

ABORIGINAL WOMEN;
GENDER AND EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS
IN CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIA

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PERMISSION

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation arises from research I conducted while on a year's placement study from August 1984 at the Australian National University's North Australia Research Unit in Darwin, as part of a B.Sc. in Sociology at the University of Bath.

In the first few weeks of my placement I joined a research team interviewing Aboriginal people about their housing needs in Katherine, about 500 kilometres south of Darwin. Shortly afterwards I was given the valuable experience of visiting two remote Aboriginal communities to help conduct research on the forthcoming Federal election. The opportunity to visit Aboriginal communities, to which access is restricted and for which permission must be sought, provided some small insight into conditions which prevail on settlements in rural areas.

My own research was concerned with Aboriginal employment in Darwin, and focussed on the enabling factors and constraints of Aboriginal participation in the urban labour market. This was an opportunity of carrying out some original research, as none had previously been undertaken on Aboriginal employment in the city.

NARU's Field Director, Dr. Peter Loveday obtained funding from both the Federal Government's Bureau of Labour Market Research and the Northern Territory Government for the research in Darwin and a comparative study

INTRODUCTION

This paper is about Australian Aboriginal women and their position in contemporary Australian society. It centres on changes in government policies towards Aborigines and the implications of these changes for women in the labour market, their structural relationship to Aboriginal men and to white society.

The focus throughout is on Aboriginal women and employment in the Northern Territory, an area with the largest percentage of Aborigines in the population. Yet I would suggest that the conclusions drawn are equally applicable to Australia as a whole.

The great majority of Aboriginal people live outside the major urban areas, and over forty per cent live in small country towns and remote areas with populations of less than 1000 people. Today access is restricted to many self-managed Aboriginal communities which lie in reserve areas. Many were formerly government or mission stations, established to discourage the Aboriginal hunter-gatherer way of life and to promote, and in some cases enforce, Aboriginal settlement.

Studies of Aborigines in the workforce are unusual, mainly because most work which relates to Aborigines and the labour market are concerned with Aboriginal unemployment rather than with their employment. Aboriginal unemployment in Australia is five times higher than unemployment for non-Aborigines and in comparative terms, Aboriginal poverty is high. Many relevant policy studies concerned with the

alleviation of poverty focus on the need for the provision of employment for Aboriginal people. This is equally true for Aborigines who live in remote communities and for those who live in the context of what can be called mainstream Australia - essentially a white urban society.

Yet little attention has been given to the position of Aboriginal people in the urban workforce, and still less to Aboriginal womens' employment. Studies which have considered Aboriginal labour have tended to focus on low wages and poor conditions, particularly in the pastoral and mining industries, neither of which could be described as urban employment.

On the other hand, studies which focus on the increasing number of Aboriginal people who have moved to Australia's towns and cities document their socio-economic circumstances, centering around issues such as housing, health and unemployment. These works have been carried out in the southern cities, but not in the Northern Territory's capital, Darwin.

Informed opinion generally agrees that great improvements in the last twenty years or so have resulted in Aboriginal women faring rather better than their male counterparts. It is said that many Aboriginal women who work in the cities hold the status of having 'respectable' jobs in offices, working as telephonists, typists and clerks. In contrast, Aboriginal men - if they have a job at all - are more likely to be employed as labourers.

My own research confirmed that this was indeed the case in Darwin. Most Aboriginal men who had a job were unskilled or semi-skilled manual workers, and most Aboriginal women were office workers. The study showed that few business firms employed Aborigines, who were for the most part employed in the public sector.

I find it significant and surprising that while there are explanations for the low socio-economic positions of Aborigines in contemporary Australia, most of which revolve around the issues of employment and unemployment, there are no explanations for the differences between them and their relations to white society.

This paper aims to fill this gap and make an original contribution to the literature by considering relations between Aboriginal women and men, and the particular articulation between Aboriginal women and 'mainstream' Australia. In examining these relations, I fully recognise that they do not operate in a vacuum. They are moulded, developed and transformed over time, and it is important to acknowledge the key part that government policies play in such developments. It is equally important to recognise that changes in official policy targetted toward particular groups in society may not necessarily result in similar outcomes for the men and women who make up those groups.

Over the last three decades policies directed towards the assimilation and intregation of Aborigines into white Australia have been replaced by current policies directed at Aboriginal self-management and self-determination. Although assimilation is now decried as ethnocentric, I

will argue that assimilation has been the price that 'successful' Aboriginal women in the city have had to pay, and that conversely self-management now hailed as a major innovation, is for most women living in Aboriginal communities, little more than rhetoric. Years of contact with white patriarchal society has eroded Aboriginal women's traditional autonomy and independence within their own society, and has generated institutional dependency on white society, which self-management of Aboriginal communities has done little to remedy.

Although policies have shifted in three stages from the mid 1950s, from assimilation, to integration, to self-management, the three themes continue to exist side by side in the context of Aboriginal women's relation to white Australia. The ideology of white male supremacy may have been challenged in recent years, but current policies merely reinforce the reproduction of patriarchal relations imposed on Aboriginal society.

This paper is in four sections, the first of which identifies strands of thinking in the academic literature and considers its limitations. As the published work on Aborigines in the urban workforce is so limited, I have considered it necessary to include some unpublished works. And since the subject is so closely interrelated with other aspects of Aboriginal affairs, I have also included works that while not directly concerned with Aboriginal employment, nonetheless impinge on the topic in one way or the other.

Changes in government policies towards Aborigines from the early days of white settlement to the present are documented in the second section, and these are related to changes in Aboriginal employment in the Northern Territory.

The third section draws on a current debate within Australian anthropological circles, concerned with assessing the role of Aboriginal women in traditional society. The section considers the impact of self-management policies on the employment of women in Aboriginal communities, and by using my own research findings, assesses the position of Aboriginal women in the city workforce. Parallels are drawn between these women and 'successful' Aboriginal women in the nineteenth century, and the view that Aboriginal women have fared better than their male counterparts is challenged.

The final section considers the articulation of government policies with employment relations and with gender relations between different groups of Aboriginal women. It is argued that cleavages created and reinforced by earlier policies have not been remedied by the current policy of Aboriginal self-determination.

While white patriarchal values imposed on Aboriginal society remain dominant, the struggle for equal rights - both as women and as Aborigines - has provided common ground for women of differing class and regional experiences. It is concluded that emerging opportunities for Aboriginal women to experience an exchange of views and comparison of gender and class relations may pave the way for a new solidarity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following overview of the literature excludes works written by Aborigines themselves. If I have any justification for this major omission, it is that I wish to present an analysis of official and academic works centering on Aboriginal employment, which is seen by many as the key solution to Aboriginal poverty. Literature written by Aboriginal people has only recently emerged and is largely made up of personal accounts, often autobiographical in nature. Although references are made to some Aboriginal writers in the main body of the text, I hope my reasons will be properly understood if they are excluded in this section.

The last twenty years has seen a burgeoning interest in Aboriginal affairs, and I have limited this discussion to literature published within the last two decades. Current concern over the high levels of Aboriginal unemployment means that much academic work focusses on unemployment and its consequences, rather than on the position of Aborigines in the workforce. Where Aboriginal employment has been addressed, it has largely centred around mining and pastoralism, the major industries in the Northern Territory. Little attention has been directed at Aborigines in the the urban workforce, and as far as I am aware, until my research in 1985 no research had been conducted on Aboriginal participation in the urban workforce in the Northern Territory.

Where the literature has been concerned with urban dwellers, the focus has most frequently centred around the issues of high levels of Aboriginal unemployment, poor housing conditions and the need for improved provision of services such as health and education to Aboriginal people.

Similarly the specific position of Aboriginal women in the workforce has received scant attention. In recent years Australian research on the labour market (in common with labour market research in Britain and the United States) has turned to a consideration of the place occupied by women and attention is increasingly being given to dual labour market theories to explain gender segregation (Sams, 1984).

However, many works on gender segregation in the workforce conflate women into a single group without acknowledging that there are class and racial dimensions which impinge on the position of women in Australian society'. In other cases, the specific historical conditions which have moulded the contemporary position of Aboriginal women are subsumed within a framework of 'ethnic minorities' (Storer and Hargraves, 1979).

If Australian labour market research has been colour-blind, much Australian anthropology has been remarkably gender-blind. Until recently anthropological work on Aboriginal culture has overlooked or marginalised the roles played by women in both ceremonial and economic life. There is currently a debate within Australian anthropology concerning women's autonomy in traditional society. This has important implications for my discussion of contemporary relations between

Aboriginal men and women and their differing relations to white Australia, and I shall return to this area in a later section.

It seems to me that it is possible to identify strands of thinking in the contemporary literature, which I have somewhat arbitrarily divided into three main approaches.

Firstly, what I have termed a 'social welfare' approach, which arises from a number of disciplines, including history, anthropology, geography and sociology, and is frequently more descriptive than explanatory. Secondly, the 'economistic' approach, which is generally policy-orientated towards the reduction of Aboriginal unemployment levels and the development of the Aboriginal reserves. Thirdly, there are some more theoretical approaches, some of which are directed towards policy-making and stem from the 'culture of poverty' thesis, and other, more radical approaches which examine the relations between Aboriginal society and Australian capitalist society.

THE 'SOCIAL WELFARE' APPROACH

It was during the late 1950s and early 1960s that areas of the Australian social sciences other than anthropology became interested in Aborigines as a social group. The Australian Social Sciences Research Council funded an 'Aborigines Project' in the mid 1960s. This resulted in Rowley's (1970) major work, a trilogy which described the poor social and economic positions of Aborigines. Attention was drawn

to the plight of urban Aborigines throughout Australia, as well as those living in the rural areas.

Rowley was exceptional in focussing on a socio-historical - rather than cultural - explanation for the position of Aborigines in Australian society. Drawing upon the history of colonial administration, he was highly critical of former and current official strategies, which at the time remained committed to the 'white Australia' policy. He was particularly concerned with the need for government policies that would help integrate Aborigines into the Australian community, and concludes 'The real question is whether the *logic of welfare* or the prejudice of white Australia is to prevail'(my italics).

