NGOing in Central Australia

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of The Australian National University

School of Archaeology and Anthropology

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February 2019

Statement of Originality

This is to certify that, to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own original work, except in cases where I reference and acknowledge the work of others. This thesis has not been submitted for any other degree or other purposes at this or any other university.

The word count of this thesis exclusive of footnotes, tables, figures, maps, bibliographies and appendices is 80, 961.

Signed:

Drew Richard Michael Anderson

February 7 2019.

Acknowledgements

This research was designed, researched and written up on the lands of the Warlpiri, Arrernte, Darug, Cadigal and Ngunnawal peoples.

The thesis would simply not have been possible without the intellectual generosity of multiple people. First acknowledgements must be made to my supervisors. Nicolas Peterson has offered continued support and feedback from the inception of the project, and was always offered guidance through meetings in his office or on long phone calls. Tess Lea has been equally supportive, providing insight at critical points throughout the research process. I wish to particularly acknowledge Tess for taking me on as a student even when I was not enrolled at the University of Sydney. Patrick Guinness has also kindly participated in my supervisory panel and offered useful feedback in seminars.

A great debt goes to a group who unfortunately cannot be directly acknowledged here: the participants in my research study. For opening up their organisation to the presence of an ethnographer, I cannot thank the staff of “Global Partners in Development” enough. To the Warlpiri people who have welcomed me onto their country and participated in the research, I offer my sincere gratitude.

Many of my colleagues have read chapter drafts and provided encouragement over the years, and I for this I wish to thank Alifa Bandali, Eve Vincent, Mythily Meher, Thomas Michel, Ute Eickelkamp and Yasmine Musharbash. Thank you to Chris Marcatili of Ellipsis Editing, who provided professional editing services for the thesis.

For assisting me with employment and mentoring over my candidature I thank Eve Vincent, Robbie Peters, Neil Maclean, Geir Henning-Presterudstuen, Petronella Vaarzon-Morel and Stephen Muecke.

My parents have always supported me in pursuing anthropology, and I wish to particularly thank my mother Diane for her support over the years, without which the thesis would never have been finished. Finally, I thank Kelly Pickett for respecting my need for solitude and putting up with the multiple social events I have missed over the course of writing this thesis, and her unwavering encouragement in completing it.

Abstract

The statistically defined disadvantage of remote-living Indigenous children has often been the target of state intervention in Australia. In this thesis I present an ethnography of an international NGO that attempted to improve the lives of such children through a participatory and culturally respectful community development project.

Originally setting out to answer the question of whether participatory practices derived from "international development" could be useful in the context of Indigenous Australia, this study instead deploys the ontological approaches of Annemarie Mol (2002) and Bruno Latour (2005) to return to the dichotomous way in which such questions are framed: as a "global" organisation interacting with a "local" community. The distinction between the global and the local inhabits and structures other binaries that run throughout the thesis: between organisation and community, expertise and "cultural" knowledge, the developed and the to-be-developed, and between White and Indigenous, or in locally salient terms, *Kardiya* and *Yapa*. I ask after the effects of this framing: how do such dualisms define who participates in development, and in what ways? What forms of knowledge emerge as significant and important under these conditions? How do Indigenous people and White NGO staff negotiate the moral landscape of "helping?" What kinds of relationship are produced? And how does my ethnographic writing, as another knowledge practice, engage with development?

I demonstrate the ways in which development is performed through an examination of the day-to-day practices of the NGO: drawing upon expertise and evidence to justify intervention (chapters two and three), monitoring and evaluating project impacts (chapter four), building "intercultural" relationships (chapter five), ensuring participation (chapter six), and marketing to raise project funds (chapter seven). I argue that because NGO practice enacts the objects of development (Mol 2002), and is therefore entangled with them, participatory approaches that rely upon a boundary between the developed and

the to-be-developed are destabilised. The performance of this boundary is important however, as it serves as both the problem to be overcome and the crucial ethic through which well-meaning, settler-colonial NGO staff negotiate their work and professional identities in remote Indigenous Australia.

