

The Pulse of Policy: Mapping Movement in the Australian Indigenous Policy World

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Originality Statement

This thesis is my own original work and, to the best of my knowledge, contains no material previously published or written by another person except in cases where I reference and acknowledge the work of others. This thesis has not been submitted for any other degree or other purposes at this or any other university. The word count excluding footnotes, tables, figures, bibliographies and appendices is approximately 90,724 words.

Signature

Date

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Abstract

A “policy world” is a complex and messy assemblage of peoples, places, events, processes, procedures, discourses and artefacts (Shore and Wright 2011). In this thesis I explore aspects of the intercultural world of Australian Indigenous policy by locating and following its “pulse” (Stoler 2009). A policy’s pulse is defined as the ways and means by which that policy moves in and through the policy world assemblage. In this thesis, I track this policy via an analysis of parliamentary articulations of Aboriginality and an examination of the self-governed presentations of three bureaucratic subjectivities who participate in Indigenous Affairs.

The journey begins in Canberra, Australia’s capital city, in the chambers of the House of Representatives and the Senate where I analyse the speech acts of parliamentarians. I identify the production of a particular “Regime of Truth” (Foucault [1977] 1980a) that frames Indigenous problems, articulates imagined solutions and presents the ideal Indigenous subjectivity. Significantly, the Regime of Truth is constructed through parliamentarians’ personal narratives about interactions with, and knowledge about, Indigenous people.

The thesis then turns to investigate the routine, ordinary and everyday activities of three groups of bureaucrats: senior public servants of Commonwealth departments and agencies who appear before Senate Estimate committees; employees of the Commonwealth Ombudsman who investigate complaints about government administration and conduct outreach complaint clinics to remote Indigenous communities; and Resident Service Providers who are the street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky 1980) (teachers, police officers and nurses) working and residing in remote communities.

I argue that certain documents and discourses are vital to the way these bureaucrats present themselves in policy spaces, enact policy processes and interact with Indigenous people. Further, by following the pulse of Indigenous policy I demonstrate how the political and bureaucratic figures examined in this thesis interact with and perpetuate forms of knowledge about Aboriginal people. Each figure presents this knowledge in different ways which, to varying degrees, impacts upon wider policy processes. This variety of perspectives of knowledge is mobilised in the concluding chapter where I draw the seemingly disparate political and bureaucratic actors and locations of the policy world together.

Ultimately, I argue that tracing the pulse of policy from conception in Canberra through to application in remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory is a step towards understanding the “cultural borderlands” of the Indigenous policy world; “the arenas of interaction and interchange” between Indigenous people, politicians and bureaucrats

(Cowlshaw 2003: 11) and the entanglements between forms of knowledge, truth and governance.

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Conclusion

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Introduction

Focus, Scope and the Questions this Thesis Addresses

A group of school-aged children sit in a circle on a mat in their classroom, ready to play a game of Chinese Whispers. One child thinks up a message and, cupping her hand around the ear of her friend, whispers “there’s a monkey up a tree.” Her friend replicates this by whispering what she heard into the ear of the child beside her. This process continues until all the children in the circle have listened to and quietly repeated the message they heard to the next child in line. The last child then declares out loud what she heard: “Jenny likes to eat cheese”, to the mirth and delight of the other children, who each heard something quite different. Habitually, the children chatter following this game as they exchange with each other the message that they thought they had heard. By debriefing in this way, the children can usually discern at what points around the circle the original message was subtly altered, thus resulting in the amusing and often completely bizarre message at the end.

The Indigenous policy cycle in Australia is analogous to a game of Chinese Whispers. On the following page, Figure One ¹ demonstrates the typical ‘players’ and Figure Two ² the ‘message stages’ that policy encounters on its journey from politicians to Indigenous locals.

¹ The references for the images depicted in this diagram are as follows: Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull (The Sydney Morning Herald 2014), Heads of the Australian Public Service departments 1901 (Australian Government 2014), remote police officer (Working Safe in Rural and Remote Australia 2015) and an Indigenous mother and child (Council of Australian Governments 2015b).

² There are many working models that describe the various stages and processes relating to the development and implementation of policy. Typically, these include the following: agenda setting, development, implementation, evaluation and monitoring. For further details see the following literature: (Anderson 1994, Dye 1978, Howlett and Ramesh 1995, Young and Quinn 2002).

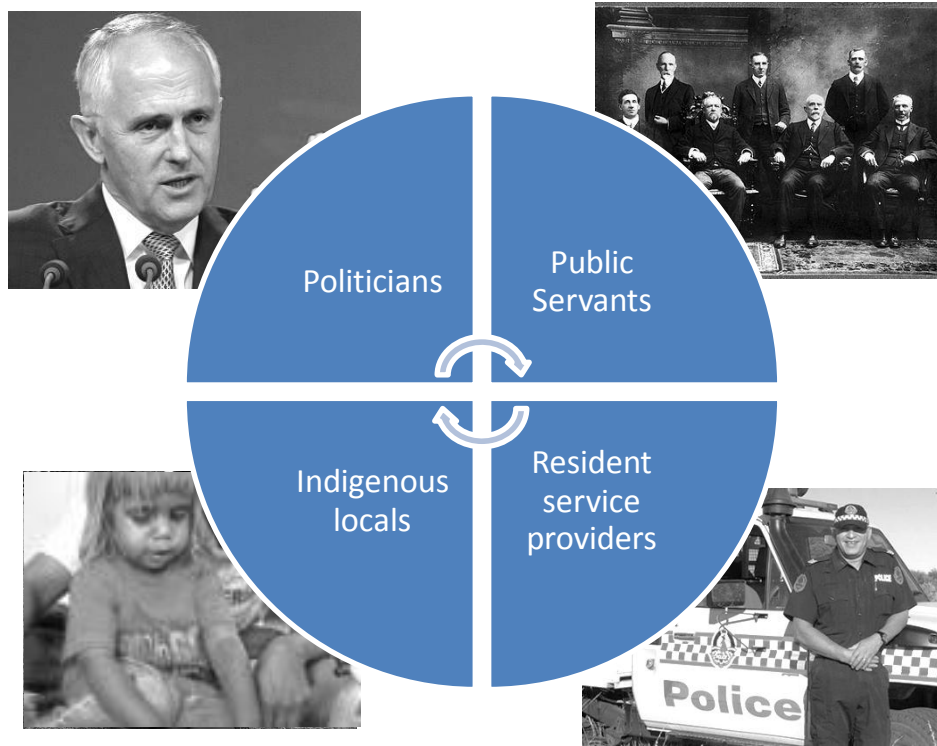


Figure 1: Figures in the Policy Cycle

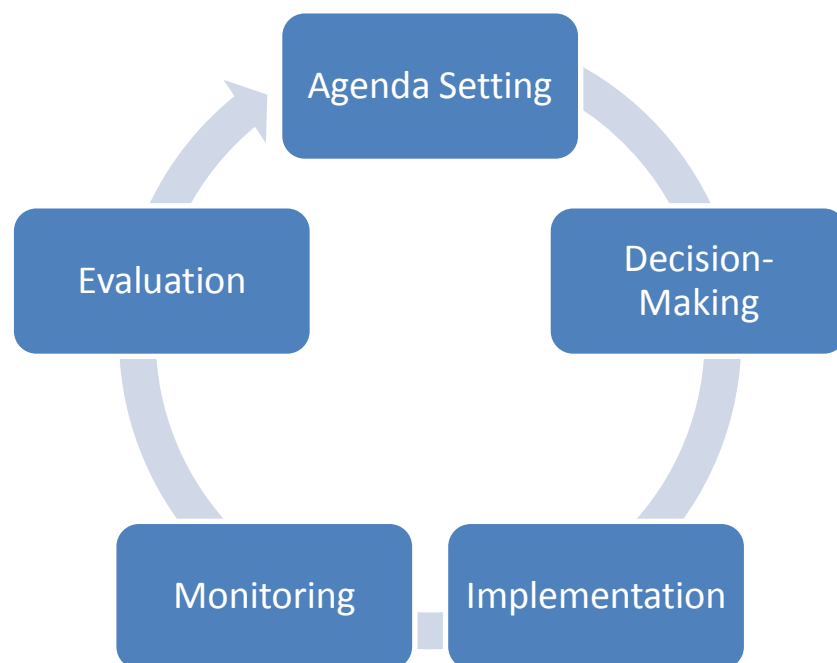


Figure 2: The Policy Cycle

Comparable to the distorted final message in the childhood game of Chinese Whispers, the aspirations that politicians hold for Indigenous Australians are articulated and written into policies that, when finally implemented on the ground in communities, rarely accomplish the desired results that the architects of policy originally intended. However, unlike the children who interrogate each other to establish where the errors in the message occurred, Australian scholarship on Indigenous policy seems to focus on either the first messenger (the politicians) or the last recipient (the Indigenous locals) (Bolger 1987a, b, Sullivan 1996a, von Sturmer 1981, Batty 2005, Lea 2008, Folds 2001, Rowse 1995, Austin-Broos 2009, Sutton 2009, Kowal 2010, Peterson 2010, Altman 2010, 2001, Stanner 1968, Holcombe 2008, Smith and Hunt 2008). Only a handful of scholars have investigated the other players in this game — the bureaucrats (Gray and Sanders 2006, Rowse 2000, 1996, Lea 2008, Sullivan 2011, Dexter 2008, Smith 2008, Kowal 2015). Yet, bureaucrats are vital players in the intercultural spaces where Indigenous policy is encountered and enacted; from public servants in government departments, employees of subsidiary agencies, offices and services, through to the teachers, police officers and nurses working at the coal-face of policy in communities. Indeed, as Figure Two demonstrates, apart from agenda setting, which remains the prerogative of politicians, the majority of the policy stages primarily rely on bureaucrats and/or bureaucratic processes.

The overarching research question driving the thesis is: How does Indigenous policy move from Canberra to remote Northern Territory communities? The substantive chapters of this thesis ask the following sub-set of questions: What governs the behaviour and actions of bureaucrats in the course of their work? How do bureaucrats present themselves within a particular policy context? And what are the ramifications of such bureaucratic presentations and performances on wider Indigenous policy processes and the lived experiences of remote Indigenous Australians?

To address these questions I undertake an investigation into the relationship between bureaucrats, bureaucratic processes and documents. This provides an important perspective of the governing power of policy and the knowledge and truths that circulate in the Indigenous “policy world” (Shore and Wright 2011). By studying bureaucrats, anthropology can contribute toward a greater understanding of “the interwoven threads of contemporary power relations and to grasp the strategic operation and intelligibility of regimes of practices” (Dean 2010: 265) that constitute the Australian Indigenous policy world.³

³ Michael Dean (2010: 265) states that scholars should study bureaucrats and political elites because it is their sense of rationality that creates the programs and policies which affect collective society.

Analysing documents can help identify the circulation of discourses of knowledge and truth and also enable us to view the governing power of bureaucratic processes and products at work in policy contexts.⁴ Thus, when I combine an examination of people (the bureaucrats) with processes and products (such as parliamentary proceedings, Codes of Conduct and Work Practice Manuals), two points of interest become evident: first, we can trace how a discourse of knowledge and truth, originally articulated in the chambers of Parliament House, is enacted and/or experienced on the ground in remote communities; and second, we can identify the contradictions, paradoxes and mismatches between knowledge and practice that are present in policy processes when we examine the bureaucrats themselves. In essence, the approach I take in this thesis contributes to an understanding of how policy on paper transitions into practical action and traverses cultural boundaries. This provides a perspective of how policy travels from Canberra to remote communities.

There are few studies in Australia that coherently map the multiple and distinctive groups of state employees or investigate documents and discourses as intercultural sites of knowledge production, reproduction and power. Prominent Australian anthropologists Gillian Cowlishaw (2003: 11, 2010: 51), Tess Lea (2010, 2008) and Patrick Sullivan (2011: 90) address and emphasise why it is important to remedy such absences in the literature and suggest research avenues for anthropologists to pursue. Cowlishaw's (2010: 51) observational complaint is that "few ethnographies deal with the characteristic forms of interaction between the local state and local people, let alone the history and the effects of such engagements." Thus, one of her calls to the discipline is,

...to trace the workings of neoliberal energies and impulses to their concrete local forms, not just in some selected actions, random consequences or abstract policies.... [and] instead of trying to explain Aboriginal people to the state, we need to understand the social engineering the state is involved in, and our own part in it... we need to develop a *cultural* understanding of mainstream Australian society, not only as ideology or policy, but also as embodied practice (Cowlishaw 2010: 51-52).

In agreement, Sullivan (2011: 90) suggests focusing on studying bureaucratic cultures and Cris Shore and Susan Wright (2011) propose that an anthropological study of policy should focus on the impact that policy has on peoples' lives and everyday behaviour. In particular, Shore and Wright (2011: 8) advocate for an interpretive approach that ascribes meaning to policy impacts and exchanges. They are not overly concerned with the end result of policy — for example, seeing policy as "a problem-solving device" (Shore and Wright 2011: 11) — but

⁴ Linguists and historians have long identified documents as ethnographic artefacts and sites of knowledge production.

rather, direct anthropologists' attention to policy interactions and processes. In doing so, anthropologists reveal deeper understandings of how policies morph and move, are given life and agency and how the bureaucracy contributes to this movement.

In considering the works of Cowlshaw (2010), Lea (2010, 2008), Sullivan (2011) and Wright and Shore (2011) this thesis follows the pulse of Indigenous policy as it moves from Canberra to remote Indigenous communities. Ann Stoler (2009) uses the word "pulse" to describe the animation of an otherwise seemingly lifeless artefact: the archive. In her ethnography *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* she explains that, "I treat archives not as repositories of state power but as unquiet movements in a field of force, as restless realignments and readjustments of people and the beliefs to which they were tethered, as spaces in which the senses and the affective course through the seeming abstractions of political rationalities" (Stoler 2009: 32-33). For this thesis, the pulse of Indigenous policy is not only located in government promises, legislative Acts and departmental actions, but courses through the work and presented subjectivities of four policy world figures.⁵ The figures I examine are: parliamentarians debating recent Indigenous policy in the House of Representatives and Senate, senior public servants of Commonwealth departments appearing before formal parliamentary committees, employees of the Commonwealth Ombudsman (a government subsidiary office) and Resident Service Providers who implement policy on the ground in communities.

I discover that each subject willingly adopts forms of neoliberal governance — through Parliamentary Acts, Codes of Conduct, Work Practice Manuals and discourses of their own creation — which impact upon how they engage in particular Indigenous policy spaces. Further, subjectivities are presented and managed as claiming to possess the knowledge and truth that will aid Indigenous well-being through direct or indirect changes to policy; this is despite each group remaining somewhat removed and distant from Indigenous perspectives. Indeed, as Lea (original emphasis in 2008: 15) observed of bureau-professionals working in Indigenous health contexts, "the idea that Aboriginal people *need our help* is a foundational assumption."

The remainder of this Introduction provides an overview of the difficulties I encountered when entering this field of study, the historical and situational context to Indigenous policy, the bureaucratic figures and the methodologies deployed in this thesis. The theoretical

⁵ Subjectivity means more than just a shared identity in the context of this thesis. I follow Kowal's (2015: 33) understanding of the term in defining subjectivity as "the sum of all the knowledge, beliefs, actions and technologies that make it possible to have a particular identity."

approaches derived from Michel Foucault concerning neoliberalism and governmentality and Erving Goffman's front stage/backstage are given substantial attention in Chapter One.

Significance of the Study: Overcoming Barriers

There is very little scholarship concerning the cross-cultural practices of bureaucrats, bureaucratic documents and discourses of knowledge and truth within the Indigenous policy world in Australia. However, this absence in the literature is not unique to the Australian experience. As Anya Bernstein and Elizabeth Mertz (2011: 6) observe: "anthropologists have been slow to treat state bureaucracies as a site for ethnography and bureaucrats as participants in a complex social arena." These authors surmise that this is because "the state itself remains an elusive object to study, difficult to approach both practically and conceptually" (Bernstein and Mertz 2011: 6). This statement summarises my initial attempts to conduct research in the bureaucratic policy field. The personal narrative below details the difficulties I encountered and the innovation required to overcome logistical barriers.

My original research proposal sought to examine the Canberra public servant's experience of working with Indigenous policy. In recent years, there has been much criticism throughout Australia surrounding policies implemented in the Northern Territory, primarily Commonwealth policies such as the Northern Territory Emergency Response (the Intervention) and Stronger Futures. Along with criticism directed at prime ministers, governments and ministers, public servants were also blamed for the perceived lack of progress towards 'advancing' and 'improving' outcomes in Indigenous communities.

I noticed that the experiences of public servants in Indigenous Affairs were under-represented in the academic literature or described in unfounded and undeserved ways in other written forms. For example, criticism has come from interest groups, academics (including anthropologists), Indigenous communities, political parties and politicians. Yet, the personal experience of public servants is seldom communicated in meaningful ways. More often, public servants in Indigenous Affairs, due to lack of representation, contend with being represented by the often negative and defamatory sweeping generalisation of 'the department' or 'those in Canberra'. Thus, I sought to view the policy world of Indigenous Affairs through the eyes of the public servants, specifically, to better understand their motivations and aspirations for pursuing this career path.

I was anecdotally told by a senior anthropologist about a recent comment made to him by a senior public servant who worked in Indigenous Affairs. The public servant and the senior anthropologist had a conversation regarding the abounding negative perceptions concerning public servants who work with Indigenous policy. This public servant suggested to the anthropologist that it would be valuable to ethnographically study the Indigenous Affairs department so that the public servants' point of view could be better understood. Encouraged by this story, I developed a research proposal that aimed to examine how incoming graduates are initiated into the department and whether this cohort develops, shapes into or adopts a particular public servant identity. The aim was to generate an ethnography of the 'peopled' public service. I anticipated that the experiences and events this cohort participated in would shape how they approached situations and issues relating to Indigenous Affairs in the upcoming years.

I secured a meeting with the Deputy Secretary of the Commonwealth department responsible for Indigenous programs and proposed the project to him. From the onset it was obvious that any interest in the Indigenous issues of this department was a red flag against the project. After a period of negotiation I agreed not to focus specifically on Indigenous areas. Instead I would be open to examining the sweep of social policies the department was responsible for. Discussing this alteration — the removal of the word 'Indigenous' from the proposal — instantly resulted in the Deputy Secretary appearing to relax.

Along with the word Indigenous, the Deputy Secretary had a further hesitation at the prospect of having an outside critical eye, 'roaming the department halls.' Not only was he suspicious of the research focus and methods, but he was also concerned that a researcher would have entry to the department's backstage spaces (Goffman 1959) and access to all manner of documents. Again, assurances were made that I would conduct participant observation by being treated as a graduate intern and therefore, would not be "lurking in hallways and bothering senior staff."

With regard to documents, my proposal addressed the department's right to be protective of classified and confidential information. I proposed adhering to the same constraints as graduate interns and also stated that I would be bound to the same confidentiality and privacy policies of the Australian Public Service and this department. In addition, I addressed the veto rights that the department would have over the results of the research, stating that I would allow the department to have a draft of the thesis reviewed prior to its submission for examination. This would be conducted by a relevant member of staff to check for any confidential information that may have unintentionally been disclosed.

Further caveats included a statement that the research focus was on the personhood of the graduate intern, not specific policies. Thus, the revised and final proposal I sent to the department a few days after this meeting, stipulated that my focus would only be on the motivations, aspirations and bureaucratic identity formation of incoming graduate interns. As a result of the department's concerns, any focus on Indigenous policy was erased from the proposal. However, despite the changes and restrictions I had agreed to place on the project I was politely informed by the department in writing a two weeks later that they would "unfortunately not be able to participate at this time" (Burns, J., Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs to Checketts, J., 17 September 2012). The reason provided stated that the department did not want to over-burden the new graduates and neither did they want to "disrupt the structure of our program nor challenge its integrity" (Burns, J., Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs to Checketts, J., 17 September 2012).

This was not the only rejection I received in the first year of this project. I also approached various government and non-government agencies and offices, as well as the shire offices of some remote Indigenous communities, seeking to conduct research that investigated bureaucratic processes, products and procedures. I soon came to agree with Bernstein and Mertz (2011: 6) that, "the state itself remains an elusive object to study, difficult to approach both practically and conceptually", but would add, unless a researcher has first accumulated prior forms of cultural capital that give them access to the bureaucratic field; for example, Lea (2008), Elizabeth Ganter (2010) and Kowal (2015) had already established connections and experience while working within particular departments/agencies prior to donning the identity of academic, and Roderick Rhodes (2005) is a prominent and well respected professor.

Refusing to concede to the barriers and limitations that this "elusive object" presented, I conducted a wide historical, literary and methodological survey which enabled me to develop an approach that led to this thesis' investigation of the pulse of the Indigenous policy world that incorporates a bureaucratic perspective. This approach is outlined in the remainder of this Introduction. Throughout the discussion I present the different pathways that Commonwealth Indigenous policy moves along from Canberra to remote Northern Territory Indigenous communities. This includes the work and subjectivities of the three bureaucratic figures examined in this thesis as well as the bureaucratic processes, procedures and artefacts that these figures engage with and enact, at different points throughout the policy cycle.

Historical Overview: Australian Indigenous Policy

Since colonisation, Australia's Indigenous peoples have been subject to government policies that have sought to manage and control their conduct and lives. These attempts can be categorised into four distinct policy eras or phases: protection, assimilation, self-determination and normalisation (Sullivan 2011). Parliamentarians of each era harness a form of political rationality to justify policy actions aimed at altering the lives and behaviour of Indigenous people who are consistently viewed as problematic.

The protection era, 1880–1940 (Altman and Rowse 2005: 160), coincided with western societal acceptance that biological determinism was a scientific fact. Ideas promulgated, such as social Darwinism, racial hierarchies and phrenology, were highly popular (Begley 2010: 12). This alleged knowledge confirmed the settlers' belief that Aboriginal people and their culture could not survive alongside European expansion. Consequently, the extinction of Aboriginal people was inevitable and unpreventable. State and territory policies supported this view by corralling Indigenous people onto government established reserves where it was intended they would live out the remainder of their days in relative peace, yet remain under the firm control of the government (Altman and Sanders 1991: 1). Each state and territory legislated "special bodies of law which set Aboriginies apart from the larger population of colonial citizens in a separate legal category" (Altman and Sanders 1991: 1). These Aboriginal Protection Acts outlined "punitive and restrictive" policies (Dudgeon et al. 2010: 30) "for dealing with its Aboriginal inhabitants" (Altman and Sanders 1991: 1), often appointing and empowering bureaucrats known as Chief Protector's or Protectors of Aborigines, who acted on Indigenous peoples' behalf (Dudgeon et al. 2010: 30, Altman and Sanders 1991: 1).

However, it soon became apparent that Indigenous populations were not dying out as anticipated. In response, governments began to adopt alternative strategies to manage the increasing half-caste population which marks the beginning of the assimilation era, 1930–1970 (Bennett 1999). It was thought that half-caste children — the result of intimacies between white men and Aboriginal women — would be able to assimilate successfully into European society if kept separate from their full-blooded relatives (Gray 2007: 32).⁶ Accordingly, subsequent state and territory governments began the systematic removal of half-caste children from their families by force (Short 2008: 5). These children were relocated to

⁶ The Aboriginal Acts that governed Indigenous people in Australia classified, defined and treated Aboriginal people differently depending on their skin colour. Classifications were "'half-castes', 'crossbreeds', 'quadroon' and 'octoroon'" (Short 2008: 89). Half-caste children, having the higher proportion of white blood in them, were considered more likely to thrive under assimilation policies, hence the government's priority in removing these children from their families.

government institutions, homes and missions, where they had limited contact with their families.

During this assimilation era, particularly after World War II, Indigenous people began to demand access to equal civil, political and social rights, as well as access to secure reserve and land tenure for economic development (Rowse 2000, Coombs and Robinson 1996). Consequently, from the mid-1960s Indigenous policy began to shift from assimilation based policies into a significantly different policy phase called self-determination. The 1967 Referendum, which gave the Commonwealth the power to legislate for Aboriginal people and to be counted in the census, signalled the beginning of this era. Altman and Sanders (1991: 4) state that "[t]he success of the 1967 referendum opened up the possibility of the Commonwealth Government becoming more directly involved in policy towards Aborigines on a national scale."

Shortly after the Referendum, the Office and Council for Aboriginal Affairs was created (National Archives of Australia 2015) to "translate the 'mandate of 1967' into Commonwealth policies" (Rowse 2000:20). The Council consisted of three men: ex Reserve Bank Governor HC 'Nugget' Coombs, anthropologist WEH Stanner and career bureaucrat Barrie Dexter. These men sought an increase in funding for Indigenous programs while publicly voicing a strong collective Aboriginal desire to live independently from mainstream society (Rowse 2000: 5). In summary, the Council called for governments to change the direction of policy by favouring Indigenous self-determination.⁷

When the Whitlam Labor Government was elected in 1972 it established the Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs, combining the Office of Aboriginal Affairs with the Aboriginal Welfare Branch of the Northern Territory administration (Altman and Sanders 1991: 5) and eventually took responsibility for the Aboriginal welfare authorities in all states with the exception of Queensland (Sanders 2002b: 3). The Department "pressured" and "persuaded" agencies "to take a more active service delivery role" in areas such as "housing, health, and education" (Altman and Sanders 1991: 6-7), while also encouraging the development of Indigenous organisations at local and regional levels to manage community affairs and "deliver government-funded services" (Sanders 2002: 3). Thus, there were various national committees and boards subsequently created whose objective was to empower Indigenous people. The Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) is the most well-known as it

⁷ Upon the Council's demise it concluded that "the way forward was to recognise and support the right for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to increasingly control their own affairs and to share freely in negotiations to determine the pattern of their relationship with 'mainstream society'" (Rowse 2000: 7).

secured from the Commonwealth Government substantial fiscal and bureaucratic responsibilities for the management of Indigenous Affairs.⁸

ATSIC was established in 1990 and was an amalgamation of the Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs and the Aboriginal Development Commission and was “the Federal government’s primary adviser on Indigenous affairs” (Dillon 1996: 89). ATSIC was comprised of democratically elected representatives from different regions across Australia (Coombs and Robinson 1996: 11, Smith 1996: 23-24).⁹ Senior public servant Mike Dillon (1996: 92) emphasises that at its conception ATSIC “involved a truly radical reorientation of governmental institutions relating to Indigenous affairs, one that transfers considerable responsibilities and functions to Indigenous interest.” ATSIC was envisioned as a means for government to empower Aboriginal people (Rowse 1996: 42); however, it “required a large measure of government power to implement and enforce [it]” (Batty 2005: 215).

By the Howard Government’s third term the criticisms levelled at ATSIC and its representatives had reached a peak.¹⁰ A review was undertaken and recommendations made for reforms to address identified problems (Strakosch 2011: 66). However, Prime Minister John Howard, with bipartisan support from the Labor Party, decided to abolish ATSIC in 2004 and ATSIC’s programs were integrated into relevant Commonwealth departments (Altman 2014). This was one of many actions that the Howard Government took which saw a shift in the national discourse from self-determination and reconciliation towards mutual obligation, shared responsibility and normalisation. This shift culminated in the implementation of Shared Responsibility Agreements, Regional Partnership Agreements, a whole-of-government-approach toward the implementation of services and the Northern Territory Emergency Response.¹¹

The Howard Government thus ushered in normalisation, an era that I argue in Chapter Two, aims to align Indigenous policy, people and communities with the values and norms of settler Australia. This is evident in the discourse of normalisation that characterised the Northern

⁸ In between the Council for Aboriginal Affairs and the Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Commission was the National Aboriginal Consultative Committee later known as the National Aboriginal Conference. For more information see Altman and Sanders (1991) and Sanders (2002)

⁹ In 1993 these regions were “reduced from 60 to 36 and grouped into 17 zones” with each zone having a member represented on the national panel (Coombs and Robinson 1996: 11).

¹⁰ For further reading, the book *Shooting the Banker: Essays on ATSIC and Self-Determination* is a volume of essays anticipating the future problems and demise of ATSIC (Finlayson and Dale 1996, Sullivan 1996b, Coombs and Robinson 1996, Dillon 1996, Smith 1996).

¹¹ For a detailed analysis of these policies see Elizabeth Strakosch’s (2015) recent book *Neoliberal Indigenous Policy: Settler Colonialism and the 'Post-Welfare' State* which provides a thorough analysis of Australia’s Indigenous policy evolution and shift towards a neoliberal paradigm (2015).

Territory Emergency Response (the Intervention) of 2007. The report titled *Ampa Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle: Little Children are Sacred* (Wild and Anderson 2007) was the catalyst for this emergency declaration. At the request of the Northern Territory Government the authors of the report investigated allegations of child sexual abuse in Aboriginal communities. In June 2007, Prime Minister John Howard (2007) stated that, based on the findings of the *Little Children are Sacred* report, Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory were to be categorised as a “national state of emergency.” Using this report as a springboard, the Howard Government rushed through legislation that established the Northern Territory Emergency Response; a Commonwealth led intervention into 73 prescribed communities in the Northern Territory. The passing of this legislation involved several controversial measures, such as welfare quarantining and the compulsory acquisition of land, which would last for five years (Hinkson 2007, Hunter 2007). The Intervention’s policy programs and measures were aimed at modifying Indigenous behaviour, actions and livelihoods.

Howard’s strategy to garner bipartisan support through deploying the language of a national ‘emergency’ was repeated by Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in 2008 “to quickly implement unprecedented and enduring policy reform” (Altman 2014: 120). Rudd championed the Council of Australian Government’s¹² nationwide reform agenda: Closing the Gap in Indigenous Disadvantage.¹³ In doing so, the national conversation regarding Indigenous policy expanded from a direct focus on the inequalities and problems present in the Northern Territory, to include all Indigenous Australians across the country. However, the perception that Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory were places and people that still required targeted government intervention continued with the implementation of Stronger Futures in 2012. This policy agenda ushered in another suite of controversial legislation and measures that enables the Commonwealth to continue to isolate and intervene in Indigenous peoples' lives.

¹² The Council of Australian Governments (the Council) is “the peak intergovernmental forum in Australia” (Council of Australian Governments 2014). The members of the Council include the Prime Minister, the state Premiers, territory Chief Ministers, and the President of the Australian Local Government Association (Council of Australian Governments 2014).

¹³ This reform is implemented via the National Indigenous Reform Agreement between the Commonwealth, State, and Territory governments that set out the Council’s framework for achieving the Closing the Gap reform targets. The Closing the Gap reform consists of six targets that aim to reduce Indigenous disadvantage and inequality with non-Indigenous Australians in the following areas: life expectancy, mortality rates, access to early childhood education, improve school literacy and numeracy, students completing Year 12, and improvement in employment outcomes. There are seven ‘building blocks’ that measure the Council’s progress towards achieving the six targets which are implemented via National Partnership Agreements.

These historical changes to Commonwealth Indigenous policy administration and service delivery draw an important, but as yet largely unexamined, spotlight on the role of the bureaucrat and bureaucratic knowledge. This is particularly evident when considering the merging of ATSIC staff into the wider Australian Public Service. As noted above, ATSIC staff and programs were incorporated into existing Commonwealth departments and portfolios upon ATSIC's demise. However, since the 1980s, the Australian Public Service had undergone a significant restructure and refocus. New Public Management principles were introduced into the public service. This drew principles and values of management from the business and private sectors and applied these to government administration. The significant resulting change was that departments sought managers who were skilled in administration and management without necessarily being an expert in their portfolio field. Thus, when ATSIC was abolished and the Indigenous programs were transferred to various government departments and portfolios, this merging with an already refocused public service adversely affected the Indigenous specific knowledge base that had been previously feeding into ATSIC's programs. Indigenous policy became populated with non-expert managers who developed, advised and implemented Indigenous specific programs as they would any other program in any other department or portfolio.

Strakosch (2015: 85) explains that despite 1300 ATSIC staff members following their programs to the newly assigned Commonwealth departments, "due to low morale and the way personnel shifts were managed, a large number chose to leave the public service altogether." This resulted in "a massive loss of Indigenous corporate knowledge" (Dodson in Curtis 2005: 104, quoted in Strakosch 2015: 86). Indeed, one senior public servant whom I interviewed for this project has over 30 years of experience working with Indigenous policy in Australia. He has observed that most of his colleagues lacked first-hand experience and connection with regional or remote Indigenous peoples and communities. He surmises that no one but himself and perhaps a handful of others, would be classified as experts when it comes to Indigenous policy.

Having provided this brief historical overview of Commonwealth Indigenous policy in Australia I now turn to the three bureaucratic figures that this thesis examines and provide an overview of each figure's history and place within the Indigenous policy world. To substantiate my observation that only a handful of Australian scholars have focused on bureaucrats within the Indigenous policy world I situate these three figures within wider international scholarship on policy, bureaucrats and elites. From this review I have selected three methodological approaches which are detailed in the last section of this Introduction.

The Bureaucratic Figures

The Senior Executive Public Servant

Anthropological scholarship on the Australian Public Service is limited, yet there is substantial information on the history, development and current status of the public service as an institution within the disciplines of history and political science. Since Federation in 1901, the Australian Public Service has been tasked with implementing Commonwealth policy. Beginning with a handful of departments run by a small number of staff, the public service has grown considerably in size, influence and the types of roles it performs (Public Service and Merit Protection Commission 2001: 2-4).

There are three categories of employment in the Australian Public Service that dictate work level standards and remuneration, while also specifying what characteristics are desirable for each level of employment. These are: the Senior Executive Service, the Executive Level and the Australian Public Service level.¹⁴ The parliament holds the prerogative to pass legislation relating to policies and it is the primary role of the public servant to create the programs and activities needed to implement those policies (Thomas 2009: 379, Public Service and Merit Protection Commission 2001: 70). Other work activities of a public servant include the following: providing a range of options and advice to ministers, maintaining an in-depth knowledge of the details and information regarding numerous programs, implementing and monitoring programs, conducting reviews, preparing legislation and liaising, negotiating and consulting with relevant stakeholders.

The public servant operates in relative anonymity, and this anonymity is the primary factor sparking the concerns that arose in the 1970s.¹⁵ Criticism was levelled at the Australian Public Service for shielding the public servant from being held accountable for their performance, the resources they used and the countless decisions and actions they executed daily on behalf of their minister (Stewart 2002: 70-71). In place of the public servant it was the minister who was held responsible by the parliament and public for the speeches, letters, question-time materials and the multitudes of reports, briefs and statements relating to policy decisions and program implementation that were written and compiled by the public servant but all penned

¹⁴ There are different levels of employment within each of these categories: the Senior Executive Service has three levels, the Executive Level has two levels and the Australian Public Service has six levels.

¹⁵ At this time, public servants' anonymity and lack of accountability were of similar concern in other countries (Thompson 1997: 144).

under the ministers name (Mulgan 2007: 572, Thomas 2009: 379).¹⁶ Hence, the 1974-1976 Coombs Royal Commission on Government Administration¹⁷ and the 1982 Reid Review of Commonwealth Administration¹⁸ both proposed that public officials should be held accountable for their actions and the advice given to ministers (Public Service and Merit Protection Commission 2001, Miragliotta, Errington, and Barry 2010: 124, Walter and Strangio 2007). These reviews and commissions were all founded “on a fundamentally ethical concern for the individual’s right to be treated fairly by the state and to know what bureaucrats were doing in their name” (Whitton 1994: 43). To achieve this, the Coombs Commission and the Reid Review suggested that the Australian Public Service adopt the private sector principles of New Public Management. The purpose for this recommendation was to increase the performance and responsiveness of the public service towards ministers and the citizens of Australia (Stewart 2002: 59).

While not the first wave of reforms to hit the Australian Public Service, New Public Management was the first comprehensive attempt to mirror the managerialism of the private sector. The term managerialism refers to “the application of private sector principles of efficiency and goal-orientation to the public sector” (Miragliotta, Errington, and Barry 2010: 124) and became the “ruling paradigm” of the 1980s and 1990s in Australia (Yeatman 1990: 34). The reforms included down-sizing departments, shifting focus from inputs and processes to outcomes and outputs and adopting accrual accounting standards (Yeatman 1990). Additionally, the oversight of the Public Service Board was decreased in favour of allocating greater authority, freedom and responsibility to departmental heads and managers (Public Service and Merit Protection Commission 2001: 120).

With this shift from administration to a focus on management techniques, New Public Management affected both how the public servant “should understand their tasks and

¹⁶ A minister’s reliance on public servants is due to the minister not always being knowledgeable of their portfolio responsibilities. This is because Cabinet has a tendency to switch or merge portfolios and ministers around (Miragliotta, Errington et al. 2010, Stewart 2010). Hence, the public servant often has more expertise regarding a portfolio rather than the minister assigned to it.

¹⁷ The 1974-1976 Coombs Royal Commission was chaired by HC Coombs — the chair of the Council for Aboriginal Affairs. This commission agreed that the Australian Public Service should move towards adopting a private sector management approach to public administration, and further recommended that departmental decisions should be held to higher standards of accountability. The commission rejected the Westminster tradition where ministers are solely responsible for all decisions and instead recommended that public service officials should be held equally accountable for policy decisions and performance (Public Service and Merit Protection Commission 2001).

¹⁸ The Reid Review was chaired by John Boyd Reid and focused on assessing financial management in the public service. This review focused on the financial processes, procedures and results of the public service and discussed how to establish greater efficiency. It recommended the adoption of the private sector’s managerialism principles of New Public Management (Public Service and Merit Protection Commission 2001).

identities” (Yeatman 1990: 17). This is clearly evident in the creation and operation of the Senior Executive Service in 1984. The intention of establishing the Senior Executive Service was to develop a specific and specialised “integrated, top-level policy advising and management group”, who would provide “wide strategic leadership in ideas, management and ethics” (Australian Public Service Commission 2015d). The main qualifications needed to enter this level of the public service still remain as expertise in management and the ability to lead.¹⁹

Thus, individuals are appointed to the Senior Executive Service on the basis of merit, experience and expertise in management and leadership and not necessarily knowledge of a policy area. Whereas prior to 1984 promotion to a higher level of the public service had previously been kept within the service, appointment to the Senior Executive Service was now open to applicants from outside the public service. This resulted in an injection of a “technical intelligentsia” of highly educated, experienced and skilled managers (Yeatman 1990: 18-19). The purpose of this new direction in appointments was “to make public agencies as responsive to their clients as private sector companies are to their customers” (Mulgan 2000:567). The Senior Executive Service, alongside their minister, were now held accountable and responsible for their department’s performance in achieving the policy objectives within the government’s budget (Yeatman 1990: 8). It is these top-level bureaucrats who appear as witnesses at Senate Estimates and are the focus for analysis in Chapter Three.

Senate Estimates are parliamentary committees that review and scrutinise the government’s proposed expenditure as set out in the appropriation Bills (Summers 2010: 79).²⁰ The purpose of Estimates is that the Senate will ensure that the government of the day is held accountable for its administrative and budget decisions as well as the public officials in charge of providing government with advice and executing government decisions, policies and programs. Indeed, the two key words used by almost every commentator for the role of the Senate and the importance of Senate Estimates are *scrutiny* and *review*; hence, reviewing legislation and keeping government accountable are the key interests and primary role of senators

¹⁹ Acting Public Service Commissioner Carmel McGregor stated at the 25th anniversary of the Senior Executive Service that this level comprises “the key leadership group” within the Australian Public Service (Australian Public Service Commission 2009).

²⁰ The appropriation Bills are in reference to the government’s Budget and concern the following:

1. Continuing expenditure
2. New policy and capital expenditures and grants to states
3. Funding for departments

The Budget is the government’s taxing and expenditure projections for the financial year and is presented in the three appropriation Bills. The Senate Estimates are held at the end of May after the government’s proposed Budget has been announced. These Estimates often centre around the Budget. Supplementary Estimates are held in October and February. Thomas (2009) and Stewart (2010) provide further information about Australia’s Budget process.

(Miragliotta, Errington, and Barry 2010, Summers 2010, Stewart 2010, Thomas 2009, Tynan and Williams 2006, Brenton 2010). Estimate hearings and the key documents involved in this process, — Annual Reports and Portfolio Budget Statements — are open to the public. These two documents are publicly available online following the presentation of the Budget in May by the treasurer. The Senate Estimates are televised via parliamentary television and are often watched live by ministerial advisors, the department and the media. Hansard transcripts and televised recordings of the hearings are also available online soon after the committee ends.

In the early years of Estimates questioning by senators was limited to the appropriation Bills. However, over time the scope of questioning has expanded “to cover almost any matter relating to the operations of government” (Bartos 2005), with senators’ questions now covering a wide range of topics (Miragliotta, Errington, and Barry 2010: 112). Thus, at Estimates, ministers, flagged by the senior public servants from their departments, can be questioned by senators on the government’s budget, outcomes, programs and any other topic a senator chooses to address.

In chapter Three I examine the political games that senators attempt to play with senior public servants during Senate Estimates committees on the Cross-Portfolio on Indigenous Matters and identify where and how the effects of the Estimates process are experienced by these bureaucrats.

The Commonwealth Ombudsman

From the late 1960s to the early 1970s extensive reviews of the entire executive, administrative, judicial and legislature systems were undertaken in Australia. It was first suggested in recommendations from the Kerr Review of 1971²¹ and the Bland Committee of 1973²² that Australia had a need to establish a Commonwealth Ombudsman. An Ombudsman is a government selected official who is responsible for investigating and attending to complaints made by individuals against a government department or agency (Commonwealth

²¹ The 1971 Commonwealth Administrative Review Committee, chaired by Sir John Kerr and known as the Kerr Review, led to the establishment of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal in 1976, the Commonwealth Ombudsman in 1977 and the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*. These institutions, Offices and Acts were established to provide checks and balances on law making, implementation and enforcement, so as “to assure parliament and citizens that misuses of ministerial and bureaucratic authority would be prevented and corrected” (Thomas 2009: 379).

²² Another Administrative Review Committee was headed by Sir Henry Bland and is distinguished by the Kerr Review by being known as the Bland Committee. Bland also headed another committee in 1975 (Wettenhall and Gourley 2009).

Ombudsman 2013).²³ Australia's first Ombudsman was appointed in 1971 in Western Australia and the *Commonwealth Ombudsman Act 1976* established an Ombudsman at the Commonwealth level (Commonwealth Ombudsman 2013).

The Commonwealth Ombudsman Bill was presented and read to the House of Representatives on 6 March 1975. Attorney-General Kep Enderby stated in his second reading speech that the establishment of a Commonwealth Ombudsman would supplement the already existing avenues for administrative review because the Ombudsman and his office would be an independent organisation, separate from the executive of government. The Ombudsman would work to promote greater transparency and accountability for government departments and agencies through being able to "go behind the screen hiding the department or authority from the citizen...The Ombudsman will be able to go behind that screen and report on what he finds" (House of Representatives 1975a: 1184-1185). Enderby anticipated that the establishment of an Ombudsman's Office would be "an important step towards the goal of improving the enjoyment of civil liberties by Australian citizens and towards better administration in Australia" (House of Representatives 1975a: 1186).

Parliamentarians discussed not just the Ombudsman's jurisdiction, role and powers, but also his character — the virtues and attributes an Ombudsman should ideally embody. Comments included a promise made by Prime Minister Gough Whitlam (1972) to appoint a Commonwealth Ombudsman "to act as the guardian of the people." Member of Parliament Robert Ellicott, quoting from the 1973 Bland Committee's report, stated that an Ombudsman must have "great humility and be devoid of prejudices and convictions" in addition to attaining a certain amount of "bulldog qualities" (House of Representatives 1975b: 285). Overall, five characteristics and personal qualities were envisioned by the politicians and senators. These include an Ombudsman being:

1. Independent
2. Impartial
3. Having a thorough understanding of government
4. Being accessible to the people
5. Endowed with the power to recommend and publicise but not to overrule and change.

²³ The word Ombudsman has been traced back to 1552 and means "representative" or "grievance person" in Swedish (Commonwealth Ombudsman 2013). The first parliamentary Ombudsman in Sweden was appointed in 1810. The Ombudsman's primary function has always been to "monitor the compliance of public authorities with the law" and "safeguard the rights of citizens" (Riksdagens Ombudsman 2013).

Indeed, the top two attributes listed above were stated in 1976 as the Ombudsman's "strength" (Senate 1976: 398). Significantly, when viewing contemporary Ombudsman websites from around the world, independence and impartiality unequivocally remain the most common attributes. Thus, it is the Ombudsman's status as independent of the executive, coupled with conducting complaint investigations with impartiality, that mark an individual or organisation worthy of the Ombudsman title.

The authority and authenticity of an Ombudsman's power is reliant on their reputation as being the embodiment of independence and impartiality. Chapter Four explains how the documents of the Office reign in individual staff, preventing them from tainting this representation and thus, tainting the products of their work – the conclusions of their investigations and reports. For when this identity is jeopardised, the credibility of the Office is called into question. Ombudsman credibility was threatened in 2011 when former Commonwealth Ombudsman Allan Asher provided Senator Sarah Hanson-Young with pre-empt questions during a Senate Estimate committee (Franklin 2011). The questions were pointedly in favour of the Australian Greens stance on refugees and enabled Asher to make particular statements about this controversial topic. Once Asher's actions had been exposed, he was forced to resign as Ombudsman.

The Ombudsman and his staff remain beholden to the same administrative and bureaucratic restraints and conditions as other public servants despite the Office being separate from the executive branch of government. For example, staff are subject to obey the laws and regulations set out in the *Public Service Act 1999*, including upholding the Australian Public Service Values and Code of Conduct. The Ombudsman and his staff must also perform the same procedures and responsibilities as other public servants, such as, appearing before Senate Estimates committees and producing Annual Reports and Portfolio Budget Statements. Further, as the Ombudsman's Office is ensconced within the Prime Minister and Cabinet portfolio, the Office is reliant on funding allocated to them by the government. Although the Ombudsman is not answerable to the minister, the Office remains in a vulnerable position as they are exposed to the same budget constraints and controls via Cabinet as other institutional bodies and departments. This places the Office in a somewhat precarious position. Chapter Four discusses the effect budget restraints has had on the Office's ability to conduct Indigenous outreach activities frequently and thoroughly.

Apart from information on official websites and a few select studies and dated narratives there is little elsewhere that concerns Ombudsmen (Dewar 2011, Jacoby 1995, Oosting 1995, Rowat 1985, Stacey 1978, Zagoria 1988).

Resident Service Providers

Resident Service Providers live in Indigenous communities and are employed in a variety of predominantly white-collar government jobs. They resemble Michael Lipsky's (1980) "street-level bureaucrats": teachers, police, social workers, nurses and doctors. Lipsky's (1980) book, *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services*, focuses on the various street-level bureaucrats in America who are involved in the delivery of health, education, law and welfare services and programs. He observes that the fundamental similarity between these vocations is that "citizens directly experience government through them and their actions *are* the policies provided by government in important respects" (original emphasis in Lipsky 1980: xvi). It is the direct contact that street-levels have with citizens that sets them apart from other types of bureaucrats. Similar vocations are prevalent on the ground in remote Indigenous communities that require bureaucrats to implement Commonwealth policies and interact directly with Indigenous locals.

American-based scholar Celeste Watkins-Hayes (2009) has conducted sociological research that focuses on the experiences of welfare officers in the service delivery of new welfare reform policies. She observes that street-level bureaucrats are often overlooked and ignored in research. In explanation, she notes that "rarely" are frontline workers asked "to talk candidly about [reform] issues and to ponder how major policy shifts as well as inequalities within and outside of their institutions affect their work" (Watkins-Hayes 2009: 10). Thus, her focus is not only on the street-level bureaucrat's interaction with clients but draws attention to how professional identities are created and shaped by institutional change (Watkins-Hayes 2009: 10).

Watkins-Hayes discovers that the reforms "created opportunities for street-level bureaucrats to rethink, redefine and represent a host of intertwining identities" (Watkins-Hayes 2009: 12). These identities then affected how her participants would perform service delivery and what service delivery to the poor, meant for staff (Watkins-Hayes 2009: 50-53). She observes that, "Professional identities, as interpretations of formally prescribed job designs, will always be infused with actors' own meanings, goals and commitments as they create day-to-day capacities of action. Individuals therefore may never wholeheartedly adopt institutional decrees or may offer competing presentations of them." Throughout her research, Watkins-Hayes (2009: 200) is mapping a particular bureaucratic culture, but also tracing one path that the reform policy has taken.

The Resident Service Providers I interview in Chapter Five reflect the street-level bureaucrats discussed in Watkins-Hayes' and Lipsky's research. In this chapter I examine how bureaucratic

identity in remote Indigenous communities is fused to the street-level bureaucrat's specific occupational task. From these tasks, I discover how individuals come to possess and articulate a particular form of local knowledge that enables the Resident Service Provider to make sense of their place within communities. This local knowledge is asserted as being distinct from that of visiting bureaucrats and politicians from Canberra; despite the Resident Service Provider's direct involvement in implementing the policies that Canberra creates.

The data in Chapter Five is collated from observations and interactions with visiting bureaucrats and street-level bureaucrats in three different Indigenous communities in the Top End of the Northern Territory. The scope of these visits allowed me to access different street-level bureaucrats working in a variety of occupations including teachers, nurses, clinic managers, police officers, shop assistants and managers, maintenance workers, administrators and shire managers. The data in this chapter is highly significant as there is little available scholarship on the perspectives of white-collar workers with the exception of one rather scathing personal memoir (Jordan 2005)²⁴ and a few other examples (Mahood 2007, 2012, Haynes 2013, Folds 2001, Kowal 2015, Moran 2016).

Unlike the bureaucrats in Chapters Three and Four the street-level bureaucrats in Chapter Five are not connected specifically to the Australian Public Service, despite Resident Service Providers working within the public sphere. Thus, Resident Service Providers are not bound to the *Public Service Act 1999* Code of Conduct and Values.²⁵ Although Resident Service Providers do willingly choose to adhere to certain work-based principles and guidelines so that they remain employed in their chosen profession, participants did not openly acknowledge or demonstrate that such documents govern their conduct. Instead, I observed from the onset a particular *discourse* that Resident Service Providers present and adopt as an identity. This discourse, 'I am a bearer of local knowledge' structures and governs their behaviour, decisions, actions and interactions with Indigenous locals, other service providers and in particular, visiting strangers. However, this knowledge is problematic as it is the Resident Service Providers *perception* of what is local truth and knowledge, and not necessarily what locals themselves would recognise or deem as such, that structures the discourse.

Resident Service Providers are an important part of the policy cycle as these individuals implement and evaluate policies and programs directly. Thus, while Resident Service Providers may not be considered formal Australian Public Servants or traditional bureaucrats, they are

²⁴ Mary Ellen Jordan is the author of the personal memoir *Balanda*. Although she is not a bureaucrat she lived in a large Indigenous community and worked for a year with an Indigenous corporation.

²⁵ However, all the participants in Chapter Five are beholden to some form of work-based principles and ethical codes of conduct congruent to their type of employment.

still key bureaucratic figures operating at the 'street-level' within the Indigenous policy world and hence worthy of scholarly attention. Their responses, as well as the observations I made during selected meetings and interviews, forms the basis of Chapter Five.

Literature Review: Policy, Elites and Bureaucrats

Due to the limited research on bureaucrats within Australian policy settings this study required the collation of three interrelated bodies of literature from international scholars. This includes studies which examine policy, elites and bureaucrats.

Anthropologists of policy are focused on gaining an understanding of "how policy functions in the shaping of society" (Wedel et al. 2005: 35). Thus, the anthropology of policy, a sub-discipline within Social Anthropology, is described as being "devoted to research into policy issues and processes and the critical analysis of those processes" (Wedel et al. 2005: 31). In contemporary use, the term policy can be used to describe (Wedel et al. 2005: 35):

- a) a "field of activity" for example, 'Indigenous policy',
- b) a "specific proposal" for example, the Intervention or Stronger Futures ,
- c) a description of programs, such as the 'School Enrolment and Attendance through Welfare Reform Measure'²⁶ or 'Income Management',²⁷
- d) a "state of affairs", or,
- e) the outcome of government achievement.

For this project, policy refers to an overarching field of activity: Indigenous policy. As a field of activity Indigenous policy might also be termed Indigenous Affairs. Both terms are used by

²⁶ This measure is aimed at encouraging parents and caregivers of school aged children to ensure that their children regularly attend school. If the parent does not, or is unable to, provide the Department of Human Services proof that their children have been attending school, "and has no reasonable excuse or special circumstances" to explain why their child was absent, the Department can suspend the parent's income support payment (Australian Government 2015c). The Department will reimburse the parent the lost income payments if the parent is able to provide details of why the child was absent within 13 weeks after the suspension of welfare payment.

²⁷ Income Management is a policy measure that was compulsorily introduced under the Northern Territory Emergency Response in 2007. It initially applied to all beneficiaries of government welfare who resided in the 73 prescribed communities subject to the Intervention. Currently, Income Management is voluntary and the measure has been extended to include other locations around Australia (Australian Government 2015d). Income Management is a way to assist people with managing their bills such as food, education, rent and electricity. Under Income Management a person cannot spend money on the following items: "alcohol, tobacco and tobacco products, pornographic material, gambling products or services, homebrew kits and concentrates" (Australian Government 2015d). People under are issued a BasicsCard that "is similar to an EFTPOS card" yet it cannot be used for the excluded goods and services listed above and can only be used at approved stores (Australian Government 2015d).

academics to refer to the arena of politics that constructs and implements Indigenous programs and services. Janine Wedel et al.'s (2005) article *Toward an Anthropology of Public Policy* provides an informative summary of the historical definition and deployment of the word policy. The authors explain that the 16th century French origin is closely associated to concepts describing the policing or polishing of human activity and behaviour. The 15th and 16th century English use was,

...commonly used as a noun for political sagacity, prudence, or skill in the execution of statecraft. However during the same period, it was also used as an adjective to describe types of conduct that were both good and bad. On one hand, policy evoked the idea of “diplomacy,” “prudence,” and “expediency,” but in its bad sense, it also meant “shrewdness,” “cunning,” “craftiness,” and “dissimulation” (Wedel et al. 2005: 36).

The authors conclude that policy is therefore a concept with “contradictory meanings; it is a word that can be coded and decoded to convey very ambiguous messages” (Wedel et al. 2005: 36). Indeed, Sullivan (2008: 129) argues that policy is “to some extent self-referring, with its own rules, forms and conventions, as well as reaching out beyond this formative environment to have an effect in the world.” Hence, “messiness” is inherent in most policy processes (Shore 2012: 92).

Shore and Wright's (2011) edited volume *Policy Worlds: Anthropology and the Analysis of Contemporary Power* explores the complexities that characterise studies of policy. To do so, they advocate that anthropologists of policy should view policies as encompassing worlds, with the aim being “to reveal larger processes of governance, power and social change that are shaping the world today” (Shore and Wright 2011: 1). Shore and Wright (2011: 1) explain that,

As the title suggests, policies belong to — and are embedded within — particular social and cultural worlds or ‘domains of meaning’. But they create as well as reflect those worlds. From our perspective, policies are not simply external, generalised, or constraining forces, nor are they confined to texts. Rather, they are productive, performative and continually contested. A policy finds expression through a sequence of events; it creates new social and semantic spaces, new sets of relations, new political subjects and new webs of meaning.

The idea that a policy exists in “social and cultural worlds” envisions how anthropologists might undertake a study of policy, in particular by emphasising that policy can no longer be restricted to a physical location or document (Shore and Wright 2011: 1, see also Wedel et al. 2005: 39). Instead, within this concept of worlds, policies can develop “complex ‘social lives’ as people interact with them [and] as they in turn enter into relations with institutions and

other artifacts” (Shore and Wright 2011: 3). Anthropologists of policy, therefore, do not see policies as static. Rather, policies are viewed as continually changing and re-negotiated through the assemblages of people, places, and artefacts that interact within these worlds. Policies are given agency and animation, or as I see it a ‘pulse’, through the subjects who interact with them — politicians, bureaucrats and recipients.

