THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF ABORIGINAL
FRINGE-DWELLERS

By

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This thesis is my own work and represents my own views and not those of the Department of the House of Representatives for which I work. I have acknowledged all sources.

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The topic for this thesis was prompted by my work as research officer and, subsequently, as Secretary to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs. I was interested in examining one of the Committee's inquiries to see how it operated to define images of Aborigines and Aboriginality.

I chose the fringe-dwelling inquiry because I was involved in it and, consequently, had direct knowledge of it. As I was interested in wider community images of Aborigines and Aboriginality, the fringe-dwelling inquiry was a particularly useful one to re-examine because of the importance that the term 'fringe-dweller' has had in summing up community perceptions of Aborigines as people caught between European and Aboriginal worlds or cultures, but belonging to neither. Also, as I am still Secretary to the Committee, an important element of the study is the current anthropological concern not to stand back and look at the situation of Aborigines 'objectively' but to consider the part that we, as anthropologists, play in defining the situation of Aborigines. The re-evaluation of the fringe-dwelling inquiry has been for me an exercise in self-evaluation which will be instructive for future Committee inquiries.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL BASIS

Introduction

Since the early days of the colonization of Australia, governments have established commissions and committees of inquiry to investigate and to provide them with advice about solutions to the Aboriginal 'problem'. These inquiries, as Woenne notes, have also had an educative aspect, informing the general public of the 'true state of affairs' of the Aboriginal situation. (Woenne 1979:324-56) The passing of the 1967 referendum and the establishment of Aboriginales as an issue of public interest has seen an increasing reliance by governments on the advisory and educative functions of such inquiries. Current policies of self-determination and self-management have contributed to this trend as governments have established inquiries to consult with Aborigines and provide them with advice that ostensibly reflects Aboriginal needs and desires. Despite this trend there are few studies of such inquiries. (Woenne 1979 and Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies 1984) This thesis is about one of these inquiries, that of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs into fringe-dwelling Aboriginal communities.

The reasons for undertaking this study are not limited to the paucity of other studies of public inquiries into Aboriginal affairs, but have a personal basis. I was research officer with the Committee's secretariat during the course of the inquiry and I assisted in preparing the draft report. I had only been with the Committee for a few months at the time the inquiry commenced and I knew little
about Aboriginal affairs, having been recruited as a generalist to the Department of the House of Representatives, which provided the secretariat for the Committee. Although I knew little about Aboriginal affairs I would have described myself as being 'sympathetic' towards the Aboriginal viewpoint, with rather romantic notions about Aborigines. As members of the secretariat, consisting of the Committee secretary and two research officers, we had significant ability to set the agenda for the Committee's inquiries through our role in inviting submissions, preparing briefing material and suggested questions for members at public hearings and finally preparing the draft report for the Committee's consideration. To this extent the Committee's analysis, conclusions and recommendations reflect the influence of ideas of members of the Secretariat including myself. The following then is as much a self-critique of my own views at the time as it is a critique of the Committee's inquiry. However, it is also true that as members of the secretariat we were conscious of parameters set by the views and political alignments of Committee members, particularly those of the Chairman. These parameters defined a boundary of acceptable views beyond which the Committee could only be eased on certain, less crucial, issues. In this sense there were limits to the influence of the secretariat.

This thesis does not stem from any disquiet which I had at the time about the Committee's inquiry, its processes and its conclusions, although I did have certain reservations. Rather it stems from a more critical perspective developed during my subsequent undertaking of a Master of Arts degree in anthropology, concentrating on Aborigines. I re-read the evidence and reflected on the inquiry more critically and in doing so became aware of the often hidden agendas in the analyses and the proposals contained in submissions and in the Committee's own views and conclusions. I also appreciated better the limitations of the Committee's inquiry process and methodology. I considered that both these areas required some examination because the ways in which Aborigines and Aboriginal issues
are constructed in public debate are revealing of underlying attitudes and influential on policy formation.

There was a tendency by the Committee, and myself, to read the evidence to the inquiry superficially without looking at implications of analyses and proposals, contradictions within submissions and the interests of those who gave evidence. Nor was there an appreciation of the limitations that the Committee's approach imposed on the kind of evidence it received, the way it defined the inquiry and the conclusions it reached. The purpose of this thesis is to expose the evidence to a critique, identifying hidden agendas, contradictions and the interests of those involved. I relate this analysis of the evidence to how the Committee's own interests and processes structured its analysis and conclusions. The major tool for analysis will be the concept of ideology which is discussed later in the chapter. First I wish to look at the Committee and its inquiry.

The Committee

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs is one of a number of parliamentary committees which have been classified as 'investigatory', being concerned with 'drawing attention to important national problems, establishing the facts about those problems and suggesting remedies for them' (Whitlam cited in Uhr 1982:61) and 'analysising problems and generating new policy ideas' (Evans 1982:82). The Committee had a strong orientation to defining problems for the government and to proposing their solutions. Among the Aboriginal 'problems' the Committee had dealt with before fringe-dwelling were employment, alcohol, health and legal aid. However, the Committee recognised it also had a wider function: its educative function of drawing attention to issues of 'public' importance and interest, and defining these issues for the public. I will discuss the consequences of these roles for the Committee's inquiry into fringe-dwelling Aboriginal communities below.
The Committee was made up of members of all parties in the House of Representatives with the then Liberal/National Party coalition government having five members and the Opposition Labor Party having three members. (A list of members of the Committee is at Appendix A.) Although it consisted of politicians with often strongly differing political views it operated, like other parliamentary committees, within a theory of bipartisanship. According to the theory, parliamentary committees supposedly represent a microcosm of the Parliament and hence of the general community and act as independent disinterested arbiters between differing interest groups advising Parliament about what 'interested organisations and individuals may think about proposed laws and other matters of national concern' (Australian Senate 1982:2). Marsh has argued in relation to similar parliamentary committees in Britain that they could:

... provide a context for mediation between the executive and interest groups. Contention that is now often concealed from public view would be brought into the open. Information about emerging policy needs and options that is now confined to departments would be projected to, and evaluated by, MPs and interest groups before final decisions are taken by the executive. (Marsh 1987:20)

The Chairman of the Committee, in the course of the debate establishing the Committee, affirmed the theory:

I am pleased that in this area (Aboriginal affairs) there will be a committee which will be able to embark upon references that will make it possible to achieve a bipartisan approach and will allow members of the Parliament to work together constructively ... Committees will not work ... if it is a matter of creating division for the purpose of pursuing a political end, whether it is in the best interests of the people involved or not ... I do not believe that that confrontationist approach is in the best interests of the Aboriginal people. I believe that the interests of the Aboriginal people can best be served by our sitting down together and working positively ... (House of Representatives Debates, 2 December 1980, p. 257).
This model of a parliamentary committee stems very much from the pluralist conception of the role of the state in modern democratic society. This conception has been described as follows:

Simple pluralist theories suppose the state to be largely autonomous. Inputs flow into the state from competing interest groups: the state acts as umpire between them. Its neutrality with respect to the differing interest groups in society is guaranteed by its separateness and autonomy. (Hall 1984:23)

The state in this sense is an 'honest broker' (Baume 1982:152) arbitrating between competing interest groups, but not itself having interests.

As applied to the Aboriginal Affairs Committee, the 'pluralist' theory portrays the Committee as an arena of competition between differing interest groups in Aboriginal affairs seeking to gain authorisation for their definitions and depictions of the Aboriginal situation and asserting a role for themselves in providing services and programs for Aborigines. While the Committee can be seen as arbitrating between these differing interests for the good of the nation as a whole, it also sees itself as being weighted towards Aboriginal interests. This is evident from the comments of members of the Committee in the parliamentary debate on the establishment of the Committee. The Chairman referred to the Committee's objective as being 'to pursue what is in the best interests of the Australian Aboriginal people' (House of Representatives Debate, 2 December 1980, p. 257), while an Opposition member stated that there was an opportunity for the Committee 'to act in great and direct service to the Aboriginal people'. (House of Representatives Debates 2 December 1980, pp. 257-58.) A similar perspective on an Aboriginal Affairs Committee of the Federal Parliament was held by Rowley who saw such a committee as being able 'to maintain continuous intervention and review, and to reinforce the legal rights of citizens of Aboriginal descent' (Rowley 1971b:166).
The pluralist theory of parliamentary committees is useful in some ways in looking at the Aboriginal Affairs Committee's fringe-dwelling inquiry, particularly in terms of it as a forum for different interest groups. My analysis below follows this approach. However, the theory misrepresents the processes of the Committee's inquiry in important respects. The theory indicates that the Committee is non-political and without interests in the inquiry. It has been noted that the desire of parliamentary committees to avoid 'matters likely to generate partisan controversy' has often had the effect of 'quite spectacularly' narrowing the field of potential inquiry. (Evans 1982:88) I will note in later chapters that the ostensibly 'non-political' character of the Committee's undertaking was used to narrow the inquiry and exclude certain perspectives that were considered too 'political'. The exclusion of such views was itself a 'political' decision. The Committee also had a hidden agenda that gave its inquiry a particular orientation. I have already noted the focus of parliamentary committees on problem solving. I point out below and in later chapters the effect of this 'problem' orientation on an inquiry into fringe-dwelling communities. Finally, the pluralist theory of parliamentary committees implies that all interest groups have equal power and resources to ensure equal access to committees. I point out below that this was not the case in relation to the fringe-dwelling inquiry. In particular, the representation of the Aboriginal Affairs Committee as giving priority to the interests of Aboriginal people is not supported by an examination of the processes of the Committee's inquiry nor its evaluation of the evidence.

Limiting factors in the inquiry process

Having discussed the operation of investigatory parliamentary committees in general, I want to relate that discussion specifically to the Aboriginal Affairs Committee's inquiry into fringe-dwelling communities. Like all parliamentary committees it is concerned with defining and publicising a problem area seen as of national concern,
and proposing solutions to the problem as defined. As noted above, the Committee represents itself as resolving these problems not only in the 'national' interest, but also in the interests of Aboriginal people. There seems to be no recognition that the 'national' interest and the interests of Aboriginal people may not coincide, and may in fact be directly opposed.

In the case of the fringe-dwelling inquiry, the then Minister for Aboriginal Affairs considered the deplorable conditions in which Aboriginal fringe-dwellers lived to be a problem of wide concern which required a solution, or a 'strategy' as it was described in the terms of reference. It was considered by the Minister that fringe-dwellers formed an identifiable group within the total Aboriginal population of whom little was known and for whom little was done specifically. As such he saw the Committee as very much defining for government and the wider community a 'problem' which it was considered had previously been inadequately defined and suggesting broad policies and programs which, taken together, would constitute a 'strategy' to remedy the 'problem'. It was also recognised that fringe-dwelling was an unsatisfactory lifestyle for the Aboriginal people involved and that it was for their benefit that ways of solving the problem be found. Thus the problem itself was somewhat unclear from the terms of reference as given to the Committee by the Minister. There was an ambiguity as to whether the inquiry was concerned with the problems which fringe-dwellers had because of the deplorable conditions in which they lived or with fringe-dwelling itself as a problem both for fringe-dwellers and the wider community.

This ambiguity is reflected in the Committee's attempts to define the 'problem' it was attempting to solve. In interpreting the reference from the Minister to witnesses appearing before the Committee, the Chairman seemed to reflect some of this ambiguity and also cast light on his perception of the Committee's purpose:
The most vexing question seems to me to be whether fringe-dwelling situations ought to survive as they are, whether there is an Aboriginal wish to survive in that way or whether there are alternative approaches which Aboriginals themselves might, given the opportunity, wish to pursue. (TE:678)

When the Minister discussed these terms of reference with the Committee he made it very clear that what he was hoping we might be able to do is come to grips with some of the longer term problems and the emphasis that our government programs have upon Aboriginal communities and particularly those living on the fringes of cities and country towns and the like. Whilst we are all very much aware of the increasing involvement of Aboriginals in determining policies which affect them and also making decisions which affect them there are still significant aspects of government policy which do have an influence. (TE:908)

The Minister has asked us to look specifically at the longer term and to look at a strategy to deal with the problems that I think are quite evident. (TE:941)

These quotes indicated a certain confusion in the mind of the Chairman as to whether the 'problem' the Committee was defining was the difficulties for fringe-dwellers caused by the circumstances in which they lived, or whether fringe-dwelling itself was a problem partly created by inappropriate government policy. Other members had different agendas with one, for example, seeing fringe-dwelling in terms of 'town planning problems' (TE:2233). While there was confusion about what the 'problem' was, there was universal agreement among Committee members that fringe-dwelling was a problem and, moreover, that it was one that was beyond the competence or resources of fringe-dwellers themselves to deal with, thus necessitating a strategy that required the intervention of the state to resolve. As I will note in later chapters this orientation to the inquiry structured the Committee's conclusions in particular ways.

The nature of the Committee meant that it was used as a forum much more by certain groups and
organisations than by others. Relevant Commonwealth and State government departments were invited by the Committee to make submissions to the inquiry. The Committee was seen by governmental organisations as a valuable mechanism for presenting the governmental or departmental perspective. Government organisations were also used to the preparation of submissions to such committees, had the resources to enable them to prepare submissions and had the experience to deal with the often intimidating ordeal of giving evidence to such committees at public hearings. As a result Commonwealth, State and local government departments and organisations involved in Aboriginal affairs provided the preponderance of submissions to the Committee and the preponderance of witnesses to appear before the Committee. Of the 69 submissions made to the Committee (see Appendix B for list of organisations and individuals who made submissions), 24 came from governmental sources, and of the 115 witnesses (see Appendix C for list of witnesses) who gave evidence at public hearings, 85 were governmental witnesses. Apart from the submissions from government organisations there were also five submissions from politicians and political organisations. Their use of the Committee as a forum was much more obviously 'political' than those of government departments which generally sought to be 'non-political' while nevertheless seeking to advance their interests.

The Committee was generally not seen by Aboriginal people as a relevant forum for the expression of their views. Although the Committee's inquiry was supposedly a part of the process of consultation with Aborigines in order to provide government with advice about their needs and the Committee represented itself as pursuing Aboriginal interests, it had limited success in tapping the views of Aboriginal people and organisations. Only 18 of the submissions were from Aboriginal people and organisations and only 16 Aborigines appeared as witnesses before the Committee. Many of the submissions from Aboriginal people or groups were in fact from governmental or semi-governmental people or organisations and many of
the Aboriginal witnesses were representing governmental organisations. Very few submissions were from fringe-dwellers themselves. This lack of response was in spite of letters inviting submissions by the Committee to all Aboriginal organisations and community groups in towns with fringe-dwelling populations.

There were a number of explanations for this lack of response. Fundamentally it was to do with the disjunction between the processes and procedures of the Committee and the procedures for Aboriginal community consultation. Few Aborigines, including fringe-dwellers, who presumably would have had a direct interest in the inquiry, appeared to be aware of the Committee's inquiry, or considered it relevant as a forum in which they should participate. While the Committee wrote to Aboriginal organisations and communities inviting submissions, it often could not write to fringe-dwelling groups as they were not incorporated organisations. They were not set up in such a way as to be able to respond to the requirements of parliamentary committees. Many Aboriginal people and organisations also have neither the resources nor the experience to prepare submissions. The formal procedural nature of the Committee's public hearings, the powerful position given to members of the Committee by the rules under which such hearings operate, and the spatial arrangements of members and witnesses, make these a particularly unsuitable forum for Aboriginal people. Von Sturmer (1981) has noted the cultural differences which create difficulties for communication between Europeans and Aborigines and these certainly help explain the often poor response by Aborigines to the Committee's inquiry, and the miscommunication in cases where a response was forthcoming. However, as Rose argues, the attribution of miscommunications between Europeans and Aborigines solely to cultural and language differences 'masks power relationships in which only selected statements are granted legitimacy' (Rose 1986:27). The power differential between the Committee and Aborigines was an important aspect of its inability to obtain, comprehend, and put in context the views of Aborigines.
However, at the same time some Aborigines and Aboriginal organisations saw benefit in the use of the Committee as a forum to establish themselves as cultural brokers between Aboriginal people and white authorities. Coombs has described this role as helping 'Governments and their agents understand Aboriginal aspirations and help Aborigines frame their demands in ways most likely to be understood by white authority'. (Coombs 1984:30) In the context of the Committee's inquiry, Aborigines and Aboriginal organisations sought the Committee's endorsement of their definitions of the Aboriginal problem, their proposed solutions to the problem and the possibility of obtaining resources to allocate to Aboriginal programs. These motivations were of particular importance to governmental Aboriginal organisations and community-based organisations in receipt of government funding. To a lesser extent the Committee was used by Aborigines for internal Aboriginal purposes to establish legitimacy as an 'Aboriginal' organisation or spokesperson. However, there were strict limits to this usage because, as I have already pointed out, most Aborigines did not regard the Committee, or were unaware of it, as a forum for the pursuit of Aboriginal matters. Also the powerful position of whites and of governmental bureaucracies has meant that they have exercised significant control over definitions of Aboriginality and hence over what has been seen as 'representative' Aboriginal opinion. In this sense, as Howard (1981b:144-45) points out, Aboriginal modes of political action have been constrained by whites into narrow and 'acceptable' fields. However, it is also true that Aborigines used the forum of the Committee to contest prevailing definitions of Aboriginality in particular and, to a lesser extent, prevailing notions of the appropriate solutions to the Aboriginal 'problem'. Aspects of this debate will be discussed in the body of the thesis.

Anthropologists and other social scientists comprised a significant group which gave evidence to the Committee. Twelve submissions were received from them and
eight of them appeared as witnesses. From the perspective of most members of the Committee, the evidence from anthropologists and others who had worked closely with Aborigines was valued as a cultural interpretation of the Aboriginal situation. It was seen as providing the Committee with an insight into Aboriginal life and was particularly valued in view of the paucity of evidence from Aborigines (especially fringe-dwellers themselves) and the frequent lack of comprehensibility or usability for Committee purposes of the evidence that was received from fringe-dwellers. As Cowlishaw has noted, anthropologists in the 20th century 'have been influential in determining how Aboriginal society was understood by Australian intellectuals, and by politicians, journalists and now by the land courts' (Cowlishaw 1986:2). However, some members of the Committee questioned the value of evidence from anthropologists.

From the point of view of anthropologists, presenting evidence to the Committee offered the opportunity to outline the results of research, influence the Committee towards pro-Aboriginal positions, provide it with an 'Aboriginal perspective' and counterbalance the predominance of non-Aboriginal perspectives in the evidence. Anthropologists, such as Bell, indicated they were 'quite happy' to answer questions 'as an anthropologist with six to seven years experience in the Northern Territory' (TE:2704). But there was at times a reluctance to accept the role of cultural interpreter which the Committee saw anthropologists performing. Following a series of questions from the Chairman seeking information on the views of fringe-dwellers about their future needs, Brandi protested that: '. . . I constantly, before this Committee, find myself in the dilemma of being asked to answer what I think are questions properly addressed to Aborigines' (TE:2748). Having made her protest she nevertheless proceeded to answer the questions prefacing her remarks with phrases such as: 'From an Aboriginal point of view . . .' and 'If I think of myself as an Aboriginal in a town camp . . .' (TE:2750). Ultimately there was an
acceptance of the Committee's requirement that anthropologists play the role of cultural interpreter and present the 'Aboriginal perspective'. The dilemma referred to by Brandl raises questions about the role and interests of anthropologists and other social scientists who present evidence or research to parliamentary committees, government organisations and other bodies which I will look at later in the chapter.

The Committee was aware, at least to some extent, of the unsuitable nature of its inquiry processes and procedures as a means of obtaining Aboriginal views. In an attempt to bridge the gulf between itself and Aboriginal communities, the Committee undertook field trips to 23 towns and cities (see Appendix D for list) to gain 'an appreciation of the social and economic problems of the Aboriginal communities' at first hand. (Committee Report:2). The trips (normally of one day's duration) involved visits to fringe-camps, discussions with fringe-dwellers, Aboriginal organisations servicing fringe camps and representatives of government agencies involved in providing services to Aborigines. While the discussions undertaken on the visits enabled the Committee more successfully to tap Aboriginal opinion by bringing the processes of the Committee's inquiry closer to those of Aboriginal communities in consulting about issues of importance, significant difficulties still existed. The discussions were more informal and had some capacity to follow the meeting procedures commonly adopted for Aboriginal community meetings, but they were of short duration and were not followed up with the communities, were normally conducted in standard English and were often dominated by white advisers to the communities or a limited number of Aboriginal spokespersons. Fringe-dwellers were often not involved in these discussions which mostly took place with the incorporated Aboriginal community organisations involving 'town' Aborigines. The Committee did meet some fringe-dwellers during its visits to the fringe camps.
The Committee made clear that the purpose of the field visits was also 'to seek the views of the non-Aboriginal community' (Committee Report:2). Consequently, it had discussions with local government councils during its visits to many of the country towns. The Committee considered that its consultations with local councils provided it with the 'non-Aboriginal voice' in the towns. During those informal discussions local councils expressed their views about fringe-dwellers in more forthright terms than they were apparently prepared to do in written submissions.

Records of the discussions held on field visits were taken for the Committee by Hansard reporters, but those records were not published. References to these discussions in the text of the thesis are based on my own notes of the meetings.

The final point I would like to make about the Committee and its inquiry concerns the nature of the evidence presented. As has been seen, the evidence taken by the Committee was in the form of written submissions, verbal evidence given at public hearings and recorded and transcribed verbatim by Hansard and precis of informal discussions also produced by Hansard reporters. The Committee's inquiry was a public one and so much of the evidence, with the exception of the precis of informal discussions, was available in the public domain. The 'public' nature of the inquiry contributed to it as a forum for the debate between differing interest groups of their definitions of Aboriginality and fringe-dwelling, their legitimacy or authenticity as interpreters of the Aboriginal situation and, consequently, of the value of their proposals for solutions. The Committee had to evaluate and assess the differing definitions and interpretations put to it. Some of the limitations on its methodology, which I have already discussed, had important affects on this evaluative process. In the central chapters of the thesis I will outline the differing definitions and depictions of fringe-dwelling and the proposed solutions to
fringe-dwelling problems of the major groups giving evidence to the inquiry that I have discussed above. I will do so by drawing out the differing themes and perspectives that these groups enunciated in the evidence and show some of the often hidden assumptions and contradictions in those themes. I will also outline the Committee's conclusions and discuss its means of assessing the evidence.

The concept of ideology

In order to provide an assessment of the evidence, the processes of the Committee's inquiry and its conclusions I require a framework as a basis for my critique. Because of my concern with the hidden assumptions and contradictions in the themes which I will draw from the evidence and my interest in the political significance of differing constructions of Aborigines and fringe-dwellers, the concept of ideology provides a valuable evaluative tool for my purposes. However, the concept of ideology is a much debated one and a discussion of how I propose to use it is required.

Ideology has been used in a number of ways. Apart from its use to refer to doctrinaire and impractical ideas, the concept has been broadly used in two fundamentally different ways. In the first, ideology is employed as though it is purely a descriptive term referring to systems of thought or belief. This is a neutral conception of ideology as ideology is perceived to be present in all political programs. (Thompson 1984:3-4 and McLellan 1986:6-9) In the second, ideology is seen as being fundamentally linked to the process of maintaining unequal relationships of power between groups or classes, i.e. in maintaining domination. This is a critical conception of ideology as it binds the analysis of ideology to the question of critique of existing relationships of power. (Thompson 1984:4)

The neutral conception of ideology can itself be divided into two broad streams, a structuralist and an
interpretative account of ideology. The structuralist approach can be represented by Levi-Strauss. Levi-Strauss is concerned in his work on aspects of culture, such as myths, kinship systems, and totemism, with discovering the hidden structures or codes which lie beneath these outward forms of culture. As Badcock notes, these hidden structures or codes which underlie outward cultural forms can be seen 'as ideologies, as theoretical constructions which justify, rationalise and explain reality ...' (Badcock 1976:72). To see ideology in terms of underlying rationalisations and explanations is to emphasise 'the consensual element in human affairs at the expense of the conflictual' (McLellan 1986:69). However, at the level at which Levi-Strauss operates there is no conflict. He is concerned with the cognitive apparatus that makes ideological dispute possible as such dispute presupposes a set of shared concepts. The structuralist approach has been extended to methods for the ideological analysis of language which are supposed to reveal the hidden ideological message that is contained in the underlying structures of speech. While such methods of linguistic or discourse analysis can concern themselves with relations of power, McLellan notes that their analysis is confined entirely to the text and consequently ignore the contextual factors, such as the social and historical basis of the text, who is speaking and for what purpose, which are essential to understanding meaning and to locating questions of power. He points to the inevitable emphasis on the consensual rather than the conflictual aspects of such approaches and hence of their tendency to legitimate the existing social order. (McLellan 1986:71-73).

The interpretative form of the neutral conception of ideology is perhaps best represented by Geertz. He argues for the need for 'a genuinely nonevaluate conception of ideology' (Geertz 1973:196). According to Geertz, ideology should be seen as a cultural system 'that has developed beyond the stage of mere sloganeering' and 'consists of an intricate structure of interrelated meanings' (Geertz, 1973:213). These meanings or ideological
cultural symbol-systems provide a 'template or blueprint for the organisation of social and psychological processes' particularly during times of social change when society's more general cultural orientations do not provide an adequate image of the changing political process. (Geertz 1973:216 and 219) As in the structuralist conception, ideology is seen as providing the explanation of why things are the way they are, thus assisting in legitimising the existing social order, albeit one in the process of change. Keesing has argued that cultural systems do not simply constitute webs of significance and meaning orienting human beings to one another and their world, they also constitute ideologies in the sense of meanings which disguise or mystify political and economic realities. (Kessing n.d.:2) This criticism points to the other major way in which the concept of ideology has been used, the critical conception. It is this critical conception of ideology which I will adopt in evaluating the evidence to the inquiry and the processes and conclusions of the Committee.

The critical conception of ideology, deriving from Marx, retains the two distinct elements which are evident in Marx's work on ideology. The first element is that of ideology as the real world turned upside down, the world as in a camera obscura as Marx describes it. (Marx and Engels 1976:42) In this usage there is a contrast between ideology and science. Ideology is like a mirage in that it is a misunderstanding of the real world, but a one that is perceived as a misunderstanding by the normal eye due to the distortion through the camera obscura. It is opposed to the real world. However, in my analysis of the evidence and the Committee's findings I am not concerned with opposing a scientifically discoverable 'reality' with an ideological representation of that 'reality' which is a distortion of it and hence somehow unreal. As Thompson notes, ideology is not a pale image of the social world 'but is a part of the world, a creative and constitutive element of our social lives' (Thompson 1984:5-6).
However, there is a second critical conception of ideology and that is of it as an expression or justification of the interests of dominant classes. As Marx and Engels expressed it:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. (Marx and Engels 1976:67)

In this usage the concern is with the connection between sectional interests and ideology. This usage is most valuable for my purposes as it insists 'that the chief usefulness of the concept of ideology concerns the critique of domination' (Giddens 1979:187). I will be concerned to analyse the evidence presented to the Committee to see 'how structures of signification are mobilised to legitimate the sectional interests' of particular groups which gave evidence to the Committee. (Giddens 1979:188) I will also be concerned with the 'interests' of the Committee and the question of ideology. I have already suggested that the Committee was used as a competitive forum by different groups and organisations to assert their depictions of fringe-dwellers and the sorts of policies and programs needed to overcome their problems. I suggest that these depictions can only be understood in the context of the 'interests' of those who make them and that the use of the concept of ideology assists comprehension of the connection between depictions of fringe-dwellers and relationships of power.