I draw upon participant observation within the NGO to present an ethnographic account that unbinds development from its normative, instrumental representations, while eschewing denunciation as the necessarily alternative research position. My work brings the critical anthropology of development into conversation with an Indigenous Australian setting, and seeks to contribute to the growing field of NGO ethnography.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The Global NGO

The Global Partners in Development (GPD) head office is an off-white, two-storey building and sits on a grassy block in the suburbs of Sydney, adjacent to a major road. The location feels suburban and mundane: the office is adjacent to a four-lane road of fast moving traffic with brick bungalows on either side, interspersed with commercial buildings, with a large shopping mall a few kilometres on. It is not dissimilar to the Australian suburb in which I grew up.

Having left my primary field site in Central Australia a month earlier, I am in Sydney to conduct interviews in an attempt to gain an understanding of the city-based, "donor-facing" side of the organisation. I walk through the automatic doors and over a large laminated GPD logo on the floor. At the front desk, a receptionist instructs me to stand in front of a camera; a few seconds later, I am handed a sticker showing my photo printed in grainy black and white, my name, and the word "VISITOR" inscribed underneath. I dutifully slap it on my shirt.

Beyond the reception desk and at the end of the foyer is a café. Staff members, predominately but not exclusively White people, are dressed in casual business attire, identification cards dangling from lanyards around their necks.[1] They chat during informal meetings and tap away on laptops, drinking coffee or waiting for it to be prepared. The foyer itself is meant to be browsed. It features a display, originally used in a street level fundraising campaign, of a plastic pig, a lamb, some ducks, and a wooden cart, on top of which sits a bucket indicating where GPD funds have been spent: 78.8% on "Our Work", 11.5% on "Fundraising" and 9.7% on "Administration and Accountability." NGOs are often under scrutiny for their overhead costs and having a good dollar-to-need ratio is one of the first points made to new GPD employees in their induction, giving

[1] I use an upper case 'W' when referring to White as a category of people, in the same way as Black, Warlpiri or Kardiya.

them the figures to defend against the by now predictable accusations of the ill-spent gains of those who work to do good.

The wall behind the reception desk features two Indigenous dot paintings, small plaques underneath revealing each artist's name. The space is unmistakably that of a humanitarian NGO; on one wall is a framed picture with the word "HOPE" in large text. On closer inspection, the picture itself is a kind of word mosaic, celebrating the launch of "CSPON 2.0," a new fundraising strategy around child sponsorship. Within each letter of the word, staff have written messages:

> I hope one day GPD doesn't have to exist. Each child will have the support of its family. That's the big dream!
>
> Every child makes a difference.
>
> My hope is that more people will sponsor children, and continue their connection with GPD.

Another wall adjoining the café is almost entirely covered by a large photograph of a dark-skinned woman planting a tree. Her caption reads "Sponsor a child and see a community grow." Another large photo shows two Sri Lankan women picking tea, carrying baskets full of verdant green leaves. There are other types of posters, too. One is titled "Getting to know our supporters," and notes generation Z, Y, X and baby boomers as relevant market segments. Next to that are maps of Australian capital cities, with the title "Understanding who gives, why, and where they are." Underneath, a poster gives the top five reasons people cancel their child sponsorship, followed with some scripted responses aimed at convincing the unfaithful otherwise. Even the meeting rooms and open plan office spaces branching off from the main foyer, each assigned to a particular division of the organisation, make semiotic claims, suggesting the organisation's "self-conscious globalism" (Malkki 2015:79). The rooms are named after distant wilderness areas: "Kakadu," "Amazon" and "Kibale."

The aesthetic touches in the foyer point towards organisational identity and the claims that the organisation makes about its work. They are large, they are global, and they bridge the gap between donor and recipient, or, in more organisationally acceptable terms, "supporter and community." The space insists upon its connection to the Global South, as if to point out that all that happens here, all the activity in this office, is inextricably connected to what goes on over there. Images of children and women of colour dominate, culturally diverse and geographically disparate but always smiling, adorning walls and posters throughout the office.