The anthropologists in both of Shore and Wright’s (1997; 2011) edited volumes all observe that policy is socially and culturally constructed and that different sorts of people respond to its workings in unique and at times, unpredictable ways. Examples include Helle Ploug Hansen’s (1997) study on discourses of power and communication between staff and patients at a hospital, Eva Mackey (1997) on the macro/micro interpretations and presentations of Canadian national identity, Halvard Vike (1997) on the different subject positions adopted by politicians, policy makers and the targeted citizens of an aged care reform policy through the invocation of a morality discourse, David Mosse’s (2011) reflections on the reactions of subjects to his published ethnography about them as professionals in the development arena and Gritt Nielsen’s (2011) work that highlights the different subject positions adopted by international fee paying students through discourses of morality and legitimacy. In particular, Mackey (1997) and Vike (1997) demonstrate that although policy makers have the prerogative to create policy and implement it, they are unable to control or predict how subjects will respond. Inadvertently, these scholars demonstrate the productive power of policy — its ability to generate, recreate and bring into existence new and distinctive subjectivities. This process is further examined in Chapters Three, Four and Five.

With regards to bureaucrats there are some studies on the inner workings of the bureaucracy that highlight important methodological and theoretical concerns that a researcher should consider (Rhodes 2005, Marshall 1984, Sullivan 2011, Mosse 2011, Watkins-Hayes 2009, Bernstein and Mertz 2011, Deeb and Marcus 2011, Reinhold 1994, Ferguson 1994, Haynes 2013, Hoag 2011, Wright and Reinhold 2011). Additionally, in the past decade, elites and bureaucrats have become popular subjects for ethnographic analysis (Beaverstock 2005, 2002, Tonkin 2002, Peers 2002, Wright and Reinhold 2011, Feldman 2011, Mosse 2011, Muller 2011, Ferguson and Gupta 2005, Gupta 2012, Biehl 2005, Watkins-Hayes 2009, Tiernan 2007, Ganter 2010, Lipsky 1980, Dery 1998, Harper 1998, Hull 2012, Kowal 2015). In particular, Rhodes (2005), Lea (2008), Watkins-Hayes (2009) and Kowal (2015) have all presented through ethnography a respectful appreciation of the public servants they researched.

Rhodes’ (2005) ethnography of the British ministers and secretaries, Lea’s (2008) exploration of mid-level to senior bureau-professionals in Indigenous health, Watkins-Hayes’ (2009)

ethnography of street-level bureaucrats in the American welfare system and Kowal's (2015) examination of White anti-racists who work with Indigenous health, all focus on select groups of bureaucratic actors within identified policy worlds. While this literature provides a crucial guide for how to approach and overcome barriers and deal with limitations for a similar field within the Australian context, the methodological approach of extended participant observation that these scholars used was not viable for this study. Instead, I adopted a combination of methodological approaches which I drew from the above literature on policy, bureaucrats and elites. These methods are described in the following section.

Methodology

The discipline of anthropology has well-developed and much cherished notions, regarding how to approach fieldwork. The most prominent methods are participant observation and thick description. These are the discipline's foundational methods and very few anthropologists deviate from this well-trodden path. Indeed, some prominent scholars of policy remain adamant that participant observation is still the only way to conduct ethnography (Rhodes 2005, Lea 2008, and Feldman 2011).

Yet, as anthropologists have sought to study the "elusive" state (Bernstein and Mertz 2011: 6), the call to develop new and innovative methods has increased dramatically (Sullivan 2012, Shore and Wright 2011, Shore 2012, Reinhold 1994). This is due to scholars of policy, bureaucracy and elites finding that participant observation is at times limiting, inappropriate, inflexible and indeed threatening to the high-level participants who engage in these fields. Examples include: Matthew Hull's (2012) studies on the Pakistani bureaucracy, Richard Harper's (1998) work with the International Monetary Fund, Hadi Deeb's and George Marcus' (2011) research with the World Trade Organisation, and David Mosse's (2011) research with development professionals. The fields these scholars examine essentially need an alternative, or an addition to, the participant observation approach.²⁸

Therefore, I employ a unique combination of three approaches in this thesis. These are: following, studying through and the para-site. In respect of each case study, I chose the approach that each group of participants were receptive to. The selection of method was dependant on practical variables such as location, time and space, as well as more relational variables, such as degree of trust, ease and privacy concerns between researcher and

²⁸ An idea that is considerably undeveloped and unexamined in Australia.

participant. An overview of the methods, and the chapters where I employ these, are outlined below.

Mobile Policy and the Method of ‘Following’

In the mid-1990s and throughout the 2000s, what scholars were calling a new phenomenon emerged in the area of critical policy studies: policy transfer. This referred to the global export and adoption of policy ideas and practice from one country to another (Stone 1999: 51-52).²⁹ Academically, policy transfer was taken up by the disciplines of political science, comparative politics and international relations studies (Stone 1999, 2000, 2004, Dolowitz and Marsh 2000, Peck 2012). More recently, this phenomenon has caught the attention of geographers who see policy as having a “social life” (Peck 2012: 23). Whereas previous studies described frameworks, linear processes and models of policy transfer, geographers have embraced anthropologists’ Shore and Wright’s (2011) concept of seeing mobile policy as relational worlds (Peck 2012: 23).

Viewing mobile policy as worlds requires researchers to employ a holistic approach when studying the movement of policy (Peck 2012: 24). Jamie Peck (2010: 171) observes that, “policies ‘mutate and morph’ during their journey”, meaning in practice, policy does not simply transfer itself from one place to another in a process of “nonlinear reproduction” (Peck 2010: 170-171, 2012: 22). Thus, studies of policy transfer should examine the multitude of sites, people, organisations, institutions and artefacts that engage with policy as it makes its journey from the politicians’ agenda through to the local subjects’ experience of policy implementation. In this way, both the macro and the micro facets of policy worlds are being considered.

For Eugene McCann and Kevin Ward (2010: 182) this new way of approaching policy relationally, means that the ways of “*doing*” research should “pay attention to the various spaces that are brought into being during the journey of a policy or program: a mixture of following the policy together with sensitivity to the particular territorial contexts at every step in the process of movement.” This view of policy mutating through mobility is also a description of how relations between the sites of policy transfer change and are re-made (Peck

²⁹ Colonisation involved similar movements of policy and ideas from one country to another. However, unlike contemporary policy transfer that can involve non-governmental organisations and private institutes, colonisation remained the prerogative of colonial governments.

2010: 170). The task of the researcher is thus: to “critically investigate” these sites “along the paths carved by the policies themselves” (Peck 2012: 24).

Researchers employ George Marcus’s (1995) method of ‘following’ when refocusing their approach to studying mobile policies. Advocates for this method emphasise the need for a balance of participant observation, semi-structured interviews and discourse analysis (Peck 2012, Peck and Theodore 2010a, McCann and Ward 2010). Indeed, Peck (2012: 24) says that “‘following the policy’ will often entail methodological travel.” Thus, researchers who seek to study policy worlds need to be flexible in their methodological approach, being prepared to shift from one method to another as required (McCann and Ward 2010, Peck and Theodore 2010b, Larner and Laurie 2010).³⁰

This method was used in the beginning stages of this project. I started following policy in the parliamentary debates that occurred in the House of Representatives and Senate over recent Indigenous policy initiatives, the Northern Territory Intervention and Stronger Futures. I then widened this search to include earlier debates on major policy approaches that engulfed entire eras, such as assimilation. From this activity, I identified the most prominent bureaucratic players: public servants within the Indigenous Affairs portfolio. I found that employing this method led to my pursuit of the various peoples, places, artefacts and events that are described throughout the thesis.

When my request to conduct research with the Indigenous Affairs department was declined I looked across other organisations and agencies that were in direct contact with both the Indigenous Affairs department and/or remote Indigenous residents. This led me to contact a former deputy Commonwealth Ombudsman and a legal aid agency in the Northern Territory. After various meetings and presentations of research proposals, the Ombudsman’s Office agreed to allow me to observe a remote outreach, which is a face-to-face complaints gathering clinics that Ombudsman staff conduct on the ground in remote and regional Indigenous communities. This outreach trip is examined in Chapter Four. After initial enthusiasm, the legal aid agency declined to participate.

Following Ombudsman staff to two remote communities allowed me to develop contacts with Resident Service Providers in the communities — the key figures examined in Chapter Five. As well as following the Ombudsman staff to different physical spaces, I also followed their paper

³⁰ Geographers include in their methodological approaches archaeologies of policy origins prior to discussing the present policy under discussion in both relational (the actors involved) and temporal (the particular social, political and economic contexts) terms. In this thesis, an archaeology of Indigenous policy is conducted in Chapter Two which focuses on parliamentary Hansard transcripts and considers the key policy debates for the current ‘normalisation’ era of Indigenous Affairs.

trails, including the progress of complaint files and tracing the journey of the Ombudsman's wider submissions to parliamentary committees and the required Annual Reports. Annual Reports and Portfolio Budget Statements are the primary documents analysed and discussed at Senate Estimate committees. Being a part of the public service, the Ombudsman is required to produce these documents and appear for questioning before Estimate committees. Following the Ombudsman to this site thus widened the scope of the policy world I was investigating and allowed me to examine the actions and decisions of senior public servants of Commonwealth departments. This opened up a whole new and unexpected avenue of inquiry into another bureaucratic figure within the Indigenous policy world; the senior public servants who appear before the Cross-Portfolio on Indigenous Matters at Senate Estimates. These bureaucrats are examined in Chapter Three.

This method of following was beneficial as it led me to locate the pulse of policy as it moves through the practice and actions of three key bureaucratic figures in three diverse policy contexts. However, I was unable to conduct long-term participant observation with any of the participants. In addition to following I adopted Sue Reinhold's (1994) method of 'studying through', outlined below, to bring together the various pieces that I had gathered through 'following'.

Studying Through

It was impossible for Reinhold (1994) to employ participant observation in her doctoral research that traced the contested issue of homosexuality in Britain during the Thatcher Government years. Conducted in the late 1990s, Reinhold's research is an "event-centred ethnography" (Reinhold 1994: 478) and therefore,

This study was not interactive and therefore could not utilise participant observation. Not only did the events occur at multiple sites, but they were over before I began my research. I cannot claim the predominant form of anthropological authority: *I was not there* (original emphasis in Reinhold 1994: 26).

Thus, Reinhold relied on reflexive interviews and discourse analysis of written documents, pamphlets, memos, letters to the editor, Hansard transcripts, campaign publicity, press releases, petitions, Bills and Acts and speeches as the main methods to gather data. However, Reinhold (1994: 28) firmly asserts that her reliance on other scholarship does not make her study any less anthropological. Indeed, she has created a new conceptual tool in anthropology which she terms studying through (Reinhold 1994: 478).

Studying through involves tracing the “back and forth” movement of policy “across different sites in a policy field and over time” (Wright and Reinhold 2001: 87-88). Further explained by Wedel et al. (2005: 39-40), studying through follows the “source of policy — its discourses, prescriptions and programs — through to those affected by the policies.” Shore and Wright (1997: 14) state that to study through is when anthropologists study the “connections between levels and forms of social process and action and [explore] how those processes work in different sites.” Reinhold studied through the discourse of this homosexuality debate in interviews and a discourse analysis of a variety of sources to reveal how the ideal conception of the family was promoted in Britain in a past era.

Shore and Wright (1997: 14) similarly advocate for a rethinking of the methods anthropologists of policy are utilising, noting that this is necessary because,

...by focusing on policy, the field of study changes. It is no longer a question of studying a local community or ‘a people’; rather, the anthropologist is seeking a method for analysing connections between levels and forms of social process and action and exploring how those processes work in different sites — local, national and global.

These researchers further instruct that “treating policy as a new anthropological field means not only working in various sites, but also with new kinds of materials. Among the most important are policy documents” (Shore and Wright 1997:15). Such an approach introduces documents as a key subject when undertaking a study of policy.

The proliferation and reliance on the documentation of Indigenous Australians embodied into documents *about* Indigenous Australians is not new. Australia’s colonial history is built upon the documentation of the “native” with anthropologists making significant contributions to the works (Tindale 1959, 1926, 1925, Elkin 1938, Thomson 1934, 1939a, 1939b). Indeed, contemporary anthropological scholarship is still drawn to the colonial documentary endeavour (Thomas 1990, Stoler 2009). Suffice to say, documentation and documents should be considered an integral part of the Indigenous policy world.

Nevertheless, Matthew Hull (2008: 503) observes that studies of bureaucracy tend to overlook the very process and product that the word bureaucracy is coined from: the writing desk — the process of writing and the control established through writing.³¹ More recently however,

³¹ Exceptions include the Australian National University’s Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research that investigated the 2001 Australian census and examined how the census form is filled out in remote Indigenous communities (Martin 2002, Martin et al. 2002, Morphy 2002, Sanders 2002a, Taylor 2002) and Altman and Russell’s review of recent “evaluation fetishism” in Commonwealth Indigenous policy (Altman and Russell 2012).

anthropologists have begun to take notice of how the document can be a source of power and control for governments in the *form* the document takes (i.e. pamphlet, booklet, report), the *process* for informing the public (i.e. online, public meetings) and the *content* the document contains (Hull 2012, 2003, 2008, Sullivan 2012, Cabot 2012, Riles 2000, Harper 1998, Li 2009, Altman and Russell 2012). A detailed analysis of the literature on documents is undertaken in Chapter Four.

This methodological approach of studying through and the artefact focus on documents, underpins Chapters Two, Three and Four. I studied through the Hansard transcripts of the House of Representatives, the Senate, Senate Estimate committees and the Ombudsman Office databases and reports. In Chapter Two I trace the “back and forward movement” of policy discourses. This process reveals that particular assumptions concerning Aboriginality have a significant degree of durability as the four discourses identified in this chapter are present in both 2007 and 2012. The discourses are used by parliamentarians to justify the rationale behind policies and programs that are aimed at changing the way Indigenous people live their lives and see themselves, within the Australian polity.

Chapter Three’s Hansard transcripts of Senate Estimate committee were initially studied through, in conjunction with an analysis of departmental Annual Reports and Portfolio Budget Statements and observations of Senate Estimates. In addition, I viewed Parliamentary Television recordings of the Senate Estimates I was not able to attend in person.³² Therefore, as well as written words and discourses, I was now able to observe and consider facial expressions, body gestures and tone of voice.

In Chapter Four I present the results of how I studied through the Commonwealth Ombudsman’s parliamentary Act and the Work Practice Manual that puts this Act into effect. This method brought to my attention the importance staff place on performing a particular collective Ombudsman identity. However, the studying through method was not sufficient on its own. While I had interpreted the governing power of the Manual in a particular way, I was concerned that this might not be how Ombudsman staff experienced it. Initially I approached the Office asking to conduct individual interviews with staff, but was met with reluctance. Hence, I employed the para-site methodology and conducted an exploratory

³² Public observers of Senate Estimates are seated at the back of the room. From this position, an observer can see the backs of the public servants who sit at the table with the minister and the senators along the far wall, facing the observer front-on. It can be difficult at times to discern the specific expressions of the senators because they are at a distance. It is impossible to witness the expressions of the public servants who face the senators. Thus, the video recordings of these proceedings have the added benefit of having a camera fixed on whoever is speaking during Estimates. These are focused head and shoulder shots of whoever is speaking, which enables an observer to later view in detail, the physical expressions and gestures of both senators and public servants.

workshop/seminar with Ombudsman staff. Later, I used the principles of the para-site as the foundation for interviews with the senior public servants in Chapter Three.

The Para-Site

Conducting interviews in remote communities with Resident Service Providers proved to be reasonably straightforward, yet, for senior public servants and Ombudsman staff, traditional forms of interviewing were either not welcomed or insufficient. Mosse (2011) addresses similar difficulties and dilemmas that can occur when undertaking ethnographies of policy and professional identities. He states that some of his participants viewed the “ethnographic description” as “threatening” because it was interpreted by participants as a form of judgement (Mosse 2011: 55).

Mosse (2011) and the development professionals he interviewed held conflicting views regarding how a narrative of programs, events and identities should be presented. He observes that participants may see an inherent risk in agreeing to participate in such research projects because “Ethnographic description can be experienced as threatening to a professional (or epistemic) community formed around shared representations. The upset and anger reveals an antipathy between professional identity and the ethnographic project” (Mosse 2011: 54-55). These participants were particularly protective of how they were presented because they wanted to avoid criticism of their professional reputations (Mosse 2011: 53-54).

Mosse (2011: 55) further explains that his elite participants’ adverse reactions were incited by the attention ethnography draws to “the irrelevant, the routine; the ordinary” instead of championing “the substance of official narratives.” Akin to Mosse’s (2011) development professionals, the senior public servants in Chapter Three and the Ombudsman managers in Chapter Four were conscious of the public image and reputations they felt they had to uphold and protect. As evidenced in the opening narrative to this Introduction, the Commonwealth department I approached was apprehensive that I might question the integrity of their work. Similarly, management staff at the Ombudsman’s Office were concerned with what employees might say off-the-cuff should I be granted interviews with individual employees.

A method that overcomes these ethnographic challenges and potential conflicts is an experimental methodology called para-site ethnography. This was first coined and trialled by anthropologists Deeb and Marcus (2011). The interview methods employed in Chapter Three

and Four model the workshop/seminar that Deeb and Marcus conducted with the Director General of the World Trade Organisation. The researchers invited the Director General to work in tandem with them in interrogating problems, developing shared meanings and drawing conclusions.

The dilemma Deeb and Marcus (2011) faced was similar to that confronted by Mosse (2011): how to conduct ongoing anthropological research with participants who are themselves elite experts, engaged in the continual questioning and consideration of their organisation's own methods, activities and professional identities. Borrowing from the university tradition of presenting seminars to colleagues, the para-site is a collaborative project, where both researcher and participant commit to a process of speculative thinking, self-reflection and shared interpretations about problems or issues of common interest. This process is not limited to the researcher gathering data, instead, the para-site becomes "a space of and for theorizing" about the production of knowledge in collaboration with participants (Hoag 2011: 88).

My aim was to bring the participants' and my perspectives together to jointly address a common issue, problem or phenomenon. I presented the para-site to participants as an opportunity to unite knowledge systems and not, as may have been feared, to debunk or demonise their bureaucratic institution (Deeb and Marcus 2011). The para-site was a space where participants and myself could engage in open "speculative thinking" about a "shared object or problem of interest" (Deeb and Marcus 2011: 55), such as subjectivity, challenges faced, vulnerabilities experienced, as well as strengths and how they understand their role within the Indigenous policy world (Deeb and Marcus 2011: 58).

Another novel aspect of this approach is that it is transparent with regard to how the researcher's knowledge is produced. The method candidly reports on the "research-in-progress" process; an element of academic research that is often absent in the published end product such as the thesis, book, conference paper or journal article (Hoag 2011: 88, Deeb and Marcus 2011: 60).³³ Thus the para-site was a viable solution to navigate the fears and concerns of some participants whilst still allowing me, as a researcher, the freedom to ask questions, gather data, make interpretations and draw conclusions.

³³ I mirrored the Ombudsman Office's own processes and commitment to procedural fairness by sharing my thoughts with staff mid-research project. For example, the Ombudsman allows departments and agencies the opportunity to comment on the way that the Ombudsman has presented events when the Office drafts their Annual Report. This research thus identifies with the Office's own methods for investigation by allowing for a para-site space within the project where staff can contribute, comment or respond to my interpretations in an attempt to find a productive dialogue forward.

The para-sites I conducted for this project occurred at a time and place that suited the different groups of participants. For the senior public servants I conducted individual interviews (who remain anonymous in this thesis) because participants did not want to be identified, even amongst their colleagues. Therefore, a group workshop or seminar was not appropriate. I invited each participant to individually contribute to the research by adding their own thoughts, points of interest or concern and commenting on the reflections that I shared regarding my interpretations of Senate Estimates and the importance of the Australian Public Service's Code of Conduct and Values. Despite these interviews lacking the collaboration of their colleagues, senior public servant interviewees still engaged in speculative thinking.

For the Ombudsman's Office I held a workshop/seminar with employees who were, or had previously been, involved with Indigenous outreach activities. This was held in the conference room of their office in Canberra. I presented four topics in turn and invited participants to make comments and ask questions at the end of each section. I kept a PowerPoint slide of questions on the screen after each section to generate discussion and ideas. Though initially participants were reticent in answering each question methodically, as the workshop progressed staff engaged in general discussion and even debates.

Chapter Outline

Chapter One outlines the key theoretical and practical foundations for this thesis. I locate the thesis first within Michel Foucault's conception of neoliberal governmentality and describe how neoliberalism is a form of political rationality, a specific form of practice and action that underpins recent Indigenous policy in Australia. I use Foucault's examination of the relationship between neoliberalism and governmentality to explain how techniques of governance are employed and adopted within the Indigenous policy world to generate particular bureaucratic subjectivities: individuals who are able to self-govern and monitor their own conduct (Chapter Two discusses the difficulties encountered when attempting to apply this subjectivity cross-culturally). Second, the chapter introduces Erving Goffman's (1959) theory of impression management. This theory details how individuals come to manage and present particular representations of themselves to others. Goffman's dramaturgical metaphor of the front and back theatrical stages demonstrate practically how neoliberal governmentality is performed by bureaucrats and explain why these same bureaucrats manage the presentation of particular identities within specific policy contexts.

In Chapter Two I examine the parliamentary debates for two recent and controversial Indigenous policies: the 2007 Northern Territory Emergency Response and 2012 Stronger Futures.³⁴ The chapter argues that parliamentarians create a vision of the ideal Indigenous subject by deploying personal narratives as truth and fact. Through a discourse analysis of parliamentary transcripts I discover within these debates that personal narratives create four discourses that parliamentarians then weave into a Regime of Truth concerning the desirable Indigenous citizen. This chapter lays conceptual ground for the remainder of the thesis on three fronts: first, it highlights the discourses that feed into the Indigenous policies that bureaucratic figures encounter and respond to in particular policy contexts; second, it provides the thesis with a contrastive view of how subjectivities within the Indigenous policy world can be manipulated and created (in Chapter Two) or willingly adopted (in Chapters Three, Four and Five); and third, as discussed in Chapter Six, it highlights how the ability for the Regime of Truth to be implemented on the ground and subsequently experienced by Indigenous Australians contradicts the way policies are being implemented.

In Chapters Three, Four and Five I unpack the messiness and complexity that characterise the Indigenous policy world in Australia by examining, in turn, the subjectivities of three bureaucratic figures, the policy contexts they engage with and the techniques of governmentality that influence their conduct and representation of themselves to outsiders. I thus present a series of distinct, yet related, vantage points from which to interrogate neoliberal governance and the front stage/backstage of bureaucratic processes, practices and presentations of the self that circulate within and provide the pulse to, the Indigenous policy world.

Chapter Three is set in Parliament House in Canberra where senior public servants of Commonwealth departments and agencies appear before Senate Estimates committees. This chapter considers how the front and backstage of Estimates proceedings impacts upon the

³⁴ The Northern Territory Emergency Response was controversial for a number of reasons, including the lack of community consultation, the speed of which legislation was rushed through the House and the Senate and some of the policy's measures including the compulsory acquisition of land, compulsory health checks for Indigenous children, the quarantining of welfare and the suspension of the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*.

In 2011 the Labor Government conducted consultations with Indigenous communities across the Northern Territory regarding the newly proposed policy Stronger Futures. Stronger Futures was to supersede the Intervention from June 2012. The controversy surrounding Stronger Futures was the way the consultations were conducted, the legacy of the Intervention and lack of progress achieved which questioned the policy logic of Stronger Futures, and the timeframe of the legislation which was set to last 10 years.

For more information see chapters in Hinkson and Altman's edited volume *Coersive Reconciliation: Stabilise, Normalise, Exit Aboriginal Australia* (2007), Hunter (2007) and footnote 21 in Altman and Russell (2012: 14).

scrutiny of Indigenous policy and the accountability of public administration. I demonstrate this by examining the types of questions senators ask public servants, observing the ways that public servants respond and considering the governing role that the imaginary of the Estimates Test performs in the senior public servants' backstage.

Chapter Four maps the movement of Commonwealth Ombudsman staff from their offices in the major cities to outreach activities in two remote Indigenous communities and back again. I consider the governing influence of the Office's Work Practice Manual and examine how this document comes to be embodied in the psyche and actions of individual staff. This is demonstrated in the stories I tell regarding the interactions Ombudsman staff have with Resident Service Providers during outreach exercises. The limitations of the governing ability of the Manual are evident when staff adopt a backstage space to debrief and vent about the controversial or upsetting events that can occur front stage during outreach.

Chapter Five utilises the front stage/backstage metaphor to critically reflect upon the initial meeting of strangers: myself and the Ombudsman staff with a particular group of Resident Service Providers. I critically consider the discourse Resident Service Providers present to outsiders; that they are the bearers of a local form of knowledge about Indigenous people and policy. This discourse relies on assumptions and personal narratives, which Resident Service Providers assert distinguishes it from the policy discourse (the Regime of Truth discussed in Chapter Two) coming out of Canberra. However, in comparing the bearer of local knowledge discourse with the knowledge inherent to the Regime of Truth it becomes evident that these street-level bureaucrats are inadvertently promulgating similar views about an ideal Indigenous subjectivity as the parliamentarians who they claim ignore them.

Chapter Six returns each political and bureaucratic figure to the full policy world assemblage. In this concluding chapter I provide a vignette from fieldwork on the policy problem of housing that highlights the arguments, themes and findings I present in this thesis. In particular, I spotlight the role that the different knowledge each political and bureaucratic figure produces, promotes and performs has in the wider policy world context. This conclusion also demonstrates that alongside the pulse of policy being embodied in the actions, activities and subjectivities of parliamentarians and bureaucrats, policy encounters different forms of knowledge; knowledge that has a combined effect of perpetuating the need for policy aimed at transforming Indigenous people. This conclusion also problematises the contradictions, paradoxes and mismatches that knowledge can produce as it circulates within the Indigenous policy world.

Chapter 1

The Influence of Neoliberal Governmentality and Impression Management Theory on the Indigenous Policy World

Introduction

Policy, as ideology, discourse and process, contains specific political rationalities aimed at shaping the conduct of others. It is brought into being *through* people with the aim of shaping the conduct *of* a targeted group of people. In the Indigenous policy world in Australia this governing endeavour is intended to benefit Indigenous Australians. The desired outcome for Indigenous policy makers is to minimise inequality, poverty and disadvantage. It is assumed that such outcomes will be achieved through altering Indigenous behaviour and actions. However, as well as affecting Indigenous Australians, Indigenous policy has a governing and subject-forming impact upon the bureaucrats tasked with the decision-making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation stages of this particular policy cycle. While each subjectivity — Indigenous and bureaucratic — is different, the discursive and documentary mode for generating, presenting and managing these identities is shared.

In this chapter I unpack two key analytic concepts that I draw together to form the theoretical foundations of this thesis: neoliberal governmentality and impression management. Michel Foucault demonstrates that neoliberalism and governmentality, whilst being distinct concepts, are intimately connected. Indeed, when investigating the power, truth and knowledge that underpin the Indigenous policy world and the forming of policy subjects, Foucault would argue that we are studying forms of governmentality. I deconstruct Foucault's theoretical concepts

to reveal how Indigenous subjectivity is envisioned (the task of Chapter Two),³⁵ moreover, to uncover how bureaucrats, the often forgotten or silent participants in the Indigenous policy world, also generate their own particular neoliberal subjectivities within this same policy space (the focus of Chapters Three, Four and Five).

An important aspect of the analysis that occurs in this thesis is the identification of techniques and technologies of governmentality. These techniques and technologies influence the ways that specific groups of bureaucrats engage within the Indigenous policy world.³⁶ To understand why bureaucrats willingly adopt governing techniques, and explain how each bureaucrat establishes their subjectivity and presents particular impressions of themselves to others, I apply Erving Goffman's analysis of impression management through the dramaturgical metaphor of the front stage/backstage. Goffman's work is essential to this study because where Foucault provides an explanation of what neoliberal governmentality might look like at an abstract level, it is Goffman's theory of the front and backstage that explains and demonstrates how we might locate and understand neoliberal governance in practice. Thus, Goffman's approach is applied to aid in demonstrating *how*, *why*, and to what *effect* the various techniques of governmentality are willingly adopted and enacted by bureaucrats.

Ultimately, I present in this chapter a theoretical model that enables me to follow the pulse of policy as it travels through the complex and messy Indigenous policy world assemblage. Using the framework of neoliberal governmentality, together with impression management, I am able to locate and identify the different types of neoliberal subjectivities that exist, as well as understand the ways these subjectivities enact Indigenous policy within a specific intercultural arena. Further, as the analysis in the remainder of the thesis will demonstrate, the theories presented here reveal important insights into the entanglements between forms of knowledge, truth and governance that circulate within the Indigenous policy world.

³⁵ Altman (2007) terms the neoliberal governmental endeavour that characterises recent Indigenous policy the "Canberra Consensus"; this consensus being the bipartisan support that both sides of the political divide give to Indigenous policies.

³⁶ It is important to note that the contexts I describe in this thesis are not necessarily indicative of all policy contexts. I specifically examine three distinct groups of bureaucrats engaged in particular forms of work and interaction with Indigenous policy.

Neoliberal Governmentality

Foucault argues that neoliberalism should be recognised as a *rationality* of government practice and not merely an abstract ideology or theory of government (Foucault [1979] 2008). For Foucault, 'government' does not only refer to the holding of political power in the conventional sense that power is understood. Rather, his conception of government relates to all activities that aim to shape, guide, affect, correct and modify (Gordon 1991: 2, Burchell 1996: 19) the "desires and configuring habits, aspirations and beliefs" of individuals or collective society (Li 2007: 275). As Mitchell Dean (2010: 20) succinctly explains:

To analyse government is to analyse those practices that try to shape, sculpt, mobilize and work through the choices, desires, aspirations, needs, wants and lifestyles of individuals and groups. This is a perspective, then, that seeks to connect questions of government, politics and administration to the space of bodies, lives, selves and persons.

As a result of attending to this perspective the *practice* of government is seen at the outset, as opposed to conceiving of government as "a theory, an ideology, a juridical philosophy of individual freedom, or any particular set of policies adopted by a government" (Burchell 1996: 21, see also Read 2009: 34-35, Dean 2010: 73). This is the vital element that structures Foucault's conception of neoliberalism. Seen as practice, government assumes a structure that orders the "mentality of rule" (the rational thinking) (Rose 1996: 43) as well as actions (Burchell 1996: 21). As Dean (2010: 18-19) defines it, "Rationality is simply any form of thinking which strives to be relatively clear, systematic and explicit about aspects of 'external' or 'internal' existence, about how things are or how they ought to be."

It is at this juncture that Foucault introduces the term 'art' to describe the complexities involved in governing. Art or rationality, terms that are employed interchangeably by Foucault (Gordon 1991: 3), refer to the practice or activity of governing. It is not pure ideology or philosophy but rather "a mode of thinking that translates into practical action for the governors and the governed" (Foucault [1979] 2008: 2, Gordon 1991: 3). Thomas Lemke (2001: 191) explains that: "The semantic linking of governing ('gouverner') and modes of thought ('mentalite') indicates that it is not possible to study the technologies of power without an analysis of the political rationality underpinning them" (Lemke 2001: 191). The art of governing then, includes a particular political rationality, such as neoliberalism and techniques of power — in this thesis, discourse and documents — that enable the rationality to be realised. Therefore, to comprehend the governmental endeavour of Indigenous Australians via policy, an analysis of the rationality informing government action and the

techniques of government that enable subjects to be governed must be included. This is provided in Chapter Two.

When adopting a neoliberal governmental perspective, the individual is viewed as an “entrepreneur” within the economy (Dean 2010: 183), and also within the private spheres of the individual’s social and cultural life (Burchell 1996: 27, Hamann 2009: 40-41, Foucault [1979] 2008: 243, 268, Dean 2010: 72, Read 2009: 32-34). This conflates ideas of the market into one: all human beings are entrepreneurs, and all social space is the site of production (Read 2009: 33-34). This is the theory of “human capital” (Lemke 2001: 198-199), meaning, all that humans do is in the hope that they will advance their own capital (Read 2009: 30, Foucault [1979] 2008: 219-222). Human capital consists of “innate” and “acquired” elements (Foucault [1979] 2008: 227, 243), the “skills, talents and capacities” (Dean 2010: 185) that people develop and attain over the course of their life time; a conception strikingly similar to Pierre Bourdieu’s (1990) concept of the habitus.

Consequently, neoliberalism transforms people into *homo economicus* — “economic man... the man of exchange” (Foucault [1979] 2008: 225) — or what is more commonly referred to as “an entrepreneur of himself” (Foucault [1979] 2008: 226). Economic man is also “*manipulable man*, man who is perpetually responsive to modifications in his environment” (original emphasis in Gordon 1991: 43). Able to have his environment altered, economic man becomes “the correlate of a governmentality” (Foucault [1979] 2008: 271). Individual responsibility and “self as enterprise” are key principles to the governing endeavour of neoliberalism; that is, self-regulation, self-direction and self-management, with individuals “perform[ing] actions that reinforce their own subjection” (Hilgers 2011: 358).

It is important to pause here to consider Foucault’s conception of governmentality; a concept that has been examined by many social science scholars (Redfield 2005, Scott 2005, Wright and Reinhold 2011, Mosse 2011, Muller 2011, Feldman 2011, Shore and Wright 2011, Inda 2005, Ferguson and Gupta 2005, Horn 2005, Biehl 2005, Simons 1995, Rose 1999). While neoliberalism is a type of political rationality, it is simultaneously a mode, or form, of governmentality. Thus, when studying neoliberal policies we are studying a form of governmentality. Governmentality is a concept that is effective “in capturing the complex operations of modern forms of state power” (Shore and Wright 2011: 16), meaning, “all endeavours to shape, guide, direct the conduct of others, whether these be the crew of a ship, the members of a household, the employees of a boss, the children of a family or the inhabitants of a territory” (Rose 1999: 7, see also Foucault [1978] 1991: 93-94). This definition is how I understand successive Commonwealth government attempts to alter the livelihood

and world view of Indigenous Australians discussed in Chapter Two. Furthermore, this conception can also be applied to the bureaucrats examined in Chapter Three, Four and Five where bureaucrats willingly submit to forms of *self*-governance, enabling themselves to be shaped and guided by techniques of governance such as Parliamentary Acts, Work Practice Manuals and discourses.

The “conduct of conduct” is Foucault’s concise definition for government and includes all efforts to alter the behaviour, thoughts and actions of individuals or groups (Burchell 1996, Gordon 1991, Li 2007, Lemke 2001, 2002, Rose 1996). “Conduct” can refer to that of children, families, households, souls and communities (Foucault [1979] 2008: 1-2, Read 2009). It can be in reference to an individual’s self-governing (subjectivation) or the governing imposed upon a population by a set of governors (biopolitics) (Hamann 2009: 38). What Foucault means is that this concept includes “all those more or less calculated and systematic ways of thinking and acting that aim to shape, regulate or manage the comportment of others... any rational effort to influence or guide the conduct of human beings through acting upon their hopes, desires, circumstances, or environment” (Inda 2005: 1); or put more simply, “the myriad ways in which human conduct is directed by calculated means” (Ferguson and Gupta 2005: 114-115). Nikolas Rose (1999: 7) further adds that the conduct of conduct, “also embraces the ways in which one might be urged and educated to bridle one’s own passions, to control one’s own instincts, to govern oneself.”

To apply a conventional understanding of how policy operates in Indigenous Affairs, the conduct of conduct would refer to the myriad of programs and services that are government implemented and funded in Indigenous communities. Yet, for the different groups of bureaucrats who enact Indigenous policy the conduct of conduct is much more subtle in its use. By submitting willingly to bureaucratic documents, discourses and procedures the bureaucrats examined in this thesis govern, guide and shape their own thoughts and actions. Foucault would state that this governance is achieved through “techniques” or “technologies” (Foucault [1979] 2008, [1980] 1993) which include all the “mechanisms, procedures, instruments, tactics, techniques, technologies and vocabularies” that become practice and action rather than just remaining as an ideology or thought (Dean 2010: 42).³⁷ Thus, techniques or technologies of the self (Foucault [1980] 1993: 203),

...permit individuals to effect, by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, on their own souls, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct and this in a manner so as to

³⁷ James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta (2002) and Barbara Cruikshank (1996) provide salient examples of self-governing techniques and technologies in action.

transform themselves, modify themselves and to attain a certain state of perfection, of happiness, of purity, of supernatural power and so on.

Therefore, a study of the conduct of bureaucrats cannot proceed without an exploration of the techniques and technologies that bureaucrats allow to govern themselves and the ways these bureaucrats manage and perform these governed behaviours and activities. Thus, in Chapters Three, Four and Five I undertake an analysis of the technologies (documents) and techniques (discourses) of the self that bureaucrats submit to, including Parliamentary Acts, the Australian Public Service Values and Code of Conduct, Work Practice Manuals and discourses of local knowledge. In Chapter Three I examine the influence of the senior public servants' individual and group habitus and the functionality of the imaginary 'Estimates Test'. These techniques aid senior public servants in navigating the political games that senators engage in at Senate Estimates. In Chapter Four I investigate how Ombudsman staff allow the Work Practice Manual to alter and guide their behaviour when investigating complaints and interacting with the public. Indeed, overtime, staff come to embody the principles of impartiality and independence as outlined in the Work Practice Manual. Finally, in Chapter Five I consider how Resident Service Providers construct and deploy the discourse of 'bearer of local knowledge' to make sense of their place within the Indigenous policy world.

From this preview of the bureaucratic examples that are to be presented in this thesis we can begin to appreciate that the governmental apparatus involves an assemblage of people, objects, mentalities, events and territories that humans might encounter in a policy environment (Foucault [1978] 1991: 93-94). Further, it is evident that there is a certain transformation occurring in the psyche and bodies of the bureaucrats as they willingly allow these abstract techniques and technologies — documents and discourses — to become a core part of their own subjectivity. Pierre Bourdieu (1977; 1990) would argue that these governing techniques and technologies become a part of the individual's habitus.

Habitus is an embodied system that operates at both the internal and external level to enable an individual to make sense of the social world (Bourdieu 1990). To explain this complex concept, Bourdieu says that individuals internalise "objective structures", including influences from education, language, culture and the economy (Bourdieu 1977: 85), which in turn become externalised in future decisions, actions and behaviours. Thus, a person's embodiment of past and present experiences directly impacts upon the way an individual perceives the world around them, altering and informing the type of externalisations (decisions, actions and behaviours) available to the individual (Bourdieu 1990: 81-83). These social experiences form a part of a person's habitus and are "durable" and "transposable",

meaning they "last throughout an agent's lifetime" and "may generate practices in multiple and diverse fields of activity" (Johnson 1993: 5). As I argue in Chapters Three, Four and Five, the techniques and technologies of governmentality that are internalised by bureaucrats directly impact upon the types of externalisations bureaucrats make in different policy settings; in particular, the way each bureaucrat manages their subjectivity backstage to enable them to present an ideal subjectivity when performing front stage. These embodied and externalised subjectivities include the apolitical senior public servant, the independent and impartial Ombudsman staff and the resident service provider as a bearer of local knowledge.

Therefore, the techniques and technologies that are encountered in each chapter inevitably work to structure how each bureaucrat engages within the Indigenous policy world and comes to view their own role within this world. Evidently, the self-governing that takes place in Chapters Three, Four and Five results in the governing apparatus becoming embodied; or rather, forms a core part of the individual's habitus. This occurs each time an individual willingly submits to the governing endeavour of Parliamentary Acts, Codes of Conduct and Public Service Values, Work Practice Manuals and discourses of their own creation. Thus, it is important to note that the governmental processes analysed in this thesis directly impacts and alters the bodies, actions and identities of the bureaucrats I examine.

The Ideal Individual as *Homo Economicus*

It should now be evident that the individual is the core focus of both neoliberalism and governmentality. In perceiving technologies and techniques of governmentality as forms of neoliberal power exercised over the individual, we might assume that a loss of the individual's freedom has occurred. Yet, despite the individual submitting to an exercise of power that shapes their behaviour, identity and actions, this does not mean that individuals become automated robots, devoid of self-will or agency.³⁸ To be *homo economicus* a person must be "a free and autonomous "atom" of self-interest who is fully responsible for navigating the social realm using rational choice and cost-benefit calculation *to the express exclusion* of all

³⁸ Foucault emphasises that power does not always refer to domination, the limiting of freedoms, or exploitation, nor is it always expressed in ways that are decidedly negative (Lemke 2002: 53). Foucault explains this in his lecture series where he outlines his shift in thinking with regards to power (Barry, Osborne, and Rose 1996). As Foucault studied techniques of domination he came to study forms of government, and from forms of government he came to study techniques of the self (Foucault [1980] 1993). Foucault explains this shift as not a simple replacement of one form of power by another — for instance, sovereignty by discipline and discipline by government — but rather, power constitutes a triangle where sovereignty, discipline and government are all present and active to certain degrees; ever present and interconnecting with each other (Foucault [1979] 2008: 101, Dean 2010: 28-30, Hamann 2009: 48, Barry, Osborne, and Rose 1996: 7-8)

other values and interests” (original emphasis in Hamann 2009: 38). Indeed, neoliberalism endows the individual with the freedom to choose: to act or not to act (Dean 2010: 21).

Additionally, as Cruikshank (1996: 234) says of the self-esteem social movement, “consent in this case does not mean that there is no exercise of power; by isolating a self to act upon, to appreciate and to esteem, we avail ourselves of a terrain of action, we exercise power upon ourselves.” In this regard, it is individuals who “voluntarily subject themselves to power” (Cruikshank 1996: 247) when they “choose between competing strategies” (Read 2009: 29). This idea of voluntary subjection to governance is crucial to keep in mind when approaching the chapters in this thesis that examine the front stage/backstage subjectivities of bureaucratic figures.

Indeed, the individuals in Chapters Three and Four are not coerced into adopting the principles of the Australian Public Service or the Ombudsman’s Office. They *freely choose* to put aside their own personal opinions and feelings when front stage. Additionally, in the case studies discussed in Chapters Four and Five, Resident Service Providers also choose where, when and to whom, they will divulge local knowledge about Indigenous Australians. This can occur on different stages as Resident Service Providers choose to either present knowledge on a front stage or a backstage. Therefore, applying a neoliberal governmental lens to Indigenous policy enables a recognition of the bureaucratic conditions “within or out of which individual[s] are able to freely conduct themselves” (Hamann 2009: 55).

Indeed, a goal of neoliberalism is the expressed aspiration “to construct responsible subjects whose moral quality is based on the fact that they rationally assess the costs and benefits of a certain act as opposed to other alternative acts” (Lemke 2002: 59). By encouraging subjects to make free-will decisions the success or failure of said decision will rest on the shoulders of the individual and not the state or governor (Springer 2011: 95, Lemke 2002: 59, Hamann 2009: 38). Government might intervene so far as to direct, or guide the individual towards self-care (Lemke 2001: 201); however, it is ultimately the responsibility and obligation of the individual to care for themselves. Thus, representatives of the state are able to wash their hands of any adverse effects that might flow from their interventions. This blame-shifting and lack of self-accountability becomes evident in the Conclusion, where I take a macro view of the operation of the Indigenous policy world to examine how each individual political and bureaucratic action contributes towards the way policy is applied and experienced on the ground by Indigenous Australians.

The Front Stage and Backstage of the Indigenous Policy World

Erving Goffman's (1959) concepts of the front stage and backstage in *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* proffers another useful framework when tracing the pulse of a policy. His work also provides an understanding of how and why bureaucrats might present themselves differently within various policy contexts. This theory is vital to understanding the way that techniques of governmentality influence senior public servants performances at Senate Estimates committees in Chapter Three, as well as the encounters documented in Chapters Four and Five between Ombudsman staff and Resident Service Providers.

Goffman (1959) uses a metaphor of "theatrical stages" to explain how people present different images or impressions to others depending on the "stage" these others are witnessing. In social science research the most prominent reference to Goffman's framework are the concepts of front stage and backstage, used to explain individual and group impression management techniques. "Performance" for Goffman (1959: 8) means: "all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants."

The front stage is the visible space where the performance takes place in front of an audience (Lewicki 1997: 587). This stage is about "impression management", with the motive of controlling the situation and ensuring that the impression others are forming is the one that is most desirable to the individual (Goffman 1959). While Goffman notes there can be any number of motives or reasons for wanting to sustain a particular impression, the important point to observe is that impression management occurs in any given situation: with those we know intimately, those we have met before, or in the initial meeting between strangers. There are clear impressions that different groups are attempting to put forward in each of the policy contexts examined in this thesis. In Chapter Two parliamentarians appear as experts who intimately know through personal experience who Aboriginal people are, what they need and what they desire from government policy. The Resident Service Providers in Chapter Five also present this image of 'knowing' about Aboriginal people, culture and issues. In contrast, the bureaucrats in Chapters Three and Four ensure that every word and action conforms to the official narrative which states they are independent and impartial, taking neither the government nor Indigenous side of an issue. How and why these figures in the Indigenous policy world manage and present particular subjectivities, as well as understanding the techniques and technologies of governance that influence the presentation of these subjectivities, becomes evident when dismantling each group's front and backstage.

Goffman's traditional notion of the backstage is all the out-of-sight spaces where performers can relax and "work with other actors to adapt and modify the front stage performance" (Lewicki 1997: 587). It is usually a physically bounded space, separated from the front stage by "a wall, a door, a lock" (Pearson 2009). Backstage is also where performers can practice their roles, refining themselves for their on-stage performance (O'Brien 2011: 291, Wheeler 1963), or it is the space that the "audience" might consider to be the "authentic" or "true" stage (MacCannell 1973). Analogous to Foucault's notion of governmentality, impression management requires "a certain bureaucratization of the spirit"; a self-regulation and self-management, to ensure that performances occur as we intend in front of the particular audience we choose (Goffman 1959: 36). This management predominantly occurs backstage.

The backstage in Chapter Three is the offices and hallways of the senior public servant. This is where senior public servants apply the Estimates Test to all decisions, behaviour and policy actions taken throughout the course of the year. In this chapter, I argue that the backstage is vital because it is where the real work of Senate Estimates occurs. While it might appear that it is during the actual committee hearing that senior public servants are held to account, interviewees explained to me that they predominantly do this themselves in the backstage.

In Chapter Four, the backstage for the Ombudsman staff can be both a physical space (in the safety of their accommodation when on outreach, or in their manager's office when at work in the city) or a spatial distance (out of earshot of Resident Service Providers when on outreach). The backstage is important, as it is where Ombudsman staff manage the potential clash of attitudes with Resident Service Providers and recalibrate themselves in order to present the independent and impartial image of the Office when front stage.

For Resident Service Providers in Chapter Five, the backstage is an area they might invite outsiders to participate in so that they can reinforce the impression that they are a bearer of local knowledge. In some instances this is where a Resident Service Provider will explain the rationale of their front stage performances with Indigenous locals; at other times, it is where they will emphasise their disconnect with policy makers in Canberra.

This perspective of theatrical stages and bureaucratic performance should not imply that the individual is deceitful in wanting to present a particular image of himself; indeed, he can be "fully taken in by his own act; he can be sincerely convinced that the impression of reality which he stages is the real reality" (Goffman 1959: 10). Thus, we can think of performance as merely presenting "an idealized view of a situation" (Goffman 1959: 23). More recently, social scientists have demonstrated this clearly through research on the creation and sustaining of online identities and the function of social networking sites (Pearson 2009, Hogan 2010).

For this study in particular, the concept of impression management is immensely practical when exploring the initial front that an individual presents to a stranger. Anthropology can at times focus too much on the long-term, deep relationships developed during participant observation, and as a result forget to consider the meeting of strangers and the ways we present ourselves to one another during our first interactions. Subsequently, Goffman's theory is important to apply to situations in this thesis where many of my participants remained strangers; I did not know them and they did not know me.³⁹

Conclusion

Foucault's conceptualisation of neoliberalism has led scholars to investigate political rationalities and government practice (Barry, Osborne, and Rose 1996: 10). Political rationalities are "more than just ideologies; they constitute a part of the fabric of our ways of thinking about and acting upon one another and ourselves" (Barry, Osborne, and Rose 1996: 7). They are therefore about action and activities, the governmental techniques that exercise and affect power upon and through individuals. The object of study here is the art of government itself — "it is a study of the organised practices through which we are governed and through which we govern ourselves" (Dean 2010: 28). We are studying the art of government when we consider the assemblages of thought, knowledge, truth, power, techniques, "identities of governed and governors" and the conduct of conduct (Dean 2010: 28).

The individual is conceived as *homo economicus* — the self-entrepreneur or man who allows himself to be modified and changed by his environment. Chapter Two attends to how government policy attempts to establish *homo economicus* over the Indigenous population, with the remainder of the thesis concentrating on how bureaucratic figures that enact and interact with Indigenous policy essentially effect *homo economicus* upon themselves. This is explained through Goffman's front stage/backstage metaphor and the willing adoption of Foucault's techniques and technologies of governance. By studying the art of government, the anthropological gaze shifts from a focus on the *destruction* of Indigenous subjectivity and instead reveals the types of bureaucratic subjectivities that are *produced* within the Indigenous

³⁹ Reinhold (1994: 26) acknowledges a similar reflexive stance in her doctoral thesis where she examines discourses of the past Thatcher Government. She states that she cannot claim the authority of participant observation methods because "I was not there."

policy world and more importantly, reveals the knowledge about Indigenous Australians that pulses throughout this world.

It is through exploring how bureaucratic subjectivities are established and maintained via the governing techniques found in documents and discourses that we are able to see particular assemblages of power, knowledge and truth circulate within specific Indigenous policy contexts. Therefore, these theories characterise not only the Indigenous subjectivities found within the Indigenous policy world, but also the bureaucratic figures — senior public servants, Commonwealth Ombudsman staff and Resident Service Providers — who are intimately engaged in various Indigenous policy spaces. By exploring how parliamentarians produce Indigenous subjectivity through policy and then shifting the spotlight to bureaucrats, this chapter reveals that these bureaucratic figures are equally vulnerable to neoliberal governing efforts as the Indigenous targets of policy. Indeed, the bureaucratic subjectivities that are investigated in this thesis mirror the ultimate vision that parliamentarians have for Indigenous Australians: the establishment of *homo economicus*; a person able to self-govern their own conduct.

Thus, where Foucault shows me *what* to look for, Goffman explains *how* and *why* this operates in practice. Foucault's theory is vital to being able to identify the Regime of Truth (a form of neoliberal political rationality) that underpins Indigenous policy in Australia (Chapter Two). His theory further highlights the specific techniques and technologies of governance — for example, Parliamentary Acts, the Australian Public Service Code of Conduct and Values, Work Practice Manuals, and discourses of knowledge — that guide the conduct and behavior of political and bureaucratic figures examined in Chapters Three, Four and Five. In partnership with Goffman's impression management theory I am then able to clarify how and why the bureaucratic figures in Chapters Three, Four and Five allow themselves to be governed and the specific subjectivities that are presented, performed and managed via the front and backstage. Combined, the work of these theorists enables me to follow the pulse of embodied policy and knowledge about Indigenous Australians in a journey from Canberra to remote Northern Territory communities. In doing so, I provide an alternative cross-cultural perspective on the Indigenous policy world from the bureaucratic viewpoint as it operates currently in Australia.

Chapter 2

Regimes of Truth as Techniques of Governance: Creating Indigenous Subjectivity through Parliamentarians' Personal Narratives

Introduction

Prominent policy anthropologist Cris Shore (2012: 92) tells us that the “contingency, fluidity and ‘messiness’ of policy processes” is best understood by first analysing the “genealogy and the contestations and negotiations involved in [a policy’s] formation.” This chapter therefore begins with an examination of “the assumptions and framing of policy debates” (Wedel et al. 2005:33) as recorded in parliamentary Hansard for two key Commonwealth Indigenous policy initiatives.⁴⁰ Within these debates, I reveal that a desired Indigenous subjectivity is activated through the personal narratives of parliamentarians. These narratives give structure to four discourses that establish a Regime of Truth about Indigenous Australians; a series of ‘truths’ and ‘facts’ that become the foundation for Indigenous policies.

Regimes of Truth are present in every society and involve an analysis of: “what counts as truth, who has the power to define truth, the role of different authorities of truth and the epistemological, institutional and technical conditions for the production and circulation of truths” (Rose 1999: 30). Foucault ([1977] 1980a: 112) argues that truth is not universal, it is temporal and culturally specific; a construct of the society that produces it. Truth does not

⁴⁰ The transcripts of these debates are located online in Commonwealth parliamentary Hansard. Hansard is a documentary archive that records all parliamentary sessions and parliamentary committee hearings.

pre-exist, as if truth and knowledge are hidden and simply needing to be discovered. Conversely, new knowledge or truth comes into existence because there is a change or transformation in what people decide will be considered truth at different moments in time (Foucault [1977] 1980a: 112). This is what Foucault calls a Regime of Truth, a new era consisting of knowledge that is recognised, accepted and acted upon as being true. His studies of medicine, psychiatry, sexuality and prison all reveal changes to forms of knowledge and the Regime of Truth that dominates at any given time (Foucault 1971, 1973, [1977] 1995).⁴¹

The Regime of Truth found in these debates contains two views of Indigenous subjectivity: first, a current view that sees Indigenous Australians in need of governmental intervention; and second, a future vision that sees Indigenous Australians as being moulded into neoliberal *homo economicus* citizens.⁴² Yet, these circulating conceptions of Indigenous subjectivity are not presented by parliamentarians as constructs. Indeed, the opposite is suggested as they articulate their assumptions as forms of truth, knowledge and evidence.

In what follows, I review and analyse the parliamentary Hansard transcripts of the debates that occurred in the House of Representatives and the Senate for two recent Commonwealth policy initiatives: the 2007 Northern Territory Emergency Response and the 2012 Stronger Futures. Strikingly, it is revealed that parliamentarians adopt a common discursive mode that sees them articulating their own personal opinions and experiences as facts in place of substantive evidence or expertise to buttress their statements.⁴³ This strategy causes the dialogue in the transcripts to read as though parliamentarians are stating evidenced truths about Indigenous Australians. It is these truths that form the foundation for the programs and measures which will be delivered on the ground in communities, should the policy under debate become legislation.

The chapter begins with an overview of the methodology and literary framing used to analyse the two parliamentary debates. I then identify and analyse some of the personal narratives that are used to channel four key discourses. Finally, I demonstrate how these discourses form the Regime of Truth that present a desirable (and undesirable) Indigenous subjectivity which is underscored by neoliberal high-modernist agendas and ideals.

⁴¹ Foucault discovered that a discipline or institution's view of what constitutes knowledge changes over time. For example, up until the eighteenth century there was one discourse characterising the medical profession. Over a 25-30 year period this discourse began to change and what was considered to be truth and knowledge about medicine changed "the ways of speaking and seeing the whole ensemble of practices which served as supports for medical knowledge" (Foucault 1980b: 112).

⁴² In other words, *homo economicus* is the Indigenous subjectivity that remains to be realised at the local level.

⁴³ Indeed, Australian scholars have questioned the policy logic and evidence base that justifies these recent Indigenous policies (Altman and Russell 2012, Hunter 2007, Sanders 2009).

Methodology and Context

Hansard transcripts are easily accessible in the public domain which makes them ideal documents to initially study in order to ascertain the truths and knowledge-sets that are dominant during the conception of any policy. As Annelise Riles (2006: 12) notes, literary criticism can reveal the existence of a wider “cultural logic” that motivates the form of the documentary text. She enlists as examples maps, ledgers, bills and tables. Riles (2006: 12) terms these documents “cultural texts” and states that it is through a cultural text that a particular social or cultural logic might be evidenced in operation.⁴⁴ To frame the Hansard transcripts as a cultural text reveals how the parliamentarians’ own social and cultural views influence the direction of policy and the desired future subjectivity they have in mind for Indigenous Australians. I argue that the cultural logic which forms Indigenous policy is expressed in the Regime of Truth.