Before moving on to a preliminary discussion of the 'interests' of the major groups which gave evidence to the Committee, I must discuss the question of 'dominant' ideology in the context of interest groups or classes. The concept of a 'dominant' ideology stems from the quotation from Marx and Engels cited earlier about the ideas of the 'ruling class' always being the 'ruling ideas'. Following Marx and Engels, it has been argued that many Marxists accept the existence within contemporary capitalist
societies of 'a powerful, effective, dominant ideology'
which 'creates an acceptance of capitalism in the working
class' (Abercrombie, Hill and Turner 1980:1). The 'dominant
ideology thesis' has been described as follows:

... in all societies based on class divisions
there is a dominant class which enjoys control of
both the means of material production and the
means of mental production. Through its control
of ideological production, the dominant class is
able to supervise the construction of a set of
coherent beliefs. These dominant beliefs of the
dominant class are more powerful, dense and
coherent than those of subordinate classes. The
dominant ideology penetrates and infects the
consciousness of the working class ... [and]
functions to incorporate [it] within a system
which is, in fact, operating against the material
interests of labour. This incorporation in turn
explains the coherent and integration of
capitalist society. (Abercrombie et al 1980:1-2)

However, Thompson notes that the question of
whether there is a dominant ideology has been clouded by a
tendency to look for a dominant ideology linked to a
particular class. (Thompson 1986:82) Instead, he argues
that we should think:

... of the ideological terrain as a complex of
discourses which have ideological effects, and
the balance of forces in that field as being
always in flux and the site of contestation over
meanings. (Thompson 1986:48)

Similarly Hall asserts that the notion of the dominant
ideology and the subordinate ideology:

... is an inadequate way of representing the
complex interplay of different ideological
discourses and formations in a modern developed
society. Nor is the terrain of ideology
constituted as a field of mutually exclusive and
internally self-sustaining discursive chains.
They contest one another, often drawing on a
common, shared repertoire of concepts,
rearticulating and disarticulating them within
different systems of difference and equivalence.
(Hall 1985:104-05)

Others also note the difficulties of seeing
coherence in contemporary Western society as being the
result of a dominant ideology that is imposed on, and
accepted by, all. Rather they consider society is stabilised by 'fragmentation' (McLellan 1986:73), a 'diversity of values and beliefs and proliferation of divisions between individuals and groups' (Thompson 1984:5) and a fracturing 'in all sorts of ways' (Abercrombie et al 1980:159). My emphasis in the study of ideology then turns from 'the search for collectively shared values' of those who dominate to 'the complex ways in which meaning is mobilised for the maintenance of relations of domination' (Thompson 1984:5). This characterisation of ideology enables me to embrace the range of perspectives presented to the Committee by differing 'interest'. The Committee's inquiry, as an arena of contestation, provides me with the basis for an analysis of the relationship between differing representatives of fringe-dwelling and its problems and the striving for domination and control over Aborigines of particular interest groups.

The 'interest' groups involved in the inquiry

Government departments and agencies: I have already pointed out that the structure of the Committee's inquiry gave government departments and agencies better access to the Committee than other groups. In a simplistic sense it could be argued that these agencies were simply arms of the state and therefore represented the interests of dominant classes in society and articulated a dominant ideology which maintained Aborigines in a position of powerlessness and poverty. However, I have pointed out the inadequacy of the concept of a dominant ideology in a complex modern society. Similarly, the state is not a monolith which is involved uniformly in advancing the interests of a so-called ruling class. There are Commonwealth, State and local government bureaucracies with responsibilities in Aboriginal affairs and all these bureaucratic organisations have their own interests which do not coincide. There have been some prominent examples of conflict between the Commonwealth and some State governments in Aboriginal affairs, as well as significant differences in policies and approaches. Similarly, there
have been conflicts between bureaucracies at particular levels of government in relation to Aboriginal affairs.

However, at a deeper level these bureaucracies share similar interests and concerns in relation to Aborigines. For example, Commonwealth and State governments are part of the welfare state which is:

. . . expected to protect and promote the welfare rights of its citizens, which may require compromise of some material interests of sections of the dominant class. The political discourses of liberal-democracy and the welfare state contains an ideology of state neutrality as between different classes and sectional interests. (Thompson 1986:92)

These bureaucracies, as part of the welfare state, are concerned with the promotion of policies aimed at achieving greater equity for Aborigines through the transfer of the resources of the state to them. This concern has led Commonwealth and State governments to set up departments and agencies whose specific function is to advance the economic, social and cultural position of Aborigines. The international focus on self-determination and the rights of indigenous populations has also forced Commonwealth, and to a lesser extent, State governments to appear to be improving the circumstances of Aborigines and giving them a degree of self-determination and greater equality.

But the government departments and agencies also have their own interests. Like all government departments they want funds to be channelled through them for the implementation of programs. Rowley notes in relation to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, that it is like any bureaucratic organisation in that it is concerned with its continuity and will resist the loss of departmental functions. As a result, he argues, the Department 'cannot be a prime mover in the promotion of change; it can often be a hindrance' (Rowley 1986:37). Bureaucrats as individuals are self-interested in their place in the hierarchy and how to advance themselves. As Howard notes, bureaucrats wish 'to sustain or expand their power within
this system' and do so by disguising this behind their claim 'to be operating to help needy clients' (Howard 1981b:146). Hence there is an interest in the representation of Aborigines as a 'welfare problem' which requires bureaucratic intervention to resolve. However, there is a conflicting interest. Governments and bureaucracies also wish to control Aboriginal affairs as a national and international political issue and this involves representing Aborigines as no longer a problem, or a problem that is in the process of being resolved through the good offices of government and the work of the bureaucracy. Although these interests are apparently conflicting, they both nevertheless justify the interventionist role of the state in Aboriginal affairs. This is a prominent element in the governmental perspectives on fringe-dwelling which I outline in later chapters.

Local government councils: By contrast, for local government councils Aborigines are not a 'welfare problem' from which they can be at one remove. Aborigines live in and around their towns and constitute for the councils a social and political problem with which they have to deal in a direct way. The councils represent this social and political problem in a neutral way as being a 'town planning problem' which requires action by them to enforce regulations and 'standards'. A councillor with the Murat Bay Shire Council in Ceduna referred to the conflict of interest between the council and organisations like DAA which were involved in servicing Aboriginal communities. He stated that the council was 'under pressure from the majority of ratepayers to maintain a high standard' and that councillors had not been elected 'because of their understanding of the Aboriginal issue' (informal discussions, Ceduna). Councillors then see themselves as being elected to represent and defend the interests of the majority white communities in these country towns, not to represent Aboriginal interests. Thus they not only articulate the narrow interests of the local council in controlling Aborigines as a 'town planning problem' they
also reflect the broader economic interests of the white community in country towns. These interests are seen as being antithetical to Aboriginal interests.

Aborigines: It could be assumed that Aborigines, as a subordinate group, would have opposing interests to those of government departments and local councils and so would 'automatically contest' those groups in the inquiry. (Thompson 1986:118) As I will argue in later chapters, oppositional elements to the definitions of the situation of Aborigines as presented by government departments and local councils can be identified in the evidence from Aborigines. However, there is a countervailing tendency and that arises from the position of Aborigines as an encapsulated and, relatively speaking, powerless group in Australian society. To some extent this forces Aborigines to see their interests and articulate their concerns, perhaps even those of opposition, within parameters and in terminology and symbols largely defined by the dominant society. (Howard 1981b:36)

Perhaps the effects of these countervailing tendencies can be seen most clearly in the so-called 'Aboriginal' organisations such as the Aboriginal Development Commission and Aboriginal Hostels, which are also governmental organisations. As Rowley has noted, there is a potential conflict of interest for Aboriginal political leaders who are also involved in the bureaucracy. (Rowley 1986:32) On the one hand they wish to appeal to their Aboriginal constituency by asserting their opposition to groups oppressing Aborigines. On the other hand they can become closely connected with, and be defenders of, governmental approaches to solving the Aboriginal 'problem'. Coombs notes that the growing strength of this bureaucratic form of influence on government and the power it can give to individuals successful within it:

... is by no means universally welcomed by Aborigines. Some see it as the emergence of a 'black bureaucracy' concerned primarily with its own power and the personal advancement of its
It is criticised as being almost as isolated from Aboriginal communities as the white bureaucracy it is replacing. (Coombs 1984:30)

Like any bureaucrats, Aborigines in the bureaucracy can become primarily interested in the channelling of funding to their organisations and consequently be prepared to limit their opposition to ensure this happens. It is simplistic then to represent Aborigines as a unified group with a single set of interests which are essentially opposed to those of the state and its bureaucracy as well as those of local government councils in towns with fringe-dwelling populations. Aboriginal interests are complex and reflect the positions of particular Aborigines and Aboriginal organisations within Australian society generally and Aboriginal society in particular.

Anthropologists and other social scientists: The final major 'interest group' to which I wish to refer is the grouping of social scientists of whom anthropologists were the majority. Their evidence was a significant contribution to the inquiry and presented a different perspective from both government and Aboriginal groups. It is difficult to speak of social scientists as a distinct social group in Australian society with particular interests, other than perhaps as a group of experts and as guardians or generators of knowledge. However, they do not have material 'interests' as a group in the same way in which I have spoken of other groups as having 'interests'.

Others have seen social scientists studying Aborigines as a group with interests. A Liberal member of the Committee referred to anthropologists during one public hearing as having the potential to 'become another lobby group that will see certain necessities to maintain their own position as time goes by' (TE:1539). He was not specific as to what these 'necessities' were, but others have been more specific. Howard has argued that academics studying Aboriginal society have a compelling interest in the maintenance of traditional Aboriginal life because

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academic kudos derives from the study only of 'real' Aborigines. (Howard 1981a:86) Others have located the problem not in an interest in the preservation of traditional society, but in an inadequate theoretical base that has produced a certain distortion. Cowlishaw argues that the concept of 'culture' tends to become for anthropologists an a priori totality which defines and reproduces the essential integrity of a given social order' (Cowlishaw 1986:8). As a result there is little ability to incorporate social and economic change except in terms of the 'loss' of culture. Howard's argument may once have had some validity, but the major defenders today of Aboriginal 'tradition' are not anthropologists but governmental organisations and some Aboriginal groups, particularly those concerned with Aboriginal education. Cowlishaw's argument has more validity, questioning as it does the orientation of the anthropological discipline. Others have noted the general failure of anthropologists to address the social pathology and trauma present in contemporary Aboriginal communities (Rose 1986; Sullivan 1986; Von Sturmer 1982), a failure that is partly attributable to a focus on culture and social structure at the expense of cultural and social change.

However, for anthropologists there are dilemmas which are difficult to resolve and which make the criticisms of Howard somewhat simplistic. There is the dilemma referred to by Brandi in her response to the Chairman of the Committee which I quoted earlier in the chapter. Anthropologists often wish to express a pro-Aboriginal perspective, but there is a reluctance to be seen to be speaking for Aborigines because this denies Aborigines the ability to speak for themselves. However, the refusal to play the role of cultural interpreter can severely limit the influence of anthropologists on governments and parliamentary committees which are looking for a basis for their policies. But then of course there is no guarantee that governments or parliamentary committees will use information or perspectives tendered to them by anthropologists for the same purposes for which anthropologists imagined they were presenting them.
This perhaps points to a more profound dilemma for anthropologists and that is the potential conflict between their pursuit of knowledge and truth, the so-called 'value-free' nature of western intellectual inquiry (Horton 1986:1), and a desire to serve Aboriginal interests. As Anderson has noted, recent moves by anthropologists to step back and analyse the position of social scientists in relation to the problems of Aborigines have been characterised as 'being, or potentially being, "anti-Aboriginal"' (Anderson in Anderson (et al) 1985:41). There is of course a difference between the professional writings of anthropologists and their practical activities on behalf of Aborigines (eg. involvement in land claims) which this position ignores. Maddock has been quick to reject calls to make anthropology subservient to Aboriginal interests stating that:

If demands like these come to be felt as their own by anthropologists the discipline would degenerate into a public relations front for this or that client group. (Maddock in Anderson (et al) 1985:51)

But Maddock's forthright comments raise the question of whether the research and findings of anthropologists can ever be divorced from the political and policy considerations they raise and the purposes to which they can be put by governments, parliamentary committees, Aboriginal leaders and others concerned with manipulating the Aboriginal situation. There is a naivety in imagining these purposes will always be benign in relation to Aboriginal client groups. More seriously, a failure to address the political and policy considerations of research leads to assertions of anthropological complicity in the perpetuation of inequality for Aborigines (Rose 1986:29) and an irrelevancy for the discipline in advising about future policy directions in Aboriginal affairs. Those anthropologists and other social scientists who made submissions to the Committee were trying to influence the direction of the inquiry in ways which they considered would be of benefit to Aborigines. This discussion provides
a context for the evidence given to the Committee by anthropologists and other social scientists and some of the
issues and questions raised will be addressed in later chapters.

Other evidence: Other individuals and organisations presented evidence to the Committee's inquiry which are not covered by this broad discussion of interests. (see Appendixes B and C) They did not in general form coherent groups with particular interests and a discussion of their interests is unwarranted because their submissions tended to be peripheral to the inquiry and the 'interest' groups discussed above were central in defining the issues before the Committee.

Conclusion

This introductory chapter has provided the basis for the analysis of the evidence and the Committee's findings in following chapters. I have located the context of the Committee and its inquiry, indicated the main 'interest' groups which gave evidence to the inquiry and outlined the concept of ideology as a tool in evaluating the evidence and the Committee's findings.

In the chapters which follow I interpret the evidence to the fringe-dwelling inquiry in terms of what I see as a number of key issues including the definition of the concepts of Aboriginality and fringe-dwellers, the way in which fringe-dwellers are depicted and the proposed solutions to the problems of fringe-dwellers. I extract from the evidence themes which recur in relation to all these key issues and show how these themes are associated with particular groups. It was from among these themes that the Committee chose to reach its conclusions in its report, and I discuss, in the body of the thesis, the Committee's conclusions on the major issues in the light of the evidence and the political context of the inquiry.
NOTES

1. See also McLennan 1984:83.

2. The terms of reference for the inquiry were:
The economic and social problems of Aboriginal communities and groups living on the fringes of cities, country towns and other communities.

3. As research officer to the Committee at the time I was present at this meeting with Senator Baume.

4. TE:678 is a shorthand response to page 678 in the transcript of evidence to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs' inquiry into fringe-dwelling Aboriginal communities. This format will be used throughout the text to refer to pages in the transcript of evidence.

5. These figures include Aboriginal governmental organisations and governmental witnesses who were Aborigines.

6. Some examples of governmental and semi-governmental 'Aboriginal' organisations which made submissions include the Aboriginal Development Commission, Aboriginal Hostels Ltd and the National Aboriginal Education Committee. Most other Aboriginal organisations making submissions were funded by the Commonwealth Government.

7. Aboriginal witnesses who fall into this category include Charles Perkins and Colin Bourke representing the Aboriginal Development Commission, Neville Perkins representing Aboriginal Hostels Ltd., John Budby representing the National Aboriginal Education Committee, John Moriarty representing the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Danny Rose representing the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations, Eleanor Bourke representing the Department of Social Security and Les Nayda representing the South Australian Government.

8. Sullivan notes that the practice of 'self-management' in Aboriginal administration is often just a procedural device to use Aborigines to elicit benefits for the administration, such as justifying a particular research project or funding program. However, Sullivan notes that this is problematic because 'the procedure of community consultation and community decision making is not organically linked with the far more powerful procedural requirements of public administration which follows closely that of other government departments' (Sullivan 1986:14). A similar disjunction exists between the methods of Aboriginal community decision-making (see Von Sturmer 1981 and Williams 1985) and the procedural requirements, tight scheduling and methods of communication of a parliamentary committee.
9. The 'rules' under which the Aboriginal Affairs Committee operates are the House of Representatives Standing Orders. One of these, No. 336, indicates the methods for examination of witnesses before the Committee:

The examination of witnesses before every committee shall be conducted as follows: The chairman shall first put to the witness, in an uninterrupted series, all such questions as he may deem essential, according to the mode of procedure agreed on by the committee. The chairman shall then call on the other members severally by name to put any other questions . .

The operation of this Standing Order makes public hearings more an interrogation of witnesses than a discussion or exchange of views. This method of consultation is quite inappropriate in Aboriginal communities, involving as it does the use of standard English, the questioning or challenging of a person's statements and the search for general and abstract rather than specific and context related information. (see Von Sturmer 1981) It should also be noted that the Standing Orders make no provision for witnesses questioning members of the committee, ensuring that it is only the committee which can challenge the validity of witnesses' statements rather than vice versa.

10. A further three gave evidence as representatives of the AIAS Uranium Impact Steering Committee. Others with qualifications in a social science area also gave evidence on behalf of governmental and other organisations.

11. A Labor member stated in relation to the evidence from one anthropologist that:

I feel very humble when I am in the company of lawyers and anthropologists who seem to speak with the authority and the legitimacy and the confusion of organised religions. (TE:2780)

A Liberal member commended the evidence from Dr Penny for its 'practical approach'. He went on to comment:

We have already mentioned anthropologists who are, in my view, the latest to get on the bandwagon. I am horrified, I will say this, that they will become another lobby group that will see certain necessities to maintain their own position as time goes by. (TE:1539)

The question of 'interests' of groups and classes is a complex one. Giddens points to three different ways of defining 'interests'. In terms of the analysis of ideology he favours an approach which argues that:

interests are closely related to wants, even if it is a mistake to identify the concept of interest with that of want. To attribute interests to an actor or actors logically implies the imputation of wants to them also. Wants (or 'wanting') are the 'basis' of interests: to say that A has an interest in a given course of action, occurrence or state of affairs, is to say that the course of action, etc. facilitates the possibility of A achieving his or her wants. To be aware of one's interests, therefore, is more than to be aware of a want or wants; it is to know how one can set about trying to realise them. (Giddens 1979:189)

As Giddens goes on to point out, it is possible to see actors as having interests by virtue of their membership of particular groups, communities, classes, etc. It is in this sense that I discuss interests in this study.

The exception to this is perhaps church organisations taken as a coherent group. As I will note in later chapters, the evidence of church organisations often tended to support the definitions of the situation of governmental submissions and witnesses, even though their submissions were often stated in strongly moral terms asserting the need for assistance to Aboriginal groups.
The definition of Aboriginality was one of the key areas over which there was debate in the evidence. Much of this debate took place around definitions of Aboriginal fringe-dwellers with many submissions providing definitions. Those who saw Aboriginality as central were interested in gaining control of the concept and developing it for political and other purposes. Others were not explicitly concerned with defining Aboriginality, concentrating instead on definitions of fringe-dweller. However, these definitions contained assumptions about what Aboriginality was and who was to control definitions of it. The Committee itself took a particular interest in the question of definition, exploring definitions in interviews with witnesses and devoting a section of its report to the range of views about a definition.

The differing themes or perspectives discussed in this chapter draw on an ambiguity in the meaning of the category 'fringe-dweller' which stems from its derivation from the word 'fringe'. A fringe is both a part of, and yet separate from, that to which it forms an edge or border. Similarly, Aboriginal fringe-dwellers can be seen as part of, and yet separate from, both Aboriginal and Euro-Australian society. This ambiguity has produced a frequent conception of fringe-dwellers as people 'in-between' Aboriginal and Euro-Australian cultures, belonging to neither. Burridge has described the fringe-dwelling environment as 'a liminal "tween-world" between the downs and deserts of tradition, and the buses, cars, office towers, and bright lights of the modern city' (Burridge 1973:228). Morris has also referred to the location of Aborigines by the wider society, ideologically
and physically in a liminal category. (Morris 1985:92)

Alternatively, fringe-dwellers are often seen as embodying only the negative aspects of one or both cultures. The ambiguity is not just reflected in popular images of fringe-dwellers, but also in their economic and social position in the towns and cities in which they live. While they often live geographically on the edge of the town and have different social and cultural values from other town dwellers, they also often comprise an important element of the local economy and can have strong social and cultural links with the area in which they live. The ambiguities and contradictions in the images and the social and economic position of fringe-dwellers have provided fertile ground for the development of differing perspectives.

**Fringe-dwellers as people 'in-between'**

Perspectives which focussed on fringe-dwellers as people 'in-between' predominated in the evidence and were articulated almost universally by Commonwealth and State government departments, local government councils, politicians of all political persuasions and some individuals.

Evidence from a representative of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs emphasised the separateness of fringe-dwellers from both European and Aboriginal societies. This separation was seen as being summed up in the meanings and associations of the word 'fringe'.

According to the departmental representative, fringe-dwellers were:

... people on the edge, people spread out thinly and not particularly well organised and, indeed, rather tatty, and people who are not part of the normal fabric of society, not entirely integrated or assimilated or in other ways comfortable in the social environment in which they find themselves ... (TE:680)

Not only were fringe-dwellers seen as being separate from the 'social fabric' of European society, they were also
seen as being separate from their own society and culture. The Department characterised fringe-dwellers as generally having 'lost an inheritance of folk culture' (TE:685). Further, fringe-dwellers were seen as being different from other Aboriginal town dwellers. A DAA representative emphasised that in towns with fringe-dwellers 'there are also large numbers, perhaps more, Aboriginal people living in those towns as citizens at "No.1 Clematis Drive" or wherever else' (TE:706). Within this context the representative went on to note that fringe-dwellers tended to be seen as the 'losers amongst the Aboriginal group' (TE:707).

The dual separation of fringe-dwellers as people 'in-between' was evident in a number of submissions. The Commonwealth Department of Health stated that fringe-dwellers found:

. . . themselves trapped between two cultures and accepted by neither. While not seen or accepted as 'real men' by traditional tribal societies they also face rejection by white Australians. (TE:810)

The Australian Law Reform Commission also referred to a view of fringe-dwellers as people 'caught between two worlds; [who] are unable to fit into either or have been rejected by both' (TE:1793). Bob Collins, the then Leader of the Opposition in the Northern Territory, asserted that some of the benefits of fringe camps were that they were half-way places 'for people caught between the cultural mores of traditional life and European style education and training' (TE:2379). There was a tendency within this perspective to equate the physical separation of fringe-dwellers with an economic, social and cultural separation. Although many submissions from this perspective gave definitions of fringe-dweller that reflected the spatial separation they also indicated that social, economic and psychological separation were just as important. (TE:6, 734, 1617, 2672 and 3037)
The view of fringe-dwellers as people 'in-between' Euro-Australian and Aboriginal cultures also contained a number of assumptions about fringe-dwellers and Aborigines. Because fringe-dwellers were seen as being 'between' two cultures they were viewed as people without a culture or identity and without a history. They were seen as occupying a 'No Man's Land' (TE:655) and as deriving from a 'no-place' (TE:354). In that they were seen as being separated from European society, society itself was not seen as being responsible for fringe-dwellers living in the circumstances they were. Paradoxically, while fringe-dwellers were seen as being 'caught' between two cultures they were also seen as being involved in a process of transition from Aboriginal to Euro-Australian society, without any personal control over the transition. The 'fringe' was the representation of the half-way staging house of Aborigines in a process of transition to incorporation into the wider society. The means by which the transition would take place was not identified although it was clear that the role of government in the process would have to be significant given the implied lack of control of fringe-dwellers over their own lives. It was up to government to effect the transition and give fringe-dwellers an identity and a culture. These themes will be traced through this perspective in later chapters when I discuss the definition of fringe communities and proposed solutions to their problems.

This view of fringe-dwellers also incorporates a view of Aboriginality. Aboriginality in this view is defined by the retention of traditional beliefs and practices. Those who 'break' from traditional culture or who 'lose' it can no longer be 'real' Aborigines. The break with, or loss of, traditional culture is viewed as an event rather than a process, and the break is sudden and irreversible. Because the concept of tradition that is contained within this view is one of a timeless inheritance reaching back to before the arrival of Europeans there is no appreciation that Aboriginal culture can adapt and change and still remain Aboriginal. Morphy has criticised the concept of tradition which dominates this perspective:
'Traditional' is by definition a backward looking term. It tends to refer to those aspects of a cultural system uncontaminated by contact with alien 'traditions'; it belongs to the school of thought which sees cultures as discrete integrated wholes, unchanging and little affected by history. 'Traditional' practices imply the existence of 'untraditional' counterparts, which are usually negatively evaluated and thought of as being impoverished and even products of cultural loss. (Morphy 1980:81)

Morris also has noted how an appropriation of a concept of Aboriginality based on the comprehensive retention of 'traditional' culture has denied to Aborigines any historical trajectory. (Morris 1985:90)

In the towns with fringe-dwellers there was a different representation of fringe-dwellers that focussed on different aspects of their ambiguous position. As people 'in-between', fringe-dwellers were seen to embody the worst characteristics of the two cultures. These views were articulated mainly by local government councils in the towns and cities the Committee visited but also by local politicians and individuals. The values and behaviour of fringe-dwellers, whether deriving from Aboriginal culture or from the worst features of white society, were seen as offending against the values most cherished by European-Australians and thus were seen as a 'threat' to the rest of society. The Darwin City Council, in its submission, stated that until proper facilities were established for Aborigines in Darwin there would be continual problems with them 'offending some of our standards by camping on beaches, being seen in a drunken state and littering' (TE:2297). Fringe-dwellers were also seen as corrupters of Aborigines who had retained their 'traditions'. The Mt Isa City Council noted that a 'delightful group' of dancers from Mornington Island had visited Mt Isa but had gone to the fringe camp at Orana and had subsequently become involved in brawling and similar behaviour (informal discussions, Mt Isa).

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Similar views were expressed in informal discussions which the Committee had with local government councils. These views were mainly relayed through stories told by councillors about particularly offensive Aboriginal behaviour. Councillors from the Kalgoorlie Town Council stated that Aboriginal 'health standards' did not fit them at this stage to come into large populated areas, Aborigines used their welfare payments for liquor, depriving their children of food, and by destroying property were simply 'vandals' (informal discussions, Kalgoorlie Town Council). A councillor of the Murat Bay Shire Council in Ceduna stated that Aboriginal people wasted their money on alcohol and consequently had to rummage for food at the local rubbish tip (informal discussions, Murat Bay Shire Council). Concern about the lack of regard of fringe-dwellers for property was also expressed by Carnarvon Shire councillors who referred to their vandalism and 'depredations' to their own houses and buildings.

Thompson notes the role that the telling of stories can play in justifying 'the exercise of power by those who possess it, situating these individuals within a tissue of tales that recapitulate the past and anticipate the future' (Thompson 1984:11). The 'stories' told to the Committee during discussions with local councillors were obviously part of the folklore of the town about Aborigines. Cowlishaw also refers to the stories about Aborigines repeated in a country town in western New South Wales which provide a source of social comment that 'is a rich and never-ending one in a town which depends largely on self-generated entertainment' (Cowlishaw 1986b:15). While in many cases these stories may have been based on observations of Aboriginal behaviour, reflecting to some extent the social pathology which can characterise fringe-dwelling communities, more significantly the stories circulate as part of the actual or vicarious experience of all townspeople. This point was noted by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs when it stated that:

The town antipathy to 'their' Aboriginals is transmitted to the Aboriginals in any contact
between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals or, perhaps more persuasively, in the absence of any contact at all or indifference by non-Aboriginals. (TE:18 - emphasis added)

This perspective, in which fringe-dwellers are referred to as the possessors of 'anti-social' behaviour and values, circulates within the white population through narratives of racism that are then extended to embrace all Aborigines. The image of the 'anti-social' nature of Aborigines is used as justification by the local white community for the geographical, social and economic exclusion of Aboriginal people from the towns.

The existence of racism at a local level among the white population of towns was a cause of concern for departments responsible for Aboriginal welfare. It was seen as undermining their raison d'être and the 'advancement' programs in which they were involved. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs expressed concern about how the 'attitudes' of the non-Aboriginal community in the towns towards fringe-dwellers limited Aborigines' opportunities for progress. However, DAA was also concerned with the wider implications of these attitudes towards fringe-dwellers as they were said to form:

... the basis of the general community's attitude to all Aboriginals even though the base on which these attitudes are formed [the fringe-dwelling population] constitutes only 8 per cent of the Aboriginal population. (TE:18)

According to the Department, the extension of attitudes towards fringe-dwellers to all Aborigines made the effectiveness of policies generally in Aboriginal affairs 'more difficult to achieve' (TE:684-85) thus threatening the long term viability of the Department's programs.

The Department thus had an interest in managing views about Aboriginality to ensure a continued public sympathy towards Aborigines and a recognition of the need for government controlled programs to assist Aborigines. Government control over definitions of Aboriginality was
also seen as essential because of an implication that Aborigines could not control the definitions of themselves. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs stated that the negative image of Aboriginality, which extended from views of fringe-dwellers to views generally of Aborigines, was also internalised by Aborigines to become their view of themselves resulting in 'self-abasement and loss of pride' (TE:18). The Department saw Aborigines as the victims of a dominant image of Aboriginality imposed on them by the wider society and which Aborigines were powerless to control or change. As a result, changing these images of Aboriginality was seen as a matter for government and DAA argued for the need for a 'public awareness campaign' under its control to effect these changes in ways considered appropriate by it. (TE:19)

Attention was focussed in the governmental perspective on racism being the result of 'attitudes' and false images gained from 'the actual observation of Aboriginal behaviour or pressure of community norms' (TE:17). However, as Carby has noted, this tendency to react to racism as if it were limited 'to a struggle over forms of representation - a struggle over images' has disguised 'the social relations of domination and subordination in which it is situated and which it reproduces' (Carby 1982:197). The socio-economic basis of racism and its place in the relationships of power and domination in country towns are thus ignored within the governmental perspective. It is imagined that racism can be eliminated by changing 'attitudes' without threatening the structure within which racism is embedded.