The contrast between the office workers and the people depicted in images on the walls is performed through ethnicity and, importantly, through material culture. The office itself is similar to most other large offices in Australia, containing desks, printers, monitors, scanners, projectors, and whiteboards; vital equipment for the types of labour undertaken in what Bruno Latour (1987:215) would refer to as a "centre of calculation," a locality where knowledge is accumulated through links to other places. The people depicted in the images around the office, however, appear with trees, plants, and farm equipment. Their labour is emplaced, rooted, small scale and ultimately local, representing a kind of "Third World agrarian imaginary" (Besky 2014:29).

Highlighting the material contrasts between people of the Global South and middle-class Australians has been a productive strategy for NGOs like Global Partners in Development. The organisation has often relied upon the frame of the nation-state in explaining relative disadvantage in fundraising efforts, and marketing staff claimed that 94% of Australians recognised the GPD brand. Indeed, I had been familiar with GPD from a young age, with recollections of my older sister participating in various fundraising activities for the organisation. The origins of this dissertation project are perhaps more recent; while employed as a youth worker in the Warlpiri community I refer to as Mulga Flat, I was intrigued by the presence of Toyota four-wheel-drives with the GPD logo emblazoned on the door. Why was GPD, an international development and relief agency, working within Australia, exemplar of the Global North in the south?

The apparent novelty of an international relief agency working within the wealthy country of Australia was the starting point for this thesis but throughout my research this apparent juxtaposition slipped in and out of view. Empirically, the distinctiveness of the international NGO collapsed into multiple other discourses from which it was supposed to be separate. GPD, like many supposedly "non-government" organisations, was bound in many ways to the state (Fisher 1997:455). Nor did the NGO appear to be entirely "non-profit," as they engaged in various marketing practices (see chapter seven). The GPD project I studied was implemented within Warlpiri communities that were often institutionally saturated, in cooperation and contestation with other interventions from which GPD's distinction was often difficult to disentangle. Even the work of the project itself was hard to define and articulate, so couched in a participatory development ethos that it often appeared that the organisation did not intervene at all. The lines that designated "international development" as a category distinct from service delivery, state infrastructure, or Indigenous policy in Australia, seemed to blur the closer I looked.

However, NGOs exist whether we study them or not (Bornstein 2017:645). No matter how my object of study disappeared and shifted out of view, GPD remained, for anyone who cared to look, an international development NGO that implemented an early childhood project in Central Australia. Based on 13 months of multi-sited fieldwork with GPD, and drawing on the actor-network theory approaches of Annemarie Mol (2002) and Bruno Latour (2005), this thesis takes the view that rather than denouncing "international development" as false artifice, its ongoing existence must be explained. This thesis asks after the durability of international development epistemologies, and the effects that they produce. What does it mean to order intervention in terms of a global development organisation interacting with local, Indigenous communities? How are such entities rendered stable through development intervention? What forms of equipment—material and conceptual—are necessary to bring about the project as existing at the confluence of global and local? And what are the effects of this dichotomous confluence as a structuring principle?

The questions here are consciously non-normative, and not the usual ones asked of development NGOs. The following section of this introduction offers further exposition, demonstrating how the research has grown up, from its crude beginnings when I sought to examine and evaluate "international development" in an "Aboriginal context." I demonstrate how the problems with this research approach afforded new theoretical and conceptual locations that informed the thesis and drove it forward. My review of the literature then positions this thesis largely in between the anthropology of development, and anthropology of Indigenous Australia *vis-à-vis* settler-colonial governance. I then offer an account of some of the methodological considerations of my research, in which the research object, an international NGO, differs in important ways from more classical anthropological topics, and reflect on what this means for the kind of research that results. Finally, I give a thesis outline, orienting the reader towards each chapter and the thesis as a whole.