Sullivan (2012: 53) suggests that for anthropologists to circumvent the challenges that an anthropology of policy can present, we should analyse “the products of practices of modernity... public documents, as performances with their own internal dynamics.” He suggests that anthropology should view public documents as “reflexive performances”, not just the products of the subjects of inquiry, but rather, as the subjects themselves, stating that public documents “offer a way to understand modern culture” (Sullivan 2012: 53). Whereas conventional policy documents such as Bills and Acts, or departmental policy manuals and guidelines, are usually seen as simply outlining the formal rules and instructions for public administration, Hansard transcripts appear as the first formal cultural texts of a particular policy that contain representations of Aboriginality.⁴⁵

It is important to recognise that these constructions occur at the beginning of the policy cycle in the agenda setting stage (Figure Two). The bureaucratic figures we meet in later chapters must still contend with these original ideas and understandings that parliamentarians generate about Aboriginality and that form the foundation of Indigenous policy measures. The Hansard transcripts discussed in this chapter are documents which confer the initial meaning, direction and justification for embarking on a specific policy trajectory and not others. The speeches of

⁴⁴ Stoler (2009: 32 -33) examines a similar notion of the cultural text in reference to colonial archives.

⁴⁵ Sullivan (2008: 129) further asserts that, with regard to bureaucrats, policy deals with *representations* of “Aborigines in meetings, plans, reports and media statements.” He suggests that the bureaucratic culture of Indigenous Affairs is based on particular constructions of the “Aborigine” which are found in documents, and as I argue in Chapter Five in bureaucratic discourse. It is within parliamentary debates that the beliefs surrounding Aboriginality initially appear in the public domain.

parliamentarians, therefore, are an appropriate starting point from which to view the political construction of Indigenous subjectivity that then circulates throughout the policy world.

The framing of Hansard transcripts as cultural texts emerges from a close reading of Commonwealth parliamentary debates. In my first reading I compared the debates documented in 2007 with 2012. The second reading of this material coincided with a wider search of Hansard from 1901, honing in on significant policy debates that made reference to Indigenous Australian policy. Across the debates I noted that the majority of Commonwealth parliamentarians spoke with authority on the subject of Indigenous behaviour, livelihoods and futures using narratives or statements that invoke personal experience to legitimate their claims. They compared and measured Indigenous Australians consistently against their own ideals, norms and values in all areas of life, including: education, health, housing and employment. The overall conclusion that they reach is that Indigenous people need to change and that the policy under debate is the answer.

Throughout these readings a clear pattern emerges: the enactment of four discourses. These are:

1. An argument that past government policy has failed.
2. An argument that policy will generate equality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.
3. An assumption that Aboriginal culture is a negative barrier that prevents Indigenous people from gaining equality and living the 'good life'.⁴⁶ Thus, aspects of culture must be modified or eliminated.
4. An assumption of what it means to live the 'good life'; which is ultimately of western orientation, including the values, beliefs and norms of European settler Australia.

The following sections consider the substance of the 2007 and 2012 debates.

The Power of the Personal Narrative

The following six excerpts from parliamentarians highlight what I consider to be a personal narrative and demonstrate how these are presented as the equivalence of evidence. When employing personal narratives parliamentarians tend to highlight at least one, but usually two or three, of the following four themes to fashion their statements as convincing and valid. The first relates to temporality; how far back in time a parliamentarian can recollect or how recent

⁴⁶ I place inverted commas around this term to indicate that it is problematic, as what constitutes a 'good life' is subjective. However, in these debates, only one version of the 'good life' is acknowledged and this is the parliamentarians' views of the 'good life'.

the experience is. Second, is the direct connection parts of the story have to an issue the parliamentarian is concerned about, or that they are in support of. Third, is whether the parliamentarian represents an electorate either subject to the legislation or with a substantial Indigenous population. Fourth, are narratives that demonstrate non-political, personal connections to Aboriginal individuals and communities.

In 2007 National member Ian Causley begins by recounting his genealogical background. He states:

My family first went to the Clarence River in about the 1860s. My great-grandmother was one of the first white children born on the Clarence River. She lived her adult life on the Esk River across from a group of Bundjalong people who lived in their native state. I still know the people of that tribe five generations down the track (House of Representatives 2007: 102).

Opening with his personal history, Causley appears to be validating the remainder of his opinions and experiences. This introduction is followed by statements where he claims to intimately know about Aboriginal customs. He says, "I know how their customs were enforced and they were different from what we are talking about tonight. Some of the laws were very strict and even brutal, but there was none of the sexual abuse or assaults that we hear about today" (House of Representatives 2007: 102). In this statement and those that follow, Causley seems to imply that the abhorrent practice of child sexual abuse is now an accepted custom in 2007.

Later, Causley recites a conversation he had approximately *nine years ago* with an Aboriginal woman, "whom I went to school, played sport and worked [with] and whom I have employed" (House of Representatives 2007: 102). This woman is from a community that he claims to know "very well" (House of Representatives 2007: 103). In secret, she approached Causley to inform him of the situation of abuse and violence that was occurring in her community that she felt the community was powerless to do anything about. Secrecy is an important factor that parliamentarians invoke in their speeches to validate their statements. No one can refute what Causley has been told in confidence. There is no basis to test the facts he is recounting because his informants remain anonymous. As the Indigenous voice is anonymous, Causley can easily invoke more than one. Indeed, he tells the parliament that "I could give you more and more terrible stories of what is going on" (House of Representatives 2007: 103). In omitting from his speech what these "terrible stories" might be, he leaves it up to the listener to imagine what might be worse than child sexual abuse and brutal domestic violence. These personal experiences become the justification for why Causley is eager to support the legislation because it will instil the type of development, education, employment and economy

that will end the cycle of violence and abuse that he has heard firsthand from Aboriginal people he cares about and is connected to through his family's history.

Similar to Causley, Liberal Senator Alan Eggleston demonstrates that it is not necessary to cite specific details, or recent examples, in order to produce a convincing testimony. At the beginning of his speech Eggleston suggests that it is Aboriginal culture that is the most significant factor that hinders Aboriginal people from emulating mainstream Australia. For example, he states that "Indigenous culture has been used to throw a cloak over these problems [of abuse] and that, in this day and age, it is time for this cloak to be removed and for the Indigenous people of Australia as a whole to be brought into the world of contemporary Australia" (Senate 2007a: 106). Eggleston implies that this is what Aboriginal communities are wanting, especially since they can see a "world" through their televisions that they are not a part of. This disconnect to the world then becomes the root cause of their "sense of hopelessness" that is "manifested in excessive drinking and various social problems, including abuse of children" (Senate 2007a: 106-107).

Eggleston is strategic in emphasising which Indigenous people we should label as problematic. He eventually acknowledges that "there are many Indigenous families within our cities, town and remote communities who live as ordinary members of their societies in normal, happy family relationships." However, Indigenous people who do not live this way are relegated to categories such as uneducated, unskilled abusers who exhibit endemic hopelessness due to isolation and alienation from "the world of modern Australia" (Senate 2007a: 106). Eggleston's evidence for these sweeping assertions is a short reference to having lived in the Pilbara for 22 years (Senate 2007a: 106).

However, this is not the only evidence Eggleston proffers to validate the facts he presents to the Senate. Nearing the end of his speech, Eggleston describes the knowledge he acquired when he attended an "Aboriginal bush meeting" back in the 1970s (Senate 2007a: 108). He educates the parliament by stating:

Such meetings were held about once every three months on the banks of a river where about 300 or 400 people would gather over three days to discuss issues of interest to them. The first bush meeting I was invited to was held on the banks of the Coongan River near Marble Bar and I was a little surprised when I first arrived to see the chief Aborigine of the Pilbara, whose name I cannot mention since he is now deceased, sitting at the head table wearing a big white stetson on his head over his mane of white hair and at tables on either side of him sat his advisers and lawyers from Perth and Canberra.

As a result of attending this single meeting with the stetson-wearing, modern, Aboriginal chief, Eggleston states that he “rapidly came to understand that these people were not naive about our society and their aspirations were much the same as all Australians in wanting better housing, health services and education” (Senate 2007a: 108). If remote Aboriginal people in the 1970s could hold meetings, dress in modern clothing and converse and work alongside lawyers and advisers from the big cities, Eggleston highlights that there can be no excuse for an Aboriginal person in 2007 to claim ignorance to modern Australian life, nor the values and norms that underpin mainstream Australian culture. Eggleston expresses a firm view that neoliberal norms and values are the solutions to problems faced by Aboriginal communities and he does so through reference to vague encounters. It is important to be aware that no other authorities are cited as justifying these assertions apart from Eggleston’s own 22 years of experience, which he does not elaborate upon, and attendance at one bush meeting more than 30 years ago.

Conversely, Senator Steve Fielding openly admits to the Senate his lack of knowledge about, exposure to, extensive experience or connections with Indigenous people. It is just prior to the announcement of the intended Northern Territory Intervention in June 2007 that Senator Fielding makes an effort to inform himself about Indigenous Affairs. He explains,

In March my wife Susan and I made a trip to the Northern Territory. Neither of us had been to Darwin or Katherine before. We went to see firsthand some of the Indigenous communities. We went to see and hear for ourselves the stories of people, to try to understand the real problem. This trip was about helping us to be better informed. Living in the outer suburbs of Melbourne, we had not been confronted with Aboriginal poverty and disadvantage. Like many, we have not grown up with Aborigines in our community. Our trip was deeply depressing and disturbing. We walked away stunned and shocked by the problems facing the Aboriginal community and that kids were growing up in such an environment. As we listened to men and women, Aborigines and white people alike, tell us their stories, our disbelief only grew. How could this be so? How could a community of people live like this? How could we all, black and white, have allowed the situation to reach this level of hopelessness? As we listened, the depth of the problem began to surface. We began to see the complexities (Senate 2007a: 109).

Despite this being Fielding’s first exposure to Indigenous issues, and perhaps his first ever substantial engagement with Indigenous men and women, he makes clear that this is a sufficient basis for making an informed decision to support the legislation. In the case of this fact-finding mission, Fielding reveals that he engaged in little discussion of particular politics with Aboriginal people; rather, he spent his trip *listening* to Indigenous people (and other white people) “tell us *their* stories” (emphasis added). Through listening, Fielding is able to see

what the issues are. Moreover, he now *knows* that the current policy in debate offers *the* solution to the problems and complexities he has witnessed during a single remote trip.

It is important to consider in Fielding's observation — and in many other parliamentary narratives — that he shows himself as adopting a position of first listening to what Indigenous people are choosing to bring to his attention. In this way he is simply a messenger, sharing with the parliament what he has been told. Similar to Causley, Fielding invokes the nameless, faceless Indigenous person. When parliamentarians conjure up Indigenous voices in this way, in essence they are asserting that they are not putting forward their own agendas or ideas of what should be done. Instead, they are the conduit for the Indigenous voice. The fact that this voice is vague and generic is not an issue. For if one cannot argue with what a parliamentarian has personally witnessed or experienced, how can anyone dispute what an Indigenous person witnesses and experiences?

This enlisting of the anonymous Indigenous person was the dominant trope deployed by Minister Mal Brough in every speech and address he made to the public concerning the intended Intervention proposals (House of Representatives 2007, Brough 2007a, 2007b, 2007c). Running parallel to the power contained in the parliamentarian's own personal observations, invoking the anonymous Indigenous voice similarly functions to disregard or circumvent other forms of evidence. Furthermore, such tactics minimise the disconnect between parliamentarian and citizen as parliamentarians are presented as 'down to earth', relevant, and both knowledgeable of and connected to, the experiences and opinions of Indigenous citizens. Consequently, the policy under debate does not contain the parliamentarian's views or aspirations; instead, parliamentarians are channelling the desires of the people into concrete action. Melding the personal narrative with the Indigenous narrative is a cunning discursive ploy.

Another repeated strategy occurs when parliamentarians invoke personal connections and interactions with Aboriginal people. Both Liberal Members of Parliament, Rowan Ramsey and Barry Haase and Labor Senator Trish Crossin, demonstrate this in 2012. While it is not viable here to fully quote Ramsey, the following is a selection of statements from his speech:

I *know* many are implacably opposed [to income management]⁴⁷... I met with the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples *a few weeks ago*... I *regularly visit* remote Indigenous communities... [I] have met *in the past* with representatives of the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankuntyathara Women's Council... When I met with them, *the*

⁴⁷ Details of this policy have already been provided in footnote number 22 on page 32.

women told me this... My observations in the communities...
(emphasis added in House of Representatives 2012: 1798).

Additionally, Ramsey expresses that “it is confronting, every time I go [sic] to my electorate, to see the disadvantage that these people operate within and how difficult it is to get kids into the schooling system” (House of Representatives 2012: 1797). He uses these experiences to validate his belief that “cultural practices”, such as funerals which can last for months at a time, are a prevention or hindrance to Indigenous children receiving the same level of education as mainstream Australian children.

This extract from Ramsey is emblematic of many parliamentarians. For example, Haase invokes similar sentiments to Ramsey when he states that, “my Indigenous *friends* across the *Durack electorate* understand discipline” (emphasis added in House of Representatives 2012: 1807). He then addresses the Speaker to say, “I know that you know I speak from experience and I speak from the heart, but it is an ongoing and long-term project to educate all the members of this House as to what really should be done and what really is expected in remote Indigenous communities across Australia” (House of Representatives 2012: 1808). This comment by Haase, contrasting his personal experience with his fellow parliamentarians’ lack of experience, places him in a seemingly well-founded position to speak with authority about Indigenous issues. Therefore, the arguments Haase puts forward through his personal narrative affirm the notion that personal experience is beyond refute.

The final personal narrative I will discuss comes from Labor Senator Trish Crossin in 2012 who represented the Northern Territory. Her speech combines all of the attributes of the personal narrative – temporality, direct connection to the agenda item being discussed, representative of an Indigenous electorate and personal connection to Indigenous people – as well as invoking the anonymous Indigenous voice. Crossin utilises personal narratives to specifically counter an Australian Green member’s accusations that people in the Northern Territory do not want Stronger Futures. Indeed, Crossin argues the exact opposite: that people have liked and welcomed government intervention in some areas (Senate 2012: 76). For example, she recounts women approaching her in a community that are in favour of Income Management. She says that “about five weeks ago” these women said to her that,

They like the fact they can go into the local store and know they have a certain amount of money to spend on their food and goods. They like the fact that it is budgeted for them. They actually like that! ...and there are many thousands in the Northern Territory who have that view... So we have to accept that there are some elements of this package that the people I represent want continued (Senate 2012: 76-77).

Invoking a non-political connection is vital to Crossin's claim for legitimacy. She describes Indigenous people as relating to her not necessarily as a senator but in terms of friendship and familiarity:

Indigenous people everywhere say to me, '*Sister*, I want my store looking just like your Woolies supermarket...' or when they say "*Trish*, you have to do something about getting my grandson to school. I want my kids to have an education. I want my community to be well educated. I just can't get my grandson to school. You have to help us do something' (emphasis added in Senate 2012: 78).

Inciting these familiar terms for her interactions with Aboriginal people is a deliberate tactic that noticeably sets Crossin apart from other politicians in both the House and the Senate.

This claiming of special status or uniqueness from other members of parliament and senators is further emphasised by Crossin when she refers to her background as an outback teacher in the Northern Territory (Senate 2012: 78, 121-122). She makes the point of singling herself out as "the only person" (Senate 2012: 78) to have had the experience of being an outback teacher, which implies that competing opinions of the usefulness and appropriateness of the Improving School Enrolment and Attendance through Welfare Reform Measure hold little weight when compared to Crossin's expertise. Of this she says:

I am probably the only person in the federal parliament who has taught in an Aboriginal community. I am probably the only person who has gone to school on Monday with 25 kids in my class and three on Tuesday, six on Wednesday, 25 again on Thursday and maybe two on Friday. Then the following Monday I get another 25 — but they might be a different 25 from the 25 I had the week before. I have been there and I have experienced how damned difficult it is trying to teach kids when you cannot even get the same child consistently day after day (Senate 2012: 78).

This example includes the themes of non-political connection (being a teacher), direct connection to the policy measure being discussed (having experience with Aboriginal school children) and representation (being the senator for the Northern Territory). In the Senate debate, Crossin repeats herself, saying, "I have taught in the Territory and I have taught out bush and I can tell you that... I sit down with people — and I am talking about senior people in communities — and talk to them under a tree, on the beach, at their council meetings, outside the store or wherever..." (Senate 2012: 121-122). These narratives draw considerable attention to Crossin's firsthand experience and knowledge of the lives of Indigenous

Territorians and stake this in direct relation to her support for the School Enrolment and Attendance (through Welfare Reform) Measure.⁴⁸

These narratives of personal experience, and those that enlist the spectre of the anonymous Indigenous person, demonstrate how particular truths are manufactured by parliamentarians in place of alternative forms of evidence and expertise. Thus, when mapping the speeches, a crucial pattern emerges that explains how a Regime of Truth about Aboriginality comes into being; a Regime that determines and judges past, present and future conceptions of the desirable Indigenous subjectivity. It is not the *quality* of the evidence that is important, because obtaining validity and legitimacy through enlisting any type of research is uncommon regardless of the source (for example, government departments, commissioned reports, or independent academics or scholars). Instead, it is the parliamentarians' ability to use their personal experiences to produce particular truths about Indigenous Australians that is prevalent in the debates. As this section has shown, the personal narrative is a powerful medium for masking opinions and viewpoints and thus producing evidence without the need for verification or review. I continue this examination of the personal narrative in the following section through the analysis of the four discourses that articulate the Aboriginal 'truths' which form the Regime of Truth.

The Four Parliamentary Discourses

The personal narrative is delivered prior to, or becomes a core part of, a parliamentarian's statement of truth and pronouncement of judgement. As I evidenced above, the personal narrative is able to deter most criticism and withstand critique; how can one dispute what another individual has experienced, witnessed, or been told face-to-face? Leading with the personal narrative is, therefore, exceedingly strategic and highly effective in presenting the four discourses examined below as truth or fact. It should be noted that the first two discourses may not appear to reference personal narrative; however, a personal narrative will

⁴⁸ Senator Crossin's unique position is further highlighted in the comments made by Senator Chris Evans. Evans directs his comments at the Australian Greens who are opposed to many of the Stronger Futures measures. He says to the Senate, "I am more inclined to listen to the Northern Territory representatives in the House of Representatives and the Senate about these issues than I am the Greens. I do not doubt your motives, but Senator Crossin moves in these communities all the time. I am much more inclined to take her advice on these issues and the practicalities" (Senate 2012: 113). He further emphasises his point by contrasting Crossin with the then leader of the Australian Greens, Senator Christine Milne. He provocatively says to Milne, "I am not sure what visibility you get from Tasmania on these issues, but I would rather follow the advice Senator Crossin gives me about the practicalities of these measures on the ground" (Senate 2012: 113); the logic being that Tasmania is the furthest state from the Northern Territory.

precede or *follow* the arguments put forward by parliamentarians. Conversely, the latter discourses draw heavily upon personal narrative *throughout* the parliamentarians' statement.

Discourse One: Articulating Past Government's Failure

Stating that past government policies have failed Indigenous communities, thus requiring the current government to take a more active role, is a key discursive strategy employed by parliamentarians in presenting past, current and future Indigenous subjectivities to the parliament. Liberal Senator Cory Bernardi's address to the Senate in 2007 demonstrates this (Senate 2007a: 112-114). He states,

Let us be frank about this: the self determination of Aboriginal communities simply has not worked. Self-determination was designed to defeat the cult of victimisation afflicting Aboriginal Australia. It has failed... Rivers of grog, pornography and substance abuse have all contributed to the current malaise. But the time for talk is over. The federal government has to act and it has to act now because the Northern Territory government has simply failed to do so over many years.... Where the Northern Territory government has failed, this federal government is taking on the role of protecting children in Indigenous communities. We are not going to allow others to hide behind customary law, which permits young girls to be promised in marriage and raped as a right. This is not right; it is simply wrong. In this case, the government's action speaks louder than the hot air of those who oppose this bill for some twisted and kooky extreme mantra. There is a national emergency confronting the welfare of Aboriginal children and the well-meaning intentions of the past have become a trap rather than a solution. Values, virtues and societal norms have broken down in a slurry of alcohol, pornography, lawlessness and excuses. The time for self-serving excuses is over. Breaking the cycle requires dramatic action and drastic changes — a fact supported by many Indigenous people.

Bernardi uses a particular formula that relies on discussing failed past policies. First, he points the finger of blame at past governments for the current problems evident in communities before widening his scope to include blaming anyone opposed to the Intervention policies. Second, he provides examples of the problems and dysfunction in communities, making sure to invoke outrage in his listeners by highlighting emotive topics such as child brides, the rape of children, substance abuse and addictions. Third, he emphasises that *this* government must take drastic action because they have been left with no other choice. A firm hand is necessary if order and stability is to return to communities.

Alongside decrying past government attempts to aid Indigenous Australian communities, Bernardi's speech consistently silences those opposed to the Intervention. This contributes to the Regime of Truth as Bernardi defines who has the authority to speak and act on behalf of Indigenous people. Opponents he predominantly criticises include the Australian Greens and "almost every latte-sipping leftie", including past senators who supported self-determination (Senate 2007a: 112). In contrast, Bernardi highlights prominent Indigenous activists who are sympathetic towards the Intervention policies, for example, Noel Pearson and Evelyn Scott (Senate 2007a: 113). Noel Pearson and Evelyn Scott's words add weight to Bernardi's general argument that blames the current state of living in Indigenous communities on the inadequate government policies of the past, although their voices are quoted sparingly, and we are not provided with the context of their statements.⁴⁹

Similarly, in 2012 Senator Crossin focuses her argument on explaining the difference between the now past Northern Territory Intervention policies and the yet to be realised Stronger Futures policies (Senate 2012: 78). She proclaims that Stronger Futures "is not a continuation of the intervention. If this legislation goes through, it will stop the Howard government's intervention" (Senate 2012: 76).⁵⁰ She then offers a series of personal narratives, as described in the preceding section, to highlight how her government has spoken with, and listened to, Northern Territory Indigenous people throughout their term in government. This is in direct contrast to the previous Howard Government which developed and sought to implement the Intervention within the course of a few weeks.

Crossin implies that the Labor Government are not looking for a short term 'Band-Aid' solution, in the same vein as the Intervention. Rather, the Labor Government's focus is beyond their term in government, with the next ten years in mind. The Labor Government believe they have a broad understanding of what Indigenous people disliked about the Intervention and thus, what policies should be removed, amended or further developed to attain the goals that the parliament hopes to achieve; goals that have been identified and developed through consultation with Indigenous people. Crossin (Senate 2012: 76) says of the Howard Government's legacy, "I have travelled the length and the breadth of the Northern Territory many, many times over the last five years... Of all the people in this place, we know only too well the hurt and pain that Indigenous people have endured in the Northern Territory

⁴⁹ Senator Bill Heffernan also presents this discourse in reference to self-determination in his speech to the Senate in 2007 (Senate 2007b: 63).

⁵⁰ Lower case for 'intervention' is used in the original transcript.

because of those policies.”⁵¹ This distinction between the Intervention and Stronger Futures is important to emphasise because it ensures that the criticisms levelled at the Intervention and thus the Howard Government, are not connected to Stronger Futures and the Labor Government; despite the draconian tone of the two policies remaining similar and criticism of the Stronger Futures consultation process.

Current governments highlight past policy failure to assert the moral superiority of their policies. Sullivan (2008: 129) says this is because “new policy is future oriented, it does not have to demonstrate efficacy, while old policy, is, by definition, wrong.” This affords no accountability to the parliamentarians who use this discourse which is often accompanied by assertions that “present policies cannot fail because they are oriented towards a future as yet unrealised and so untested” (Sullivan 2001: 7). Having established that past government policy has failed, parliamentarians can then argue for the moral superiority of their proposed policies. Predominantly, this moral argument is that equality in opportunities, lifestyles and outcome for all Australians is paramount and will be achieved via the new policies that are under debate (Folds 2001, Lattas and Morris 2010, Povinelli 2010).

Discourse Two: The Constant Concern with Attaining Equality

In the discourse of equality two prominent factors are identified as hindering progress: first, the permit system which isolates communities and hides abhorrent practices such as alleged child sexual abuse; and second, a lack of active engagement with the ‘real’ economy.⁵² These factors are predominantly argued for in 2006 and 2007 by the former Minister for Indigenous Affairs Mal Brough.⁵³ Throughout his speech, Brough makes the following statements concerning the permit system:

Closed towns mean less public scrutiny, so the situation has been allowed to get worse and worse. Normally, where situations come to light that are as terrible as the child abuse occurring in the Northern Territory, solutions are pursued relentlessly by the media. But closed

⁵¹ The “we” in Cossin’s extract refers to Senator Nigel Scullion and herself who both represent constituents of the Northern Territory.

⁵² I place inverted commas around this term to indicate that it is problematic as what constitutes a ‘real job’ is employment that brings Indigenous people into the mainstream economy. I further explain the problems with this term later in this section.

⁵³ Mal Brough was the minister for the Department of Families, Housing, Communities Services and Indigenous Affairs which was dismantled in 2013 and its portfolios mainstreamed to other Commonwealth departments. The Indigenous Portfolio was moved to the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. For the sake of brevity I refer to Brough in this thesis as the Minister for Indigenous Affairs.

towns have made it easier for abuse and dysfunction to stay hidden. Closed towns also prevent the free flow of visitors and tourists that can help to stimulate economic opportunities and create job opportunities (House of Representatives 2007: 12).

The current permit system has not prevented child abuse, violence or drug and alcohol running. It has helped create closed communities which can and do, hide problems from public scrutiny (House of Representatives 2007: 20).

Closed communities can create an environment where behaviours, including antisocial and criminal behaviours, attract little public attention. This is not healthy in any society” (House of Representatives 2007: 21).

Indigenous communities are thus conveniently hidden from public scrutiny with the permit system in place (Senate 2007b: 55, 69, 74, House of Representatives 2007: 12, 20-21, 94-95). Liberal Senator Judith Adams explains that the “removal of the permit system will promote strong, safe communities, because people throughout Australia should have access to the same opportunities and experiences” (Senate 2007b: 55). Inherent in the speeches is this persistence that “Improving access to these towns will promote economic activity and help link communities to the wider world” (House of Representatives 2007: 21; see also Senate 2007b: 55-56, 74, 129).

Linking Indigenous people back into the “wider world” (House of Representatives 2007: 21) is viable only through removal of the permit system and encouraging communities to develop economic opportunities so that locals can be employed in ‘real’ jobs — tourism and mining being the only industries suggested. The dichotomies of normal/ordinary and abnormal/deviant are referenced to promote this idea that normalisation will flourish in areas where industries are developed, but this can only occur when equality is finally realised (House of Representatives 2007: 21, Senate 2007b: 55-56, 74, 129). Indeed, Liberal Senator Guy Barnett says that the goal of the Intervention is to “lift these Indigenous children and their communities so that they can partake in Australian society *in the same way* that other Australian men, women and children partake” (emphasis added in Senate 2007a: 99). Similarly, Senator for the Northern Territory Nigel Scullion adds that “to open up these communities to *normal* interaction with other Australians... will promote tourism and economic growth and give people confidence to deal with the outside world” (emphasis added in Senate 2007b: 74). Linking the removal of the permit system to the assured establishment of industries will thus assist communities in becoming ‘normal’ and ‘ordinary’ and eliminating inequality.

The second factor hindering equality is a lack of engagement with the 'real' economy. In the debates the word real prefixes statements about employment and the economy (House of Representatives 2007: 6-8, 11-12, 20-21, 71, 79, 83, 95, 104, 114, House of Representatives 2012: 1802, 1804-1805, 1815, 1794, 1795, 1749, Senate 2007a: 94, Senate 2007b: 62). Former Minister Brough (House of Representatives 2007: 21) states this plainly when he says, "Visitors, including tourists, have been discouraged, leading to limited contact and no involvement with the real economy and the financial support that can be derived from tourists attending these communities and buying from the various arts outlets and from other economic activities that can flow from it."

Significant within this equality argument is the link parliamentarians make between a lack of a real economy and employment in communities and the existence of aberrant social behaviours. Senator Scullion bookends references to the economy in his argument concerning the permit system and community social problems. He states:

There will be changes to the provisions governing access to Aboriginal land *to increase interaction with the wider community and to promote economic activity*. The current access provisions have not prevented child abuse, violence and alcohol running. They have created closed communities which hide problems from public scrutiny. We do not want women and children to be scared to report violence and abuse. More open communities and a proper police presence will give people the confidence to report inappropriate behaviour. We also want to open up these communities to normal interaction with other Australians. *This will promote tourism and economic growth and give people confidence to deal with the outside world* (emphasis added in Senate 2007b: 74).

The equality argument is referenced when Scullion connects the future Indigenous subjectivity to the "wider community" and "the outside world." Such arguments about the 'real' economy form the assumption that Aboriginal communities are experiencing a false reality. Haase (House of Representatives 2007: 83) expresses this clearly when he discusses participation in the Community Development Employment Programs (CDEP) scheme. He says: "I have not been to a community yet where there was not employment that could very easily deserve a solid wage — not a CDEP wage, not a half-wage, not a furphy wage, but a real wage." Following this remark is his expectation that Indigenous participation in western economic forms of employment will solve inherent social and cultural problems, predominantly because having a real job "would give self-esteem to those individuals, coupled with the responsibility of doing a job on a regular basis" (House of Representatives 2007: 83).

Parliamentarians who make statements about what equal employment is for Indigenous people are inevitably classifying alternative or non-economic forms of employment as being

unacceptable. As I explain in the third discourse, customary forms of work such as preparations for 'sorry days' or caring for country are not deemed by parliamentarians in these debates to be forms of valid employment.⁵⁴ This is despite the time, energy and resources that Indigenous people invest into these activities. Conversely, parliamentarians decide what will constitute the parameters of the 'real' economy in Indigenous communities. Exactly how the development of mining and tourism industries will aid in solving economic and social problems remains unexplained by parliamentarians. It is merely assumed that by extending the expectations of the economic sphere into the social, cultural and private spheres, Indigenous livelihoods will inevitably improve.

To summarise this discourse for equality, Marcelle Burns (2010: 129) explains that the government policy *Working Future* is,

...consistent with the 'no job, no house' approach which denigrates Indigenous cultural practices as 'recreational lifestyles'. The assumption is that there are jobs 'out there' waiting for Indigenous people to fill and that with 'behavioural change' Indigenous Australians can become active in the 'real' economy.

This quote appropriately segues into the next two discourses that parliamentarians invoke which are reliant upon assumptions about lifestyles and the necessity for "behavioural change" (Burns 2010). Discourse Three examines the assumption that Aboriginal culture is a negative barrier to achieving equality. Such assumptions are held up in direct contrast to the 'ideal' Australian way of life, the 'good life', which is promulgated in the debates. This 'good life' is the fourth discourse parliamentarians deploy to emphasise that equality will be achieved when the 'good life' flourishes in Indigenous communities.

Discourse Three: Aboriginal Culture as a Negative Barrier to Progress

In the 2007, and to a lesser extent 2012, parliamentary debates cultural difference is denied recognition, worth and respect. The logic follows in 2007 that by enabling difference to exist Australia is allowing violence, crime, abuse and dysfunction in Indigenous communities to

⁵⁴ Sorry days, or sorry business, are terms used to describe the grief and mourning period and associated rituals surrounding an Indigenous person's death. This includes preparing for and conducting the funeral. Caring for country includes the activities and work that Indigenous people engage in with regards to ecology and land conservation. An Indigenous person's connection to their homeland — or 'country' — is vital for both individual and communal well-being and sense of identity. Both these forms of activity can require a significant investment of time, knowledge and skill. However, there is no means for Indigenous people to be reimbursed or remunerated for their efforts and resources used in executing these tasks (Burns 2010: 129, Altman 2001, 2007)

continue. Senator Adams (Senate 2007b: 55) affirms this three times when she says that, "The current system sets these communities up as somehow *different*. It encourages the people who live in these communities to have *different* expectations and aspirations, to think that they are *different* and to think that they do not need to worry about having a job or about sending their children to school."

In the same year, Haase tells the House of Representatives that culture is the cause of the malaise that affects Indigenous people. He explains this as follows (House of Representatives 2007: 83):

I accept and respect the fact that Indigenous law is a very demanding process, but it is overdone. An unacceptable number of children are denied continuity of education simply because, with modern communications, people know about occasions that are happening 2,000 kilometres away, for example and will take their children out of school, in the name of culture and not bring them back for four or five months. This is unacceptable and needs to be modified. If one destroys the future of one's race in the name of promotion of the culture, isn't that an enigma? Aren't we in fact recognising what is eventually effectively genocide and condoning it by saying, 'You pursue your culture. You might be denying an opportunity for your children, for your future generations, but you are doing so in the name of continuity of culture.' It is a conundrum. I could not honestly look at the situation and suggest it is appropriate. So we need to have children attending these facilities that provide an education so they can go on and get a job. With that job will come all the benefits of employment, of financial independence, of self-esteem.

These views from Adams and Haase are dominant in the parliamentary debates. Cultural difference and even the pursuit of positive cultural traditions, is blamed for the inequality that separates Aboriginal people and mainstream Australians. Indigenous culture is in a sense, self-defeating. Parliamentarians assert that the normalisation policies under debate will alter aberrant behaviour so that Indigenous Australians will be brought into alignment with the rest of society and ensure that the 'good' parts of culture remain; those being cultural practices that do not interfere with the government's neoliberal agenda.

In 2012, Liberal Member Alan Tudge communicates this discourse clearly when he explains how Stronger Futures will minimise the bothersome or barrier aspects of Aboriginal culture. He believes that instead of supporting people to live where they choose, such as homelands, the parliament needs to,

...move away from that to a position firmly based on economic engagement in the real economy, where people are fully educated to be mobile and to exploit the opportunities which present themselves

right across Australia... yet we still have policies which create incentives for people to remain in remote communities rather than to be mobile, accepting jobs located elsewhere across Australia... at the very least, the able-bodied people who graduate from school should have to leave their communities to get a job (House of Representatives 2012: 1804-1805).

This comment is a great contradiction when we consider a comment Tudge made earlier. In a previous statement, Tudge argued that mobility for cultural practices (such as sorry business) is preventing children from going to school and adults from having steady jobs. Yet in this comment, he is advocating for mobility. Tudge determines in this statement what the acceptable and unacceptable reasons for mobility are. In the above quote he implies that it is abnormal and a cause of community dysfunction to stay in communities where there is no employment. In saying this, his comment suggests that a community's spiritual connection to a specific area of land is of little importance or that it has become a hindrance to an individual's social development because they will not leave their community to pursue employment.⁵⁵ He gives the impression that this aspect of Aboriginal culture, staying on country, is serving as an excuse for the lack of economic employment in Aboriginal communities. Culture is blamed for fostering welfare dependency and should therefore, not be encouraged.⁵⁶

Similar to Tudge, other parliamentarians sit in judgement as to what is traditional/authentic culture. For example, when Ramsey (House of Representatives 2012: 1797) speaks of sorry business he asserts that:

Traditionally, anything over 20 kilometres or 30 kilometres would have been out of the community's reach. With the way that they live their lives now, sorry days are having a much greater impact now than they would have had 100 years or 200 years ago. That is one of the reasons that school attendances are so bad throughout the lands.

⁵⁵ For more information about the importance of land and country to Indigenous people see Pat Dudgeon et al. (2010: 26, 32-33).

⁵⁶ Tudge implies in his speech that Indigenous people are adverse to work. Yet, Rowse (2010) suggests that other obstacles, such as social exclusion, prevent Indigenous people from fully engaging socially, economically and politically in the wider Australian polity. Rowse (2010: 166) references government data to argue that remote Indigenous Australians experience higher levels of social exclusion than urban Indigenous Australians. He further observes that the majority of Indigenous Australians live in urban areas, and in these urban areas Indigenous Australians generally experience levels of inequality similar to that of non-Indigenous Australians in the same areas. Thus, Tudge's suggestion that remote Indigenous people should be forced to leave their communities so that they might attain equality with non-Indigenous Australians is a weak argument when confronted with the data Rowse analyses; data that shows Indigenous levels of inequality and social exclusion to be just as significant in urban areas too. Consequently, moving from remote communities to urban areas may not yield any difference in social and economic outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

Ramsey presents a fossilised view of culture that forces contemporary Indigenous Australians to fit within his static and unchanging conceptions. Additionally, blame is placed on Indigenous people for the lack of school attendance and/or poor levels of education in communities. Yet, even when culture is identified as being authentic — such as the cultural practice and family obligations/responsibilities attending to sorry business — it does not necessarily follow that Ramsey believes this practice should be supported or fostered.

The caveat to Ramsey's statement is that he does not believe that governments should intervene in the lives of its citizens. However "in this case", which is that "of a situation that was out of control" he supports the approach of Stronger Futures, which requires the carefully crafted intervention of government in the lives of Indigenous Australians (House of Representatives 2012: 1796-1797). This is because he believes that intervening will "create good social norms" and build safer communities through "building up families" (House of Representatives 2012: 1801). However, it is not simply government intervention to establish economies in Indigenous communities that is needed; Ramsey implies that the principles of human capital should extend beyond the market into all spheres of social life. This is similar to the sentiments promulgated by the neoliberal Chicago School discussed in Chapter One.

In both 2007 and 2012 parliamentarians also identify a lack of English speaking skills, geographical isolation and closed communities as barriers to attaining equality and experiencing the 'good life'. For example, when discussing the topic of education in 2012 Senator Ron Boswell states:

We have to do something. We cannot just keep going the way we have been for the last 50 years where Aboriginal children are only speaking one language in a community that maybe 400, 500, or 600 people can understand. They cannot speak English. They get marooned in the community. They cannot go out because no-one can understand them (Senate 2012: 101).

To speak English, to go get a western education and to leave communities, these are the actions being promoted.

Another example from 2012 combines culture and education. Australian Greens Senator Scott Ludlum wants to pass amendments to the School Enrolment and Attendance through Welfare Reform Measure to ensure that "cultural practices and obligations" will be considered as acceptable excuses for absences from school (Senate 2012: 4957). Labor Senator Chris Evans (Senate 2012: 4957) responds by stating:

We do not support the amendments. We are a bit old-fashioned on the Labor side of politics. We think kids should go to school and they

should go to school every day. These measures are designed to make sure that that happens to give those kids the best opportunity to make their way in life. So we do not think setting a lower threshold is appropriate. We support the scheme to try and change that sort of culture to make sure the culture is one which says kids ought to go to school and they ought to be supported to go to school every day.

Senator Crossin speaks next to make clear that absentees from school for cultural reasons, such as “initiation purposes or for funeral purposes”, will be taken into account. However, Senator Evans’ comment about changing Indigenous culture to model that of mainstream Australia appears to be provocation for Australian Green Senators Milne and Ludlum to question the motives of Stronger Futures.⁵⁷

It is the assumption that culture creates a deficit and lacking in Indigenous Australians that ensures they cannot be seen as merely different and further, that difference is not a desirable quality to have (Folds 2001: 160, Morphy 2008: 145, Stanner 1979a, Sullivan 2012: 59, Kowal 2015). These assumptions of Indigenous culture are vital for the second prevalent assumption of what constitutes the ‘good life’. Parliamentarians in 2007 and 2012 argue that either the complete elimination, or drastic modification, of aspects of cultural practice is essential to attaining equality and experiencing the ‘good life’. Parliamentarians are of the view that should Indigenous Australians be taught the values of western society they will naturally and rationally choose these for themselves. To admit otherwise would undermine the very foundations of policy arguments and the core tenets of western neoliberal existence exemplified in the discourse of the ‘good life’.

Discourse Four: The Solution of the ‘Good Life’ and How to Attain it

The discourse of the ‘good life’ presents an idealised vision for Indigenous Australian futures. The foundation of this vision is the establishment of western cultural values and norms in Indigenous communities. Haase (House of Representatives 2007: 82) indicates what it means to live the ‘good life’ in his speech to the House in 2007:

All manner of strategies have been put in place in the past, with all manner of dollar resources from governments, but still the problems have persisted. One must ask oneself: why have the problems continued to be exacerbated in the lives of Indigenous people? So many people, so many good brains, have put their minds to solutions

⁵⁷ The Australian Greens opposition to Stronger Futures rests on the belief that it is yet another attack by the Commonwealth Government on Indigenous culture and an attempt to transform Indigenous people into ‘normal’ Australian citizens.

over so many decades. Why do the problems still exist? Let's look at the mainstream style of life in Australia and see what some of the foundations of that in-the-main cohesive, motivated, socially acceptable community is like. It relies on a few cornerstones. It relies on education, it relies on the acceptance of personal responsibility, it relies on the security that comes through the knowledge that the law will be upheld by an ever-present police force and, of course, it relies on a judiciary in the situation of dispute. Many of those cornerstones of our mainstream society are non-existent in so many of the Indigenous communities across Australia.

It comes as no surprise that the above statement is immediately followed by a personal narrative outlining Haase's experiences and connections with Indigenous Australians. He reminds the chamber that he *knows* these communities because, "I have in excess of 200 of them in my electorate and I visit them frequently. I know the problems that exist and I know the services that do not exist" (House of Representatives 2007: 82). His belief in the "social norms in our community, in mainstream Australia" and his witness to the adverse effects in communities that lack such norms, influences his decision to support the Intervention (House of Representatives 2007: 82). In his opinion, the Intervention is the policy initiative that will instil social norms that will improve the Aboriginal communities he claims to care about.

By 2012, Haase's conceptualisation of Aboriginal communities has not shifted. Indeed, the assumption that Aboriginal people must be forced to do what they are told is cemented in his personal narrative about the Aboriginal body becoming docile, disciplined and self-regulated. Haase (House of Representatives 2012: 1807) refers to the missionary days as the ideal template for how to attain this Indigenous subjectivity. He states that,

The advancement and wellbeing of Indigenous people after the arrival of the First Fleet was probably the arrival of the missionaries across remote Australia. At that point in time education was given. Guidance that was believed to be necessary for assimilation was given. The outcomes of course were much less than the expectations of those missionaries involved, but their intent was great and good and their commitment was great and good. The criticism that they have had heaped upon them since those day is in the main unjustified. I know that in my original patch of Kalgoorlie in the Eastern Goldfields all of the successfully employed and deployed Indigenous people had a solid grounding of education in mission schools — Mount Margaret, Warakurna, Warburton... Today, we are faced with a debate on legislation that is once again going to regulate the behaviour of Indigenous communities. As I said, in the main it is regulation that was introduced by the Howard government as a matter of necessity. It was necessary then, it is necessary now and it should be embraced. Any opportunity to impose more rigour on that legislation should be taken, because as legislators we cannot afford to simply wish to avoid offence.

Thus, he argues, there is a need for “discipline” and for the parliament to “teach discipline” through this legislation (House of Representatives 2012: 1807), and deploys a personal narrative to emphasise the good that came out of the missionary days:

My Indigenous friends across the Durack electorate understand discipline. They understand the necessity for rigour. They understand the necessity for their children and grandchildren to get an education. I am speaking in the main of those people who got their education at the hands of the missionaries and got jobs on pastoral stations. Those people absolutely deplore the current situation where sit-down money is paid.

In his speech Haase determines that the Indigenous people who accept the necessity for government discipline are not those who are experiencing problems with alcohol, drugs and child abuse. Conversely, it is Indigenous people who refuse to adopt the western norms, values and responsibilities of the ‘good life’ who are the targets for government policies. His perspective is reinforced by the ‘fact’ that mutual obligation — a popular term drawn from the Howard Government — has failed.⁵⁸ He states that mutual obligation “does not teach the individual that they will stand out in a group by putting their shoulder to the wheel and going the extra yard and being rewarded for it” (House of Representatives 2012: 1807), here insinuating to the western value of the hard working individual and the protestant ethic. These assumptions provoke Haase in 2007 and 2012 to support any legislation that will encourage, or force, Aboriginal communities to adopt and comply with western social, cultural and economic norms and values.

The necessity for government intervention to guide Indigenous people towards choosing the ‘good life’ is further evident in the 2007 debate in a speech made by David Tollner of the Country Liberal Party. His reference to Aboriginal town camps as reflecting the living conditions of the “third world” helps to explain why he supports the government’s attempts to engage Aboriginal people in “private home ownership and business enterprise development” (House of Representatives 2007: 95). Such changes would be the solution to the excessive “poor hygiene, extreme violence, alcohol abuse and child sexual abuse” that he says marks town camps (House of Representatives 2007: 95).

Tollner’s vision of the future for Aboriginal communities mirrors any mainstream Australian township or city which includes “a market garden, a greengrocer, a hairdresser, a restaurant, a clothing shop, a shoe shop, a bakery or a butcher shop.” These businesses and industries will

⁵⁸ Mutual obligation in this context is the idea that certain welfare recipients should not just be handed money from the government but must be subject to responsibilities and requirements that aim to return them to the work force (Parliament of Australia 2015b).

contribute to the 'good life' through generating happiness, productivity and employment opportunities (House of Representatives 2007: 95). Tollner asks, "Who out there honestly believes that Aboriginal people should not have access to these services in their townships that other Australians enjoy?" (House of Representatives 2007: 95). The question of whether Aboriginal people want their communities to be serviced by this range of enterprise is not canvassed. He provides no evidence, explanation or personal narratives to support such statements. He merely assumes that all people value the norms provided by these services and that a blossoming 'good life' would follow in the wake of its establishment, absent of "the carpetbaggers, the drug pushers, the grog runners, the abusers and the corrupt" (House of Representatives 2007: 95).⁵⁹

Many other parliamentarians' speeches imply that they are in agreement with Haase and Tollner; that the 'good life' is achieved when the presence of the following western norms and values are produced:

1. The promotion of the individual and the family (House of Representatives 2007: 2, 3, House of Representatives 2012: 1801, 1807, 1815).
2. Engagement with the 'real' economy and employment (House of Representatives 2007: 6, 8, 11-12, 20-21, 71, 79, 83, 95, 104, 114, House of Representatives 2012: 1802, 1804-1805, 1815, 1794, 1795, 1749).
3. Home ownership (House of Representatives 2007: 11, 95, 107, House of Representatives 2012: 1792, 1794, 1803-1804, 1743, 1749).
4. Receiving a western education (House of Representatives 2007: 82-83, House of Representatives 2012: 1795, 1800, 1815).

The impression is that Indigenous people are not making real use of their land and are thus not able to sustain real economies or own their own homes. Ultimately, within these debates, parliamentarians conceive of no solutions to improve the limited employment and economic opportunities that already exist or suggest alternative opportunities that have the potential to be fostered in Indigenous communities, such as those of the "hybrid economy" for livelihood and wellbeing proposed by Jon Altman (2001, 2007, 2010).⁶⁰ When alternate economic forms are acknowledged parliamentarians do not accept these as being legitimate or adequate. Parliamentarians depict current remote Indigenous ways of life as embodying all that must be

⁵⁹ Gibson's (2012: 10) observations in Daguragu are the opposite of the 'good life' described in the debates. He says that the Intervention has hindered Aboriginal people from realising their aspirations and has left a resounding "sense of hopelessness" amongst the community. For instance, Gibson (2010: 10) states that "Since the attacks on CDEP and the coming of shire the Vincent Bakery, the CDEP office, arts centre, brickworks, family centre, health centre and canteen have all closed down. The feeling of loss and despair is palpable." Gibson's experience is that the Intervention policy has reversed the 'good life' that was already present.

⁶⁰ Hybrid economy

altered and corrected via policy so that the four elements listed above can be achieved and enable Indigenous Australians to partake in the 'good life'.

The Culmination of the Discourses into a Regime of Truth

These debates have the appearance of a calculated discursive strategy that parliamentarians in 2007 and 2012 deploy to silence opposition and refute any evidence that might contradict the foundations upon which the policies are built. Thus, regardless of the evidence or alternative Indigenous views that other parliamentarians, most notably members of the Australian Greens, present to the parliament, the parliamentarians from the major political parties are able to dismiss all evidence by deferring to what they have personally witnessed, experienced and heard. This collective endeavour to affirm a particular Regime of Truth concerning the future of Indigenous subjectivity, through personal narratives, is steeped in high-modernist aspirations.

Applying aspects of James Scott's (1998) ideology of high-modernism to the parliamentary debates enables an understanding of how the four discourses coalesce to produce a Regime of Truth about Aboriginality. I classify high-modernism as an extreme type of neoliberal ideology that is enacted through policy. Neoliberalism allows for minimal state intervention to ensure that individuals are able to compete and thrive in society. However, the state's intervention in high-modernist practice, while still minimal, is simultaneously incredibly coercive and carefully crafted.

High-modernism is referred to by Scott (1998) in *Seeing Like a State* to understand the state's efforts to order and control citizens through urban planning. Scott argues that the key desire of the state is to make society legible, with the state taking additional action to ensure this occurs for 'abnormal' populations. Scott (1998: 4) says that high-modernism,

...is best conceived as a strong, one might even say muscle-bound, version of the self-confidence about scientific and technical progress, the expansion of production, the growing satisfaction of human needs, the mastery of nature (including human nature) and, above all, the rational design of social order commensurate with the scientific understanding of natural laws.

Therefore, high-modernism is "a particularly sweeping vision of how the benefits of technical and scientific progress might be applied — usually through the state — in every field of human activity" (Scott 1998: 90). Scott observes that the individuals who affected great societal transformations all "envisioned a sweeping, rational engineering of all aspects of social life in

order to improve the human condition.” Thus, high-modernism is usually present when “a revolutionary movement or visionary announces a grand plan for the total transformation of society” (Li 2007: 276). An example from Australia is the way that former Prime Minister John Howard and Minister for Indigenous Affairs Mal Brough abruptly announced, legislated and implemented the Northern Territory Intervention (Howard 2007, Howard and Brough 2007, Brough 2007c). However, it is vital to distinguish high-modernism from “scientific practice” (Scott 1998: 4). Scott emphasises that high-modernism is an ideology or faith, an elitist endeavour, relying on the expertise of science, bureaucrats and intellectuals who *appropriate* “the legitimacy of science and technology” to achieve the high-modernist’s goals (Scott 1998: 4). High-modernists are therefore “uncritical, unskeptical and thus are unscientifically optimistic about the possibilities for the comprehensive planning of human settlement and production” (Scott 1998: 4).

The high-modernists in the parliamentary debates are parliamentarians from major political parties who subscribe to the dominant Regime of Truth. It is the major party parliamentarians who hold the power to discern the expert or those deemed to hold legitimate authority to speak about Indigenous matters. Indeed, Scott (1998: 93) states that, “The troubling features of high-modernism derive, for the most part, from its claim to speak about the improvement of the human condition with the authority of scientific knowledge and its tendency to disallow other competing sources of judgment.” Major party parliamentarians decide what evidence and views will be acknowledged and those that are to be silenced. Therefore, my decision to focus on the parliamentarians from the major parties (or the parliamentarians that conform to the majority view) is because they are the subjects who set the Regime of Truth for Indigenous policy. Within these debates the voices of the minor parties, some independents, and some prominent academic scholars, are quashed because they do not agree with the direction of the policies under debate. Thus, their views are not a part of the dominating Regime.

Scott (original emphasis in 1998: 90) explains that “the high-modern state began with extensive *prescriptions* for a new society and it intended to impose them.” This is noticeably evident in the four discourses. The programs in the Intervention and Stronger Futures policies sought the development of particular industries, economies and institutions in remote communities that would require a change in people’s behaviour, responsibilities and obligations towards the state. This revised relationship with the state would be coercively met via new tenancy agreements, new employment programs, new school attendance measures, changes to income support eligibility and an increase in police presence to impose the law of the state.

The parliamentary discourses I identify thus operate as a technique of governmentality, employed by the state, to achieve the ideal Indigenous subjectivity. Through policy (and the programs it enacts) the state intends to shape, guide and coerce Indigenous Australians into producing particular forms of conduct; specifically thinking, behaving, acting and self-governing in the same ways that mainstream Australians do. Parliamentarians in these debates thus allow for only one vision for the Aboriginal future which is based on their own world view. This echoes the intentions of Scott's high-modernists to build a "utopia" through changing "people's work habits, living patterns, moral conduct and worldview" (Scott 1998: 5). It is assumed that such changes will enable the state to effectively govern society.

To achieve this utopian vision, the state requires a "completely fresh start" which is achieved through conducting a comprehensive "critique of the existing society" (Scott 1998: 115). This is evident in the 2007 Intervention. Minister Brough, backed heavily by Prime Minister Howard, led the charge with a "sweeping vision" (Scott 1998: 90) for how to improve Indigenous communities. The impetus for this sudden policy shift was proclaimed as addressing the widespread evidence of abhorrent child sexual abuse. However, the actual measures contained within this bundle of policy legislation included programs relating to land tenure, job security and income support payments, which appeared to have little connection to the issue of child abuse (Begley 2010, Macoun 2012, Strakosch 2011, Wild and Anderson 2007, Altman 2007, Hinkson 2007). Hence, these policies were couched in terms of facilitating change for not only the perpetrators of child abuse, but *all* Indigenous Australians in 73 prescribed communities across the Northern Territory. Most parliamentarians in the 2007 debates followed the Prime Minister and Minister's lead: they pictured a particular utopian future for Indigenous Australians; a future that matched their own western ideals and aspirations for the social improvement which they deemed imperative to eradicate child sexual abuse, amongst other pathologies, in Indigenous communities.

While the parliamentarians might be articulating the creation of a utopia, upon further reflection it is apparent that the four discourses conform to Scott's idea of how a dis-utopia is created. Scott (1998: 89) explains that, "The ideology of high-modernism provides, as it were, the desire; the modern state provides the means of acting on that desire; and the incapacitated civil society provides the levelled terrain on which to build (dis)utopias." Scott identifies that the following three elements create dis-utopias:

1. The aspiration to order nature and society.
2. An unrestrained state power being used as a tool to achieve these aspirations.
3. A civil society that is "weakened or prostrate" and thus unable to avoid the state's actions.

In reference to the first element listed, parliamentarians aspired to alter land tenure, remove permits and create development opportunities such as tourism and mining, as well as modifying culture and tradition. In line with Scott's high-modernism their aspiration was to bring order, stability and normalisation to Indigenous land and communities.

Both the Liberal Coalition and Australian Labor Party also display Scott's second dis-utopian element during their term in government. Under the Australian Constitution the Commonwealth has legitimacy to wield state power over a territory. The "unrestrained" (Scott 1998) aspect of this power is especially evident in 2007 with the suspension of the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*. Suspending this Act ensured that policies and programs would be administered in the Northern Territory without affecting the targeting of Indigenous Australian citizens. Ultimately there was no means to require the Commonwealth to reinstate this Act, despite the Australian Human Rights Commission (2009) and the United Nations disagreeing and problematising this course of action (McKechnie 2009). Hence, suspending the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* ensured that any person who felt discriminated against by the Intervention laws, or measures, had no avenue to legitimately lay a complaint on the grounds of racial discrimination (Begley 2010: 64).

Power also seems to be unrestrained because most Indigenous policy matters receive bipartisan support (Altman 2014).⁶¹ Whereas the opposition will generally resist, or denigrate government policy, with the 2007 Intervention both major parties agreed upon the key aspirations and the general spirit of the policies. Additionally, with the media confirming, and even inflaming many of the negative assumptions inherent in the debates, this unrestrained political power resulted in the general public assuming a default position of support, or at the very least failure to oppose, the policy measures. This was achieved through constantly referring to the situation in remote Northern Territory Indigenous communities as a national emergency.

The analysis in this chapter's previous sections highlights how parliamentarians in 2007 were able to deploy Scott's third element, the ability to "incapacitate civil society", through the Regime of Truth in three ways. First, they silenced any opposition by selectively enlisting the work of scholars or public figures that were in agreement with their version. Second, they strongly insinuated that those who opposed the policies were supporters of the dysfunction and pathological behaviours that the policies would combat; in particular, opposition to the Intervention was suppressed by the discursive move that accused those who did not agree

⁶¹ Scott (1998: 5) observes that high-modernist practices tend to occur across "traditional political boundaries."

with the policies as taking action synonymous with condoning child sexual abuse (Stringer 2007: 4). Finally, invoking the anonymous Indigenous voice within their personal narrative enabled parliamentarians to stifle alternate views. Thus, both Indigenous people who perceived their circumstances to be different and commentators/experts with alternative visions to the government had their voices silenced through the operation of the Regime of Truth.