The two perspectives I have outlined, which draw on the 'in-between' connotations of fringe-dwelling, reveal significant differences in terms of their representations of fringe-dwellers and the interests of those articulating them. Local government councils and local politicians draw on the negative consequences of being between two cultures, of embodying the worst aspects of both. They construct Aboriginality and the category of fringe-dweller in ways
which rationalise and explain the exclusion of Aborigines from town life providing the basis for the removal of fringe-dwellers. State and Federal government departments and organisations (particularly the DAA) express concern about this negative image of Aboriginality because of the threat it poses to their role in Aboriginal welfare. If Aborigines are hopeless and their lifestyle fundamentally incompatible with town dwelling, then there is no point in programs of 'improvement' for them as they are considered 'irredeemable'.

Government departments and organisations develop a construction of fringe-dweller which focusses on their liminal qualities, their occupation of a 'half-world' or 'between-world' which is a stage of transition to incorporation into the wider society. As occupants of this 'half-world' they are without power, identity or culture. But they are redeemable, and it is seen as the role of government to effect the process of transition and give them an identity and a culture. This provides the rationale for the intervention of the state to 'improve' the lives of fringe-dwellers. Aboriginality is seen as a concept that must be defined by the state, both to enable the state to ensure a continued public sympathy to the need for interventionist programs and to control the way Aborigines define their Aboriginality (given their supposed powerlessness to define it for themselves). The wider focus of government departments on controlling images of Aboriginality and changing 'attitudes' brings them into conflict with local government councils and the white communities in country towns who supposedly possess these attitudes in their worst manifestations. However, there is no threat from governmental organisations to the socio-economic structures in country towns which produce the racism that is the basis for white domination and exclusion of Aborigines. Government programs are not concerned with changing relationships of power in country towns and by often operating through the existing structures they tend to affirm existing power relationships.
Aboriginal views of fringe-dwellers

Aborigines and Aboriginal organisations asserted the importance of Aboriginal control over the definition of Aboriginality. The Aboriginal Development Commission which is both an Aboriginal and a governmental organisation stated that:

In the past, names such as tribal, or de-tribalised Aboriginals, part-Aboriginals, non-traditional Aboriginals etc. have bedevilled Aboriginal policies, because, while it may well be academically, or administratively convenient to do so, the effect has been to create unnecessary and artificial divisions . . (TE:2129)

The ADC saw a need to escape from the changing, and apparently arbitrary, classifications of Aboriginal people (of which fringe-dweller was one) that had arisen from white definitions of Aboriginality, to one controlled by Aboriginal people. It wished to see Aborigines develop as a 'distinct race' by pursuing policies which 'encourage the development of what Aboriginal Australians have in common, rather than pursue policies based on the differences between groups' (TE:2129). However, the ADC was equivocal about the content of Aboriginality other than that of attachment to land which was said to embrace all Aborigines. The ADC argued that:

Aboriginal ideology, and way of life, indeed the totality of Aboriginal social organisation, religion, law, language and economic activities are spiritually, culturally and materially sustained by the land, which Aboriginals have occupied for more than 40,000 years. (TE:2126)

John Budby, then Chairman of the National Aboriginal Education Committee, also asserted that non-Aboriginal control over the classification of Aborigines had led to the creation of divisions between Aborigines which prevented the development of 'a national Aboriginal identity' (TE:1720). Divisions, such as those between 'tribal' and 'urban' Aborigines were, according to Budby, manufactured by government:
... they have been tribal people because the government has forced them into that little category. It has said: 'You are traditional you are different from people living in the urban situation'. If you keep being told that time and time again you start to believe it. (TE:1725)

Budby stated that there was a need to work towards calling 'all people of Aboriginal descent, whether they are traditional or urban, Aborigines, so that you have one people rather than a variety' (TE:1720). I note parenthetically that this quote from Budby indicates that he accepts categories such as 'traditional' and 'urban' as useful at least at one level. With Aborigines controlling the definition of Aboriginality, Budby saw the start of the development of an 'Aboriginal nation' (TE:1722). The political basis for the development of this 'Aboriginal nation' was the collective experience of Aboriginal people of oppression at the hands of Europeans. Budby stated that as a result of this experience the whole of Aboriginal society stood outside the framework of the dominant or oppressive mainstream Australian society, making all Aboriginal people 'fringe-dwellers'. For Budby, the context of Aboriginality was essentially oppositional, resulting from a common experience of oppression.

Robert Bropho, a 'spokesman' for the 'fringedwellers of the Swan Valley', also recognised the importance of Aboriginal control over identity. Bropho was keen to identify as a 'fringe-dweller'. By choosing to identify as a 'fringe-dweller', Bropho is accepting the negative world of meaning which is associated with Aboriginal fringe-dwellers and acknowledging the appalling living standards and the lack of rights which go with being a fringe-dweller. However, he is asserting autonomy of identification and is seeking to use it for a political purpose to make a statement about the oppression of Aboriginal people and the need for Aboriginal people to struggle against this oppression, to fight to obtain land, better living conditions and rights. Bropho is saying that to be Aboriginal is to be a fringe-dweller, an opressed
person without rights, but also a person who is struggling to overcome that oppression. He refers to the need to 'protest', to be 'fighting for land rights' and to 'start pushing together against the Government' (TE:3018-22). The content of Aboriginality, as seen by Bropho, is also oppositional, being concerned with the struggle against domination. However, he also sees it as having a cultural content comprised of 'traditional' beliefs and attachments. He refers to the Aboriginal culture of fringe-dwellers as comprising 'our ancestors' beliefs' which existed 'long before the coming of the white man' (TE:3019). The most prominent of these beliefs is about land which he says is: 'Our blood and our bone structures, our mind and our strength . . .' (TE:3019).

Aborigines and Aboriginal organisations advanced definitions of Aboriginality which challenged those of governmental organisations. They also asserted the Aboriginal right to control those definitions. Within the context of the inquiry the differing definitions were drawn from differing connotations of the category 'fringe-dweller'. The Aboriginal Development Commission wished to move away from the pejorative connotations of 'fringe-dwelling' and instead construct Aborigines as a 'race', a socio-cultural category based on tradition. By contrast, Budby of the National Aboriginal Education Committee, saw the development of pan-Aboriginality as more a political than a cultural concept, with Aborigines becoming a 'nation'. He twisted the negative connotations of fringe-dwelling to highlight the oppression of Aborigines by the dominant society and the political consciousness and unity created by this common experience. Bropho also twisted the negative aspects of the term 'fringe-dweller' to highlight political oppression and the denial of basic human rights. Morris has noted a similar use of the idiom of the dominant society for political purposes by early pan-Aboriginal organisations:

The collective identity which was being articulated to mobilise Aborigines to political action was clearly the strong sense of a common past and a common fate suffered at the hands of
Europeans. The political aims are expressed in the political idiom of the dominant society. In effect, by appealing to egalitarian principles, the AAPA [Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association] attempted to turn the logic of the rules and ideology of the state against it and to their own advantage. Such appeals for equal rights are however as much aimed at ending oppression as at denying the wider definition of Aborigines, embodied in repressive political practices, as inferior and incompetent. (Morris 1985:107-08)

The expression by Aborigines of their identity and definitions of Aboriginality, even those of opposition, in terms of dominant idioms is partly an indication of the powerlessness and encapsulation of Aborigines within the wider society. In this sense the content which is given to Aboriginality by Aborigines is often vague and esoteric - because the primary basis on which it is defined is in opposition to the specific dialogue or forum in which Aborigines are involved. However, for Aborigines themselves, their own identity is not usually problematic, it is establishing their definitions of Aboriginality within the wider community which causes them problems. The tendency to state these wider definitions in oppositional terms reflects the oppositional political character which Aborigines wish to assert and a strategic use of the political idiom of the dominant society to achieve this end.

Aboriginal opposition to the dominant society's definitions of Aboriginality is aimed at ending oppression. But it is also concerned with the authorisation and empowerment of Aborigines and Aboriginal organisations as 'representatives' of Aboriginal opinion and interpreters of the Aboriginal situation. National Aboriginal organisations such as the Aboriginal Development Commission and the National Aboriginal Education Committee authorise their own role in Aboriginal affairs by asserting the existence of a pan-Aboriginality. The existence of such a pan-Aboriginality justifies the need for nationally-based Aboriginal organisations. Bropho, in identifying as a
'fringe-dweller', is concerned with authorising himself as an authentic representative of Aboriginal opinion. He refers to himself and the community for which he is 'spokesman' as the 'grassroots Aboriginal people' to distinguish themselves from those Aborigines who 'have lived in the white society all their lives and . . . want to leave their Aboriginal way of life and culture behind . . .'. A representative of the Dandenong and District Aborigines Co-operative refers to the Aborigines the Co-operative deals with as the 'true descendents' of the 'original fringe-dwellers'. They are distinct from Aborigines who have given evidence on behalf of the Victorian Government earlier who are said not to 'belong' in the area, to be without any 'traditional kinship' and who are used 'against the local people'. They are referred to by locals as 'kuka imaji budani' - 'lost soul crocodile' because they were prepared to go anywhere. Definitions of Aboriginality are an important way for Aborigines to establish their authenticity as Aboriginal 'representatives' both within the Aboriginal community and as cultural brokers between Aborigines and the wider community. The question of the authority of Aboriginal witnesses to speak as 'representatives' of Aboriginal opinion was also an important one for the Committee to assess to enable it to support its findings with authoritative Aboriginal opinion. I will refer to the Committee's assessment later in the chapter.

Fringe-dwellers as town campers

Connotations of the term 'fringe-dweller' were a central concern of a number of anthropologists who gave evidence to the Committee. They wished to substitute terminology which they considered better reflected the position of fringe-dwellers in towns. In this anthropologists asserted what they claimed was an 'Aboriginal' perspective on fringe-dwelling as distinct from perspectives which reflected European values. Heppell and Wigley, whose book Black Out in Alice was an exhibit to the inquiry, argued that the term 'fringe-dweller' was 'a
European one and one of opprobrium' which had 'little currency' for Aborigines. (Heppell and Wigley 1981:14)

According to Heppell and Wigley:

In the white view . . . 'fringe-dweller' is an ascribed social status describing those Aborigines who do not conform to European standards of behaviour, who should be resident in an appropriate establishment set up for them where proper behaviour can be learnt, but who have rejected this 'better way' and hang on, living in small groups where they can and eking out an existence on the fringes of society. (Heppell and Wigley 1981:14)

Heppell and Wigley wished instead to refer to fringe-dwellers as 'town campers' to indicate that they were a group of people 'about which there are only positive aspects' (Heppell and Wigley 1981:14).

Brandl referred to the connotations of marginality and illegality associated with the word 'fringe-dwelling'. She stated that in fact there was 'a permanent core of stable, traditional reasons for Aboriginal people living in town areas' (TE:2743). Bell also referred to the separateness implied in the use of the word 'fringe':

The term 'fringe' gives the idea that they are peripheral, transient and somewhat haphazard. It gives some weight to statements like ring-barking. It makes people look as if they have no rights where they are, as if they are on the fringe. It suggests that in some sense they have different sorts of claims whereas the term 'town campers' locates people within the town. It indicates that they are camping there and camping in Aboriginal terms means living. (TE:2727)

The anthropological perspective gave emphasis to what was positive about fringe-dwellers, pointing to the permanency of their communities, their social and kinship structures and their continuing attachment to traditional Aboriginal beliefs and values. Anthropologists were arguing that Aborigines had a right to be in towns on the basis of their long term social and cultural attachments to those areas. They saw this providing a moral basis for the
recognition and accommodation of Aboriginal interests in the town by the white community. As Bell indicated, hearings of town land claims in the mid-1970s had shown 'the desire of town campers to have their residential rights recognised' (TE:310). Similarly, Brandl stated that Aborigines in Darwin town camps 'have a right and have always had a right to be there' (TE:2743). The view was presented that fringe-dwellers were not people who had come from nowhere, people without social relationships, a history and rights in the towns. The issue of 'rights' was questioned by the Northern Territory Government which considered that 'there is no special right given to Aborigines by law to claim land in urban areas' (TE:2166). Similarly, a member of the Committee, while noting the 'appropriateness' of Aboriginal camping arrangements around Alice Springs given the traditional orientation of the differing groups, strongly questioned their 'right' to be there. (TE:2269) Aboriginal rights and interests in towns were also denied, as was seen earlier, by the local government councils. The image of a fringe-dweller they presented was quite specifically as a person without rights, because he was a person without a social and historical background.

Anthropologists were very much defining Aboriginality in terms of tradition. Brandl explicitly referred to traditional Aboriginal obligations and commitments as 'so integral a part of their Aboriginality' that they were unwilling to relinquish them. (TE:100) Bell referred to the 'sustaining ideal' which embraced all Aboriginal communities and which was formed by 'traditional considerations'. (TE:2733) In his paper 'The Aboriginal commonality', which was submitted to the inquiry, Sansom stated that there were 'sets of understandings' that made Aboriginal people feel at home with one another. (TE:2882-87) These understandings were not the negative ones of having been administered as welfare outcasts by white Australians, but were true to traditional forms, even though in some cases they were enunciated in Aboriginal English rather than in 'language' (TE:2882-87).
Fringe-dwellers were seen as part of a continuing Aboriginal tradition by bracketing the central elements of tradition which were unchanging and which fringe-dwellers retained. The anthropologists' concept of Aboriginality incorporated a theory of culture that could comprehend social change as taking place outside the central elements considered essential to the continuing Aboriginal tradition. These central elements were variously described as traditional 'obligations and commitments' (TE:100), 'tight kin relationships and a relationship to land' (TE:2705), 'fellow feeling and similar understandings' (TE:2905) and 'Aboriginal ways of doing business' (TE:2888). However, these elements were not explained in detail and it was less than explicit what anthropologists saw as the content of Aboriginality.

In highlighting only the positive and traditional aspects of the fringe-dweller lifestyle, anthropologists ignored important aspects of the 'reality' of life for fringe-dwellers. For example, the social pathology of many fringe communities, which was the 'reality' forming the basis of the dominant perspective of fringe-dwellers was not addressed. The socio-cultural links of fringe-dwellers with the towns in which they lived, including traditional attachments to land in or near the towns, kinship attachments with people who had always lived in the area and historical links through long residence were highlighted. However, the linkages of fringe-dwellers with the wider community, particularly in terms of economic and social relationships of exclusion and exploitation, received little attention. It must also be questioned whether the theory of culture of most anthropologists who gave evidence was adequate to account for social and economic change, or whether it was just an adaptation of earlier theories of culture which placed so much importance on the retention of a pristine 'tradition' denying Aborigines the ability to adapt and change.

Some writing within this perspective did give attention to the economic linkages of fringe-dwellers with
the towns in which they were living. On the basis of field work in Alice Springs, Drakakis-Smith noted that fringe-dwellers made a crucial contribution to the local economy by generating employment for a large proportion of the work force in the town in servicing Aboriginal welfare needs and through their place as consumers. Income received from welfare benefits, wage earnings and money brought in by visitors was spent largely on food and drink in the supermarkets of Alice Springs. Large sums were also spent on taxis. While Aborigines made a significant contribution to the economy as consumers, Drakakis-Smith noted that they tended to be excluded as producers with less than 2 per cent of the local work force being Aboriginal and only 25 per cent of the adult camp population in regular full time work. As a result, Drakakis-Smith argued that the nature of the economic incorporation of Aborigines into the town was 'an exploitative integration' (TE:293). Aborigines were in an 'unequal dominant-dependent relationship' and they occupied a marginal position in the society because they were rejected and exploited by the wider society (TE:293). Drakakis-Smith creates a further moral basis for assistance to fringe-dwellers beyond that of their rights in the town by focussing on the unfairness of the treatment of Aborigines in view of the important economic contribution they make to the towns. Fringe-dwellers need recognition not just because they are part of the socio-cultural make-up of towns, but because they are economically unequal.

The Committee's view

I have noted the significance in the evidence to the Committee of the nature of, and control over, definitions of 'fringe-dweller' and Aboriginality. While Aborigines explicitly asserted definitions and emphasised the importance of their controlling them, definitions and the question of control were more implicit in the evidence of others such as government departments. However, control over definitions was important both in terms of policy implications and directions and in terms of the
authorisation or empowerment of individuals, organisations or the state to interpret the Aboriginal reality to the wider community and to Aborigines. As Rowse has noted, the characterisations of categories such as 'fringe-dweller' are simultaneously both 'semiotic and political' (Rowse in Anderson et al. 1985:45-46). In its assessment of the differing perspectives on fringe-dwellers the Committee denies the political character of representations. Instead, it focusses on differences in meaning or 'semantics' and assesses these according to their adequacy as characterisations of the 'reality' of life for fringe-dwellers. However, in denying the political aspect of representations of fringe-dweller, the Committee itself was adopting a 'political' stance which it masked by referring to its concern only for describing the 'reality' of fringe-dwellers' lifestyle.

The Committee considered the issue of defining 'fringe-dwellers' sufficiently important to devote a section to it in its report as well as discussing the question with a number of witnesses. The issue was one about which the Chairman said during Committee proceedings that the Committee had 'an open mind' (TE:1721). The range of perspectives highlighted in this chapter was canvassed in the report. The argument of those Aborigines and Aboriginal organisations who asserted that all Aborigines were fringe-dwellers because of their oppression and exclusion by the wider society was acknowledged by the Committee. However, it was rejected for 'practical' reasons:

... the Committee believes that this reference requires it to report on the circumstances of a particular group of Aboriginal people which is probably the most disadvantaged within the Aboriginal community and which has problems which need a separate focus. (Committee Report:5)

The Committee confined its consideration to fringe-dwellers as a discrete group, not allowing its inquiry to become part of a wider political debate about oppression and exclusion of all Aborigines. To do so would have raised
issues about the place of Aborigines generally in Australian society. The Committee excluded this reading of the term 'fringe-dweller' because of the political agenda it contained.

That this was the case emerged from exchanges between the Committee and John Budby who, as was discussed earlier, forcefully expressed this view. The Chairman acknowledged Budby's point of view of the total 'Aboriginal nation' being fringe-dwellers as a 'semantically' useful one, but pointed to the 'practical' difficulties it would establish for the Committee in having to address all Aboriginal needs instead of those of a particular group. (TE:1720-21) The Deputy Chairman, a Labor member, was also prepared to concede Budby's argument as part of a 'political position' within both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. However, he stated that this political position was not relevant to the inquiry because the Committee was looking at 'a fairly narrow area and particular problems relating to a particular group' (TE:1723). Another Labor member rejected Budby's view as unrepresentative of Aboriginal opinion:

... this concept of pan-aboriginality really is a concept that exists only in Canberra and perhaps to a lesser extent in capital cities. When you are out looking at the real problems of people there is no concept of one Aboriginal race; quite the contrary. (TE:1724 - my emphasis)

The Committee rejected the political arguments put to it by some Aboriginal opinion as rhetoric and 'unrepresentative' and instead focussed on the 'real' problems of fringe-dwellers.

Despite the Chairman's rejection of Budby's view on the grounds of its concern with 'semantics', the Committee accepted the 'semantic' distinction made by anthropologists who suggested the substitution of the term 'town campers' for 'fringe-dwellers' to avoid 'the connotations of semi-permanency and marginality' of the latter term. (Committee Report:5) In doing so it also
ostensibly rejected the perspectives of government departments and local government councils which focussed on the 'in-between' qualities of being a fringe-dweller. However, while accepting a definition which emphasised only the 'positive' aspects of being a fringe-dweller, the Committee still highlighted in the Foreword to its report those 'negative' aspects of fringe-dwelling which had characterised governmental and local council perspectives. The Committee stated that, although fringe-dwellers were few in numbers 'their plight has wider repercussions since to many people the town campers, in a shack on the outskirts of town, represents the Aboriginal people'. (Committee Report:(iii)) In fact I show in the following chapters that the Committee focussed much attention on the 'negative' aspects of fringe-dwelling and that this led it to propose solutions to the situation that did not seem to accord with its own 'positive' definition of fringe-dwelling communities as town camps. In fact they more closely identified with the definition of fringe-dwellers in terms of the governmental perspective which I outlined earlier.

The Committee adopted a 'practical' approach to the definitions of fringe-dweller and Aboriginality by addressing itself to the 'reality' of the problems of fringe-dwellers. This provided the basis for the Committee's rejection of the political point of view put to it by some Aboriginal people and groups about the common experience of Aborigines of political oppression and exclusion by the dominant society. However, the Committee's rejection of this perspective also involved the rejection of issues raised by the wider political situation of Aborigines including the part their oppression and exclusion played in creating and maintaining fringe-dwellers. This rejection had important consequences for the Committee's analysis of the problems facing fringe-dwellers and of the solutions to those problems as I will outline in later chapters.
While denying the political agenda of certain meanings of fringe-dweller, the Committee's acceptance of the argument of anthropologists about the importance of terminology demonstrated that it did consider the question of meaning of differing representations to be important. However, while supposedly accepting the 'positive' meaning of fringe-dweller, as proposed by anthropologists, the Committee apparently could not accept that this representation fully characterised the 'reality' of the fringe-dwelling existence for which it was searching. Thus we see a strong intrusion, into the Committee's analysis, of the 'negative' perspective on fringe-dwelling of governmental organisations which the approach of anthropologists sought to correct. As I will argue in the next chapter this intrusion was probably inevitable given that the Committee's brief was in terms of the 'problems' of fringe-dwellers and fringe-dwelling as a 'problem'. The intrusion of the governmental perspective on fringe-dwelling into the Committee's analysis is accompanied by those assumptions and implications about the 'in-between' nature of fringe-dwellers, the fringe as a stage of transition and the essential role of the state in solving Aboriginal problems, which I have outlined earlier in the chapter. The Committee's positive definiton became lost in the overwhelming 'reality' of the problems of fringe-dwellers as seen by the Committee. It is to depictions of these problems that I now turn.

NOTES

1. By Aboriginality I mean the qualities inherent in being an Aborigine.

2. The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines 'fringe' as 'An ornamental bordering, consisting of a narrow band to which are attached threads of silk, cotton, etc., either loose or formed into tassels, twists, etc.'; 'Anything resembling this; a border or edging; an outer edge or margin of any kind; an outer limit of a country, area, etc.' The Macquarie Dictionary defines 'fringe' as 'An ornamental bordering having projecting lengths of thread, cord, etc., either loose or variously arranged or combined'; 'border; margin; outer part or extremity'; 'of or pertaining to a person or group living on the outskirts of social
acceptability'. It defines 'fringe dweller' as 'a person who lives, usually in miserable conditions, on the fringe of a town or settlement'; 'a person who attaches himself to a group, etc., in order to benefit from the social advantages or prestige which naturally accrue to that group'.

3. A Department of Aboriginal Affairs representative stated that the word 'fringe' had the following associations for him:

I found myself thinking about what the word 'fringe' meant and I thought it probably meant three things. First of all, that it was something on the edge; secondly, that it was something rather thin and a bit tatty; and thirdly, that it was something which did not form part of the normal fabric of that to which it was a fringe. (TE : 679)

4. Bropho stated that: 'All Aboriginal people became fringedwellers the day the white man set foot upon this continent' (TE : 905).

5. The letter from the Western Australian Minister for Community Welfare, Ray Young, to Robert Bropho is worth reproducing in full:

Dear Robert

As you have consistently refused to concern yourself and the people for whom I note you describe yourself as 'voluntary spokesman', in the discussions with the Government on the Madonna Downs campsite, I think it is only reasonable that I advise you that I am not prepared to have consultations with you on the matter, whether verbally or in writing.

I have dealt with and negotiated with the representatives of the other groups who are most keen to co-operate with the Government and to use the Madonna Downs site in the future.

They have made it clear that they do not want your people there any more than you apparently want to go there.

I will be concentrating my efforts on having that campsite established in accordance with the wishes of the Aboriginal communities and the Government.

When I have been successful in doing that or at any time between now and then, you are free to approach me in respect of the future of the community currently at the Lockridge campsite.

I have made it clear that at all times I am prepared to discuss the future of your people as a separate issue, if that is what you desire.
In other words, it is presumptuous of you to interfere with the arrangements being made between myself and other communities as it is certain that you do not speak for them, if indeed you even reflect the wishes of the people at the Lockridge campsite.

Yours sincerely

Ray Young
MINISTER FOR COMMUNITY WELFARE (TE : 1264)
CHAPTER 3

DEPICTIONS OF FRINGE COMMUNITIES

The Committee's terms of reference were twofold. First, it was asked to delineate the 'economic and social problems' of fringe-dwelling communities, and second to develop 'strategies' to overcome these problems. In this chapter I will be concerned with the differing depictions of fringe-dwelling communities and the construction of their 'problems' which emerge from the evidence. The 'strategies' will be examined in the next chapter.

The 'problem' orientation of the Committee's terms of reference drew some comment in submissions. The dangers of this orientation were described by Ross:

To focus an inquiry on "problems", without considering the possible advantages offered by fringe camps to their residents, risks perceptions of fringe camps in terms of such problems, or even as problems in themselves . . . An outsider's perception of a "problem" may not be perceived as such by campers, and a camper's problems may not readily be apparent to outsiders. (TE:444-45)

Similarly, the South Australian Department of Education considered that there was a danger of 'ethno-centricity' in defining problems, as minority groups 'can by the very nature of their lifestyle present "problems" for the wider society and its smooth administration' (TE:831). Heppell also pointed out that there was a danger of fringe camps being seen simply in terms of problems. (TE:2556)

Most depictions of fringe camps presented to the Committee followed the problem orientation of fringe-dwelling with the camps being seen as an aberration in the social fabric. Fringe communities were seen either
as having problems or as being a problem. Their characteristics were said to include the lack of traditional or any other authority structures; inhabitants with unacceptable 'standards' of behaviour in an urban environment; economic, social and cultural poverty; and a mood of despair, inferiority and powerlessness as a result of dependency on the wider community. While local government councils depicted fringe camps as a problem, by contrast Federal government departments and others, including some Aboriginal organisations, depicted them as having problems. On the other hand, anthropologists depicted fringe camps as a positive form of residential situation for Aboriginal people living in towns. Their characteristics were said to include close kin relationships between inhabitants; the operation of traditional authority structures; autonomy and control of inhabitants over their lives; and a mood of security and harmony. Aborigines and Aboriginal organisations at times drew on all the above perspectives but they also introduced distinctive elements.

At a superficial level the division between positive and negative depictions is useful in contrasting the fundamentally different perspectives on fringe communities. The Committee itself juxtaposes these depictions in its report when discussing the features of fringe camps and their social and economic problems. However, the central questions are how such different perspectives on the same communities can be held and what they indicate about those who articulate the different perspectives. Are they simply the result of different perceptions, the consequence of an 'ethnocentric' understanding of an Aboriginal reality versus an understanding from 'the Aboriginal perspective', as the critics of the problem orientation of the Committee's inquiry implied or is something more involved? Do the differing perspectives indicate a fundamental ambiguity in the nature of fringe communities? I will return to these questions following a more detailed examination from the evidence.

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Fringe camps as an aberration

There are two perspectives which focus on the 'problem' orientation of fringe-dwelling. They correspond to the two perspectives outlined in the previous chapter which centre on the supposed 'in-between' qualities of fringe-dwellers. Cowlishaw, in writing about race relations in a country town in New South Wales, has identified them as a 'hard-line' position where Aborigines are seen as problems and a 'soft-line' position where Aborigines are seen as having problems. As Cowlishaw notes, both 'blame the victim' for their subordinate position. (Cowlishaw 1986:14)

A 'town planning problem': The 'hard-line' position focussed on the problems which fringe-dwelling communities posed for local government authorities and was expressed to the Committee primarily by local government councils. In the broadest sense the existence of fringe camps within urban areas was seen to create a 'town planning problem' (TE:2234) for local authorities, particularly as towns expanded to include the fringe camps. Fringe camping was often described as 'indiscriminate' (TE:112 and 131), being supposedly without logic. Aborigines were also said to cause particular difficulties to authorities by just 'turning up' (TE:927 and 1073-74) in the town. The socio-cultural ties of Aborigines to towns were not acknowledged. Among subsidiary problems identified were those of the 'health hazards' posed to the general community by fringe camps (TE:114 and 130, informal discussions with Murat Bay Shire Council and Kalgoorlie Town Council), those of littering (TE:114), and problems of 'law and order' created by what the councils saw as Aboriginal alcoholism and anti-social behaviour. (TE:129 and informal discussions Murat Bay Shire Council and Kalgoorlie Town Council).

