orthodox model that encapsulates and interprets history, provides an invisible and mystical link among all Aboriginal people which stresses commonality over difference (blood and spirit), and explains, interprets and orders social action (style). It also provides a sense of the possible, and a framework for interpreting what is, what can and what should be.

Structure is reproduced when people do not or cannot see alternatives to that structure, or when they lack the power to enact the changes they envision (Ortner 1989: 201). When new alternatives are seen, imagined or experienced, orthodoxy is challenged. These alternatives -- heresies or heresy in Bourdieu's (1977a: 169) terms -- are effectively critiques of the Blackfella Way. Thus, as I
have suggested above, though there is a close fit between the extant objective divisions experienced by most Aborigines in Adelaide and the principles of division embedded in the Blackfella Way, the Blackfella Way is not entirely effective in defining the sense of the possible for Aborigines in Adelaide today. As I have shown, the legitimacy of the Blackfella Way is the subject of debate among some Aborigines in the community and is summarily rejected by a few.

With the emergence of heresy there is a suspension of the assumed and a struggle in the positioning of the boundary between the questioned and unquestionable. The truly contentious nature of the Blackfella Way is manifest in the elaborate discourse surrounding it and the strong resentment its adherents harbor for those Aborigines who deny or reject it. Though most Aborigines in Adelaide attempt to hold to this orthodox definition and classification of reality, the existence of critical opinion jeopardizes the self-evidence of the Aboriginal socio-cultural world through questioning the very discourse about the nature of the world -- the Blackfella Way -- which cements, through daily practice, that self-evidence.

The Blackfella Way is questioned most fundamentally when individuals find themselves drawn fully into the dominant economy. For many, increased opportunities for education can be translated into material gains. With a degree, certificate or diploma, an individual is suddenly "marketable" and the doors of material opportunity open. According to the Blackfella Way, one can refuse to be drawn into the exploitative world of the Whites, or one can go to work for one's people. In the first case, one may be accused of "selling out", 
but in the second the pressures may be overwhelming. In either case the individual is faced with a critical contradiction of the ideology. Few can successfully balance the enormous increase in demands from both the Black and White worlds. As one Aboriginal bureaucrat described it, the changes in lifestyle which are required to hold a job in the "new Black middle class" don't fit with the Blackfella Way. One "needs" nice clothes, a reliable car, and a regular and stable lifestyle. One needs to be "on time" and dependable. There are increased costs and additional responsibilities. On the other hand, the Aboriginal ideology suggests the individual with a steady, well-paying job is a resource one can depend on, but the demands of relatives for money, lodging, and food, are suddenly disruptive.

"I can't have people stopping in here in the middle of the night for a feed, I have to go to work," one man said. "I'm building a better life for my kids and I just can't meet all the demands anymore". When individuals attempt to change their lifestyles in ways which contradict the Blackfella Way they are accused of "forgetting who they are", of "becoming white", of pretension and snobbery. They are heretics, challenging the unchallengeable, denying their identities as Aborigines. These individuals find themselves in a sort of social and cultural vacuum, neither White nor, so people tell them, Black.

For those who attempt to balance the demands and resolve some of the contradictions, the pressure is enormous. Aborigines with stable jobs and stable incomes are often pressed into political leadership and the stress is often overpowering. Many of these individuals are overworked and quickly burn-out.
Their gains are seen by other Aborigines to be a result of translating symbolic capital into economic capital, and there is an assumption that they "owe" the community. Many among the emergent Aboriginal middle class hold this same view but find the stress of expectation too much to take. With the emergence of the Black middle class, the fundamental assumptions of the Blackfella Way have been tested and challenged. The domain of options has expanded and the orthodox view is contested. So far, those who challenge the ideology have done so at great personal cost.

As I have argued, there exists an interplay between the dominated and the dominating. Where the dominant European society, from the earliest days of cultural contact, relied on overt and usually physical violence and control, violence has become increasingly symbolic and the imposition of definitions of "the natural scheme of things" has been accomplished with the complicity of the dominated. Further, these principles of division have become so deeply inscribed as to become self-evident -- to prescribe for Aboriginal people sense of limits -- reflecting and reproducing the practical experience of objective social divisions.

The Blackfella Way is instrumental in sustaining the interests of the dominant non-Aboriginal society in that it embodies the objective limits of possibility made available to Aboriginal people by that dominant society. Through this ideological system human agents participate in the reproduction of a system of dispositions, values and ideals which in turn reproduce those objective conditions. Through this process, involving what Giddens has called the duality
of structure (1979, 1984), Aboriginal actors collaborate in the (often unintentional) reproduction of the existing structure of social relations. As I have shown, however, Aboriginal actors are both capable of imagining other possibilities and resisting existing structures. As Paul Willis (1977: 175) points out:

Social agents are not passive bearers of ideology, but active appropriators who reproduce existing structures only through struggle, contestation, and a partial penetration of those structures.

I believe the argument I have developed here shows that the power of ideology is not absolute. This is an important contrast to the theories of ideology developed by Marx (1972) and many other of the neo-Marxists (e.g., Althusser 1971), who envision an iron-fisted ideology which binds actors so securely that the possibility of human agency is eliminated (cf Abercrombie, Hill and Turner 1980). Rather, the experience of Aborigines in Adelaide shows the power of orthodoxy to shape, not determine the realm of common sense. As Scott (1985: 326) points out

the main function of a system of domination is to accomplish precisely this: to define what is realistic and what is not realistic and to drive certain goals and aspirations into the realm of the impossible, the realm of idle dreams, wishful thinking.

I have argued that to understand identity and ideology among Aborigines in Adelaide, one must understand the interrelationship of culture, practice and history, and I have attempted to show the ways in which a cultural system shapes practice and the ways in which that practice shapes and is shaped by objective structures in the world. In this process, Aboriginal people interpret
and reconstitute their own history. As I have shown, the sense of identity, character and style inscribed by the Blackfella Way results not from a set of age-old cultural values pervading Aboriginal society but from the constraints of limited opportunity which the structural separation of Aborigines from the dominant society affords them. The sense of character and style which Aborigines attribute to the Blackfella Way is more accurately the outcome of the process whereby Aboriginal people have found value in what the dominant society allows them while rejecting and devaluing that which is denied. Yet the Blackfella Way is produced so effectively because it is more than simply a set of ideas about spirituality, more than a framework for interpreting history, and more than a social and political manifesto: it is both subject and object, practiced structure. In this sense the Blackfella Way is ideology embodied and enacted.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Berndt, R. (n.d.). Unpublished manuscript in two volumes describing the indigenous culture of the Jaraldi tribe of the Narrinyeri "confederacy". Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.


South Australian Association (1834). *South Australia: Outline of the Plan of a Proposed Colony to be Founded on the South Coast of Australia; With an Account of the Soil, Climate, Rivers, &c.* London: Ridgway and Sons.