Further, high-modernism provides a reason why parliamentarians might invoke references to a past, present and future Indigenous subjectivity. To the high-modernist, the past is seen as “an impediment” and in need of radical change (Scott 1998: 95). Yet, it is the failures of the past that become the ideal “platform for launching plans for a better future” (Scott 1998: 95). High-modernists surmise that this particular vision of the future can be known, achievable and certain by setting clear goals and calculating the consequences or sacrifices needed to attain them (Scott 1998: 95). Congruent with this perspective of the past and the future, Scott (1998: 95) asserts that in the present, “The practical effect is to convince most high-modernists that the certainty of a better future justifies the many short-term sacrifices required to get there.” Thus, to achieve the future goals the present population must endure sacrifices.

This model of temporality saturates the four discourses in this chapter. For example, by highlighting past government failure in Indigenous Affairs the government is able to create the “platform” needed to justify its own vision for an improved Indigenous future (Scott 1998: 95). This future is viewed and articulated through a temporal lens with a certainty that extends beyond the lifetime of the policies under debate. For instance, the vision of fully developed townships, complete with thriving businesses, requires “short-term sacrifices” (Scott 1998: 95) in the present, primarily on the part of the Indigenous citizen. Such sacrifices, endured for five years in the case of the Intervention, are currently set for ten years under Stronger Futures.

The final component of this analysis that conforms to high-modernism is when parliamentarians self-identify as saviours or heroes of Indigenous people, either individually or as a parliament collective. They are the heroes to the helpless and hopeless Indigenous ‘damsels-in-distress.’ Scott (1998: 95) explains this by noting that,

Progress is objectified by a series of preconceived goals – largely material and quantifiable – which are to be achieved through savings, labour and investments in the interim. There may, of course, be no alternative to planning, especially when the urgency of a single goal, such as winning a war, seems to require the subordination of every other goal. The immanent logic of such an exercise, however, implies a degree of certainty about the future, about means-ends calculations and about the meaning of human welfare that is truly heroic. That

such plans have often had to be adjusted or abandoned is an indication of just how heroic are the assumptions behind them.

“Heroic assumptions” (Scott 1998: 95) in the parliamentary debates are depicted as waging war on disadvantage, inequality and in particular, violence against Indigenous children and women who are paralysed by fear and unable to help or save themselves. Indeed, in an address to the Sydney Institute, former Prime Minister John Howard compared the situation of communities detailed in the *Little Children are Sacred* report to that of a natural disaster (Schubert and Murdoch 2007, Howard 2007). He specifically referenced Hurricane Katrina, the cyclone that devastated the New Orleans coastline and city in 2005. The current Indigenous situation in the Northern Territory was purportedly a similar national emergency that required a firm and immediate response. By referencing a natural disaster, Howard distanced himself from blame regarding the situation in Indigenous communities because, as in the case of a hurricane, it was not the result of human action nor able to be controlled. Further, Howard contrasted his own strong reaction to the *Little Children are Sacred* report to the inadequate response of the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory. The level of heroism required, coupled with the urgent action that would be undertaken to ‘save the children’,⁶² made allowance for bi-partisan support in the House and acceptance of the high-modernist aspiration to achieve normalisation in Indigenous communities and reorient Indigenous people to be the ideal and proper governable subjects.⁶³

In 2011, with the end of the Intervention in sight and no significant progress towards meeting its stated goals, the Labor Government announced its intention to continue aspects of the Intervention through Stronger Futures. In keeping with high-modernism, former Minister Jenny Macklin highlighted the failure of the Coalition Government’s Intervention to solve the problems in Indigenous communities, whilst claiming with certainty that Stronger Futures would improve Indigenous lives. The high-modernist pattern tracked through this chapter, the presentation of four discourses and the associated assertion of an ideal Indigenous subjectivity as a Regime of Truth, was thus replicated in 2012.

⁶² ‘Save the children’ is another key discourse used to justify and promote the Intervention (Begley 2010: 25-29).

⁶³ More recently, former Prime Minister Tony Abbott championed heroism in his declaration to become the first Indigenous Affairs Prime Minister. To demonstrate this, Abbott moved the Indigenous portfolio into the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, established an Indigenous Advisory and changed the structure of Commonwealth delivery of services via the new *Indigenous Advancement Strategy*.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter's analysis of the 2007 and 2012 parliamentary debates reveals that recent Indigenous policies are a social, cultural and historical construct (Shore 2012: 90) founded upon a particular form of neoliberalism: high-modernism. It is clear that this trope has become deeply entrenched within the mind-sets of Australian parliamentarians, as the same arguments and assumptions continually resurface to project a future Indigenous subjectivity that is cemented as a Regime of Truth about Aboriginality. Thus, the identified discourses analysed in this chapter that circulate within Indigenous Affairs prove to have a significant degree of durability. The intent is clear: past government policy has failed to eradicate the parts of Indigenous culture that are a barrier to Indigenous people experiencing equality and choosing the 'good life'.

The increasing reference in parliamentary debates to evidence-based research to develop, implement and evaluate policy, constitutes the science parliamentarians point to when attempting to persuade others with their arguments (Altman and Rowse 2005). However, when the evidence they use to reinforce their arguments is closely examined it is not science or academic research that parliamentarians are referencing. Rather, evidence appears as a synonym for personal experience and opinion. These narrative stories or short anecdotes are used to justify parliamentarians' support for the policies that are being considered and are integral to the delivery of the four discourses.

The four discourses are woven together to present a Regime of Truth about Aboriginality, that not only justifies and legitimises controversial policies, but becomes the foundational thread running through programs that are implemented on the ground in communities. The logic ignores past policy failures by moving forward with a 'new' policy prescription and does not allow for cultural difference or alternative visions to be considered. A certain "aesthetic" for how things should be done and a specific vision for the future is then created (Scott 1998: 253). Thus, policies are not divorced from the aspirations or assumptions that parliamentarians have for Indigenous subjectivity, rather, the discourses form the cornerstones that hold policy practice together.

The parliamentarians of 2007 and 2012 thus assume that Indigenous Australians are unable to successfully thrive in the economy or society if government continues to have a hands-off approach. This is why they argue that state intervention is necessary to shepherd Indigenous people into the mainstream way of life, the 'good life', which Indigenous people will eventually

choose as appropriate for themselves. The irony is that to make these ideal free-market, neoliberal subjects, requires a dramatic increase in state paternalism.

This chapter has set the policy scene for the following chapters that examine three key bureaucratic figures: senior public servants, employees of the Commonwealth Ombudsman and Resident Service Providers. The remainder of the thesis analyses the everyday activities and behaviours of bureaucrats to ascertain how they establish their own subjectivities and present forms of knowledge about Indigenous people in the Indigenous policy world. Knowing how bureaucrats engage with the policy arguments, assumptions and prescriptions identified in this chapter will contribute towards disentangling areas of the Indigenous policy world and will provide a perspective on how policy operates and journeys from Canberra through to communities. I examine how these bureaucratic figures navigate the unique set of pressures that govern their word, conduct and subjectivity within this policy world by turning first to the senior public servants ensconced in Canberra in Chapter Three, followed by Ombudsman staff as they oscillate between Canberra and remote communities in Chapter Four, before returning to remote communities and Resident Service Providers in Chapter Five.

Chapter 3

Navigating Political Games: Senior Public Servants' Performances at Senate Estimates

Introduction

To the untrained eye, Senate Estimate committee hearings appear as a candid forum where senators and senior public servants engage one another in the exchange of information relating to a particular policy area. While this does indeed occur, Senate Estimate proceedings are often far more convoluted, intricate and perplexing. In the very centre of this complexity sit the senior public servants of Commonwealth departments and agencies who have become experts in navigating the distinct political games that are played at Estimates. The following narrative demonstrates this.

During the course of the morning's questioning I observed a government senator ask what appeared to be a fairly straightforward question of a senior public servant (Public Servant A): did his former colleague (Public Servant B) co-author book 'X'? Public Servant A answered that the question would need to be 'put on notice'.⁶⁴ Raising her eyebrows, the senator moved on to other questions and the proceedings were soon adjourned for the morning tea break. In the course of the break, as public servants entered and left the room, engaged in light conversation or stood and stretched, a colleague of Public Servant A approached him and informed him that, "I just got a text message from one of my team. [Public Servant B] was the co-author of that book!" Public Servant A promptly replied, "Yes, I know. I own it." Confused,

⁶⁴ A public servant asks to put a question on notice when the public servant does not have the answer to a question readily available. Questions that are put on notice are answered in writing later by the department and are available to the public on the Senate Estimates website.

the man asked, “Why didn’t you answer her question then?” Laughing as he turned to leave the room, Public Servant A simply quipped “I didn’t want to!”

This response seemed puzzling, and coupled with what occurred next, added further to my own sense of bewilderment of Estimates and the public servants’ performances within them. Later, Public Servant B, the co-author of the book, appears before the committee in his capacity of recently appointed CEO of a statutory authority. The senator who had previously posed the question to Public Servant A asks Public Servant B directly: did you co-author book ‘X’? Public Servant B declines to answer. Incredulous, the senator exclaims that surely Public Servant B can remember whether he co-authored a book or not. Again, Public Servant B provides no direct answer and diverts the question to the Chair of the committee, asking if he may answer it in a personal capacity and not as the CEO of this organisation. The Chair orders a brief recess in order to convene outside. The senators return a short time later to inform Public Servant B that he may not answer in a personal capacity. Public Servant B then responds that the senator’s question will need to be put on notice.

These interactions between senators and public servants, as well as Public Servant A’s private conversation, were initially puzzling. Why did the senator ask this question when a simple Google search would have produced the answer? What did this question have to do with the Indigenous portfolio? And why did both public servants decline to answer a question to which they both knew the answer? These were queries I posed to the public servants sitting beside me who were discussing the interactions during the afternoon break. They surmised that the senator was trying to discredit the former government by implying that Public Servant B had been appointed to his new position through his personal connection with the co-author to his book. It was not a question that had anything to do with current expenditure or policy programs; indeed, it had nothing to do with Indigenous people or policy at all. Rather, the government senator’s question was intended to weave a web with which to discredit the opposition and Public Servant B was the necessary scapegoat in this attempt to score political points.

Tracing back through Hansard transcripts and video recordings it became evident that the way in which Public Servants A and B interpreted the question and chose to provide an answer, was not an isolated example. Additionally, the seemingly irrelevant question asked by the senator was also not a unique occurrence. If a large proportion of questions posed are not about policy or programs, what then we may ask, is the purpose of questioning at Estimates? Furthermore, at a broader level, how can the Estimates proceedings influence current

Indigenous policy? To address these questions, it is first necessary to deconstruct the messiness of Estimates. I undertake this deconstruction in three parts.

Part One provides an overview of the establishment and purpose of Senate Estimates committees within the Australian political system, to orient the reader to this particular field site. Additionally, I outline the interview selection method I employed to identify which public servants should be approached and invited to take part in this research.

In Parts Two and Three I combine Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of games, habitus and capital with Erving Goffman's metaphor of the front and backstage. I discuss how the existence of senators' different motives mark Estimates proceedings as a particular political 'game', initiated by senators but also played by senior public servants. I observe that much of the questioning at Estimates is a means for senators to score political points. However, successfully navigating politicised questions can enable public servants to avoid being implicated in the points scoring game. To demonstrate this I examine four categories of questions from Estimates which mark, to varying degrees, the multiple layers, complexities and patterns of the eight Estimates hearings that I attended and reviewed for the Cross-Portfolio for Indigenous Matters over a four year period.

According to senior public servant interviewees, the games that senators are playing within these performances do not effectively question policy nor hold public servants to account. Hence, it may appear that the front stage of Estimates makes no contribution to the current evaluation, scrutiny, or accountability of government policy and bureaucratic action; which is the original purpose of Estimates hearings. The analysis in Part Two thus provokes an important question: with senators more concerned about scoring political points than adequately scrutinising and holding to account public servants, government and policy progress, are Estimates useful to the wider Indigenous policy process?

Part Three directly addresses this question. A major part of how public servants are able to competently and confidently navigate the political games that senators try to entangle them in, is developed in the backstage; the things that occur outside of formal Estimates hearings. The backstage is all the unseen spaces of the public servant's department, office, in meetings, in hallways and in the back room of Estimates where public servants await to be summoned before the committee. It is in these spaces that the senior public servants acquire the habitus dispositions needed to skilfully navigate the senators' political games. Furthermore, it is in these backstage spaces where the real work of Estimates occurs; this being the scrutinising of policy and holding public servants accountable for policy decisions and actions via what interviewees termed the Estimates Test. This is a sort of visualisation or imaginary exercise

that senior public servants are constantly practicing. The Estimates Test becomes a governing device (akin to Jeremy Bentham's panopticon) that is self-applied with discipline to every action, decision and process the public servant enacts outside of the formal Estimates proceedings.

I argue that front stage proceedings at Senate Estimates alone may not be the most useful vantage point from which to observe if we want to understand the senior public servant in Indigenous Affairs and the pulse of Indigenous policy in this context. Though Indigenous policy is discussed during the proceedings there is a heightened politics operating in this space that appears to take precedence over thoroughly scrutinising the programs and goals of policy. However, I demonstrate in this chapter that the rationale for Indigenous policy and the way it functions as it does can be found in the senior public servants' backstage spaces and in particular the operation of the Estimates Test.

Part One: Overview

The Senate Estimates Committees

There are three types of parliamentary committees in Australia: standing committees which "operate continuously and concentrate on examining bills and issues relating to particular subjects" (Parliamentary Education Office 2015); select committees that are established to investigate into specific issues and are in operation for a specific period of time (usually until a report is given to the parliament); and Estimate committees which are the subject matter for this chapter.⁶⁵ Additional joint committees are formed for special purposes and consist of members from both the House and the Senate.

The Senate Estimates were established in 1970 and originally consisted of five committees. There are currently eight legislative standing committees that sit at Estimates today (Summers 2010: 79):⁶⁶

1. Environment and Communications Legislation Committee
2. Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

⁶⁵ For more information on parliamentary committees see the Parliament of Australia (2015a) and the Parliamentary Education Office (2015) websites.

⁶⁶ The Cross-Portfolio on Indigenous Matters under the Rudd/Gillard Government was heard by the Community Affairs Legislation Committee. When Indigenous Affairs was shifted to the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet in 2013 under the Abbott Government, this portfolio came under the Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee.

3. Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee
4. Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee
5. Community Affairs Legislation Committee
6. Economics Legislation Committee
7. Education and Employment Legislation Committee
8. Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee

An Estimates committee consists of six members: three from the government, two from the opposition and one minor or independent senator (Bartos 2005: 88). An important feature of Senate Estimates is the questioning of public servants (Miragliotta, Errington, and Barry 2010: 112, Summers 2010: 88, Thomas 2009). Whereas a minister is always liable to be held accountable by their House during Question Time, public servants primarily work in anonymity. However, at Senate Estimates the public servants are visibly held to account for the decisions they make in their minister's name as well as the advice they provide to their minister. To put it bluntly, they are in "the hot seat" (Bartos 2005), or as one interviewee described it, "it's an oral exam" (Public Servant One 2015). Thus, on paper, Estimates should allow for greater examination and scrutiny of government action through keeping ministers *and* public servants accountable for their actions and decisions (Thomas 2009: 379). Yet, as I demonstrate in this chapter, in practice Estimates function as a highly politicised space in which both senators and public servants can be evasive.

In addition to holding people to account, the function of Senate Estimates as scrutineer ensures that laws are implemented as they should be (Thomas 2009: 379). Estimates are past and future focused, with senators questioning a department's previous financial year's progress (the Annual Report) and their projected performance for the coming year (Portfolio Budget Statement) (Thomas 2009: 380). However, the actual crux of a department's work is mostly glossed over or remains unexamined, due in part to time restrictions and to the individual interests of senators.

Paul Thomas (2009: 382) outlines four key benefits of Senate Estimates:

1. They provide senators with the opportunity to challenge ministers on the operation of their departments and programs;
2. The actual program managers can be questioned directly rather than having questions put through ministers and/or on notice which often leads to delays;
3. Portfolio Budget Statements provide a helpful guide to program administration; and
4. Non-departmental bodies are included within the scope of Estimates review.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ The Commonwealth Ombudsman's Office is an example of a non-departmental body that is still required to appear before an Estimates committee.

The primary witnesses at Senate Estimates are public servants, predominantly at the level of the Senior Executive Service. The secretary of the main department (that governs the majority of programs which relate to Indigenous policy) is the key presenter and remains at the desk with the minister for the entire Estimates proceedings.

In the Estimates for the Cross-Portfolio on Indigenous Matters, analysed from June 2012 to May 2013, the main department was the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs,⁶⁸ and from October 2013 through to the present this has become the responsibility of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.⁶⁹ The minister for Indigenous Affairs sits in the middle of a long table with the secretary of the department to their right. Behind sit the awaiting public servants, the majority of whom are the heads of different policy and program areas. Across from this table sit the senators of the Estimates committee.

Questioning at Estimates covers many topics and agendas (Thomas 2009: 389). The apparent randomness of questions can cause frustration for public servants, but likewise, their hesitation to answer or lack of preparedness can cause frustration for senators. Departments attempt to liaise with committee secretaries to anticipate likely areas of questioning and some departments even “conduct dress rehearsals” (Thomas 2009: 390). Preparation for Estimates can begin months before the actual hearing with hundreds of public servants dedicating an extraordinary number of hours to prepare their superiors for the proceedings (Public Servant One 2015, Public Servant Two 2015, Public Servant Three 2015, Public Servant Four 2015). It is impossible to be completely prepared for questions, due to the unpredictability of questioning from senators and their shifting topics of interest (Thomas 2009: 390). However, some interviewees said that they instruct members of their teams to investigate and follow vocal senators’ media releases, social media profiles and recent travel itineraries in the weeks leading up to Estimates, in an attempt to anticipate the questions that might be asked (Public Servant Two 2015, Public Servant Three 2015).

While a public servant is allowed to talk about programs, they cannot comment on questions related to policy, as policy is a matter for the government and not the ‘apolitical’ public servant. Hence, public servants engage in strategies to avoid issues of policy whilst still providing a senator with the information they request. Strategies include prefacing an answer by rewording the senator’s question, ensuring that their response refers to the government

⁶⁸ This department was restructured and renamed the Department of Social Services from late 2013.

⁶⁹ The Indigenous Affairs portfolio was transferred to the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet as Prime Minister Abbott asserted that Indigenous matters were a key priority for his Government.

and the government's decisions, referring the question to another department or unit and putting the question on notice. The important caveat to any answer, however, is to provide accurate, yet succinct, answers to questions. As Stephen Bartos (2005) states:

It has long been the convention that public servants need only answer the question asked. At every Estimates hearings someone goes home relieved because the difficult and embarrassing questions they had been dreading were never asked. Indeed, many officials have got themselves into trouble by adding unnecessary information to material that already fully answers the question — a succinct answer is all that is needed, provided it is accurate.

For interviewees, this is emphasised as imperative and the main instruction given when teaching junior staff how to perform at Estimates proceedings. As one senior public servant explained, "You answer the question that is asked to the best of your ability" (Public Servant Two 2015). Another instructs junior staff that, "you answer the question, just the question, don't give anything extra, keep it narrow" (Public Servant Three 2015). In summing up the sentiments of many interviewees, another interviewee emphasises that you "don't speculate and assume if you don't know... You can take your time to find the answer, clarify the question, consult your colleagues. You don't need to jump in without thinking" (Public Servant Ten 2015).

It is crucial to note that these comments, and others cited in the following discussion, should not be interpreted as public servants being corrupt or deceitful in their handling of Estimates. Nor should these manoeuvres be interpreted as a negative or aggressive assertion of control, a withholding of information or an intention to deliberately mislead senators. Rather, control over the release of information into the public domain — with their name, department and minister attached to every word uttered in this space — is a carefully crafted skill senior public servants develop over time. Additional competencies which complement this skill include: knowing how to identify and navigate particular questions while still abiding by legal obligation, and meeting responsibilities to be truthful and provide assistance to inquiring senators.

Para-site Interviewees

At Estimates, it is not the case that every public servant who attends the proceedings ends up speaking at 'the table' with senators. Therefore, I conducted a statistical analysis of Estimates to determine who I would approach for interviews. First, I collated the Hansard transcripts of the eight Estimates proceedings that I attended between 2012 and 2015. On a spreadsheet I

recorded the names of every public servant who spoke during these hearings. I then narrowed this search down by determining those public servants who contributed 'significantly' to the proceedings. I determined significance from two factors: first, those who provided long answers that were recorded as a series of solid paragraphs carried over a minimum of two pages of written transcript; and second, those who delivered short to medium answers that carried over a minimum of five pages of written transcript.

Second, I separated the average number of attendees (those who are recorded in Hansard as attending the hearings) from those who had significant speaking roles. Regarding the Estimates I observed during the Gillard Government an average of 76 public servants were recorded as attending each time, with an average of 15 public servants making a significant contribution to the proceedings. During the Abbott Government Estimates I attended, 44 public servants attended on average, with again, an average of 15 public servants making a significant contribution. Thus, I aimed to contact at least 15 public servants.

Third, from each Hansard transcript I calculated the total of public servants who had contributed significantly to that Estimate proceeding. Combining the totals of each transcript, I observed the number of significantly contributing public servants from 2012 to 2015 to be 74 individuals. To determine which public servants to approach for interviews from this group, I considered those who had made significant contributions to at least three Estimates proceedings. The majority of these appeared between four and five times (some exceeding this). This process of elimination revealed 20 senior executive public servants who made significant contributions, appearing at Estimates a minimum of three times between 2012 and 2015. It is these 20 that I approached for interviews.

My attempts to make contact with these public servants resulted as follows: one could not be located, four gave no reply after at least three attempts to make contact via email and phone calls, and four declined to participate, leaving eleven who agreed to participate. Thus, the senior executives interviewed for this chapter represent approximately 55% of those who made regular and significant contributions to Estimates during the period of the proceedings I observed between 2012 and 2015; this period spans two Commonwealth Governments and involves public servants from 12 Commonwealth departments, statutory offices and agencies.

To protect the identity of interviewees all quotes have been de-identified including the specific titles, departments, agencies, offices and units. However, I can reveal that all of these interviewees are either presently, or have been, employed at the Senior Executive Service level as deputy secretaries, first assistant secretaries, assistant secretaries, or chief executive officers of statutory authorities.

Part Two: The Front Stage Political Games Senators and Public Servants Play at Estimates

Improvisation within the Games

In the opening vignette to this chapter, and in the examples that follow, I call the struggles that occur between senators and senior public servants during Estimates ‘games’. Following Bourdieu, this theory of social life involves people “improvising” or having a “sense of the game, a sense of how to play” (Calhoun 2003: 275). Craig Calhoun (2003: 286-287) emphasises that “human activity involves a combination of discursive awareness and unconscious skill... rules do not account adequately for what actually goes on [in social life].” Furthermore, as habitus is embodied, it is “collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor” (Bourdieu 1990: 53). The following example explains these concepts of rules, games and embodiment (Calhoun 2003: 275-276):

Whether a tennis player rushes the net is a complex result of numerous factors, not a simple, conscious decision. Indeed, if it is simply a conscious decision the player is probably already too late. The tennis player has a physical, bodily sense of how strong her own serve was and an awareness (usually without words) of the shot her opponent is returning; thought and bodily action are not sharply separate. She also has an inclination to rush a lot or a little, to play risky or safe tennis, to be confident in her physical strength and speed or to watch for angles or chip shots to throw a stronger opponent off balance. This is partly the result of years of experience, partly the result of coaching and disciplined practice. The coach may even use theory to help analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the player’s game; for example, urging her to rush the net a little more, hang back at the baseline a little less. This can be long-term, general advice, or specifically targeted to the opponent the player faces today. Either way, however, the player’s actual shots are actions that cannot be reduced to theoretical rules. They are improvisations. Sometimes they are inspired surprises, occasionally disastrous mistakes. But for a good player they are also embodiments of a highly consistent style. This is what Bourdieu terms a “habitus,” the capacity each player of a game has to improvise the next move, the next play, the next shot.

Different fields have their “own distinctive rules and stakes of play” (Calhoun 2003: 294). To explain this notion, Bourdieu sees fields as analogous to games (Webb, Schirato, and Danaher 2002: 7, Johnson 1993: 8).⁷⁰ To determine a field as a game is to recognise that agents hold different positions and that there are “stakes”, or capital, that agents value and compete with one another to accumulate (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 105). Thus, a game or field is “a site of struggle and strategy” (Webb, Schirato, and Danaher 2002: 11) where agents compete

⁷⁰ Bourdieu’s notion of a field is explained in the Estimates Test section in Part Three of this chapter.

for “control of the interest or resource which are specific to the field in question”; in other words, they are competing for capital (Johnson 1993: 6).⁷¹ This investment in the game for the pursuit of capital accumulation is a “gamble” because there is no certainty that one will attain it (Webb et al. 2002: 23-24). Agents must therefore determine whether the stakes of the game are worth the gamble of pursuing (Bourdieu 1993: 30). Will an investment of time, energy and resources produce the benefits and profits that the agent desires? Furthermore, are the stakes worthy of pursuit when one will be struggling and competing with other agents for its accumulation (Bourdieu 1986: 246)?

The difference between fields and games is that a field “is not the product of a deliberate act of creation and it follows rules or, better, regularities, that are not explicit and codified” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:98). Furthermore, “a field is a game devoid of inventor and much more fluid and complex than any game that one might ever design” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 104). Calhoun (2003: 275) explains this by stating that:

...by ‘game’ [Bourdieu] did not mean mere diversions or entertainments. Rather, he meant a serious athlete’s understanding of a game. He meant the experience of being passionately involved in play, engaged in a struggle with others and with our own limits, over stakes to which we are (at least for the moment) deeply committed. He meant intense competition. He meant for us to recall losing ourselves in the play of a game, caught in its flow in such a way that no matter how individualistically we struggle we are also constantly aware of being only part of something larger – not just a team, but the game itself... when Bourdieu spoke of playing, he spoke of putting oneself on the line.

On the front stage at Estimates, senators engage in two types of games: the *political partisan game* played between government and non-government senators and the *knowledge game* between senators and senior public servants. Within these games senators are competing for two types of capital: in the game with other senators political advantage or political point scoring are the objects of competition, while in the second game, senators compete with public servants for access to knowledge and information. In this second game, public servants sit waiting for the senator to ask the ‘right’ question before they will part with the information that is sought. Even if they can guess or assume what a senator might be trying to discover, they do not freely offer information. A senator must do the work first. As one senior public servant reflects, there are times when she thinks a senator is “on the money, they are just two questions away from discovering the gold”, but then the senator stops asking follow up

⁷¹ It is important to emphasise that this competition is not always conscious because “as a product of the habitus, strategy is not based on conscious calculation but rather results from unconscious dispositions towards practice” (Johnson 1993: 17-18).

questions. The interviewee says when this occurs she thinks to herself, “you nearly got it honey! Better luck next time (*laughs*)!” (Public Servant Six 2015). Though analytically distinct, in practice these games are intricately intertwined. The improvisations that public servants make demonstrate this in the examples of the four categories of questions to which I now turn.

The Frame Analysis of a Senator’s Question

Goffman’s (1974) theory of frames is initially useful to the untrained observer for understanding the seemingly mundane interactions between senators and senior public servants at Estimates. First, this theory is useful as it enables the observer to locate different categories of questions that senators tend to ask, as well as vividly highlighting the intents or motives that underpin each question. The second benefit is that it provides an insight into the two-fold game that is being played. Third, it points toward the governing influence of the habitus dispositions of public servants that enable them to successfully navigate the politically partisan intent of the senators’ questions.

This theory of primary frameworks drew my attention to the ordinary, the mundane and the routine aspects of the scenes I was observing at Estimates. Goffman (1974: 26) advises that there can be multiple frameworks in operation, “or none at all”, in any given moment.⁷² From the activity that is being analysed we can determine what sort of “vulnerabilities” might affect the frame that an individual applies to a scene to make it meaningful. Vulnerability is not the same as a weakness or limitation. Rather, this term refers to how the primary framework that is being used can be susceptible to alternative meanings, which may be different to those a person originally employs to understand what is going on. I explain this later in the section where I examine, contrast and compare the different types of questions senators ask public servants.

Thus, I developed a primary framework: a “schemata of interpretation”, to render “what would otherwise be a meaningless aspect of the scene into something that is meaningful” when observing Senate Estimates (Goffman 1974: 21). This framework consisted of grouping and classifying the type of questions that senators asked public servants. The categories I initially identified were: genuine information seeking, generating controversy/discrediting the opposition or government of the day and time-wasting. There appeared to be clear patterns in

⁷² Goffman calls these moments of activity “strips of activity”, which refer to “any arbitrary slice or cut from the stream of ongoing activity” (Goffman 1974: 10).

the reactions (physical gestures and verbal statements) of senators to a public servant's response.⁷³ It is important to note here that these reactions are clues to both senators and the public servants as to the motive or intent behind a question and thus which game is being played.

Some of the senior public servants I interviewed added another category to my existing list: settling personal vendettas. Therefore, upon analysing the responses to my original categories and incorporating this additional category, the type of questions that the senior public servant interviewees and I believe to exist in the Estimates space are as follows:

1. Genuine information seeking
2. Generating controversy or discrediting the opposition
3. Time-wasting
4. Settling personal vendettas

During the interviews I used these categories of questions as a springboard for discussions and an invitation for interviewees to reflect upon their own experiences. Most agreed that this break down was "fair and reasonable" (Public Servant Seven 2015, Public Servant Nine 2015). However, it is important to note that some interviewees explained that these categories are not always as discreet or bounded as I had presented them. For example, there could be a question asked that is genuinely seeking information, with a by-product being that it also discredits the government. Keeping this consideration in mind, I now turn to examples of the four categories.

Question One: Genuine Information Seeking

Genuine information seeking questions initially appear as the descriptor suggests: senators asking direct questions and expecting a direct answer.⁷⁴ More often, opposition senators ask these questions about topics or themes they care deeply about. These questions are asked promptly; they are short and to the point. This category of questions can be readily identified

⁷³ Thomas (2009: 390) and Holland (2006) have also observed similar patterns in questions at Senate Estimates.

⁷⁴ Some interviewees added other categories to the list including constituent follow-up questions and questions that are asked to aid in formulating their own policies. However, I believe these constitute a sub-category of genuine information seeking questions. For example, Senator Scullion has been particularly renowned for his determination to use Estimates to direct attention to specific constituent issues in his jurisdiction of the Northern Territory, especially when he was in the opposition. He asked questions on program progression and used the answers supplied by public servants to highlight his own policy concerns.

by the rapid backwards-forwards dialogue between senators and public servants with no hesitation on either side to give a response or reply. Senators tend to look directly at the public servant, holding their gaze. Public servants promptly answer with either the exact information, divert the question to another department or put the question on notice.

A senator's reaction makes clear when a public servant has not supplied the information that is genuinely sought. Such a case was evident when non-government Senators Jan McLucas, Rachel Siewert and Claire Moore attempted to question acting Deputy Secretary Ms McDonald from the Department of Health on 30 May 2014. McDonald gives expanded replies to questions from McLucas and Siewert; questions to which the senators were obviously expecting yes/no answers or answers containing figures or numbers. The senators acknowledge McDonald's response and try to guide McDonald towards the sort of information they are wanting. For example, Senator Siewert says at one point,

Sorry, can we come back to that issue. Could you answer the question I just asked. I would really like to hear what you are saying but I want that first question answered, please. What is that \$44 million that is coming in 2017-18? Is that what you are stopping and pausing and all those sort of things, or is it new investment? (Commonwealth of Australia 2014b: 71).

Again, McDonald provides no direct answer to Siewert's finance question. Siewert's reaction should have indicated to McDonald that she was genuinely seeking information. Was McDonald misinterpreting the frame? For when intending to generate controversy, discredit or time-waste with questions, senators tend to allow public servants to answer in their own time and rarely interrupt. When asking a direct question that seeks information a senator does not give a public servant this courtesy. Senators might attempt to interject, by motioning with their hand, avidly nodding in agreement or quickly interpolating into a pause in the public servant's response. They are usually polite, thanking the public servant for their response but signalling that they are either already aware of the information or that it is not quite answering their question. In the case of the latter, they will guide the public servant back to the question, perhaps repeating it in a different format.

If a public servant continues to speak with no pause in the dialogue to allow the senator an interjection, as McDonald does in the next example, the senator's reaction is considerably different. Siewert and McLucas move the discussion to consider the funding for the Australian Medical Society, Medicare and reviews of the funding cuts to Indigenous health (Commonwealth of Australia 2014b: 72-74). McDonald fails to provide clear answers to the senators' questions and diverts part responsibility to another department or area. The senators look visibly exasperated and frustrated. They began by making direct eye contact

with McDonald, but as soon as they are refused an interjection, they look pointedly away; either looking down at their notes or just diverting stony-looking gazes to another part of the room with the appearance of ignoring the offered response. In McDonald's case, the senators look with incredulity to one other as she refuses them an interjection or does not answer the question directly.

Initially, it may not appear that McDonald's responses are evasive or irrelevant. She provides a response to every question, explains why she is unable to answer some questions and puts some senators' requests on notice to follow up later. In the first example, Siewert's questions appear to straightforwardly seek information, yet McDonald did not provide a satisfactory answer. These questions may indeed have been genuine — Siewert and McLucas wanting to understand the recent funding and budget changes — however, McDonald's response suggests she was interpreting the senators' intent as leading her down a risky path that was political and not policy driven.

This is an important precaution that interviewees spoke about anticipating: the direction a senator's question and follow-up questions might be leading them. In crafting improvisations for the next round of questions, McDonald may have been attempting to shut down lines of inquiry that she believed were about scoring political points, which may have been detrimental to herself, her department or her minister. Some interviewees admitted that while the obligation and responsibility of the public servant is to provide a clear response to every question, they are also deeply aware of the imperative to "shut it down" (Public Servant One 2015), deterring the line of questioning, before it gets political. This becomes especially important in the fourth category, settling personal vendettas.

Returning to the opening vignette of this chapter involving Public Servant A and B, one interviewee who was present that day observed, "it was clearly going down a route to make accusations about X and Public Servant B and all that stuff where you shouldn't go" (Public Servant One 2015). This is a 'no-go zone' for the senator, who should not be trying to lead a public servant into a political trap. Similarly, the public servant should not — and need not feel obligated — to put that information on the public record by providing a response.

We cannot know for certain why McDonald chose to avoid directly answering the senators' questions, or why she seemed to shut down the line of inquiry with responses that did not address the questions put to her. We can assume that being in the position of acting deputy secretary of a large Commonwealth department, McDonald knows her portfolio. Interviewees frequently noted that by the time a public servant advances to the executive level, "you know your stuff" (Public Servant Ten 2015). They ought to know the whole sweep of policies and

programs that are relevant to their specific departmental area in great detail. More importantly, for our understanding of McDonald's performance, interviewees stated that deputy secretaries and secretaries of departments are experts in reading the "political climate" of the room (Public Servant Six 2015). Should a less experienced senior public servant fumble with their responses, spend an extraordinary amount of time rummaging through their briefing folders, or confuse senators with their responses, the secretary will often "jump in" to save the public servant (Public Servant Six 2015). McDonald may have been sensing something in the political climate of McLucas' and Seiwert's questions that she wanted to avoid putting on the public record, hence the reason for the particular improvisations she chose to make on that day.

Question Two: Generate Controversy/Discredit the Opposition

The first category of questions is subtle in its potential to be politically motivated. Conversely, politics are increasingly visible and obvious in the second category: questions that generate controversy and discredit the opposition or the government of the day. What is interesting about these sorts of questions is that they are not really aimed at the public servant at all. These questions are aimed *through* the public servant in the guise of seeking information on a particular topic, yet the real objective is to discredit, generate controversy or embarrass the senator's opposing party. All senators, both government and opposition, engage in this type of questioning.

At Estimates on 30 May 2014 the key concern for non-government senators was the controversially proposed \$500 million dollar budget cut to the Indigenous portfolio. While Senators Seiwert, Moore and McLucas ask questions that lead to statements decrying the budget cuts, Labor Senator Penny Wong's questions are defiantly aimed at discrediting the government at every opportunity during the day's proceedings. Throughout the course of the morning, she continually interrupts, cuts off and shouts over government senators, the minister and any unfavourable or "dressed up" response she receives from public servants. The chair of the committee, Senator Cory Bernardi, makes futile attempts to maintain the formal rules governing Estimates proceedings, such as not talking over the witness, allowing government senators to ask their questions and permitting the minister to give a reply. Yet, Senator Wong continues to cause upheaval until she leaves the proceedings shortly before the lunch break.

The motive for her behaviour is obvious: to keep the spotlight on the topic of the budget cuts. As soon as she arrives at the hearing she rolls her eyes, shakes her head, looks with frustration and annoyance at her fellow Labor senators and overtly glances periodically at her watch whenever government senators pose questions. For example, Wong interjects during Government Senator Dean Smith's questioning and explains to the protesting Chair Bernardi that if Smith requires a lengthy briefing, he can arrange this with the minister's office instead of taking up the limited time of Estimates. Wong shouts across the room to Smith, "You're wasting time. You know what you are doing; you don't want to talk about cuts!" (Commonwealth of Australia 2014b: 19).⁷⁵ She then points out that government senators can get briefings from the minister whereas opposition senators cannot, thus the time Estimates allows to ask questions is particularly valuable for opposition senators. Australian Greens Senator Siewert agrees, referring to this later in the hearing when she forcefully argues over the Chair that "government senators can just go and ask the minister, we can't!" (Commonwealth of Australia 2014b: 66).

Not long after this, a visibly exasperated Wong reiterates that she is concerned that time is running out and asks the Chair if her side can "get to the department" (Commonwealth of Australia 2014b: 35). The Chair agrees to move that opposition senators may now ask questions on the condition that government senators have no further questions. Government Senator Bridget McKenzie indicates that she does. To this, Wong throws her hands up in the air, and raising her voice over the Chair who tries to establish control, bursts out, "Oh come on! Anything but the budget, anything but a half billion dollar cut from the budget! Everyone watching this knows that the government is trying to avoid scrutiny of a half billion dollar from the budget!" (Commonwealth of Australia 2014b: 35). McKenzie continues unperturbed, asking questions which are of a broad and general nature about the Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporation's training and capacity building activities.

However, Wong is not the only senator attempting to score some sort of political advantage by discrediting other senators. Another clear example is evident in an exchange between Coalition Senator Smith and Labor Senator McLucas. This example also highlights how a public servant attempts to navigate the political battle that these two senators engage in. After opposition senators have finished their questions, Senator Smith refers back to the evidence

⁷⁵ The gestures and tone in Wong and Seiwert's reactions can be viewed in the video recording (Commonwealth of Australia 2014a).

that Deputy Secretary Mr Eccles gave in response to questions asked earlier that morning.⁷⁶ Smith carefully uses the words that Eccles had spoken previously, paraphrases these and re-presents Eccles' response in the form of a statement. This would require Eccles to respond with a true/false answer. Smith states:

You talked, Mr Eccles, about the new arrangements providing greater clarity in service delivery. You talked about the new approach outlining clearly what the expectations are of organisations delivering programs and you also went on to say that the new approach will be a little bit more focused than in the past on results. Am I correct then to assume that the previous approach lacked clarity... (Commonwealth of Australia 2014b: 66).

Taking this opportunity to discredit the previous Labor Government — inferring that the previous government's approach was inadequate — incites reactions of outrage from Labor senators. Instructed by the Chair to "ignore the interjections" made by Labor Senator McLucas, Smith continues: "So am I correct then to assume that the previous approach lacked clarity... wasn't as well focused..." at which point Labor senators interject (Commonwealth of Australia 2014b: 66). Senator Smith deliberately stops mid-sentence and visibly frowns/pouts when McLucas interrupts with a complaint that Smith cannot ask a public servant for an opinion.

While these series of questions, or rather, political statements, made by Smith are aimed at Eccles, Smith's choice of words that insinuate the incompetence or failings of the previous Labor Government are clear. For example, in the guise of asking Eccles a question he says: "Mr Eccles, was the previous approach not as focussed as it could have been, not as integrated as it should have been, in order to deliver on the results that the community would expect in terms of improving Indigenous disadvantage?" (Commonwealth of Australia 2014b: 67). Whether Eccles would have answered differently had McLucas not pointed out that Smith was asking for an opinion — not facts, knowledge or information — we cannot know. Yet, we see in Eccles' response his success in shutting down politically motivated questions by not commenting on previous government approaches. Instead, he guides the focus back to the present government's policies and intentions.

This is an improvisation strategy that interviewees reveal they deploy a lot: either paraphrasing the question back to the senator minus the political content, or, as we see Eccles

⁷⁶ Smith makes an unnecessary political stab at the opposition before he begins his line of questioning. He does so by asking the Chair "does Senator Wong have any questions?" knowing full well, as everyone in the room can clearly see, Senator Wong is not at the table nor in the room (Commonwealth of Australia 2014: 66). The opposition senators roll their eyes and sigh in annoyance and exasperation at Smith's attempted dig at Senator Wong.

do in this example, “gently guide” (Public Servant Eight) the senator back to the present government’s policies and programs, thus eliminating the attack that was aimed at the opposing party. In doing so, public servants are ensuring that an apolitical impression of themselves is firmly established when they perform front stage. This is imperative as interviewees said they need to always remember that “next year, I might be working for the other side”, meaning, they must be able to show both sides of the political divide that they have the ability to remain apolitical, and thus valuable, to any party that might one day become “their boss” (Public Servant Six 2015).

Thus, the partisan political games that are played between senators must also be carefully navigated, and played to a certain degree, by public servants. They need to be seen as independent, apolitical and impartial, as well as showing that they have the skills to shut down political attacks. While this might not be advantageous when a party is in opposition it certainly is an advantage when that party comes into government. One interviewee mentions that current Minister Senator Nigel Scullion remembered the way she handled his attacks when he was in opposition. He now sees her as an asset to have on his side. However, she was only able to show what Scullion now views as desirable qualities and abilities when she was navigating the political attacks he had levelled at her during the Labor Government’s term in office.

Question Three: Time-Wasting

Examples of the third category are not always intended to discredit or generate controversy. As the descriptor suggests, often such questions are asked by government senators with the intention of using up the precious and tightly scheduled timetable. The more time they can control, the less time opposition senators have to scrutinise and review programs or raise controversial topics. Government senators engage in this line of questioning when they spend time praising programs or activities, draw attention to singular positive examples of improvement or ask public servants for information that is publicly available or centres on mundane processes and procedures which are irrelevant to the outcomes of programs. Additionally, time-wasting questions include asking lengthy questions of the minister, whom government senators have the opportunity to meet with any time outside of Estimates, whereas opposition senators are not afforded this advantage.

The example cited earlier where Senator Wong attempts to discredit the Government’s budget cuts also contains a time-wasting example on the part of Senator McKenzie. We see McKenzie

ask the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations Mr Beven about capacity building and training, to which he provides a detailed and lengthy answer. Opposition Labor Senator Moore then asks Beven whether the information he has just shared with the committee is available on his Office's website or in their Annual Report. Beven explains that while they do not have to produce Annual Reports the information is on the website where the Office reports annually about their activities. With finality and a stern appearance Moore says, "thank you" (Commonwealth of Australia 2014b: 36), implying that this is her ultimate point: McKenzie was wasting time asking questions to which the answers can be readily found.

Interviewees recognise that these time-wasting questions exist but are rarely asked. While senators may use this category of question to put matters on the public record, simultaneously public servants are at times able to use the same question to put issues on the public record that *they*, or their government, deem important. Interviewees felt that Estimates should be about getting things "put on the public record" (Public Servant Seven) and are an opportunity for both senators and public servants to learn more about the programs, processes and procedures of a department. Time-wasting questions can therefore be inverted as public servants take the opportunity that senators were originally using to score political points and flip it to score points of their own. Interviewees were clear that these are not points that are for their own personal advancement or benefit — although any success at navigating politically motivated questions gains respect in the eyes of their colleagues. Rather, success is measured by taking control of such moments to put on the public record what they deem to be of importance or value.

Question Four: Settling Personal Vendettas

This fourth category was added to the list by a handful of interviewees. While this category does exist, interviewees were adamant that such interchange is uncommon. These questions can be either aimed at a public servant personally, or like category two and three, can be directed *through* the public servant and aimed at a third party. Interviewees believe these questions are inappropriate for the setting of Estimates as they rarely have anything to do with actual policy or program outcomes. Instead, these questions are asked by senators who have a score to settle with an individual who they want to discredit publicly. The standard approach is via lengthy interrogations of particular public servants.

One interviewee directed my attention to the Estimates hearing on 27 February 2015 where Senator Smith engaged in approximately 30 minutes (20 pages of transcript) of "forensic

questioning” (Public Servant Three 2015) of Joe Morrison, Chief Executive Officer of the Northern Land Council (Commonwealth of Australia 2015). Public Servant Three’s interpretation of this interrogation was that the senator aimed to “take Morrison down. It wasn’t about good policy” (Public Servant Three 2015). Public Servant Three explains that Senator Smith could have discreetly asked the Minister those questions in private or could have privately requested the agency to provide the information he sought any day of the week; “but they do it in public to take down this guy who’s been a fly in their ointment” (Public Servant Three 2015). Indeed, interviewees felt this was the ultimate aim of the senator’s questions about the co-authoring of Public Servant B’s book cited in the opening of this chapter.

Navigating and Interpreting the Four Possible Intents in a Senator’s Question

While all interviewees agreed that the four categories of questions exist, the point where interviewees’ opinions diverged was with regard to the intent and motive behind the questions. This divides interviewees into two schools of thought and hence applies two frameworks of understanding to the Estimates proceedings. Group A see *different* categories of questions being asked with *different* intents behind them. Group B see the *appearance* of different questions but with the *same* singular intent: to make a political point and score points. It is a game of one political ideology versus another.

Although Group A state that genuine information seeking questions can be asked devoid of political intent, their responses during interviews describing how they act and what they think during Estimates proceedings, appear as a significant contradiction. Indeed, congruent with Group B, Group A entertain a degree of suspicion when engaging at Estimates, remaining “alert but not alarmed” (Public Servant Six 2015). Thus, despite the difference in Group A and B’s framing of Estimates both described their experiences as occurring in a politically charged space in which engaging with caution is necessary.

This sense of hesitation is not related to providing an answer to a senator’s question, for as one interviewee described it “we all live in fear of misleading the senate” (Public Servant Six 2015). Caution in this sense, means having an awareness that the content of their response could be used by senators for political means. Thus, even questions that might seem innocuous on the surface may be followed by questions that aim to cause damage (Public Servant Two 2015, Public Servant Three 2015). Senior public servants are aware that senators are political beings; they are elected into a political role and are affiliated with political parties

and ideologies. Thus, though a question may not appear overtly political it is still a question being asked by a political actor in a heightened political space competing for political advantage. Therefore, Goffman (1974: 302) would suggest, both Group A and B entertain “uncertain ambiguity” to discern the motive of a senator’s question.

Goffman (1974: 302) posits that it is “perfectly possible for individuals, especially one at a time and briefly, to be in doubt about what it is that is going on.” He is referring to a particular form of doubt over the definition of the situation; not the doubt, for example, one experiences in flipping a coin and not knowing which way it will land, but rather, “the special doubt” that arises when the individual is puzzled, “because some expectation is present that the world ought not to be opaque in this regard” (Goffman 1974: 302). This ambiguity is translated into either:

1. Vagueness: where we are in “puzzlement” as to what is going on, and,
2. Uncertainty: where we recognise that one or more things are plainly going on.

Senior public servants from Group A and B all entertain, to a degree, the possibility that senators may be attempting to do more than one thing. For example, not only seeking information but also attempting to generate controversy or score political points. Therefore, I argue that the examples from Estimates analysed in the previous sections demonstrate Goffman’s second type of ambiguity — uncertainty.

For instance, when a public servant is asked a question it stimulates a rational degree of uncertainty; the public servant can never be certain of the true motive or direction of the question. The action that a public servant takes occurs at the point when this uncertainty is resolved. It is imperative that a public servant resolve these ambiguities, “lest the individual be forced to remain in doubt about the entire nature of the happenings around him” (Goffman 1974: 304). Thus, senior public servants must question which “framework of understanding to apply and, once selected, to go on applying” (Goffman 1974: 304).

To do this, senior public servants might ask themselves which category of question a senator is asking: information seeking, discrediting/generating controversy, time-wasting, or settling personal vendettas? Uncertain ambiguity is usually resolved when the public servant provides an answer and then witnesses the reaction of the senator. Is the senator satisfied with the answer and moving on to other questions? What sort of follow-up questions are asked based on the response given? Does the senator get frustrated or accuse the public servant of withholding information or not being prepared? Does the senator cast doubt on the answer given or provide additional comments that reveal that the senator knew the answer all along?

Whilst the ambiguity concerning the question is eventually settled, the public servant is unable to resolve it until after they have given an answer.

Despite this uncertain ambiguity that characterises senior public servants' experiences of Estimates, public servants can still retain an element of agency in these games at Estimates. When studied closely, there is a transfer in the agency and position an individual holds over the direction of the proceedings, at times moving from senator to public servant and back again. In essence, while senators appear to be the "judges" in the "court room", with public servants "in the dock", public servants are not without agency (Public Servant Five 2015, Public Servant Six 2015). Agency occurs via the improvisations public servants make within these Estimates games. In the process, the public servant's view of the initial primary framework — one where the senator is in control — may become challenged and altered. How a public servant attains the skills and experience necessary to interpret what is occurring at Estimates and successfully navigate these games primarily stems from the backstage. I turn now to Part Three, where I discuss how the public servant's conduct is governed by the habitus when front stage and the Estimates Test when backstage.

Part Three: The Governing Role of the Backstage

Habitus Dispositions Deployed as Improvisations in Estimates Games

Paul Thomas (2009) examines how ministers and senior public servants are held accountable by Australia's democratic process and focuses on the accountability roles of the House of Representatives, the Senate and key documents such as the Annual Report and Portfolio Budget Statement. Thomas interviewed 30 people, including parliamentarians, parliamentary officials and senior public servants. With regards to Estimates, the senators Thomas (2009: 382) interviewed reported that they found public servants to be forthcoming with answers and did well to avoid questions relating to policy, whilst still answering "competently and immediately."

However, while my analysis supports a view that public servants do not answer policy questions, I argue that there is careful skill in the way public servants present an appearance of being forthcoming with answers. Indeed, from the perspective of the public servant it is almost impossible to avoid questions of policy as the majority of questions are loaded with partisan political aims. Thus, in their careful navigation of these ambiguous questions, a degree of rational suspicion is required as public servants learn over time to discern how to

respond to a senator's question while avoiding entanglement in the political intent or motive that often lies behind it. My analysis goes beyond that of Thomas (2009). I argue that the public servant's success in answering questions "competently and immediately" relies first on their investment in the game, accumulated capital and habitus dispositions, which in turn contributes to their skilful navigation and discernment of the entanglement of politics, power and knowledge which are in constant play and characterise the workings of Estimates proceedings today.

During my observations, it became apparent that most interviewees' success in achieving a place in the bureaucratic elite stemmed from their personal history. This was realised when they gave overviews of their background and experience as public servants which spanned across the Indigenous policy world. Indeed, despite having different occupational backgrounds, university qualifications and experiences, the senior executives within the public service seem to form a structured group identity of apolitical professionals who have become experts in navigating the partisan world of policy. Two important factors that contribute to this are the Australian Public Service's Values and Code of Conduct.

The need to clearly enshrine employment values is first evident in the 1993 Management Advisory Board document, *Building a Better Public Service* (Bechtel 1993, Public Service and Merit Protection Commission 2001: 132). It is in this document where the articulation of what is now recognised as the Australian Public Service Values can be seen.⁷⁷ In the revised *Public Service Act 1999* the Code of Conduct,⁷⁸ Employment Principles⁷⁹ and Values⁸⁰ are intentionally built into this legislation (Australian Public Service Commission 2015b). The Code, Principles and Values provide clarification to the definition of merit, outline the relationship of the public servant to ministers, parliament and the public and articulate the expectations of accountability and responsibility that public service employees are beholden to (Commission 2001: 123). The Australian Government's website states that, "The APS Values, together with the Code of Conduct, provide an ethical framework for APS employees' relationships with the Government, the public and colleagues and their personal behaviour."⁸¹ In addition, public

⁷⁷ The Public Service Board established draft guidelines about Australian Public Service values in 1978. The *Official Conduct of Commonwealth Public Servants* was published in 1979 and revised in 1987 and 1995 (Public Service and Merit Protection Commission 2001: 123-132) before seeing these values incorporated into the *Public Service Act 1999*.

⁷⁸ The Code of Conduct is in section 13 of the *Public Service Act 1999*.

⁷⁹ The Employment Principles are in section 10A of the *Public Service Act 1999*. The Employment Principles are not elaborated nor mentioned exclusively beyond this point as these are mostly about the expectations of employment in the Australian Public Service and not principles that are embodied by public servants (Australian Public Service Commission 2015c).

⁸⁰ The Values are in section 10 of the *Public Service Act 1999*.

⁸¹ The acronym in this quote stands for the Australian Public Service.

servants employed at the Senior Executive Service level are expected to promote and model at all times the Principles and Values and comply with the Code of Conduct (Australian Public Service Commission 2015b).

The five public service Values are (Australian Public Service Commission 2015a):⁸²

1. Impartiality; meaning they are apolitical and give advice that is “frank, honest, timely and based on the best available evidence.”
2. Commitment to service; which includes adjectives such as “professional, objective, innovative and efficient and works collaboratively to achieve the best results.”
3. Accountable; specifically, they are “open and accountable to the Australian community under the law and within the framework of Ministerial responsibility.”
4. Respectful; of people, their rights and heritage.
5. Ethical; including demonstrating leadership, integrity and trustworthiness.

Like all good ‘bureaucratese’ this schema has been simplified by taking the first letter of each Value and forming the acronym known as “I CARE” (Public Servant Two 2015, Public Servant Six 2015, Public Servant Ten 2015).⁸³ And this is exactly the succinct description of how the senior public servant interviewees presented themselves to me. Many interviewees expressed dissatisfaction or frustration with the Estimate process, yet, their general attitude embodied a sense of ‘I care’ about the Australian public, giving good policy advice, getting value for money and enabling the government of the day to do their job.

This I CARE commitment is grounded in the constant references to the democratic process. I did not raise democracy or any other governmental system or institution during interviews. Yet, this concept was frequently articulated by almost all interviewees at some point during our discussions. They made clear that I CARE the acronym is synonymous with their attitude of ‘I care about democracy’. Therefore, how senior public servants demonstrate and promote the Australian Public Service Values — especially seemingly intangible ones such as impartiality — is entangled with an expressed commitment to democracy. As one particularly senior interviewee explained when describing how he operates independently of his opinions and judgements: “It’s about democracy, remembering who are the elected ones and who are the servants and being okay with that distinction” (Public Servant Four 2015). Another interviewee was conscious of conforming to I CARE and putting aside her own beliefs when a new government comes into office. She reported that she tries to bring her team “back to those realities” of: “what are we here for? What’s our role? Who’s in charge? If you impose

⁸² *The Public Service Commissioner’s Directions 2013* (which revoke the 1999 directions) further outline the scope of these Values and provide instruction for how public servants should apply these in their work (Australian Public Service Commission 2013).

⁸³ Pronunciation of this acronym implied a distinct separation between the ‘I’ and ‘CARE’.

your view over the new government how is that democratic?” (Public Servant One 2015). Another interviewee suggested that “if you’re into politics you should become a politician” because personal views and opinions are not part of the public servant’s job description (Public Servant Ten 2015).