Underlying this perception was a number of stated and unstated beliefs and assumptions, not all of
which were entirely consistent. Aboriginal lifestyle and
behaviour and urban dwelling were seen as 'not compatible'.
(TE:2354) One local government councillor told the
Committee that Aboriginal culture was 'a nomadic one' and
that it would be thousands of years before these 'nomads'
could be turned into town dwellers. (informal discussions,
Kalgoorlie Town Council). A resident of Katherine similarly
described Aborigines as a 'backward and nomadic race'
(TE:3148). Aborigines incompatibility with town life was
demonstrated by the fact that they 'do not use the hotels
and motels to stay in' while in town, preferring instead to
camp under 'a shady tree out on the flat where they can
meet and congregate, drink and yarn till the cows come
home' (TE:3648). Other local government councils decried
numerous Aboriginal practices as incompatible with urban-
life. Because of this 'failure by camp residents to adhere
to the prescribed rules' (TE:127), conflict between urban
authorities and Aborigines in fringe camps was seen as
'inevitable'. This provided the rationalisation for the
exclusion of Aborigines from towns and was justified not on
the basis of 'race' or 'skin colour' but on the basis of
'behavioural differences between Aborigines and white
people' (informal discussions, Port Augusta Council).

The other side of this assumption was that if
Aborigines chose to live in an urban area then they had to
conform to European standards. The Mayor of the Darwin City
Council stated the assumption succinctly:

.. whilst an Aboriginal has the right to
choose the style of life that he wants to live,
if he chooses to live in the urban situation he
should conform generally with that urban pattern
of living. (TE:2304-05)

Similarly, a Katherine councillor stated that a transient
camp for Aborigines should not be allowed within the town
boundary unless all building codes were complied with.
(TE:220) The move of Aborigines to town, from an Aboriginal
domain to a European one, provided the justification for
the imposition of European behaviour and expectations on
them. As the Alice Springs branch of the Northern Territory
Country Liberal Party expressed it: 'We would expect European law to dominate in the town' (TE:2604).

Even though Aboriginal values and behaviours were seen as incompatible with urban life and were used as a rationale for the exclusion of Aborigines, Aborigines at the same time were 'blamed' for the separatism which existed in the towns. The Alice Springs branch of the Northern Territory Country Liberal Party argued that 'Alice Springs is not a divided town in such aspects as religion or white ethnic background' (TE:2603). However, the unity of the town was being threatened by 'the separation of Aboriginal fringe camps, which appear often to be encouraged by Aboriginal groups . . .' (TE:2603). The provision to Aborigines of a range of benefits which, it was claimed, was not available to the rest of the community was also seen as encouraging separation. Despite the evident poverty of Aborigines, local government councils declared that Aborigines received better treatment than any other section of the community (informal discussions, Kalgoorlie Town Council), and one resident described Aborigines as 'not in any way disadvantaged people' (TE:3148). The fact that Aborigines had still not been able to improve their situation was considered further 'proof' of their profligacy and their failure to help themselves (informal discussions, Kalgoorlie Town Council). The supposedly favourable treatment of Aborigines led to claims that Aborigines and whites should have the same rights and entitlements. However, the implications of these claims were not fully thought through by those who asserted them. For example, the right of Aborigines to consume alcohol was clearly problematic for this point of view, given the perceived failure of Aborigines to handle it. Consequently, it was expressed to the Committee that rights should be withheld from Aborigines until they 'accept a responsibility with those rights' (informal discussions, Kalgoorlie Town Council).

This fragmented collection of assumptions and beliefs is primarily an explanation and rationalisation for
the exclusion of Aborigines from town. The unifying factor appears to be its adaptability in achieving this aim of exclusion. This is perhaps no better illustrated than in the comments of the Mayor of Kalgoorlie about the development of a shelter for fringe-dwellers. He said the shelter should be developed well outside the city limits so Aborigines 'need never come to town' (TE:1244). Despite the desire to exclude Aborigines as a group from the town and to deny their legitimate reasons for being in town, the Mayor stated that he wanted the development to be called an 'Australian' rather than an 'Aboriginal' village as to call it an 'Aboriginal' village would be 'racist' (TE:1244). There is a constant masking of the reality of Aboriginal exclusion and inequality by the articulation of ideas about the need for unity in the town, the recognition that 'we' are all Australians' and the demand for 'equality of rights' for Aborigines and whites. The apparently inconsistent assumptions of an Aboriginal incompatibility with town dwelling and of Aborigines conforming to urban living when they choose to live in town are opposite sides of the same coin, or differing strategies for the achievement of the same end. Aboriginal exclusion is justified by the perceived incompatibility of Aborigines with urban life, but if Aborigines choose to live in town they do so by agreeing to become something other than Aboriginal by conforming to European standards and assimilating. In achieving this conformity there is an appeal to the impersonal requirements of building codes and town planning regulations. The effect of both strategies is the same - the elimination of Aboriginality from the town.

A 'social pathology'

The 'soft-line' depiction of fringe-dwelling communities, articulated by governmental organisations and church groups focussed on an interconnected range of problems which was seen as producing and reproducing the social pathology of the fringe-dwelling lifestyle. In doing so, many submissions presented fringe-dwelling within terms of the culture of poverty model, although there was no
direct reference to the model as developed by Lewis (Lewis 1966). Primarily the culture of poverty is a theory about the reproduction of poverty. The key to perpetuation lies not in externally imposed conditions, a reproduction of a structural inequality, but in the absorption by the poor of 'the basic attitudes and values' of the culture which include 'a strong feeling of fatalism, helplessness, dependence and inferiority' (Lewis 1966:21 and 23). While poverty is one of the elements of the culture of poverty, it is not invariably accompanied by a culture of poverty. It is the 'low level of organisation' and the reproduction of values of despondency and despair which are crucial in identifying a culture of poverty.

Some submissions represented fringe-dwelling directly as the cultural reproduction of poverty. The Inter-church Committee on Aboriginal Affairs in Perth noted that in fringe-dwelling communities: 'Children are born into a situation of despair; a situation of sub culture survival adaption that is carried through from generation to generation' (TE:368). However, there was a tendency in many submissions to mix the internal, cultural, factors of the culture of poverty with the externally imposed, structural, factors as the means by which a fringe-dwelling lifestyle was produced and reproduced. The Commonwealth Department of Health referred to the social aspects of the fringe-dwelling environment as being:

... characterised by a poor environment, low economic status, low educational standards and severely limited employment opportunities which frequently create frustration, mental illness, family breakdown, child neglect, delinquency, apathy and helplessness, as people find themselves trapped in a situation over which they have little control. (TE:807)

It is unclear from this quote whether the Department saw the 'little control' of fringe-dwellers over their lives as being the result of structural factors of the reproduction of a culture of poverty. Similarly, the Commonwealth Department of Education referred to Aboriginal people experiencing 'a general feeling of powerlessness brought
about by their depressed living situation and low position in Australian society' (TE:734). However, it also referred to the 'inability or unwillingness on the part of the fringe-dweller to try to change his/her circumstances' (TE:741). The Department of Aboriginal Affairs referred to the central features of the fringe-dwelling lifestyle as being 'inadequate housing, poor employment prospects, chronic ill-health, lack of effective formal social organisation and marital and extended family disintegration' (TE:4). But it also stated that fringe-dwellers had 'a widespread psychological conviction of their own inferior position' (TE:5).

The mixing of internal and external factors extended to the analysis of the depressed economic situation of fringe-dwellers. Their situation was generally seen as the result of their inability to adapt and respond to changing circumstances. One submission stated that:

European and Aboriginal cultures appear to have been quite incompatible and the present situation is the result of what has been wrought over the years. Europeans have worked hard to secure economic development, individually and for the community, yet Aboriginal people have not benefitted but remain lost somewhere between traditional life and the new European world. (TE:162)

A representative of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs referred to Aborigines' 'inability to cope with social change' and their lack of 'the skills or motivation' to sustain employment in urban centres. (TE:942) There was an assumption that "traditional" culture made Aborigines unqualified or resistant to the demands of capitalist techniques or patterns of production' (Morris 1983:511). As Morris notes, this assumption is misleading as Aborigines did adapt to changing circumstances (1983:511). However, significant structural changes in agricultural/pastoral production in the last thirty years have seen the 'transition of rural Aborigines from underemployment to unemployment' (Morris 1983:513 and Rowley 1982:10-13) as Aborigines have been displaced from the niche they had
developed in the economy of rural areas. Only brief attention in the evidence of the 'soft-lines' was given to the impact of these structural changes on the creation and perpetuation of fringe-dwelling. Where they were referred to, it was often in terms of the failure of Aborigines to respond to the changes, rather than the way in which the changes made Aborigines, and the skills they had developed, redundant. (See TE:942-43, 2620 and 2622-23)

There was also a tendency to locate the problems of fringe-dwellers within the Aboriginal family situation and its 'traditional' concerns with kinship obligations. The Victorian Government referred to the 'Aboriginal extended family' which it said caused 'problems where the house is too small and where tenancy laws limit the number of people who are able to stay' (TE:1619). As a result the families' problems were compounded and limitations placed on their 'fully participating in society' (TE:1619). Similarly, the Mt Isa Welfare Council saw the 'extended family situation' as a 'problem' and one of the reasons why Aborigines could not budget or cope. (TE:1619). There is little recognition of the positive role the extended family situation and kinship obligations can play in the marginal economic circumstances of fringe-dwelling as a survival mechanism. However, it is always double-edged because, while it can provide some economic security, it can also prevent Aborigines from accumulating assets and establishing an economic base to change fundamentally their economic situation.

A final element in the 'soft-line' analysis of the problems of fringe-dwellers was that of racial discrimination.¹ The Department of Aboriginal Affairs saw it as a 'major factor limiting the progress of fringe-dwellers' (TE:16), while the Commissioner for Community Relations stated that 'attitudinal discrimination is deep and widespread in Australia' (TE:2021) and had led to significant infringements of the rights of fringe-dwellers (TE:50). The problem was perceived as one
of 'attitudes', 'prejudices' and 'misunderstandings' and not the result of power relations within the towns or in Australian society generally.

Even racial discrimination was twisted into an Aboriginal problem with the Department of Aboriginal Affairs maintaining that racial discrimination was the result of:

... the separateness of Aboriginals in many towns, housed together in fringe communities on the town's outskirts, and possessing all the characteristics of an underprivileged and deprived group. (TE:18)

An official of the Department in Perth stated that:

The Aboriginal life-style, especially of those people who have moved into the towns, is much more easy-going. They do not have the same standards as the white man sets himself and this has tended in a great number of cases for the white man to look down on them for this simple reason and also to expect them to raise their standards to become compatible with what is accepted as the normal standard in our community. (TE:959)

Given the 'visibility' of fringe-dwellers and their 'obviously' incompatible lifestyle, discrimination against them was considered to be understandable. Furthermore, it was argued that the wider public image of Aborigines contributed to their inability to help themselves as it lowered their perception of themselves with 'consequent self-abasement and loss of pride' (TE:18). In this way discrimination became a further element of the culture of poverty, reinforcing those values which characterised the culture.

There has been significant criticism of the culture of poverty theory that was such a significant part of the 'soft-line' depiction of fringe-dwelling communities. In broad terms it has been described as a 'blame the victim' theory with an emphasis on negative and disorganising aspects even though there is significant
evidence that there are strongly positive aspects to the lifestyle (Valentine 1968; Valentine (et al) 1969:181; Brown 1986:178). It has also been criticised on the basis that poverty is not the result of a set of values and behaviours that perpetuate a culture of which poverty is a central element, but rather the result of inequality in the social structure of the wider society (Valentine (et al) 1969:183). Culture of poverty theories focus on internal (cultural) rather than external (structural) factors as the explanation for the perpetuation of poverty (Howard 1981:148). As a result, attention turns to changing the cultural orientation of individuals and attempting to incorporate them as individuals into the general community, rather than on changing the structural causes of poverty. The role of the bureaucracy and service organisations in alleviating poverty is also rationalised, given the psychological inability of those living in the culture of poverty to help themselves.

As I noted earlier, the 'soft-line' depiction of fringe communities was a mixture of externally imposed, structural problems and internal, cultural ones. There was a recognition of a need for government intervention to improve the external conditions of fringe-dwelling communities if the poverty of fringe-dwellers was to be overcome. I will refer in the next chapter to the means by which governments proposed to intervene to change conditions for fringe-dwellers. However, there was also a strong view that the internal, cultural attitudes associated with fringe-dwelling had to be overcome if the fringe was to be transformed. The culture of poverty depiction of fringe camps was central to this view and it accorded well with the 'in-between' qualities of fringe-dwelling which government departments highlighted in their definitions of fringe-dwellers. As fringe-dwellers were seen as being 'caught between two cultures' their possession of an impoverished culture was comprehensible. In identifying fringe-dwellers as powerless and unable to help themselves, the culture of poverty depiction confirmed the impotence of fringe-dwellers that flowed from their
perceived liminal existence and justified the necessity of state intervention to improve the circumstances of fringe-dwellers. In locating the central problems of fringe-dwellers in their aberrant culture and lifestyle, attention was diverted from the importance of the structural position of Aborigines in the towns and the relationships of power in these towns and the wider community as explanations for the creation and persistence of fringe-dwelling. These also were not considered among the external factors which needed to be addressed if the circumstances of fringe-dwelling were to be improved. The persistence of fringe-dwelling, the inability of fringe-dwellers to 'pull themselves up by their own bootstraps' (TE:655), was explained by the enormous psychological and cultural constraints on individuals which prevented them from changing or improving their situation, or which gave them no desire or motivation to do so.

Improving the lot of fringe-dwellers was seen to be as much about changing their lifestyle as about changing their structural position in the towns. The culture of poverty was as much of a problem as poverty itself. For example, a study of the future of New South Wales reserves conducted by Department of Aboriginal Affairs and New South Wales Government officials noted that the residents of Moree Aboriginal reserves exhibited 'a number of social problems which do not exist to the same extent among the Aboriginal community in the town' (TE:1313). The differences between the two communities were said to be not wholly understandable in terms of differing opportunities and physical environments but seemed to be related to 'a difference in values, attitudes and lifestyles' (TE:1313). Given this, the solution to the social problems of reserve dwellers was seen to lie in changing these values, attitudes and lifestyle. To this end the report recommended that housing only be built in the town because of 'the general undesirability of building on either of the Reserves' (TE:1314). In the next chapter I will explore in greater detail the implications of the way the problems of fringe-dwelling communities were depicted for the proposed
'solutions' to these problems, noting in particular the sanction it gave to governmental intervention to improve the situation of Aborigines and the orientation towards changing and incorporating Aborigines as individuals into the wider society.

Aboriginal depictions of fringe camps

Despite the challenge by Aborigines to dominant definitions of 'fringe-dweller' which I outlined in the previous chapter, a number of Aborigines and Aboriginal organisations depicted fringe communities in similar terms to those of governmental organisations, relying heavily on a culture of poverty framework. The Aboriginal Development Commission referred to a range of external conditions which it stated produced a 'cycle of poverty'. It saw inadequate housing leading to poor health, education and job training and consequently poor employment opportunities and poverty to complete the cycle (TE:3038). However, the ADC considered that the 'attitudes of despair' in fringe-dwellers which created a 'daunting barrier of despondency and a resignation to one's plight' (TE:3038) were of equal, if not greater, importance in understanding the perpetuation of fringe-dwelling. Consequently, improving conditions for fringe-dwellers was seen to be as much about changing their attitudes and lifestyle as transforming the physical conditions in which they lived. As expressed by the Chairman of the Commission, Charles Perkins, it was about 'developing the inner Aboriginal person to be able to create and develop more confidence, dignity and self-respect...' (TE:2059) and about fringe-dwellers wanting 'to change the lifestyle they are living' (TE:2062). Aboriginal organisations servicing fringe camps also relied on a culture of poverty framework to depict fringe camps. The Kalano Association in Katherine argued that fringe-dwellers had lost family and traditional ties and as a consequence had become 'apathetic and lifeless' with 'social controls and traditional activities' no longer operative in the communities. (TE:195)
A different perspective on fringe communities was provided by Bropho. He described the fringe-dwelling lifestyle as 'entirely different to the white society's lifestyle . .' (TE:1254), not as an aberration but as a rejection of what white society had to offer. Bropho asserted that:

We experienced what the white man offered us, his lifestyle on a silver plate, but the treatment he gave us for accepting it, it is not for us, we backtrack from there back into the past, to where we came from to where we know we have peace of mind . . . (TE:3020)

In Bropho's depiction, fringe camps were seen as the result of the imposition on Aborigines of a white lifestyle. But they were also seen as part of an Aboriginal rejection of that lifestyle and of having 'white ideas shoved down their throats' (TE:2063). As Von Sturmer has noted, what has been depicted as the 'degradation' of Aboriginal communities and the 'failure' of Aborigines to seek improvement within terms set by the white community may simply be 'a refusal to acknowledge any beholdenness' (Von Sturmer in AIAS 1984:51). Hence, fringe-dwelling can be constructed in terms of a resistance to, or rejection of, a European lifestyle and all the responsibilities and obligations it entails.

Although the views of fringe-dwellers themselves (other than Bropho) were largely unheard in the evidence, material in some submissions pointed to the 'advantages' perceived by fringe-dwellers of their lifestyle. Ironically, one of the most comprehensive statements of fringe-dwellers' depiction of their lifestyle was contained in a submission from the Western Australian Department of Community Welfare which also argued that reserves and fringe camps should only be seen as temporary 'until a better alternative has been developed' (TE:1071). According to the submission the views of Aboriginal fringe-dwelling and reserve residents about their lifestyle were that:

1. Reserves are a very cheap place to live.
2. On reserves there is no pressure put on people by whites, other town dwelling Aborigines or authority in general. People are left to themselves.

3. Some reserves are important socialising and drinking venues for visitors and the general Aboriginal community.

4. The location of some reserves is very convenient and close to shops, hospital, seaside and hotel.

5. Reserves serve as a short-term camping area for visitors and itinerants.

6. General acceptance of reserve environment and reluctance to face a change in circumstances. Suits fringe-dwelling lifestyle.

7. Don't want burdens of a S.H.C. home and 'high' rents.

8. Old pensioners have an emotional bond with location and don't want to move. (TE:1072)

Similar expressions of fringe-dwellers' views of the advantages of their lifestyle were expressed in relation to reserves and fringe camps in New South Wales (TE:487, 1306 and 1315), South Australia (TE:860), Queensland (TE:569 and 3274-75) and the Northern Territory (TE:2149). We can see in this perspective reasons for an acceptance by some Aborigines of a fringe-dwelling lifestyle. It entails few financial burdens and enables Aborigines to pursue their lives without social pressure from the non-Aboriginal community to conform to its 'standards', while at the same time permitting them access to towns and associated services. As in Bropho's perspective, it demonstrates a rejection of betterment in non-Aboriginal terms. However, it also demonstrates what Beck has called a 'mentality of "concrete and limited objectives"' (Beck 1985:110). It points to the existence in fringe camps of limited expectations and lack of a desire for 'betterment' which can explain the reproduction of a lifestyle of poverty for fringe-dwellers. In this sense fringe-dwellers are perpetuating their own position of poverty and inadequate
living conditions, although in circumstances that enable them to retain values and a lifestyle which they find desirable.

As with their definitions for fringe-dweller, Aborigines' depictions of fringe communities differed substantially. While there were elements of opposition to the local council and governmental depictions of fringe communities, there was also an acceptance of these depictions by some Aborigines. The primary elements of opposition concerned the depiction of fringe communities as a rejection of a white lifestyle and a refusal to accept white authority. However, this rejection also often involved for Aborigines the perpetuation of a life of poverty. On the other hand, other Aborigines highlighted the degradation of fringe camps, and the hopelessness and despair that characterised their residents. They referred to external factors which explained the circumstances of fringe-dwellers, but also saw fringe-dwelling in terms of the reproduction of attitudes of despondency and resignation. The transformation of the fringe, the necessity for which these Aborigines did not question, required both improvements in physical conditions of fringe camps as well as a change in attitudes and lifestyle of fringe-dwellers.

Fringe camps as autonomous Aboriginal communities

For some witnesses, particularly anthropologists, fringe camps were seen as autonomous communities operating according to Aboriginal values and with an organisation and structure that were distinctly Aboriginal. In contrast to the picture of disorder and dependence characteristic of the culture of poverty approach, the central themes which emerged in this perspective were structure and autonomy. There was an emphasis on the 'community' and its 'structure', as distinct from the focus on the 'individual' and his/her 'behaviours' and 'attitudes' which characterised the perspective of fringe-dwelling as an
aberration. The right of Aborigines to be in towns and hence the necessity of recognising their place in the towns was also asserted strongly.

Bell argued that fringe communities often appeared to be haphazard but once you got inside them you found that 'they are structured along the same sorts of principles that a camp in any other Aboriginal community is structured' (TE:2705). According to Bell, the lifestyle of the fringe-dweller:

... is underpinned by the same values as those cherished by Aborigines in remote areas: it is a distinctive life-style and one that is defiantly Aboriginal. (TE:307)

Similarly, Brandl stated that fringe groups had 'a wealth of shared traditions and a structure and organisation' (TE:107). Sansom also pointed to 'structures' in the two sorts of fringe-dwelling communities he identified. The 'local fringe-dwelling community' was made up of people with long histories of association with a particular place and a stability in cleaving to that place. (TE:2876) The more common 'hinterland Aboriginal community' was made up of a group of 'countrymen' who were linked by years of working together and by kinship and affinity and who, while regarding a particular place as their home base, travelled over a 'beat' comprising a number of camps (TE:2877-78). Others also referred to a structure of Aboriginal movements which incorporated the town as one of the camping places (TE:2706 and 2743).

There was also extensive reference to the autonomy of fringe camps. Ross stated that the advantages of fringe camps over other residential situations for Aborigines, such as the former missions and government settlements and reserves, were the social and economic autonomy they provided to their residents. Aspects of social autonomy included having access to towns but with the ability to withdraw to the privacy of the camp where Aboriginal values operated. The physical distance of the
camp from the town was said to reflect the degree of autonomy sought. Most importantly, people in fringe camps were said not to be subject to the direct control of non-Aboriginal authority. In this sense a number of anthropologists compared fringe camps to outstations where a similar autonomy was said to exist (TE:447, 1767, 2541, 2705). The economic autonomy of fringe camps was claimed to stem from the lack of economic commitments entailed by living in a house in town. This allowed fringe campers a marked degree of freedom in their disposal of cash reserves on consumer items and to meet the demands 'of the fringe campers' sub-economy' (TE:447 and see also Sansom TE:2903-05). Related to the autonomy theme, fringe-dwelling was also seen as a 'resistance' by Aboriginal people to changes which would destroy their lifestyle and other values (TE:444 and 454). Morris has also noted fringe-dwelling as an 'effective form of resistance' by Aborigines to government control exercised over them on reserves in the early 1900s (Morris 1985:102).

Only a few submissions from anthropologists or other social scientists gave much attention to the economic situation of fringe-dwellers. However, two contrasting perspectives can be identified in the evidence. One was that of Sansom who referred to the existence of a 'parathetic' relationship between the societies and economies of Aboriginal town camps and the wider Australian community. Sansom claimed there was an internal Aboriginal economy which operated according to its own norms and values and which was not dependent on the wider European economy. Within this internal economy Western material goods were adopted but the modalities and values associated with them were not also appropriated. Instead these goods were used according to 'Aboriginal allocations of values' (TE:2903-05). This perspective was criticised by Beck who argued that Aboriginal and European economies could no longer be seen to operate in a symbiotic relationship. Instead he asserted that there was an increasing dependence of the Aboriginal economy on the European economy (Beck 1985:101). In the context of non-Aboriginal dominated towns
it is very difficult for Aborigines to impose their norms and values, even within the fringe camps, making the operation of a separate economy difficult. The other perspective was referred to in the previous chapter arising from the evidence of Drakakis-Smith. He concentrated largely on the economic situation of fringe-dwellers and, like Beck, he considered the economic situation of fringe-dwellers was a dependent one. While Sansom's representation of the economies of fringe camps glossed over the questions of inequality and exploitation by seeing those economies as internal and separate from the wider economy, Drakakis-Smith considered the questions of inequality and exploitation were central to understanding the economic situation of fringe-dwellers.

The anthropological argument, by focussing on the positive aspects of fringe-dwelling, highlights the extent to which Aborigines, as shown in the previous section, are rejecting assimilation by wishing to pursue a fringe-dwelling lifestyle. This element of rejection by Aborigines of a European way of life is of obvious importance in explaining the persistence of fringe-dwelling. But the focus on the 'natives point of view' and the desire to avoid ethnocentricism reveals a certain naivety or a blinkering of vision within the anthropological perspective about the circumstances of fringe-dwellers. There is the question of the wider relationships of power within the towns and the degree of deliberate exclusion and oppression by the wider community as an explanation for fringe-dwelling. There is a tendency to regard Aborigines as 'free' agents with control over their circumstances and making the choice to be separate, ignoring the way in which external constraints limit the range of Aboriginal choice. Because of a desire to avoid ethnocentricism and instead create a moral and political basis for the recognition of Aboriginality in the towns, the anthropological perspective also often glosses over the appalling conditions in which fringe-dwellers live: the alcoholism, the poverty, the violence and the poor health, all of which, in the governmental perspective, are seen as
part of the 'aberration' that is fringe-dwelling. There is a tendency to incorporate these conditions as aspects of the fringe-dweller lifestyle. Others have noted the general failure of anthropologists to address themselves to the social pathology of many contemporary Aboriginal communities (Sullivan 1986, Rose 1986, Von Sturmer 1982) with one asserting that 'only a distorted epistomology could produce such a distorted representation of reality' (Rose 1986:28) and another stating: 'All is not lovely in the ethno-relativist garden' (Von Sturmer 1982:105).

However, some anthropologists and other social scientists wished to extend their analysis to include a wider, more critical perspective on fringe-dwelling. While affirming that fringe camps provided Aborigines with autonomy and the ability to retain their cultural identity and pursue their desired lifestyle, Beck also argued that there had been 'a strong European push to keep Aboriginal people outside the town . . .' (TE:2541). In referring to the very poor health indices among children in town camps, Beck highlighted not only the local forces operating to create the problems but also the role of wider forces, including Aboriginal policies generally in Australia, in creating the problems. On the basis of his research in Alice Springs, Drakakis-Smith recognised that Aborigines lived in fringe camps because they were 'preserves of traditional values', but he stated that 'the long-standing pressures from white people for them to remain there have also been important' (TE:268-69). He argued that this pressure was applied through a limited incorporation of Aborigines into the town. While Aborigines were incorporated into the economy as consumers and made a crucial contribution to local businesses by the money they spent directly and the money spent indirectly on 'Aboriginal welfare', they were excluded as producers from the economy. The position they occupied in the town was seen as closely connected with their rejection and exploitation by the wider society (TE:293) and the explanation for Aboriginal separatism lay as much in the degree of access permitted to the town by the dominant
white population as in Aboriginal attitudes and values (TE:278-79). Drakakis-Smith thus strongly rejected culture of poverty and other theories of marginality which concentrated on the responsibility of the victims for their marginalisation and instead focussed on the structural factors which created and perpetuated fringe-dwelling.

The Committee's analysis

In its report the Committee referred to varying perceptions of fringe camps. It juxtaposed what it saw as two fundamentally opposed perceptions: the generally negative perceptions that included an image of the inhabitants of fringe camps of 'poverty, helplessness, lack of appropriate hygiene facilities and perhaps drunkenness' held by most non-Aboriginals (Committee Report:13); and the view that fringe camps had an established social structure and a 'positive social organisation' with a camp life appealing to many town campers (Committee report:13 and 18). My exploration of the evidence reveals a much more complex range of stated and unstated depictions of fringe communities. The so-called negative non-Aboriginal images can be separated into at least two different depictions: the 'hard-line' perspective which sees fringe-dwelling as a problem to be eliminated by the local community and the 'soft-line' perspective which focusses on the problems which fringe-dwellers have, stemming partly from external conditions but also from their existence within a culture of poverty. The positive perspective on fringe-dwelling is reflected in evidence from anthropologists and the views of fringe-dwellers themselves emerging from the evidence. While acknowledging a positive social and cultural perspective of fringe-dwelling, other anthropologists and some Aborigines highlight the often appalling physical conditions in which fringe-dwellers live to emphasise their oppression and exclusion by the wider society and their occupation of a structural position of inequality.