Searching for analytical tractability

To begin mapping the theoretical terrain of the thesis, I want to return to the crudely figured question that served as its initial spark: Why was an international development agency working in the developed country context of Australia? One answer to this question could be found, predictably, via a quick Google search. GPD brings their expertise and experience in administering development projects internationally to the well-documented problems facing Indigenous people in Australia. With this premise in mind, my research questions took further shape: What was it that GPD brought? What were the differences between the international development context and Indigenous communities? How would their approach play out in the Australian context? And would it *work* in the achievement of goals of Indigenous development? Given the "wicked problems" (ACFID 2011:3) facing Indigenous Australia, my evaluative questions appeared compelling, with the promise of a fresh approach and new solutions to old problems. GPD fundraising material consistently relied upon a divide between Global North and South as justification for the benefactions of wealthy donors. Their presence in Australia appeared out of step with this organisational identity, and had to be *different* in some way from their other engagements.

My study would thus be comparative, taking as its first object "international development" as carried out by the organisation, and as its second, the "Indigenous Australian context," the operating environment for the development project. I was aware that my approach was what Douglas Holmes and George Marcus (2005) call "para-ethnographic"; it was a study of research subjects who already produce their own representations. In the case of GPD, these representations often took the form of marketing materials, annual reports, and project evaluations. In producing this thesis, I took a classical anthropological stance, with the conviction that my work would be different from those existing representations by virtue of its ethnographic method, detailed observations, and scholarly rigour. Perhaps, but even with this approach, I had yet to depart from the normative understandings of how development works: the project is the product of global development expertise, which then travels, *mutatis mutandis*, to local sites of implementation.

This line of enquiry proved to be something of a false start, leading to fundamentally sterile conclusions. What was "global" about the project persistently evaded apprehension and description. The global seemed to possess a substance that evaporated upon closer investigation. The epistemological artefacts—documents, models, plans and frameworks—that GPD carried with them from their experience in international development quickly lost analytical prominence when examined for their globalism. The idea that studying "international development" in concert with Indigenous Australia would produce interesting frictions was complicated by the point that Latour has made, that "the global has no concrete existence" (2005:192). When I searched for it, it seemed intangible and out of reach.

Frequently, when I told staff I was interested in finding out about GPD's "international development practice," I was directed to particular overarching documents with words like "guidelines," "principles" or "framework" in their titles. But many of these documents proved difficult to analyse. The anthropologist Annelise Riles is instructive here. In her ethnography of global women's networks based in Fiji, she has argued that "forms of liberal rationalism are impervious to critique because they point not to themselves but to the gaps within the form, and beyond, to the Real" (Riles 2000:182). My attempt to compare some of these "forms of liberal rationalism," such as development models, principles, plans, and frameworks, with the local context proved difficult, largely because those artefacts always pointed me back towards the local, the point at which they are said to reach their substantive fulfilment, at which they will finally *become* meaningful. To offer an example, in one conversation with a GPD manager, I asked what he thought the major lesson from GPD's experience in international development was, and how this applied to Indigenous Australia. His response was simply "the lesson is community development," which is to say, a form of participatory development in which the locals take the lead and pursue development on their own terms (see Mansuri and Rao 2004). The manager's answer here pushes my question elsewhere, nowhere in particular, but towards a multitude of local, "on-the-ground" realisations. The lesson is, in a sense, not held by GPD, but in forms of local knowledge. The organisation points always to something other than itself.

The presence of GPD in the wealthy country context of Australia did appear novel, but it presented no fundamental challenge to the logic of the international development organisation. As with Riles" network, "transcultural efficacy is internal to the form" (Riles 2000:181). International development, is always already *transnational.* The organisation encountered a multitude of cultural differences within its global mandate. These are written into organisational documents, not as polyglossia, but as transcendence of cultural difference. Documents presented a kind of universality, with axiomatic statements about ensuring the "wellbeing" and "life potential" of children. Such statements offer multiple interpretations (see also Mosse 2005:15), thereby anticipating the forms of cultural difference in the sites where the development agency works. The encounter with "culture" does not emerge only as the development project is implemented and reaches "the ground." It is anticipated, a conclusion at once foregone and yet always somewhat incomplete. Attempts to compare Indigenous "culture" with the models of development fell flat, especially when those models are—semiotically, at least—endlessly accommodating of difference.