Moving now to the Code of Conduct, interviewees described it as a “useful guide... an anchor... scaffolding” (Public Servant One 2015), a “regulatory framework” (Public Servant Two 2015), “a touchstone” (Public Servant Six 2015, Public Servant Five 2015, Public Servant Nine 2015) and, for the public, an “insurance policy” (Public Servant Eight 2015) ensuring that the public service is an institution consisting of apolitical professionals. To distil the fourteen characteristics in the Code of Conduct down to two virtues: an employee must be honest and act with integrity. Honesty and integrity are to be applied to all the public servant’s actions and behaviours. This includes relationships with other employees, the public, ministers and ministerial staff, use of resources, application of laws, maintaining confidentiality and acknowledging conflicts of interest. Additionally, the Code of Conduct includes a directive that the Values must be upheld at all times. Those who are unable to uphold and abide by the Code of Conduct and Values will be unsuccessful in their employment.

Over time, the Code of Conduct and Values intuitively become embodied within the actions, practice, psyche and behaviour of senior public servants. However, while senior public servants may conform to this aspect of governing, it is not as simple as presuming that any public servant who allows themselves to be governed by the principles in the *Public Service Act 1999* will attain a senior position in the public service, nor if they do, that they would have the skills needed to successfully perform at Estimates. Indeed, a common thread running through the interviews with senior executives was reference to their professional backgrounds, their experience of working in the Northern Territory on Indigenous issues and the alignment of their own personal values and beliefs with those already existing in the public service. Interviewees had a clear view of how these factors had contributed to their capacity to navigate with relative ease a difficult political and policy environment such as Estimates.

Senior public servants spoke of the necessity in striking a “balance” (Public Servant One 2015, Public Servant Two 2015) or deciding what “your line is” (Public Servant Five 2015) when demonstrating throughout their career a commitment to these core aspects of the public service; finding a balance between adhering to the formal guidelines and managing one’s own personal values, experiences and viewpoints. While some spoke of putting “yourself to the side” (Public Servant Two 2015, Public Servant Four 2015), most admitted that erasing one’s sense of self is impossible. As another particularly senior interviewee explained:

You can't take yourself out of the game or you'd just be a cypher. You can't be neutral. The Australian Public Service is more than that, it's about engaging with the government and providing advice which is based on your own perspective, the environment and drawing from a range of sources including your own values and experiences. The minister will make their decision and then it's your job to implement that impartially and to the best of your ability. But in the lead up it's not that simple; policy is a complex process. You need a sense of yourself. You need to be apolitical, you can't be partisan, but you need to be engaged. You need to understand the politics and the set of views you bring to the table and hopefully they are views that will advance the public interest. They're not views that advance your personal interests, but they are your views (Public Servant Three 2015).

In my early observations of Estimates I assumed that it was the Code of Conduct and Values that governed and influenced the performances of senior public servants. This was because the senior executives always appeared to remain apolitical, neutral and independent, as well as striking a careful balance between loyalty to their minister and department, protecting their professional reputations and fulfilling their obligation to provide the senators with accurate information.

Although my perception was not incorrect, it became clear in discussions with these senior executives that there are other techniques that govern their performances at Estimates. The first is that the principles enshrined in the Act work in tandem with the senior executive's own habitus dispositions. The second is the Estimates Test which I explain in a later section. A simplified definition of Bourdieu's description of habitus is this: a system of dispositions that are structured through past experiences (Bourdieu 1990: 82-85). The "durable, transposable dispositions" (Bourdieu 1990: 53) are the integrated past experiences that function as expressions of "aspirations and world views" of the individual and/or group (Bourdieu 1990: 81). It is habitus dispositions that inform social positions in society and in different fields (Bourdieu 1990: 82). Dispositions are the "*result of an organizing action... and in particular, a predisposition, tendency, propensity, or inclination*" (original emphasis in Bourdieu 1977: 214). They structure how I see the social world, what I deem to be desirable or valuable in life, what my preferences and tastes are and where I see myself, my place and my position in the social world. Habitus structures these dispositions and our ongoing experiences are continually informed by, and restructure, the habitus. Hence, Bourdieu says the habitus is "a past which survives in the present and tends to perpetuate itself into the future by making itself present in practices structured according to its principles" (Bourdieu 1977: 82). Dispositions are therefore "the principle of the transformations and regulated revolution" of practices (Bourdieu 1977: 82). As we proceed through social life, acquiring and adding to our individual

habitus, we also naturally adopt the habitus of different groups depending on the choices we make, the experiences we have and the way we choose to orient ourselves.

Within the upper levels of the public service we see the senior executives form a particular group habitus, through their accumulated individual decisions to embody and promote the Australian Public Service Values and Code of Conduct, which results in their ability to secure the top public service positions. An example of how the Values and Code govern conduct and constitute a group habitus is revealed when I asked interviewees how they “promote” and “model” these principles. Many responded that the values they hold personally are *already in alignment* with those of the public service. No interviewee expressed a sense of having to work at keeping their own opinions or thoughts at bay in order to be independent, impartial or apolitical. Rather, their own individual habitus makes them ideal candidates for the senior positions they occupy. It is the dispositions they bring to their job, and those dispositions that they acquire from the group habitus which develop as their careers progress, that govern their conduct. In opening themselves up to acquiring, developing and presenting the Values and Code of Conduct, these core principles become further entrenched within the individual, who eventually, through embodying those principles attains a position at the level of the Senior Executive Service.

The Values and Code of Conduct are designed to govern all individual public servants within the scope of their work. However, as just highlighted, the majority of interviewees believed they had already allowed these principles to govern their thoughts, behaviour and actions prior to entering the service. Thus, throughout their ascent into the bureaucratic elite, transitioning from a lower position in the public service to a more executive role where they must embody and promote the Values and Code was not a difficult task. Neither was this something that they were necessarily conscious of. Their ability to assimilate and adopt the shared group habitus of the Senior Executive Service is almost seamless. It is this shared habitus that is put into action at Estimates.

The capital that a senior public servant has acquired through the individual and group habitus also contributes to their success or failure at navigating Estimates. In Bourdieu’s theory the capital an agent is able to acquire upon entering a field is determined by their habitus and possession of original capital (Webb, Schirato, and Danaher 2002: 7). It is habitus that orients us towards certain fields and not others and capital that determines our hierarchical position (or power held) within the field (Webb et al. 2002: 28, Johnson 1993: 8). Prior to entering a field an agent must possess “at least the minimum amount of knowledge, or skill, or ‘talent’ to be accepted as a legitimate player” (Johnson 1993: 8).

The dispositions that the agent possess and produce give them their “feel for the game”, which “implies a practical mastery of the logic of the game” (Webb, Schirato, and Danaher 2002: 7, Bouveresse 1999: 52) — meaning, the agent knows how to play the game successfully — alongside determining their position in the field (Johnson 1993: 17).⁸⁴ Habitus and capital are an agent’s “*relative force in the game*, her *position* in the space of play and also her *strategic orientation toward the game*” (original emphasis in Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 99). For example, “two individuals endowed with an equivalent overall capital can differ, in their position as well as in their stances (“position-takings”), in that one holds a lot of economic capital and little cultural capital while the other has little economic capital and large cultural assets” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 99). This would then affect each player’s strategy, the moves they make and their chances of success within the game. Thus, both habitus and capital shape the agent’s potential gains in a field (Webb, Schirato, and Danaher 2002: 11, Johnson 1993: 8) and act as “trump cards” in the game (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 99). Together, habitus and capital “determine the style of play, success and failure” (Webb, Schirato, and Danaher 2002: 11).

Thus, the individual and group habitus fuse to equip public servants with the skills, knowledge and capital needed to engage within the Estimates proceedings, without becoming caught in the games senators are playing. Senior public servants demonstrate Bourdieu’s theory, by displaying habitus dispositions that structure their positions when front stage at Estimates thus affecting the variety of improvisations available; the moves they automatically and unconsciously make when responding to a senator’s question. Indeed, they must be one step ahead of the senator, anticipating the next series of actions their opponent (the senator) might choose, analogous to the tennis player in Calhoun’s (2003) example quoted earlier.

I propose that what transpired in the opening vignette to this chapter were two senior public servants successfully navigating the political trap that was set for them. Having knowledge of the political climate and of their department’s current Indigenous policies and programs, they were under no obligation to provide the senator with an answer. Being experienced and regular attendees of Estimates these public servants knew immediately that this was a politically charged question and one that was leading down a “dangerous path” (Public Servant One 2015). The different improvisations that Public Servant A and B adopted demonstrate the importance and role played by the habitus they had acquired backstage: the ability to discern politics from policy, to know their rights and obligations under the Code of Conduct and Values and to know the details of their own programs.

⁸⁴ The dispositions which constitute the habitus are altered as positions within the field change (Webb, Schirato, and Danaher 2002: 11).

The Governing Influence of the Estimates Test

In my early observations I had conceived that the day of Estimates functioned as a *political* field, with the work that a public servant conducted outside of Estimates functioning as a *policy* field. A field is Bourdieu's term for a social situation or context, a "structured space" that organises the social activities of agents and is where practice occurs (Johnson 1993: 6, 8-9). This space is described by Bourdieu as being "a separate social universe having its own laws of functioning independent of those of politics and the economy" (Bourdieu 1993: 162). The limits or boundaries of fields are determined when "the effects of the field cease" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 100).⁸⁵ Although there are relationships between fields (Webb, Schirato, and Danaher 2002: 9) they remain "relatively autonomous but structurally homologous with the others" (Johnson 1993: 6). However, to retain this view would force a rigid dichotomy upon Estimates proceedings, which I see as being more flexible and intricate than a field might be able to explain. Both political and policy moments interact and overlap within and outside of formal Estimate proceedings. Perhaps then, if we want to remain aligned with Bourdieu's theory, the Indigenous policy world is the 'field'. I came to this realisation when I considered the influence of an Estimates spectre which extends *beyond* the day of Estimates and into the backstage of the senior public servant's daily work. Interviewees called this the Estimates Test.

The Estimates Test drew my attention during the interviews I conducted with senior public servants. Interviews were structured in three parts. The first section of questioning concerned the Values and Code of Conduct; what purpose these principles serve and how senior public servants "promote" and "demonstrate" their commitment to these in their actions and behaviours (Australian Public Service Commission 2015b). The second section addressed major criticisms in the literature regarding public servants' ability to be independent and apolitical in their daily work activities. The third focus was on the categories of questions I had identified at Estimates. I asked the senior public servants what they thought about these classifications and how they navigated responses. The interviews followed the para-site methodology (Deeb and Marcus 2011) and were conducted in the manner of discussions or a seminar. I would share ideas drawn from the academic and political literature, as well as my own interpretations and conclusions concerning the three areas of questioning identified above. I then invited the interviewee to comment with feedback and provide points of clarification or correction.

⁸⁵ In Bourdieu's theory, fields include all sorts of different areas. Common examples include the intellectual field, the artistic field, the cultural field, the education field, the economic field, the sporting field and the political field (Bourdieu 1984, 1993, Johnson 1993: 6, Calhoun 2000).

It should be noted that the overarching focus of these interview questions centred on the Senate Estimates committee Cross-Portfolio on Indigenous Matters. However, the nature of para-site interviews is such that interviewees tend to lead the discussion towards broader topics, themes and observations than my original focus. Thus, much of the data stems from matters interviewees felt were important to address and to which they wished to draw my attention.

The new information that public servants brought to my attention was predominantly offered during the second section of the interview where I listed four factors that the academic literature and political commentaries argue govern public servants' performance at Estimates. I classified this literature under four headings and briefly summarised the main points of provocation that are highlighted in the literature. These are:

1. Ministerial advisers, who are the unseen eyes of Estimates. They closely watch the Estimates proceedings and grade the performance of public servants.
2. The media, which is only interested in a controversial headline.
3. The *Freedom of Information Act 1982*, which allows anyone to request copies of the information that a public servant brings to the table at Estimates or mentions at Estimates.
4. Awareness that a successful performance at Estimates may lead to a pay rise, promotion or increase the public servant's status amongst colleagues.

I then summarised for interviewees the overarching argument that scholars focus on within the literature. This argument posits that the four external influences identified above contribute to the politicisation of the public service, thus questioning the public servant's ability to uphold the I CARE Values and the Code of Conduct.

All interviewees agreed with the literature that highlights a decline of ministerial accountability as problematic and of concern (Walter and Strangio 2007, Weller 2002, Waterford 2006, Stewart 2010, Miragliotta, Errington, and Barry 2010). However, interviewees were largely dismissive of these factors as considerations that affect their front stage performance at Estimates. For example, while many interviewees were aware that ministerial advisers are "down the hallway" listening and watching closely to televised Estimates and "firing questions off to senators" via iPads, laptops or mobile phones, they disagreed with the suggestion that advisers exert significant influence over Estimates (Public Servant Two 2015, Public Servant Three 2015, Public Servant Five 2015, Public Servant Eight 2015). One interviewee commented that "there is way too much emphasis on the power that an adviser has" (Public Servant Four 2015). Others disagreed with the negative association scholars connect to ministerial advisers (Bartos 2005, Weller 2002, Waterford 2006, Walter and Strangio 2007). Indeed, interviewees provided examples of fairly amicable relationships

that develop at the higher levels of the public service between the senior public servants, the minister's office and with advisers. Further, some interviewees had been employed as ministerial advisers prior to entering the public service so they intimately understood the role and limitations of advisers and therefore are not threatened by them.

Nor were interviewees convinced that the last three factors — the role of the media, the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* and the public servant's own career ambitions and reputation — influenced their performance. Interviewees expressed a low opinion of the media's coverage of Estimates, and pointed out that the media seems to lack interest in the Cross-Portfolio for Indigenous Matters. Hence, they did not consider the media to have a significant role in shaping their performance at Estimates. Regarding the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* interviewees explained that this is a governing principle across all their work and roles, not just at Estimates. Public servants are always aware that what they reference verbally and the physical materials brought into the Estimates room, can be requested via this Act. While some interviewees did admit that they restrict the documents they bring to the table at Estimates, overall, Estimates are not viewed as being significantly different from any other meeting or forum where the requesting of documents might occur. Lastly, because senior public servants felt that Estimates are no different from any other aspect of their work, their careers and professional ambitions are not necessarily linked to how well they perform at Estimates. Indeed, they remarked that this is perhaps the last thing they consider when preparing for, and engaging with, Estimates proceedings. However, they conceded that, like any area of their work, they strive to perform well and avoid making mistakes or embarrassing themselves in front of their colleagues.

I argue that from the interview data these four factors do not appear to consciously influence the way senior public servants respond to senators' questions when performing on the front stage at Estimates. Instead, the data highlights the key role a person's individual and group habitus plays in supplying them with the tools needed to navigate real or potential conflicts and influences. Akin to the Values and Code of Conduct that have become embodied within the individual, by the time a public servant has advanced in their career and acquired the necessary capital that identifies them as competent and knowledgeable enough to appear at Estimates, many of the four factors discussed have already been incorporated into, or managed by, their habitus.

However, while the four factors identified in the literature do not appear to have a governing effect upon the senior public servants I interviewed, this does not mean that Estimates lacks a governing mechanism. These discussions revealed a sense of how the day of Estimates

functions in the backstage as a technique of governmentality. It is in the unseen spaces of offices, hallways and meetings — as well as the unseen mental spaces where decision making, leadership style and actions are taken — where Estimates perform the original purpose in ensuring both government and public servant accountability. Thus, senators need not worry about failing to adequately scrutinise public servants at Estimates because senior public servants are constantly scrutinising themselves.

For example, interviewees used words such as exam, test and court of law to express how they approach the front stage of Estimates. Akin to an exam, public servants study and review their programs and investigate the areas of interest that senators on the committee might ask questions about. As previously noted, for example, Senator Nigel Scullion is one senator in particular whom public servants will follow through social media, press releases and recent travel itinerary in an attempt to anticipate the sort of topics or constituent issues Scullion might quiz them on at Estimates (Public Servant Two 2015, Public Servant Five 2015, (Public Servant Six 2015). In a sense, they studied for the exam they anticipated Scullion would have subjected them to.

Also analogous to an exam is the preparation of the departmental brief. Briefs are prepared weeks or months ahead of Estimates with scores of public servants preparing materials for senior officials. Senior public servants attend Estimates meetings with senators of the committee to discuss the agenda and potential topics that might be raised. They also attend in-house meetings with the minister, secretaries and heads of departments. Briefs are viewed, reviewed and re-reviewed before they make it to the table at Estimates. Depending on each interviewee's responsibilities, but also their own personal style, the amount of time spent on "knowing your brief" varied (Public Servant One, Public Servant Six). But even for the most confident of public servants who are renowned for their ability to perform at Estimates, "it's an oral exam... there's no question about that" (Public Servant One 2015).

Despite interviewees lamenting the amount of time and resources spent on Estimates, most concede that it is valuable in the sense that this preparation process adds to their learning. In having to "know your stuff" (Public Servant Six) across a range of areas at the senior levels, as well as attend briefing meetings, senior public servants learn things about the progress and results of programs that they might not have known otherwise. As one interviewee suggested, even on the day of Estimates public servants are learning about other areas pertinent to Indigenous Affairs policy (Public Servant Five 2015). The Cross-Portfolio on Indigenous Matters spans multiple and diverse departments, agencies and statutory offices. Thus, Estimates is sometimes the only opportunity senior executives have to find out about progress in other

areas and to catch up with colleagues who work in this complex policy space. This type of learning occurs not only in the backrooms at Estimates but also in the committee room; here public servants await their turn to sit at the table and subsequently listen to colleagues being questioned.

While the exam mentality of “knowing your stuff” aids public servants in being prepared and provides the opportunity to learn more about different Indigenous policy areas, it is the test mentality that governs their conduct throughout the year. In this context, ‘test’ is not the concept analogous to an exam. Rather, it is a series of qualifiers that public servants apply to their work. It is akin to testing the productiveness of a new product; putting the product through a series of evaluations to ensure it is of the highest quality and making the necessary adjustments to improve it. When giving advice and taking any sort of action, many of the interviewees spoke about applying the “Estimates Test” to everything they do. For example, one public servant says,

The one thing about Senate Estimates is, it’s a useful exercise in accountability, a test to apply to how you do business, how you keep contracts etc. A question we constantly ask ourselves is ‘will this pass the Senate Estimates test?’ And that’s a good thing. It makes sure you have the appropriate documentation, are following the proper procurement rules. If you take short cuts then it will be found out in Estimates (Public Servant Four 2015).

Public servants are habituated to keep at the forefront of their minds that at Estimates they could be asked about anything and everything. This knowledge acts as an insurance policy they apply to their work. It ensures that they investigate every possible avenue and consider as many options as possible when providing advice to ministers and when following directives. Additionally, should a mistake or error occur, applying the Estimates Test ensures that they have a ready explanation for why an occurrence transpired as it did, what action they took to remedy it and how they will attempt to avoid a repeat in the future.

The Estimates Test must also transcend geographical, cultural and Commonwealth/state boundaries as senators represent Indigenous peoples in remote, rural and urban places across Australia. Commonwealth bureaucrats ensconced in Canberra must converse and negotiate with the states and territories on matters pertaining to Indigenous Affairs so that, for example, they are able to give a ready answer to housing queries from Senator Scullion representing the Northern Territory, Senator McLucas of North Queensland and Senator Siewert of Western Australia. Reaching beyond the front stage of Estimates, the Estimates Test ensures that public servants consider the past, present and future when making decisions or taking action concerning any Indigenous community or issue in Australia.

Contrary to much academic and political commentary, it appears that Senate Estimates committees are holding public servants to account for their decisions and actions, although not in obvious ways. The day of Estimates may not appear “productive or useful for anyone” (Public Servant Six 2015) in scrutinising policy and keeping public servants accountable, because of the two-fold games played in this space. Indeed, it may seem that substantial discussions concerning policy are occurring less and less and that the navigation of Estimates by senior public servants means they are not being adequately held to account. However, the operation of the Estimates Test in the senior public servants’ backstage is performing the primary function of Senate Estimates.

This is not to imply that senators do not have an important role to play in the Estimates Test. Indeed, some senators play a vital imaginary role. The *idea* of a senator like Penny Wong, who is renowned for her capacity to “sniff out blood” and “go hunting” for even the smallest of details (Public Servant Six 2015), ensures that the senior public servant checks that their every action, decision and piece of advice — including those of the public servants underneath them — would stand the Estimates Test should they be questioned by her. Thus, it is not only the knowledge that public servants must appear before Estimates, but also that there are skilled senators that can and will expose them, that is a further inducement to ensure their work is beyond reproach.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates that there is far more going on at Estimates than a simple exchange of questions and answers between senators and public servants. The day of Senate Estimate proceedings occur on a political front stage and becomes a space where political games are played by senators and public servants. The unseen backstage is where the senior public servants acquire the necessary habitus dispositions and capital needed to navigate such questions, traps and games with relative success. The backstage is also where all the unseen policy action occurs, including the scrutinising of policy and holding public servants to account. This occurs prior to and post Estimates via the Estimates Test.

It seems that, while there are different categories of questions that may not be politically charged, the very real possibility that these questions *might* be political affects the way that senior public servants engage front stage at Estimates proceedings. As I demonstrated through examples, a large proportion of questions at Estimates are not about seeking genuine information on Indigenous policy or programs at all; rather, they are asked by senators for the

purposes of: scoring political points by discrediting the opposition, generating controversy, questioning the actions of the government of the day or intentionally wasting time and thus preventing the other political side from asking questions. Consequently, the valuable aspects of policy are not always discussed upon the front stage.

However, this does not mean that Estimates is an irrelevant process. Indeed, the Estimates proceedings on the Cross-Portfolio on Indigenous Matters *are* able to influence the Indigenous policy process. Despite matters of policy or programs not being discussed at length or in-depth it is the spectre of the Estimates Test which extends *beyond* the day of Estimates and into the daily work practice of the public servant that impacts upon how policy is formulated and implemented. I conclude that the Estimates Test functions as the key accountability mechanism for Indigenous policy at the decision-making stage of the policy cycle. It directly impacts the way public servants go about their work, prepare for upcoming proceedings, respond to questions on the day, and it is also an assurance that Indigenous policy-making decisions and actions are held to account; even if this is not the direct result of a senator's questioning on the day. Thus, the effectiveness of Senate Estimates is revealed in the relationship between the front and backstage.

I now turn to the second bureaucratic figure examined in this thesis, staff of the Commonwealth Ombudsman's Office. Unlike senior public servants who conduct most of their work from Canberra, Ombudsman staff travel from Canberra, Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane to remote Indigenous communities to conduct outreach complaint clinics. I consider the ways that staff manage their apolitical bureaucratic identity by drawing upon the principles of the Office's Work Practice Manual when encountering potentially challenging situations with Resident Service Providers.

Chapter Four

Transforming Paper into People: The Governing Role of the Commonwealth Ombudsman's Work Practice Manual

Introduction

Staff of the Commonwealth Ombudsman's Office are an unusual group of public servants within the Indigenous policy world. As bureaucrats employed under the *Public Service Act 1999* they adhere to the same Codes of Conduct and Values as the senior public servants examined in the previous chapter. However, Ombudsman staff are different, as they are simultaneously removed from the directive constraints of ministers, due to the Office being separate from executive government control. This places staff in a somewhat liminal position within Australian politics and policy as they straddle the bureaucratic/civic divide.⁸⁶ Ombudsman staff manage this sense of liminality when they embody a particular Ombudsman document: the Work Practice Manual (Manual).

While many offices have Work Practice Manuals, Codes of Conduct or Work Place Guidelines, much scholarly literature fails to grapple with how such documents come to be personalised or embodied; the ways in which the document can transform from combinations of letters, words and sentences on a page or a screen into the tangible actions and practices of individuals. Additionally, while there are examples of how people come to master documents or utilise them for their own means (Reed 2006), there remains a significant silence when assessing how

⁸⁶ Kowal's (2012: 7) research on White anti-racists in Australia further discusses the production of liminal positions that operate within the "intercultural space where postcolonial subjectivities are formed and maintained".

documents instil forms of governing power over people, and of greater significance, how people willingly allow this to occur.

The examination of the Manual in this chapter addresses these gaps in the literature while also investigating how Ombudsman staff “learn to do and say bureaucratic things” (Lea 2008: 79) during remote complaint clinics (what staff call ‘outreach activities’). This is achieved through an examination in this chapter of how paper and people relate to each other. The complexities inherent in how this occurs are demonstrated in the following vignette which transpired near the end of an Ombudsman outreach visit to the Northern Territory that I attended in early 2013.

Two Ombudsman staff and I had just spent an intense week conducting outreach activities in Top End remote communities. The non-stop, time-pressured travelling, talking with Indigenous locals and Resident Service Providers and following up as many complaints as possible while on the ground, was physically, mentally and emotionally draining work. Not only were we enduring the oppressive humidity that characterises the wet season, but the first-hand personal stories and experiences of problems, issues and complaints recounted by locals were by turn distressing and frustrating. Additionally, staff were under pressure to progress complaints quickly while they were still on the ground in the community.

Upon our return to Darwin we hailed a taxi to take us from Darwin's airport back to our hotel in the city centre. The taxi driver was particularly talkative as he commented on the scenes we passed as we made our way into the city. At one intersection, a young man stood holding a cardboard sign which indicated he was seeking construction work to build houses in Indigenous communities. Seeing the sign, the taxi driver said “What’s the point? Waste of time and money, they all just trash the places anyway.” Beside me, out of the corner of my eye, I observed one of the Ombudsman staff tighten her grip on the mobile phone she was holding in her hand. We all remained silent. Soon, the taxi pulled up outside the hotel and the driver, having been paid, cheerfully wished us a pleasant evening. As soon as the car pulled out from the curb we erupted, outraged and incredulous at such overt and blatantly racist accusations and generalisations. Having spent a week in communities where the hot topic was the desperate urgency for home improvements, rebuilds and new houses, his comments hit particularly hard.

In contrast to the disposition of the taxi driver, masking one’s immediate reactions and opinions is necessary practice for staff of the Commonwealth Ombudsman’s Office.⁸⁷ This is a

⁸⁷ In later sections I will reflect upon the emotional response I shared with staff.

practice that staff demonstrate within the scope of their work but also carry over into their private lives. It is a skill they have come to master and involves the enactment of principles drawn from both the *Commonwealth Ombudsman Act 1976* and the *Public Service Act 1999*. Employees learn to unconsciously embody the core principles and values of independence and impartiality as articulated in these parliamentary Acts. Further, their ability to resist reacting to the taxi driver and instead present a neutral façade stems from having developed an internal mechanism that activates when facing challenging scenarios and/or people.

This chapter argues that the Manual is effective in assisting staff to govern their own behaviour and actions when front stage, such that a particular Ombudsman identity is presented collectively by staff to others. However, there is a clear limit to this document's governing influence. While staff can harness the knowledge contained in the Manual to mask their true feelings front stage, they cannot disengage entirely from the emotions that particular encounters might trigger. While this example with the taxi driver highlights the line that staff do not cross, or the balance they strike even when off duty, it also provides a glimpse into the sorts of moments and situations when this front stage visage is vulnerable to an employee's own values, feelings and views. Knowing how to embody and present the values of the Manual and of the collective Ombudsman identity is not wholly sufficient for staff to function. There is a supplementary need to release tensions that develop when facing challenging situations. In what follows, I show that while the Manual impacts deeply upon the establishment and maintenance of a collective Ombudsman subjectivity, staff still retain a semi-autonomous individual personhood.

In Part One I provide an overview of the engagement of the Office with Indigenous Australians. First, I explain the scope of the complaint process; when is a matter considered to be a complaint? What might a complaint look like? In what sort of circumstances can the Office intervene? And what actions can the Office take? Second, I discuss the past success and influence of the former Indigenous Unit and Indigenous outreach activities during the Northern Territory Emergency Response. Third, I highlight the current vulnerabilities and limitations the Office now face with regard to gathering Indigenous complaints and monitoring Commonwealth programs.

Part Two then analyses the operation and influence of the *Ombudsman Act 1976* and the *Public Service Act 1999* as detailed in the Office's Work Practice Manual. Here I provide a review of the anthropological literature concerning bureaucratic documents. This review provides clarity for understanding how the Manual becomes embodied within Ombudsman staff practice. This section demonstrates the governing power documents can exert over the

actions of individuals and the intimate relationship within policy worlds between paper, people and practice.

Part Three shifts our attention from the bounded document to the individual in a specific milieu: Indigenous outreach activities in the Northern Territory. I select a variety of encounters from outreach to demonstrate how the Manual comes to be embodied within Ombudsman staff psyche and practice which influences the way staff perform the collective Ombudsman identity when front stage in remote communities. This section also considers the importance of the backstage for staff, in managing how to hold their true feelings at bay and navigating the line between being a helper (assisting complainants) and an advocate (speaking on behalf of complainants). Further, although I remained an observer of Ombudsman interactions on outreach, Ghassan Hage (2015) would suggest there were moments of “emotional participation” where I joined with Ombudsman staff in expressing similar reactions and feelings towards interactions with certain Resident Service Providers. I problematise my reactions and those of the Ombudsman staff in this section.

The questions I seek to address in this chapter are: what is the relationship between bureaucratic papers and the bureaucrats who enact them? Specifically, how does the Manual move beyond paper and into embodied practice? And, to what extent do staff allow the Manual to regulate their thoughts, behavior and actions? The data I draw on in this chapter stems from a week spent observing two Ombudsman staff interacting with Indigenous locals and Resident Service Providers during remote outreach activities in early 2013. Back in Canberra, I then followed the progress of these complaints over the course of a year via the database system called Resolve. At the end of 2013 I conducted a para-site workshop with staff working with Indigenous complaints and former staff of the Indigenous Unit. Follow-up interviews with staff were conducted in person and via phone in early 2015.

Part One: The Office’s Involvement in the Indigenous Policy World

The Scope of Investigating a Complaint

The primary role of the Commonwealth Ombudsman’s Office is to investigate complaints about the administrative actions and decisions of Commonwealth departments and agencies.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ The states and territories have their own Ombudsman Offices which handle state and territory government administration. However, in some circumstances the Commonwealth Ombudsman can investigate state or territory matters.

The jurisdiction of the Commonwealth Ombudsman extends to Commonwealth departments, agencies, funded services and statutory offices.⁸⁹ This includes “the Australian Taxation Office, Australia Post, Centrelink, Child Support Agency and Department of Immigration and Citizenship”, and also the Defence Force, Australia Federal Police and issues concerning the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*.

The Ombudsman serves all people in Australia, so a person does not need to be an Australian citizen to access the Ombudsman’s services and have their complaint investigated. A matter is considered a complaint if a person believes they have been treated by a Commonwealth department or agency in a manner that is “wrong, unjust, unlawful, discriminatory or just plain unfair” (Commonwealth Ombudsman 2015a).⁹⁰ Often the Ombudsman will only investigate the complaint once the complainant has attempted to have the matter remedied through the complaints mechanisms of the department or agency. If it transpires that the department or agency is not at fault, or has already adequately investigated the complaint, the Ombudsman, “cannot override the decisions of the agencies we deal with, nor issue directions to their staff” (Commonwealth Ombudsman 2015b). However, the Ombudsman can request the department/agency review the complainant’s case. If an error has occurred or there is just cause for the dispute, the Ombudsman aims to work collaboratively and in good faith with the department or agency “through consultation and negotiation and if necessary, by making formal recommendations to the most senior levels of government” (Commonwealth Ombudsman 2013).

When a person makes a complaint to the Ombudsman the following steps are generally taken:

1. The case will be assigned to an investigation officer who will undertake an initial assessment of the complaint to determine whether the matter is something the Ombudsman can assist with.
2. If the Ombudsman can assist, the investigation officer will draw up an investigation plan which is considered by their manager. This plan includes details about what sort of outcome the complainant is wanting and what reasonable outcome the investigation officer thinks the Ombudsman might be able to achieve.
3. Once this plan is approved by the manager the relevant agency is contacted. They are advised that the Ombudsman is investigating a complaint about them, they are told the complainant's version of events, the agency is invited to tell their version of events and often the Ombudsman will ask the agency a series of questions to gather

⁸⁹ When investigating complaints, the Ombudsman’s Office refers to ‘agencies’, a term which includes government departments, agencies, funded services and statutory offices. Where ‘agencies’ is used in this chapter the reader should assume this includes the aforementioned list.

⁹⁰ Extensive details outlining when an Ombudsman can and cannot investigate an issue are explained fully in the *Commonwealth Ombudsman Act 1976*. For example, the Ombudsman does not have the jurisdiction to investigate the actions of government ministers or judges (Commonwealth Ombudsman 2015a).

additional information and request relevant documentation. The agency is given 28 days to respond.

4. Once the agency's response is received the investigation officer will review the response. The investigation officer then determines whether the agency is at fault, discusses with the agency what sort of reparation can be achieved for the complainant, or if the case is still unclear, the officer might request further information by asking a second series of questions.
5. The complainant is advised of the outcome of the investigation via phone and/or letter.

There are three categories of complaints that the Office can investigate: individual, systemic and own motion. Individual complaints are made by one person or by a group of people. In both instances the complaint is about one issue and is handled as one Ombudsman investigation case. Typical remedies for individual complaints include reducing delays in processing a request or application, requesting a suspension or postponement of certain actions, reconsidering and changing decisions, providing financial compensation or apologising to the complainant.

The second and third categories are often connected. Systemic complaints are generally identified when a high number of similar complaints have been investigated. Staff might investigate an individual complaint and decide that the circumstances of the complaint could apply to others. If this is the case, the Office can recommend that the relevant department or agency should offer the same remedy to other people in a similar situation even if formal complaints have not been made. From systemic complaints the Office might decide to conduct an own motion investigation and produce a report. This is when the Ombudsman decides that there is an issue that needs further investigation.

During the tenure of the Indigenous Unit, the Office produced the following investigation reports about systemic issues that concerned Indigenous Australians: the communication of asbestos surveys (Commonwealth of Australia 2009), Income Management review rights and Income Management decisions (Commonwealth of Australia 2012b, 2010a), remote housing reforms (Commonwealth of Australia 2012a), business loan management (Commonwealth of Australia 2010) and the administration of funding agreements to Indigenous organisations (Commonwealth of Australia 2010b).⁹¹

For the outreach visits that I observed in 2013, the Ombudsman staff identified eight complaints that they believed the Office might be able to assist with. These complaints were

⁹¹ In these reports issues such as language and remoteness are identified as barriers to Indigenous people being able to engage with and understand government. Other vulnerabilities such as inequality and problems with housing, education, health and employment are also discussed in relation to government attempts to urbanise and normalise Indigenous people through policy and programs.

recorded in the moment and lodged later that same afternoon via telephone with an Ombudsman staff member back in Brisbane. Staff in Brisbane would gather as much information as they could via the government policy and legislation database, or by conducting quick phone enquiries that the Office has access to, and relaying this back to the staff who were on the ground in the community. The staff on the ground tried to progress, or resolve completely, complaints as best they could while they were with the complainants. Sometimes this involved advising the complainant that the Office would be unable to assist. In these instances, staff would suggest alternative agencies that the complainant could contact or avenues they could pursue. At other times, the staff had to inform the complainant that, administratively, the department or agency had done nothing wrong. For example, one complainant wanted to move onto the age pension but was denied because she was not old enough to be eligible. In this case, staff informed the complainant of why she could not receive this benefit and when she would be eligible to apply. The complaints that could not be remedied while in the community were followed up when staff returned to the Canberra office.

A list of the eight complaints that were followed up in Canberra is provided in Appendix A and B. Appendix A contains the complaints that the Ombudsman determined they could not investigate and Appendix B contains the complaints that the Ombudsman did investigate. Included in these appendices are explanations of the reasons why the Ombudsman could/could not investigate, what the complainant wanted, what the Ombudsman thought they could reasonably achieve for the complainant, the response of the department or agency and the final outcome.

Indigenous Outreach

Indigenous outreach is a term referred to by Ombudsman staff to describe their activities within remote and regional Indigenous communities. When staff visit remote communities and anticipate engagement with Indigenous people, staff follow similar protocols to those of the health institute described by Kowal (2015: 123). These protocols are found in an Outreach Manual that complements the Work Practice Manual. The Outreach Manual contains additional information which instructs staff on how to conduct complaint clinics and interact with Indigenous people in culturally appropriate and respectful ways. For instance, the Ombudsman team leader will phone shire councils numerous times prior to the visit to ensure that it is still suitable for staff to come. Sometimes visits can be delayed or postponed due to

severe weather conditions or cultural events such as funerals. The team leader will also try to make contact with relevant Resident Service Providers to advise them of the impending visit and schedule a time to meet and discuss any issues the Resident Service Provider is experiencing or observing. These meetings are also an opportunity for Ombudsman staff to gain clarity on the administration of Commonwealth policy, programs and funding.

An important part of preparing for outreach visits is selecting appropriate clothing to wear. The Ombudsman staff are conscious of being respectful in the manner in which they dress, especially female staff. One staff member spoke of having a bag of clothes that she reserves specifically for outreach activities; this consists of long, loose trousers and long skirts, baggy t-shirts or button shirts, old sneakers and closed-in plastic or rubber shoes. I was instructed to wear “modest” clothing that was not too tight, had high necklines and covered most of my legs (Employee Six 2013). Other instructions included general cultural advice such as not looking people straight in the eye when talking and not sitting directly opposite older males.

Staff make a concerted effort to visit the shire manager and/or Government Business Manager upon landing in the community. They receive a briefing on matters of importance pertinent to this particular community, including information about no-go zones that are sacred sites or areas of the community where funeral or mourning rituals are taking place. Other cautionary pieces of advice include descriptions of certain parts of the community which are known for particularly ‘cheeky dogs.’⁹² Staff also ask the shire manager to point out and introduce them to the Traditional Owners of the community. This last point is seen as a priority for staff to ensure that they show what they consider to be proper respect and acknowledgement for the local people and land.

The main outreach activity is setting up a stall in a public place. The site for the stall is generally chosen in a place that will ensure the staff’s presence in the community is visible.⁹³ This is often outside or near the local store (of which there is usually only one) where staff anticipate heavy foot traffic. Staff set up trestle tables which they cover with pamphlets, flyers, pens and cotton shopping bags filled with ‘freebies’ such as pens, key chains, soft footballs for children and other bits and pieces. These ‘freebies’ are part of a strategy to assist staff in initiating general conversations with locals, that may progress to talking about any problems individuals might be experiencing with government administration.

⁹² ‘Cheeky dogs’ is a common term referencing stray dogs in the community that are aggressive or territorial.

⁹³ There are also free-standing banners displaying the Ombudsman’s logo and what the Office can achieve. These banners are set up near or around the trestle tables used in the stall.

On the outreach visit I observed, one staff member would man the stall area and engage Indigenous locals in conversation, with the assistance of qualified female and male Indigenous interpreters. The other staff member would visit the Resident Service Providers located in their various offices within the community. At lunch time, the Ombudsman staff retreated to their accommodation, debriefed with one another and checked in with their counterparts back at the Office headquarters. In the afternoon, staff went back out into the community and repeated the same process.

The Indigenous Unit

The Commonwealth Ombudsman was funded to establish a focused Indigenous Unit with the announcement of the Northern Territory Intervention in 2007. The Office's mandate was to handle complaints from Indigenous communities that were subject to the Intervention policy measures. The Unit also fed information back to agencies and worked alongside them to "improve public administration" and provide training for government agencies in the area of complaints handling (Commonwealth of Australia 2008: 99). The Unit liaised at both the national and local operational levels (Commonwealth of Australia 2009b: 94)⁹⁴ and conducted outreach visits to targeted communities to "increase Indigenous awareness of and access to, the Ombudsman's services" (Commonwealth of Australia 2008: 99). The Commonwealth Ombudsman became a vital organisation in overseeing the implementation of the Intervention measures when the Howard Government suspended the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*. This incited great controversy because any person who could have laid complaints against the Intervention policies on the grounds of racial discrimination had no legitimate avenue to do so. Thus, with this key complaint channel shut down, the importance of Ombudsman complaint investigations increased dramatically.

A key focus of the Unit in 2008 and 2009, having refined their strategies and methods, was to enhance their "engagement with the government agencies involved in the Intervention and Indigenous program delivery in the NT" (Commonwealth of Australia 2009: 94). Predominantly this was referring to: the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs; the Department of Human Services; and the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. This engagement required the Unit to participate in

⁹⁴ As the Intervention was Commonwealth led, the Commonwealth Ombudsman's jurisdiction extended to include all the Intervention policies, programs and services that were being implemented in the 73 prescribed communities in the Northern Territory. In a memorandum of understanding, the Northern Territory Ombudsman ceded responsibility in this area to the Commonwealth Ombudsman.

meetings, forums and briefings, all of which were aimed at improving service and program delivery, administration and policy formation. The Unit also kept government agencies updated on any information or feedback that the Office was receiving that related to the Intervention.⁹⁵ The aim was to have a collaborative and cooperative relationship with government departments and agencies.

Establishing a positive working relationship is crucial for the Ombudsman Office's investigations and for wider Indigenous policy processes. In particular, early engagement with departments and agencies is important in bringing awareness to the issues that the Office's investigations are identifying. A key aim in this early engagement is to:

Provide an opportunity for agencies to adjust and refine their programs and processes before more people are adversely affected. This strategy has the potential to address a problem before it affects more clients and attracts wider attention and criticism. The Ombudsman is in a strong position to contribute to the improved delivery of government programs and if these cooperative objectives are understood, improved outcomes should follow (Commonwealth of Australia 2010c: 73).

The Office's investigations have resulted in improvements and changes in areas of Indigenous policy that have received the largest number of Indigenous complaints; in more recent years these have been in the areas of Income Management and housing (Commonwealth of Australia 2012a, 2012b, 2010a, 2011, 2010b, 2009).⁹⁶ The vital role the Office holds within the Indigenous policy world is apparent when departments and agencies address the problems

⁹⁵ Government Business Managers — Canberra appointed bureaucrats stationed in communities as part of the Intervention — should have been able to fulfil this liaison role. It was intended that these managers would act as a direct link between the Commonwealth Government and Indigenous locals. Further, they were tasked with reporting back to Government how the Intervention was progressing. However, as the Ombudsman's commissioned report *Improving the Service of the Commonwealth Ombudsman to Australia's Indigenous peoples* (Winangali 2010) and own motion report *Talking in Language: Indigenous Language Interpreters and Government Communication* (Commonwealth of Australia 2011) identifies, Indigenous people are more comfortable talking with an intermediary rather than government itself. Thus, perhaps Indigenous people were more comfortable and confident talking with Ombudsman staff because staff were not seen as 'government'.

Anecdotally, in one community I heard that at the beginning of the Intervention the Government Business Managers had a more active and visible role in the community. Yet, by the end of the Intervention, and into Stronger Futures (the name Government Business Manager changing to Government Engagement Coordinator), most of the locals and Resident Service Providers did not know who the Government Business Manager/Coordinator was. This person no longer lived permanently in the community and when he/she did visit (some locals thought the Manager was a man, others a woman), allegedly, he/she made no attempt to engage with locals. Thus, this may explain why the Ombudsman may have had a different and arguably more backstage view of the problems pertaining to the Intervention that they then passed onto departments and agencies who were unaware of these problems on the ground.

⁹⁶ For details of Income Management see footnote 27 on page 33. I consider housing policy in greater depth in the thesis Conclusion.

that the Office identifies in these reports as well as adopt the Office's recommendations for improvement. The aim of Ombudsman reports is always to improve policy decision-making and processes, administration and program implementation, via the restructuring of Indigenous policy.⁹⁷

From 2007 to 2012, the Annual Reports of the Office contained comprehensive chapters that summarised the activities of this Indigenous Unit.⁹⁸ These reports included information on:

- Successful investigations and reports.
- Problems, challenges or issues faced.
- Types of complaints received and common themes of Indigenous complaints.
- Relationships and interactions with government departments, agencies, boards, Senate committees, House of Representative Committees and service providers, and Indigenous people, communities and organisations.

Post-2012, outreach still remains vital to the Commonwealth Ombudsman's ability to connect with Indigenous complainants. As stated in the commissioned report *Improving the services of the Commonwealth Ombudsman to Australia's Indigenous Peoples* (Winangali 2010), Indigenous people said they view the Ombudsman as favourable to other forms of complaint handling services specifically because the Office is separate from government. This report found that Indigenous people prefer to speak face-to-face with staff rather than over the phone or through email; indeed, the Office receives hardly any complaints from Indigenous people through these other channels.

Indeed, the success of the outreach approach is clearly evident in the volume of complaints taken by staff during the five year period of the Intervention. With the special funding provided by the Commonwealth Government the Unit was able to conduct an extraordinarily high number of outreaches during the Intervention period. This resulted in the Unit receiving

⁹⁷ As well as the Ombudsman's investigation reports, the Office also made submissions to the following:

1. The Northern Territory Emergency Response Review Board.
2. The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs' inquiry into community stores in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
3. The Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs inquiry into the Family Assistance and Other Legislation Amendment (2008 Budget and other Measures) Bill 2009 (Commonwealth of Australia 2009: 95).

The Office used the knowledge it acquired from investigations to engage with wider policy processes in these submissions.

⁹⁸ Outreach activities did occur prior to the special funding allocated to the Office by the Commonwealth government from 2007 to 2012 to a limited extent. However, there was a greater reliance on stakeholder engagement; to build relationships with stakeholders who would then provide the Office with information about problems Indigenous residents were experiencing rather than the Office having direct contact with Indigenous communities.

over 300 complaints each year. However, with the special funding ceasing in 2012 the Unit has since received only a handful of Indigenous complaints coming through the usual channels, such as telephone or email. The primary cause of this significant reduction in complaints is speculated to be directly correlated to the decrease in Ombudsman outreach activities.

The Unit's investigations during the Intervention period revealed that many Indigenous people in the Northern Territory do not understand Indigenous policy; what affects them, what their rights are or who they can turn to should they have a problem or issue with public administration. This theme of inadequate communication is a continuing "underlying cause of many complaints" (Commonwealth of Australia 2010c: 74). In the 2009, 2010 and 2011 Annual Reports, this issue was consistently highlighted as a significant concern (Commonwealth of Australia 2009, 2010c, 2011a). The Office recommended that there needs to be a more "flexible approach to program implementation, taking into account the characteristics and needs of particular communities" (Commonwealth of Australia 2009: 97) and observed that the delivery of policy information is passive and/or "inappropriately targeted, misleading, unclear, untimely, inaccessible or simply non-existent" (Commonwealth of Australia 2010c: 73).

This pointed to an overarching concern that government consultation, engagement and information sharing needed improvement. Indeed, as the Ombudsman's 2011 Annual Report states, if there was a "more effective local information service" and "adequate complaints mechanisms" many of the complaints the Ombudsman received could have been avoided entirely or addressed quickly (Commonwealth of Australia 2011a : 90).⁹⁹ Conducting outreach enabled the Unit to ascertain the variety of issues faced by different Indigenous communities, as well as providing communities with an "important avenue of communication about government programs and decisions" (Commonwealth of Australia 2009: 95).

Despite the Unit's marked success in identifying problems that Indigenous people were experiencing from the Northern Territory Intervention, in June 2012 the special funding provided by the Commonwealth Government was not renewed. Consequently, the range and volume of outreach activities that had been conducted was unable to continue. Further, permanent dedicated staff of the Unit were decreased from seven to one. It was initially projected that the Office would conduct quarterly outreaches to a few communities.

⁹⁹ Of note in the 2009/2010 Annual Report is the statement that the number of complaints is linked to the number of outreach visits and that there are "many more complaints than this office is presently resourced to handle" (Commonwealth of Australia 2010: 71). The report also states that, "it is evident that most agencies have not established accessible complaint mechanisms of their own in remote communities. Consequently, many issues that could be resolved by agencies do not come to their attention until we raise the complaint with them" (Commonwealth of Australia 2010: 73).

However, in 2013 only two trips to remote communities were able to proceed and by 2014 visits were predominantly focused on engaging with stakeholders and other agencies in major centres who could gather information on the Ombudsman's behalf (Commonwealth of Australia 2014a). This returned the Office's services to pre-2007 strategies (Commonwealth of Australia 2013: 48-49).

Independence and Impartiality: Principles of Importance for both Complainant and Departments

The goal of the Ombudsman's Office is to assist in identifying and remedying maladministration practices of the Commonwealth Government. It is anticipated that this then will have a flow-on effect, improving the functioning of Commonwealth policies and programs. A core aspect of how Ombudsman staff come to identify and investigate problems in the Indigenous policy world is through frontline engagement with Indigenous people in remote, regional and urban communities. Because this face-to-face engagement yields the most complaints, it is crucial that Indigenous locals recognise that the Ombudsman staff do not push the agenda (or merits) of a particular program, policy or service. Staff are to always remain independent and impartial. Thus, staff make an effort to present themselves as bureaucratic-but-not-of-government. Presenting themselves in this way places Ombudsman staff in a different spotlight to other visiting officials, many of whom are from the government, and non-governmental organisations and services, and thus able to have a more activist role.

Presenting an image of independence and impartiality toward government departments is also crucial for the Office so that departments can be assured that Ombudsman recommendations are unbiased. This is because the Office does not have the power to coerce or enforce departments to change policy; the Office can only recommend changes which departments can then choose to adopt or ignore. However, by remaining independent and impartial, taking neither the side of the complainant or the department, the Ombudsman's recommendations are more often accepted by departments. Hence, Ombudsman staff must at all times protect and project this collective Office image of impartiality and independence, both on paper (through their recommendations) and in person (in their interactions with Indigenous locals), to satisfy and gain trust from both sides of the bureaucratic/civic divide. Learning to perform this Ombudsman identity is an imperative that new staff are immediately exposed to. The governing influence of the Office's Work Practice Manual and parliamentary Act, as well as an overview of the literature concerning bureaucratic documents, is detailed in Part Two, to which I now turn.

Part Two: Self-Governance through Documents

Ombudsman staff neither advocate for government nor for Indigenous complainants. Staff must remain neutral, impartial and independent from the perspective of both parties, relying on “the facts of the case” to “speak for themselves” (Employee Two 2013). In their interactions via phone, written correspondence or face-to-face conversations, staff take particular efforts to perform the key principles of independence and impartiality. The associated management and self-regulation of personal, idealised, value-laden views is achieved through adherence to the Office’s Work Practice Manual.

Matthew Hull (2003: 287), an anthropological scholar of bureaucracy and documents, asserts that the bureaucracy is a “social form” and “social technology” whose key rationale for existing with authority and authenticity is to unite individual action and thought (Hull 2003: 287-288). Thus, Hull (2003: 288) says that for the scholar of documents the objective in studying bureaucratic organisations “should not be to debunk the legitimating actions of individual bureaucrats, but rather to describe how and why in bureaucratic processes corporate agency is realised.” This is the role that a Work Practice Manual performs.

A Work Practice Manual is a document common to many bureaucratic institutions and organisations. It is often the first document that new staff are introduced to, as it lays out the what, how and why of an organisation. The Ombudsman Office’s Work Practice Manual is a document that takes the intangible principles espoused in the *Public Service Act 1999* and *Commonwealth Ombudsman Act 1976* and demonstrates practically how staff are to transform these principles into material action. The role of the Manual is to enable staff to govern themselves in order to present a unified and collective identity.

The earliest version of the *Public Service Act 1999* was legislated in 1902, the year after Federation. Parliamentarians discussed key concerns for the establishment of a federal public service. During the parliamentary debates a prominent concern was how to ensure that the public service would remain apolitical, accountable and helpful in serving government with impartiality (Public Service and Merit Protection Commission 2001: 7-9).¹⁰⁰ These key principles and values remain embedded in the 1922 and 1999 revisions of this Act (Miragliotta, Errington, and Barry 2010: 121, Public Service and Merit Protection Commission 2001: 7-8).¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Other considerations included ministerial responsibility and appointments to the public service being based on merit.

¹⁰¹ It is important to note though that the public service Values and Code of Conduct are not explicitly outlined in the 1902 or 1922 versions.

In the current 1999 version, the principles of New Public Management, as well as the public service's 'I CARE' Values and Code of Conduct, are ensconced within the legislation itself (Public Service and Merit Protection Commission 2001: 123). This Act outlines the relationship with ministers and parliament and articulates the expectations of accountability and responsibility (Public Service and Merit Protection Commission 2001: 123). As employees of the Australian Public Service, Commonwealth Ombudsman staff must uphold and promote the public service's 'I CARE' Values and Code of Conduct to the same extent as the senior public servants in Chapter Three.

There is an additional parliamentary Act that Ombudsman staff must also abide by: the *Commonwealth Ombudsman Act 1976*. This Act complements the *Public Service Act 1999* detailing more fully how the 'I CARE' Values should be enacted by Ombudsman staff. As highlighted in the Introduction, the Act details the Ombudsman's jurisdiction, role and powers. Prior to this legislation's enactment, parliamentarians discussed what specific characteristics and virtues the Ombudsman, and those employed in his office, should exhibit. At the top of the list were the principles of independence and impartiality. Yet, these are not explicitly mentioned within the *Commonwealth Ombudsman Act 1976* itself.

It is the Manual that states the importance of independence and impartiality and guides staff towards embodying these principles when undertaking investigations. Further, the Manual details what the Office does, outlines the role of staff for both complainants and agencies and explains why this role needs to be executed in a certain way. Indeed, this is the first document I was tasked with reading thoroughly when I began my research with the Office. I was told that this document would explain to me: "what, how and why we do our work" (Employee Six 2013).

The Manual, therefore, presents a specific set of intangible ideals and characteristics and, in essence, instructs employees in how to make these tangible. In doing so, staff must simultaneously push aside any personal thoughts, values or opinions which might conflict with the collective actions and behaviour of the Office's identity. To appreciate how the Manual achieves all of this in practice is not possible without first understanding the strength and influence that the nature of a document can exert over people. It is this particular subject — the document — that the literature review addresses in the following section.

The Study of Bureaucratic Documents

In the past decade anthropologists have recognised the intimate relationship between people and paper (Hull 2008, 2012, 2003, Li 2009, Brenneis 2006, Cabot 2012, Frohmann 2009, 2008, Kim 2011, Miyazaki 2006, Reed 2006, Riles 2006, 2000, Strathern 2006, Sullivan 2012, Hoag 2011, Jacob 2007, Shore and Wright 2011, Gordillo 2006, Stoler 2009). Most scholars pay attention to how documents mediate between objectivity and subjectivity (Hoag 2011, Brenneis 1994, Cabot 2012, Hull 2003, 2008, Jacob 2007, Kim 2011, Miyazaki 2006, Reed 2006, Dery 1998), while others present an analysis of documents as a means to enter a difficult bureaucratic field (Bernstein and Mertz 2011, Sullivan 2012, Harper 1998, Reinhold 1994). Li (2009), Sullivan (2012) and Altman and Russell (2012) draw particular attention to how governments can harness documents as a mode of governance, while others (Cabot 2012, Kim 2011, Jacob 2007, Gordillo 2006, Reed 2006) have noted how a government's attempt to exercise power and control through documents can be resisted or refashioned for an alternative purpose or understanding.

This rising curiosity with regards to the study of documents seems to have originated with Michael Buckland's (1997: 804) article *What is a Document?* While the answer to this title's question may appear obvious, Buckland problematises the fraught existence of paper-based texts. In particular, he examines the works of significant historical scholars Paul Otlet (1868-1944) and Suzanne Briet (1894-1989) (Buckland 1997: 804-805). Otlet stated that objects can be documents "if you are informed by observation of them" (Buckland 1997: 805); for example the objects recovered from archaeological contexts. Documents could therefore be classified as sources of information or identified as anything that "extends knowledge" (Buckland 1997: 805).

Similarly, Briet stated that "A document is evidence in support of fact" (Briet 1951: 7 cited in Buckland 1997: 805). This could include a "physical or symbolic sign, preserved or recorded, intended to represent, to reconstruct, or to demonstrate a physical or conceptual phenomenon" (Briet 1951: 7 cited in Buckland 1997: 805). Briet explains that if something is "made an object of study" it has transformed into a document (Buckland 1997: 806). Briet takes this perspective of documents further than Otlet when she argues that when a wild antelope is captured and displayed in a zoo it has become an object of study and therefore, should be considered a document. Thus, Briet did not confine documents to a textual record.