The Committee's analysis is superficial and does not reflect the complexities in the evidence before it
because it makes no explicit evaluation of contrasting positions in its report. It does reject the 'hard-line' position of fringe-dwellers as a town planning problem. It refers to local government authorities as reflecting 'the prejudice and inherited attitudes towards Aboriginals of their communities' and notes that these 'attitudes' will need to be overcome if local government is to play a role in relation to fringe camps (Committee Report:45). In rejecting this position the Committee argues that the racism of local government authorities and the wider community in country towns is the result of 'prejudice and inherited attitudes', attitudes which can be overcome by a process of 'education' and 'public awareness'. The Committee makes no reference to the socio-economic and political relationships between Aborigines and whites in country towns as a root of racism and the exclusion of Aborigines. Consequently, its rejection of the 'hard-line' position does not entail a challenge to local white interests which perpetuate Aboriginal exclusion from the towns.

Although the Committee defines fringe-dwellers as 'town campers', emphasising the 'positive' aspects of fringe-dwelling, its identification of a range of problems associated with fringe-dwelling dominates its depiction of fringe camps. The Committee's depiction reflects the evidence of government departments and mixes structural factors with the attitudes and values of fringe-dwellers as explanations for the persistence of fringe-dwelling. The Foreword to the report, in which the Committee most strikingly highlights its central findings, refers to the 'deplorable conditions' in which fringe-dwellers live in physical, social and economic senses. It also refers to fringe-dwellers as 'the real losers of today'. Its analysis of the economic problems of fringe-dwellers focusses on the interconnection of a range of external factors such as poor housing and health and a lack of education and employment which produce 'a vicious cycle of poverty' for fringe-dwellers (Committee Report:21). However, these external factors are complemented by psychological traits
of dependency, lack of incentive and motivation, and powerlessness which are seen by the Committee as perpetuating the fringe-dwellers' poverty (Committee Report:28-29). The Committee also incorporates into its conceptualisation of the 'problems' the effect of discrimination and unfavourable attitudes towards Aborigines on the part of the wider community. It argues that these attitudes reinforce the 'negative stereotyped image of Aboriginals', become the Aboriginal perception of themselves and result in a state of 'apathy' among fringe-dwellers (Committee Report:36).

Why did the Committee concentrate on the problems, rather than the advantages, associated with fringe-dwelling given its approach to defining fringe-dwellers in positive terms. The focus on the problems of fringe-dwelling certainly had the 'weight' of evidence as it was articulated by all government departments and organisations and by a number of Aboriginal organisations, church and welfare groups servicing fringe communities and some academics. However, this was also the case with characterisations of fringe-dwellers as people 'in-between' which the Committee had apparently rejected in adopting the definition of fringe-dwellers as 'town campers'. The overwhelming physical impression of devastation of fringe camps obviously also made an impression on members of the Committee. By tending to equate a physical impression with social and cultural assumptions about fringe communities, the Committee could be said to have fallen into the ethnocentric trap which, I pointed out earlier, had been referred to in some submissions as a danger of the problem orientation of the Committee's terms of reference. Certainly, the Committee in its questioning focussed on the problems of fringe-dwellers and tended to see fringe-dwelling itself as a problem which required a strategy to solve it. However, the inadequacy of the anthropological perspectives in providing an adequate account of the social pathology of fringe communities and the basis for it gave the Committee little alternative to the governmental perspective. The Committee could not
ignore the pathology which often characterised the fringe camps and which it had to seek to explain. The culture of poverty analysis seemed to provide an explanation. The Committee's definition of fringe-dwelling in terms of problems also provided a strong moral basis for an interventionist approach to solving the problems. The moral argument was clearly stated in the Foreword to the report:

It was glaringly apparent to the Committee that the deplorable conditions in which town campers live, not only in a physical sense but also in social and economic senses, are of urgent concern to all Australians (Committee Report:iii).

The question the Committee's analysis provided an inadequate answer to was the important one of why fringe-dwelling was so persistent. Most fringe camps and fringe-dwellers were identified as living in New South Wales, the original State of colonisation, indicating that fringe-dwelling would not be eliminated simply by the passage of time. In constructing its depiction of fringe camps broadly within a culture of poverty framework, the Committee could explain the reproduction of a fringe-dwelling lifestyle as lying in cultural traits that were perpetuated over generations. As a result the Committee's analysis underemphasised the structural factors producing and reproducing fringe-dwelling. The clear implication of the Committee's analysis was that change in the structural position of fringe-dwellers could not of itself eliminate fringe-dwelling. Fringe-dweller 'mentality' and 'attitudes' (TE:720) would also have to be eliminated. By concentrating on the 'problems' of fringe-dwelling the Committee also underestimated the importance of Aboriginal desires as an explanation of the persistence of fringe-dwelling. The Committee did acknowledge the advantages to Aborigines of a fringe-dwelling lifestyle, particularly the autonomy, the financial advantages and the pursuit of an Aboriginal way of life (Committee Report:9). Given its 'moral' stance, the Committee could not recognise the possibility that Aborigines would resist the efforts to 'improve' them that were embodied in programs to change the appalling living
conditions in fringe camps. The Committee could not have imagined that anybody would see long term 'advantages' in continuing to live in those circumstances.

To return to the question I posed early in this chapter, the differing depictions of fringe-dwelling communities are the result of a much more complicated set of factors than simply that of differing 'perceptions' - an ethnocentric one as opposed to one which sees them from 'the native's point of view'. As I have argued, this division oversimplifies the complexity of differing depictions contained in the evidence. Interests are closely involved in the differing depiction of fringe communities, various sociological and anthropological models are associated with differing perspectives on fringe-dwellers, while other ideas about fringe-dwellers emerge from the socio-economic situation in country towns. In posing the question in terms of 'positive' and 'negative' perceptions, attention focusses on 'prejudices' and 'attitudes' and important issues are lost. Despite the apparent radical difference in these two perspectives they both almost totally exclude power relationships and the structural position of Aborigines within country towns from their explanations for the perpetuation of fringe-dwelling and the appalling conditions in which fringe-dwellers often live, as does the Committee in its analysis. In the 'positive' analysis these conditions, together with their associated causes, are glossed over as part of an Aboriginal lifestyle or as ethnocentric perceptions of another culture. In the 'negative' analysis the appalling conditions are seen either as evidence of the failure of fringe-dwellers to conform to, or cope with, white 'standards' and values or to be able, on their own behalf, to improve their circumstances. In both cases important explanations are not included as part of the agenda and both lead, as we shall see in the next chapter, to proposed solutions which avoid central reasons for the persistence of fringe-dwelling.
NOTES

1. Lewis refers to discrimination against the poor as one element of the culture of poverty (Lewis 1966:21). However, this element received much greater attention in the 'soft-liners' analysis of fringe-dwelling in the inquiry.

2. The following are some further examples of the perceptions of advantages in a fringe-dwelling lifestyle as contained in the evidence:

   Among the good things about the reserve [Cowra] as perceived by its residents are its closeness to town with its facilities such as shops, schools, hospital, banks and post office; the prospect of improvements as evidenced by the ongoing improvement programmes; and safety and security. On the social side, the good things about the reserve are perceived to be the sense of belonging and identity, and the presence of relatives and friends. (TE:487)

   The residents of Bellbrook are almost unanimous in their resolve to remain living there. This preference derives from long association with the place, either through birth, marriage, or 'tradition'. It is bolstered by a tolerable lifestyle whereby basic services, including accommodation, are provided free or at little cost; whereby social security benefits, supplemented by occasional casual work, hunting and fishing, are adequate to cover day to day personal needs; and whereby the mutual support system cushions any crisis. The remoteness of the place guarantees an unusual degree of privacy and quiet enjoyment. (TE:1306)

   This lifestyle [in the fringe camps in Alice Springs] offers some advantages to permanent dwellers such as:

   . Aboriginal groups are in a position to make decisions affecting their lifestyle
   . These settings assist in stabilising community members' lives
   . Settings are usually less institutionalised than places where they have been staying previously
   . An easing of race relations problems
   . Allows families to regroup

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Some groups are located on land which has traditional significance.

- Easy access to employment, health and welfare services
- Cheaper living costs (TE:2149)

3. The extent to which the appalling physical conditions in which fringe-dwellers lived made an impression on members of the Committee was evident from their reaction on field visits to the camps. In a number of cases members were clearly unhappy and angry about the conditions in the camps. For example, following a visit to a camp in Darwin one member described it as being 'a disgrace' and a 'health hazard' (TE:2241) and needing something to be done to improve it. The comments of the Committee in the Foreword to its report also indicates the extent to which the appalling conditions of fringe camps made an impression on members.
CHAPTER 4

ELIMINATION OR RECOGNITION OF FRINGE-DWELLING?

Proposed solutions to the problems of fringe-dwellers were closely related to the ways in which fringe-dwellers were defined and their communities depicted. The themes I have drawn from the evidence in the previous two chapters can be pursued to their conclusions through the 'solutions' they recommend to the problems of fringe-dwellers. The implications and ramifications of the themes also emerge clearly from the exploration of their associated proposals for solving fringe-dwellers' problems and I discuss these in the chapter.

The erasing of fringe-dwelling

I referred in the previous chapter to the 'hard-line' depiction of fringe-dwelling as a 'town planning problem' for local authorities. I noted that there were two assumptions underlying this depiction which were opposite sides of the same coin. On the one hand there was the belief that an Aboriginal lifestyle and town dwelling were incompatible while, on the other hand, there was an assumption that if Aborigines came to town they should abandon their 'incompatible' Aboriginal lifestyle and conform to European standards and behaviour. This depiction of fringe communities was also related to the ways in which fringe-dwellers and Aboriginality were defined in this perspective. Fringe-dwellers, seen as people caught between two cultures, were considered to reflect the worst aspects of both. Their Aboriginality, seen as primitive and nomadic, was considered appropriate in the 'natural' environment of the bush, but was said to produce only degradation and deprivation in the town environment.
Given these depictions and definitions of fringe-dwellers, solving their problems involved either their re-absorption into Aboriginal society or their assimilation into the wider community. Either way it was seen as essential by local authorities that they 'deal with' (TE:920) and 'control' (TE:1074 and informal discussions, Katherine Town Council) fringe camping. Coercion and the enforcement of community standards were seen as necessary parts of any solution. One method of 'dealing with' fringe camps was to oppose their establishment or to 'take action' against camps which had been established. Both Katherine and Darwin Town Councils opposed the establishment of fringe camps within municipal boundaries (TE:131 and 219) and both moved to eliminate 'illegal' camping by demolishing temporary shelters (TE:179) and enforcing regulations regarding illegal camping (TE:2292). The strict enforcement of health, building and litter regulations by local authorities was also seen as a useful way of controlling fringe-dwelling (TE:138 and 2294). However, local authorities were often frustrated in their efforts to control fringe-dwelling. Local councils pointed out that, despite their efforts, fringe-dwellers still often chose 'to sit down and lie down in areas other than those designated [as appropriate by local authorities]' and when moved on did not necessarily move to 'the area to which we want them to move' (TE:2308). What went hand in hand with the crackdown on 'illegal' camping was proposals to 'encourage' or 'repatriate' fringe-dwellers back to their 'tribal lands' (TE:129 and 1074 and informal discussions, Alice Springs police). Presumably these proposals were to enable fringe-dwellers to be re-integrated into Aboriginal society, where it was considered they properly belonged.

If Aborigines chose to remain in town, despite pressures for their exclusion, it was argued that they had to conform with general community standards and assimilate into the wider community. Enforcement of the laws of the State and local governments and building regulations was
seen as one way of achieving conformity. A Country/Liberal member of the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly, appealing to the principle of 'only one law for all our people' (TE:2234), argued that an important consideration in solving the problem of fringe-dwelling was that there 'be no movement from the laws [of the Northern Territory as well as Council by-laws] that control an area' (TE:2234). Similarly, the Boulder Shire Council told the Committee that health by-laws could not be altered to suit fringe-dwellers but that fringe-dwellers 'could be assimilated and could abide by the laws of the community' (informal discussions, Boulder Shire Council). The appeal to laws and regulations made the control of Aborigines in town impersonal as it was based, not on the prejudices of local officials, but on the enforcement of laws which applied to all town residents.

In the long term, Aborigines were to be assimilated into the towns (TE:2297) by the less overtly coercive methods of 'education' and 'training'. Learning to live in a house was considered a vital element of the 'preparation' for assimilation. In Port Augusta a separate housing estate called Bungala had been established for Aborigines from the nearby Davenport Reserve. The estate was described by the Port Augusta Council as a 'staging project' so that 'Davenport Aborigines were to go to Bungala and, once used to that type of environment, to urban Port Augusta' (informal discussions, Port Augusta Council). Aborigines had to become 'suited to urban living' before moving from the reserve into town (informal discussions, Port Augusta Council). The Alice Springs branch of the Country/Liberal Party argued that:

Training in all of the responsibilities involved in running a house is important with the desired end result being transition into Housing Commission housing in the town. (TE:2606)

In view of this it was suggested that those fringe campers who had jobs should be encouraged to find housing in the town 'leaving houses [in the fringe camps] for training
other families' (TE:2606). Another perceived advantage of providing housing was that it enabled Councils to move against 'illegal' camping. The Carnarvon Shire Council pointed to its policy of 'removing' car bodies or other temporary shelters as soon as residents moved into a house (informal discussions, Carnarvon Shire Council). From the point of view of the local Aboriginal organisation this amounted to taking 'action against squatters' once housing developments for Aborigines were complete (informal discussions, Koorda Club, Carnarvon).

Apart from specific training to live in a house, education generally was seen as an essential prerequisite to the change in values necessary for assimilation to take place. The Darwin City Council stated that:

> Education among the children should be encouraged as in the long term this is the most certain way of improving the standards of living among Aborigines. It will tend to break down the non-integration both between themselves, because of tribal barriers, language and custom, and with the white community. (TE:2294)

Not only did children have to be 'educated', it was stated that parents also needed 'to be educated' if the Aboriginal home environment was to be changed to allow assimilation to take place (informal discussions, Port Augusta Council).

There was an apparent contradiction in the proposed solutions to fringe-dwelling problems. As Aborigines and town dwelling were seen inherently as incompatible, it was proposed that Aborigines be returned to their traditional communities to be 're-integrated' or at least kept out of the towns. Despite the assertion of this inherent incompatibility, it was also argued that Aborigines were able to be 'trained' and 'educated' for assimilation into the wider community. However, as I pointed out in the last chapter, the proposed solutions were simply different sides of the same coin. While there was an apparent desire for assimilation this could only be achieved after a period of 'training' and 'education' in an environment separate from the town. Fringe camps were seen
as functioning as these staging places for Aborigines. Once ready for assimilation and prepared to 'conform' to European 'standards' Aborigines were transformed into something else, thereby becoming acceptable as town dwellers.

Local councils and politicians generally were not interested in the longer term aspirations of fringe-dwellers. The rhetoric of assimilation tended to hide the primary concern which was to keep Aborigines out of the towns, thereby maintaining them as a European domain. Bob Collins, the Labor leader in the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly, noted that some fringe camps had received official recognition because they 'keep Aboriginal people from moving into suburban areas where some fear their proximity will reduce property values' (TE:2369). Drakakis-Smith also noted the protest by a middle-class white pressure group in Alice Springs to prevent the Housing Commission from building Aboriginal housing in the town because of the 'threat to property values' (TE:281). The Wyndham-East Kimberley Shire Council indicated in informal discussions with the Committee that it wished to abolish the reserves on the outskirts of Kununurra. However, it did not want Aborigines spread throughout the town because it claimed no one would want to live in adjacent houses. Instead it proposed housing Aborigines outside the town in an area between the Reserve and pastoral land set aside for Aboriginal purposes (informal discussions, Wyndham-East Kimberley Shire Council).

The assertion of the principles of 'equal rights for all' and 'equal treatment under the law' was used as the rationale for a campaign of coercion to enforce local by-laws and regulations and destroy 'illegal' camps. The campaign was represented as an impersonal one, being based on laws and regulations, and therefore one which local councils had no choice but to conduct. 'Legal' camping could be tolerated as a staging ground to 'prepare' Aborigines for assimilation but appropriate controls needed
to be exercised over it, it needed to fit into 'rational' town planning (TE:138) and it had to conform with general community 'standards'. In this way the separation of Aborigines from the town, appropriate to their supposed incompatibility with town dwelling, could be achieved but without the camping being 'uncontrolled' by the local authorities. The establishment of 'Special Purpose Leases' in the Northern Territory over which guidelines for 'development' were introduced was one method of attempting to achieve that control within an environment of supposed recognition of fringe-dwelling. The continued association of Aborigines with the towns, albeit with some physical separation, also meant that the economic benefits of Aborigines as consumers within the local economy could still be exploited. However, the physical separation of fringe-dwellers and the social stigma attributed to them by the white community meant they were excluded from competing with whites for employment.

The transformation of the fringe

Commonwealth and State government departments responsible for delivering services to Aborigines faced a significant dilemma in their approach to fringe camps. This dilemma was stated by a senior officer in the Department of Aboriginal Affairs:

Should governments and society make the investment . . of housing, essential services, roads, electricity, sewerage and the like, which imply that the place is a permanent place for occupation by people into the future as part of the social life of the Australian people; or should the fringe phenomenon be seen as an aberration and so there should be disincentives . . for people to settle or to remain settled in sub-standard or inconvenient eyesores or unattractive environments (TE:683). 

The dilemma was to be overcome by pursuing a policy of self-management and self-determination thereby supposedly allowing fringe-dwellers as individuals to make decisions about their futures. As the same senior DAA official pointed out, the question of the future of fringe
settlements was 'fundamentally and firstly one for the Aboriginal people themselves' (TE:683). The rhetoric of self-determination and self-management reverberated through the evidence of government departments and organisations with policies and decisions being justified, not as their own, but as the result of 'consultation' with, or decision by, Aboriginal people and communities (TE:1595 and 1854-55). The impression was given that solving the problem of fringe-dwelling was simply a matter of finding out, and giving effect to, Aboriginal desires. Unfortunately this did not resolve the dilemma referred to above. The picture of Aboriginal desires which emerged from 'survey work' in reserve and fringe communities done by the DAA in New South Wales was a 'confused and confusing' one with some Aboriginal people wishing to stay, but improve their circumstances, some wishing to move out and others wishing no change in their circumstances (TE:684). A similarly 'confused' picture emerged from a study of Western Australian reserves with Aborigines in the southern part of the State wanting to leave the reserves for 'conventional houses within the townships' (TE:1069) while residents in the north wished to remain on the reserves (TE:1076).

The dilemma therefore remained and solutions proposed to fringe-dwelling problems by what I called in the previous chapter the 'soft-line' position stemmed closely from the way fringe-dwellers were defined and their problems depicted. By seeing fringe-dwellers as people 'caught between two worlds', people not part of the 'normal fabric of society', there was seen to be a necessity to fit them into one or other of the two worlds between which they were 'caught', to integrate them into the social fabric. The integration of fringe-dwellers into the social fabric was to be done on an individual basis reflecting the concentration of the culture of poverty analysis on individuals rather than communities. The concentration on the integration of Aborigines into the wider society as individuals, rather than as communities, gave policies strong assimilationist effects and consequences.
As with the 'hard-line' position one element of the solution to fringe-dwelling problems was a perceived need to re-integrate fringe-dwellers into traditional Aboriginal society by encouraging them to return to Aboriginal communities. Unlike the 'hard-line' position which wished to return Aborigines to their traditional communities to 'clean up' the towns, to remove the 'polluting' effects of Aborigines on the town, the 'soft-line' position was concerned with the 'polluting' effects on Aborigines of life in the towns and saw a need to return them to their communities for their own benefit. This is perhaps most clearly seen in a submission from a representative of the Uniting Church in the Northern Territory. He stated:

There is little doubt in my mind that the town environment is destructive to the community spirit of a large portion of the Aboriginal Community... Some people have recognised this and have or are attempting to set up homeland groups out in the rural areas on their traditional lands to reduce the town influence on their group... (TE:1398)

Von Sturmer has noted that life in Aboriginal towns has been represented as 'polluting' when compared with the life of purity and innocence in the bush (AIAS 1984:106). A similar contrast is an important element of the 'soft-line' approach to fringe-dwelling with the contrast being drawn between town life and 'traditional' life. Thus there is strong advocacy of the need to make the remote communities more attractive by improving facilities and services and giving them an economic base to attract Aborigines from the town and to help prevent others leaving in future (TE:949, 2065-66, 2073-74). Why the provision of extensive facilities and services was essential to the reproduction of 'traditional' life was not made clear.

Alternatively, the ambiguous status of fringe-dwellers was to be resolved by integrating them as individuals into the wider community despite the evident desire of some fringe-dwellers to remain in the fringe camps. Policies were pursued by Commonwealth and State
governments which had the aim of closing down the reserves and fringe camps. A representative of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs noted that there was:

\[ \ldots \text{a tendency for Aboriginal people who used to live on reserves to make a change and live more inside the town to which the reserve or fringe was attached. That has been a result of our housing policy of encouraging State housing commissions and also Aboriginal housing associations to provide housing inside towns.} \ (TE:687) \]

Although 'enormous amounts' of money had been spent encouraging such development, it was acknowledged that 'the problems are still with us' (TE:687). The Western Australian Government submission, while pointing to the strong desire of reserve residents in the north of the State to remain on the reserves, still asserted a policy of eventual closure of the reserves as 'residents acquire better accommodation' (TE:1069 - my emphasis). A study of the future of New South Wales reserves, conducted by Commonwealth and State officials and provided to the Committee, also strongly opposed a perpetuation of the reserves despite the wishes of the people. For example, the study showed that 44 per cent of the residents of Moree reserves wished to remain on the reserves but with improved conditions. Nonetheless the study expressed the 'undesirability' of building on either of the reserves and recommended that housing should be concentrated in the town (TE:1314). Similarly, while most residents of Cummeragunja Reserve indicated their desire to stay on the Reserve, the study stated that new housing could not be provided there because of the Reserve's 'social problems' (TE:1315). Instead, it was recommended that Reserve residents '... be given every opportunity to move from the Reserve if they so desire and be provided with appropriate housing elsewhere' (TE:1315).

The New South Wales Housing Commission pointed to the importance of moving Aborigines from the reserves to eliminate the 'aberrant' fringe lifestyle and develop appropriate practices in Aborigines:
The Commission sees great social advantages in families moving off reserves into town houses in terms of better/closer access to services such as schools, shops, hospitals, recreational facilities, and in terms of reducing the negative disadvantages of social isolation and stigmatisation of reserve residents. The Commission points to observable improvements in property care and maintenance and domestic skills when Aboriginal families are properly housed in towns (TE:2987).

Despite the assimilationist assumptions of its policy and practice evident from the above quote, the Housing Commission still referred to the 'tremendous amount of consultation' that took place before decisions were made in relation to the future of particular communities maintaining the myth of self-determination (TE:1855).

Even when it was proposed that reserves or fringe camps be allowed to remain and be provided with facilities, particularly housing, it was on the basis of their being temporary or of the camp being transformed into something other than a fringe camp. The fringe camps occupying Special Purpose Leases in Alice Springs were described by the Northern Territory Government as being 'developed urban leases for Aboriginal people', having lost the 'connotations' of fringe camps (TE:2226). The Northern Territory Government did not make clear what these 'connotations' were, although they were clearly undesirable and hence to be eliminated. One of the Alice Springs camps, Mt Nancy, was also described by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs as an example 'of how yesterday's fringe can become tomorrow's suburb' (TE:1283). The fringe was seen as transformable.

In the total strategy advocated by the 'soft-liners' to overcome the problems of fringe-dwellers, housing was to play a crucial role. Housing was crucial because of its perceived ability to transform the external conditions of poverty which confronted fringe-dwellers as well as changing the attitudes and values which
characterised the culture of poverty in which it was considered fringe-dwellers lived. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs referred to a lack of suitable shelter as 'sowing the seeds of underprivilege in yet further generations of Aboriginals' (TE:25). At a public hearing a representative of the Department described housing as 'part of our armoury of social development and change' (TE:1893).

The Western Australian Department of Community Welfare referred to its 'obligation' to provide housing to break the 'poverty' cycle (TE:1070). There was a sub-text within the 'soft-line' position about the ability of housing to change Aboriginal practices and values in what were considered to be the right direction by powerful training and disciplining effects. Government organisations referred to the provision of housing with its associated financial obligations as inculcating a sense of 'individual responsibility' (TE:2976 and 3004) in Aborigines, enabling them to 'rehabilitate' themselves (TE:2079) and 'manage' their lifestyles (TE:3060). 'Homemaker' services were seen as an essential backup to the provision of housing to 'raise' Aborigines to a suitable 'domestic standard' (TE:1873 and also 912 and 2960). The Department of Aboriginal Affairs referred to homemaker services as 'programs to prepare Aboriginal families to live in the dwellings provided' (TE:25). Housing was to facilitate the incorporation of Aborigines as individuals or as families into the wider society.

The approach of governmental organisations was based on their denial of Aboriginal community and identity through their representation of fringe-dwelling as an 'in-between' world. The effect of this 'in-between' world on Aborigines was considered to lead to their individualisation, their loss of Aboriginal identity and their separation from the Aboriginal community thus preparing them for incorporation into the wider community. Morris has noted this process in relation to attempts by the state to assimilate indigenous populations:

The cultural integrity, ie., group sovereignty, of the subjugated population is denied and
political parties of the state aim to 'equip' the indigenous population for what is perceived as individual success in the dominant society. Pedagogic intervention based on establishing equality was primarily concerned with the dismantling of Aboriginal identity (Morris 1985:102).

The hidden agenda within the strategy of Commonwealth and State governments can perhaps be seen in the comments of a review of the New South Wales Housing Commission's 'Housing for Aborigines Program' where it was stated that 'Aboriginals generally believe that the Commission is seeking to use housing to assimilate them into the wider society' (TE:2985).

A further element in the strategy was the provision of employment which was to complete the Aboriginal incorporation into the wider society. Employment was seen as flowing inevitably from the improved living conditions resulting from the provision of housing and as being necessary to support continued improvements in those conditions. However, it was in this area that the strategy floundered. Lea and Sinbandhit, in their study of the Erambie Reserve in Cowra provided to the Committee, stated that there was: '... no obvious evidence to suggest that improved living conditions at Erambie have led via better health, hygiene and presentability to the increased employability of local Aborigines' (TE:539). On the contrary they came to the depressing conclusion that, despite the achievement of parity in housing with white society by some Aborigines, 'equality in other fields is as distant as ever' (TE:540). Their conclusions about a particular reserve coincided with the general findings of Rowley on the socio-economic changes in Aboriginal households in rural New South Wales between 1965 and 1980 (Rowley 1982). Rowley noted that housing was one area of 'great improvement' (1982:26). However, the only change in the employment situation over the 15 years was 'greatly increased unemployment' (1982:13) and Rowley concluded that there was a danger in providing housing in areas where employment could not develop as the 'drastic unemployment
situation' could be perpetuated (1982:29). Even some proponents of housing as the 'cycle of poverty' breaker acknowledged the stumbling block created by the question of employment (TE:1303 and 2078).

The structural and historical factors, which I described in the last chapter as creating high levels of unemployment among Aborigines in rural areas, made the generation of genuine employment for fringe-dwellers particularly difficult. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs, after reviewing the range of options to improve employment among fringe-dwellers including greater training in the establishment of industries and the establishment of Aboriginal enterprises, came to the conclusion that it was unlikely:

... that there would be any benefits from the provision of training or temporary employment opportunities for fringe dwelling Aboriginals in country areas where there is little prospect of permanent employment, unless those receiving this assistance are willing to move to areas where there is a real prospect of obtaining permanent employment (TE:32).

Such 'voluntary' relocation programs, which incorporated Aboriginal families into the wider society by providing housing and employment, were seen as 'desirable' by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. It was acknowledged that a much wider program than the existing 'voluntary' relocation program would be required to have 'a substantial impact on the fringe communities' (TE:33). However, a different perspective on such programs was provided by representatives of the Aboriginal Development Commission who argued that they only further impoverished the human resources of fringe communities by taking the 'best people' and leaving the rest 'leaderless' (TE:2104). There seemed to be some acknowledgement of this by the DAA which stated that fringe-dwellers, as opposed to those Aborigines who had made the move into towns, represented 'the losers' in Aboriginal society, seeming to imply that fringe-dwellers were the dregs left after the cream had been skimmed off (TE:707).
Finally, I wish to comment on the perceived role within this perspective of Aborigines on the one hand and government, bureaucracy and organisations servicing Aborigines on the other hand. Given the rhetoric of self-determination and self-management it could have been expected that Aborigines would have been seen to have a central role. Certainly there were numerous expressions of the importance of Aboriginal 'involvement' and Aboriginal 'consultation'. In fact fringe-dwellers were seen within this perspective as having little capacity to act to improve their own circumstances and, consequently, the role of governments and organisations intervening on their behalf was seen as vital. This perceived inability of fringe-dwellers to act for their own benefit flowed very much from the view of fringe-dwellers as liminal people, caught between two worlds and powerless to change their situation. It was also related to the culture of poverty analysis of fringe-dwelling which focussed on the despair, resignation and resistance to change of fringe-dwellers which rendered them impotent and unable to adapt.