The participatory process of community development itself can be partially understood as a practical response to critiques of "top-down", high modernist development schemes (see Scott 1998), or of development as Foucauldian discourse about the 'Third World' with the objective of controlling it (Escobar 1995). More than just the focus on community development, GPD also emphasised the inclusion of culture as perhaps the most significant aspect of their project in Central Australia, an example of the broader "cultural turn" within development where "Western ethnocentrism as the implicit culture of developmentalism is no longer adequate" (Nederveen Pieterse 2010:64). The respect for "culture" was even more significant with regards to GPD's Indigenous Australian projects than in the international programming group. While the pathologisation of certain populations occurs in the context of international development (Koddenbrock and Schouten 2015) and also of Indigenous communities, GPD consciously avoided such actions through a discourse of being "strengths-based," aimed at building upon the resources and assets of Indigenous communities rather than remediating their deficits.

To offer one example, the GPD Australia Program team—focused exclusively on Indigenous Australia—was invited to a workshop in the head office on the topic of working in "the field." The presenter was a long-time worker in disaster relief for GPD, and perhaps as a result of this particular line of work, his view of the field was a kind of "hardship post," a place he had suffered through: "I divide months into weeks, weeks into days, days into hours. That's how I get through." He asked the group whether the Indigenous communities where GPD staff worked were "pretty crappy places." The phrasing was out of step with staff of a project that claimed to be founded on the respect for Indigenous culture, people and communities. Australia Program folk shifted in their seats, glanced at each other, with no one sure how to respond, until a Central Australia program manager stepped in with "the communities are beautiful, but they are facing a number of challenges." Insofar as communities "face" challenges, their problems are always positioned as the result of external influences. In having such a framework, staff on the Australia Program team were precisely the people who the critics of development want them to be (see Kowal 2015a); they sought to efface their own agency, let Indigenous people lead the development process, valorised Indigenous culture and always avoided pathologising Indigenous communities.

The artefacts of international development I examined did not just disable a form of critique, they left little space for analysis at all. Their sequential formulation, where implementation comes *after* planning, tells us always to wait for a reality that is future perfect, a project that will only appear once "the local community" is added in. The institution appears as a form awaiting content (Handelman 1981:9), and as anthropologists our gaze is directed elsewhere. If we stay within the topography that posits a binary between the organisation as the subject and the local community as the object of development, the gaze can move only from one pole to the other, from the failed analysis of the global organisation to an attempt at accounting for local culture. But to pursue this line of enquiry risks reifying the development organisation as rational, functional and already well-known, thus eliding its detailed ethnographic analysis. The implementation of development projects always encounter "challenges," but to account for these in terms of local culture is, as Richard Rottenburg has demonstrated, fulfilling the expected role of anthropologists in the "self-staging of development cooperation" (2009:73). To paraphrase Latour, the "straight path to reason" does not require explanation, only the "crooked deviations" (2005:97). Culture, or a mismatch of cultures, serves as an explanation when things do not work as they are supposed to (see chapter six). Development models guard against analysis in terms of their own unacknowledged cultural content, but to approach the same issue with the assumption of Indigenous cultural difference risks reifying development discourse as monolithic and essentially functional: models are basically valid, but implementation "on the ground" is always messy and somehow more "cultural". Also, the development project claims endless scope to incorporate any anthropological insights from the "local culture," to become ever more "culturally appropriate." An anthropological approach which sets the two scales in contrast simply affirms the inherent teleology.