Bernd Frohmann (2009) presents a more recent view of how we might decide what a document is. He deploys Hilary Putnam's (2001) argument concerning Albert Einstein as an example. Putnam explains that scientific revolutions come to be accepted as knowledge

because scholars, like Einstein, tell 'stories' and demonstrate through these stories how others can apply them. For example, when mathematicians Bernhard Riemann and Nikolai Lobachevski told their 'stories' of geometry, this led to Einstein later developing the theory of general relativity in physics. In turn, Einstein then tells his 'story' of general relativity which may lead to further discoveries (Putnam 2001: 16 in Frohmann 2009: 296). This idea of story-telling involves the continual emergence of new stories that in some way extend our understanding of a particular topic, such as Riemann, Lobachevski and Einstein did with mathematics and physics. Thus, Frohmann states that when scholars like Briet tell a story about how an antelope can become a document it has the potential to extend our understanding of what a document could be; all we need to determine that this can be the case is the evidence that Briet provides.

In Part Three of this chapter I present stories from fieldwork to extend an understanding of documents "to new situations" (Frohmann 2009: 296). The objective of this chapter is therefore, to "(like Einstein) tell a story and how to apply it and connect our extensions to theories, arguments and relevant intellectual resources to try to bring about an enlarged understanding of what documents and documentation can be" (Frohmann 2009: 296). Unlike Briet though, my argument does not insist that Ombudsman staff should be considered a document. Rather, I argue that the Manual plays an important governing role over Ombudsman staff subjectivity as it becomes embodied in the practices of staff. This is demonstrated by revealing how a bureaucratic document gives structure and guidance to front stage and backstage staff performances.

As I mentioned in the Introduction, Hull (2008: 503) observes that studies of bureaucracy tend to overlook the very process and product that the word is originally coined from: the writing desk — both the process of writing and the control established through writing. He calls for anthropologists to focus on the document's "material qualities, discourses and careers" (Hull 2008: 503), and in particular pay attention to its "mediating role" as a "tactic of power and authority" (Hull 2012: 253). With regards to this, Hull (2012: 253) explains that "Just as discourse has long been recognised as a dense mediator between subjects and the world, newer anthropological scholarship on bureaucratic documents treats them not as neutral purveyors of discourse, but as mediators that shape the significance of the signs inscribed on them and their relations with the objects they refer to." Consequently, as well as considering what sorts of objects could be thought of as documents, there is a need to re-think the changing nature, function and impact of the materiality of the texts themselves (Danet 1997, Kempson and Moore 1994, Cabot 2012, Wheeler 1969, Sullivan 2012, Harper 1998).

Scholars are increasingly moving beyond the classical understanding of documents being synonymous with paper. Many of the Commonwealth Ombudsman's documents are now digital, existing in a database, with Ombudsman staff corresponding throughout investigations via electronic mail. Certainly, many organisations today are moving towards the paper-less office (Sellen and Harper 2002) with traditional documents such as reports, files, letters and memos now accessed electronically, "exist[ing] physically in digital technology as a string of bits" (Buckland 1997: 807).

In the remainder of this chapter I present a perspective of how we can understand the relationship between both the discourse and the materiality of texts. I demonstrate how it is not only the two principles of independence and impartiality, but also the entirety of the Manual as a how-to-guide, that becomes personified in Ombudsman staff. Thus, staff of the Commonwealth Ombudsman demonstrate an important fluidity between paper and people; between bureaucratic products and the bureaucrats themselves. However, before I demonstrate the value in telling "stories" (Frohmann 2009), it is vital that I explain *how* the Manual is able to become embodied in the first place in order to enhance our understanding of document embodiment. Part Two details how this document achieves physical expression. The data referred to is gathered predominantly from a workshop conducted in December 2013. In what follows I highlight two important aspects of the Manual. First, how the new staff either learn, or are unable to learn, the role and principles of the Office as laid out in the Manual. And second, how over time the Manual becomes embodied in Ombudsman staff.

Instructing New Staff

Managers and supervisors often refer new staff back to the Manual for its primary function: to guide and support their actions and decisions. The Manual is the go-to reference by which staff learn how to perform, and why they must perform, in a particular way. It is also a resource containing examples of complaint investigations and decisions. For example, Employee Four (2013) says when he supervises new staff "one of the key things" he will impress upon them is the specific style of language an Ombudsman investigation officer should use in all communication situations. One's language must be professional, formal and exemplify impartiality at all times.

Referring new staff back to the Manual is a habit the supervisors in the room will try to "impress upon new staff" (Employee Four 2013) when they assess correspondence that comes through the office. Staff are consistently reminded not to take the complainants' or agencies'

word on any matter, but to investigate the “facts of the case” (Employee Five 2015). Meaning, “you present it in a way where the facts speak for themselves, in an independent and impartial sort of way and you know that that, in the end, is going to be the best way to get your outcome” (Employee Two 2013). Independence and impartiality are regularly repeated and emphasised in both the Manual and in conversations with staff.

Employee Two (2013) provided me with an example of an investigation officer asking questions of an agency. She said that they use the phrase “the complainant has said” or “the complainant told us that”, and avoid phrases such as “this is the case” (Employee Four 2013) or “this is what happened” (Employee Five 2013). Instead, as Employee Two (2013) continues,

We go in saying the complainants view is *[blank]*, please explain or please clarify, or please advise... you don’t assume that anything, in your writing to the agency, you don’t assume that anything the complainant has told you is correct or absolute, you give the agency the benefit of the doubt and a fresh chance to explain and answer the questions without any preconceived assumptions.

This example illustrates that every action taken by an investigation officer is always brought back to the key principles of the Office: independence and impartiality. Employee Two (2013) emphasises that the best way to convince a department or agency is through demonstrating that you have examined the matter from an independent and impartial standpoint. It is imperative therefore, that new staff are trained in how to embody independence and impartiality by learning to self-regulate their opinions, views and biases.

Despite being under the watchful eye of a supervisor, there will always be staff who are unable to achieve this on their own. One senior supervisor commented that the two key principles are “actively cultivated in reminding people when they start and when you’re inducting people into the Office what the role is about and then reinforcing that throughout” (Employee One 2013). Yet, “some people actually do find it a difficult thing to learn. And they struggle with it depending on their background and the roles they’ve had before. So, I mean I know that I will pay particular attention to that person and sort of push them back into the middle to try and help them to learn” (Employee One 2013). Nonetheless, Employee One (2013) later states “I’d have to say, just being absolutely frank, I think that some people don’t get it in this job.” She refers to the person whose actions and behaviour make them unsuitable or unable to be seen as being an impartial investigator. When such staff are identified there is not much the Office can do but “wait until they leave, because some people aren’t suited for this job and they may have accidentally (*laughs*) found their way in and they just don’t learn it” (Employee One 2013). This comment triggers agreement from Employee Two (2013) and Employee Four (2013) that some investigation officers simply cannot learn to “do the job.” They add that

these people are the ones who “find it harder” (Employee Four 2013) to remove their own opinions and viewpoints when dealing with a complainant or agency. Put simply: “they can’t, or don’t ‘get it’” (Employee Two 2013).

It should be noted that the Office does not prevent people from having an opinion. However, staff must discern where, when and to whom it is appropriate to air these opinions (the importance of these backstage spaces is discussed in Part Three of this chapter). If staff fail to learn the Office’s distinctions around such matters they are deemed unsuitable for this type of work. As interviewees stated:

They can’t put a lid on those viewpoints and opinions and do the job and so if you can’t do that then you can’t really do the job (Employee Two 2013).

I mean, you can talk about it and talk about it and then, but it doesn’t really sink in or mean anything. I’ve certainly come across a couple of investigation officers that, even over a fair bit of time, would still venture down that path when someone’s talking about a problem they’d start saying, ‘oh yeah, I agree with you and I really feel for you and that shouldn’t be done like that’ and blah blah blah. Or if someone’s confronting them and challenging their decision they’d get really, really worked up (Employee Four 2013).

Therefore, more than a matter of ensuring an employee presents independence and impartiality in their work, staff must also be able to control their emotions when a complainant or agency challenges their decision, their actions and even their qualifications to work in this area.

Staff who *are* able to embrace their role and the Ombudsman culture have shown a willingness to self-govern their opinions and actions. This does not result in an office of robotic and mechanical individuals, but rather, produces a group of individuals who have shown that they are able and willing to learn how to manage and regulate themselves. Staff know how to show empathy in a “measured way” (Employee Two 2013); a way that does not contradict independence and impartiality yet still expresses compassion for the complainant’s situation. However, they also learn when it is unhelpful to share their personal thoughts concerning a complainant’s situation.

The Effect of the Senior Employee’s Successful Embodiment of the Manual

It is this comparison between new staff, supervisors and the actions and behaviours of office-misfits that reveals the governance role of the Manual. This form of governance is productive

and useful for Ombudsman employees who submit to its shaping and regulating powers. Importantly, for staff that do embrace and submit to the shaping of the Manual, this is not necessarily experienced as a negative constraint. Interviewees found that the Manual is a “good guide” (Employee Three 2013), a support (Employee Four 2013), a source of encouragement and even an influencing factor in shaping their personal opinions (Employee Two 2013). It is when staff become more familiar with the Manual and the work of the Office that the deeper function performed by this document is revealed.

Over time the need to constantly refer back to the Manual’s physical form decreases as elements of the Manual become unconsciously embodied within individual staff. The knowledge staff glean from the Manual begins to act as a self-regulating mechanism between their value-laden selves and the key principles of the Office. This enables staff to be “free of bias, conflict of interests, real or perceived, [and look] at the matter without any pretence notions. You have an open mind when approaching the matter” (Employee One 2013). Therefore, over time, the Manual transforms from being a physical document that one goes to for guidance, advice, help and support, to an automatic action, behaviour or attitude of staff. The Manual becomes ensconced in “the back of your mind” (Employee Two 2013). It is “in the background” of staff thought and action.

This is a subtle and perhaps unconscious transformation, as evidenced when workshop attendees paused at certain points in our conversation to reflect upon how they do what they do and why they do it that way. For example, during the workshop I recounted to staff an observation from our remote outreach trip in early 2013. I noticed that during some difficult meetings with very opinionated Resident Service Providers the Ombudsman staff were able to continue the meeting without reacting. I asked how they manage their responses, body language, viewpoints and opinions in such situations and was given responses such as “I don’t know! I just do it!” (Employee Three 2013). Indeed, Employee Two (2013) says that “when you’re out on outreach you’re not using those documents [the Act and Manual], so it’s become part of you, from working in the Office, that you embody it.” Thus, the importance of the physical Manual as a document fades as one begins to live it out in daily practice.

There are three environments where this transformation is apparent:

1. In their work interactions with complainants and agencies.
2. In their interactions with junior staff.
3. In their lives outside of the Office.

Hence, the Ombudsman’s way-of-being, as laid out in the Manual, is not only restricted to the Office, but becomes so instinctive and ingrained in staff that it seeps into how they present

themselves even outside of work hours. Employee Four (2013) and Employee Two (2013) engaged in the following conversation about how they manage personal viewpoints and opinions. It started with Employee Four (2013) talking about how he focuses on what his role is, what he *can* achieve for the complainant, and firmly asserting that: “my opinion is irrelevant.”

Employee Two: And the more that you do it the more that it grows into you, like, I feel like my viewpoints and opinions are a lot more measured since I’ve worked in this job. Because it’s what you do every day, so it becomes you and you start to act like that and think like that in things that you do generally.

Employee Four: I think it does slowly impact on you...

Employee Two: Yeah! It seeps in...

Employee Four: I’ve been in the role for eight years and yeah, I think some of my friends would say, oh you know, ‘you’re doing your Ombudsman thing again...

Everyone: Laughs

Employee Four: ... kind of like, you’re being too impartial.

Employee Two: You fence sitter!

Employee Four: Yeah but you know, being nice and rational, sort of...

Employee Two: (*Laughing*) where’s the evidence for that?!

To support this observation, interviewees talked about matters that were always in ‘the back of the mind.’ This phrase was referred to when interviewees were relaying how they interact with complainants, agencies and in their general day-to-day “work flow” (Employee Two 2013; Employee Four 2013). The things they keep in the back of their minds all seem to be in reference to elements contained in either the Act or the Manual.

A further push to govern oneself is evident in the panopticon-type scenario created via the complaint file database called Resolve. The Resolve database is where all information relating to the investigation is filed. There are different tabs in the database that reference different stages in the complaint file’s life. Two participants began to explain a thought they keep in the back of their minds, that directly influences their engagement with Resolve, when I was discussing my observations about the role of the Office’s complaint files and Manual. Employee Four (2013) shared the following example. He might write a letter to an agency or complainant about certain issues/problems relating to the investigation, and whilst he does this he will keep an imaginary “third party reader” in the back of his mind. He explains,

...it’s advice that I’d give to an investigation officer, if a third party, completely unrelated to any of this picks it up they should be able to read it and understand where we’re coming from in that document,

even though it's got nothing to do with them. And they should be able to see what our independent position is and that that's how we've reached that position. And that should demonstrate that our conclusion is an independent, impartial conclusion and a reasonable conclusion.

Employees Two, Three and Four (2013) then engage in a conversation about how they relate to the Resolve process of documenting in detail their thought processes as well as any actions taken. Similar to the way that senior public servants in Chapter Three submit to the governance of the Estimates Test, the panopticon scenario for Ombudsman staff is to keep in their minds that an outsider (a third party) or a process (the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*) can at any time watch, monitor or request to see their work. Staff learn, therefore, to instinctively present the facts of the case in an independent and impartial manner. This is not only through a letter to an agency or complainant, but must also be evident in all recorded thought processes that led to a particular decision or conclusion. Staff keep in mind that anyone, at any time, may gain access to that file.

Another example is when Employee Four (2013) talks about how he feels as though he is "briefing the file." He does not write to anyone in particular, but rather, writes to the file, as though it were a person. Indeed, he admits,

No one else may ever read it, but it's a record so that *if* someone else was to read it, or if someone wanted to review my decision or whatever, there's a stand-alone document there that is evidencing the thought process and to show (*pause*)... and I guess to help show that yes, I did consider this, I did consider this, I did consider this, I might not put this in the letter but I did consider this because I think that will inflame 'whatever'. And so it's a way of documenting that. It sometimes seems (*pause*)... difficult because you sit there writing it thinking, 'oh I'm just writing a little note to myself'!

This free-form text-writing tool is an important discipline that staff adopt, not only to reflect the principles of independence and impartiality in their work, but also to have a written record of these principles at work within themselves: in their thoughts and actions. In essence this is meant to demonstrate through documentation that staff have taken an independent and impartial position. While it might seem illogical to spend time writing a note that no one may ever read, it is an ingrained and instinctive action for experienced Ombudsman staff. Interviewees all agree that "it's important" to do this and that, "we've always been taught that it's important" (Employee Two 2013).

When participants mentioned the Manual they spoke as though it should live in and reflect the present processes, procedures and jurisdictions of the Office. Although, as Employee One (2013) admits, "it's not as alive as it should have been, it really needed to be updated more

frequently.” “It’s always being updated and it’s always never up to date”, says Employee Four (2013), to laughter of agreement from other participants. To this, I ask, “So you’re already doing it [the new additions/revisions]... You just need that document [the Manual] to reflect what you’re already doing?” There are murmurs of agreement. Yes, it still guides their work, but there are sections that are out of date and things no longer done. This is why, they tell me, the Act is the “ultimate document” (Employee Two 2013). The Act is a document that is somewhat more concrete.¹⁰² It is this observation, that the Manual does fall out of date, that emphasises the importance for staff to embody the Manual. In essence, the senior and more experienced staff embody the previous Manuals and enact the future Manual — the Manual that is in the process of reflecting what people are already doing.

Participants inform me that questions over who has “responsibility and ownership” of this document have been left unanswered since the Office’s last restructure (Employee One 2013). Perhaps this is because, as Employee Four (2013) notes, “Often the case with these things is that different people think it’s everyone else’s job and you know, because it’s a resource commitment to own it and to update it and so forth and everyone’s busy doing other stuff, everyone wants to get someone else to do that (*laughs*).” In light of this, some may question the assertion that the Manual is an important document to the Office. If it were important, would there not be more care taken to ensure it is always reflecting the present reality of the Office’s principles, work flow and jurisdictions? Moreover, if it is out of date, how does this enable new staff to accurately reflect (in their work and themselves) the principles and activities of the Office?

I suggest that to have an up-to-date Manual at all times is impossible for any organisation or institution. Further, it is less of an imperative for the Ombudsman’s Office in light of the past, present and future versions of the document being embodied in senior staff. Employee Two (2013) explains that though the Manual might be out of date, “in the meantime, we have supervisors and we have people check our work to make sure that your work is still not wrong, that you’re still doing things properly.” Employee One (2015) also mentions that she constantly “reminds” new inductees about the role of the Office, the importance of the Act and refers them back to sections of the Manual so that staff might be guided in learning how to do the job and what new staff “need to *be*” in order to do it well. Thus, while the document may not be up to date on paper, it is still reinforced throughout the workings of the Office and is always up to date in the actions of the supervisors.

¹⁰² However, changes and additions can occur to the Act. The current and older versions of the Act are publicly available on government web sites.

When we consider the embodiment of the Manual into the thoughts, beliefs and actions of Ombudsman staff we are seeing them acting out and bringing to life a particular document. I argue in the following sections, and to further Frohmann's (2009) theory about expanding our understanding of documents through telling "stories", that, (a) it is an ever increasing reality that our understanding of documents can no longer be confined to physical materials such as paper, and (b) a document can exert governing power over an individual. These two points are clearly evident when we consider the staff's front and backstage performances during remote outreaches.

Part Three: Stories of Impression Management

It is not enough to simply state that Ombudsman staff present a unified Ombudsman identity modelled from the Manual when engaging with individual people and government departments and agencies. During the outreach that I observed, this presentation of the Ombudsman image was indeed performed front stage in interactions with Resident Service Providers and Indigenous locals. However, at times, a clash of attitudes between Ombudsman staff and some Resident Service Providers occurred regarding views of Aboriginality. These encounters reveal an important caveat to the successful presentation of an Ombudsman identity: Ombudsman staff require a backstage to express feelings or opinions of outrage, incredulity, sadness and frustration, in response to the attitudes and situations they encounter during remote outreach.

There are three important points worthy of explanation before I provide examples of Ombudsman staff impression management. The first is that it is common practice for staff to meet with Resident Service Providers during outreach. The second is the relationship between the Ombudsman staff and some Resident Service Providers. The third point concerns my own "emotional participation" in the Ombudsman's outreach activities (Hage 2015: 109). Each of these points is outlined in greater detail below.

Staff try and meet with as many service providers as possible to gain information on the administration of particular Commonwealth policies, programs, services and funding. This is also an opportunity for Ombudsman staff to ascertain whether there are any systemic problems occurring in the community and to establish new networks, or solidify old ones, by making the Resident Service Provider aware of the types of matters the Office is interested in and how the Office can assist them.

By meeting face-to-face with Resident Service Providers staff hope that they will leave a positive impression. Thus, when Resident Service Providers encounter a problem or issue in the future they might remember that the Ombudsman could help them. This may be in relation to the work of the service provider or in referring an Indigenous client to the Office. The “chit chat” (Employee Three) that occurs during these meetings may not result in a formal complaint that the Office would be able to investigate, however, these conversations with Resident Service Providers are crucial in establishing working relationships.

Ombudsman staff increasingly recognised the limitations their Office faced with regard to their ability to connect with Indigenous people in remote communities, in light of the curb to funding that came in mid-2012. Hence, meeting with Resident Service Providers has once again become a vital component to the Office’s strategy to remain ‘accessible’ and ‘effective’ in monitoring policy and programs on the ground — two buzzwords that the Manual instructs Ombudsman staff they should strive to achieve.

Further it is important to note that the Resident Service Providers that Ombudsman staff engage with, and who are a focus in this and the following chapter, comprise a specific group of service providers which are present in communities.¹⁰³ Staff tend to meet with those Resident Service Providers who are employed by, or administer, Commonwealth policies, programs, services and funding because the Commonwealth Ombudsman’s jurisdiction remains restricted to the Commonwealth government. Thus, staff initiate meetings with police, school principals, age care workers, some store managers and health clinic managers. These are the street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky 1980) charged with implementing Commonwealth programs in targeted areas of policy concern (law, education, health).

Had staff addressed managers of art galleries, volunteers, youth workers, activists, environmentalists, tradespeople, fly-in-fly-out service providers such as Centrelink or legal aid, or other researchers, the initial impressions that were formed and the particular local knowledge presented to us may have produced different results. Thus the engagements Ombudsman staff have during remote outreach trips are with particular government agents who operate in specifically bounded policy spaces. I differentiate these spaces using Goffman’s previously outlined concepts of the front and backstage.

¹⁰³ At the beginning of all meetings and conversations with the Resident Service Providers and Indigenous locals described in this chapter Ombudsman staff made it clear that I was an accompanying PhD research student. I explained the purpose of my research, what participation involved and where the results of this research could potentially be published as per the Australian National University’s Ethics Committee approval that I obtained prior to conducting research. All of the Resident Service Providers mentioned in this chapter gave verbal consent that they understood the research and had no objections to my presence in the meeting, thus giving their consent to the data that I obtained.

The relationship between the Ombudsman staff and some Resident Service Providers is the second point to note. Usually anthropologists describe the intercultural encounters between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Conversely, what I found interesting was the clash between Ombudsman staff and some Resident Service Providers. It is therefore important to recognise that these different bureaucrats inhabit different bureaucratic cultural worlds, and it is the interactions between these bureaucratic cultures that are a part of this chapter's analysis. In this regard, the 'other' is not the Indigenous local, but the Ombudsman's bureaucratic opposite, the Resident Service Provider. In Chapter Five I continue this examination of bureaucratic 'otherness' when I explain how Resident Service Providers present and identify with a specific form of local knowledge about Aboriginality. The 'other', from the Resident Service Provider's perspective, is anyone who does not work and reside in a remote community, such as Ombudsman staff.

The third and final point I feel is important to highlight concerns my own "emotional participation" in the Ombudsman's outreach activities (Hage 2015: 109). Ghassan Hage (2015: 94) has recently reflected on what he calls "ethnographic vacillation"; the tension between researcher-as-observer (analytical/impartial) and researcher-as-participant (strongly experiencing the same feelings and emotions as participants). Ethnographic vacillation is Hage's attempt to make sense of the similarities he noticed when he shared feelings of anger and hatred with his Lebanese participants in response to the 2006 bombing of Lebanon by Israel. To discover what activated his anger towards Israel's actions, and to make sense of the difference in the intensity of the emotions he felt compared to his informants, Hage began a process of deep self-reflection. He believed there must be something beyond the obvious 'attacking-another-country-is-unjust' explanation to understand emotional response. This led him to connect experiences from his childhood to the events that occurred in Lebanon. He explains that his feelings of anger toward Israel were of a particular intensity because he recognised a similarity in the wielding of excessive domination and power by Israel over Lebanon to that of his father over his siblings and himself when he was growing up (Hage 2015: 99-100).

Although Hage experienced this emotional response in 2006 he has only recently published these reflexive thoughts in 2015. Thus, I imagine that it might take me longer than the few years I have to write this thesis before I am able to wrestle with the notions Hage posits in his book; to ascertain from what or where or whom my feelings of outrage toward some Resident Service Providers' attitudes were "activated". Although I have tried to reflect in the way that Hage (2015) suggests I cannot exactly pinpoint why my reactions of outrage, offence and incredulity that I shared with Ombudsman staff in the interaction with the taxi driver in the

opening to this chapter, and with the police officers that I examine in the next section, were similar or from where they stemmed. However, I think being able to acknowledge in advance that at times I was not the impartial, passive observer, but rather an active, emotional participant in the experiences of my informants, is an important starting place.

Having addressed these caveats I now turn to examples of how the front and backstage are integral for Ombudsman staff to present independence and impartiality.

Holding it Together: A Clash in Attitudes between Locals and Outsiders

In early 2013 the Ombudsman's Office conducted a week of outreach activities in two remote Northern Territory communities. We arrived in Community A on Monday around noon. While we were at the local store buying a few provisions for our stay, we met the community's two police officers. The Ombudsman staff introduced themselves to the officers, explaining who they were, where they were from and what they were in the community for. The officers invited the Ombudsman staff and me to accompany them on a tour of the community and surrounding area later that same afternoon. They picked us up in two police vehicles and drove us to their favourite fishing spots, showed us where the barge lands to supply the community with goods and drew our attention to the sacred sites where men's and women's ceremonies take place. The officers were very friendly and eager to converse about their life in the community. Unfortunately, this hospitality did not aid the police officers in presenting a favourable impression of themselves to Ombudsman staff, after the meeting the following day.

The meeting was conducted in the air-conditioned staff area of the fenced police compound. We sat around a small table sipping the water and Pepsi offered to us by the cheerful, welcoming officers.¹⁰⁴ The Ombudsman staff were interested in the officers' perspectives of the community, concerning the administration of policies and programs. Staff were particularly interested in learning more about school truancy matters and how the newly proposed Northern Territory child restraint laws might impact the community and the officers'

¹⁰⁴ As my primary research purpose was to observe the Ombudsman staff, I was present at the meeting in the capacity as observer, allowing staff to do the majority of the talking. However, I was invited to ask my own questions at the end of the meeting. This meeting with the police officers is referenced as Police Officer Four and Five in Appendix C.

own work, such as picking children up and taking them to school or the ability of night patrols to return children to homes.¹⁰⁵

One officer was a seasoned veteran, while the other was a new recruit, with this being his first posting to a remote community. The officers were both lively and jovial, making jokes about aspects of their work with Indigenous people. For example, at one point during the meeting an upcoming funeral was mentioned. This led the senior police officer to talk about Indigenous culture and traditions. Both officers then started to joke about the practicalities of transporting a deceased person's body via a non air-conditioned aeroplane when it was not embalmed. Not only was the discomfort the decomposing body's odour would produce joked about, but the police officers also parodied having to sit beside the corpse in the passenger area of the plane, due to the limited space on aeroplanes that service remote communities. This parody was accompanied by a mimicking of one of the officers placing his arm around the deceased body in a gesture of mate-ship while the imaginary flight was in progress.

The walk back to the Ombudsman accommodation was conducted in silence, but there was a palpable feeling of tension passing between us. Back at the accommodation, the very neutral and composed facades the Ombudsman staff and I had put forward during the meeting disappeared, replaced by a flood of incredulity and disbelief. There was a clear disconnect between the front stage the Ombudsman staff presented to the police officers ten minutes ago and the feelings and emotions that were released in the safety of our private accommodation.

In this backstage space, the Ombudsman staff and I felt free to express opinions and make comments that we had withheld front stage.¹⁰⁶ Ombudsman staff asked each other questions, such as: how could the police officers joke about events as sensitive as the upcoming funeral the community were preparing for; how could they make such distasteful jokes about a person

¹⁰⁵ In this community the main mode of transport is four-wheel drive, utility vehicles. The new child restraint laws would require the police and night patrol vehicles to be fitted with appropriate car seats and restraints for children. This policy would greatly impact upon the work of police and night patrol because of the frequency with which children are often picked up and driven to school and/or back to their homes. It is a somewhat impractical policy to expect remote communities to adhere to, considering the limited availability of appropriate transport for children.

¹⁰⁶ This was my second visit to a remote community but my first encounter with remote police officers. Like the Ombudsman staff, as a researcher, I presented an impartial front to the officers; which is what most researchers try to do. However, although I have previous experience working with police officers in New Zealand and am therefore accustomed to the particular sense of humour that police can sometimes exhibit, I had not been personally exposed to such insensitive and racist comments before. Alongside the Ombudsman staff, I required the backstage to work through this initial encounter, to return to an impartial equilibrium through which I would be able to gather data, consider and access it and develop an understanding of this experience without allowing my personal responses to cloud my analysis.

who had died; how had these officers been allowed to work in remote communities if they openly expressed such views with strangers? This lack of respect for Indigenous traditions and beliefs regarding death and funeral practices led the Ombudsman staff to project sympathy to the Indigenous locals who would have to endure these officers for at least three months.¹⁰⁷

While the Ombudsman staff did not verbally agree with what was being said by the police, they did not give any indication that they disagreed, or indeed, that they were highly offended by the officers' comments. An Ombudsman interviewee later explained: "Whenever you're meeting with people you're putting on your independent public service face whether it's a department or a complainant. There can be things you're really thinking that you don't get the chance to say" (Employee Four 2015). The staff in this encounter were able to convincingly present as neutral, independent and professional during all their conversations with Resident Service Providers and locals, including these police officers, because they had embodied the Manual. They had learned what is acceptable Ombudsman behaviour to perform front stage with the public, how to manage their own opinions when in difficult situations and what they should be focusing their attention on (i.e. the matters they *can* investigate).

What the staff and I were perhaps misinterpreting was the necessity that some service providers, such as the police, have to use "cynical, gallows, or "black" humour" (Rowe and Regehr 2010: 448) as a way to manage the difficult experiences that they are exposed to on a regular basis. Rebecca Wright et al. (2006: 507)¹⁰⁸ define black humour as "the juxtaposition of morbid and farcical elements to give a humorous effect", and Alison Rowe and Cheryl Regerhr (2010: 449)¹⁰⁹ add that: "It is a humorous response that appears inappropriate or illogical in the face of hopeless situations." Wright et al. (2006), Rowe and Regehr (2010) and Sarah Charman (2013)¹¹⁰ all observe that the use of humour is an important way that police officers release tension, manage stress and cope better with the emotional demands of their work. Indeed, Rowe and Regerhr (2010: 450) state that humour is "almost universally utilized by emergency personnel."

Wright et al.'s (2006:507) study investigates police officers who deal with child abuse victims. The authors argue that for the police officers they interviewed, although black humour "might be seen as inappropriate to outsiders, participants emphasised that the intent was never derogatory nor was amusement achieved at the expense of the child victims." Yet, the way

¹⁰⁷ Three months is the general length of police rotations in remote communities.

¹⁰⁸ Wright et al.'s (2006) study examines the daily challenges faced by police officers who investigate child abuse.

¹⁰⁹ Rowe and Regerhr (2010) explore the use of black humour for emergency service occupations.

¹¹⁰ Charman (2013) investigates the similarities in the use of humour for police and ambulance officers.

the police spoke about Aboriginality in the example of the imaginary plane ride seems to conform more to a sociology theory about attaining superiority through humour. This theory recognises that a particular type of humour releases tension through amusement but does so “at the expense of either the client group (e.g. the customer in retail, the student in education, the patient in medicine or the offender in criminal justice) or other, competing groups” (Charman 2013: 156). Further, Rowe and Regerhr (2010: 456) note that “black humor can be viewed as highly offensive to others.” They explain that: “While using such terms within such a serious situation may seem outrageous to individuals who are not directly involved, the use of humor in these situations provides an effective coping mechanism against stress and prevents professional burnout in individuals confronted with death, bereavement and human suffering.” However, the authors go on to state that there are limitations and “rules” surrounding when, where and in front of whom it is appropriate to share black humour.

They acknowledge that “black humor will be experienced by those outside the emergency professions as callous and harmful” (Rowe and Regerhr 2010: 459). Further, they suggest that “Black humor that cannot be contained appropriately to peer interactions should be considered professional misconduct” (Rowe and Regerhr 2010: 459). Although the Ombudsman could not have opened an investigation into the behavioural conduct they witnessed at this meeting with the police officers (as technically these officers were not administratively doing anything wrong or unjust), the Ombudsman staff could still have notified the Police Department of this interaction and requested the Department investigate into these officers’ conduct.¹¹¹

However, regardless as to why the police officers felt they could express black humour in front of the Ombudsman staff and myself, we were highly offended by their jokes. Instead of sharing my own feelings of offence, disgust and anger in front of the police officers I followed the Ombudsman staff’s lead in ‘holding it together’ until we were in the private space of our accommodation. Holding it together during a meeting is a key aspect of being able to successfully work for the Ombudsman’s Office; it is what staff do when they encounter a clash of attitudes and/or opinions. In such situations, staff remind themselves of the task at hand: focusing on the correct allocation of Commonwealth funds and the successful implementation of policy and program administration. Holding it together requires staff to focus on the

¹¹¹ In this example with the police officers, the Ombudsman staff could not have investigated into the officers’ seemingly racist behaviour. The staff could have send a letter to the Police Department noting the concerns they had with regards to these officers, however, any disciplinary or directive action taken is the prerogative of the Police Department.

matters that the Office can legitimately address and let go of those matters the Office is unable to pursue.¹¹²

Interestingly, when I returned to this community six months later I heard positive reports from Indigenous locals about the initiatives those particular police officers had taken in the community. Moreover, despite the Ombudsman being a complaints gathering body, not one person laid a complaint nor made a negative comment about these two police officers. Goffman's (1959) metaphor of the front and backstage may explain the discrepancies I observed between the impression Ombudsman staff and Indigenous locals formed of these two police officers.

I suggest that what we experienced in the police compound that day was an invitation into the officers' backstage. They were relaxed, open and transparent about the nature of their work and incorporated us into their way of understanding and managing cultural difference: through their particular use of black humour. Further, while the police may have conducted themselves in one way amongst non-Indigenous people in a backstage space does not mean that this is how they would present themselves or interact when front stage with Indigenous locals.

The second example of holding it together involves an encounter with a principal of a remote school. The Ombudsman staff were interested in a number of Commonwealth programs that concerned remote schools: truancy, the nutrition program and the upcoming School Enrolment and Attendance through Welfare Reform Measure.¹¹³ Staff were wanting to learn more about what the school was doing presently in these areas, how they anticipated the Enrolment and Attendance Measure to be implemented and whether the principal anticipated this measure having an impact upon school attendance. The principal had initially indicated that she would not have spare time to meet with Ombudsman staff. However, we ended up being in her office for the better part of the morning, as the principal seemed in no hurry to end our conversation.

As the principal spoke about her role in the community she gave the impression that she was a saviour, Aboriginal parents were child-like and that Indigenous children have difficult

¹¹² Hage (2015: 105) refers to a similar idea through the exhortation "Pull yourself together." He describes this as an individual's attempt to achieve a "non-fragmented" sense of self, or "at least give ourselves the appearance of a certain wholeness, coherence and togetherness." Similarly, we see Ombudsman staff struggle to present the collective image of the Office as impartial and independent when personal emotions and reactions threaten this neutral/independent state of being. Thus, staff must 'hold it together' and only release the tension they experience when in a safe backstage space.

¹¹³ For details of this program see footnote 26 on page 33.

childhoods which lead to hopeless futures. As we were about to enter her office, she talked condescendingly to some Aboriginal parents about needing to get their children to school. These adults hung their heads and gave small nods when she questioned whether they were taking in her words. At another moment during our meeting, a non-Indigenous teacher came in asking for medical cream as one of her children had suspected scabies. The principal laughed and dramatically shuddered as she told the teacher, who appeared visibly uncomfortable throughout the interchange, that she was in contact with a child yesterday who might have scabies. The principal then turned to us and said with a laugh: “you’re probably talking to someone with scabies!” She then proceeded to talk about the frequency of scabies amongst children in this community, implying that it was the children’s own fault for being unclean and unhealthy.

The Ombudsman staff did not agree nor disagree with what the principal was saying, similar to the way they handled their interactions with the police. In fact, staff gave no real response apart from trying to divert the conversation back to the Commonwealth programs the Office had the jurisdiction to investigate. The principal’s train of thought was random and often diverged to tangents that the Ombudsman staff later dismissed as “meaningless”, once we had left the room. For example, when the principal swivelled in her computer chair to point at piles of unidentifiable papers or showed us computer spreadsheets of her own creation, none of which had any relation to what the staff were asking about. The principal then began to talk about the frequency of funerals in the community as “an excuse for kids not to come to school”, and that children and teens should be “taught useful skills”, such as cooking, building and laundering. She was taught these skills at school and expressed the opinion that because the Aboriginal kids here “are not academic... there’s no reason for the kids to be academic” (School Principal Two 2013), they should at least learn basic life skills. Despite these comments the composure of Ombudsman staff remained impassive.

After the conclusion of the meeting, we were barely a few metres away from the school building before a member of the Ombudsman staff began to softly vent incredulously about what she had witnessed over the course of the morning. She shared that she could not wait to get out of the meeting, as she could tell straight away that it was going to be fruitless. Indeed, she reflected that the principal had little of value to say because her views of the community were so entangled with normative racist beliefs. Walking with purpose, and visibly tense, the staff member expressed her thoughts. Here, the staff member did not wait for the safe haven of the accommodation to express her feelings; instead, the space away from the earshot of the school principal was far enough backstage for her to get the burden of the meeting off her chest. This venting was a necessary tactic to return the staff member to the composed

equilibrium of the independent and impartial Ombudsman identity; an identity that she needed to quickly adopt and present front stage at another meeting she was now on her way to attend.

Holding it together is one way that staff respond to challenging or trying situations and people. Interviewees also shared that when they face such scenarios with people who express what they regard as unfair or racist remarks they do not allow the feelings of frustration, anger or disgust to overwhelm them. Instead, staff choose to focus on and draw from the principles and instructions they have filed away unconsciously from Office documents such as the Manual.

In these examples there is a clash of “knowledge systems” (Kowal 2010: 184) or a “crossed purpose” (Folds 2001) between Ombudsman views and those of local Resident Service Providers with regards to Aboriginality; views that need to be managed by Ombudsman staff.¹¹⁴ The Manual lays out examples for how to deal with difficult complainants and/or conflict but also reinforces exactly what the staff’s role is at all times. Knowing that staff have a specific task and role helps them push aside any negative or reactionary responses when encountering attitudes that conflict with their own. As one interviewee explained, she will often think to herself, “Well what can I do as an Ombudsman officer? Where is the legal, policy, practice, program issue that might not be working properly here? What angle can I take? While also juggling the emotional response” (Employee One 2015).

Interviewees further acknowledged that it is important to hold personal feelings of discomfort or outrage to themselves when still in contact with the person who triggers these responses. Staff remind themselves that they are meant to present front stage a wider Office identity that is independent and impartial. With experience, staff come to realise that adding their own opinions or views to a situation will not aid them in the tasks the Office requires them to perform. As one interviewee who encountered the police officers described earlier explains:

I suppose, at the end of the day, I think ‘I’m not going to be able to change their view’. I’ve grown up with racism my whole life, I’ve copped it from Aboriginal people and white people because I have a white parent and a black parent. So I just think that I’ve come to this point where sure, I can argue with you and argue with you and argue with you — I can do that all day and all night — but I’ve come to the point where I can pick the people where it doesn’t matter how much I argue with them, they’re never going to change their view. Ever. So

¹¹⁴ Scholars have also explored through the trope ‘mercenary, missionary and misfit’, the varying attitudes that are produced amongst groups such as Resident Service Providers with regards to how they view their position within Indigenous communities, which explain different views about Aboriginality (Kowal 2012, 2015, Mahood 2012).

at times it's just better — and even though it makes you feel sick and angry and furious with what their views are — if I argue about that point and if I get ridiculously upset it's not going to change their view. And there's no point in wasting any time or energy trying to think about that (Employee Three 2015).

Employee Three in this extract is similar to Employee One who focuses on what she *can* achieve. The interviewee who encountered police officers from Community A shared that she would have had an issue with those officers had they made a complaint to her Office saying that her investigations were compromised because she allowed her personal views to overtake her professional thoughts and actions. This is where she again highlights the importance of being able to “separate yourself” from the professional work she enacts. Additionally, she says that often she will think, “I might find their views racist, but at the end of that day, is that really what this complaint is about? And nine times out of ten it's not. It's about everyday things” (Employee Three 2015). These are the matters that she diverts her attention and energies to.

As another interviewee explains, when engaging with an abusive, hostile or offensive person, often there is a need to just try and “let their comment go and focus the conversation on the issue that you need to get to” (Employee Four 2015). Although, there is a generally accepted view that if a staff member receives abuse in a conversation they have every right to discontinue the conversation. Yet, this interviewee adds that,

When it's about someone else it's a blurred line about what to do.... Especially when outside the office; you're in their turf, you're in their patch. When you're in [our] office you can just walk away from the counter and end the conversation. But when on outreach, it's harder to end a conversation that you feel uncomfortable or unsafe in.... Everyone has their different levels of tolerance (Employee Four 2015).

Whilst I argue that the Manual is embodied in Ombudsman staff thoughts and actions I am not saying that this embodiment is necessarily expressed the same way (although the management of challenging encounters do all occur backstage). Therefore, while the Manual is the same document, it performs differently when influencing and directing staff work; including engaging with difficult people, managing their own opinions and projecting the collective image of the Office. There is a level of freedom and agency in how the Manual is expressed in individual practice. One interviewee explains that the important point to remember is that while staff might think differently, act differently or approach an investigation differently, Office staff are united in the processes and procedures they follow. Ultimately they are united in that the final “goal, aim and vision is the same” (Employee Three 2015). This is to improve government administration through remedying complaints. In

essence therefore, it “doesn’t matter how we got there, so long as we all get there” (Employee Three 2015); the best way to “get there” being to put aside one’s own personal views and follow the Manual guidelines when front stage.

We witness in these stories from outreach the embodiment of the Manual in front stage thought and practice, but also, the importance of having the opportunity to ‘let off steam’ with other staff backstage. This releasing of personal feelings is crucial in assisting staff to navigate the line between their individual identity and the collective identity of the Office.

Toeing the Line between Advocate and Helper

The previous stories demonstrate how the Manual can aid employees in restraining their own feelings and personal responses when encountering difficult people on outreach. The next story I turn to demonstrates an ambivalence that is present in certain moments during outreach because of the liminal position Ombudsman staff occupy within the Indigenous policy world. This state of liminality, between complainant and government departments, bureaucrat-but-not-of-government, while still needing to remain personal and empathetic to the complainant’s situation, means that there is no definitive answer or rule to indicate when staff might be crossing the line between advocate and helper. Staff made the following summative statements when reflecting on how they discern this line or balance: “It’s really hard to do to be honest!” (Employee Three 2015), “It’s hard to explain!” (Employee One 2015), “It’s a difficult balance” (Employee Four 2015). I argue that it is elements of the embodied Manual which alert staff that they are approaching the line where they cease to be seen by complainants as helper and instead, cross over to become an advocate. Should the line be crossed, and the staff viewed as advocating more in favour of the complainant, the independence and impartiality of Ombudsman investigations is then questioned. A story of toeing the helper/advocate line is outlined below.

During outreach one of the Ombudsman staff began talking with a local Indigenous woman about her son’s Centrelink payments. The mother explained that he had just come onto a new payment, and because he did not have a bank account Centrelink had sent him a cheque in the mail.¹¹⁵ The woman was concerned for her son because with no place in the community to cash cheques (the local shop refused to cash welfare cheques) he would be without any source of income. She wanted to know whether it was possible for his welfare payment to go into her

¹¹⁵ Without a bank account a BasicsCard could not be issued.

bank account until he was able to get a bank account of his own. This was a matter that staff identified as being a potential issue the Office could investigate. It sounded as if there might be a problem with Centrelink's processes in finding alternative ways to distribute payments to remote clients. With no banks in the community, nor banks within a viable travelling distance and no place within the community to cash a cheque, the young man, Mr D, was in quite a dilemma.

Over the next few days the Ombudsman staff member made contact with Centrelink to try and ascertain what the details of Mr D's situation were. She also inquired as to what processes Centrelink had followed that had led them to issue a cheque to a remote client. At the same time, she queried whether it was possible for Mr D's mother to be a nominated person that would enable her to receive the payment on his behalf in the interim. Centrelink said that would be fine, but that both Mr D and his mother would need to come into a Centrelink office for a face-to-face interview. When it was explained that there was no possible way that this could occur — the community being located hundreds of kilometres from Darwin and the Centrelink support services not scheduled to revisit for a few weeks — it seemed they had reached an impasse. They could not travel to Darwin which meant Mr D's mother could not be a nominated person. Mr D could not open a bank account because there was no bank nearby. There was no place to cash his cheque. What other options could Centrelink provide?

While walking from the accommodation to the shire council offices, where there was a telephone the Ombudsman staff member could use, her supervisor made a comment of caution and reminder. From the supervisor's perspective the staff member was edging closer to the line where she would cease to be merely helping or assisting Mr D and instead, could be viewed by Centrelink as advocating on his behalf. This comment was accepted in good faith and briefly talked through as we continued to make our way towards the office.

Reflecting on this idea of there being a line or a balance that staff must maintain, I draw attention back to the way the Manual governs staff behaviour and actions in situations when staff are physically away from the office. While the Manual is the practical guide that aids junior staff in learning to do and say Ombudsman things, I have argued that for staff at mid to senior levels this document becomes embodied within the individual. Indeed, at times the physical document lags behind the updated version of the document which has become internalised within the individual. The new experiences, knowledge and precedents that have occurred since the last version are present within mid to senior staff.

Therefore, when it comes to individual scenarios and situations — such as the one described above with Mr D — where the precedent has not been set with regards to a specific

investigation case or scenario, the staff member is left to interpret what they know about the role and rules of the Office and how they might best apply it to suit the needs of the situation. As one manager states regarding this knowledge of the line between advocate and independent, impartial helper:

It's a perception as to whether they're crossing the line of being independent. But I have seen staff respond in situations where the perception could be different. [i.e.] Someone tells you an issue or concern and it can be a very sad or upsetting story or outcome. Especially if it's emotive, you don't want to sit there and nod your head and say, 'well we can't do anything'. It's human interaction! I've seen people get into 'I'm sure we can help you, or something can be done' because they want to respond to the need of that person for support. Maybe they say things that we can do, but that we can't. It's a balance. If you don't show support, that person won't feel that they can trust you. But at the same time, you can't promise to do things (Employee Four 2015).

Striking this balance between asserting the common identity of the Office yet still remaining personable to Indigenous locals is a difficult task indeed. In this quote, the difficulty staff face in achieving this balance is evident. The challenge begins during the initial meeting between staff and locals (potential complainants). On the one hand, staff want to be "personable" (Employee One 2015) so that locals feel they can approach them with confidence and confide in them their problems with government. Yet, on the other, staff need to maintain a professional distance so that they are not seen as promising a complainant an outcome that they may not be able to deliver. There is a careful balance that staff must master in order to achieve the Office's objectives in the community — assisting people with their problems — while ensuring that people understand what they might reasonably expect of the Office's role.

One key question I asked interviewees was how they strike this balance: being personable while still projecting the collective identity of the Office. Interviewees implied that it is a fine line to walk, but that ultimately, it is a "personal thing," (Employee Two 2015) or personal style, regarding how an individual will define when that boundary is crossed. To be personable, staff try to engage with locals in a "casual way" (Employee One 2015), often starting with "general chit chat about the weather or something general" (Employee Two 2015), in the hope of making "a connection and build[ing] upon that relationship so you have common ground" (Employee Three 2015). As mentioned earlier, staff will also pay attention to how they physically present to locals. Many dress in a way that they think is respectful and will not appear as "too much of a bureaucrat" (Employee Two 2015). As one interviewee says,

You want people to talk to you, so be sensitive and show concern. The balance is not over-promising in what we can do. You want to show

empathy and that we will try to help, but don't get peoples hopes up where, or if, we can't [help]. Always be really clear in what our role is, what we will do with their problem and what we can try to do. And if we can't do anything, we need to tell them there and then that you can't help them and direct them to someone who can (Employee Two 2015).

Here is where knowing the role, jurisdictions and constraints of the Office, laid out in the Parliamentary Acts and Manual, is crucial. Knowing the sorts of issues that the Ombudsman can assist with and knowing how to go about investigating these issues is paramount, especially on outreach, where time in communities is limited. Staff want to progress a complaint, or at least determine whether the matter is something the Office can assist with, while they are still on the ground in communities and can talk with complainants face-to-face. Staff are alert to the reality that their ability to continue contact with remote complainants diminishes once they return to their offices in the major cities.¹¹⁶

If staff are unable to assist with a person's problem they will direct the person to an agency or service that can. However, at times, staff might choose to continue to help someone despite the matter being outside the Ombudsman jurisdiction. Below is an example where the line between advocate and helper becomes a personal decision, made upon reflecting what the role of the Office is (despite there being governing documents that are meant to shepherd people through choices such as these). As one interviewee admitted, she still might spend,

...a lot of time with a person trying to assist them even when I realise that our Office can't do anything. I will make phone calls back to the HQ office to get people to have a think about where this person might go, who might be able to help them, get the numbers of people they can contact and maybe set up some meetings. So in the end, I might end up spending a lot of time trying to connect them with others (Employee Two 2015).

To other staff, Employee Two's actions may be interpreted as crossing the line. Yet, Employee Three, who dealt with Mr D's Centrelink problem, draws attention to an important caveat when she reflected upon whether or not she had indeed crossed the line. She too believes it is a personal, partial decision that is made during these rather "blurry" situations. In a sense, while the line exists, she views it as movable, to be interpreted differently depending on the experiences of other staff.

¹¹⁶ This can be the result of complainants changing mobile phone numbers and not informing Ombudsman staff, the complainant moving away from the community leaving no forwarding address, or the complainant's lack of sufficient literacy skills for reading and understanding the letters that Ombudsman staff send regarding the progress or outcome of the complaint investigation.

For Example, Employee Three worked directly for Centrelink in remote servicing prior to being employed by the Ombudsman. She thus explains her actions as not crossing the line because, “I knew how far I could push that envelope because I knew what Centrelink was capable of and what they can do and all those sorts of things” (Employee Three 2015). Analogous to the senior public servants in Chapter Three, there is reference here to the benefits a person’s prior life experiences can bring to a situation. Employee Three’s existing knowledge and experience influences how she reads her capacity to act while on outreach. Thus, it is habitus of a longer duration that structures where she sees the line forming between advocate and helper.

In contrast, her supervisor had previous experience in more formal settings such as Royal Commissions, thus her perspective was perhaps, “very much black and white, cross all your T’s dot all your I’s” (Employee Three 2015). Employee Three explains that different backgrounds bring varying definitions of where crossing of the line may occur. In reflecting upon why her supervisor might have been concerned she states,

I think we’re different people. I understand where she’s coming from in terms of: have I gone over that line? And maybe I had. I don’t know, maybe... but I can justify that at the end of the day. I can justify why I had gone and taken those steps to have done that” (Employee Three 2015).

Thus, it is important to note that while the Manual details what the Office can and cannot do, combined with the ways that staff are to approach a complaint, there is a degree of flexibility when it comes to assessing each case individually. In the example above with Centrelink, Employee Three demonstrates this flexibility when she states that she knew she could “push [Centrelink] a little bit harder to make some decisions and to get onto something a lot quicker.” She summarises that:

...so I think that line can be moved, other people might not, but that’s an individual thing and you have to manage that yourself, no one’s going to say ‘you’re now bordering on...’ — well people do and they’ll give you that view — but you need to make that decision about whether you are or you’re not (Employee Three 2015).

The power of the governing reach of the Manual is seen in these stories, as are its limitations. The Manual can only go so far in being a direct roadmap for guiding staff in their work. At other times, there may be more than one route to reach the same destination, which is left to the individual to decide. Indeed, especially on outreach, some interviewees felt that the line is more movable when in remote communities than in other cases.

Conclusion

Bureaucratic documents can provide useful insights into the written and enacted cultures of bureaucratic figures. Sullivan (2012) suggests that public documents “offer a way to understand modern culture”, suggesting that anthropologists should view public documents as “reflexive performances”, not just the products of the subjects of inquiry, but rather, as the subjects themselves (Sullivan 2012: 53). Drawing together Sullivan (2012) and Hull’s (2012) recent views, this chapter approached the Manual as the subject itself, not only as abstracted text or representation, but further, to “analyze documents as something other than or more than instruments of “representation”” (Hull 2012: 254).¹¹⁷ The treatment of the Manual in this chapter has been concerned with its influence in shaping the behaviour, thoughts, actions and subjectivities of Ombudsman staff through the retelling of “stories” (Frohmann 2009) from outreach.

The stories in this chapter demonstrate that the Manual is vital to Ombudsman staff’s successful navigation of the liminal space they occupy between complainant and department. It is crucial that staff perform the collective impartial/independent identity of the Office when front stage for two reasons: first, so that Indigenous people will see the Office as trustworthy; and second, so that the Office is able to affect policy and program change when Commonwealth departments and agencies adopt Ombudsman recommendations.

How to become this upstanding Ombudsman employee, who models independence and impartiality, is laid out in the Work Practice Manual. This is how staff learn to do and say acceptable Ombudsman things. What is interesting about this aspect of the Ombudsman “writing desk” (Hull 2008: 53) is that the Manual is not only a process and product, but also a vehicle for governing power, instructing and guiding the conduct of the very bureaucrats who construct it. The Manual is, therefore, an inwardly focused document that teaches staff how they should perform when focusing outward.

The Manual is willingly adopted by staff who wish to remain in Ombudsman employment. Over time the Manual becomes embodied in senior employees’ thought processes, actions and behaviours. On Indigenous outreach, where staff do not have their writing desk with them (computers, databases and even paper forms at times) the importance of embodying the Manual is especially heightened. Within themselves and through ongoing exposure and experience, staff are able to make the writing desk mobile; it moves from its location within

¹¹⁷ For a contrasting view see David Dery’s (1998) article *“Papereality” and Learning in Bureaucratic Organizations*.

the Office to function outside the Office when conducting their work, whilst also moving into their personal lives.

However, while it may appear that this document is all consuming there are limits to the governing power that a document can exert over individuals. This is where the importance of Goffman's (1959) backstage emerges as vital to the self-management of Ombudsman staff identity. Ombudsman staff must find appropriate and effective ways to manage the difficult people they encounter during outreach activities. I have explained how Ombudsman staff 'hold it together' when in confrontational front stage situations, use the backstage to return to a neutral equilibrium, as well as emphasise the importance of 'toeing the line' between advocate and helper.

The next chapter returns us to one of the Indigenous communities I visited initially with Ombudsman staff. Here, the focus is on the Resident Service Providers' presentation of a discourse and identity that asserts that they are the bearers of a local form of knowledge about Indigenous people. Although separated by over 4000 kilometres, it will be shown that these Resident Service Providers also uphold parts of the parliamentary Regime of Truth examined in Chapter Two. The impact these forms of knowledge have upon the ways Resident Service Providers present themselves to outsiders is the focus for the following chapter.

Chapter 5

On the Frontlines: Resident Service Providers as the Bearers of Local Knowledge

Introduction

Stepping off the small plane onto the tarmac I am enveloped in a wave of hot, humid, sea air. I have landed on a small island off the northern coast of Australia, home to approximately 300 Indigenous Australians and an estimated 25 non-Indigenous service providers. As we move to the side area of the airstrip, three other visitors and I take shelter from the sun in the small open-sided building that serves as the airport terminal. Sitting relaxed and at ease on one of the benches is the clinic manager. He chats to one of the local women who waits to board the plane back to Darwin. He gives us new arrivals a cursory glance before turning back to the woman. He is often there to greet the daily flight from Darwin to pick up medical supplies for the local clinic. For the past two years he has witnessed a multitude of “whitefellas” fly-in and fly-out over and over again. Indeed, in the twenty years he has been in the medical profession in remote communities, this man has witnessed his fair share of temporary strangers. From his perspective, it is not worth paying them much attention, as they will not stay here long. A week, a day — perhaps only an hour. There is little point in even saying hello.

The subsequent encounters I have with this clinic manager, from our first official meeting where we shake hands and exchange names, to our interviews and conversations in the days that follow, shed light on this initial observation. As in Chapters Three and Four, Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical metaphor of understanding social interactions as theatrical stages is a useful framework I apply to the performances Resident Service Providers present to outsiders and to Indigenous locals. Contrasting and comparing these varying front stage performances with the backstage that this clinic manager invited me into, brings to the surface a discourse

and identity that a particular group of Resident Service Providers firmly hold onto: they are the bearers of a particular form of local knowledge.