Given the view within this perspective that fringe-dwellers were impotent, what was seen as being required to overcome their problems was a more effective delivery of programs by the bureaucracy and organisations responsible for fringe-dwellers and a change in the 'negative self-image' of fringe-dwellers which prevented them taking advantage of programs available. There was a sanguine view of the role of government, that 'given the appropriate time, resources and official encouragement' (TE:2394) the problems could be overcome. It seemed to assume, as Von Sturmer has noted elsewhere, 'a rational and caring government that will, as it were, self-correct when the errors of its ways are made clear - a permanently self-perfecting machine . . .' (Anderson (et al) 1985:49). And, as Von Sturmer goes on to ask: 'what happens to the notion of the "free actor"? Do all the available choices become with respect to - with respect to "the machine"?' (Anderson (et al) 1985:49). It could also be asked what
happens to self-management and self-determination? Self-determination and self-management are the means by which governments construct Aborigines as active agents. Aborigines need to be empowered to be active, and government plays this role by asserting the ability of Aborigines to be self-determining.

Governments attempt to achieve this by controlling definitions of Aboriginality for the wider community and for Aborigines themselves. As it was argued that fringe-dwellers' negative self-image was merely a reflection of the image held of them by the wider society, government departments focussed attention on developing an 'informed public view' of fringe-dwellers (TE:343). This was to be the means of improving the wider community's understanding of fringe-dwellers and hence fringe-dwellers' view of themselves and it was to be achieved through public awareness programs (TE:1288-89 and 3293-95), the employment of liaison officers (TE:3162) and the use of Aboriginal studies programs in schools (TE:756 and 1607). The definition of Aboriginality was considered to be far too important a matter to be left to Aborigines because of concern about the threat to government programs if 'inappropriate' images of Aborigines were held in the general community. It should be noted that this fear was probably not an idle one. The current Liberal Party policy on Aboriginal affairs proposes the dismantling of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the transfer of this responsibility to the States and Northern Territory. The rationale given for such a move is at least partly a supposed 'backlash' in the general community to Aboriginal affairs programs as a result of a belief that Aborigines are receiving more than their fair entitlement. This demonstrates the point I made in an earlier chapter, that representations of Aborigines are not only semiotic but also have significant political implications.

The reality, particularly for fringe-dwelling Aborigines, is that few options are available to them for changing their circumstances despite a government policy of
self-determination which supposedly empowers Aborigines to determine their future. In fact, fringe-dwellers are locked into a situation where any improvement in living standards is dependent on acquiring more assets, but they do not have the income necessary to obtain assets. They also have few prospects of employment to generate income as a result of the discrimination they face from local government councils and local white communities. The existence of these constraints makes a pretence of self-determination and self-management with fringe-dwellers being unable to determine their futures because of the existence of these constraints. By attempting to construct Aborigines as self-determining and self-managing, governments mask the need to change structural conditions for Aborigines as the prerequisite to enabling Aborigines to have a significant degree of control over their future.

Aboriginal 'solutions' to fringe-dwelling

What was the Aboriginal response to this attempt to define and control the situation of Aborigines? In some cases there was an acceptance of solutions in similar terms to those proposed by the 'soft-line' approach. In other cases there was a challenge to attempted government control.

I pointed in the previous chapter to the depiction of fringe communities by some Aboriginal groups substantially within a culture of poverty framework. Proposed solutions followed from this depiction in similar terms to those of the 'soft-line' position. Representatives of the Aboriginal Development Commission argued that housing was essential to break the 'vicious cycle' of poverty facing fringe-dwellers (TE:2093). It was stated that:

If you have reasonable housing then you have a chance to stabilise yourself and your family. You realise you have financial commitments, so you find employment. You do then begin to understand that reasonable standards of education can be achieved . . . (TE:2075)
The supposed 'educating' effects of housing and the associated behavioural and attitudinal changes which it was considered would result from being housed are evident in this statement. While there was an implication within this view of the incorporation of Aborigines into the wider society as individuals or families, the ADC instead proposed the incorporation of Aborigines as a group. As Charles Perkins of the Commission stated:

If you can get that community organised well enough through providing the assistance about which we have been talking - enterprise, decent housing and so on - then it can organise itself to want to make that move [resettlement in other centres] in its own good time, at its own discretion, realising that it has to make the move (TE:2106 - my emphasis).

The ADC also advocated the transformation of fringe areas into 'suburbs' of the towns (TE:2075).

The Commission represented its own role and that of other governmental organisations as being one of placing Aborigines in a situation in which they had options or choices for their future. As outlined by Perkins, the Commission was 'to provide these opportunities so people can make the choices in their own time as they see it best suits themselves' (TE:2103). As fringe-dwellers were considered to live in a culture of poverty, and were without power, it was seen as the role of the Commission to empower them as actors. This was the meaning for the Commission of self-determination for Aborigines:

... the key to fringe-dwelling communities in New South Wales and many other places [is to give] them the machinery or the mechanics so they can do it for themselves - a chance for a decent job, a chance for a reasonable shelter and access to reasonable education - and it is all over. Fringe-dwellers are a thing of the past (TE:2104).

Aborigines could pull themselves up by their own bootstraps but only in concert with governmental organisations,
particularly 'Aboriginal' ones like the ADC. This was the meaning of 'self-determination' and 'self-management' for the ADC: Aborigines in the bureaucracy acting as brokers for, and making decisions on behalf of, other Aborigines for their 'betterment'.

Fringe-dwelling, as an aberration, was also to be tackled from a different direction. The ADC considered emphasis should be given to improving conditions in Aboriginal towns, outstations and cattle stations as a means of reducing the movement of people to non-Aboriginal towns and encouraging those in the towns already to re-integrate themselves into traditional society (TE:2074 and 2089). It referred to the often unstated agenda in this, that if these communities did not exist there would be a massive influx of Aborigines into towns such as Alice Springs (TE:2065).

Many submissions from Aborigines and Aboriginal organisations focussed on land rights as a panacea to fringe-dwelling problems. Bropho stated that:

Land is the answer to the Aboriginal problem and this is from the black man's point of view. Aboriginal people will always be fringedwellers no matter how cleanly they're dressed or how educated they are until land is given back to Aboriginal people (TE:1235).

Similarly the Dandenong and District Aborigines Co-operative considered that: 'With land many of our problems will cease to exist' (TE:1665). Mostly the place of land in transforming conditions for Aborigines remained at the level of rhetoric. However, one group spoke of it as 'a secure base for future social and economic development' (TE:2127). Altman and Peterson have noted that although land rights cannot create economic equality, it can 'create greatly increased opportunities for Aboriginal people to exercise control over their lives' (Altman and Peterson 1984:52). For fringe-dwellers, land provides the opportunity for stability and the establishment of permanent facilities enabling an improved standard of
living and control over the access of non-Aborigines to the camps. However, the extent to which it can transform the structural position of inequality of fringe-dwelling Aborigines, as the rhetoric seems to indicate, is questionable, and there is no detailed program for such transformation in the submissions.

Finally, there was an emphasis in the submissions from Aborigines on solutions only being provided by Aborigines. Organisations like the ADC and Aboriginal Hostels asserted the need for 'Aboriginal involvement' as the basis for their own role in providing the solutions to fringe-dwelling problems (TE:1955 and 2058). Others stated that only 'Aboriginals will overcome the Aboriginal problem' (TE:2585) and that 'No white man can tell an Aboriginal man how to live . . .' (TE:1234). While these statements can also be seen in terms of the authorisation of organisations and spokesmen to act as cultural brokers and intermediaries for the funding of Aboriginal communities, they also represent a challenge to attempted government control over Aboriginal affairs' funding and definitions of Aboriginality. A number of Aboriginal organisations challenged such funding control by asserting they were being 'dictated to' (TE:3145) and prevented from operating effectively (informal discussions, Victorian Aboriginal Health Service Co-operative). The Kalano Association claimed such control over funding meant that it could become simply 'a vehicle to implement government policy' rather than 'an effective aid towards Aboriginal self-management' (TE:198). Bropho rejected DAA's desire to control definitions of Aboriginality in the wider community through 'public awareness programs'. Instead, he argued that the money would be much better spent 'upgrading the living conditions of Aboriginal people' (TE:905).

Although the views of fringe-dwellers themselves were largely absent in the evidence, I noted in the previous chapter indications of the advantages which fringe-dwellers saw in their lifestyle. This is further reflected in some evidence of their rejection of change or
'improvement' in their lifestyle. A survey by DAA of some fringe communities indicated that while the residents of half the communities considered their standard of living 'inferior and unacceptable and wish an improved situation', more than a third had 'consciously selected this style of living and want no major changes' (TE:3168). The Department of Aboriginal Affairs also pointed to evidence that some who had moved from the fringe into town were now moving back to fringe communities (TE:27). These may be seen as indications of the apathy and hopelessness that supposedly characterise fringe-dwellers who live in a culture of poverty from which they see no escape. Alternatively, they may be evidence of an Aboriginal resistance to the assimilationist consequences of any 'improvement' in their living conditions and rejection of European expectations.

Recognising fringe-dwelling

I noted in previous chapters the strong moral basis asserted by anthropologists for the recognition of the rights of fringe-dwellers within towns based on historical and socio-cultural links. Anthropologists argued that catering for fringe-dwellers was a matter of recognising these rights and including fringe-dwelling needs in town planning considerations and in the provision of services. As Sansom stated, it was a matter of recognising 'naturally existing Aboriginal social units', devising policy 'with reference to such units' and encouraging 'administrators to work in terms of such recognition' (TE:2879). The alternative of encouraging or forcing fringe-dwellers to return to traditional lands was described as 'unrealistic' (TE:321 and 1749). It was implied that all that was wrong with, or problematic about fringe-dwelling, could be solved by greater recognition of difference and less ethnocentricity. The emphasis within this perspective was on catering for fringe-dwellers as a community or social unit and not as individuals or families as in the 'soft-line' approach.
Unlike other perspectives which discounted the role of Aborigines as actors, the anthropological perspective gave specific recognition to this role in catering for fringe-dwellers. Brandl argued that fringe communities did not need 're-integrating' or 're-making' as they had 'all the elements and skills within them for taking charge of their own destinies' (TE:104). Similarly, Heppell stated that the major mechanism to provide a lasting solution to fringe-dwellers' problems was 'to release their energies so that they in fact can plan their futures from a secure background' (TE:2554). Bell pointed to the 'assurance', 'sense of purpose' and 'dignity' which fringe campers had gained as a result of living on or near their country (TE:309 and 2731). As a result she stated that they felt they had much greater 'control over their lives' (TE:2931) and were able to communicate on a basis of equality with bureaucracies (TE:309). Because of the recognition of Aborigines' ability to act for themselves, the overall approach advocated was non-interventionist. As Ross stated: 'Direct intervention on social problems is not recommended, especially where they are internal matters for camps to resolve according to their own norms' (TE:453). Aborigines were not seen to require governmental organisations to be their saviours. In fact it was argued by Brandl that one aim of the Committee's inquiry should be 'to remove those bureaucratic and legal barriers which at the moment are hindering the functioning of these communities' (TE:101).

Within this perspective there was also a rejection of the centrality of housing as the 'solution' to fringe-dwelling problems. This rejection was based on various grounds. It was argued that a house was a 'cultural object' and Aboriginal people, in asking for housing, didn't necessarily want to accept the cultural paraphernalia that went with the European conception of housing (TE:2757). Concern was expressed about the threat housing based on European models posed to Aboriginal 'living arrangements and social interaction' (TE:447) and 'traditional obligations and commitments' (TE:99). However,
it was stated that Aborigines did want certain services that went together with housing such as access to water, shelter from the rain, sun and cold and a safe storage and lock-up area (TE:2757). Thus it was considered that greater flexibility and a greater range of options was required in housing for Aborigines to take account of cultural differences. Closely associated with this was criticism of the strongly assimilationist assumptions in existing governmental programs to provide housing for Aborigines with their approach of 'transitional' housing (TE:300 and 510). It was implied that the assimilationist consequences of the provision of housing to Aborigines could be avoided by appropriate design solutions. However, this implication is debatable. A house, however designed or wherever located, imposes the same financial burdens, entails at least some changes in habits in order to live successfully in it and has the same potential to interfere with kinship obligations.

Ross provided a different perspective on 'solutions' by arguing that fringe-dwelling represented a rejection of 'betterment' by Aborigines, including the provision of housing, appropriately designed or not. She noted that even if access to other living environments were available as the result of provision of more housing, fringe camps would be unlikely to disappear because of this element of Aboriginal rejection of 'better' circumstances. She argued that the persistence of poor living conditions for fringe-dwellers was partly explained by a 'resistance to changes which might jeopardise their autonomy and other values' (TE:454). This has hints of the culture of poverty approach although it focusses on the perpetuation of fringe-dwelling as a resistance to assimilation and control by non-Aborigines rather than as the reproduction of despair and hopelessness. However, like the culture of poverty approach it ignores the extent to which fringe-dwellers are locked into their living conditions by a range of constraints which prevents them from improving their living standards. It could also be asked whether the rejection of 'betterment' by fringe-dwellers is but an
internalisation by them of the wider society's rejection. Dagmar points to this as a factor in the negative perception of themselves held by some Aborigines in Carnarvon (Dagmar 1978). However, as Beckett has argued about Aboriginal drinking patterns it may be 'the only means whereby a minority which has been terrorized in the past, and which remains disunited and politically impotent, can defy the white majority' (Beckett 1965:46).

A further critique of housing as the central means of overcoming fringe-dwelling problems focussed on the myth of the ability of housing fundamentally to transform conditions for Aborigines. I have referred above to elements of this critique. Lea and Sinbandhit argued that housing was 'a symptom and not a cause of underdevelopment' and consequently housing 'can never be a convenient cure-all for the wide spectrum of socio-economic ills in the Aboriginal population' (TE:476). Instead they argued that real improvements in all aspects of life for Aborigines 'requires major social and political transformation of a kind that transcends the debate on housing' (TE:540). However, Lea and Sinbandhit did not specify how such a transformation could be achieved. Ross pointed to the political system of the wider community which presented powerful resistance to attempts to transform fundamentally circumstances for Aborigines to provide a basis for better living conditions. Unless there was change in political will to effect a fairer distribution of resources to Aborigines, she argued that attempts to improve conditions in fringe camps 'will continue on a piecemeal and superficial basis' (TE:454). Presumably this transfer of resources and power would have to be from the state to Aborigines as powerful local interest groups could not be expected to freely relinquish their socio-economic position of control to Aborigines. If the transfer of resources was not to be in the form of housing, then what form should it take to achieve the structural change desired?
Drakakis-Smith considered that lack of employment rather than poor housing was the 'primary' factor in the underprivileged position of Aborigines (TE:264 and 280). However, the creation of more employment in the towns with fringe-dwellers was not without its problems. I referred in the last chapter to the structural and historical factors which had created Aboriginal unemployment (and also unemployment amongst whites) in rural areas. Government created employment for Aborigines in these areas to make up for the lack of other employment would probably be tenuous and heavily dependent on continuing subsidies, consequently achieving little in terms of the transformation of the structural position of Aborigines.

A further question arises as to whether greater employment in fact could change the structural position of Aboriginal fringe-dwellers as a group. In a survey of three fringe camps in Alice Springs, Beck pointed out that the camp with the highest level of paid employment also had the lowest per capita income, although only marginally so. The significant fact was that regardless of the amount of paid labour, all camps had similar levels of income. The ability of paid employment, unless sustained over an extensive period and involving most members of the community, to transform circumstances for fringe-dwellers as a group is questionable. This points to the other difficulty for those who consider the 'solution' lies in structural change and that is the extent to which it has assimilationist assumptions and consequences. Certainly there is a rejection of assimilation by those advocating this approach. But there is no exploration of what changes in Aboriginal behaviour and values might accompany a change in the structural position of Aborigines and what this would mean in terms of its assimilationist effects. There seems to be an implication that this transformation would take place for Aborigines as a group or community, and that therefore their assimilation as individuals would not occur. This implication is debatable.
The Committee's solutions

Although there was great complexity in the evidence about proposed solutions, the Committee considered only four broad options for improving the circumstances of fringe-dwellers. The options were:

1. Improve existing conditions in fringe camps.
2. Encourage fringe campers to move to houses in town.
3. Relocate fringe-dwellers to pastoral stations or their traditional environment.
4. Enforce local health and building regulations by removing 'illegal' and 'sub-standard' fringe camps.

(Committee Report, pp. 41-43)

Of these only option four was rejected by the Committee with the comment that 'while it may provide some sort of satisfaction to town authorities in "cleaning up the town" it does little to overcome the problems' (Committee Report:43). The Committee's rejection of the 'hard-line' option coincided with its rejection of the 'hard-line' depiction of fringe communities and was done in spite of the evident support for this general position by at least one member of the Committee. However, while rejecting the 'hard-line' strategy, the Committee in its own approach proposed a strong role for local government councils. In spite of the evidence before the Committee, and its own perception (see Committee Report:45) of the racism of local government authorities and their efforts to coerce and oppress Aborigines, the Committee could still advocate that local government authorities had 'a significant role to play in the implementation of strategies' (Committee Report:(iii)). This role included being 'consulted' about developments in fringe communities within municipal boundaries and being provided with funding for programs in fringe camps. The Committee endorsed comments made to it in a submission, that it would be 'intolerable' if fringe camps were developed 'against the
wishes of local government' (Committee Report:44). Thus the Committee effectively gave its imprimatur to local government authorities to continue their efforts to exercise control over fringe-dwellers. In return for the endorsement of continuing control the Committee recommended that local government councils establish 'Aboriginal liaison committees' and/or appoint 'Aboriginal liaison officers' to enable them to 'consult' with Aborigines and overcome their 'prejudice and inherited attitudes towards Aboriginals' (Committee Report:45-46).

Broadly speaking, the Committee adopted a two-pronged strategy to solving the problems of fringe-dwelling communities. On the one hand it argued that the needs of existing fringe camps had to be catered for. On the other hand it argued for a strategy which would reduce the desire of people to move to non-Aboriginal towns and settle in fringe communities. In adopting the first approach the Committee mixed elements of the 'soft-line' position with that advocated by anthropologists. Thus the Committee asserted the centrality of housing in its 'strategy' by describing its provision as 'the first step in an integrated approach to overcoming the problems of the town campers' (Foreword to the Report). Its approach flowed directly from the analysis of the problems of fringe-dwellers as a mix of external conditions and a culture of poverty. Housing was seen by the Committee as providing the means of transforming circumstances for Aborigines. The assimilationist consequences and assumptions, which I noted above were associated with such a belief, were hence necessarily a part of the Committee's proposed solutions. However, at least some members of the Committee recognised the assimilationist assumptions and consequences involved in the provision of housing for Aborigines under existing programs. They saw a need to accommodate Aboriginal cultural differences.10 Their concern was expressed in the report and was reflected in the recommendation that:

- town campers be involved to the fullest possible extent in the provision of housing for their communities. (Committee Report:65)
The Committee thus endorsed the questionable presumption that the assimilationist effects of housing could be avoided by 'appropriate' designs and locations decided in 'consultation' with Aborigines.

Part of the Committee's strategy involved the strong endorsement of the need for Aboriginal 'self-management' if the problems of fringe-dwellers were to be solved. The Committee saw this self-management primarily being effected through 'representative' Aboriginal organisations such as the ADC and Aboriginal Hostels. They had proved to the Committee their credentials to act for Aborigines on the basis of their 'high degree of Aboriginal involvement' and consequently were seen as having a 'central role' in implementing strategies (Committee Report:41). In doing so the Committee endorsed Aboriginal views that expressed themselves primarily within what I have called the 'soft-line' approach and proposed solutions in terms of that framework.

Another aspect of the Committee's strategy which flowed from its analysis was that of the need to change general community 'attitudes' towards Aborigines. These 'attitudes' were seen as an obstacle to 'progress' in Aboriginal affairs programs and a determinant of Aborigines' perceptions of themselves. Given its recommendations for the extensive involvement of government in solving fringe-dwelling problems, the Committee saw the need for a public perception that this intervention was worthwhile in changing the conditions for Aborigines and in 'improving' Aborigines themselves. It recommended that a 'public awareness campaign' be conducted by the Department of Aboriginal Affairs. This gave sanction to state control over definitions of Aboriginality as the state was also intervening on the behalf of Aborigines to improve their conditions.

All these aspects were part of the Committee's strategy to improve the 'existing' problems of
fringe-dwelling communities. In pursuing the other prong of its strategy the Committee effectively approved the sub-text of the 'soft-line' position, that fringe camps were an aberration which should not be reproduced in the longer term. The Committee stated that its strategy would 'ameliorate those forces which push people unwillingly to town camps' (Foreword to the Report) and 'reduce the drift of people into the town camp' (Committee Report: 39). The strategy was based on a presumption that Aborigines were much better off in traditional communities than in the 'destructive' environment of the town. The Chairman of the Committee articulated this point of view most clearly when he described fringe-dwelling in terms that implied it was a disease which required a strategy that was 'preventative rather than curative' (TE:1552). Fringe-dwelling was seen as the result of white pressures on Aborigines who were unable to adapt quickly to change and the Chairman was anxious to see a strategy that allowed 'a slower and more deliberative form of contact to emerge so that the capacity in the community will be able to handle the transition' (TE:1801). Somewhat paradoxically, the measures the Committee recommended to encourage fringe-dwellers to move back to, and remain in, their 'traditional' environment included the establishment of 'business enterprises' and the provision of essential services, housing and educational and medical facilities (Committee Report:76-78). What the provision of these services and facilities had to do with the maintenance of traditional culture was quite unclear. The important point was that it was implied by the Committee that 'tradition' could be more easily maintained in the remote communities than in the destructive environment of the towns.

The Committee's inquiry was concerned with the defining of a problem and then the proposing of solutions to the problem as defined. In the previous two chapters I indicated the way in which the Committee defined the problem of fringe-dwelling. In this chapter I have been concerned with its search for a strategy that would solve the problem as defined. As the Committee defined and
depicted fringe communities in terms of problems, necessarily its strategy had to involve doing something for and to fringe-dwellers, changing them in such a way that they no longer posed problems for government and the wider community. Thus the Committee's strategy inevitably involved a highly interventionist approach that on the one hand was designed to transform existing fringe-dwelling situations through a transfer of resources from the state (primarily in the form of housing) and, on the other hand, involved the 'prevention' of a further spread of the fringe-dwelling 'disease' by providing resources to the remote Aboriginal communities to discourage Aborigines from moving to town. The clear message contained in the Committee's strategy was that the deplorable and degrading conditions of fringe-dwellers, as perceived by the Committee, could not be allowed to remain. Within the context of the Committee's definition of the problem, the strategy was both a moral one, in that it sought to eliminate degradation, and a practical one, in that it was to be controlled and managed by a state intervention that did not require extensive resources, nor threaten powerful interests.

The anthropological perspective on fringe camps was also a moral one, creating as it did morally based claims to the recognition of fringe-dwelling based on the historical, social and cultural rights of fringe-dwellers to be in towns. Anthropologists were not necessarily advocating the persistence of fringe-dwelling and its appalling conditions, rather they were creating a moral space for the recognition of Aborigines within the towns. The Committee did not fully appreciate the moral argument as put to it by anthropologists. However, anthropologists also did not make clear that they were focussing on the rights of Aborigines to be recognised in towns rather than supporting the persistence of a fringe-dwelling existence. As a consequence, the Committee misinterpreted the anthropological perspective as an endorsement of the continuation of fringe-dwelling in an unchanged form. The acceptance of the anthropological perspective by the
Committee would have entailed a failure of what it saw as its moral responsibility to do something about a problem 'of urgent concern to all Australians' (Committee Report:iii). It would also have represented a failure by the Committee to achieve its practical aim of problem-solving as the 'disease' of fringe-dwelling would have continued. The Committee also had to reject the anthropological perspective because of its failure to outline a strategy. Anthropologists spoke of providing resources to Aborigines to free them to act for themselves, to realise to the full the potential which they already had. However, this was too nebulous to constitute the sort of practical strategy which the Committee was searching for. What sort of 'resources' were anthropologists talking about, and to whom were they to be transferred? A further reason for being unable to accept the anthropological approach was the Committee's acceptance of a depiction of fringe-dwelling with an unstated agenda about the inability of fringe-dwellers to act for themselves.

In relation to the perspective about the need for structural change to transform circumstances for fringe-dwellers, the Committee's strategy saw this taking place by the provision of housing. While those proposing the need for structural change questioned whether housing could achieve such a transformation (and there was significant evidence that such a strategy was questionable) there was no specification by them of what were the alternative methods of achieving structural change which they wished the Committee to recommend. They did not offer the Committee a strategy which it could adopt. However, I have also shown that the Committee's focus on housing as a solution flowed very much from the way it constructed the problem of fringe-dwelling. Other methods of achieving structural change did not fall within the Committee's agenda.
1. A representative of the Western Australian Government also referred to transients arriving in towns and not camping at a Department of Community Welfare reserve but instead camping 'wherever they want to and that causes problems' (TE:927).

2. On this same point the Darwin City Council stated that long term or permanent residents of fringe camps should be encouraged to assimilate into the general community by moving to houses, flats etc within the community. It was argued that this would leave fringe camp facilities for 'transient' campers who could then presumably be similarly 'prepared' for assimilation (TE:2294 and 2297).

3. Beck also recounts this protest:

That these views of separate development are still prevalent in the Alice Springs European community was recently demonstrated by activities of a committee named the 'Citizens for Civilised Living', subsequently renamed 'The Alice Springs Citizens' Association'.

In May 1979, this group was formed in order to block the implementation of a special housing program. In this program houses were distinguished from other Housing Commission homes by a second toilet, a large verandah, a store room and an outdoor barbecue (Centralian Advocate 31 May 1979) and catered better for the extended family than the basic Housing Commission houses. A spokesperson of the group was reported as saying that 'the group wanted minimum standards to be enforced in the town area. People not used to European type civilisation should be offered half-way houses where they could learn the basics of Western civilisation' (Centralian Advocate 31 May 1979). Though the Housing Minister, Marshal Perron, initially commented 'that it would set a "dangerous precedent" if the Commission asked the neighbours' approval before moving members of an ethnic minority' (Centralian Advocate 31 May 1979), the program was suspended pending further investigation (Centralian Advocate 21 June 1979) and subsequently significantly curtailed (The Age 31 October 1979) (Beck 1985:103-04).

4. The controls on 'development' which existed over Special Purpose Leases are listed in the submission from the Northern Territory Government (TE:2168-69).

5. A similar dilemma was noted by the Australian Housing Research Council Report. It noted that: 'On the one hand, some people are cautious of making any
improvements which may lead to creation of a "permanent fringe settlement"... On the other hand, other people suggest that the people at Half Way Camp [outside Ceduna] are not itinerant, but have chosen to live there permanently because they prefer the lifestyle, and would in any case have problems integrating into Ceduna society' (TE:856).