Stevens' (1964, 1971, 1972, 1981) work on Aboriginal labour in the pastoral and mining industries in Northern Australia provides an overview of the role of Aborigines in the employment market from the days of British colonialism. He particularly condemns the white administration for their failure, over a period of fifteen years, to implement provisions by which Aboriginal cattle workers could receive higher rates of pay.

Continuing Stevens' work, an unpublished MA thesis produced in 1975 by Hilliker documents the history of Aboriginal wage policy in the Northern Territory's pastoral industry. Hilliker makes the key point that the economic development of the Northern Territory was seen as via private industry, in particular the pastoral industry, and as a result of this the interests of cattle station owners were given priority

Criticisms of government, private industry and trade unions are made by Rogers (1973) and Cousins (1985) in their work on Aboriginal employment in the mining industry. Concerned that equal employment opportunities should be provided for Aborigines, Rogers recommends that mining companies should be required to employ one Aborigine for each white employee until at least 50 per cent of all employees in the industry's workforce are Aborigines. Neither Rogers nor Cousins address the issue of whether Aboriginal people themselves want mining jobs².

Young's (1983) comparative study of income and employment for women in three remote communities in the Northern Territory highlights the scarcity of opportunities and the fact that women are rarely recommended for positions of responsibility. She notes the lack of official consultation with women about their economic needs and their dependence on government funding for support. Her focus on Aboriginal town dwellers in New South Wales (Young, 1982), is based largely on Rowley's empirical work in 1965 and 1980. She provides an overview of the socio-economic conditions of urban Aborigines, pointing out that poor housing, health and education affects participation in the labour force. Young considers that without adequate resources geared to their specific needs, Aborigines find it difficult to break out of the circle of poverty, which is reflected by the high levels of Aboriginal unemployment.

Similarly, work based on surveys over a period of fourteen years in Adelaide by Gale and Wundersitz (1982) shows that Aborigines in the workforce are concentrated at the lower end of the job market, with an

overall high reliance on unemployment or other state benefits. They make the point that Aborigines in Adelaide are generally worse off economically now than they were when the first major migrations to the cities occurred during the days of full employment in the 1950s. Kinship networks which remain prevalent among Aborigines when they move to a city environment are emphasised by both Gale and by Young.

The family network is a theme taken up by Collman in an unpublished PhD. thesis written in 1979. Describing the access of urban fringe dwellers in central Australia to the Northern Territory pastoral industry, Collman notes the importance of links through kinsmen, and the stress laid by prospective employers on a family's reputation of 'proper motivation' for paid employment. He further argues that the kinship idiom is a key factor in the relationship between Aboriginal cattle workers and their white bosses. Collman is notable for the fact that he acknowledges the different perspectives held by Aboriginal men and women toward pastoral work, which he argues is largely because of the special relationship a man must develop with a boss.

Loveday's (1985) survey of Aboriginal employment in a country town in the Northern Territory, carried out in parallel to my own research, shows that Aboriginal people want work and are prepared to move permanently in search of it. Nevertheless, although they constitute one third of the town's population, Aborigines constitute little more than one-tenth of full time employees. Borrowing economic terminology, Loveday suggests that more attention should be drawn to the 'demand'

side of the employment market, in other words, employers' demand for Aboriginal labour.

THE ECONOMIC APPROACH

A collation of empirical research on Aborigines in Australia is presented by economists Altman and Nieuwenhuysen (1979). The data presented focusses on areas such as unemployment, health, housing and education. Strongly advocating economic growth, they equate improvements in Aboriginal health and education with increased productivity, and emphasise the need for Aboriginal participation in the labour force.

The history and the failure of schemes designed to reduce Aboriginal unemployment is considered by Cousins and Nieuwenhuysen (1983). They argue that the subsequent failure of these schemes has been due to lack of interest on the part of both the government and industry. Again advocating economic development, Cousins and Nieuwenhuysen consider that any reduction in Aboriginal poverty is unlikely without employment growth within the Aboriginal communities themselves.

Stanley (1985) takes the point of the development of Aboriginal communities a step further by examining the viability of the economic resources available. He considers that land is a minor resource, as he argues that much Aboriginal land is almost useless. He further points out that communities cannot compete with low-labour imported goods, and that few Aboriginal enterprises can generate enough capital for expansion let alone other activities. Unlike most economists, who seem

to consider economic growth is viable, Stanley takes a pessimistic view and he concludes that the realistic prognosis for the development of Aboriginal communities is not good.

THEORETICAL APPROACHES

The Culture of Poverty

For many policy makers Aboriginal employment is the key to breaking the vicious circle of poverty into which many Aboriginal people are locked. Much of the literature from the late 1960s is influenced by the 'culture of poverty'³ thesis (Lewis, 1966).

Drawing directly on Lewis' work, Schapper (1969) looking at the needs of Aborigines, emphasised the psychological effects of the 'culture of poverty'. His work identifies the necessity of freedom from want, disease, ignorance, squalor and, crucially idleness as central to 'Aboriginal advancement'.

At worst, such an approach places the blame for Aboriginal poverty squarely on Aborigines themselves. One such example is the work undertaken for the Commission of Inquiry into Poverty by Hill (1975) who studied two country towns in Western Australia. Hill argues that Aboriginal poverty has come about through the mispending of income and 'lack of motivation to help themselves.'

More recent radical approaches have been developed which examine relations between Aborigines and white society.

Hartwig (1978) uses the concept of 'internal colonialism' developed by Harold Wolpe (1975) in relation to South Africa as a model for the Australian situation. Hartwig argues that a differentiation between racial and class exploitation needs to be made, and highlights differences between South Africa and Australia. For Wolpe's model of internal colonialism in South Africa shows the need of that country to conserve the non-capitalist mode of production to further its own interests. By contrast, internal colonialism in Australia has a differing need, Hartwig argues, for the (then current) Australian assimilation policy reflected the aim of dissolving the Aboriginal mode of production (traditionally a hunter-gatherer economy) in northern Australia.

Institutional Dependency

Drakakis-Smith (1983) has recently produced some further work on this theme, with the emphasis on the consumption, rather than the productive role of the Aboriginal mode of production. He argues that consumption of the products of white capitalist society has increased Aboriginal dependency and has institutionalised Aborigines rather than giving them the freedom of self-determination. He maintains that Aboriginal-white relations have developed in distinct stages, the first and second stages being the appropriation of Aboriginal land and of Aboriginal

labour. The dependency which has now developed marks a third stage in Aboriginal-white capitalist relations.

Stanley (1985) states his aim is to examine how closely large Aboriginal communities follow the 'underdeveloped country' paradigm from comparative theoretical work. He concludes that although there are some similarities between Aborigines in communities and people in the Third World, at least the latter have some degree of control over their own destinies, whereas Aborigines are largely dependant on white society. However, by positing control over their destinies of Third World countries in his analysis, Stanley takes no account of the influence of international capitalism on the Third World. In fact he makes no mention of factors outside the national economies, which is a glaring omission in a comparative analysis of this kind.

The institutional dependency of Aborigines is also raised by Thiele (1982) in his radical assessment of the history - and the failure - of the first Aboriginal cattle station. Thiele argues that the official policy of Aboriginal 'self-management' is in effect a way of reducing conflict and maintaining social control over Aborigines, in such a way that Aboriginal people unknowingly contribute to and reproduce their social and economic inequality. He argues that 'self-determination' within the context of European domination is a contradiction in terms.

In contrast to writers such as Stanley, Drakakis-Smith and Thiele, Alexander (1984) rejects the institutional dependency argument. Like Drakakis-Smith, he uses the consumption model but argues that Aborigines

It is true that Rowley (1970) documented the major differences and policy implications between what he called 'settled' and 'colonial' Australia. Similarly, Altman and Nieuwenhysen (1979) distinguish two basic geographic groups corresponding to 'settled' and 'remote' areas.

But this analysis is too simplistic for two reasons. Firstly, 'remote' Australia has pockets of urbanisation which to all intents and purposes are virtually indistinguishable from 'settled' Australia. Although geographically remote from other centres, suburban life in Alice Springs or Darwin appears remarkably similar to that in the southern cities. Many urban Aborigines have been through the mainstream Australian educational system, own their own homes in the suburbs, drive their children to school and themselves to work.

Secondly, there can be major differences in lifestyle between Aboriginal people who live in the same town. By no means do all urban Aborigines live a suburban life. Some may live in 'towns camps' which may be on land specifically set aside for Aborigines. In some cases lacking the facilities of modern urbanisation, their lifestyle comes closer to resembling those in the remote Aboriginal communities more than their neighbours in their suburban homes.

In terms of lifestyle variations, a more realistic division than 'remote' and 'settled' Australia would posit a continuum with those who have set up their own outstations at one end, and those who adopt suburban living at the other, with those living in town and fringe camps and Aboriginal communities lying along a line between these two poles.

In the same way as the literature is often misleading in conflating Aboriginal people I would argue that it can be misleading to ignore the conflict that can and does exist between them. Much of this has been a direct result of government intervention.

Government policies directed towards settlement have frequently resulted in inter-group tension. In contemporary Australia there remain over fifty different Aboriginal Languages, many of them still spoken as a mother tongue. Imposed settlement has meant, among other things, that members of various linguistic groups have been gathered together on land that is neither part of their traditional country nor connected with their dreaming. The Aboriginal relationship to the land is a complex one, with deep religious, philosophical and indeed psychological significance, and conflict can and does arise when differing groups are compelled to live in close proximity to each other.

Sometimes the situation can be eased by the positioning of dwelling-places. In this way people speaking the same language may be able to live far enough away from others to avoid clashes. If they are not fortunate enough to be settled on their own land, groups may be able to compromise by positioning their houses so that they face the direction of their traditional country⁵.

As young people are increasingly exposed to the trappings of European ways, attempts to adopt them may be a source of conflict between young and old. The wearing of makeup or the adoption of the current trend

for short hemlines is a current source of friction between some parents and daughters.