A bearer of local knowledge is a subjectivity that some, but not all, Resident Service Providers adopt. In conversations, 'bearer of local knowledge' is invoked to highlight two interrelated impressions Resident Service Providers wish outsiders to make:

First Impression: Resident Service Providers have acquired local knowledge about Indigenous people that is superior to any knowledge held by outsiders — government officials and researchers included — because of their specific positions of residence within the community and the personal relationships they have developed with locals.

Second Impression: This knowledge distances Resident Service Providers from negative Indigenous policies and politics of the past and present. It is not *their* knowledge that dictates the policies they are implementing. Therefore, they are free of any blame should a policy or program they are employed to implement result in failure or have adverse effects on the community.

This chapter seeks to answer the following questions: How can we make sense of this self-proclamation to be a bearer of local knowledge? Why do Resident Service Providers profess that this knowledge is distinct from, and different to, others within the Indigenous policy world? And how does this knowledge compare to the knowledge that underpins Indigenous policy that I discussed as a Regime of Truth in Chapter Two?

I answer these questions by unpacking the discursive effect the bearer of local knowledge discourse has within the Indigenous policy world. The key text informing this analysis of local knowledge is Kenneth Miller's (2004) *Beyond the Frontstage: Trust, Access and the Relational Context in Research with Refugee Communities*.¹¹⁸ Miller shows that the ethnographer can learn to distinguish between front and backstage performances to ascertain where, when and how participants might reveal or conceal knowledge. I apply Miller's (2004) framing of Goffman's (1959) front stage/backstage to the Resident Service Providers' initial encounters with outsiders. By doing this, not only do I ascertain how front stage and backstage performances differ, I also identify how Resident Service Providers attain this form of knowledge, classify it and mobilise it as a particular discourse and identity. From this analysis I also identify some important disjunctures and paradoxes inherent to the bearer of local knowledge performance.

¹¹⁸ The author of this article is cited as only being Miller although research partner Debbie Billings is referred to by Miller throughout the article.

Who are Resident Service Providers?

The teachers, nurses, store managers and police officers tasked with implementing the policies and programs of government are the “street-level bureaucrats” of the Indigenous policy world (Lipsky 1980). They reside in communities to undertake roles linked to various government policies, programs, reforms and funding grants. The Resident Service Providers I deal with in this chapter are those I met through Ombudsman staff during the outreach visit to the community. The Ombudsman staff, while speaking to as many service providers as possible, are primarily concerned with speaking to those residents who are employed in government funded occupations and/or distributing services via government funding. Thus, the majority of the service providers we engaged with fell into a defined category: bureaucrats implementing Commonwealth programs to target policy areas of concern; for example, the police (the law), school principals (education) and clinic managers (health).

However, not all Resident Service Providers subscribe to the identity of being a bearer of local knowledge. Indeed, a nurse, a crèche supervisor and a local store worker to a greater degree, may echo the subjectivity of Emma Kowal’s “White anti-racists” examined in her recent book *Trapped in the Gap* (2015).¹¹⁹ The Resident Service Providers who emulate Kowal’s White anti-racist subjectivity problematise their position within this Indigenous community through asserting that they are only there until they can hand their job over to a local Indigenous person (Kowal 2015: 46-47). Furthermore, these White anti-racist Resident Service Providers recognise the importance and value of Indigenous difference, they are anti-assimilationist, promote Indigenous ownership of projects and programs, exhibit discomfort when managing their “white stigma” and acknowledge Indigenous knowledge and expertise as important and valid (Kowal 2015). An example of the White anti-racist Resident Service Provider, as opposed to one who is a bearer of local knowledge, is a female nurse I met during my second visit to the community. This nurse displayed all the attributes described above and made particular efforts to distance herself from the clinic manager (who I examine in more detail in later sections of this chapter and argue is a bearer of local knowledge).

During a second encounter I had with the nurse this distinction became clearer. She shared with me the personal philosophy concerning Indigenous health that underscores her practice as a nurse. Deploying this narrative of her experience working on an Indigenous health project she repeated the phrase that the Indigenous representatives would “guide me” through the

¹¹⁹ Kowal has further examined White anti-racists in articles prior to the publishing of this book (Kowal and Paradies 2005, Kowal 2012, 2011).

stages of the project but she had to be “open to it [that guidance]” (Nurse 2013). As she explains,

Within Aboriginal Australia all groups are very, very different and you have to be respectful of all that. Ultimately, with any exposure I’ve had with Aboriginal cultural work, they guide you through that [the processes of the work/project] as long as you are open to that guidance. So you have to expose yourself to their guidance and it’s not going to be done as direct, usually, as our culture might work. Like, you [meaning me the researcher] might tell me “oh yeah you’ve done that wrong or whatever” but with them it will be a lot more subtle. It will be just [pause]... it is a beautiful, gentle way of guidance and learning (Nurse 2013).

Later, the nurse spoke of a recent episode where she deferred to Indigenous knowledge and expertise whilst performing a medical procedure. She explained that many families in the community were religious due to the historical influence of colonial missionaries. She knew that the particular family she was working with that day attended church and believed in the power of prayer. While not religious herself, the nurse said that she “works well” with incorporating “the prayer as well as the cultural stuff” when engaging with Indigenous patients (Nurse 2013). She recounts,

In fact, I was trying to put an ‘IV’ [peripheral intravenous device] in the other day and I said “come on everyone we have to pray that this one works, cause I’ve only got one shot now.” And so we all just stopped and did a little prayer and in it went just like that, yeah! (Nurse 2013).

This example demonstrates again the nurse’s philosophy in allowing community members to be her “cultural guides.” As a result, she is able to manage her white stigma by acknowledging Indigenous expertise or ways of doing things, rather than only deferring to western knowledge (Kowal 2015: 147).

While there were a few other Resident Service Providers similar to this nurse in their presentation of self and knowledge, out of the 17 Resident Service Providers (over the course of three separate visits) with whom I had encounters in this one community, 12 participants reflected the bearer of local knowledge subjectivity. I observed 10 of these 12 Resident Service Providers in direct front stage interactions with Indigenous locals and 10 invited me

into their private backstage.¹²⁰ The remaining five modelled Kowal's (2015) White anti-racist subjectivity, and all five spoke with me backstage.

While what we see here is not necessarily a career-long acquisition of habitus dispositions as with the senior public servants in Chapter Three, or a document enshrining certain principles such as independence and impartiality as in the case of the Commonwealth Ombudsman staff in Chapter Four, all Resident Service Providers consistently self-manage and perform a particular bureaucratic subjectivity that is enacted when implementing and engaging with Indigenous policy; this is either the White anti-racist subjectivity or the bearer of local knowledge subjectivity.

Having distinguished the bearers of local knowledge Resident Service Provider subjectivities from alternatives that co-exist I now explain what is considered to be local knowledge and how Resident Service Providers attain it, before turning to two episodes from my fieldwork where Resident Service Providers demonstrate the bearer of local knowledge as identity and discourse.

Disqualified Knowledge and Time as Capital

The conversations Resident Service Providers initiate with strangers form a particular speech act that presents a unique form of knowledge about Indigenous Australians, Indigenous problems and the current Indigenous policy that is marketed as 'the' solution. Such knowledge is imagined as held aloft from the reach of other bureaucrats; in particular, governments and departments in Darwin and Canberra, their own employers based in the relative major centres of Jabiru or Oenpelli and their family and friends living elsewhere in Australia.

While local knowledge is never explicitly defined or explained by Resident Service Providers they consistently allude to this by comparing their own interactions and enactments with Indigenous people to those of outsiders. Examples of this knowledge include identifying who the spokespeople are for the community, how to communicate and spread messages effectively, claiming to know locals' motivations for inaction with regards to employment, education and health, identifying family connections and having Indigenous friends. These

¹²⁰ The one exception was the Government Business Manager. Another Government Business Manager in a different community also refused to talk about Government policy or programs with me. While both men did talk about general aspects of the community and community life they would not talk candidly about their work, and when they did, they specifically requested that it remain off the record.

Resident Service Providers thus uphold a specific localised form of knowledge that stems from the shared experiences faced and observations made whilst living in a remote community. Settling into the daily rhythm of life, Resident Service Providers position themselves on the same side as Indigenous locals, as against the multitude of outsiders and visitors who enter the community on a daily basis.

In Chapter Two I argued that a form of dominant knowledge establishes the foundation for Indigenous policy — the Regime of Truth. In contrast, Resident Service Providers circulate what Foucault would identify as a “popular knowledge” or “disqualified knowledge”, that is, a set of knowledges “that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity” (Foucault [1977] 1980b: 82).¹²¹ Foucault defines popular knowledge as “a particular, local, regional knowledge, a differential knowledge incapable of unanimity and which owes its force only to the harshness with which it is opposed by everything surrounding it” (Foucault [1977] 1980b: 82). He cites as examples the knowledge of patients, nurses and even the doctors as “disqualified”, being “parallel and marginal as they are to the knowledge of medicine” (Foucault [1977] 1980b: 82).

It is vital to note that it is Resident Service Providers *themselves* who classify their knowledge as disqualified. This is not to say that their knowledge is not of value or does not reach the policy decision-makers in Darwin and Canberra. Rather, in their *own view* their knowledge is not recognised nor appreciated by others in the Indigenous policy world, or wider Australia, as being legitimate forms of ‘knowing’ about Indigenous Australians. In Foucault’s example, the patients’, nurses’ and doctors’ knowledge does not necessarily contribute to the monolithic knowledge of medicine. In a similar way, Resident Service Providers see their knowledge as “parallel and marginal” (Foucault [1977] 1980b: 82) to the knowledge of Indigenous people that circulates in other parts of the Indigenous policy world. In particular, their knowledge is distinct from the knowledge of parliamentarians which forms the dominant Regime of Truth about Aboriginality.

Thus, in the Resident Service Providers’ perspective, their knowledge appears to exist in a disqualified space; not informing policy-makers nor influencing the direction of policy nor able to assist Indigenous people in attaining equality and experiencing the ‘good life’. An aspect of how their knowledge becomes disqualified is connected to the nature of how Resident Service Providers are required to report back on their work. From their perspective,

¹²¹ This way of using of the word “knowledges” is how Foucault ([1977] 1980) uses it himself. Thus, while it may appear grammatically incorrect it is referred to in this thesis in a way consistent to that of Foucault’s own mobilisation of the word in reference to an analysis of power, truth and knowledge.

the procedures for reporting back to regional centres or to government departments does not adequately capture the reality of what is occurring in the community. For example, nurses and shire managers spoke about ticking boxes on pre-generated forms. Rarely is there an opportunity within these reporting systems to capture or explain what *they* deem to be important or of interest. Hence, they see their knowledge as existing in a disqualified space; of no use to anyone who has the power to make and change policy. Consequently, they do not believe that policy makers have all the information that is required to make effective Indigenous policy.

Essentially, what Resident Service Providers view as valuable knowledge about Indigenous people and programs in relation to their area of policy implementation (health, law, education, municipal services) never travels far beyond the local level. As a result, Resident Service Providers would agree with Sullivan's (2008: 128-129) summation that, "When policy works well it is because local players are able to reinterpret their practical activities to be expressions of policy and policy makers are able to present as policy successes the results of local action."¹²²

While it is vital to acknowledge that Resident Service Providers hold decidedly different views about Indigenous culture and community development, their point of unification is how they classify and attain local knowledge. Primarily, local knowledge is attained because Indigenous locals invite them into a backstage space. From the perspective of Resident Service Providers, the backstage is where the true or authentic knowledge about Aboriginality is to be found. However, Resident Service Providers believe they are only able to gain access to this knowledge because they have spent time in communities and developed relationships built on trust with Indigenous locals.

Miller's (2004) study concerning how researchers gain trust and access to vulnerable or marginalised communities such as refugees is a useful guide to make sense of the Resident Service Providers' correlation between time and knowledge attainment. For Miller, it seems that certain habitus dispositions contribute to the level of influence and the social position he gained when entering the refugee field. He had lived and worked in similar areas to where the refugees originated and fled from. Together with his research partner Billings, Miller (2004: 220) says that their previous "experiences in Guatemala lent us some degree of legitimacy as we interacted with community members in the refugee camps." It was this information that seemed to enable people to open up and share their experiences with the researchers.

¹²² Sullivan's quote is influenced by Mosse (2004).

Invoking time is thus an important legitimising strategy. The idea that it takes time to be invited into a backstage resonates with the specific temporality that Resident Service Providers refer to during initial encounters. Time is invoked as an intangible commodity that a person must first accumulate before access to the Indigenous backstage can be accessed and knowledge about Indigenous people acquired. In this view, time is a form of capital that structures the positions Resident Service Providers take when entering a new community. While they concede that the process of adjusting to and learning about the specifics of any new community is not automatic, Resident Service Providers see that the dispositions they have acquired over time will lessen the period it should take for them to gain access to the backstage of Indigenous communities. Access to the backstage is a marker indicating that relationships and trust have successfully been secured and developed. The less time it takes to be invited backstage reflects the amount of capital accumulated, and the more capital accumulated results in the capacity of the Resident Service Providers to be effective when functioning in the community.

Having clocked an appropriate amount of time in remote communities Resident Service Providers can legitimately present themselves as the bearers of local knowledge. This is often expressed through reference to the relationships and trust that they have established with local Indigenous people. Resident Service Providers openly admit that prior to their placement in an Indigenous community they lacked ‘true knowledge’ about the realities faced by Northern Territory Indigenous people and communities. Indeed, as one interviewee said of the Northern Territory as a whole: “We didn’t know anything about it except it’s up there and it’s hot” (Clinic Manager 2013). Others only knew of the Northern Territory from pictures of “scenic places” but “had no idea about what life is like here or the needs of the people” (School Principal One 2013). For many, their employment in communities is their first exposure to remote Indigenous people and community life. As one police officer comments,

I had next to no Aboriginals where I was. Coming up it’s very hard to realise how they function, how Aboriginal communities are, unless you’ve been out there and lived in one. You try and explain it to people and they just don’t understand... unless you’ve been out there and lived and breathed it and seen the way they’re living... it’s very hard to understand for white people (Police Officer Three 2013).

It is this knowledge of the true and authentic remote Indigenous community that is challenged by family and friends “down south” who “have no understanding whatsoever” of Indigenous communities (School Principal One 2013). This clash of ideas over knowledge, truth and the reality of Indigenous communities is a key point of distinction between Resident Service Provider ‘locals’ and visiting government officials — the latter’s lack of knowledge seen by the

former as the reason for failed Indigenous policy as a whole.¹²³ They suggest that the faults inherent in Indigenous policies could be rectified should government officials spend time in remote communities; not fleeting two-hour or two-day tours, but real time. In this sense 'real' is synonymous with the notion of time that the Resident Service Providers uphold; real time is recognised as either achieved through full-time residence in communities or frequent visits.¹²⁴

This measure of the time required to achieve local knowledge varied between Resident Service Providers. For example, one police officer thought that knowledge of how to communicate and converse effectively with remote Indigenous people would be gained by "anyone who's worked in a community for more than three or four months... most police officers get it within the first few months of working in communities. It's just one of those things you develop" (Police Officer Two 2013). Significantly, the longer Resident Service Providers had been residing in communities the more these individuals emphasised the importance that time played in contributing to their knowledge base in comparison to any other variable. Two respondents commented upon this, one who had over 30 years experience and the other 20 years (Clinic Manager 2013, Clinic Manager Two 2014). Although the ideal amount of time required to acquire local knowledge is immeasurable, it was frequently referred to as crucial.¹²⁵

Thus, accumulated time is spoken of as the key to gaining deeper access into the Indigenous backstage; a key which outsiders are unable to attain. This echoes Miller's (2004: 220) work with refugees where he explains that for himself and Billings "It was only once we had established a mutually supportive and trusting relationship with a particular family that members of that family felt comfortable revealing some of the "backstage" truths of their community." However, Miller diverges from Resident Service Providers when he acknowledges that access to the backstage is not necessarily tied to real time, but rather,

¹²³ The use of the word 'locals' is problematic as the principal just quoted had only been in the community for three months, yet, categorised himself as a local.

¹²⁴ It is worth bearing in mind however, that time Resident Service Providers spend in community remains at a vast social and cultural distance from other locals. For example, many Resident Service Providers posted to remote communities receive significantly higher incomes than Indigenous locals, and live in far more comfortable conditions. The Resident Service Providers homes I was invited back to were two or three bedrooms with air conditioning throughout the house; a strong contrast with the family of seven, living in a single room in a house occupied by 20 to 30 people. These differences in income, housing situations and the freedom to leave the community when desired are not acknowledged by Resident Service Providers in their bearer of knowledge discourse. This discourse and identity comes from comparing their physical distance, and thus the knowledge that comes from living in a remote community over time, to those 'down south.'

¹²⁵ The interviewees ranged in the time they had spent working and living in remote communities — from two weeks to 30 years. This also spanned the occupations of nurse, clinic manager, clinic administrator, school administrator, school teacher, school principal, store manager, crèche supervisor, aged health care supervisor and police officer.

occurs when a “mutually supportive and trusting relationship” is established between researcher and participant.

Additionally, Miller’s study is an important guide for other researchers as he provides examples of how to discern whether participants are presenting us with a front stage or backstage performance. Yet, when Resident Service Providers describe their interactions and relationships with community members they give the impression that because they access the Indigenous backstage they are never subject to an Indigenous front stage performance. The Indigenous front stage is a stage reserved for outsiders.

Holding meetings outside under trees instead of in offices and talking with people in public spaces like the local shop or school instead of approaching them at home is how Resident Service Providers demonstrate that they can activate and access Indigenous backstage relaxation and openness. Some Resident Service Providers do acknowledge the existence of other Indigenous backstage spaces but state that either they are not comfortable engaging in these spaces, such as funerals, or have not yet been invited to participate in them, such as hunting or fishing trips. However, if they are invited to participate in such events this can become a further marker that indicates they have gained access to restricted or special forms of local knowledge. More often, the common Indigenous backstage is the demarcated, physical space that is common ground for both the Resident Service Provider and the Indigenous local. It is not in a local’s home or backyard, nor is it inside the Resident Service Provider’s home, but tends to be the safe, public and open spaces that Resident Service Provider and Indigenous locals can equally enter and participate in. Therefore, Resident Service Providers purposefully seek out these safe intercultural spaces to engage with and access knowledge that stems from the Indigenous backstage.

Miller’s adaption to Goffman’s theory is useful to apply in relation to the Resident Service Providers I encountered. By critically analysing initial impressions I noticed a pattern begins to appear: regardless of length of time spent in communities, age, gender or occupations, Resident Service Providers present a particular impression of themselves as the bearer of local knowledge about Indigenous people, communities and their culture. This is a knowledge that provides structure and meaning to their presence in communities and governs how they present themselves to both locals and strangers. While as a demographic they are united in their belief that they hold this knowledge and the means of acquiring it, they differ significantly in what they see this knowledge as entailing and how (or if) they choose to reveal it to outsiders. I examine in the following sections two performances of this bearer of local

knowledge subjectivity and discourse. Throughout the analysis I address important disjunctures and paradoxes which characterise these presentations.

The Community Safety Action Plan Meeting: A Backstage Space or a Front Stage Performance?

The Community Safety Action Plan (Action Plan) is an initiative of the Northern Territory Government to be discussed, agreed upon and actioned on the ground in communities by resident police officers. It involves the formation of a committee made up of stakeholders, namely the school, shire council, police and Indigenous locals; often the Traditional Owners of the land and/or elders in the community. This committee meets once a month to discuss community safety issues and concerns. There is a template Action Plan document that police use as an initial discussion starter which the committee then tailors to fit each community's particular needs and priorities. The result is an Action Plan document that is specific to each community. Once agreed upon, this document is signed by each of the members of the committee. The signing of the document symbolises that all parties are in agreement and are committed to the principles and objectives as set out in the Action Plan document.

Although the meetings occur once a month I was fortunate enough to be present in the community on the day that the document was scheduled to be officially ratified by the Indigenous committee members. The meeting was chaired by the senior police officer with a junior police officer in the role of minute taker. It was held in the conference room at the shire council office and was attended by six Indigenous locals (both Traditional Owners and elders), the shire manager, the principal of the primary school and myself as an observer situated at the back of the room.¹²⁶ The meeting itself was strikingly bureaucratic and included many of the formalities one would expect at any business meeting. There was an agenda, past minutes were handed out, processes such as passing motions with a first and seconded action required,

¹²⁶ As Goffman (1959: 82-83) notes, the presence of an outsider affects the initial performance. The performer, who for arguments sake I will say is the police officer, could have managed this in three ways:

1. Changed the performance to one that the outsider can view,
2. Included the outsider in the original performance, or,
3. Asked the outsider to "stay out", leave, or ignore them (Goffman 1959: 86).

The police officer did a combination of points two and three. He introduced me to the group, acknowledged my presence and noted it in the minutes, and handed me copies of the previous minutes and other relevant documents that the committee were to discuss. After this, I was ignored and chose myself to stay out of the discussions, remaining a silent observer in the back corner. The committee members themselves were seated in chairs grouped together in a circle around the large table, with the two police officers at the head of the table chairing the meeting and recording the minutes.

as well as frequent usage of vocabulary such as “actioning items”, “ratifying agreements” and making “stipulation[s].” It seemed such a formal and rigid way to conduct a meeting when the intention was to create open dialogue, addressing any further issues Indigenous committee members might have with the Action Plan document.

The performance of the senior officer was friendly and patient throughout the hour and half meeting. He methodically went through each point of the meeting’s agenda, pausing briefly to invite feedback from the Indigenous locals, who remained relatively silent, before moving the meeting along to the next agenda item. He spoke for the first 45 minutes of the meeting and after that time, slowly, the Indigenous committee members began to engage each other in conversation. At the close of the meeting the officer specifically addressed the Indigenous committee members to remind them to sign their name on the Action Plan document, which they all did as they left the conference room.

Later, backstage in the police compound, I asked the senior officer why he chose to conduct the meeting in such a formal manner. He said since this was the first meeting he had chaired in this community he wanted to keep it focused on the Action Plan and the four main strategies/pillars/objectives; three terms he used interchangeably throughout the meeting. These strategies/pillars/objectives are identified in the Action Plan document as,

1. Mutual respect and partnerships,
2. Reduce domestic and family violence,
3. Reduce substance abuse, and
4. Improve community amenities.

He believed that having a formal format for the meeting would afford him more control over the discussion. From his perspective, community safety was about gambling, illicit drinking, community violence and domestic disturbances, so these were the issues the committee should be discussing in this meeting. Yet, from his observation and participation in other Action Plan meetings, he reported that the meetings often have little structure or direction. This results in “just a lot of talk with nothing tangible coming out of it” (Police Officer One 2014). The senior officer viewed these meetings as opportunities for “soap box bleating”, where local people talk about all kinds of things, “but not much gets achieved” (Police Officer One 2014). So, for this particular meeting, the police officer intentionally structured it to “keep the meeting on track”, firmly focused on the four strategies/pillars/objectives and achieving *his* intended outcomes (Police Officer One 2014).

It was backstage where this officer expressed his exasperation that matters could not be addressed more directly in remote communities. It was quite simple, he told me; the elders of

the problem families (some of whom were at the meeting) just needed to go and speak to the offenders. Yet, this was not an opinion or solution that he felt he could vocalise without offending anyone. Instead, he presented a patient impression during the rather lengthy Action Plan meeting. “As you can see”, the police officer shared, it can be frustrating because in the end the outcomes he had intended all along were achieved: the community’s elders had organised themselves and agreed to speak to the problem youth and the Action Plan document was signed (Police Officer One 2014). But he had to be patient and endure an unnecessarily long meeting to achieve what he considered to be straightforward outcomes.

I asked why it was important to sign that document on the day. He explained that this was the final version that the committee had agreed upon from the previous meeting. Signing it was important because this document would then establish objectives that could be measured and: “it gives everyone direction and purpose, but also, it means that it is a reference point to bring community people back to” (Police Officer One 2014). While he could not really explain why a community needed “measurable objectives”, or what the benefits of having these might be, he was nonetheless convinced that this was a good thing for the community to have because it would “keep them [Indigenous people] on track” in future meetings by focusing discussion around issues related to community safety, while excluding those that would not be.

I then asked if the locals knew what they were signing and why. He replied that, “yes they are all on the same wave length. They’ve taken ownership of it. They discuss it amongst themselves in language” (Police Officer One 2014). It is important to note that this police officer cannot speak the local language and there was no interpreter present at the meeting. Thus, there was no definitive way that this officer could have understood what these locals were saying. However, he went on to explain that he had noticed a clear difference between the Traditional Owners in this community and others he had worked with elsewhere.¹²⁷ The Traditional Owners here were “articulate” and had become accustomed to meetings conducted formally; as opposed to informal chatter conducted under a tree outside. These Traditional Owners were the same people on all the committees and boards in the community, competent, intelligent and switched-on. This community demonstrated the positive influence that strong Indigenous leadership can have in contributing to the wider well-being of the community. Yes, he concluded, the Traditional Owners knew what this day was about, the signing of the Action Plan document, as it had been in discussion for the past six months.

¹²⁷ The police officer did not distinguish between Traditional Owner and elder. He referred in our discussion to “Traditional Owners”, but I assume he meant this to include the elders on the committee who attended the meeting.

This backstage encounter is revealing. Using knowledge acquired from other communities the police officer feels able to pass judgement on the level of understanding and competence of this community's Indigenous committee members. Subsequently, this knowledge informs his front stage engagements: *the Indigenous members are articulate and on lots of committees and boards, thus they can handle a formal bureaucratic-style meeting; they always attend these monthly meetings, thus they understand what the Action Plan is and why they need to sign the document; I will not insult, offend or belittle them by suggesting that they do not understand the Action Plan or quizzing them as to why they are signing this document; Indigenous people need time to talk and reflect, so I will allow for more time than I would normally allocate for this type of meeting.*¹²⁸ This list is considered to be a part of the local knowledge he has acquired about Indigenous people and the ways to appropriately and respectfully engage with them that he feels able to apply to this particular community. Hence, the actions he takes and decisions he makes, prior to and during this meeting, are justified, as they are founded on knowledge. Using these reflections of the meeting as a springboard, the officer shares other points of knowledge that he, as an experienced officer in remote Indigenous policing, has gained over time and which have shaped the core part of his remote policing identity.

During the remainder of my visit I took a copy of the Action Plan document and managed to talk individually to five of the six Indigenous committee members who had signed at the meeting and one who was not present but would be signing later. At the start of our conversation I produced the Action Plan document and asked them if they had a copy of this at home. All of them did. Had they read it? None of them had. I then asked what they understood the document to be about and why they signed it. I received a range of responses; however, only one indicated that the committee member understood the Action Plan document in the same terms as the police officer.

Two Indigenous committee members believed the Action Plan concerned cyclone and fire warnings, another suggested it was about working together with the police and another said it was about safety but could not elaborate on what the term safety implied. Two had signed it to show they had attended the meeting. One man signed believing it to be a draft of the final document which he signed to indicate that he approved of this draft, while one woman saw the document as showing that "we want to work with the [white] people together. To live happy lives together." For her, signing the document was a symbol of this desire to work

¹²⁸ I have placed this in italics to identify this section as articulating the assumed perspective of the police officer.

together; she also said that she signed it as she agreed with what the Action Plan contained (although she had not read it).

This interaction between the police officer and the Indigenous committee members is a prime example of how Miller (2004) would differentiate between interpersonal and illusory interpersonal access in a front stage performance. The police officer seemed to imply that having good relationships with who he identifies as Traditional Owners of a community equates to interpersonal access (Miller 2004: 221-222); the officer did not need to ask if they understood, because he *knew* that they did. Yet, the responses of the committee members to my questioning suggests what is occurring in the case of this Action Plan meeting is what Miller would identify as “*illusory interpersonal access*” (original emphasis in Miller 2004: 221).¹²⁹

Miller (2004: 221) speaks from the position of researcher when he observes that illusory interpersonal access is a threat to the validity of research “precisely because we may not know that the stories we are being told, the responses indicated on our questionnaires, or the behaviours we are witnessing, are protective fronts that mask the more authentic data we hope to gather.” He demonstrates this by comparing the different response Billings and he received from a ten year old boy (Miller 2004: 222). The contrasting expressions the researchers received displayed how the more informal and relaxed atmosphere that Billings offered, by taking the boy for a walk, elicited a more backstage response to that of Miller’s formal and taped interview earlier that same day.

The possibility that the police officer was experiencing illusory interpersonal access suggests an element of vulnerability in the Resident Service Providers’ discourse of being the bearers of local knowledge. While I do not deny that the police may indeed have genuine relationships and a level of trust secured with the local Indigenous committee members, how could the police officer be certain that these people were not engaging in a front stage performance? First, not all of the Indigenous committee members were giving their undivided attention to the police officer when he was speaking. From my vantage point at the back of the room I could see that one was reading the local newspaper and another consulting a clip-board which looked like it contained information relating to her job in aged health care. Second, during the meeting the signatories to the agreement did not: (a) articulate in English their reasons for signing, (b) admit they had not read their copy of the Action Plan document, and (c) verbally agree or disagree with the police officer about what he was saying the Action Plan was about.

¹²⁹ While it is valid to question the legitimacy of the knowledge Resident Service Providers and outsiders gather, it is important to appreciate that not all knowledge should be considered or classified as illusory.

Third, the Action Plan document was not translated into the local language nor was there an interpreter present at the meeting.

The last point is particularly important. When discussion was in English the Indigenous committee members talked about what they considered to be safety issues, which were not accepted by the police officer as falling under the Action Plan safety criteria. For example, locals discussed the concern they have when a local crocodile swims up the creek after heavy rains. The Indigenous committee members spoke about how this poses a risk to the school children who frequently cross the poorly constructed wooden bridge that spans the creek. However, from the police officer's response, this aspect of community safety (protecting children from being attacked by crocodiles) did not fall within the boundaries of the four pillars/objectives/strategies of the structured Action Plan. Subsequently, the police officer informed the Indigenous committee members that it is the responsibility of the local park rangers to manage wild life, essentially shutting down further discussion about this topic. This example demonstrates that the Indigenous committee members were not on the "same page" (Police Officer One 2014) with the officer at all. I argue that they gave the impression that they understood the Action Plan in the act of signing and performed this impression upon a created front stage.

Although the Indigenous committee members' understanding of what constituted community safety differed from that of the police officer, their interpretation of safety was not incorporated into the Action Plan, which was supposed to reflect this community's safety priorities. How then, could the committee members be expected to promote and abide by the principles of the Action Plan, and be held accountable for the management of safety in the community, if they did not understand the document they signed and if their own understanding of what constitutes safety was not included?

Conversely, the shire manager who was present at the Action Plan meeting, and is more akin to Kowal's (2015) White anti-Racists, did not dismiss the Indigenous view of safety completely. He asked the police officer where and when the other safety issues that the Indigenous committee members were identifying could be discussed and addressed. The shire manager and the senior police officer then engaged in a dialogue between themselves as to who should have responsibility for these other issues and at what time and place they might be addressed. They discussed who the relevant stakeholders might be and whether the shire or council meetings should take responsibility for these issues or whether another meeting and/or committee should be formed. Although the shire manager tried to ensure that the Indigenous committee members concerns were not dismissed but would be considered and actioned at

some point, both he and the police officer dominated this conversation. The Indigenous committee members were not invited to participate in or contribute towards this conversation. While both the shire manager and the police officer kept looking in the direction of the Indigenous locals, as if to check their reactions and receive silent confirmation that what they were discussing was acceptable, they did not directly include or ask for the locals' input.¹³⁰ It is questionable then, whether this Action Plan meeting was truly about empowering the Indigenous committee members to take ownership and responsibility for community safety or whether this was a 'tick-the-box' process for the police officer (Garde 2014). The suggestion that a meeting such as the Action Plan is a token gesture of empowerment without actually divulging any sort of tangible power to local Aboriginal people has been similarly examined by other scholars in Australia (Haynes 2013, Garde 2014).

Indeed, Gillian Cowlshaw (Cowlshaw 2003: 3) reminds us that it is imperative to listen to how Indigenous people see and represent themselves before we attempt to interpret them to others.¹³¹ The following statement by Cowlshaw could apply to this Action Plan example and go further to describe the power relationship between the police and Indigenous committee members. She says,

If we cannot listen to what people say, then we had better not try to help them — and this is surely a general principle... Aborigines are, in my experience, overwhelmed by the fact that they are already known to others, not as they experience themselves but in the images, stereotypes and discourses which have made them known in the public domain.

It is the police officer who, armed with 'local knowledge' from other communities, uses his knowledge to make a "self-assessment" (Cowlshaw 2003: 3) concerning this community's Indigenous Action Plan committee members. The result is a meeting where the police officer does not really listen to what these locals are telling him about community safety nor does he question whether they understand the Action Plan as he does. Although he gives the impression both front stage and backstage of a genuine desire to work in partnership with these locals and to see a real improvement in community safety, he does not seem to be aware, or entertain any sort of self-reflexivity, that this has still been structured and controlled according to his terms.

¹³⁰ Non-Indigenous people talking *over* and talking *for* Indigenous people is not uncommon in such inter-cultural settings (Sullivan 2008, Haynes 2013, Cowlshaw 2003, Folds 2001).

¹³¹ Cowlshaw's article is in response and critique to Peter Sutton's controversial address to the Australian Anthropological Society's 2000 conference.

Cowlshaw (2003: 3) discusses a similar idea when she compares how anthropologist Peter Sutton and Indigenous people might understand and communicate the concept of suffering differently. Sutton delivered a controversial address to the Australian Anthropological Society's 2000 conference which essentially blamed Indigenous people for the current poverty, inequality and violence that affects many Indigenous communities. Cowlshaw writes in response to Sutton's address that, "An opportunity to think differently is lost" when Sutton dismisses, for example, the way Indigenous people might self-assess their health status and rate it as "good to excellent" while Sutton sees it as being the exact opposite. Cowlshaw (2003: 3) then explains,

To me this titbit of information provides a valuable glimpse of what the people Sutton is concerned with say about their own conditions and it could provide a point of entry into the meanings generated in these social collectives, meanings that are strangely unfamiliar and even foreign to the way outsiders commonly view this 'suffering'. Perhaps the denial of suffering is a means of parrying the prying eyes of outsiders; if so, it reveals sensitivity and shame as a constituent element of these social conditions. But because this self-assessment is 'utterly at odds medically with global ideas of reasonable levels of health' and 'has never been the basis of official health policy', which is 'as it should be' (Sutton 2001:fn 3), no more thought need be given to this sign of difference.

Similarly, when it came to community safety the police officer was not flexible or accommodating of what 'safety' could mean for Indigenous people; as equally meaningful and relevant but in a different way. The police officer's dismissal of the issue of crocodiles in the creek is an example of his failure to listen to what safety means to Indigenous people in *this* community, which simultaneously results in the police officer taking away a potentially empowering moment from the Indigenous committee members.

This notion of illusory empowerment is not confined to the Action Plan committee. Scholars such as Chris Haynes (2013), who examines the joint management of the Kakadu National Park in the Northern Territory, and Murray Garde (2014), who discusses the communication problems that can occur when interpreters are not present at meetings, both consider the ways that non-Indigenous people can stifle opportunities to foster Indigenous empowerment and ownership. Garde's (2014) description of how Bininj Traditional Owners misinterpreted the signing of a 99-year lease resonates particularly with the assumptions that the police officer made regarding the Indigenous committee members' understanding of the Action Plan and why they were required to sign it.

Garde has worked as an interpreter in the Kunwinjku language of Western Arnhem Land for over 20 years. From his observations, government officials engage too often in perfunctory

western bureaucratic processes with Indigenous people to garner Indigenous consent. However, consent is given because Indigenous locals have not properly and fully understood what they were agreeing to. He provides as an example, a time when Commonwealth Minister for Indigenous Affairs Nigel Scullion attended a 99-year lease meeting with Traditional Owners in Gunbalanya. At the end of this meeting the Traditional Owners signed an Agreement in Principle document. Similar to the Indigenous committee members I observed signing the Action Plan agreement, Garde (2014: 4-5) later asked the Gunbalanya Traditional Owners if they had understood what they had signed. He was told that,

In signing the document they were expressing a willingness to have further discussions with the Australian Government about township leasing. They told me that in signing the document they were not expressing any intention to agree or disagree with township leasing but that they were open to further discussions – and that was all... There seemed to be a clash between their understanding of what it was they had signed and the actual contents of the document.

I suggest that Garde would take issue with the police officer's assertion that because the Indigenous committee members were "articulate" and fluent in English they understood the Action Plan and why they had signed it. As Garde (2014: 4) states, "The comment, 'Why do we need an interpreter?' suggests that many non-Indigenous residents or professional visitors to remote communities are claiming to have expertise in assessing second language competency when clearly this is not their area of professional training expertise." When Garde interpreted into the native language what the 99-year lease contained and what the document that they had signed entailed, the Traditional Owners replied in language: "That's the first time we have heard/understood this information" (Garde 20104: 5). Garde (2014: 4) then questions whether "free, prior and informed consent" can be obtained when, upon investigation, it is clear that these Traditional Owners did not understand the policy measure, what they were signing and why.

To return to my example, the police officer made clear later backstage that the meeting was conducted in a strict bureaucratic manner so that he could retain control over the proceedings and ensure his desired outcome was achieved: the signing of the document. Miller (2004: 222) eloquently explains that, "Front stage behaviour is manipulative not in a pejorative sense, but rather, in that it is a *performance* designed to present a particular appearance, typically with the aim of achieving some desired effect (e.g., appeasing a superior, impressing a potential romantic partner, showing off to gain social status, etc.)." The police officer did not concede that Indigenous locals might be active audience members, participating in their own performance for a police audience upon an Indigenous front stage. Miller (2004: 222) might

suggest that the Indigenous locals were projecting “a particular appearance” that they understood the Action Plan, the significance of their attendance at the meeting that day and the significance of the signed document.

When comparing Indigenous committee members’ understanding of the Action Plan document, and their endorsement of it, with the police officer’s assertion that they fully understood the process, it is questionable whether some Resident Service Providers who self-identify as bearers of local knowledge do indeed have as deep an understanding of Indigenous locals as they might wish others to believe. The consequences of not having such status mean that Resident Service Providers will be offered,

‘Front stage’ responses when asked to provide data about personally meaningful domains of their lives. They may opt to respond according to what they perceive to be the researchers’ expectations or desired responses; they may provide what they consider to be politically expedient answers; or they may seek to avoid personal discomfort by not revealing painful or conflictual information. In the absence of a trusting relationship, it is also likely that researchers will be insufficiently familiar with the context of their participants’ lives to be able to recognize such ‘front stage’ responses as the protective fronts they are (Miller 2004: 222).

There are many possible reasons why I received different responses about the Action Plan document than the police officer. It is possible that when I spoke to the Indigenous committee members, the familiar and public places the conversations took place in — outside, sitting in the shade on picnic tables or benches, outside the local shop — were places where people felt more comfortable or relaxed when answering my questions about the meeting.¹³² Perhaps also my position as an independent researcher encouraged them. Then again, could it have been the type of questions and the way I presented them to the Traditional Owners that elicited responses different to those given in the meeting? Or was it the impression I was giving them during our conversations, my own front stage performance, where I asked the Traditional Owners to educate me as to the purpose of the Action Plan and what the document was about; this being in opposition to the police officer who presented a firm and controlled impression of ‘knowing’. Contrasting the encounters I had with locals in familiar public spaces to the formality of the meeting which was conducted indoors in the shire office’s conference room, seated at tables in a semi-circle with strict adherence to bureaucratic formalities, as well as the presence of two uniformed police officers at the front of the room,

¹³² I acknowledge that my brief interactions with the Indigenous committee members who attended the meeting may have been another type of front stage performance in asking them to tell me about the Action Plan document (what it contained, what it meant and why they had to sign it). However, it is significant that these conversations reveal that during the Action Plan meeting the locals had indeed been presenting a front stage to the police officer.

may provide an insight into the different front stages that the Indigenous committee members presented.

Deep relationships are not always necessary to be invited into a person's backstage space, as the contrast between the responses I received and the assertion from the police officer that the Indigenous committee members understood the Action Plan reveals. Indeed, in some encounters I had with Indigenous locals it seemed that they allowed me to access certain parts of their backstage while refusing Resident Service Providers who lived in the community the same access, although I was only in the community for a short period of time. The key point to consider from these cases is that while one may hold some backstage access to certain forms of knowledge about Indigenous Australians this will not necessarily protect one from becoming an audience to a front stage at another point in time. Indeed, as Dean MacCannell (1973: 597) says of his research into the backstage of the tourist industry: "It is always possible that what is taken to be entry into a back region is really entry into a front region that has been totally set up in advance for tourist visitation."

All social interactions, therefore, must be weighed and measured separately. Goffman (emphasis added in 1959: 77) instructs that "We must keep in mind that when we speak of front and back regions we speak from this reference point of a *particular performance* and we speak of the function that the place happens to serve *at that time* for the given performance." Or as Miller (second emphasis added in 2004: 223) explains,

There is, of course, no single moment of having "arrived" in the backstage of other people's lives. Even in the most intimate relationships there are private spaces and an invitation into the backstage of one arena does not constitute a *carte blanche* invitation into the myriad other domains of an individual's personal experience. This suggests that it may be more accurate to think in terms of *multiple* backstages, or, alternatively, multiple private spaces, each with its own doors of admittance and exclusion.

This suggestion of multiple backstages, or perhaps, a middle stage somewhere in between the front and back region, may better describe what some Resident Service Providers firmly see as the Indigenous backstage. This middle stage might be where Resident Service Providers are given a simultaneous front and back performance, with Indigenous locals neither fully divulging or concealing information. Or perhaps this middle stage exists similarly to Hage's (2015) "ethnographic vacillation"; constantly moving backwards and forwards between the Indigenous front stage and the Indigenous backstage, thus occupying a space somewhere in the middle. We must therefore question whether the local knowledge Resident Service

Providers proclaim to have attained is not merely information garnered from a front stage performance or perhaps some other type of stage or space.

We see this complex set of performances and relationships occur between Resident Service Providers, outsiders and Indigenous locals in the case I turn to now. The clinic manager presented at the opening to this chapter gave an identical front stage performance during two different encounters: with Ombudsman staff and then myself six months later. These encounters provide further insights into the operation of the bearer of local knowledge subjectivity as well as highlighting important contradictions in this discourse when comparing it to the parliamentarians' Regime of Truth in Chapter Two.

The Clinic Manager: The Problem of Panadol, Glasses of Water and Nappies

It was during my initial visit to this community with the Ombudsman staff that I first heard of the clinic manager. Staff of the Office met with the clinic manager while another staff member and I assembled and manned the outreach stall by the local shop. The staff member returned from her meeting with the clinic manager later that morning with a glowing report. The clinic manager had decades of experience working in remote communities and he took the opportunity to voice some complaints and concerns he had about the nature of his work in this particular community. As recounted by the Ombudsman staff member, the clinic manager felt locals either took the clinic for granted or did not understand the sorts of assistance they could genuinely expect of a health clinic. He mentioned locals coming to the clinic and asking for Panadol for a headache, a glass of water to quench their thirst or a fresh nappy for their baby, when all of these items were readily available in the shop directly across the street from the clinic.

The clinic manager also complained that some patients expected to have their medications delivered to their homes or that the nurse would visit them daily to personally administer shots or ensure they were taking prescribed medications. He told the Ombudsman staff this was not part of a remote nurse's job description; it is not a nurse's responsibility and they are not under any obligation to respond to these sorts of requests, especially if the patient is able to physically travel to the clinic. The manager observed that if the patient is able to visit the shop (directly across the street) then she/he should be just as able to cross the road to the clinic.

Another complaint was that Indigenous locals need to learn to take responsibility for their own health and not rely on a nurse to oversee them. Thus, the manager complained to Ombudsman staff, he not only performs medical procedures, manages clinic staff and runs the clinic, but he must also step into the role of educator: teaching Indigenous people about the role of the clinic and what locals can expect from their services. The Ombudsman staff member returned from this meeting with a favourable impression of the clinic manager and empathised with his frustrations. While there was nothing officially that she could do to assist the clinic manager in the scenarios he described, she was satisfied that he was managing the clinic well and had adequate strategies in place that were aiding him.¹³³

Six months later I revisited this community and met with the clinic manager myself. I was struck that his narrative echoed the same complaints he had given to the Ombudsman staff six months earlier, despite the different objectives of our separate meetings. He complained to me of locals asking for Panadol, glasses of water, nappies, the delivery of medicines to homes, the dependency of locals on nursing staff and how he must teach the community the nature of his (and the clinic's) role.¹³⁴ The next day the clinic manager invited me to his house for a cup of tea and an interview with his wife, who also had experience working in another area of government policy in Indigenous communities. I interviewed his wife for approximately an hour. During this time the clinic manager hovered on the edges of this interview, walking in and out of the room before finally settling in an arm chair. It was only after I switched off the tape recorder that the discussion shifted.

For the next 30 to 60 minutes the three of us engaged in conversation, our topics ranging from high politics and government policy to personal anecdotes. Comparing the structured and formal atmosphere of the previous day's interview in the clinic staff room, with the now comfortable, relaxed and informal setting of their own living room, the clinic manager began

¹³³ This example demonstrates that when Ombudsman staff ask service providers about the administration of their programs and invite them to share any problems, issues or complaints the conversation does not always progress in the way staff might anticipate. Nor is the information they elicit necessarily relevant to program implementation. Resident Service Providers may not have formal complaints about policy or program administrations to offer Ombudsman staff but do have complaints about how difficult their work is and the hardships they endure in remote contexts. Thus, Ombudsman staff can be at the outreach stall engaging with Indigenous locals about complaints with government, whilst other staff are backstage with these very same government employees who are complaining about locals.

¹³⁴ As if to highlight his point about the distance between the shop and the clinic, during our interview a nurse came in to inform him that Mr X was across at the shop and did not feel well. The clinic manager said he would attend to him once the man came to the clinic. Despite the nurse saying that the man was unable to make it to the clinic, the clinic manager insisted that if he was able to make it to the shop then he could cross the road to the clinic. He then turned back to me and continued with the interview, unabashed. The possible reasons that could have been preventing Mr X from making it to the clinic were not raised nor considered by the clinic manager.

to ease into what I would identify as a backstage. While he did not contradict the front stage performance he gave the day before, he did add to it by revealing some of the motives and beliefs he held that led him to give a particular front stage performance when engaging with Indigenous locals, but also with strangers such as myself.

His front stage and backstage performances project the image of being a bearer of local knowledge. However, Ombudsman staff were not invited to the backstage where he explained the *rationale* behind this knowledge, thus they were privy only to the front stage performance. In explaining why he chooses not to include his rationale in front stage performances, the manager said that it was because people “down south” do not understand the reality of communities in the same ways that he and his wife do; ‘people’ including family and friends, but also politicians and bureaucrats located in Canberra. This couple found that when they speak negatively about Aboriginal people or community life they are “automatically labelled racist. And we’re very far from racist, well we believe we’re very far from racist, but that’s what we’re labelled so we keep our mouth shut!” (Clinic Manager's Wife 2013), “If you criticise Aboriginals than you’re racist and you don’t know what you’re talking about” (Clinic Manager 2013). To avoid being misinterpreted or judged they avoid talking about Indigenous politics, policy and their experiences.¹³⁵

In talking about Indigenous policy and programs made in Canberra he said, “There’s a lot of rules that the feds and state or NT government make [that] seem to foster dependency which I think, ‘that’s a short term solution to a problem. It doesn’t fix the problem’. To me, makes it worse... so I don’t particularly encourage it” (Clinic Manager 2013). The key word repeated in our conversations was dependency. This is similar to other Resident Service Providers I interviewed later. While the clinic manager made clear he believes in providing assistance to anyone who needs it regardless of race, ethnicity or any other factor, his view of Indigenous specific policies is that it encourages Indigenous people to be different in a negative way. He

¹³⁵ The couple appeared progressively unguarded as our conversation unfolded; perhaps because of what might be considered as my own front stage performance the day before. The clinic manager had initially refused to talk with me because of my interest in government policy. He was suspicious of my motives and questioned where I had gained ethical consent to conduct this research. I took from this first encounter that he would not agree to an interview. So, the next day when I went to speak with a nurse at the clinic, I was surprised when the clinic manager asked me when I was going to interview him. Already aware of his suspicions and concerns I actively tried to reassure him that I was not a “government spy” (Clinic Manager 2013), which is what he thought of the Ombudsman staff. When I mentioned that I am from New Zealand we spoke about the differences between New Zealand and Australian Indigenous policies and also the differences and similarities between Maori and Aboriginal people. I reflected afterwards that this conversation seemed to be a sort of test; the clinic manager canvassing controversial and ‘hot topics’, to watch how I responded and reacted. Although I conversed honestly with him, I also wanted the clinic manager to perceive me as an impartial researcher and not misconstrue my interest in government Indigenous policy as being a means to pass evaluative judgement on his implementation of policy.

does not want to deny them access to health or any other service, yet, he firmly holds that governments, and those that administer government policy, need to treat Indigenous people as equal to other Australians. In turn, Indigenous Australians need to take responsibility for themselves and their actions. These views underlie his particular work ethic: operating the clinic and engaging with locals as he would in any other clinic or with any other group of people. As he explains of another community health clinic he worked in:

I didn't particularly like their [the clinic staff's] attitude when they started encouraging dependency. You know, somebody would come round and check that you got your medications on Friday for the weekend. What, so somebody's going to come round and check that I've got mine? 'Oh no you're white'! Na, I don't wear that shit. You know I believe [it] should be on a needs basis not on any other, you know you're Irish or German or whatever, it should be on a needs basis not done because of any other factors. So I didn't like that attitude at all (Clinic Manager 2013).

The clinic manager's stance resonates with other buzzwords in Indigenous policy such as mutual obligation and shared responsibility.¹³⁶ These discursive artefacts of the Howard Government era characterise the clinic manager's attitude and actions towards local Indigenous people. While he might state that he does not agree with the policies of the "Feds" in Canberra, throughout our conversation it became clear that he actually does agree with many of the key tenets of Indigenous policy: scaling back dependency, promoting individualism and personal responsibility. He is frustrated at the lack of employment and engagement in the wider community and concerned about Indigenous health, but primarily he is concerned that Indigenous people are treated differently to other Australians which only serves to further entrench this dependency. In essence, his idea of an Indigenous future echoes the neoliberal high-modernist conceptions we saw parliamentarians articulate in Chapter Two; the very same policies he is now charged with implementing. This contradiction — stating his knowledge is different despite his knowledge echoing the dominant Regime of Truth — demonstrates what Gregory Feldman (2013: 138) terms a "conflicted conscience."

In Feldman's (2013) research with border security technocrats, he observes the presence of a "conflicted conscience" when participants exhibit contempt for the effect policy has on the targeted subjects while simultaneously complementing the good intentions underpinning that policy. Similarly, we see in the clinic manager's performance a commitment to the key pillars of modernisation such as "law, order and sovereignty" (Feldman 2013: 137) and agreement with the good intentions of policy makers to create the 'good life.' Yet, he also

¹³⁶ These two terms were championed by the Howard Government in the dismantling of ATSIC and by prominent Indigenous leader Noel Pearson in his influential paper *Our Right to Take Responsibility* (Pearson 2000).

shares a concurrent disenchantment with the overall effect of Indigenous policy on the ground. This conflict structures his front stage performance with locals as he tries to encourage and enforce certain neoliberal self-governing behaviours, while also decrying government interventions backstage for the lack of progress towards Aboriginal people attaining equality and 'closing the gap' (Commonwealth of Australia 2015a, Council of Australian Governments 2015a).¹³⁷

Feldman (2013: 136) would suggest that this clinic manager is making "an ambivalent ethical assessment of the effect of their work on the lives of others." Feldman discusses this notion of ambivalence by providing examples of his technocrat participants who experienced a particular type of tension in the course of conducting their work. This occurred more often when they took the abstract category of a policy's "subject-object" (Feldman 2013) — the migrant, the refugee etc.—, whom their work was directed at and humanised them; i.e. felt compassion for an individual or group and viewed them as persons with a lifeblood, a story. Making these ambivalent ethical assessments assuages feelings of guilt or concern about the impact their work is having on these groups.

In the same way, the clinic manager's background — the habitus dispositions he has acquired over his life time — influences the ambivalent ethical assessments he makes of remote Indigenous Australians. His history includes fleeing from Europe to claim refugee status in Australia with his parents when he was a child and growing up with his family working hard to build a life here. It is equality and respect for all people regardless of race or ethnicity that informs his front stage performance with Indigenous locals. While he respects cultural difference he firmly holds that in some instances certain requests should not be encouraged; such as asking for Panadol, glasses of water, a nappy or having medication delivered unnecessarily. Just as he never received special handouts or treatment from the government, he believes others should not either.

Yet, he would not correlate denying these requests from locals as an attempt to change culture in line with the way government policy is aiming to. Like other Resident Service Providers I met, the manager clearly distinguishes himself and his work from that of government and those 'down south.' Kowal's (2011, 2012, 2015) documentation of White anti-racists and Cowlishaw's (2010) consideration of the relationship between the state and Indigenous people, demonstrate that anxiety is often present when a non-Indigenous person chooses to engage in a helping manner with Indigenous Australians. A large part of this is

¹³⁷ Closing the Gap is a reform agenda of the Council of Australian Governments and has become a buzzword for parliamentarians since 2008.

because of the stigma associated with historic non-Indigenous attempts to 'help' Indigenous Australians; for example, colonial missionaries or government policies such as protection and assimilation.¹³⁸ Hence, Resident Service Providers present themselves as the channels through which government programs flow. Each Resident Service Provider made a concerted effort to distinguish their own work and experience in communities from government agendas when asked about their thoughts on Commonwealth Indigenous policy. This is despite their occupations being directly tied to Commonwealth funded programs.

Indeed, the majority of Resident Service Providers denied being in communities to aid the neoliberal high-modernist agenda that characterises recent Indigenous policies. Most Resident Service Providers encountered in my research stated that they were motivated neither by activism or affinity with Indigenous locals. Yet, the content of their knowledge and their front stage performances for Indigenous audiences appears to reveal the opposite. Many Resident Service Providers who admit to being in communities for career, monetary or recreational reasons seem to hold assumptions of Indigenous people, their culture and their livelihoods that mirror those of the dominant Regime of Truth; assumptions that see Indigenous culture as being a negative barrier to social development and conceive of development in terms of western modernisation.

Therefore, the bearer of local knowledge discourse and identity contributes towards these Resident Service Providers occupying a potential liminal space within the Indigenous policy world; they are neither pure public servant nor remote community local, but nor do they identify wholly with mainstream Australia any longer. Instead, Resident Service Providers exist in a separate space that they carve out for themselves. In this space they make sense of their presence and occupation in communities by asserting that their knowledge is disqualified from the dominant Regime of Truth. Thus, their actions cannot be connected towards exacerbating existing, or future, problems or inequalities because their knowledge does not contribute towards the Indigenous policies they are tasked with implementing. This provides a way for Resident Service Providers to safe-guard their actions from being ascribed blame.

However, it is through this exact assertion that their knowledge is local, and thus true or real, that Resident Service Providers are paradoxically shadowing the knowledge trajectory of government, which places westerners in positions of agency and renders Indigenous Australians passive. Indeed, as Feldman (2013) argues of technocrats, compassion expressed

¹³⁸ See pages 20-21 of the Introduction for a brief historical overview of these policy eras.

through pity, as opposed to solidarity, can be particularly harmful. He explains the difference between pity and solidarity by stating that,

Compassion can lead to solidarity when I prompt direct exchange of opinion with oppressed people in which case it comprehends the weak and the strong. In contrast, it leads to pity when one's motivation becomes the *passion for feeling compassion* for an abstract sufferer. Pity has a vested interest in others' suffering as it is necessary to sustain the revolutionaries power position over the suffering masses they claim to represent (original emphasis in Feldman 2013: 144).

While Resident Service Providers might believe their relationships with Indigenous people are based on a compassion that leads to solidarity, in the examples examined in this chapter where compassion was expressed it was expressed through pity, or perhaps some other emotion or feeling.