6. Others have noted that Aborigines have been regarded as 'polluters' of the European environment and the way this 'discourse of pollution' (Morris 1985:98) has been used to segregate Aborigines:

Despite the various reasons given for the segregation of Aborigines, the removal of Aborigines at this point in time marked the development of a medical discourse asserting the polluting aspects of Aborigines in relation to Europeans. It was, however, sustained by racial typifications which were the inverse of prevailing medical practices based on intervention through understanding the biographical history of the patient. Aborigines were systematically excluded from areas where hygiene was a high priority or where there was a chance of contamination from contact with them. This is quite clearly revealed in the separate practices which were initiated to treat Aborigines in hospital. As well as segregated accommodation, all cutlery, clothing, towels, etc. had the letters 'ABO' on them to prevent the inadvertent use by Europeans. By 1939 the discourse had established itself at the level of a concrete fact. As one councillor seeking the removal of Aborigines from the hospital stated at a council meeting, 'He had it on good medical authority that at least 80 per cent of the Aborigines were infected with T.B. and in many cases with something worse' (Macleay Chronicle September 1939). The development of the discourse of pollution may be seen in the attitudes expressed towards the nurses caring for Aboriginal patients in 1916 and again in 1939. Whereas in 1916 the view expressed was that 'nurses should receive special remuneration for handling Aboriginal cases' in 1939 it was said that 'it was not fair to have nurses attending Aboriginal patients at the same time as they had to attend patients in other wards' (Macleay Chronicle September 1939). The possibility of contagion was no longer disputed; it was simply a matter of organizing practices to deal with this concrete reality. Such racial ideas of pollution therefore, did not simply legitimate discriminatory relations, they constituted them (Morris 1985:98).
the women's section of the United Country Party (Melbourne branch) protested that the girls might 'infuse a strain of Aboriginal blood into our coming generations.' This awful risk they would avoid 'for the race heritage we hold in trust . . . for the sanctity of our age-old traditions, and for the protection of our growing boys . . . ' That this was not a matter of a few conservative ladies taking more seriously than usual the myths of innate British superiority over the 'lesser breeds without the law' was clearly demonstrated three years later by the recommendations of the first conference of Commonwealth and state officers in charge of Aboriginal administration.

That these men in 1937 shared the views of the Melbourne Country Party ladies about Aboriginal potential, but not their horror of possible pollution from racial mixture, illustrated their own isolation as members of small organisations of low status in the respective civil services (Rowley 1986:113).

7. Von Sturmer makes a similar point in relation to the provision of services to outstations:

Administrators tend to see outstations as a return to traditionalism - and consequently people taking the outstation option are expected to build their own houses and run their own schools, and so on. Why building houses and running schools should be seen as essential parts of a return to traditionalism is a mystery which has never been explained . . . (Von Sturmer in AIAS 1984:108).

8. Rowley's data shows that employment among males over 15 years decreased from 57 per cent in 1965 to 44 per cent in 1980 (Rowley 1982:12).

9. The following statements by a Liberal member of the Committee indicate at the least a sympathy for the 'hard-line' point of view:

Mr Tuckey - I wish to make a quick comment on this particular issue. You have just used phrases like 'people themselves', 'whether they want to' and 'the wishes of the Aboriginal people'. We are talking about fringe-dwellers, and the principal area of fringe-dwelling is found when people live on the fringes of probably white urban society. To what extent in this strategy can we establish a policy for people who have basically chosen an urban lifestyle? It
says that their wishes are paramount. The Alice Springs is an example where they had 14 areas ringing the town. Some areas are many hectares in size. In fact they believe they will grow into those. . . Is this a long term strategy for an urban region like Alice Springs? The town council is of the opinion that the person there who leant more to the Aboriginal cause than anyone else was prepared to admit that he saw town planning problems. They tried to shelve that on to the fact that it is not their problem yet. What I am really getting at is that if an Aboriginal chooses an urban lifestyle, to what extent can we decide that he is entitled to all of the privileges, if you like, when he is living with just his tribe or his family in the bush, because it does not represent the same sort of problem? (TE:2233)

Mr Tuckey - I am terribly concerned that we are crowding municipalities within municipalities. We are talking about the urban environment when we talk about fringe-dwellers. We are talking about people who have opted to leave a traditional situation in their own area and come into a town for all sorts of reasons. Some do that very successfully, in European terms. In other words, they occupy a house and they cease to be fringe-dwellers. A fringe-dweller could be argued to be the transitional type of person but at that stage and having made that decision, to what extent can we continue to consider a separate right which is not granted to anybody else living in an urban environment? They have certain opportunities to choose but only within the framework of town planning or within the requirements of all the other health requirements and whatever. Is it reasonable to argue that once having made that decision any more than it is reasonable to argue that I, choosing to move to a traditional Aboriginal situation, should be able to move into their community and act according to my rules (TE:2273).

10. That at least some members of the Committee were aware of the possible assimilationist consequences of the provision of standard housing to Aborigines is demonstrated by the following lines of questioning from members:
[Chairman] - On page 8, paragraph (c) says:

The applicant must be capable of living independently in self-contained accommodation and must be capable of meeting appropriate rental and property care responsibilities and living harmoniously with neighbours.

There is no indication that the special position of Aboriginals is taken into account in that matter. What happens to an Aboriginal family if they do not comply with one or more of those requirements (TE:1677-78).

[Mr Holding] - . . . Really what one is wanting to know is what is the kind of lifestyle that exists in a community. Obviously for example in Western Australia, given just the sheer size of it there is going to be a lot of difference in climatic features and the way in which the people live between the very north of Western Australia and the area down near the Great Australian Bight. You can get some variations in kit, but I would have thought it desirable actually to try, within the framework of that, to be continuously producing houses which bear some real relationship to the lifestyle of the community you are trying to service. The impression that I have from your evidence is that - partly as a result of cost, partly as a result of practice - what you do is get essentially a kit development and allow for some variation in the hope that the indigenous Aboriginal community will either adjust its lifestyle or create a lifestyle which suits the kit house. It seems to me to be perhaps in the long term a waste of resources as well as not really meeting the needs of Aboriginal communities (TE:1693).
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

I noted in the first chapter that parliamentary committees, such as the Aboriginal Affairs Committee, are represented by a pluralist theory of such committees as being mere arbiters between competing interest groups which present evidence to them. They supposedly assess the evidence within an apolitical framework and attempt simply to get at the reality of the situation before them so that they can provide solutions to perceived problems of public importance and interest. Just as the pluralist conception of the state has been criticised for not taking into account the fact that interest groups may be unequal in political strength, and that the state is not a neutral arbiter (McLellan 1984:85), similar criticism can be applied to the pluralist theory of parliamentary committees and the Aboriginal Affairs Committee's fringe-dwelling inquiry. Not all interest groups had the same potential to expound their views to the Committee. Aborigines as a group in particular often had neither the resources nor the knowledge of parliamentary committees to effectively make submissions or appear as witnesses. By contrast, governmental departments were favoured by the requirement for written submissions, the formal nature of the Committee's hearings and the location of the Committee in Canberra. More particularly the Committee had its own interests, agenda and orientation which influenced its inquiry and conclusions. In this chapter I discuss the way in which the Committee's agenda influenced the inquiry, the evidence made to it and the conclusions reached by it. The concept of ideology, which was outlined in the first chapter, will be used in assessing the inquiry and the evidence.
The inquiry

The Committee asserted its independent and apolitical role throughout the inquiry with the Chairman making clear the Committee's 'open-mindedness' to the issues before it. This independence was modified to the extent that as an Aboriginal affairs committee, the Committee also represented itself as pursuing the interests of Aborigines within the framework of open-mindedness. The general problem-solving agenda of parliamentary committees also was reinforced in relation to the Committee's fringe-dwelling inquiry by the particular terms of the reference. The Committee was specifically requested to address the 'problems' of fringe-dwelling communities and recommend a 'strategy' to the government to deal with those problems.

As I have shown in earlier chapters, this agenda restricted the range of evidence considered by the Committee as relevant and practical to the task before it of defining problems and proposing solutions. The agenda centred on a number of key components that comprised the unstated but commonly shared assumptions and influences of members of the Committee for the assessment of the evidence: bipartisan, independent, open-minded (although leaning towards Aboriginal interests), fact-finding, problem-solving, practical and realistic.

It has been noted that such methods of favouring certain ways of setting up topics can operate as ideological constructs which:

... are so common, so natural, so taken for granted, so deeply embedded in the very communication forms which are employed, that they are hardly visible at all ... unless we deliberately set out to ask, 'What, other than what has been said about this topic could be said?' 'What questions are omitted?' 'Why do the questions - which always presuppose answers of a particular kind - so often recur in this form? Why do certain other questions never appear?'

(Hall et al 1978:65)
The key components mentioned above comprised the ideology of the Committee's operation, its taken-for-granted assumptions and inferences from which it assessed the evidence to the inquiry. This ideology represented the Committee as being equally open to all points of view (although inclined towards an Aboriginal viewpoint) which could be expressed with equal force by all interest groups in Aboriginal affairs and assessing the evidence before it on the basis of the facts, the reality of the Aboriginal situation and the practical requirement of the Committee to solve the problem. Some interest groups were more attuned to the agenda set by the Committee than others. As a consequence their evidence fell more clearly within the parameters set by the Committee and had a more powerful influence on the Committee's definitions of the situation and conclusions.

The construction of fringe-dwelling as a problem

The evidence from two major interest groups couched fringe-dwelling within a problem orientation that was in accord with the Committee's agenda. In the case of local government councils fringe-dwelling was defined in terms of the town planning problems it created for the councils. In the case of governmental organisations the focus was on the problems which fringe-dwellers experienced as a result of their lifestyle and how this created a wider political and equity problem which government had to address.

Local government councils: While local governmental councils depicted fringe-dwelling as a problem their agenda was different in many ways to that of the Committee. While the Committee was concerned with being apolitical, bipartisan, and reasonable in balancing different interests, including accommodating Aboriginal interests, the local government councils were concerned with a much narrower set of interests. Primarily, they were concerned with their interests in dealing with fringe-dwelling as a town planning problem and with
ensuring interests of the local white community were paramount in the town. They did not see the representation or accommodation of Aboriginal interests as part of their agenda.

Local government councils depicted fringe-dwellers as people 'in-between' possessing the worst aspects of both Aboriginal and European cultures. As such fringe-dwellers were seen as being incompatible with urban living because they were potential 'polluters' of the town environment. As a result there was strong pressure to exclude them from towns. This practice of exclusion, achieved through enforcement of local building, health and litter regulations, was reinforced by an ideology about the inadequacy and profligacy of Aborigines which circulated in the towns in the form of stories about supposed Aboriginal behaviour. These stories were considered to provide the 'proof' of the incompatibility of town life and Aboriginality and hence provided the rationale for the exclusion of fringe-dwellers from the socio-economic benefits of the town. Paradoxically, the practice and ideology of exclusion went hand in hand with assertions of 'equality of rights and responsibilities for all Australians' and the necessity for Aborigines who wished to remain in the towns to conform and assimilate.

While appearing contradictory they were rather differing in strategies for the achievement of the same purpose, the exclusion of Aboriginality from the towns and the maintenance of the power of the dominant white community to dictate the 'standards' and 'values' of the town environment. On the one hand, Aborigines were considered unable or unprepared to assimilate, and hence they could not obtain access to the services, facilities and employment of the town. On the other hand, if they wished to gain access to the 'benefits' of the town they had to be prepared to assimilate and conform to general community 'standards' with a consequential denial of their 'Aboriginal' values and lifestyle. In the eyes of the white community this conformity meant that they were no longer seen as Aborigines and hence no longer to be excluded.
'Aboriginality' was not explicitly defined by the councils, but a conception of Aboriginality was contained in their evidence. Aboriginality was seen as backward, unable to adapt and change and fundamentally incompatible with European values and lifestyle. The image of Aboriginality fitted with, and was part of, the ideology concerned with the exclusion of Aborigines from the town environment. As a result it did not need to be explicitly defined as it was part of the 'knowledge' and 'understanding' of members of the white community who lived in the towns. As Giddens has noted, one of the means by which ideology operates is by a 'naturalisation' of the existing state of affairs, thereby making them the 'taken-for-granted assumptions of lived experience' (Giddens 1979:195).

The exclusion of Aborigines from the town in fringe camps seemed to run counter to the desire of local authorities to 'control' the situation from a town planning point of view. Aborigines living in fringe camps were more easily able to pursue their lifestyle and effectively resist the control of the local authorities. For local councils the real problem of fringe-dwelling was that it was uncontrolled. This led the Kalano Association in Katherine to suggest that it was in the 'interests' of the local town council to help solve the problems in the fringe camps (TE:199). However, as I noted from the evidence, local councils called for the extension of coercive powers and regulations to enable them to 'control' fringe camping. The existence of fringe camps provided the justification for the assertion of greater control by local authorities. The long-term goal of the councils of the assimilation of Aborigines into the towns would ensure control and conformity in the longer term.

The exclusion of Aborigines from the town served not only the planning interests of local councils, but also served the interests of the white community in reducing the competition for available employment in towns with often
limited employment opportunities. But the situation was not quite so simple because, although fringe-dwellers were poor, they still had access to significant social security income which, in the context of the economies of these small country towns, was significant. However, the local ideologies were sufficiently flexible to embrace Aborigines as consumers. As the Alice Springs Branch of the Country Liberal Party noted, fringe-dwellers' 'money is welcomed and we see very little discrimination against them obtaining goods and services as Aborigines' (TE:2605). This was asserted as an aspect of the 'equality for all' and the desire not to have 'separatism' as part of town life (TE:2604-05).

Governmental departments and organisations:
Governmental departments and organisations concerned with Aboriginal affairs expressed their definition and depictions of fringe-dwelling within the agenda of the Committee because it was also their agenda. As governmental bureaucracies they represented themselves as being apolitical and arbiters between differing interest groups. As I noted in Chapter 1, the then Minister for Aboriginal Affairs referred to government as 'honest brokers, and we hope we can set a context in which reasonable people will work to find solutions - not simply assert rights' (Baume 1982:152). Like the Committee, government organisations also saw themselves as concerned with finding solutions to problems by balancing 'conflicting interests' (Baume 1982:152) and proceeding in a 'reasonable' and 'mature' way (Baume 1982:151-52) without asserting irreconcilable entitlements. As departments and organisations specifically concerned with Aboriginal affairs, they also represented themselves as being 'pro-Aboriginal'. It was in their interests to highlight Aboriginal affairs as a problem area which required a sympathetic and generous response from government because of the funds that would be channelled through them to solve the problem.
As a result of their approach, governmental departments and organisations saw fringe-dwelling as a problem in terms of the appalling conditions for fringe-dwellers themselves and also in terms of the national and international ramifications of the existence of these communities of degradation. They also drew on the 'in-between' qualities of fringe-dwellers, seeing them as transitional people belonging to neither Aboriginal nor European society. Fringe-dwellers were depicted as the victims of a range of external conditions such as poor housing, health, education and employment which perpetuated them in poverty. However, they were also seen as having attitudes of hopelessness and despair which tended to perpetuate fringe-dwelling as a culture of poverty. As such fringe-dwellers were seen to require integration, either back into Aboriginal society, or by making the transition to European society.

In either case the role of government was seen as central as fringe-dwellers were perceived as powerless to help themselves. The breaking out of fringe-dwellers from their appalling living conditions and culture of poverty was to be achieved by the provision of housing through a transfer of resources from the state. This was one of the few politically acceptable ways of the state transferring resources to Aborigines without encountering a backlash from powerful interest groups. However, this approach to changing circumstances for Aboriginals had strong assimilationist assumptions. As Aborigines lived in a culture of poverty their traditional organisational structures were considered to no longer exist. Aboriginal society had been broken up into 'individuals' and 'families' who were able to be incorporated into the wider society. The disciplining effects and financial obligations of living in a house were to ensure the appropriate changes in values and lifestyle that were necessary for 'normal' town dwelling. The change in the socio-economic position of Aborigines that housing was seen as producing was thus inevitably to produce changes in attitudes, values and lifestyle. However, it is questionable whether the
provision of housing by itself is a mechanism for the transformation of circumstances for Aborigines. While a proper house is more costly to run, there is no reason to believe that people will have more income to meet the additional costs. No evidence was provided to the Committee that the provision of housing had resulted in greater employment or increased income. In fact, as a result of the provision of decent housing, Aborigines may be poorer or tend to overcrowd their houses in order to meet the additional rent and other costs involved. The very existence which the provision of decent housing is meant to change may be perpetuated by the means of trying to transform that lifestyle.

The crucial role of government in changing circumstances for Aborigines and the necessary changes in Aboriginal values that would accompany the interventionist approach of government were reinforced by an ideology of self-determination and self-management. As fringe-dwellers were regarded as powerless and unable to change their circumstances, government had to empower Aborigines to act for themselves. Hence there was a need for policies of self-determination and self-management. However, these policies disguised the control which government continued to exercise over the lives of Aborigines through control over the funding of Aboriginal organisations and the defining of Aboriginality.

There was no explicit defining of Aboriginality by governmental organisations, although their evidence contained an implicit image of Aboriginality. Aboriginality was seen in terms of tradition, of a set of beliefs and values that were part of a timeless inheritance, unchanging and unadaptable. As a result, Aboriginality was seen as potentially being corrupted and diluted by a mixing with European cultural influences. Fringe-dwelling was seen as the epitome of the results of such mixing, resulting in the 'loss' of tradition, the 'loss' of culture, and the emergence of the culture of poverty. However, Aboriginality was not explicitly defined because the ideology of
self-determination and self-management dictated that definitions of Aboriginality were a matter for Aborigines. A myth of self-identification for Aborigines and their control over definitions of Aboriginality was asserted, while government continued to implicitly control definitions of Aboriginality to suit its own purposes.

The two problem perspectives: There is conflict of interest and purpose between the perspectives of local government councils and governmental departments and organisations. The desire of governments to integrate the fringe within the wider society and eliminate it as a political problem runs counter to strong local pressure to exclude Aborigines from towns on the basis of their 'incompatibility' with urban dwelling. The Mt Isa Council reflected this conflict when it told the Committee that officials in Brisbane and Canberra had no idea of the local pressure that had resulted from their practice of 'dumping Aboriginals into urban streets populated by whites, without first preparing them [Aborigines]' (informal discussions, Mt Isa Council). According to the Council, it ran directly counter to what it was trying to do and had only created 'racism' (informal discussions, Mt Isa Council). Not only were the practices in conflict, the policies were also in conflict. Local authorities despaired at a governmental policy of 'self-determination' which appeared to them to be empowering Aborigines and encouraging the aberrant fringe-dwelling lifestyle when their own policy impressed the need for assimilation and conformity. At the same time organisations like DAA expressed concern about the images of Aborigines which existed in country towns because of the potential danger they posed through public antagonism to departmental programs to improve conditions for fringe-dwellers (TE:18).

Perhaps the 'hard-line' and 'soft-line' approaches can be represented in similar terms to those in which Morris (after Foucault) has characterised colonial policy towards Aborigines. He described a transformation in colonial policy from treating the Aborigine as a 'leper' to
treat ing him as a 'plague victim'. The policy associations of the former were 'rejection' and 'exile-enclosure', while those of the latter were 'correct training' and 'discipline' (Morris 1985:101). The strategies of local government councils oscillate between 'rejection' and 'correct training' and 'discipline', while those of governmental organisations oscillate between 'correct training' as a means to assimilation, and some recognition and accommodation of Aboriginal cultural difference as a means to the integration or incorporation, rather than the assimilation, of Aborigines into society. The desire of governmental organisations is still to eliminate the fringe as an aberration, but the methods are less coercive and more subtle. The fringe is to be eliminated by a state controlled and financed incorporation of it rather than by an erasing of it or a forced assimilation of fringe-dwellers. These contradictions or oscillations in policy between local councils and governmental organisations are not inconsistencies 'but characterisations related to different political aims and ends' (Morris 1985:101). The ideologies and policies of local councils and governmental organisations are not unitary as they reflect the outcome of differing interests and the pursuit of different strategies of domination and control of Aborigines. While in this sense one cannot speak of a single dominant ideology, there is a range of ideologies which is part of a framework of domination of Aborigines and involves their eventual assimilation or incorporation into the wider society.

While the perspectives of local councils and governmental organisations met the Committee's agenda of fringe-dwelling as a 'problem' they each represented fringe-dwelling as a problem in quite different terms. The Committee rejected the perspective of the local government councils because their defining of the problem of fringe-dwelling reflected a narrow set of interests which the Committee did not share. The councils were explicitly anti-Aboriginal and made no pretence of attempting to balance a range of interests in the town. Their concerns
with fringe-dwelling were local and they had no interest in its wider implications. The Committee pointed to the racism of the councils as being a threat to the achievement of an improvement in conditions for fringe-dwellers and hence to a wider concern with the transformation and integration of the fringe. In fact the councils had no interest in the integration of the fringe, being more concerned with its control and elimination. While rejecting the local councils' definition of the situation, the Committee's recommendations nevertheless involved a continued role for local government councils in the future of fringe communities ensuring the continuation of their attempts to control the communities. The Committee's rejection of the councils' depictions of fringe-dwelling did not extend to a challenge to relationships of power in country towns. While the Committee's agenda was concerned with accommodating Aboriginal interests, this did not include giving those interests primacy in the towns above the interests of whites. The Committee's rejection of the local councils' perspective then was relatively superficial as it still left power in the towns very much in the hands of the councils and the white community.

The governmental definition of the problem of fringe-dwelling, as a wider one requiring the intervention of the state to resolve, was endorsed by the Committee. Like the Committee, government departments were concerned with the wider interests of the welfare state in addressing the needs of Aborigines in terms of greater equity and the solving of Aboriginal affairs as a national and international political problem. In achieving this there was a recognition of the need for state intervention to improve the circumstances of Aborigines. The Committee's recommendations were almost entirely concerned with mechanisms of state intervention and a transfer of the state's resources to resolve the fringe-dwelling problem. The strategy could be represented as balancing the different interests involved, addressing the real problems of Aborigines by focussing on their basic concern with improved living conditions and achieving the practical
result of problem-solving. Governmental organisations can be described as the 'primary-definers' (Hall et al 1978:64) of the situation of fringe-dwellers in the inquiry as their definitions most closely fitted the agenda set by the Committee. The correspondence between the ideological framework within which the Committee and governmental organisations worked, and the relatively superficial rejection by the Committee of the perspective of local councils led to a tendency towards an 'ideological closure' (Hall et al 1978:64) of definitions of the situation of fringe-dwellers in the inquiry indicating the existence of dominant ideological frameworks for defining the problems of Aborigines. However, there was not a complete closure as opposing explanations and definitions were articulated by other interest groups. I now turn to these.

Opposing perspectives

There were perspectives in the evidence which to varying extents opposed the agenda set by the Committee. These perspectives contested meanings of key concepts such as fringe-dwelling and Aboriginality as defined in the perspectives of local government councils and government departments. Some questioned whether fringe-dwelling was a problem requiring solution, while others proposed alternative solutions to those of governmental organisations. Hall notes that the tendency towards ideological closure of an issue by 'primary-definers' is opposed by the power, organisation and legitimacy of the 'counter-definers' of a situation making complete closure around a definition of a controversial issue difficult (Hall et al 1978:64). To what extent were the 'counter-definers' in the fringe-dwelling inquiry able to have their alternative definitions of the situation influence the Committee?

Aboriginal perspectives: I noted in Chapter 1 that Aborigines, as a subordinate group, could be assumed to have opposing interests to those of governmental organisations, local councils and parliamentary committees,
and so would automatically contest their definitions of the situation. In particular, Aborigines challenged governmental definitions of Aboriginality and asserted the importance of Aborigines controlling these definitions. While others explicitly avoided defining Aboriginality for reasons I have indicated above, Aborigines argued that the way they were defined should be highlighted as it was an important means of governments exercising control over them. The ADC referred to the 'administrative convenience' of definitions of Aboriginality and the effect they had in creating 'unnecessary and artificial divisions [between Aborigines] . . .'(TE:2129), while Budby stated that governments had 'manufactured' classifications of Aborigines for their own purposes (TE:1725). Brophy also asserted the importance of Aboriginal control over identity and identified himself as a fringe-dweller in order to highlight the oppression which all Aborigines had suffered and which had made them all fringe-dwellers. Aborigines thus challenged definitions of the situation by governments and others by opposing their implicit definitions of Aboriginality around which they constructed policies and ideologies of control and domination.

However, when Aborigines themselves come to define Aboriginality, their definitions were often nebulous and lacking in content. Both the ADC and Budby defined Aboriginality primarily in terms of a developing pan-Aboriginality. If Aborigines were to alter their structural position of inequality in Australian society, some form of pan-Aboriginal movement would probably be crucial to its achievement (Jones and Hill-Burnett 1982). However, in the case of the ADC, pan-Aboriginality was expressed as a cultural identity which was built on the spiritual and cultural attachments of all Aborigines to their land. Consequently it was not seen as part of a political process of transformation. Similarly, the assertion of attachments to land as the content of Aboriginality was not presented as part of a political program to transform the structural position of Aborigines through a transfer of power and resources to Aborigines in
the form of land. Instead, it was nebulous and spiritual, affirming land as the 'foundation of Aboriginal society and life' (TE:2126), part of 'our blood and our bone structures' (TE:3019) and involving for Aborigines the return of 'their country, their dreamings, their stories, their culture' (TE:3144). Budby's assertion of pan-Aboriginality was more directly political with his focus on the development of an 'Aboriginal nation' (TE:1722). Both he and Bropho drew attention to the common experience of oppression of Aborigines which had made them all fringe-dwellers and which formed the basis for the development of a political consciousness. However, neither gave their political program a content. They remained largely oppositional, articulating their opposition in changing terms according to the changing approaches and definitions of the dominant society.

A different challenge to the Committee's agenda of the incorporation of the fringe came from fringe-dwellers themselves. Although fringe-dwellers did not directly articulate their perspective, their challenge emerged in evidence from others. A survey of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs of some fringe communities showed that over a third of them were 'permanent resident groups [who] have consciously selected this style of living and want no major changes' (TE:3168). It emerged from the statement of the review of the Housing for Aboriginals Program in New South Wales that Aborigines saw the purpose of the New South Wales Housing Commission as being 'to use housing to assimilate them into the wider society' (TE:2984). It also emerged in a study of New South Wales reserves with the evident Aboriginal resistance to attempts to 'improve' or 'better' them (see TE:2975-3005). There was also resistance to the coercion and conformity imposed by local authorities with fringe-dwellers camping 'in areas other than those designated' by local authorities (TE:2308) and engaging in behaviour considered 'offensive' by the white majority.
Fringe-dwelling apparently forms a 'sub-culture' which resists pressure to assimilate or integrate it. However, to what extent are fringe-dwellers participating in their own oppression? Rather than resisting governmental policies and objectives, have they simply internalised the negative image held of them by the wider society? Are they simply saying: 'Because the wider society sees us as degraded, demoralised and useless, then that is the way we are going to be'? Are they, like other Aborigines I have referred to earlier, simply opposing governmental and the wider society's attempts to integrate and assimilate them, and defining their identity as Aborigines in terms of that opposition? The fringe-dwelling 'sub-culture' of resistance can be seen as the 'culture of poverty' of the 'soft-line' position, made up of those who are, not so much resisting integration and assimilation, as lacking in the economic and intellectual resources to be able to change their position. While their 'betters' have changed their circumstances by moving into towns, fringe groups can be seen as trapped in an environment of few assets, low expectations, lack of confidence and unwillingness to change. Are fringe-dwellers resisting 'betterment' from a position where they have options available, or are they so constrained by governmental control and their structural position that for them fringe-dwelling is a matter of necessity?

These questions are difficult to answer from the evidence. Certainly, there was evidence that some were taking up the option of moving from the fringe to town, although in doing so it was less clear whether they were accepting the unstated agenda of the change in values and behaviour which might have been necessary to enable them to fit into the wider society. Certainly, at least some compromise in the lifestyle of the fringe is essential to successful town dwelling. This was demonstrated by other evidence that indicated that others were moving back to the fringe from the towns illustrating perhaps that they were not prepared to accept the assimilationist consequences of their 'betterment'. However, it could also have indicated
that their failure to make it in the wider society was the result of their internalisation of 'fringe-dwelling values'. Alternatively, an improvement of circumstances for fringe-dwellers might necessarily entail an agenda of assimilation because of the way the wider society has defined the acceptable mechanisms of change for Aborigines, rather than because assimilation was inextricably bound up with any transformation of circumstances for Aborigines.

There was a countervailing tendency to that of opposition in the evidence of Aborigines. A number of Aboriginal organisations, particularly those in the bureaucracy, depicted fringe-dwelling broadly within the governmental perspective. While the circumstances of fringe-dwellers were expressed in more passionate terms than those used by government departments, the depiction of the problem and proposed solutions were essentially the same. Aborigines as an encapsulated and relatively powerless group, are often forced to:

... respond in terms pre-established by primary definers and the privileged definitions, and have a better chance of securing a hearing and influencing the process precisely if they cast their case within the limits of that consensus.

... If they do not play within the rules of the game, counter-spokesman run the risk of being defined out of the debate [because they have broken the rules of reasonable opposition] ...