A more recent solution to the conflicts inherent in settlement life is the outstation movement referred to above. Increasing numbers of Aborigines are leaving settlements, most often in small family groups, to establish small camps in their own country. Thus they can escape the confines placed upon them by enforced settlement, and to return to a more traditionally-orientated way of life.

Today many people of mixed descent who have been brought up in a suburban environment and who may aspire to European values, may be dismissed as 'yellowfellas' by the more traditionally orientated people. Traditional values include knowledge of customary law, ceremonies of religious significance, and contain rules which govern relationships to the extent that some individuals may not address each other directly. Aborigines who uphold these values (which includes some who live in town camps) may feel contemptuous towards others who infringe these most basic rules and disparage their western-style 'success'. Indeed it is true to say that Aboriginal people who work for government agencies, may be as distrusted as white government officials.

Positive government policies in areas such as housing and employment have provided positive material benefit for those who identify themselves as Aborigines, and there has certainly been a growing confidence and a resurgence of Aboriginal pride over the last two decades. And yet there are some who see themselves primarily as

Australians, denying their Aboriginal heritage. Others, while not disavowing their Aboriginality, deny that there are any real differences between themselves and white Australians⁶.

Today there is a complex interplay in the relations of Aboriginal women to both white Australian society and to Aboriginal men. Aboriginal womens' access to the resources offered by mainstream Australia has been restricted by European perceptions of them as subordinate to men.

The anthropological literature and government officials alike have failed to acknowledge the importance of womens' traditional contribution to the maintenance of Aboriginal law,⁷ and Aboriginal men have capitalised on this failure. The marginalisation of some traditionally-orientated Aboriginal women *qua* women has led directly to their exclusion from the arena of contemporary white Australian politics⁸. Yet there are some urban Aboriginal women whose employment position put them at a relative advantage to their urban male counterparts.

The relationships between Aboriginal people, and relations between groups of Aborigines and white mainstream Australia have developed unevenly since the earliest days of white occupation. The failure of contemporary work to explore the contradictions and the tensions between relationships based on class, gender and linguistic group divisions is, I would argue, a serious weakness.

The point is not simply an academic one. For when policy decisions are based - or at least influenced - by serious studies of the position of Aborigines in Australian society, such a failure may well serve to reinforce these divisions and undermine prospects for Aboriginal solidarity.

CHANGES IN GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND THE EMPLOYMENT OF ABORIGINES IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

In the last section I highlighted what I see as shortcomings in the contemporary literature. I now aim to outline shifts in government policies towards Aborigines, their impact in creating and reinforcing divisions among Aborigines, and the implications of the policies for Aboriginal employment in the Northern Territory.

Policy during the nineteenth century was heavily influenced by the notion that Aborigines would inevitably become extinct in the face of superior white culture. Faced with ever-increasing attacks from European settlers as they fanned out across Australia and from imported diseases for which they had no resistance, Aboriginal numbers rapidly decreased. Although some Europeans saw this with regret, the inexorability of Aboriginal extinction was accepted, and it was considered that as Aborigines were unlikely ever to be able to contribute to society, the best that could be done was to 'soothe the pillow of a dying race'⁹. In effect this meant little more than rounding Aborigines up and keeping them together on settlements until the inevitable occurred. The tension and inter-group conflict created by such a policy was doubtless viewed by white administrators as part of this inevitable process.

This 'protectionist' policy resulted in legislation which governed almost every aspect of Aborigines' lives. The Aborigines Ordinance vested powerful control over the day to day living of Aboriginal people

in the Northern Territory Director of Welfare, Aborigines were made wards of the Director, which meant that as their legal guardian, he held any property belonging to them as trustee. His permission had first to be gained before any major moves, such as marriage or leaving a settlement, could take place. Upon lengthy bureaucratic procedures, exemptions could be made for individuals; the exemption certificate became known with contempt among Aborigines as the 'dog license'.

The expansion of the cattle industry into the Northern Territory from the beginning of the last century and the opening of goldfields in the Top End¹⁰ increasingly alienated Aboriginal land. Conflict arose as the needs of the settlers came into conflict with the needs of Aborigines, but by 1899 an official report noted that the "native men and women in and about Palmerston (now Darwin) were in a fair way of becoming good and useful workers;...up country and on the the goldfields where both men and women to some extent work for their living". However the same report stated that outside the boundaries of the more settled districts, relations between white pastoralists and Aborigines remained harsh.

Over the course of the next fifty years, pastoral stations were established throughout the Northern Territory and Aboriginal labour became the backbone of the cattle industry.

From Assimilation to Integration

During the 1930s figures were produced to a somewhat surprised administration, that showed that Aborigines were not dying out after

all. Mortalities had decreased, particularly among infants (although they remain to this day far higher than for other Australians) and the Aboriginal population was increasing.

Clearly the government had to think again. Although segregation of Aborigines on government and mission settlements had generated conflict among linguistic groups, with a diminishing population the matter was thought to be capable of ultimately resolving itself. However, the segregation of a growing population was seen as likely to produce future problems. It was finally agreed that if Aborigines were not becoming extinct, then they would eventually have to be assimilated into mainstream white Australian society. Assimilation was adopted as official policy at the Australian State and Federal conference of 1937.

It took the next fifteen years for assimilation to be translated into a more formal form. The policy document produced by the Native Welfare Meeting of Commonwealth and State Ministers held on 3rd and 4th September 1951 read;

"All Aborigines shall attain the same manner of living as other Australians, enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting the same responsibilities, observing the same customs, and being influenced by the same beliefs, hopes and loyalties."

One of the major influences in this more formal adoption of assimilation policy was undoubtedly the experience of World War II. Lacking in manpower, the Australian government had employed Aborigines in the war economy, and they had proved themselves willing and proficient workers. Europeans who had never encountered Aborigines before, but nevertheless

held the generally-accepted negative views about them, found themselves working alongside men as capable as themselves of doing a good job.

Later, to justify the delay in granting some rights to Aboriginal people, the administration was to argue: 'When war broke out in 1939 it disrupted all planning and accelerated the effect of new forces on the aborigines, so that from 1945 onwards *the aboriginal problem* became vastly more acute.' (My italics) Although reforms were being undertaken at this time, it seems clear that as far as policy-makers were concerned, it remained the Aborigines themselves who were seen as 'the problem'.

Until the end of World War II the pastoral industry had provided blankets and rations, but very little else in exchange for Aboriginal labour. This was despite the fact that the Aborigines Ordinance had written into law provisions for a minimum wage for Aborigines in the Northern Territory Cattle industry. The minimum was as little as a quarter of European wages, but even so it remain unpaid as often as not (Hillaker, 1975)

In the post-war era, as beef prices rose, the profit margins for pastoralists increased. Profits were also to be made out of the new welfare benefits introduced for non-employed Aboriginal station hands. Receipt of welfare cheques by pastoralists on behalf of Aborigines became known as 'nigger-farming', and it was reported in one case that a station had made a net profit of £10,000 in a year from welfare allowances¹².

The mid 1960s marked something of a watershed in Australia's thinking towards Aborigines. In 1963, the assimilation policy was reviewed and it was proposed that education for Aborigines should come within the general school system. It was also proposed that further encouragement should be given to nomadic Aborigines to settle. Two years later, the Native Welfare Conference modified the concept of assimilation. The official proposal was amended to read:

"The policy of assimilation seeks that all persons of Aboriginal descent will *choose* to attain a *similar* manner of living to that of other Australians and live as members of a single community - enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting the same responsibilities and influenced by the same hopes and loyalties as other Australians." (My italics)

The changes in the wording may be subtle, and it is probably true to say that the shift may have gone unnoticed among many Aborigines. Nevertheless the change marked a step forward in government thinking. Previously ethnocentric in the extreme, the recognition that cultures other than European might have something to contribute to Australian society were emerging. The concept of 'assimilation' had become one of 'integration'.

Assimilation and Integration policies and training for employment

From the end of world war II until the beginning of the 1960s Government efforts to encourage Aborigines onto settlements within the Northern Territory intensified. Some analysts believe that the primary motive among government circles for this encouragement was simply to keep Aborigines out of towns like Darwin and Alice (Altman, 1980). However,

it is fair to say that generally from the mid 1950s onwards, settlements became regarded as transitional to teach Aborigines European ways.

But it seems that this training did not include the European notion of a fair wage for a fair day's work. Cash wages were not paid to any Aborigines working on the government settlements. Free accommodation and rations were offered, together with a small amount of pocket money. In the Northern Territory in 1969, this amounted to \$7.20 a week.

This is not to say that before the war no official policies were directed at training any Aboriginal people. Even before the end of the last century it was considered that 'half-castes', by virtue of their part-European ancestry, might be capable of making some sort of contribution to society. Accordingly, efforts were made to 'rescue' them from the influences of Aboriginal life. In practise this meant the rounding up of 'half-caste' children from Aboriginal camps, forcibly removing from their mothers, and sending them off to mission stations¹³.

This practice was further encouraged by government subsidies as late as 1956 under the assimilation policy, with the introduction of a new scheme. This scheme was specifically designed to reach part-Aboriginal children living in the Northern Territory, and to transfer them to institutions in southern States, where they might learn 'suitable' trades or occupations¹⁴. This policy, entailing the categorization of Aborigines and the forced removal of one particular category led directly to the cleavages and divisions between rural dwellers and a new group of suburban 'yellowfellas'.

The introduction of an allowance payable under the Training Allowance Scheme introduced into the Northern Territory by the Federal government in 1969 meant some alleviation of hardship for many, for in the late 1960s no unemployment benefits were available to those living on Northern Territory missions or settlements. Considerable numbers of Aborigines drifted into the settlements from cattle stations, towns and bush communities, and by 1973 over 4,000 Aborigines in Northern Territory were employed under the scheme.

But if the object of the scheme was to provide training in useful skills and thus enable Aboriginal people to enter the labour force provided by the European economy, it was a failure. Few vocational skills training facilities had been provided, and there was a lack of properly skilled staff to carry out the training. The training allowance became a euphemism for low pay for low status work. At rates well below award wages¹⁵, the scheme was later to be condemned as a 'disguised form of handout' by a Senate Standing Committee (1975). The Training Allowance Scheme was terminated by Australia's Labour government in December 1973¹⁶.