Grasping for an effective analysis now, a development anthropologist may be inclined to drift towards the evaluative impulse: Did the project work? In spite of my protestations that I was seeking to discover "not whether but *how* development projects work" (Mosse 2005:8, emphasis in original), most GPD staff assumed that I was aiming to answer the overall question of whether GPD was doing a good job or not. Friends and family, too, would ask about my research and assume the same: "So, what are your findings? Should I donate to Global Partners in Development?" The latter question has become a pertinent one, as the idea of "donating to charity" is increasingly differentiated in terms of which charity is best. Charities, non-profits and NGOs are now ranked in terms of their effectiveness and accountability, with the emergence of numerous websites that rate organisations to help "make your dollar go further."[2] This trend is characteristic of the increased marketisation of the non-profit space, but the question of "how effective" also contains the moral concern to see improvements for disadvantaged populations. It is no longer enough that NGOs simply aim to do good, they must now be good at notably doing good (Hilhorst 2002).

To assess a development project as either a success or failure is, however, to simultaneously assert what Cris Shore and Susan Wright, in their discussion of policy, refer to as "authoritative instrumentalism" (Shore and Wright 2011:4–5). Such instrumentalism takes as its starting point the objective existence of policies, that are the result of rational decision-making processes until the right policy is selected, before being implemented and evaluated (2011:4-5). NGOs

[2] Some examples are givewell.org and changepath.com.au

implement projects rather than policies but as the state continues to outsource its functions, the distinction between the two is not always clear, and NGO projects adhere to the same topography of rational policy design that occurs prior to implementation. The point is that assessing success or failure is already internal to development as standardised evaluation; as James Ferguson has noted, “there is a ready ear for criticisms of ‘bad development projects,’ so long as these are followed up with calls for ‘good development projects’” (1994a:185). This is what Tess Lea has called “the continual possibility for review and techniques of self-correction” (2014:3). Critique is quickly co-opted by development discourse with the promise to do better. Even if critique is not our goal as anthropologists, at the very least such instrumentalism facilitates an analytical narrowing. Both success and failure reaffirm both the ontological coordinates of development projects and their moral legitimacy. And by now it is well-established that “failure” can be more valuable than success, generating ever more interventions into the lives of the disadvantaged (Ferguson 1994a:8; Lea 2008:13; Mosse 2005:19; Riles 2000:181; Sanders 2008). Indeed, GPD had its own monitoring and evaluation team, as well as annually contracting external evaluators to assess the project against predefined outcomes.

However, even in the presence of existing paradigms of evaluation, a total elision of the instrumentalist question of evaluation is not sustainable as an ethnographer of NGOs. It is precisely the question of whether the project was working or not that allowed for my ethnographic engagement, with my promise of reflections for the organisation and the potential for improved practice. GPD’s orientation towards review, evaluation, and generating their own interpretations of practice is what allowed my research to occur at all. I relied upon what Amanda Lashaw refers to as the “slippery meaning of critique” operating as a “unifying identity” between ethnographer and organisation (2012:514). Further, the question of effectiveness is also framed in moral terms, as nothing less than the achievement of happy, healthy Indigenous children. Such humanitarian goals entail a kind of “moral untouchability” (Fassin 2011:35) that cannot be dismissed by the ethnographer because they appear, perhaps, analytically banal.

My research on GPD entailed difficulties in gaining analytical distance from the object of study. Existing paradigms of interpretation threatened to overwhelm my own, especially when combined with the imperative to make the research somewhat relevant for the organisation. Considering that traditional ethnographic approaches were often based on "the radical incommensurability of modern and non-modern worlds" (Bessire 2014:20), and particularly so in the context of ethnography of Indigenous Australia (Cowlishaw 2017), my research required some concomitant shifts in ethnographic techniques. Providing ethnographic detail on the lives of White NGO staff is of questionable anthropological value (Holmes and Marcus 2005:248; Lashaw 2012:516), lacking as it does the assumed difference between the research subjects and the implied reader, a binary on which ethnography has traditionally depended. The object of study is, as Riles points out, already well known (2000:5). Simultaneously, it seemed to evade ethnographic description. I had encountered what Lashaw (2012:501) has referred to as "the impasse of NGO studies."