Therefore, although Resident Service Providers may indeed be compassionate, like the police officer who seemed to care deeply about community safety and the clinic manager who had dedicated 20 years of his life to improving Indigenous health, the discourse and identity of bearer of local knowledge continues to uphold the unequal power relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The way that Resident Service Providers express local knowledge to outsiders maintains that a form of governance is necessary to understand Indigenous Australians, to identify the problems on the ground and to suggest solutions for improvement. However, because they are acutely aware of the failures in past attempts to improve and help Indigenous people, Resident Service Providers purposefully distance themselves and their knowledge, to avoid outsiders associating them with the governance of previous policy eras, such as protection and assimilation, and from being accused as being racist by those 'down south.'

Conclusion

Resident Service Providers are a particular group of bureaucrats implementing Indigenous policy on the ground in remote communities. These street-level bureaucrats present us with a different idea of knowledge from that of Foucault. For Resident Service Providers, knowledge is not recognised as socially constructed; a product of a specific culture, time and society (Foucault [1977] 1980a). Rather, they present knowledge as 'out there', waiting to be discovered and appropriated over time. This knowledge cannot be understood or attained through any other avenue than residing in communities or frequent visitation. 'Bearer of local

knowledge' is both the discourse Resident Service Providers deploy and the identity they adopt and present to outsiders.

The desired effect of this presentation of local knowledge is for the Resident Service Provider to distance themselves from any real or perceived negative impacts their presence in communities and the policy work they implement might have on Indigenous people. They present their knowledge as superior to other forms of knowledge, such as that of visiting government officials or politicians, because of the link they make between accessing true knowledge, via the Indigenous backstage, and residence in Indigenous communities. However, the actual effect of their knowledge, in their opinion, is disqualified from influencing the direction of Indigenous policy. This reinforces the firm assertion that they are separate and different from those 'down south', which circulates back to the originally inferred claim that they cannot be blamed for the impact Indigenous policy has upon Indigenous peoples lives.

When analysing this discourse and identity, as demonstrated in the actions of the police officer at the Action Plan meeting and the clinic manager's front stage performances, some important disjunctures and paradoxes become evident. In the example with the police officer we witnessed the officer presenting his personal experiences of other Indigenous communities and people to inform his assumptions about *this* community's Indigenous committee members. Like the Regime of Truth, this police officer's bearer of local knowledge identity translated personal experiences into universal truths about Aboriginality. This was demonstrated when he stated he did not need to ask the Indigenous committee members if they understood the Action Plan and why they were signing it that day. Instead, he assumed that fluent and articulated English language skills equates to knowledge and understanding of bureaucratic concepts and processes.

I argue that the police officer had illusory interpersonal access to the Indigenous backstage; meaning, he honestly assumed that he was having an open and transparent conversation with the Indigenous committee members, when in reality these Indigenous locals were presenting the police officer with an illusion of understanding the Action Plan and the need to ratify it. They presented this on a front stage performance of their own. Further, this example highlights an important consideration concerning the bearer of local knowledge identity. The police officer believed the Action Plan was a positive step towards empowering Indigenous people and communities to take ownership and responsibility for safety in their community. He was also of the firm opinion that getting the Traditional Owners and elders of a community directly involved in solving the problems of community violence and disorder will improve the overall functioning and harmony of remote communities.

Ironically, it is his own assumptions about local knowledge that has potentially hindered his desires from becoming a reality. The Action Plan meeting and document gave the illusion of empowerment to the Indigenous committee members and the community. This is because the vast majority of the Indigenous committee members clearly do not understand why they signed, have not read the Action Plan document and nor are their ideas of safety incorporated into the structure of the document. This example highlights the importance of recognising how easily miscommunication can lead to misunderstanding, and further, the imperative to be aware of the difference between the front and backstage in intercultural spaces.

In the example with the clinic manager we learn how and why a Resident Service Provider might present a particular impression when front stage with two different audiences: visitors/outside and Indigenous locals. The clinic manager explained in his backstage the rationale for his performances. Regarding visitors or outsiders to the community he is aware that these people do not have the same level of local knowledge as he does because they do not reside in communities. Thus, he is cautious in encounters with these people from 'down south' to avoid being unfairly judged as racist. The reactions he often experiences by those 'down south' further entrench his local knowledge as disqualified; this knowledge is misunderstood and thus not accepted by policy-makers. This would appear to place his knowledge outside of the dominant Regime of Truth, and thus, assuage him of any blame should policies have adverse effects.

However, this clinic manager's local knowledge actually mirrors in many ways the Regime of Truth that is established in Canberra. Stating he has contempt for policies that foster dependency, yet simultaneously agreeing with the good intentions of policy makers — i.e. to change Indigenous behaviour so that Indigenous people take responsibility for their lives and become independent of welfare assistance — is a prime example of conflicted consciousness. Thus, while he might emphasise that his local knowledge is different from, and does not inform, government policy made in Canberra, in practice he is at times providing the pulse for the Regime of Truth to operate on the ground.

In his front stage performances with Indigenous locals the clinic manager acts in a particular way because of his personal history and background. His firm belief that Aboriginal people should not be treated as different or special stems from his own refugee status and his family's personal struggle to make their way in the world without the assistance of government. Further, the clinic manager happily assimilates into Australian culture and society yet still retains some of the core cultural beliefs and traditions of his country of birth. These factors give structure to the way the clinic manager runs his clinic and forms the expectations he has

of Indigenous people. However, because of his caution with visitors this information is not usually given during front stage encounters. It was backstage, in the comfort and safety of his own living room, where the clinic manager felt relaxed, and trusted me enough, to share and explain the rationale that structures his front stage interactions with visitors and Indigenous locals.

Conclusion

Following the Pulse of Policy: A Consideration of the Implications of Knowledge for the Wider Indigenous Policy World

Introduction

In this thesis I have argued that an understanding of how Indigenous policy moves from Canberra to remote Northern Territory communities can be gained by mapping the tracks that the Indigenous policy pulse generates within a wider policy world assemblage. I have demonstrated that this journey is complex and messy; full of contradictions, paradoxes and mismatches between policy knowledge and policy practice. I developed this argument by examining the entanglement of knowledge, truth and governance in parliamentarians' articulations of Aboriginality, which results in the construction of a Regime of Truth that underscores recent Indigenous policies, and by examining the actions, activities and subjectivities of three bureaucratic figures engaging in distinct policy contexts.

The broad question this thesis sought to address was: how does Indigenous policy move from Canberra to remote Northern Territory communities? The answer this thesis has provided is that policy moves as a series of pulses, which are given expression and animation *through* the actions and activities of the figures examined as well as embodied *within* specific political and bureaucratic subjectivities that are performed upon the front stages of particular policy contexts. The significant glue binding together these seemingly separate policy world pulses, is knowledge: the different forms and modes of knowing about Indigenous Australians, the content of policies and how to successfully navigate and perform policy processes and procedures when front stage.

In Chapter Two I argued that knowledge is built into a Regime of Truth that parliamentarians deploy to justify and advocate for certain policies over others. This knowledge is not necessarily based on substantial evidence; rather, knowledge is constructed via the parliamentarians' personal experiences, coupled with the selective highlighting of the anonymous Indigenous voice. I claimed that the Regime of Truth underpinning recent Indigenous policy, carries the weight of high-modernist neoliberal aspirations for establishing the ideal Indigenous future and subjectivity.

In Chapter Three knowledge was a key factor animating the games played by senators and senior public servants at Senate Estimates. These political settings involve policy knowledge as both a game that is played and capital that can be accumulated. Senior public servants simultaneously harness different sets of knowledge — primarily from the individual and group habitus — to assist them in knowing when games are being played and how to avoid being ensnared in political traps.

In Chapter Four I demonstrated how the Work Practice Manual is the key document providing Commonwealth Ombudsman staff with the information for knowing how to act and behave front stage. Managing such performance is essential for cultivating and maintaining the Office's reputation of being independent and impartial in their investigations. This is important for the Office as they lack the power to force departments and agencies to adopt their recommendations for policy administration changes. Further, this identity is crucial for staff to gather information from Indigenous complainants when complainants view them as separate from government and other bureaucrats and thus are often more inclined to communicate openly. Therefore, the power of the Ombudsman to influence policy administration is initially closely tied to the successful presentation of the Ombudsman identity; an identity that is taught to staff through the Work Practice Manual.

In Chapter Five I argued that a particular group of Resident Service Providers adopt an identity, and present a discourse, that distinguishes them as bearers of local knowledge. To be a bearer of local knowledge involves a specific belief in how knowledge about Indigenous people, culture and policy can be legitimately acquired and deployed. This knowledge is selectively presented depending on the audience to the Resident Service Provider's front stage performance: Indigenous locals, other Resident Service Providers or outsiders. I argued that although this knowledge is meant to separate and distance Resident Service Providers from the agendas and policies coming out of Canberra, in practice, the bearer of local knowledge discourse contains the same beliefs about Aboriginality and holds the same aspirations for the ideal imagined Indigenous future, as the Regime of Truth identified in Chapter Two.

Therefore, at each stage of the policy's journey, different forms of knowledge are constantly being produced, presented and circulated by the figures I have analysed. Presented in their individual policy settings, the 'knowledge' of each figure examined, may seem unrelated. Yet, when we view the parliamentary and bureaucratic figures in the context of the wider policy world assemblage it becomes evident that these different manifestations of 'knowing' are producing the *same effect*: a mismatch between policy knowledge (what is needed to improve Indigenous livelihoods), policy practice (the actions and activities taken by parliamentarians and bureaucrats within different spaces and contexts in the policy world) and policy impact (how Indigenous Australians are affected or remain unaffected, engage or are unable to engage, with policy).

This results in what appears to be the ideal Indigenous subjectivity, articulated by parliamentarians as a Regime of Truth in Chapter Two, remaining unrealised on the ground as Indigenous Australians continue to value, adopt and abide by their own principles as opposed to the goals of Canberra-created Indigenous policies. However, as the discussion in this conclusion addresses, in some instances, such as the housing vignette provided, it is not that Indigenous people do not *want* to adopt the subjectivity presented in the Regime of Truth, but rather, they are *unable* to. As I will also consider, this generates important questions concerning the actual power of the Regime of Truth and the perpetuation of the need for policy, despite policies failing to achieve the desired results.

This conclusion therefore, considers the implications of my analysis in the wider Indigenous policy world context, specifically with regards to the Indigenous Australians who are subject to recent Commonwealth policies. How can Indigenous Australians locate and engage with the pulse of the Indigenous policy world? How does the knowledge that is constructed, performed and circulated by the figures I have described impact upon the lived experience of Indigenous Australians? And can the complexity and messiness of this policy world ever truly be untangled? To address these questions, and to see the pulse of policy in action, I consider *what happens* when a specific policy moves through a selection of the policy world assemblage; the different people, places, processes and spaces described in the thesis.

I centre this concluding discussion on an additional vignette from fieldwork in a remote Indigenous community. This vignette first describes the community's emergency housing meeting before detailing the various responses and actions (including inaction) of parliamentarians, a Resident Service Provider, Senate Estimates proceedings and the Commonwealth Ombudsman's Office. The thesis concludes by summarising the key

observations and insights in relation to the overall thesis and in response to the implications discussed in this conclusion.

An Indigenous Community's Attempt to Locate and Engage with the Pulse of Indigenous Policy

It is the second day of my return visit to a remote Indigenous community in the Top End of the Northern Territory. During the course of the morning I engage in a conversation with one of the community elders about what he considers to be the greatest problem the community is currently facing: housing. He holds up his phone and informs me that he has just received a phone call from a relative in an adjacent community informing him that the money allocated to this community for housing has been “frozen.” He is confused. His understanding, and what he has gathered from other community members to be theirs, is that the community was to receive 25 new houses, and all other houses would be refurbished.¹³⁹ He is a key member of the community's Housing Reference Group and this was “promised” over two years ago.¹⁴⁰ Indeed, his understanding was that construction should have already commenced. As a “mover and shaker in the community” (Clinic Manager's Wife 2013), this elder is determined not to sit by and watch his community miss out. He has scheduled an emergency housing meeting for tomorrow morning and invites me to come along and write down what I witness.

At approximately 10 am the next morning, the sound of a droning air-raid siren pierces the muggy air. Reverberating throughout the small community, it signals that an emergency meeting to discuss the current housing crisis will commence shortly at the community hall. The elder had spent the previous day visiting all the Resident Service Providers, informing them of the housing situation and inviting them to attend the meeting. He spread the news throughout the community, encouraging both Indigenous locals, Resident Service Providers and visitors, such as myself, to attend. Despite the invitation there is only the shire manager, a maintenance worker, the shop manager and myself representing the Resident Service Providers and visitors.

¹³⁹ This number, indicating the amount of houses to be built is the perspective of this individual elder and those he has spoken to. When I spoke with different Indigenous residents and Resident Service Providers this number changed. Ultimately, the number of houses the community was to receive was not confirmed until November when the building company met with the community.

¹⁴⁰ A Housing Reference Group is a committee consisting of local Indigenous people from the community. The primary task of these groups is to provide Territory Housing officers with input and feedback on housing design, layout, and allocations. However, these are recommendations only. This means that the Housing Reference Group might not get the preferences they specified in meetings.

Outside, under the shelter of the trees, most of the Traditional Owners and elders have gathered already. Soon many more community members arrive and take their places; women to one side, men to the other. In the meeting that follows, Indigenous locals discuss why they have gathered today and express their feelings about the news that the community's housing funds have been frozen. They consider their position and rights as voting citizens and discuss the options at their disposal for trying to get their voice heard by government.

"The strategy" that is enthusiastically agreed to at the meeting is to write a letter to the Commonwealth Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Nigel Scullion, that explains the housing situation and how it affects the community, and invites Scullion to visit the community so they can "talk to him, to his face" and show him their houses. Having discussed the content of the letter, another member says that, "We can use the opposition. The different parties, they argue in Parliament" and suggests that the letter should also be sent to other Commonwealth parliamentarians who represent the Northern Territory, such as Senator Nova Perris and Member of Parliament Warren Snowdon. The backup plan, if they get no response from the Minister, is to go to the media and "blow it up in his face in the newspaper!"

Over the course of the next 15 months, letters are emailed to local, Territory and Commonwealth parliamentarians in an attempt to get answers as to who has responsibility for housing and to whom the community can bring their complaints about the housing process. The few responses they receive are from parliamentarians who inform them that they are not responsible for this area and will forward their query onto the appropriate person or department. Even the Northern Territory housing minister, in written correspondence, seems unsure as to which government — Territory or Commonwealth — is responsible for housing funds.¹⁴¹

Four months after this meeting, Senator for the Northern Territory Nova Peris and Shadow Minister for Communication Jason Clare visit Community X as part of a tour of local schools in the Northern Territory. An informant advises that the parliamentarians considered housing

¹⁴¹ This confusion and uncertainty about which government has responsibility for housing policy is primary finding in the Commonwealth Ombudsman's report *Remote Housing Reforms in the Northern Territory*. As part of the Office's investigation into the administration of remote housing reforms the Office determined that the Commonwealth Department for Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (now the Department of Social Services) is the primary agency responsible for the administrative and procedural fairness problems highlighted in the report. However, the Department argued against the Ombudsman's findings and requested that reference to them in 10 out of the 13 recommendations be removed (Commonwealth of Australia 2012a: 42-50). The Department maintained that because they had delegated this responsibility to the Northern Territory Government the Department should not be held accountable for failure to comply with regulations and agreements, dissatisfaction of clients, nor the ineffectiveness of administrative processes. Yet, the Ombudsman maintained that this Department, as the primary landlord because they held the title for the housing leases, were ultimately responsible.

“as an extra” (Resident Service Provider 2015) to the original purpose of the day’s itinerary which was centred around visiting the local school. Peris and Clare meet with the shire manager and a Resident Service Provider to ask *them* what they think about the housing situation and what possible solutions might be viable. It is the Resident Service Provider, who identifies more with Kowal’s (2015) White anti-racist subjectivity and not a bearer of local knowledge, that suggests and insists that the parliamentarians meet and speak with a local Indigenous couple who have been waiting for their new home to be built. Peris and Clare then visit this couple’s home and talk briefly about housing issues before returning to the school to continue their original purpose of the visit. Peris promises to bring this housing issue to the attention of Minister Scullion and indicates she will report back to the community on what she learns. But she never does and the community have not heard from her since.¹⁴²

I return to Canberra six months after this housing meeting and attend a Senate Estimates hearing as described in Chapter Three. During the morning tea break I approach Senator Peris. I briefly introduce myself and my connection to the community, before asking her whether she will be bringing the community’s housing issue to the attention of the Estimates committee. She says that she has indeed prepared a list of questions that she intends to ask the senior public servants who are at the table. When the committee resumes, Senator Peris asks the chair of the committee if she might proceed with her housing questions. The chair, with the agreement of other senators, decides that the line of questions would fit better in another section scheduled for later that same afternoon. I continue to observe this hearing until it is concluded at approximately four o’clock. Peris never asks her housing questions.

Fast-forward one year to a different Estimates hearing, where Senator Peris again tries to direct housing questions to the department’s senior public servants. Having received answers to previous questions about other community housing and infrastructure developments, the conversation continues as follows:

Peris: Now to Community X on [*location of community*]. Is there any housing development there? How are things at Community X? Where are things at?¹⁴³

Senior Public Servant One: If you are asking about the progress of construction of housing or property tenancy management, we will probably have to bring someone else to the table.

Senior Public Servant Two: That is under 2.1 [of the day’s scheduled agenda].

Peris: Okay. I will come back to that.

¹⁴² The Resident Service Provider sent Peris an email thanking Peris for her time and asking her to keep in contact with the community. This email was never acknowledged or responded to.

¹⁴³ I have de-identified the community in this quote.

But she never does. Later in the proceedings other housing concerns are brought to the attention of the Estimates committee and questions asked of senior public servants. Indeed, Peris questions Minister Scullion and senior public servants about another community's housing issues. Then, Peris engages in a political game with Minister Scullion, attempting to discredit his government and himself. It seems Scullion is aware of Peris' motives, and rather than wait for her to make her political point through the questioning of the public servants, the Minister directly addresses the attack saying: "Perhaps I can save you waltzing with the question." Scullion then discusses the recent media attack on himself that he assumes Peris is alluding to. Community X is never mentioned.

Throughout a four year period,¹⁴⁴ and in relation to wider housing policy and programs, the Indigenous locals from Community X had contact with parliamentarians from Canberra and Darwin, Commonwealth Ombudsman staff, visits and meetings with bureaucrats, attended meetings alongside Resident Service Providers and had their housing issues cursorily mentioned at the Senate Estimates hearing described above and during Question Time in a Northern Territory parliamentary sitting. I now turn to a discussion that considers the influence and movement of knowledge as content and actions from the community meeting, to Senator Peris and Shadow Minister Clare's visit, to the Senate Estimates hearing, to the actions of a Resident Service Provider and the inaction of the Ombudsman. In mapping this movement, I highlight that (a) knowledge silos are created and maintained; (b) the Indigenous community's ability to locate and engage with policy is adversely impacted; and (c) the previous two points compound the complexity and messiness of policy processes.

Discussion: The Impact of Policy Knowledge

In Chapter Three I emphasised that parliamentarians are political beings; elected into political positions, are affiliated with political parties and ideologies and compete for political advantage in heightened political spaces. Thus, in the discussion that follows, where I draw attention to Senator Peris, Shadow Minister Clare and Northern Territory parliamentarian

¹⁴⁴ From the date of this community meeting it is a further seven months before demolition of houses begins, another two months before construction begins and a further six months before people have moved into their new, rebuilt and refurbished homes. The Government's promise takes over four years to be fulfilled in total.

Kurrupuwu it is my intention to emphasise their role in the policy world as political beings and not necessarily focus on their personal character.¹⁴⁵

It was argued in Chapters Two and Three that parliamentarians have particular purposes for the appropriation and deployment of knowledge, depending on the context. In the second Estimates proceeding we witness Senator Peris choosing to engage in political game-play with Scullion. Why Peris decided not to ask her housing questions on behalf of the community is unknown. Why she did not reply to the community's numerous attempts to contact her, or why she did not contact the community herself to reorient herself with the housing situation prior to deciding to ask questions a year later, is also unknown.¹⁴⁶ We might speculate that as a political actor operating in the heightened political space of Estimates she had some motive or reason for taking the course of action that she did which was not to pursue asking questions about Community X.

Instead, what can be witnessed clearly is Peris taking the opportunity at Estimates to highlight a different housing example to achieve her presumed motive of discrediting the minister and government — the second of the four common questions that tend to be asked at Estimates. Further, in asking this category of question, Peris contributes to the senior public servant's rational decision to question the framing of senator's questions at Estimates, and thus a senator's motive and intent behind questions. Consequently, the game is perpetuated whereby the senior public servant waits for the senator to ask the exact/right question before providing the information that is sought after. Hence, the fact that Peris engaged in playing a political game serves to further affirm to senior public servants the rationality of engaging in the Estimates process with caution.

As a consequence of such decisions, Peris does not find out any new information about the housing issues that have been plaguing the community. Nor does she take this moment at Estimates as an opportunity to unite knowledge systems; to bring an Indigenous perspective to the attention of the Estimates committee and to understand the department's position in relation to housing programs. I suggest that failing to ask questions at the first Estimates, and then choosing not to ask questions when she had an opportunity at the second Estimates, can be interpreted as one way that knowledge silos in the Indigenous policy world are maintained:

¹⁴⁵ However, it should be noted that Peris and Kurrupuwu are both Indigenous Australians who may or may not have family connections to the locals in Community X. Hence, their decisions to act or not act may have been influenced by cultural or family obligations and responsibilities.

¹⁴⁶ At the time of the second Estimates hearing, houses had already been built and occupied in the community.

keeping her knowledge, the department's knowledge and the community's knowledge about housing, separate.

Perhaps in future parliamentary debates or Estimates hearings we might witness Senator Peris or Shadow Minister Clare deploy their visit to Community X, and short conversation with the Indigenous couple about housing, as a personal narrative. As argued in Chapter Two, such use of the anonymous Indigenous voice would appear to add authenticity and validity to whatever argument they wished to make. As an anonymous voice, the Indigenous couple would effectively defeat any accusations that Peris or Clare are putting forward their own viewpoint and not those of Indigenous Australians. Further, no one need know that this visit was not originally intended to include housing matters, nor that their conversation with the couple was an afterthought, and a brief encounter at that. The selective highlighting and concealing of information in a parliamentarian's personal narrative is both their prerogative and a part of their political strategy.

Interestingly, although there was no bearer of local knowledge Resident Service Provider directly involved in the events of the housing situation described in the previous section, the actions of the parliamentarians involved can still make two important points about the bearer of local knowledge as identity and discourse: first, the Resident Service Providers' claims to be the exclusive bearer of local Indigenous knowledge is entrenched; and second, there is a contradiction in their personal perception of their local knowledge being disqualified.

In reference to the entrenchment of the bearer of local knowledge identity, no other visiting bureaucrat from a housing department or parliamentarian (neither Territory nor Commonwealth) remained in close contact and correspondence with the community — this includes Territory Housing officers who visited the community regularly and chaired Housing Reference Group meetings, yet did not communicate effectively with the community. This leaves the Resident Service Providers — both bearers of local knowledge and White anti-racists — who were most attuned to the impact that the housing delays were having upon the Indigenous locals in the community. Both these groups of Resident Service Providers were the ones who were watching and trying to facilitate the locals' attempts to understand what the housing policy entailed and therefore, which level of government was responsible for the funding and for the delays in construction.

Connected to this is a point about the Resident Service Providers' assertion that their knowledge is disqualified. For example, Peris and Clare's engagement with the community's housing problems contains an important contradiction to this belief. In particular, one of the Resident Service Providers said that Shadow Minister Clare "was very interested in my opinion

on how many houses should be built and how” (Resident Service Provider 2015). In this regard, the knowledge this Resident Service Provider held was not disqualified as Peris and Clare both listened intently to her opinions and ideas and were in positions of power to enable this knowledge to be a part of wider policy debates and discussions back in Canberra. However, it is important to note that this particular Resident Service Provider who interacted with these parliamentarians would probably not identify as being a bearer of local knowledge, being more akin to Kowal’s White-anti Racists.¹⁴⁷

I observed that with other Resident Service Providers and Indigenous locals, she consistently problematised her position within the community in terms of wanting to highlight and put forward the local Indigenous perspective over and above her own. Unlike the police in Chapter Five, she was not afraid to ask local people if they understood complex bureaucratic processes and meetings, and similar to the nurse in Chapter Five, she incorporated Indigenous knowledge into her own worldview. She was often asked to attend meetings that were chaired by outsiders and conducted in English. Echoing the concerns of Garde (2014), this Resident Service Provider recognised the persistent problem that not having qualified interpreters at meetings created. Although she tried her best to explain what the visiting officials were saying in “simple English”, she still acknowledged that this was insufficient to enable Indigenous locals to comprehensively understand complex policy processes and programs. Consequently, many of the Indigenous locals who I spoke with had varying understandings of what sorts of works and the number of houses the community would be receiving.

Unlike a bearer of local knowledge, such as the clinic manger in Chapter Five, the Resident Service Provider felt uncomfortable during her interaction with Peris and Clare at the prospect of being seen as the primary spokesperson for the community. She thus organised for the parliamentarians to meet with an Indigenous couple who were on the list for a new home. In the events that transpired throughout the following year, after both the emergency meeting and parliamentarians visit, this Resident Service Provider persistently attempted to assist the community in having their voices heard. She was asked to draft a letter to send to Commonwealth and Northern Territory parliamentarians, and was the intermediary for the community in all correspondence. It is worth pausing to consider that, had she been a bearer of local knowledge and assumed that she *knew* what locals wanted without necessarily hearing it directly from the source (such as the police officer in Chapter Five), or had she held a viewpoint that determined Indigenous locals should take responsibility for themselves and

¹⁴⁷ She has lived in the community for three years and we regularly kept in contact and discussed the alternative subjectivities that seemed to exist in the community’s Resident Service Provider population.

pursue this case on their own (such as the clinic manager in Chapter Five), there would be far less likelihood of her insistence that Peris and Clare meet and speak with an Indigenous person to hear first-hand the crisis the delay in completing the housing project was having on the couple's family and wider community.

This oversight of Peris and Clare in not asking to speak with an Indigenous local about the housing situation is just one way that the Indigenous locals were potentially excluded from being active participants in the policy world. At the community meeting, the community had identified Minister Scullion as the person directly responsible for the housing delays and determined a strategy to engage with other selected individuals who they anticipated would be able to assist them.¹⁴⁸ The main argument and motive for taking this course of action was the community's status as a collective of voting citizens; they had a right to have their voices heard and to receive answers to their questions. They also knew they had the right to live in affordable and decent housing. Thus, in line with some of the aspirations contained in the Regime of Truth, I suggest that the community members who attended the meeting were trying to appropriate and experience the 'good life', and the desired subjectivity that would result, as articulated in Chapter Two: communities of independent, educated, healthy and market-engaged individuals.

Indeed, the Indigenous locals at the meeting repeated some of the points that parliamentarians in the policy debates made concerning health and education problems and the scope for developing employment opportunities. For example, the locals discussed their desire to have *safe* and *healthy* homes to live in;¹⁴⁹ two adjectives that are continually emphasised to Indigenous people as being important. Further, the Indigenous locals were eager to give the young men in the community the opportunity to gain skills and employment through assisting in the building of the new homes and maintaining employment afterwards by learning how to perform maintenance and repair works. Many of the Indigenous people at

¹⁴⁸ Specifically, the community identified during the meeting Northern Territory representatives Minister Scullion, Senator Peris and Member for Parliament Snowdon as key individuals they could go to for assistance with this issue and answers to their questions. Later, letters were sent to the following recipients: Commonwealth Senators Scullion, Peris and Rachel Siewert, Member for Parliament Snowdon, Northern Territory Member for Parliament Francis Xavier Kurrupuwu, Northern Territory Minister for Housing Matt Conlon and local member Harry Appo.

¹⁴⁹ Health is connected to houses in the Closing the Gap reform. One of the 'building blocks' in Closing the Gap is Healthy Homes. Healthy Homes aims to provide communities with "well-built houses and infrastructure" which is vital "to good health, family, safety, community and jobs" (Allen Consulting Group 2013). The National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing is the main agreement that focuses on implementing the Closing the Gap Healthy Homes building block. The objectives of this agreement are to address the following issues: overcrowding, homelessness, poor housing conditions and housing shortages, with an additional goal being to provide local employment and training to Indigenous people.

the meeting also expressed their concern that the effects of overcrowding were having on the community, including the problem this contributed to young people leaving the community or families being forced to live elsewhere temporarily; both of these examples relate to mobility issues which parliamentarians determined to be a barrier to Indigenous people experiencing the 'good life'.¹⁵⁰

Such issues point to a glaring contradiction in the way that parliamentarians spoke about Aboriginality in Chapter Two: that culture is a barrier and hindrance to attaining the 'good life' and that equality will flourish when the 'good life' is valued and adopted by Indigenous people themselves. The paradox is that the Indigenous people who attended the meeting, many of whom were waiting for new, rebuilt or refurbished homes, felt that an aspect of their ability to partake in the 'good life' was directly dependent on the completion of the housing project. In this instance, it was not Indigenous culture or the individual's failure to choose to live the 'good life' that was hindering their ability to attain equality with the rest of Australia. Conversely, it was the government's failure to complete the housing project in a timely manner and provide adequate housing alternatives in the interim. Indeed, at the time of the meeting, one family had moved out of their home two years ago and were still waiting for the new house to be built. In the meantime, they were forced to live with another family, which was contributing to the already severe overcrowding issues. Thus, while the community waited for the government to fulfil their promises, it could be argued that those in the community awaiting houses were unable to actualise an experience of the 'good life'; not only in housing but also in other connecting areas such as health, safety and employment.

The Indigenous locals at the emergency housing meeting were not only being excluded from being able to experience the 'good life' and attain equality with other Australians. The specific parliamentarians who were contacted after the meeting are also accountable for failure to assist their constituents, or at the very least, provide them with the general courtesy of responding to their letter. The exception is Member for the Northern Territory parliament, Francis Xavier Kurrupuwu, who visited the community after Senator Peris and Shadow Minister Clare. Kurrupuwu notified the community of his intended visit a few weeks prior to his arrival. This gave the community time to find people who would show him their houses. During his short five-hour visit, he was shown around the community, met with locals and viewed some of the current housing stock. He took pictures, asked Indigenous locals questions about housing and said he would bring this housing matter up with the Northern Territory Minister

¹⁵⁰ This community had 24 houses demolished and only 23 rebuilt. The new houses are smaller and still do not accommodate the local lifestyles and cultural obligations to accommodating family. This further contributes to this community's overcrowding issue.

for Housing, Matt Conlan, when the parliament was scheduled to sit next. A few months after this visit, and in Kurrupuwu's absence, Member for Arnhem, Larisa Lee, asked Kurrupuwu's questions to Minister Conlan during Question Time:

Lee: We have received a letter from the community of [X] expressing deep concern about the state of housing there. The government has promised new houses for the community, as well as upgrades to existing properties, yet you have now frozen the funding and what was promised has not been delivered. There are up to 20 people living in a home meant for only five. These problems are causing great concern to the community. They have sent letters to your department, but have not received any response from the department or you... Why has housing been promised and not delivered?

However, the Minister did not provide a specific answer addressing the question. Instead the Minister offered general information about the government's delivery of housing in the area. The Minister never once mentioned Community X, nor did he provide the community with information after this attack by the opposition, highlighting his lack of action. Similar to Peris, the Minister never makes contact with the community. In effect, by not corresponding with these locals, the Minister and the other parliamentarians, Kurrupuwu being the only exception, were essentially excluding the community from being able to engage with, and become an active voice in, the political and policy process.

An avenue that was not identified as an option to enable this Indigenous community to participate in the policy process was making a complaint to the Commonwealth Ombudsman's Office. The housing situation would have been an ideal complaint to bring to the attention of the Office. First, the Office could have investigated this case as this community's housing issue involved Commonwealth funding, thus falling within the Ombudsman's jurisdiction.¹⁵¹ Second, and similar to Mr D's example in Chapter Four (with Centrelink issuing a cheque) and others such as the complaints detailed in Appendix B, this housing scenario appears to include some classic examples that the Ombudsman have identified as consistent barriers to Indigenous Australians' understanding of, and ability to contribute towards, policy processes. I suggest such examples might include government departments, agencies and contractors not communicating effectively with Indigenous housing applicants, and not providing the housing

¹⁵¹ Had the housing issue been about remote tenancy agreements the Commonwealth Ombudsman may not have been able to investigate because responsibility for these agreements transferred from the Commonwealth to Northern Territory Government in 2012. This would then have fallen under the jurisdiction of the Northern Territory Ombudsman. From 2007 to 2012 the Commonwealth and Northern Territory Ombudsmen had a memorandum of understanding between them, enabling the Commonwealth Ombudsman to investigate matters that were Northern Territory jurisdiction. This agreement ceased in 2012.

applicants with alternative solutions or options for housing accommodation between moving out of houses and waiting to move into new ones. The Ombudsman could also have investigated the department's delays in processing requests and failure to satisfactorily address and remedy complaints.

Indeed, a key problem seemed to be the communication of housing policy and subsequent explanation of housing programs. Similar to the Indigenous committee members in the Community Safety Action Plan example in Chapter Five, many of the Indigenous people who attended the housing meeting seemed to have varying understandings of how many houses were to be built, when construction was due to commence and what configuration the new housing stock would take. One poignant example of this is an Indigenous resident Mr J, whose three-bedroom home was demolished and a duplex built in its place. Up until Mr J and his family moved into the duplex, he had been of the understanding (for the past four years) that he was to be allocated a new three-bedroom home. Instead, his wife and he occupy one side of the duplex and his children, of primary and high school ages, occupy the other. Consequently, Mr J pays double rent, as technically, he is occupying two different residential spaces. Yet, despite the Ombudsman staff conducting outreach activities the previous year, and attaining successful results for some complainants,¹⁵² they were not contacted to assist with the many housing issues facing the community. Regardless of all the effort Ombudsman staff have put into being seen as independent and impartial, bureaucrat-but-not-of-government, to remote Indigenous people, this community did not think to contact the Ombudsman with their complaint.¹⁵³

By July 2015, 15 months after the initial emergency housing meeting, construction in the community had been completed and the shire manager reported two months later that the community was, for the most part, happy. There were some Indigenous residents who had

¹⁵² For details of successful complaints see Appendix B.

¹⁵³ An informant advises that the community has so many government, non-government and other organisations and services visiting that "it all becomes quite a blur and unless people come out consistently, people forget which agencies are out there." So it may not necessarily be a lack of effort on the Ombudsman's part that resulted in the community not identifying the Ombudsman's Office as a viable avenue to assist them with their complaints, but rather, the Ombudsman not being able to physically visit and meet with Indigenous locals on a frequent and regular basis. The ability for the Ombudsman's Office to visit communities regularly is directly affected by the lack of funding the Office is allocated by the government in the annual Budget. Thus the Office is unable to conduct outreach activities like they did previously during the Intervention because this was special funding allocated to them for a five year period only.

not agreed with some of the allocations and therefore, were disappointed.¹⁵⁴ Some residents of the newly completed houses were also disappointed because problems were already occurring, such as cupboards not closing properly, cupboard doors falling off and pipes and manholes resurfacing above the ground.¹⁵⁵ Other people have complained that the locks on the doors can be easily opened with a screwdriver making people feel unsafe and that there is no place for them to store their valuables. Meanwhile, other tenants were already being warned by Territory Housing about the possibility of eviction, due to unpaid rental arrears.¹⁵⁶ It is unknown where evicted tenants would go. One positive outcome for the community is the training and employment of young local Indigenous men in the construction and maintenance of fences for the new, rebuilt and refurbished homes.

Conclusion

The focus of this thesis was to draw attention to how a few select figures in the Indigenous policy world contribute towards the movement of policy from Canberra to remote Indigenous communities. I demonstrated how different forms of knowledge govern the conduct of parliamentarians, senior public servants, Commonwealth Ombudsman staff and Resident Service Providers when they enact or interact with Indigenous policy or people in particular policy contexts. To demonstrate the operation of these forms of governmentality (Foucault [1978] 1991, [1979] 2008) I deployed Erving Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical metaphor of the front stage/backstage to investigate the actions, activities and subjectivities of the bureaucratic figures in particular. In this conclusion, I returned the figures to the wider policy world assemblage to consider some of the impacts that Indigenous Australians are experiencing.

¹⁵⁴ For example, one local believes a new house should have been prioritised to an elderly man who is confined to a wheel chair and who was born in the community, so should have been given priority. The level ground around the new house would have benefited his ability to transport himself. Instead, she points to a new three-bedroom home that has been allocated to a young couple with a new-born baby. This couple are not locally from the community nor do they have any other children.

¹⁵⁵ Tess Lea and Paul Pholerios' (2009) article *This is Not a Pipe: The Treacheries of Indigenous Housing*, argues that the initial construction of houses in remote communities cannot withstand the pressures caused by overcrowding and environmental impacts, both of which are primary causes for the damage caused to remote housing stock. The article further emphasises that the maintenance and repairs carried out on remote houses is not to the same standard as urban housing.

¹⁵⁶ Territory Housing are responsible for the signing and management of tenancy agreements. All the new, rebuilt and refurbished homes are subject to these agreements between Indigenous resident as tenant and Territory Housing as landlord. These houses are also subject to higher rents than other types of dwellings.

To conclude, a mapping of the people, places, events, processes, procedures, discourses and artefacts that constitute a policy world assemblage can reveal how forms of knowledge and truth govern the ways that a policy pulses from one place to another. In undertaking such a mapping of the Indigenous policy world, I simultaneously revealed that at each moment of its journey, policy encounters forms of knowledge, pulsing as *content* (Regimes of Truth; games; Work Practice Manuals; bearers of local knowledge discourse) and *action* (the 'knowledge content' is performed or presented as particular 'actions', which as this thesis has argued, usually occur upon a front stage). In practice, this knowledge functions in silos — both knowledge about Indigenous Australians and policy problems and solutions, and also knowledge about how to effectively accumulate desired capital, whether this is to make or score political points, successfully navigate political games, gain the trust and confidence of complainants or make sense of one's place within the policy world.

In effect, when knowledge functionally exists in silos, it can contribute to: a) the continual construction and maintenance of these knowledge silos; b) the inability for Indigenous people to locate and engage with the pulse of policy; and ultimately, c) the messiness and complexity of policy processes and procedures. These points are significantly displayed in this thesis and warrant further investigation in future research. As the thesis has demonstrated, although a partial mapping can be achieved, it requires the careful navigation of these different expressions of knowledge and truth and paying close attention to the techniques and technologies of governmentality that influence the actions, activities and performed subjectivities of different figures within the policy world. Importantly, it is the three points listed above that foreshadow the way a policy might pulse — the ways and means by which that policy moves in and through the policy world assemblage — from Canberra to remote communities, which in turn, can significantly impact the success or failure in the policy achieving its results.

I contend that when knowledge is considered in the wider context of the Indigenous policy world a clearer understanding is gained of the moments where mismatches occur between policy visions articulated in Canberra and the lived experience of those policies by Indigenous Australians. This has produced a unique perspective that highlights important contradictions in the way a Regime of Truth is constructed and presented as having the power to change Indigenous behaviour and livelihoods, and yet is failing or forestalling to achieve the desired results on the ground. The Regime of Truth is founded upon the assumption that Indigenous people are getting in their own way of being able to experience all that is expressed in it, in particular, attaining equality and experiencing the 'good life'. However, the inherent paradox is that in instances, such as the housing example in this conclusion, it appears as the reverse: it

is parliamentarians and governments who can adversely impact upon whether the Regime of Truth has the potential to be realised on the ground.

The discussion in this Conclusion also points to potential grey areas inherent to the Regime of the Truth and the presentation of Indigenous subjectivity when we consider the unique position of Senator Peris. She is entangled both in the *creation* of an ideal Indigenous subjectivity (as a parliamentarian) and *performance* of an Indigenous subjectivity (as an Indigenous woman). In this circumstance, what the Regime of Truth states is 'ideal' and what it means to identify as 'Indigenous' are questions that are raised when considering the position of an Indigenous parliamentarian such as Senator Peris. For instance, is Peris an exemplar of the 'ideal Indigenous subjectivity' that is articulated in the Regime of Truth? She is educated, she is successfully employed, her children attend school, and she presumably either owns her own home or lives in a home with just her immediate family. Peris thus presents an important conundrum: the 'ideal' Indigenous subjectivity that Canberra created policies seek to establish simultaneously co-exist with similar Indigenous subjectivities that are already being realised and performed. Consequently, the Regime of Truth concerning Aboriginality that Canberra parliamentarians present in the parliamentary debates, and embody in policies, may not be as straightforward or defined as it appears. These are points that lay outside the scope of this thesis but are interesting to consider.

Further, it is essential to note that the Regime of Truth I identify in this thesis is created in *Commonwealth* parliamentary debates and implemented through *Commonwealth* policies. It is worth considering the possibility that other parliamentary Regimes of Truth may co-exist alongside, or in contrast to, the Commonwealth's Regime. For instance, if we take the Northern Territory parliament as an example, there are Indigenous politicians who may also be experiencing a conflict, tension or entangled as they navigate the creation and performance of Indigenous subjectivity. Such considerations add a potential layer of complexity to this policy world and are worth exploration in future research.

This mismatch between policy knowledge and policy practice is not exclusive to the Regime of Truth. Policy and program knowledge that is known to senior public servants (in their backstage spaces, where the vigilance of this pursuit of knowledge stems from the influence of the Estimates Test) can be withheld or used selectively when navigating the political games at Senate Estimates. Similar to the senior public servants at Estimates, Commonwealth Ombudsman staff on outreach trips to remote Indigenous communities can get caught up in performing other sets of knowledge — such as attempting to 'hold it together' and 'toe the line' to maintain an unblemished independent and impartial identity — or can be restricted by

the reach and terms of their jurisdiction, resulting in information about Indigenous Australians, policy or programs remaining un-investigated.¹⁵⁷ Further, the knowledge that is presented in the Ombudsman's Annual Reports and investigation reports does not seem to have a powerful enough impact upon public administration as repeated problems, such as the communication of policy and programs, continues to characterise the relationship between the government and remote Indigenous Australians.

In a similar vein, the Resident Service Providers who appear as bearers of local knowledge, such as the police and clinic manager in Chapter Five, can also contradict and confuse the relationship between policy knowledge and practice. In their attempts to accumulate the capital associated with the identity of 'bearer of local knowledge', Resident Service Providers can overlook the need to take precautions to ensure that Indigenous locals understand the policies that affect their lives. To question Indigenous Australians, or to question the way they treat Indigenous Australians, could be viewed as contradicting their firm stance of 'knowing'; knowing what Indigenous locals want, how they should be treated and what is in their best interests.

Ultimately, this thesis does not seek to provide policy 'answers' or 'solutions' to the disadvantages and inequities that characterise the contrasting life outcomes between remote Indigenous Australians and other Australians. Instead, its aim is to contribute towards the production of a different lens with which anthropologists can view and begin to research the "cultural borderlands", the arenas of interaction and interchange between Indigenous persons and Whitefellas" within the Indigenous policy world (Cowlshaw 2003: 11). Thus, with this unique way of viewing policy we are better positioned to distil a *part* of the messiness that tends to characterise Indigenous policy, and attune ourselves to the different formations of knowledge, truth, power and governance that can complicate its movement. This is achieved when we view Indigenous policy as a world, and both draw attention to and map the movements of, the players who animate the pulse of this world — a pulse that can be expressed as actions, activities, subjectivities and forms of knowledge. Applying this

¹⁵⁷ For example, in Community Z an Indigenous Centrelink agent who resides in the community was explaining to the Ombudsman staff during outreach the futility of form-filling in this community. He pointed to a Centrelink form that recipients of Centrelink benefits are required to fill out on a fortnightly basis. The form is supposed to capture the efforts the applicant has made to apply for, and secure, paid employment. The Centrelink agent had filled out and laminated a sample of the form to aid beneficiaries in knowing how to fill out the form. However, shaking his head in frustration, he explained how he gets many of these forms handed to him with the beneficiary having literally copied, word-for-word, the laminated sample. This includes the space where the form asks for the beneficiary's name, and instead of writing 'Jane Brown', the person will write, '[YOUR NAME HERE]', as is printed on the sample form. This issue was not something the staff identified as a fruitful complaint case to investigate, yet, it highlights important insights into how Indigenous Australians can interpret and engage with bureaucratic processes.

perspective and the methods used in this thesis to other policy figures and contexts within the Indigenous policy world will contribute to this important endeavour of understanding and expanding our view of the “cultural borderlands” of Indigenous policy and further untangling the complexities and messiness that have characterised this world to date.

Appendix A: Complaints not investigated by the Commonwealth Ombudsman

Complaint One	The complainant wanted a mobile tower to be constructed for her community so they could use mobile services. There is no Commonwealth policy pertaining to mobile towers, so the Ombudsman did not have the jurisdiction to intervene. The complainant was provided with advice about how she could lodge an application for a tower on behalf of her community and was also informed about what the Government Engagement Co-ordinator (a government appointed person whose main role is to liaise between the community and government services) has been doing to progress this issue.
Complaint Two	This Resident Service Provider complainant was having frequent disputes with another service provider group in the community over use of shared kitchen facilities. The complainant wanted a separate space or kitchen to work in. When the Ombudsman made the initial assessment of this case the staff member discovered that the responsible Commonwealth department that funded this Resident Service Providers service were aware of the issue and were attempting to find solutions to resolve the dispute.
Complainant Three	This complainant was on compulsory Income Management but does not want to be. She reports that she had an interview with Centrelink to cease being on Income Management and that she was offended by the interviewer implying that she was not, and cannot, take care of her children; which is why she was on Income Management. The outcome the complainant sought was to be taken off Income Management. Before opening this complaint into a formal investigation case Ombudsman staff phoned Centrelink to get a better understanding of why the complainant was on Income Management. As a result of this phone call, the Ombudsman decided they would not be able to investigate the complaint because there was no administrative error. The staff informed the complainant that she was on compulsory Income Management because her children were not participating in "approved activities." The Ombudsman staff then learnt from the complainant that in Terms 3 and 4 of the school year she and her children were travelling between communities and her children were not regularly attending school. She was advised that she could reapply for an exemption with the results of her children's participation in approved activities

	for Terms 4 and the following year's Term 1. The Ombudsman staff also provided the complainant with further information relating to these issues and to help her towards achieving her desired outcome of not being on Income Management in the near future.
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Appendix B: Complaints investigated by the Commonwealth Ombudsman

Complainant Four	Two community members complained on behalf of the community about the local store selling rotten food and food past its use by date. The complainants wanted the store to stop selling poor quality food and for the non-Indigenous store manager to listen to the store committee (consisting of Indigenous locals). The Ombudsman believed they could provide the complainants with a better understanding of how the Department would investigate these types of complaints. Because the licensing of some stores was the responsibility of a Commonwealth department this was within the jurisdiction of the Ombudsman to investigate, and the Ombudsman staff believed they could provide the complainants with a satisfactory outcome. The Department responded to the Ombudsman's investigation by providing information about how stores are licensed and how the Department monitors stores. They provided information about how remote store visits are conducted and how they would handle a complaint such as this one. The Department advised that they had not received any complaints from this community about this store. As an outcome for the complainants, the Department responded that they would raise the risk rating of this community store and would undertake quarterly, as opposed to annual, monitoring visits. The Department also raised the issues with the licensing holder management and the Northern Territory Department of Health who would now send out an Environmental Health Officer to the community. Additionally, the store manager was able to provide some plausible reasons for why stock might have been rotten or passed its used by date, including issues with supplies coming in from Darwin and issues with the stores freezers.
Complainant Five	The complainant had numerous Centrelink debts but was unsure how he had incurred these and could find no explanation. The complainant wanted to know the amount of the debts, the reasons he had incurred them and how to avoid receiving debts in the future. The Ombudsman thought a reasonable outcome would be for Centrelink to explain the current details of his debts and the reporting requirements the complainant was obliged to undertake in order to ensure he would not incur anymore. The Ombudsman could investigate this complaint because Centrelink falls within their jurisdiction and also because the Ombudsman had observed that Centrelink's processes for connecting with and informing Indigenous customers of

	their obligations and responsibilities when receiving certain welfare payments often seemed inadequate. The agency replied that they had been communicating with the complainant about his requirement to report his wife's income and acknowledged that the complainant did not seem to understand this obligation. They had placed him on a fortnightly notification system whereby the complainant received a phone call and letter to remind him of his obligations. The Ombudsman analysis of the agency's response was that the strategies put in place to remind the complainant seemed more suitable for customers in an urban setting. For example, the Ombudsman staff had noticed that there was undelivered mail waiting at the shire council offices that were dated months back, bringing into question the reliability of the mail service in remote locations. The Ombudsman staff were also concerned that the agency had not talked with the customer about any potential barriers to his reporting of his wife's income. It appeared that the customer either did not understand his obligations or could not report frequently for some other reason evidenced by the continuous debts the customer was incurring. Although administratively the agency was not at fault because the customer had incurred legitimate debts, the Ombudsman staff did see an opportunity to send the agency comments and recommendations (as per Section 12(4) of the <i>Commonwealth Ombudsman Act 1976</i>) for improvement of their services to remote clients. The Ombudsman staff saw this complaint as an opportunity for the agency to rethink their strategies for communicating with and informing Indigenous clients, so that issues like this would not occur again in the future. Additionally, if the Ombudsman continued to be concerned about this issue they could request to follow up with the agency three to six months later to see how the complainant was getting on.
Complainant Six	The complainant had numerous Centrelink debts in relation to his work with the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) but did not know what for. The outcome he sought was to understand why he had this debt. The Ombudsman thought a reasonable outcome would be for Centrelink to provide more information regarding why the complainant had these debts. Centrelink responded that the complainant only had one debt and provided documentation to prove this. Upon reviewing this documentation the Ombudsman investigation officer noticed that it took Centrelink 12 months to raise the debt with the complainant. The

	Ombudsman staff saw this complaint as an opportunity to learn more about how the main Commonwealth department and Centrelink work together administratively in relation to CDEP. Upon further pursuit of this case the investigation officer discovered that when the original debt was incurred it was given the incorrect region code, so it did not go straight to the Indigenous Debt Management Team (Debt Team). The Debt Team realised this error only when they processed another debt for this complainant. Moreover, the investigation officer discovered that the Debt Team did not follow all the required processes and procedures, such as consulting with CDEP. As a result of this investigation the complainant's debt was waived and Centrelink were considering applying the same outcome to other clients who may have experienced the same error, yet had not made a formal complaint with the Ombudsman. When I last spoke with staff about this complaint I was informed that they were composing an "issues paper" to send to the Department of Human Services, the main department responsible for Centrelink and CDEP. This letter would outline concerns the investigation officer had, such as: how Centrelink were handling Indigenous debt management, whether they were following proper procedures when encountering Indigenous debts, and whether the Debt Team's strategies and procedures were indeed working effectively. Further, the Ombudsman staff member wanted to highlight to the Department that in this case, the Indigenous complainant had done all that he could to avoid incurring debts, including reporting frequently to Centrelink concerning his participation in CDEP. This would be an opportunity for the Ombudsman Office to gather more information about this type of debt issue, and also brings into question broader debt issues that staff informed me could initiate a broader investigation report.
Complainant Seven	Full details of this complaint is provided in Chapter Four.
Complainant Eight	The complainant wanted to receive the disability pension but was informed by Centrelink that she did not have enough points to be eligible. The Ombudsman staff thought that they might be able to achieve one of the following possible solutions: seek a review from Centrelink, seek a different payment or make

	adjustments to the complainant's Income Management allocations to provide her with more disposable income. In response to the Ombudsman's questions, Centrelink advised the Ombudsman investigation officer that their original decision was administratively correct: the complainant did not have enough points to go on the disability pension. Centrelink provided additional information, including documentation showing the complainant was on voluntary Income Management and that \$50.00 was being withheld due to previous overpayments and other debts the complainant had incurred. The Ombudsman investigation officer recognised that the issue of incurring frequent Centrelink debts was one that the Office could investigate. They responded to Centrelink with a further set of questions, including asking for information concerning how the debts arose, what they were for and what sort of communications Centrelink had engaged in with the complainant about her responsibilities concerning the debts. When the Ombudsman staff had spoken with the complainant on outreach she had reported that she did not know she had debts and did not know what they would be for. The result of this investigation was that Centrelink advised the Ombudsman that they would provide more details to the complainant as to the nature and cause of the debts. Centrelink were also attempting to set up a face-to-face meeting with the complainant to outline her obligations and responsibilities for reporting her income so that she could avoid incurring debts in the future.
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Appendix C: List of de-identified interviews and personal communication

Interviews and personal communication with Resident Service Providers in remote communities in the Top End of the Northern Territory:*

Clinic Manager's Wife. Interview by author. In person. Top End of the Northern Territory, 20 July 2013.

Clinic Manager. Interview by author. In person. Top End of the Northern Territory, 19 and 20 July 2013.

Clinic Manager Two. Interview by author. In person. Top End of the Northern Territory, 9 April 2014.

Nurse. Interview by author. In person. Top End of the Northern Territory, 21 July 2013.

Police Officer One. Interview by author. In person. Top End of the Northern Territory, 2 April 2014.

Police Officer Two. Interview by author. In person. Top End of the Northern Territory, 18 July 2013.

Police Officer Three. Interview by author. In person. Top End of the Northern Territory, 18 July 2013.

Police Officer Four. Meeting with the Commonwealth Ombudsman. In person. Top End of the Northern Territory, 12 March 2013.

Police Officer Five. Meeting with the Commonwealth Ombudsman. In person. Top End of the Northern Territory, 12 March 2013.

Resident Service Provider. Personal communication with author. Email. 2 and 4 November 2015.

School Principal One. Interview by author. In person. Top End of the Northern Territory, 20 July 2013.

School Principal Two. Meeting with the Commonwealth Ombudsman. In person. Top End of the Northern Territory, 14 March 2013.

Shire Manager. Interview by author. In person. Top End of the Northern Territory, 11 April 2014.

*Note: Included in this list are only the interviews with Resident Service Providers that I have directly quoted in this thesis.

A para-site workshop held in the conference room of the Commonwealth Ombudsman's Office in Canberra with employees who have experience conducting remote Indigenous outreach clinics:

Employee One. Interview by author. In person. Canberra, 10 December 2013.

Employee Two. Interview by author. In person. Canberra, 10 December 2013.

Employee Three. Interview by author. In person. Canberra, 10 December 2013.

Employee Four. Interview by author. In person. Canberra, 10 December 2013.

Employee Five. Interview by author. In person. Canberra, 10 December 2013.

Follow-up interviews and personal communication with employees from the Commonwealth Ombudsman's Office:

Employee One. Interview by author. In person. Canberra, 6 March 2015.

Employee Two. Interview by author. Telephone. 11 March 2015.

Employee Three. Interview by author. In person. Canberra, 2015.

Employee Four. Interview by author. Telephone. 12 March 2015.

Employee Six. Personal communication with author. In person. Canberra, 7 March 2013.

Para-site interviews with individual senior public servants who appear before Senate Estimates Committees:

Public Servant One. Interview by author. In person. Canberra, 17 February 2015.

Public Servant Two. Interview by author. In person. Canberra, 26 February 2015.

Public Servant Three. Interview by author. In person. Canberra, 3 March 2015.

Public Servant Four. Interview by author. Telephone. 13 March 2015.

Public Servant Five. Interview by author. Telephone. 18 March 2015.

Public Servant Six. Interview by author. In person. Canberra, 27 March 2015.

Public Servant Seven. Interview by author. In person. Canberra, 20 March 2015.

Public Servant Eight. Interview by author. In person. 24 March 2015.

Public Servant Nine. Interview by author. Telephone. 27 March, 2015.

Public Servant Ten. Interview by author. Email. 6 May 2015.

Public Servant Eleven. Interview by author. Telephone. 30 March 2015.

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