The introduction of Self-Management and Self-Determination

Until 1967, Section 127 of the Federal Constitution had excluded Aborigines 'of full descent' from the national census counts. As members of the Australian population, one could argue, officially they simply did not exist. Section 51 (XXVI) had prohibited the Federal

Government from passing laws relating to Aborigines living in the Australian States. As a result of this prohibition, each State had its own legislation relating to Aborigines. The restrictions and constraints placed upon Aboriginal people therefore varied considerably, which caused great difficulties for Aborigines travelling from one State to another.

The referendum held in May 1967 sought among other things, public approval to change these clauses and the result was an overwhelming victory for the Federal government¹⁷. If the individual States felt threatened by the new powers of the Federal government, perhaps they felt even more so by the surge of expectancy among Aborigines that this was indeed the beginning of a new age.

A constant stream of events occurred between 1967 and 1972, among them the Gurindji claim to Daguragu, writs issued against a mining company and the Federal government by the Yirrkala people, and the setting up of the Aboriginal Embassy tent at Canberra. Aboriginal land rights had captured at least part of the public imagination and in 1971 at a Conference of Federal and State ministers, the Liberal Prime Minister McMahon argued that Aboriginal people should be helped to take an increasing part in the management of their own affairs.

1972 saw a new Labour government in power, committed to introducing more radical changes for Aborigines. A new Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs was established together with a National Aboriginal Consultative Committee was established to advise the Minister on policy.

An indication of the need for Aboriginal self-management was also muted by a Committee of Review on the Pastoral Industry in 1972. But it was evidently to be self-management only in so far as it conformed to the expectations of Europeans. For while it agreed that Aborigines should have a real say in the running of their own affairs, the report stated that they

"need to be led to understand the obligations this independence implies under the law and the penalties for non-observance and these conditions *will need to be policed.*"¹⁸ (My italics)

During the next few years, the new key words of 'self-management and 'self-determination' were introduced, replacing the concept of 'integration'. Government settlements and mission stations were to be become self-determining Aboriginal communities, deciding the pace and nature of their own future development.

An Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Bill was introduced by the Labour Government. It was agreed that Aboriginal Trust Funds should be given full title to all Northern Territory mission and reserve areas (with the exception of the Bagot reserve in Darwin) and that two Land Councils should be established in the Northern Territory to bargain for mining royalties.

Aboriginal hopes were high. But The Land Rights Bill did not allow for compensation to be given to lands that had already been alienated, and although they were given full title to their lands, provision was made for the right of veto by Aborigines to be overridden by insertion of a clause giving priority to the 'national interest'. The Act was passed in 1977. Explorations for uranium had been underway on Aboriginal land

in the Northern Territory, and despite protests the government decided that mining operations were in the 'national interest'. Today a thriving town has grown up around the Ranger Uranium mine at Jabiru.

It should be emphasised that for many years the development of the Northern Territory pastoral industry was regarded by the Federal administration as essential to the economic development of this vast expanse of territory. When it came to a showdown between Aboriginal and pastoral interests, Aboriginal interests were always the first to be compromised (Stevens, 1987).

The same was to remain true when major mining interests turned their attention towards the Northern Territory. Today pastoralism and gold-mining have declined¹⁹, but within the last two decades the mining of other minerals, notably bauxite and uranium, has become of greater significance, and the Nabalco and Ranger Uranium operations are now an important source of revenue.

At the time these mining operations were established, it was argued that they would bring wealth and prosperity to the area, and provide valuable opportunities for learning new skills to the local people through the provision of jobs. But this was not to be. Although it is true to say that jobs were made available, a survey carried out among mining companies over the two years 1967-1969 (Rogers, 1973), found that of Aboriginal workers, nearly 50 per cent were working in unskilled jobs. In the mining industry, these jobs are likely to be dusty, and dirty if not dangerous.

Policies directed at self-management have directly resulted in a small number of jobs being created in Aboriginal communities, in the council offices, and for the maintenance of the communities roads and buildings. But this policy, like its predecessors has also created and further widened cleavages between Aboriginal people. For kinship networks play an important part in traditionally-orientated Aboriginal life, and those selected for jobs by the community councils are likely to be members of the same family. Minority linguistic groups within a community may therefore find themselves more powerless as a result of self-management policies than they previously were.

It is also important to recognise that self-management has had more impact on the day to day lives of Aboriginal people living in settlements than it has on those who lives in towns and cities. For those living in suburban areas, the policy change may hold little real significance.

Government Employment

Throughout the Northern Territory there is little prospect of employment outside the urban areas. As most Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory live outside the towns, permanent employment possibilities for the majority are remote. Where Aborigines have been able to find work, they remain overwhelmingly concentrated at the lower end of the labour market.

Since the Northern Territory achieved self-government in 1977, a major expansion of the public service has taken place, and it is now a major employer in the Territory. As few Territorians had the necessary experience or qualifications for the more senior positions, a major recruitment program has introduced public servants from all over Australia into the Northern Territory public service.

Departments of both the Federal and Northern Territory governments operate in areas which bring them into contact with many Aborigines, and both areas of the public service recognise that they have a particular need to employ staff who communicate well with Aboriginal people. Increasingly, Aborigines are being recruited to fill those positions which provide an interface between government departments and their Aboriginal clients. Aboriginal health workers and teachers' aides are employed on the communities, and liason units with Aboriginal people acting as 'brokers' have been set up in areas such as Social Security and Employment.

In 1980 the then Chief Minister of the Northern Territory announced that positive measures would be taken to recruit Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory public service, and further promised that by the end of the decade, twenty percent of the Northern Territory public service workforce would be Aboriginal people. Controversy still exists about the numbers of Aboriginal people currently working in the Northern Territory public service, and positive steps to recruit Aborigines appear to be dependant on individual departments (Manuel, 1985b). But regardless of the numbers involved, it is true to say that most

Aboriginal public employees hold low level posts, such as manual labourers or routine office workers.

POLICY CHANGES AND WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

In this section I aim to outline the changes faced by Aboriginal women in the context of the contemporary Australian labour market. By drawing on my own and others' research I hope to show that shifts in government policy have had differing effects on groups of Aboriginal women. But it is important to recognise that changes do not operate in a vacuum, and I would like to relate these briefly to the position of women in Aboriginal society.

Women in the Traditional Aboriginal Economy

Until the last decade, most academic work on Aboriginal culture has been remarkably blind to the question of gender. The focus within anthropology has largely centred on the recording of what remained of 'contemporary stone age man' before 'he' and 'his' culture dissappeared completely. A notable early exception was anthropologist Phyllis Kaberry (1939), who was better able to grasp an understanding of gender relationships than most in her profession, and argued that there was equality among the sexes in Aboriginal society.

By pointing to this glaring omission, recent writings have redressed the imbalance, and have established that women played a significant part in traditional Aboriginal economic, religious and political culture. This is not to argue that Aboriginal society held no divisions of labour based on gender²⁰. But as independent producers and as

distributors of food, as the decision-makers in deciding where to camp, and when to move on, women exercised considerable power within Aboriginal culture at large. As partakers in their own rituals and ceremonies, exercising their rights and responsibilities for their own sites, women held power and autonomy from men (Bell, 1983). As women from Borroloola in the Northern Territory have explained:

'We talk for our hunting business, ceremony business. We used to go hunting, and feed the men too... And we having other ceremony, our own with the woman herself, that important nobody see... Men never used to boss over the woman. We are bosses ourselves...'21

The change from a hunter-gatherer lifestyle to one on a European-run settlement itself had a negative impact on the position of women within traditional Aboriginal society. The mass migration of European settlers and in particular the spread of pastoral stations was accompanied by the settlement of Aborigines. Ever-diminishing traditional hunting grounds were increasingly taken over as grazing ground by pastoralists. Encouraged, or in some cases forced, to settle in specific areas by government administrations, the Aborigines' ability to hunt and gather even their most basic foods was increasingly restricted.

Once their role as the chief suppliers of food was taken over by European suppliers, either via the cash economy or through the distribution of rations, women no longer held such a crucial position. White settlement in Australia in effect meant that as vital producers within the traditional economy, women were simply made redundant.

Aboriginal women in the contemporary economy

Much has been done to provide improvements in health and education in rural Aboriginal communities since the late 1960s and early 1970s. European specialists continue to run health clinics and schools, but with the growing recognition that Aboriginal involvement is desirable, employment opportunities in health and education, and the chance of greater economic status for some Aboriginal women in rural communities has been created.

The introduction of bilingual education in the Northern Territory has gone some way to returning to Aboriginal women their traditional role as educators (Young, 1983). There has been a growing recognition among European educationalists that women as parents play an important part in the development of their children's education. Consequently some Aboriginal women are now successfully employed as teachers and teachers' aides, educating the children in their own language and giving them an education and pride in their traditional values and skills.

The Aboriginal Health Worker Programme introduced early in the 1970s, provides training through an apprenticeship system of teaching. Trainees receive practical instruction working alongside nursing sisters, and also attend short courses at centralised Training Centres. Many Aboriginal women have successfully trained as health workers, although in traditional society men took the greatest responsibility for health care (Young, 1983). By combining the traditional and western medical systems for the benefit of their people (Tynan, 1983) women in

the Northern Territory have achieved a high degree of success in this field. Some are becoming highly skilled clinical workers in some cases running their own health centres, which has been seen as an indication of their improved status on the rural communities (Hargrave, 1982).

Government recognition of the need for Aboriginal involvement as part of self-management policy had resulted in economic status for some women. But this is by no means true for all Aboriginal women living in rural communities. Jobs in communities are scarce, and those selected for training in health and education are more likely to be chosen on the basis of their kinship relation to prominent council members than by in European terms, more objective criteria. As Young (1985) points out, it is usually unwise for Europeans to interfere, but the fact remains that self-management, while creating employment opportunities for some, has generated inequalities between genders and kinship groups²². Inequalities may also exist in the provision of services to Aboriginal women (Wade-Marshall, 1982).