Ontological politics and NGO practice

The difficulties I encountered in articulating exactly *what* I was studying, however, generated another question: Why was it possible to think of the substance of "international development" in the first instance? If we are to take this question seriously, we cannot simply denounce "international development" as false artifice while choosing some other entity, perhaps the local community, as the real and solid thing to study (Latour 2005:28). Rather, I want to ask how international development gains stability as a "category of practice" (Mosse 2013:228). In this task, I deploy the work of Annemarie Mol (1999; 2002) on ontological politics, in the tradition of actor-network theory (commonly abbreviated to ANT).

Actor-network theory is perhaps best known for its attribution of agency to non-humans, and the subsequent destabilisation of the human/non-human divide (Law 1999:3). While I do discuss the significance of what might be called non-human actors (mainly documents) in the chapters that follow, the human/non-human binary is not my explicit concern in this thesis. I focus on the performative or enactive element of ANT, following Bruno Latour, who argues that there are "no groups, only group formations" (2005:27). I understand this to mean that we should not take the groups or ensembles of social analysis as fixed from the beginning of our research, but aim to describe how groups are continually performed. I quote Latour to elaborate on this point:

> Group formations leave many more traces in their wake than already established connections which, by definition, might remain mute and invisible. If a given ensemble simply lies there, then it is invisible and nothing can be said about it. The ensemble generates no trace and thus produces no information whatsoever; if it is visible, then it is being performed and will then generate new and interesting data (Latour 2005:31).

The use of the term "performed" here does not imply artificiality, but points to the way in which practices makes entities visible. Social aggregates, Latour argues, "are made by the various ways and manners in which they are said to exist" (2005:34). In this way, the entities that I took as the starting point of my analysis—the international development organisation and the Indigenous community—need to be understood not as pre-given, but continually performed through practice. In this way, my study does not take "the NGO" as pre-given, but focuses on the process of doing the NGO, or of "NGOing" (see Lewis 2017:36).

The anthropologist and philosopher Annemarie Mol's work is particularly valuable for building on this observation in ethnographic practice. Mol studies the subject/object distinctions in the medical diagnosis and treatment of atherosclerosis in Dutch hospitals. Mol is concerned with the ways in which "medicine enacts the objects of its concern and treatment" (Mol 2002:vii). Enacting is separate from knowing in Mol's analysis because the practice of medicine is always entangled with its object—there is no separate object that can be known more or less accurately by way of different practices (2002:vii-viii). Mol demonstrates that atherosclerosis, the object of medical intervention, is *performed* in multiple ways—as a pain in a patient's leg when walking, as plaque removed from the artery of an amputated limb, or as a diagnostic blood pressure measurement—without ever accessing a single object, or a foundational reality of what the disease is, as each practice produces a slightly different object.

These performances may chime—pain in the leg and a drop in the blood pressure measurement adds up to atherosclerosis (Mol 2002:68). If they do not match up, the singularity of the object must be maintained by discarding one signifier, and an explanation is found for an inconsistent diagnosis (Mol 2002:66). A patient may have no pain, but experience the plaque build-up and blood pressure that signify the disease. Such inconsistencies coexist within medicine, and do not lead to big debates on the precise nature of illness (Mol 1999:78–9). The implications here are significant.

> Objects come into being—and disappear—with the practices in which they are manipulated. And since the object of manipulation tends to differ from one practice to another, reality multiplies (Mol 2002:5).

For instance, a microscope is used to look at plaque, but for plaque to be relevant in the hospital, it needs the microscope (Mol 2002:156). The two are ontologically entangled. Mol's ethnographic strategy "hinges on the art of never forgetting about microscopes" (2002:31). The "singularity of the object" must therefore be viewed not as a pre-given fact, but an accomplishment (Mol 2002:119).