(Hall et al 1978:64)

As noted in earlier chapters, 'Aboriginal' organisations such as the Aboriginal Development Commission and Aboriginal Hostels were able to influence the Committee's inquiry because they expressed their definitions of fringe-dwelling and proposed solutions within the agenda set by the Committee. One Committee member approved the evidence from the ADC as conveying clearly the reality of the problems of fringe-dwellers. He stated: 'It seems to me that you are tuned in more closely to the problems and you would know what they are better than we do' (TE:2096). In its report the Committee used the evidence of the ADC and other 'Aboriginal' organisations to
justify its findings as being supported by Aboriginal views and it recommended the channelling of funds through these organisations for programs to improve the circumstances of fringe-dwellers. The Committee could then represent its strategy as one that was not only developed with the support of Aboriginal organisations but also gave effect to Aboriginal self-determination by implementing the strategy through Aboriginal organisations.

By contrast, those perspectives of Aborigines which opposed the governmental definitions of fringe-dwelling were rejected by the Committee as impractical, political or unrepresentative of Aboriginal opinion. The Committee rejected the argument of Aborigines who claimed that all Aborigines were fringe-dwellers on the basis of their common experience of oppression and marginalisation because it was considered not 'practical' to extend the category of fringe-dweller to too great an extent. In rejecting this argument, the Committee also effectively ignored the wider historical and political factors which had created and perpetuated fringe-dwelling. The ideological agenda of the Committee's inquiry meant that factors such as the relationships of power in country towns and the wider community were excluded for 'practical' reasons and because they would lead the Committee into 'political' controversy which it wished to avoid. Those who presented these perspectives were also challenged as to their 'representativeness'. For example, Budby was challenged by a member of the Committee as being 'unrepresentative' in arguing for a developing concept of an 'Aboriginal nation' based on a common experience of political oppression of Aborigines at the hands of white society. This member stated that Budby's views were just those of the Canberra-based Aboriginal bureaucracy (TE:1724), and not those of Aborigines in the bush. This member therefore was making the very distinction between urban Aborigines and the 'real' Aborigines who lived in the bush that Budby had sought to deny (TE:1725).
Anthropologists: While anthropologists did not form an 'interest' group in the same way as those I referred to above, their framework of analysis gave their evidence a different orientation to that of governmental organisations. They were primarily the ones who challenged the 'problem' orientation of the Committee's agenda, arguing instead the need for a 'positive' view of fringe-dwelling. However, their challenge was primarily a moral rather than a political one.

While the Committee was concerned with balancing different interests, anthropologists were concerned primarily with promoting what they saw as the interests of Aborigines. Thus anthropologists created a moral space for the recognition and accommodation of Aborigines in towns by asserting fringe-dwellers' historical, cultural and social rights in the towns. They argued that this accommodation of Aboriginal interests should be recognised by referring to fringe-dwellers as 'town-campers', who had a substantive basis in the towns and the internal resources and ability to take charge of their lives. In their desire to avoid enthnocentricity, anthropologists tended to gloss over the often appalling conditions in which fringe-dwellers lived. It was not so much that they were unconcerned about these conditions. Rather it was an implication of their focus on what was positive about fringe-dwelling in order to create the moral space for its recognition. They also ignored the relationships of power, and attempts at domination and control of Aborigines, in which terminology such as 'fringe-dweller' played such an important part. There was a certain naivety in the anthropological perspective focussing on the transformational possibilities of a change in terminology, without an associated change in relationships of power within which such terminology was embedded. Rose has criticised the epistemological basis of this anthropological approach in the following terms:

... I believe that it is fair to say that in Australia anthropologists have constituted their studies in such a way as to ignore a primary fact of Aboriginal people's lives - that people live, by coercion, under a form of institutionalised
injustice. Our discipline is at fault in denying such a system of pathological relationships in which all of us, social scientists, general public, and research populations, are involved (Rose 1986:28).

Anthropologists, like Aborigines, asserted the importance of the relationship between definitions of Aboriginality and government policies towards Aborigines. They offered alternative definitions which they claimed provided the basis for radically different policies towards Aborigines. They saw Aborigines as having the power to act for themselves and therefore as not requiring massive governmental intervention to re-make or transform them.

To the extent that the Committee shared the concern of anthropologists with accommodating Aboriginal interests, it followed their argument for a change in terminology to refer to fringe-dwellers as town-campers. However, the Committee did not appreciate the underlying agenda in this argument about the creation of a moral space for the recognition of Aboriginal interests. This was because the Committee was concerned with a different moral dimension, and that was the deplorable living conditions of fringe-dwellers and how these could be changed. Because anthropologists did not construct fringe-dwelling as being problematic, their perspective did not address what the Committee considered to be the real issues facing fringe-dwelling communities. Anthropologists also did not provide the strategy for change that was one of the Committee's primary objectives. By stating that fringe-dwellers had the capacity and ability to take control of their lives given a due recognition of their rights, anthropologists saw no need for the interventionist approach recommended by governmental organisations. However, such intervention was seen by the Committee as essential in solving the fringe-dwelling problems.

'Applied anthropological' perspective: What I refer to here as the 'applied anthropological' perspective, was articulated by Drakakis-Smith, Beck, Lea and Sinbandhit
and, to a lesser extent, Ross and Heppell. While most of the abovementioned are not anthropologists, they accepted the moral implications of a recognition of the social and cultural basis of fringe-dwellers in towns. But they also asserted a political dimension by addressing themselves to the often appalling circumstances in which fringe-dwellers lived and the need for structural change to transform those circumstances. They adopted a different epistemological approach to anthropologists by also taking into account the role of local and wider power structures in producing and maintaining the fringe-dwelling situation. The 'applied anthropologists' argued for the need, not just for a recognition of Aboriginal rights in towns, but also for the necessity of a change in the structural position of Aborigines if their circumstances were to change. However, they did not make clear how they saw this structural change coming about. They challenged the assumption of the governmental approach that circumstances for Aborigines could be radically transformed by the transfer of resources from the state to Aborigines in the form of housing. The provision of housing in the absence of employment was seen as unlikely to change the structural position of Aborigines. However, they did not address directly how the structural change they desired could be effected. Presumably it could only be achieved by a transfer of resources from the state. But if the concentration was to be on employment creation rather than housing, to what extent would this employment be genuine and sustainable in small remote country towns with few opportunities and a great distance from markets? It might be questioned whether this would create the possibility of altering the structural inequality of Aborigines. The rhetoric was radical and challenging, but the alternative prescriptions offered were not detailed.

A further problem not addressed directly in this perspective was the possible consequences of a change in the structural position of Aborigines. Like the other anthropologists, the 'applied anthropologists' strongly rejected assimilation as a solution to Aboriginal problems.
This was one aspect of their concern about the provision of housing to Aborigines under existing policies. But they did not assess the possible assimilationist effects of the radical change in the structural position of Aborigines which they advocated. To what extent would there be a change in Aboriginal values as a consequence of Aborigines no longer being poor, living in decent housing and being employed on a regular basis? The applied anthropologists appeared to be drawing a distinction between assimilation as involving Aborigines changing their values and beliefs to those of the European community, and assimilation in the sense of Aborigines achieving economic equality with non-Aborigines. While they favoured the latter, they were strongly opposed to the former. However, it was not clear from their analysis that such a distinction could be made and that an achievement by Aborigines of economic equality would not also involve changes in values and beliefs to more closely correspond with those of the wider community.

The perspective of 'applied anthropologists' did not fall entirely within the agenda defined by the Committee. The Committee's agenda included a similar concern about the poverty and appalling conditions of fringe communities, and the need for this to change. Hence they shared with 'applied anthropologists' the moral concern with the unfairness of the circumstances in which fringe-dwellers lived and the need to produce greater equity. In this sense the agendas of the Committee and the 'applied anthropologists' tended to converge, with arguments taking place over how the state should go about transferring resources to Aborigines to improve circumstances for them, whether by providing housing or by some other means. Similarly, one could point to a convergence in the hidden agendas of possible assimilation which both positions might entail. However, 'applied anthropologists' were primarily concerned with structural inequality and the need to change the structures of power in the towns and in the wider community as a prerequisite to the transformation of the situation of fringe-dwellers. By contrast, the Committee was primarily concerned about
fringe-dwelling as an aberration to be incorporated into the social fabric. The correction of the gross inequality in which fringe-dwellers lived was just a consequence of the incorporation of fringe-dwellers.

A counter-ideology or counter-agenda?: There were challenges to governmental perspectives and the Committee's agenda in the evidence, and to this extent there was not a complete ideological closure around particular definitions of the situation of fringe-dwellers. However, these alternative perspectives were not influential in re-defining a counter-ideology of fringe-dwelling for the Committee. The evidence of some Aborigines challenged the perspectives of governmental and local council groups and the Committee's agenda. But it failed to articulate fully an alternative agenda, in many cases simply opposing the agenda set by others rather than re-defining it. This made it easier for the Committee to reject these perspectives as unrepresentative of Aboriginal views, impractical or unreasonable. In those cases where the evidence of Aborigines was most influential it was expressed largely within terms set by the Committee. Fringe-dwellers themselves appeared, from the evidence available, to reject the 'solutions' to their problems in the terms put by government and the wider society. There was an apparent refusal on their part to conform, to be assimilated or integrated. To what extent this 'sub-culture' of fringe-dwelling also incorporated a counter-ideology was impossible to judge from evidence because of the lack of detailed construction of the world of fringe-dwellers and the inability of the Committee to obtain their views directly.

Anthropologists challenged the Committee's agenda, but their failure to make clear their underlying message in defining fringe-dwellers in the way they did meant that their challenge was never fully appreciated by the Committee. While the Committee adopted a moral position towards the degradation of the situation of fringe-dwellers it did not perceive the moral position being articulated by
anthropologists. In failing to address central questions of power in country towns and the wider community as explanations for the place of fringe-dwellers, the challenge of anthropologists was not one which threatened the key interests of local government councils or governmental organisations. Thus it could be ignored as somewhat peripheral.

With their focus on the inequality of the circumstances in which fringe-dwellers lived, the approach of 'applied anthropologists' tended to converge with the Committee's concern with fringe-dwelling as an unsatisfactory lifestyle. As a result there was also a convergence of possible implications of assimilation in both approaches. However, for 'applied anthropologists' the focus on inequality was central and led to assertions of the need to transform relationships of power in country towns and the wider community if circumstances for fringe-dwellers were to change. By contrast, for the Committee a concern with equity was subordinate to its desire to transform fringe-dwelling as an aberrant and unacceptable lifestyle in the longer term. The promotion of greater equity would be a consequence of the transformation of the fringe.

The inquiry - a retrospection

Rose has characterised the system of relationships in which Aboriginal and European societies are embedded as being that of a double-bind in which the 'victims' (Aborigines) are 'faced with the paradoxical necessity to act in a no-win situation and [are] denied the opportunity to escape or to represent this situation to others' (Rose 1986:25). We can see this double-bind operating in the Committee's inquiry with Aborigines being restricted in their opportunities to define their situation. When they do provide definitions, they often express them within terms set by the dominant society in order to have some influence, thus helping to maintain, often unwittingly, the political and ideological structures
which dominate them (Howard 1981:(ix)). Alternatively, they express opposing definitions which are then rejected as not fitting the predetermined agenda. In both cases Aborigines are denied the power to re-define their situation in ways that could lead to a transformation in their living conditions. There is thus a tendency towards a closure in the inquiry around the Committee's setting up of the problem of fringe-dwelling and governmental organisations' definitions and depictions of, and proposed solutions to, the situation of fringe-dwellers. This closure was reinforced by the subsequent governmental response to the Committee's report. This response strongly endorsed the Committee's findings and established a special Town Campers Assistance Program involving substantial spending on housing to deal with the problems as defined by the Committee. The circle was perhaps complete - the Committee set up the problem which was reinforced by governmental definitions and depictions of it. These were in turn reiterated by the Committee in its report as its findings and were then accepted by government as an 'independent' assessment of the situation of fringe-dwellers.

However, the government's own progress reports show that the Town Campers Program is not fully successful. While the progress reports document improvements in physical living conditions as the result of the provision of better housing, water supplies, sewerage systems and electricity supplies, there is little evidence of improved employment or income levels (Town Campers Assistance Program, Annual Report). The first report notes a significant increase in the number of fringe-dwellers employed (28.48%), however, it states that 'the picture remains grim' (Report for 1 March 1984 - 30 April 1985, p. 9). The report is optimistic about the long term future because of the flow on effects of improvements to housing and essential services:

The assumption underlying this strategy is that the provision of these essentials will indirectly affect other problems, such as health, attendance...
at school and employment. These effects are not immediate however. They take time to occur. (Report for 1 March 1984 - 30 April 1985, p. 9).

However, by the time of the next report the situation had become grimmer, with the report recording a fall in the number of fringe-dwellers employed despite further improvements in housing and essential services (Report for 1 May 1985 - 30 June 1986, p. 5). With the apparent failure of the strategy the report said that emphasis was now also to be given to the 'development of an economic base for Aboriginal people in the long term, with associated permanent employment opportunities' and to providing Aborigines with employment skills and experience (Report for 1 May 1985 - 30 June 1986, p. 6).

This whole process of constructing an Aboriginal problem and proposing and implementing solutions to it is instructive of the history of Aboriginal affairs policy and its failure. The development of Aboriginal affairs policy has been about constructing and then reconstructing the Aboriginal 'problem', as proposed solutions are seen to fail. The debate about policy has largely taken place within parameters defined by government and there have been few alternative definitions of the situation by Aborigines. Those taking part in the debate have been forced to confine themselves to these parameters if they wished to influence the debate or secure for themselves access to the funding allocated to Aboriginal programs.

Although there is the appearance of shifts in policy, the primary emphasis is always on government programs aimed at doing things to Aborigines (Sullivan 1986:16), to change them into something more acceptable to, or compatible with, the wider society. As Von Sturmer has noted, future observers of the current scene may consider the best description of what is happening now in Aboriginal affairs is the policy of the Queensland Government, as enunciated by its Minister in the mid-1970s, to encourage Aborigines 'to assimilate at a rate and in a manner decided
by them' (Von Sturmer in Anderson et al 1985:48). If by assimilation it is meant an economic assimilation by which Aborigines are incorporated into the wider society and achieve a standard of living equal to that of the wider society, but without sharing all the values and beliefs of that society, then that may be what many Aboriginal people want.

However, the circumstances of Aborigines have not improved markedly in the last twenty years, and in some cases may have worsened. This makes a mockery of governments' efforts to achieve the economic assimilation of Aborigines by enabling them to achieve economic equality with the rest of the community. Governments have been reluctant to address the structural factors which have produced Aboriginal inequality, particularly where addressing those issues involves a challenge to the socio-economic interests of powerful groups. Also, governments have focussed on providing substantial welfare funding in areas such as housing in the benign belief that the provision of housing can break the 'cycle of poverty' in which it is considered Aborigines live.

However, I have also pointed out that the achievement of economic equality may entail changes in beliefs and values that are unacceptable to many Aboriginal people. It is principally such changes which Aborigines are rejecting when they oppose assimilationist approaches and not the achievement of economic equality. This tension between the objectives of achieving economic equality for Aborigines whilst allowing them to retain their Aboriginality is not fully explored in the approaches opposing those of government. On the one hand, the structural change desired by some to improve circumstances for Aborigines may also have assimilationist effects which are not desired. On the other hand, Aborigines may become locked into a low standard of living because of their desire to retain cultural beliefs and values which inhibit their accumulation of assets. Ways of avoiding this apparent dilemma are not articulated in the evidence and,
as a consequence, approaches of governments towards solving the Aboriginal 'problem' are not successfully challenged.

NOTES

1. The transfer of land with all its associations of property so central to the capitalist system is much more dangerous politically. The recent campaign over land rights by mining companies and other groups indicates the extent to which powerful interest groups consider the transfer of land to Aborigines to be a long term threat to them. Both the Federal and Western Australian governments were unwilling to support land rights in the fact of this opposition. Housing, however, is seen as a central part of the Australian ethos and there is less questioning of programs to provide housing for Aborigines.

2. The Mt Isa Council did not specify what it was trying to do but presumably it wanted to exclude Aborigines until they could be properly 'prepared'.

3. The Alice Springs Branch of the Country Liberal Party criticised Federal government programs for encouraging separatism:

   Commonwealth money supporting Aboriginal organisations is being used to attract Aboriginal and part-Aboriginal people out of private and government employment into the Aboriginal organisations. No doubt better money is being offered and capable people are needed, however, it reverses the previous trend for these people to become part of the town community (TE:2603).

APPENDIX A

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

P.M. Ruddock, M.P., Chairman (Liberal Party)

A.C. Holding, M.P., Deputy Chairman (Australian Labor Party)

I.M.D. Cameron, M.P.* (National Party)

G. Campbell, M.P. (Australian Labor Party)

The Hon. R.J. Groom, M.P. (Liberal Party)

J.L. Scott, M.P.** ((Australian Labor Party)

G.E.J. Tambling, M.P. (Liberal Party)

C.W. Tuckey, M.P. (Liberal Party)

* I.M.D. Cameron, M.P., replaced the Hon. I.L. Robinson, M.P., on the Committee on 8 September 1982.

APPENDIX B

LIST OF SUBMISSIONS MADE TO THE INQUIRY CLASSIFIED ACCORDING TO INTEREST GROUPS

Local government councils, local politicians and political parties

The Corporation of the City of Darwin
Moree Plains Shire Council
Townsville City Council
Tom Harris MLA
Parliamentary Labor Party of the Northern Territory
Northern Territory Country Liberal Party (Alice Springs Branch)
Northern Territory Country Liberal Party (northern Darwin Branch)
Tambo Shire Council
The Hon. J.L.S. MacFarlane MLA
The Corporation of the City of Port Augusta

Commonwealth and State Government Departments and agencies
Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs
Commissioner for Community Relations
Northern Territory Government
Child Protection Panel - northern country region, Port Augusta
Commonwealth Department of Education
Commonwealth Department of Housing and Construction
Commonwealth Department of Health
South Australian Government
Department of Community Welfare, W.A. State Government

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Victorian State Government
Commonwealth Department of Social Security
Tasmanian Government
Australian Law Reform Commission
New South Wales Government
Commonwealth Department of Employment and Industrial Relations
Aborigines and 'Aboriginal' organisations
Yipirinya School Council
Kalano Community Association
Tingha Aboriginal Corporation
Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre
R. Bropho
Cullacabardee Women's Group
Cullacabardee Village
Aboriginal Medical Service, Perth
Nyoongah Community Incorporated
Dandenong and District Aborigines Co-operative
Born Free Club
National Aboriginal Education Committee
Aboriginal Hostels Limited
Aboriginal Development Commission
Flinders Island Health Service Co-operative
North Gippsland Aboriginal Advancement Co-operative Limited
Mr J. Coorie
Aboriginal Resource Centre, Carnarvon

Anthropologists and other social scientists
Dr M. Brandl
Dr D.W. Drakakis-Cmith
Dr D. Bell

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Ms A.H. Ross
J.P. Lea and P. Sindbandhit
Dr A.K. Eckermann
Dr E.A. Young
Mr P. Renkin
Professor B. Sansom

Other
United Church in Australia Northern Synod
Aboriginal Advisory and Development Services - Alice Springs
Aboriginal Advisory and Development Services - Darwin
Mrs Z. Smithson
Interchurch Committee on Aboriginal Affairs - Perth
P.S. Bembrick
Sister W.M. Raymond
Dr T. Gavranic
Mount Isa Welfare Council
Dr H.H. Penny
G. Robin
Mr G. Taylor, Aboriginal Treaty Support Group
Mr A.J. Clark, United Church in Australia
Ms M. Braddock
Ms P.A. Gardiner
Quaker Service Council Australia
APPENDIX C

LIST OF WITNESSES TO THE INQUIRY CLASSIFIED ACCORDING TO INTEREST GROUPS

Local government councils, local politicians and political parties


C.A. Black, Lord Mayor, Corporation of the City of Darwin

T. Harris, M.L.A., Member for Port Darwin

Commonwealth and State Government Departments and agencies

Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs

W.T. Barclay, Senior Assistant Director, Queensland Region

E.G. Beard, Acting Area Officer (Country Area), Victorian Region

P.G. Blackney, Acting Director, Welfare and Special Groups Section, Central Office

G.M. Brownbill, First Assistant Secretary, Development Division, Central Office

M. Casey, Assistant Director, Northern Territory Region

J.A. Cooke, Executive Officer, South Australian Region

D. Frampton, Assistant Director, Field Operations, Western Australian Region

W.D. Frazier, Assistant Director, Field Operations, Western Australian Region

G.E.P. Hansen, Acting Assistant Secretary, General Branch, Central Office

R. Huey, Assistant Secretary, Central Office

D.G. Kidney, Acting Assistant Director, Regional Office (Victoria-Tasmania)

J. Leung, Assistant Director, South Australian Region

J.P.M. Long, Deputy Secretary, Central Office
K. C. Martin, Regional Director, Eastern Region
*J. Moriarty, Regional Director, South Australian Region
W. T. Neech, Senior Project Officer, Welfare Services, Western Australian Region
Mrs A. Norgard, Senior Project Officer, Ministerial Section, Western Australian Region
P. J. O'Neill, Acting Regional Director, Northern Territory Region
D. J. O'Rourke, Regional Director, Queensland Region
M. J. O'Rourke, Senior Research Officer, Eastern Region
B. H. Paterson, Acting Area Officer, Queensland Region
L. J. Richardson, Area Officer, Northern Territory Region
R. K. Rolfe, Executive Officer, Queensland Region
P. Vaughan, Assistant Director, Planning and Projects, Eastern Region

Commonwealth Department of Education
C. L. Beltz, First Assistant Secretary, Special Programs Division
Ms A. Mays, Principal Aboriginal Education Adviser, Aboriginal Education Branch
R. K. Moss, Director, Aboriginal Grants and Project Section
E. C. Sutton, Aboriginal Education Program Development Officer, N. S. W. State Office

Commonwealth Department of Employment and Industrial Relations
T. M. Gibson, Acting Principal Executive Officer, Aboriginal Employment and Training Branch
B. J. Hodgetts, Manager, Aboriginal Employment and Training Branch
P. L. Mason, Acting General Manager, CES Programs
*N. G. D. Rose, Acting Assistant Director, Aboriginal Employment and Training Branch
K. T. Steele, Principal Executive Officer, Aboriginal Employment and Training Branch
Commonwealth Department of Health

Dr W.A. Langsford, First Assistant Director-General (Public Health)

R.G. Walton, Assistant Director-General, Aboriginal Health Branch

W.T. Wilson, Senior Project Officer, Aboriginal Health Branch

Commonwealth Department of Housing and Construction

M.B. Roger, Director, Housing Policy

R.H. Thomas, Acting Deputy Secretary

K.V. Wylie, Project Manager, Aboriginal Housing

Commonwealth Department of Social Security

*Mrs E.A. Bourke, Director, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Unit

J.T. O'Connor, Acting Director-General

Law Reform Commission

The Hon. Mr Justice Kirby, Chairman

Dr J.R. Crawford, Commissioner

P.K. Hennessy, Senior Law Reform Officer

New South Wales Government

R.H. Barnes, Division Manager, Regional Management, Housing Commission of New South Wales

B.P. Bartels, Manager, Estates, Housing Commission of New South Wales

J.J. Carr, Divisional Manager, Corporate Services, Housing Commission of New South Wales

Dr T. Goh, Senior Medical Officer, Aboriginal Health Unit, Health Commission of New South Wales

J.M. Isaacs, Assistant Secretary, Commonwealth State Liaison, New South Wales Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs

Northern Territory Government

W.J. Coburn, Director, Community Government Division, Department of Community Development

T.C. Lovegrove, Deputy Director-General, Chief Minister's Department
J.M. Pinney, Director, Southern Division, Department of
Lands

South Australian Government

J. Coker, Superintendent, Aboriginal and Isolated
Education, South Australian Education Department

J.L. Crichton, Manager, Housing Services, South Australian
Housing Trust

*L. Nayda, Secretary, Office of Aboriginal Affairs

Dr A.D. Packer, Senior Medical Officer, Aboriginal Health
Organisation of South Australia

B.J. Powell, Director, Aboriginal Health Organisation of
South Australia

Ms E. Sampson, Senior Tenancy Officer, Aboriginal Housing,
South Australian Housing Trust

C.A. Temme, Housing Services Officer, Aboriginal Housing,
South Australian Housing Trust

*R.J. Thomas, Senior Community Worker, Department for
Community Welfare

Sgt F. Warner, Police Aboriginal Liaison Officer, South
Australian Police Department

S.J. Weir, Administrative-Project Officer, Intergovernment
Relations Branch, Department of Premier and Cabinet

D.A. Westover, Principal Education Officer, Department of
Further Education

Tasmanian Government

K.L. Underwood, Executive Officer, Multicultural Affairs
Section, Attorney-General's Department

Victorian Government

*R.A. Blow, Aboriginal Adviser and Secretary, State
Interdepartmental Committee on Aboriginal Affairs,
Department of the Premier

Ms J.J. Bryant, Consultant to the Victorian Government,
Department of the Premier

A.V. Cahir, Assistant General Manager, Ministry of Housing,
and Chairman, State Interdepartmental Committee on
Aboriginal Affairs, Department of the Premier

Dr K.A. Coghill, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary of the
Victorian Cabinet and assisting the Premier in
Aboriginal Affairs

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Ms S.L. Firebrace, Co-ordinator, Department of Community Welfare Services

Western Australian Government

M.S. Hepburn, Social Work Supervisor, Department of Community Welfare

*Hon. A.J. Grassby, Commissioner for Community Relations

Aborigines and 'Aboriginal' organisations

Aboriginal Development Commission

*C.N. Perkins, Chairman

*C. Bourke, General Manager

W.A. Koller, Assistant Manager, Housing

A.J. Oberdorf, Branch Manager, Special Projects and Secretariat Branch

K.L. Smith, Acting Assistant Manager, Land and Enterprises Branch

Aboriginal Development Foundation

*B. Valadian, Executive Officer

Aboriginal Hostels Limited

*N.G. Perkins, General Manager

V.G. Copley, Executive Officer

B.P. Hansen, Projects Manager

R.E. Huddlestone, Senior Research Officer

Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement Inc.

K. Ratneser, Director

Dandenong and District Aborigines Co-operative Society Limited

*J.S. Murray, Chief Administration Officer

*Ms H.J. Skelly, Family Aide Co-ordinator

National Aboriginal Education Committee

*J.R. Budby, Chairman

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Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre

*Miss K.E. Brown, Administrative Secretary
*K.J. Everett, Member
*Ms R.F. Langford, State Secretary

Anthropologists and other social scientists

Aboriginal Sacred Sites Protection Authority

R.W. Ellis, Director
D.J. Ritchie, Anthropologist-Field Officer

Uranium Social Impact Steering Committee

Professor C.M. Tatz, Chairman
Professor B. Berndt, Deputy Chairman
Dr J.R. von Sturmer, Project Director
Dr E.J. Beck
Dr D. Bell
Dr M.M. Brandl
Dr M. Heppell
Dr J.P. Lea
P.F.B. Renkin
Professor B.L. Sansom
P. Sinbandhit

Other

Inter Church Committee on Aboriginal Affairs

W.S. Couche, Chairman
Mrs M. Bradley, Project Supervisor
K.J. Larner, Community Worker
Rev. R.G. Stringer, Secretary

Uniting Church in Australia (Northern Synod)

H.C. Amery, Relieving and Research Person, Aboriginal Advisory and Development Services
J.M. Blackett, Community Worker (Alice Springs), Aboriginal Advisory and Development Services

A.C. Clark, Community Worker (Tennant Creek), Aboriginal Advisory and Development Services

Rev. R.S. Udy, Associate Secretary

Dr H.H. Penny

Emeritus Professor B.H. Watts

* Indicates the witness, to the author's knowledge, is an Aboriginal person.
INSPECTIONS AND INFORMAL DISCUSSIONS WERE HELD IN THE FOLLOWING PLACES ON THE DATES INDICATED:

Perth - 3 November 1981
Kalgoorlie - 4 November 1981
Oodnadatta - 8 December 1981
Port Augusta - 8 December 1981
Coober Pedy - 9 December 1981
Ceduna - 9 December 1981
Townsville - 2 February 1982
Mount Isa - 3 February 1982
Brisbane - 4 February 1982
Sydney (Western Suburbs) - 2 March 1982
Tingha - 3 March 1982
Moree - 3 March 1982
Sydney (Prince Henry Hospital) - 4 March 1982
Alice Springs - 29 March 1982
Tennant Creek - 30 March 1982
Katherine - 30 March 1982
Jabiru - 31 March 1982
Darwin - 31 March 1982
Trefoil Island - 14 April 1982
Lake Tyers - 11 May 1982
Melbourne - 12 May 1982
Carnarvon - 15 June 1982
Roebourne - 16 June 1982
Kununurra - 17 June 1982


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