Nevertheless conditions for these women in employment, health and education have certainly improved in recent years, and despite the uphill struggle against male attitudes, women are increasingly voicing their opinions on community decisions that affect family life, and their role as educators of young children.

But if it is true to say that some gains have been made by rural Aboriginal women living in the communities in the last decade or so, it

is in the cities that Aboriginal women have improved their position more noticeably.

Part of my research on Aboriginal employment in Darwin highlighted perceptions towards employment and differences between women and men in the urban workforce. Despite over forty per cent Aboriginal unemployment in the area, these people are committed to the idea of working for their living, and in common with most Australians see unemployment as highly undesirable. Particularly noticeable is that strong views are held towards sexual equality in the workforce. While recognising that Australian society exercises constraints on men and women by restricting the training and employment opportunities available, most Aboriginal people of both sexes feel that in principle there are no jobs that either sex cannot perform equally well.

The research highlighted that Aboriginal women workers had stayed on at school longer than men, and attained a higher level of schooling²³. They were also far more likely to continue their formal education having left school, for the most part undertaking clerical training. Not surprisingly, office work figures highly among the occupations of Aboriginal women, whereas most Aboriginal men in both the public and private sectors are unskilled or semi-skilled manual workers.

But these female office workers are rarely employed in private firms. Although over a third of Darwin's major private employers workers are women, less than one per cent of the private sector workforce are Aboriginal women.

One might infer from the negligible numbers that Darwin's private employers (who are overwhelmingly European and overwhelmingly men) are racially prejudiced and discriminate against Aboriginal women. Perhaps they do, but the issue is more complex than a simple matter of racially discriminatory recruitment. Many of Darwin's private employers say they do not employ Aboriginal workers because Aboriginal people rarely apply to them for jobs.

Why should this be? Perhaps the answer lies in the work experiences of Aboriginal men and women. My research discovered that most of the Aboriginal people interviewed had previously worked in European-run firms in their first jobs and many had subsequent experience of working in the private sector. Many said they had disliked the work, the pay and employment conditions and their bosses. Indeed when asked what sort of organisation they would prefer to work for, very few (less than two per cent) said they thought a non-Aboriginal business firm was best. In view of the unpleasant experiences of so many Aboriginal workers in private companies, it is not surprising that they avoid them when looking for a job.

But positive recruitment policies in Darwin's public sector has led to a dramatic increase in the opportunities available. Changes in official attitudes in the public service means that Aboriginal women have succeeded in being recruited for 'identified' jobs. Exact numbers of Aboriginal women employed in the Northern Territory Public Service are not easily assessed²⁴ but in areas such as Social Security, Education, Health and Employment and the Federal Department of Aboriginal Affairs,

there are Aboriginal women working in administrative and liason jobs, making a contribution to the provision of services to the Aboriginal community,

Over the last ten to fifteen years, an increasing number of Aboriginal-run organisations have been established. They vary in objectives and in size from small co-operatives involved in the production of arts and crafts, or the provision of specialised services for a local community, to nation-wide organisations such as those providing accommodation or legal aid to Aborigines throughout Australia. Although in Darwin the numbers employed are small, nevertheless jobs have been created for Aboriginal people and some women hold responsible jobs within the Aboriginal-run organisations.

That positive action in recruitment and training within the public service has created a space for some Aboriginal women to enter the employment market, there can be little doubt. The continuing campaign for equal employment opportunities over the last decade has resulted in more jobs being made available for Aboriginal women, some of whom have good jobs and economic independence.

But I would suggest that this success has taken place on European terms, because these women have conformed to the expectations of white society. There is evidence to suggest that such a dramatic change in the status of Aboriginal women in such a relatively short period and crucially, for the same reason, is not unprecedented. I hope to illustrate the

point with a brief comparison with Aboriginal women in the nineteenth century.

Diane Barwick (1978) has documented a rapid increase in the status of Aboriginal women in Victoria between 1860 and 1886. Barwick's line of argument is that the increase in status was a consequence - although an unintended one - of the European administration's decision to settle the tribes in mission and government stations.

Barwick notes the fact that early histories on Aboriginal society give very little information about the traditional roles of women, although she does point to Howitt's recognition that older women exercised considerable political influence among the Victorian Gippsland linguistic groups. However, by and large the evidence available pointed to a traditionally patriarchal society, and despite Howitt's case, Barwick leans towards this view.

The decision to settle the semi-nomadic tribes and train them in agricultural practices was based on the administration's belief that this would turn them into self-sufficient peasant farmers. But Aboriginal social relations and political practices were not taken into consideration by the European station managers. As a result the mission station life severely disrupted not only the semi-nomadic life style but also traditional inter personal-relations. By failing to take these into account, Barwick argues, station life totally undermined the men's economic and political authority. On settlement the men 'suddenly and voluntarily abandoned certain rights and powers, allowed

and encouraged new economic and religious roles for women, and invited their political participation'²⁵.

Meanwhile, the women were encouraged by the missionaries to take up suitable occupations, working in their gardens and selling their arts and craftwork. Sewing, embroidery, and lace-making were also encouraged, and the degree of success was so high that one Aboriginal woman received a letter of thanks from Queen Victoria for a lace collar she had made and sent as a gift. If the men were dismal failures as smallholders and horticulturalists, the women achieved economic importance. Moreover, by conforming to the expectations of the mission station, they found a niche for themselves within the church, and respectability as homemakers. The 'lubras', it was said, were ladies now.

But what did it mean to be a lady in the Victoria of the 1880s? Under the law, it certainly did not mean having achieved 'personhood'. For as in Britain during this period, a woman's identity was conflated with, or under the direction of a father or a husband. A married woman as a separate entity was non-existent as far as legal rights were concerned. As one feminist writer has succinctly stated, 'her body, earnings, children and domestic services belonged to her husband' (Oakley, 1981).

In the first instance, assertions of women's autonomy in traditional society seems to contradict Barwick's argument that women's traditional status was low, and that it was as a consequence of settlement - and one might add, assimilation - that the women's status increased. But

perhaps an explanation for this apparent contradiction is that it is perfectly feasible, indeed highly likely, that Aboriginal womens' status had already been undermined by the 1860s, precisely by contact by

European settlers. The protection afforded by the mission stations, particularly from marauding European men²⁶ and the rise in the women's economic status would certainly have aided the re-establishment of their self-confidence and esteem. If Aboriginal women did not gain a new position of prestige, but rather *re-gained* some of their traditional status, this would go some way to explaining why it was that Aboriginal men appeared to relinquish political power to their women.

What is particularly interesting about Barwick's analysis for the purpose of this dissertation, is the parallels that can be drawn between those Aboriginal women in the Victorian mission station, and contemporary urban Aboriginal women. In recent years Aboriginal women have gained through taking advantage of the education and training and jobs provided by European society. Many have the status of holding clerical and administrative or semi-professional jobs.

The similarity between these women of the 1980s and Barwick's 'ladies' of the 1880s is striking. Today's women have gained some degree of economic independence, and some hold positions with a degree of respectability and prestige. As with the women of the Victorian missions, they have taken advantage of the provision of schooling and training in order to do so. As with the women of the Victorian missions, their improved status has occurred within a period of two decades or so. And as with the women of the Victorian missions, their

success has been due to the fact that they have conformed to the expectations of European society.

But there is an important point at which the parallels between the position of Barwick's mission station Aborigines and contemporary Aborigines diverge. It is the position of Aboriginal women relative to Aboriginal men.

In the Northern Territory registered unemployment among Aboriginal men is about three times higher than that of Aboriginal women²⁷. The desirability of paid employment among both men and women highlighted by my research would indicate that official figures underestimate the numbers of unemployed Aboriginal women who want jobs. But access to unemployment benefit for women is governed by white official perceptions and is restricted. As Wood (1985) argues, the management of access (and the generation of resources) requires authoritative classification. In the case of Aboriginal women, the lack of an official 'unemployed' label being applied to them can result in severe hardship. Wade-Marshall's (1982) work on the provision of services to Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory suggests that many women may not claim unemployment benefit because they either do not know they are eligible, or they lack the confidence to make their claim. Regulations do not permit married women to receive unemployment benefit in their own right, as official policy is governed by the European model of men as heads of the nuclear family and responsible for the economic maintenance of their dependant wives.

But for Aboriginal people this model may not hold. Firstly, because the traditional role of Aboriginal men was never that of the European-style breadwinner and secondly because a man's kinship obligations may take priority over financial support for wives and children. The failure of adminstrations - in Wood's terms, the 'authors of labels' - to acknowledge this has led to much economic hardship for women. This is particularly so in Aboriginal communities where jobs are scarce.

Where Aboriginal women and men have succeeded in entering the workforce, it is likely that the men have jobs as manual workers, but we should not conclude that women office workers are better off economically than these men. My research showed that for the same length of working week, women's average wages were well below that of men, and the few Aborigines in higher income brackets were exclusively men.

Historically, clerical work has been considered more prestigious than unskilled semi-skilled manual work. Initially a male domain, over the last fifty years or so office work has become defined as a female occupation. There is a current debate²⁸ among social scientists on the deskilling effects of new technology (Jones, 1982; Wood, 1982). However many are agreed that the last decade has seen a routinisation in office procedures, and what was once a relatively high status occupation has been reduced to a level of semi-skilled repetitive routine (Crompton and Reid, 1982). This has in effect devalued a major area of women's work.

Nevertheless there can be no doubt that the position of Aboriginal women in contemporary Australian society has changed dramatically since the mid 1960s. And the changes have been for the better. Certainly in Darwin, Aboriginal women are literate, better educated than the men, are socially aware and are committed to their work. Some of them have good jobs, and many are ambitious for their future.

It remains true that the promotion of the ideals of equal employment opportunities in both the Northern Territory and the Federal public services and the 'identification' of certain jobs has created a space for Aborigines. By recruiting Aborigines to act as 'brokers' between the department and their Aboriginal clients, the public sector has provided openings for women.

And yet an overall view of the public service shows that despite some degree of success, Aboriginal women are most frequently found as 'assistants' to European qualified staff, or working in routine clerical jobs. The very few senior level 'identified' jobs, reserved for experts in Aboriginal affairs that are not filled by European men, are more likely to be filled by an Aboriginal man than an Aboriginal woman. Of the very small number of Aborigines in the Northern Territory who have received university, professional or management training, most of whom are employed in the public service, less than three per cent are women. This is ironic given that education and training plays such a significant part in Aboriginal womens' lives.

The same point of course applies to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women in Australia. The key to equality in the workforce is not merely a question of the time spent on education and training, nor on the qualifications gained as a result. Equality in the workforce depends rather on a critical examination of the areas of work which are available to women, and the lifting of restrictions on those areas of work denied to them.

As in other countries, Australian labour market research has recently become interested in occupational segregation. Much of this work has been influenced by the concept of the 'dual labour market'.

This hypothesis challenges the neo-classical economic model of the labour market, which is based on the principles of supply and demand in a competitive situation. The hypothesis argues that 'primary' and 'secondary' labour markets, characterised by high and low job security, pay, status and prospects respectively, exist and that they operate not in competition to one another, but in parallel.

As in Britain and the United States, Australian studies (Sams, 1984; Selby-Smith, 1984) indicate that the options available to women are restricted to those jobs operating within the 'secondary sector'. However Australian research in this area has remarkably failed so far to examine the specificity of Aboriginal women's employment. This may be due to the difficulties inherent in the concept of duality.

Aboriginal teachers aides, healthworkers and administrators in the public service have some of the characteristics (such as job security and through the workings of the internal labour market, job prospects) of 'primary sector' employees, whereas many Aboriginal men work in what the dualist hypothesis would describe as the 'secondary sector'. A serious flaw in the concept of dualism is that it cannot explain the variations that exist within the two sectors. Further, as British sociologist Beechey (1986) argues, analyses which posit women as secondary sector workers cannot adequately account for the fact that not all women are, and this is clearly the case for some Aboriginal women.

British work (Hakim, 1979; Cambridge Labour Studies Group 1985) has noted occupational segregation occurs both vertically and horizontally, and that indicators of the ability to perform a job from an employer's perspective, such as educational qualifications, age, sex or race may be unrelated to the actual ability or the performance of the individual. This is a key issue in examining the occupational segregation of women and the specifics of Aboriginal women's relation to the employment market.

Despite their ambitions and their commitment to work, Aboriginal women find themselves constrained by the restrictions placed on them by European patriarchal ideology. Despite their belief in the value of equality at work highlighted by my research in Darwin, they nonetheless have had to conform to the sex-roles imposed on women at work in white Australia.

In remote communities the old protectionist policy created tension and cleavages between Aboriginal people, cleavages which the current self-management policy has done little to ameliorate. It is certainly true that employment opportunities have been created for women in communities, particularly in schools and clinics, under the rubric of self-management. But such jobs are scarce, and the strength of kinship networks means that they are not open to all Aboriginal women. Self-management has created positions of power at the local community level, but the European notion of male dominance has imposed asymmetrical gender relations foreign to traditional Aboriginal ways.

Despite the liberal ideals of Australian society, the fact remains that power and authority remain in the hands of European men. And women, but particularly Aboriginal women, continue to suffer the politics of exclusion.

TOWARDS A NEW PERSPECTIVE

My earlier review of the literature identified various strands of thinking, which I criticised for subsuming Aboriginal people into one homogeneous category. I would suggest that academic policy analysis has suffered from the lack of an analytical framework which a sociological perspective can provide, for it has failed to recognise that shifts in Australian government policy have served to generate and reinforce class, regional and linguistic, and gender divisions among Aboriginal people.

I now want to consolidate the findings I have presented and consider the usefulness of the literature in an analysis of the structural relations between groups of Aboriginal women and Aboriginal men and their employment relation to contemporary white Australia. In doing so, I aim to critically examine current government policy, and assess the implications for the future.

Although this is a sociological dissertation, it is not my intention to try to 'fit' any one sociological perspective to the discussion. Sociology as a discipline owes much to economics, history, political science and other areas within the social sciences, as well as offering a critique of them. Indeed I would argue that the more overlap between the disciplines, the more fruitful will be studies of the type this dissertation has presented. I certainly would wish to acknowledge my debt to anthropological, economic, political and feminist thought in developing my own framework.

Employment as a consistent policy

The issue of Aboriginal employment continues to be a prime concern for policy makers. Throughout the last five decades, since the idea of assimilation was first muted in the 1930s, and despite shifts in policies since then, the central concern has essentially remained the same; the provision of skills and training seen necessary to allieviate poverty and/or to turn Aborigines into 'useful members of society'.

As Loveday (1985) has rightly pointed out, whenever the problems of Aboriginal employment and unemployment are considered, most of the attention has been focussed on the 'supply side' of the employment relation. In other words the problem has been defined in terms of Aboriginal people, their lack of motivation or of skills, and their consequent inability to compete on an equal footing with non-Aborigines in the labour market.

My research has shown that urban Aboriginal men and women in the Northern Territory give every indication of holding the same perceptions towards paid employment as non-Aborigines. They are motivated, they have ambitions, and they have no wish to live on state handouts. There is no sign of the distinctive traits ascribed to the 'culture of poverty' thesis. And yet Aboriginal unemployment remains higher among Aborigines than any other group in Australian society. Leaning towards what I have termed a 'social welfare' approach, and borrowing economists' terminology, Loveday argues that attention could usefully be

drawn to the 'demand side' of the equation; employers' demand for Aboriginal workers.

The disappearance of a Reserve Army of Labour

But the fact is that in the Northern Territory at least, private employers show little demand for Aboriginal men and even less for Aboriginal women as workers. Legislation which has made award wages applicable to Aborigines has dramatically cut off a cheap supply of labour. In Marxist terms, what was once a reserve army of labour, particularly in the pastoral industry, has virtually disappeared.

Perhaps it is unsurprising that the 'demand side' of the employment relation is so weak. As Hartmann (1981) has pointed out capitalism is not particularly interested *who* works in the factories, or goes down the mines. If there are no perceived advantages in employing Aboriginal labour, then private industry evidently does not see it as its duty to do so.

This point is evidently not recognised by officialdom which feels that the initiative in employing Aborigines rests largely with employers and unions. As a marketing strategy to promote the concept of equal employment opportunities²⁹, official proponents have argued that equal opportunity recruitment policies can make a large contribution to productivity. Evidently as far as Aborigines in general, and Aboriginal women in particular are concerned, private employers remain unconvinced.

If employment for Aborigines has been a continuing concern, what have been the specific effects of new government policies to women in very different situations? Here it may be useful to employ three points of the 'lifestyle continuum' identified earlier; women on outstations, in Aboriginal communities and those in suburban areas.

Self-determination and women on outstations

The outstation movement over the last decade has largely been made possible by the introduction of policies directed at Aboriginal self-determination. Small but growing numbers of Aboriginal people, disenchanted with the settlement life have moved away from Aboriginal communities to set up camp on their own. In doing so, they have escaped the tensions and conflicts of community life and returned to some small semblance of their traditional way of life. But this does not imply that their relations with other groups is broken.

Aboriginal people, in common with non-Aborigines, wish to take advantage of some of the benefits that white society has to offer, and the provision of services such as health and education means that communications between outstations and the larger settlements remain. Some women leave their children at the settlement so that they may continue at school, and visit the settlement on a regular basis for welfare cheques and provisions. Although basic purchased food may be supplemented by hunting and gathering, the erosion of traditional hunting grounds (both in terms of the areas of land now available to

them and in terms of grazing stock imported by Europeans) has meant that total self-sufficiency on outstations is not possible.

Outstations have been seen by some as empirical evidence of Aboriginal self-determination. Alexander (1934) has argued that Aborigines are using white legislation and regulations in order to escape white capitalist domination and to return to an independent life on their own traditional country. But I would argue that beneath this romantic image lurk the realities of the economic and political spheres and a deeper penetration of the institutional arrangements would show that dependence on white society has reduced very little. The outstation movement operates within the overall structure of European domination, and as long as outstation dwellers remain dependent on social security payments for transport and basic food supplies, they remain institutionally dependent on white society.

Similarly (although as far as I am aware no analysis has yet been made) it would be simplistic to assume that gender relations on outstations have reverted to or resemble the traditional relations that pertained in the past between Aboriginal men and women. Personal relations do not change overnight simply because of a change of environment. The impact of male ideology absorbed and recreated within Aboriginal communities from years of contact with white patriarchal society cannot be expected to dissolve. However, it is possible that a removal from the direct influence of overt sexism and a return - albeit in a limited form - of the traditional Aboriginal way of life, may create a space for

Aboriginal women living in outstations to regain some of their lost autonomy.

Hence the current self-determination policy may bring some positive benefits for Aboriginal women within the outstation movement. For while they remain ultimately dependent on white society, it has at least allowed them to escape the worst excesses of community life and perhaps may yet provide them with the opportunity of redressing the imbalance in gender relations white society has created.

Self-determination and women in Aboriginal settlements

To what extent has institutional dependence been removed by policies espousing self-management and self-determination within Aboriginal communities? They are now run on a day to day basis by councils whose members are elected from within their own communities. But despite the new keywords, paternalism still abounds.

The Department of Aboriginal Affairs employs community advisors whose role is to act as assistants to community councils. Few council members have had the education to equip them with the complexities of accounting procedures or the administrative skills seen necessary in the smooth running of a township. In effect the placing of white government advisors onto Aboriginal communities is a means of ensuring they are run in line with European notions of local government.

Aboriginal involvement, as part of the self-management goal has created some employment opportunities for women in community clinics and schools. But as we have noted, a power nexus often exists among dominant groups, for the strong kinship relations which formed an important part of traditional society have not been relinquished under self-management policies. Nor have they been superimposed by European ideals of democracy.

Few women sit on the Aboriginal councils. At both the economic and the political levels, self-management essentially involves management within the confines of western-imposed values. And implicit in these values is a tension between democracy and patriarchy, the latter of which Aboriginal men have not been slow to exploit. Policies directed at self-determination and self-management of Aboriginal communities have done little to reverse the erosion of women's traditional autonomy and independence.

Assimilation in the City

If self-determination is a hollow concept for women living in Aboriginal communities, then what real meaning does it have for Aboriginal women in suburban Australia?

The assimilation policy formalised in the 1950s is now decried as ethnocentric and patronising. With the abandonment of the 'white Australia' immigration policy in the 1950s, Australia today acknowledges that it is a multi-cultural society, and has policies designed to assist

its ethnic minorities. In political circles, assimilation is now, one might say, a dirty word.

Aboriginal women in the urban workforce have improved their position considerably, and in economic terms, they are now dramatically better off. But this is only true in terms of their position before the mid 1960s. They are not better off financially in comparison to Aboriginal male workers. Nor has their position improved compared to white women, and certainly not compared to white men. Nevertheless, they are educated, committed to the concept of employment and have taken full advantage of any opportunities made available to them. Compared to the position of Aboriginal women twenty or even ten years ago, theirs is one of 'success'.

But it is not the shift to self-determination that has created the space for suburban women. Assimilation may today be disparaged, but I would suggest that these Aboriginal working women have succeeded precisely because they have assimilated into white society.

For self-management and self-determination have little direct bearing on the working lives of these urbanised women. Essentially for Aboriginal women to achieve any degree of success in the urban workforce, they must become - as indeed they are - assimilated. Their attitude and perceptions, expectations and ideals demonstrate that they are as committed to the values of mainstream Australia as non-Aborigines. And like non-Aboriginal women who share the ideals of equality in the workforce, despite their ambitions and their commitment to the work

ethic, in assimilating they have found themselves constrained by the restrictions placed on them by a western patriarchal system.

Assimilation and class analysis

In Marxist terms many Aboriginal men and women in the workforce form part of the working class. Yet within Marxism itself definitions of class based on relations to the means of production continue to be debated and remain as yet unresolved (Poulantzas, 1978; Olin Wright, 1976). Equally problematic are analyses which fail to take gender relations into account (Garnsey, 1978; Benavie, 1979; Crompton and Mann, 1986).

Examples of such difficulties occur when we consider those Aboriginal women who are outside the labour force. One might also question where a class analysis would posit Aboriginal 'brokers', who act as an interface between Aboriginal and mainstream white society and those Aboriginal men holding authority and control within their own communities. Should they be seen as spokespersons, protecting the patriarchal values of Australian society, or as a ruling class within their own society, holding as they do control over economic resources? Do they occupy 'contradictory class locations' as (Olin Wright's analysis would posit the 'brokers') or are they in Poulantzas' terms mere 'bearers of structures'? If so, which structure do they support - mainstream Australian or Aboriginal?

The class analysis of Aborigines poses more questions than it answers. Analyses based on relations to the means of production are as problematic as descriptive differences in lifestyle *per se* are inadequate. Neither explain the very different relations between Aborigines and white Australia. The relations are essentially a question of institutional power, and in the Australian context, Aboriginal women are the least powerful (adult) group.

Institutional dependency and Aboriginal consumption

The anthropologist E. P. Elkin (1944) was among the first to document the structural relations between Aboriginal and white Australia. He described the Aboriginal position as one of 'intelligent parasitism', a phrase he was later to regret having coined as it was subsequently misused. If his analysis was correct, changes in policy over the last forty odd years have insidiously altered the 'parasitic' relation to one of dependence. As Drakakis-Smith has cogently argued, the consumption of white society's goods and services has been a major factor in Aboriginal institutional dependency. While it remains true that Aborigines have made use of white power structures to attempt to escape them as Alexander maintains in relation to the outstation movement, ultimately they remain institutionally dependent.

The consumption, rather than the production role of what Hartwig and Drakakis-Smith term the 'Aboriginal mode of production' is a useful concept in examining the relations between white society and Aborigines. My criticism of these analyses is not aimed at the concept but rather at

the theorists who persist in perceiving Aborigines as a single group. Consumption could also be used to assess the specific relations of Aboriginal women and wider Australian society. So far, an analysis along these lines has not been undertaken, but I consider it could usefully be employed to examine these relations.

The advantage, as I see it of using the notion of the consumption rather than the production role, or simple economic factors such as income, is that it gives a more realistic picture of dependancy relations.

For the provision of services to Aboriginal communities is not equally distributed between men and women. If government benefits are paid to male 'household heads' who in Aboriginal terms are not necessarily responsible for family provision, this means that women are not only institutionally dependent on white Australia, but also on Aboriginal men.

Further, the economic advantage of Aboriginal men may not necessarily mean that their consumptive role is higher. As a result of higher spending power, men may be more involved in capitalist relations as consumers than the women. But women may make more use of non-capitalist services on communities such as education, training, and healthcare. In other words, although they may not hold the same degree of economic power as men, as consumers of the services provided by white official institutions the women far outweigh the men. Dependent on the provision of white services, and dependent on the political and economic

power of Aboriginal men, these women suffer from a double bind of dependency.

Self-determination and Land Rights

Aboriginal Land Rights is seen by many proponents as the crucial key to genuine Aboriginal self-determination and power. Indeed the issue has captured the public imagination within liberal circles in Australia and abroad. Certainly the unconditional granting of land rights would enable some Aboriginal people to gain a powerful economic base and subsequent political strength. However, I would suggest that for economic and political reasons the granting of such rights on any significant scale is unlikely to occur.

White Australia is still a young country, and is anxious to develop its economy in the face of fierce competition from neighbouring South East Asia. Lacking an industrial base, it has experienced a 'flattening off' in the growth of its pastoral industry, which for years has been the mainstay of the Australian economy. Its future development is now seen to lie in the mining industry. Vast tracts of land in Australia's hinterland are ripe for mineral exploration, and the granting of extensive land rights to Aboriginal people is likely to bring mining interests and Aboriginal interests into greater conflict.

Land Rights legislation so far in Australia relates only to the Northern Territory. Where mineral deposits have been discovered, any Aboriginal veto - a veto which was used in the case of the Ranger Uranium mine -

has been overruled in 'the national interest'. In a very real sense then, economic and political self-determination, without a sound economic base which the granting of extensive land rights would provide, is a contradiction in terms.

Women, employment and Aboriginal solidarity

Another hope lies in the direction of education and employment for Aboriginal people. Aborigines need Aboriginal educators, doctors, accountants, lawyers and politicians. But these people will need to recognise the inherent danger of elitism and of their co-optation into the white political process. Divisions between Aborigines can only be reinforced if these dangers are not recognised by the educated few, who currently are almost exclusively men.

Perhaps the chances of greater Aboriginal solidarity lie with the women. My research has clearly shown that in the city, Aboriginal women are better educated than their male counterparts, constitute a stable workforce, enjoyed their work, are motivated and hold ambitions for their future careers. They have been quick to grasp the opportunities made available for them by policies directed at equal employment within both the Federal and the Northern Territory public services, and they are beginning to voice their views.

There are indications that differences between these women and women in rural areas are becoming minimised as opportunities become available for them to meet and discuss the linkages between them and their common

heritage. At one of the first major national conferences of Aboriginal women held in the late 1970s, women who had travelled to Adelaide from remote areas all over Australia had their first opportunity of meeting suburban Aboriginal women. Sometimes speaking through interpreters, traditionally-oriented women addressed an audience of Aboriginal women of differing backgrounds³⁰, and over the course of the conference, women discovered that their similarities far outweighed the differences between them.

Such opportunities for an exchange of views and comparisons of gender and class relations are paving the way for a new solidarity to emerge among Aboriginal women. The struggle for equal rights, both as Aborigines and as women, has provided a common ground for women of differing class and regional experiences. Having suffered from the experiences of male and of white domination, Aboriginal women are aware of the elitism and co-option which can undermine solidarity.

If they continue to take advantage of the educational opportunities available and if feminist pressure for equal employment opportunities results in better prospects for Aboriginal women in the workforce, then a revival of women's autonomy and authority, together with the creation of a new solidarity may emerge.

That being so, assimilation, integration and self-determination may take on a new meaning for Aboriginal women, both in the context of their relation to white society and in the context of their relation to Aboriginal men.

What is certain is that all people in Australia who are concerned with the ideals of equality have something in common with Aboriginal women. They may have something to offer them. But more than that, they have something to learn from them too.

FOOTNOTES

1 A recent bibliography of research publications on womens' employment in Australia (Ruth Crawford, Bureau of Labour Market Research Library, 1984) covering the period 1975 to April 1982 lists two hundred and twenty-five books, journal articles and conference or seminar papers. It is an extremely comprehensive list, yet not one of the titles mentions Aboriginal women.

2 This is one of the issues raised by a report on the conditions of the Yirrkala people produced by a House of Representatives standing committee of Aboriginal Affairs in 1974. The committee considered it

'unreasonable to expect the Aboriginal people to conform closely or strictly to the standards by which other people live within Australian society...The Committee emphasises that a decision to adopt the Western work ethic is one which can only be made by the people themselves.'

3 The thesis posits a cycle of deprivation that breeds distinctive cultural traits, such as the immediate gratification of needs and lack of motivation which are inexorably at odds with the spirit of the western work ethic. It has been used to explain the position of the poor in Mexico, blacks in the United States and Irish gypsies. For an excellent critique of the thesis in relation to the latter, see Schaffer (1985).

4 This is not to argue that no distinctions should be made between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. During the two hundred years of white rule in Australia, racial categorisation has resulted in an asymmetrical balance of power relations of the most severe kind, and yet the distinction is a necessary one if positive measures are to be taken to redress that balance. One of the problems of implementing positive action in the public service is precisely that of identifying who should qualify for positive action. However, there is a danger that in identifying Aborigines as a single group, the very real differences that exist between them may be overlooked or ignored.

5 The problems generated by the government's movement of the Warlpiri people onto Kaytej land are noted by Diane Bell (1983). Government officials used the availability of water *not wanted by white*

pastoralists as a criterion for the establishment of Warrabri in Central Australia as an Aboriginal settlement. Warrabri is considered by Aboriginal people as a 'sickness place'.

6 During my own research, Aboriginal workers at a statutory authority in Darwin refused to be interviewed (by Aboriginal interviewers) about their jobs. They had no wish to be singled out as a group, and felt they were just the same as anyone else in the organisation. Another organisation kept figures on the number of Aboriginal workers, based on employee surveys. Figures for 1985 had fallen considerably from previous years, although few Aboriginal staff had left; it was clear that fewer had identified as Aborigines for the purpose of the survey.

7 Traditionally, Aboriginal women played a significant part in the maintenance of customary law, and in some areas among the more traditionally-oriented people, the older women continue to hold a position of autonomy from men. More recent work on Aboriginal women and the recognition of customary law in Australia (Bell, forthcoming), makes it clear that some women continue to exercise authority on matters of land and law, an authority which among Aborigines at least, is recognised by men and women alike.

8 Aboriginal women in a remote community in the Northern Territory informed me that they had been told by their men that the then forthcoming Federal government elections were 'men's business'. These women had been excluded from discussions on voting procedures with

officials from the government Electoral Office on the grounds that the political process was not their concern.

9 Others were not so humanitarian in their views. During a Western Australia parliamentary debate, one member stated:

'If we take the history of the colony for the last six months, it seems to me we have a stream of blood gurgling away from Kimberley to the Irwin - the blood of settlers 'done to death' by natives... I think the best way to proceed in this matter is to start on the basis of teaching these natives the sacredness of human life... I have seen good natives and bad natives, and I have a strong opinion about them. I think it will be a happy day for Western Australia, and for Australia at large when the natives and the kangaroo disappear.'

W.A. debate on Settlers' Protection, W.A. Parliamentary Papers, Perth, Vol2, 1892.

10 A large number of Chinese were employed as labourers during the Territory gold rush in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Today there are some successful Chinese businesses in Darwin, the owners of which are influential in the Darwin community; the present mayor is of Chinese descent.

11 Department of Territories (1958) *Progress towards Assimilation: Aboriginal Welfare in the Northern Territory*

12 *Centralian Advocate* 27 October 1966, quoted in Frank Stevens (1981)

13 The Government Resident, the Hon. J. L. Parsons recommended in his last annual report dated February 3rd, 1890:

'Then something may be done for the half-caste children by compelling mission stations that have concessions from the Government under certain conditions, to take in such half-castes and civilize them. They would then when grown up, make excellent servants, and thus be raised above

the ordinary condition of an aboriginal. I do not think there would be much difficulty in getting mothers to give up their half-caste children, for I believe any of them may be had for a bag of flour. Up to within a few years very few half-castes live beyond the age of 12 to 15 years, and when enquiring after the whereabouts, as I generally do when missing any, the answer is 'he been die along bush'; but my opinion is when they get to a certain age they are taken away by old members of the tribe and knocked on the head.'
Quoted in Stone, (1974).

It seems clear that the Government Resident had little inkling that the children were in fact being taken out bush by their elders, precisely in order to prevent their kidnap by the police.

14 The Aboriginal author Kevin Gilbert (1977) tells of one of his contemporaries who as a boy successfully avoided the round-up of children by policemen on horses around Alice Springs for some years until he was finally caught. Heartrending stories of the search by Aborigines of their own families as a result of being taken away to institutions are not uncommon in the Northern Territory today. I have heard at first-hand the story of an Aboriginal friend - a woman of my own age, whose mother had died giving birth - and her search for her grandmother. When after several years enquiring, she met a group of women who had known her mother as a young girl before she had been taken away, my friend learnt that her grandmother had recently died. She had never given up hope of seeing her daughter again.

15 The trade union movement has been strongly influential in the Australian labour market (and in Australian politics). Most occupations are covered by minimum adult wage rates - the award wages - which have been negotiated by unions and employer organisations.

16 Training for the employment market has continued to be considered a major problem for policy-makers. Two Committees of Inquiry have been held within the last six year on employment training for Aboriginal people living in remote communities and those in urban area. Urban government sponsored training programs in particular have recently been criticised for doing little more than providing employers with cheap labour rather than equipping Aborigines with the skills necessary to compete in a competitive employment market. (see Manuel, 1985a; Report of the Committee of Review, 1985.)

17 Eighty-nine per cent of Australian voters were in favour of the changes

18 Report of the Committee of Review of the Pastoral Industry, 1972, p. 29.

19 The last two years have seen renewed interest in the Territory's Top End's gold deposits around Pine Creek, about two hundred kilometres south of Darwin.

20 Comparative work on hunter-gatherer societies by Hiatt (1978) shows that where gatherable foods occur in abundance, women are more important than men as food providers. The same point is taken up by Mies (1986). Work by Bell and Ditton (1980) concludes that as Aboriginal desert women produced up to 80 per cent of the diet, they were were critical to the survival of the group. In these areas, as hunters of small game and as

gatherers of plants, it was the women who provided the mainstay of the Aboriginal economy.

21 'Borroloola women speak' in Fay Gayle (1983)

22 One Aboriginal women who lived in a remote community about 500 kilometers from Darwin told me that she lived in a humpy (a tent or lean-to, often made out of corrugated tin sheeting) with thirteen of her family. She saw no hope of being offered one of the houses currently being built there, as she had no kinship ties with any community council members.

23 Similarities in different levels of schooling also occur outside urban areas. Young's (1985) study notes that young women in rural communities in the Northern Territory are more likely to continue post-primary classes than young men, who may have to spend considerable time away from home undergoing training for their initiation.

24 The problems of identifying Aboriginal employees proved difficult in the two largest departments interviewed in the Northern Territory Public Service. Figures have been published by the Public Service Commissioner's office on the numbers of Aborigines the NTPS employs, but given the difficulty encountered by some departments in identifying their Aboriginal workers, there would seem to be room for concern about the validity of the official figures.

25 Barwick (1978)

26 Aboriginal women's enforced use and abuse as sexual objects was well established by 1899, when South Australia's Inspector of Police noted that young girls were 'obtained by what is termed 'running them down' and forcibly taking them from their tribes'. (Parliamentary Proceedings, Vol. 2., *Select Committee of the Legislative Council on the Aborigines Bill*, quoted in Stone, 1974.) The rape of Aboriginal women (and the resultant spread of venereal disease among Aboriginal communities) is discussed in Sykes (1975).

27 Department of Employment and Industrial Relations, Darwin, Unemployment Quartlery figures, March 1985.

28 The debate centres around what could be termed technological determinism on the one hand and labour processs writers on the other. Bryn Jones (1982) argues convincingly that the organisational structure, trade union strengths and the product market are important factors in the level of deskilling effected by the introduction of new technology.

29 'Equal Employment Opportunity: Some guidelines for developing personnel practices", Australian Government Printing Service, 1984.

30 The results of this conference, organised by the ANZAAS, is published by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Affairs; see Pay Gale ed, (1982).

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APPENDIX I

Equal Opportunities in Darwin? Aborigines in the Workforce

Methodology:

This research, conducted in 1984 - 1985, focussed on the enabling factors and the constraints acting upon Aboriginal participation in the workforce in Darwin.

Two sources of data were used: semi-structured interviews were conducted with sixty three major employers in the city, and a questionnaire was administered to 208 Aboriginal people.

The 1981 Australian census shows the total working population of Darwin at 29,897. The employing organisations interviewed employed a total of 13,200 people - approximately forty-three per cent of the city's workforce.

The employers interviewed contained a cross-section of major private sector organisations, identified as such by the Darwin office of the Federal Department of Employment, and of public sector organisations. Most of the selected public sector departments were either involved with Aboriginal affairs, or had a significant proportion of Aboriginal employees. This means that the overall picture may have been more 'positive' than one which presented a representative sample of all Darwin employers, which would have included government departments

employing few (if any) Aborigines, and smaller private employers in the city. Access to these major employers was greatly facilitated by Kenneth Pope, the Northern Territory's Public Service Commissioner and by the officers of the Department of Employment's Commonwealth Employment Service. I gratefully acknowledge their co-operation and assistance.

Managers responsible for employment and personnel were asked for information on the numbers of Aborigines currently and previously employed, the types of jobs they were in, methods of recruitment, the use of government-sponsored employment and training schemes and their perceptions of Aboriginal people. These interviews were carried out by the researcher, and later collated. They formed the basis of Loveday's (1985) parallel research by postal questionnaire in Katherine.

The census figures do not differentiate between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal employees, and although the Commonwealth Employment Service keeps records of Aboriginal unemployment, it is not possible to obtain accurate statistics on the Aboriginal workforce participation. A representative sample could therefore not be identified for survey purposes. The Aborigines interviewed worked in both the private and public sectors and in Aboriginal-run organisations. The survey also included a small number of unemployed people.

Respondents were asked if they identified as Aborigines using a list of descriptions successfully used in the past (Loveday and Jaensch, 1985). A small team of interviewers, most of whom were themselves Aborigines,

asked respondents for information about their personal, educational and employment backgrounds, their experiences of getting a job, their perceptions of employers and their future ambitions.

The questionnaires were coded for computer analysis and cross tabulations were then produced for interpretation.

APPENDIX 2

Equal Opportunities in Darwin? Aborigines in the Workforce

Semi-structured Interviews with Employers: The areas covered, and the type of questions asked were the following:

The employing organisation's policy on the employment of Aborigines

Total number of Aborigines employed

Male or Female

What jobs do they occupy

Do they belong to any trade union

Do the trade unions help them to get a job

Do Aborigines have a higher turnover as employees than non-Aborigines

How long have they been with you

Have any been promoted within the last 12 months

Why don't you employ any/more Aborigines

Have you employed Aborigines in the past

Have you heard of any government training/employment schemes specifically for Aboriginal people

Have you used any

Were they effective

What are your usual methods of recruitment

Does it differ for Aboriginal recruitment

Are Aborigines as reliable as non-Aboriginal employees

What are their attitudes to work

Are there any differences between Aborigines in the city and those in the bush

What do you think Aborigines are best suited for

Do you think more should be done to help Aboriginal employment, if so