The reality of the "object," then, depends crucially on the forms of practice that bring it into view, and without which it disappears. Mol's concern is with therapeutic interventions between a doctor and patient, but the collapse of the distinction between subject and object that is inherent in ontological politics also offers a way out of the instrumental paradigm of development, as well as the assumed familiarity of the ethnographic subject. If practice is fundamentally entangled with the object, then the question of how the development project acts upon the Aboriginal community is one that has taken as its starting point the separation of those two entities, which acts as a frame for subsequent description. Ontological politics returns us to the initial decision to frame the problem in this way, suggesting that "reality does not precede the mundane practices in which we interact with it" (Mol 1999:75).

Ontological politics has been taken up outside of Mol's medical setting by other researchers. Kai Koddenbrock and Peer Schouten (2015) have adopted Mol's approach in the field of humanitarianism. Koddenbrock and Schouten argue that the apparatus of humanitarian intervention in the Democratic Republic of the Congo performs "Congo" as a failed state. The extensive security apparatus that surrounds White humanitarian staff and facilitates this performance not only segregates "the developed" from locals, but pathologises "Congo" as an unsafe, "flawed object" (Koddenbrock and Schouten 2015:194–8). Such securitisation might ordinarily be considered the by-product of intervention, but Koddenbrock and Schouten demonstrate its centrality to the humanitarian project here itself, as the enactment of a "failed state" sustains the ongoing need for intervention.

The point for my research is not only that the development apparatus conjures an object that requires intervention and thereby legitimates ongoing development, a point made by James Ferguson (1994a) in his classic ethnography *The Anti-Politics Machine.* This thesis demonstrates the ways in which the multiple objects of development are ontologically entangled with development practice. In so doing, the terms of the question shift, to ask not how the "global" development organisation acts upon the "local" community, but how those two entities are produced as separate, stable and enduring in the first instance (Latour 2005:192; Riles 2000:91). In this way, this thesis fits into a "new institutionalism … that seeks to explain institutions rather than simply assume their existence" (Nee 1998:1). Further, drawing on Latour (2005:185), the question is not one of asking in what kind of "site" we are located at any given time—global, national or local—but of demonstrating how it becomes possible to talk about "sites" in these terms at all.

David Mosse notes that ontological "network" type approaches to the study of development have, however, been critiqued for their failure to consider power relations as part of their analysis (2013:232 citing Escobar 2012). Certainly, Mol's assertion that "realities have become multiple" (1999:75) when performed by different practices leaves us with the question: Which reality is privileged? In Mol's hospital, competing realities tend to mean that one is discarded; a diagnostic test is taken as truer than a clinical one, for instance. The clashes that Mol describes as occurring within the hospital rarely rise to the level of a controversy. But in this thesis, I deal with what such performance-based understandings of objects mean in the context of the heavily politicised field of Indigenous affairs. Indeed, if we acknowledge Mol's formulation of "ontological politics" which suggests that "the conditions of possibility are not given" (1999:75), this means that things could always be otherwise. The question—which approaches considerations of power—is not whether a particular performance corresponds to reality, but what the effects of that performance are. The conceptual locations and staging of the development project produce particular effects, and in this thesis I seek to ask after these and their consequences.

For Mol, certain types of equipment are required to produce the singularity of a disease like atherosclerosis: microscopes, scalpels, pressure measurements, and also a doctor and a patient. In the chapters of this thesis, I show what kinds of equipment and practices, both material and conceptual, are needed to stabilise development intervention. It is relevant that GPD builds evidence, that they write reports, have meetings, raise funds and do projects. All of these activities perform and shape the organisation: they are not neutral but are necessary compositions making development work. Moreover, such practices are not hijacked by some other social force through which they serve only as vectors (Latour 2005:45). In the case of literature on NGOs, "neoliberalism" stands out as the hidden force that lurks always beneath the surface or outside as a meta-designer. Indeed, neoliberalism now seems maligned not only for its deleterious social outcomes, but also for its scholarly ubiquity (Ferguson 2009). Conceptual categories such as neoliberalism are far from irrelevant to my analysis. However, I am attempting, at all times, to hold the NGO, its practices and effects in view, without substituting them with something else before the fact.

Situating the thesis: cross currents of literature

Taken as a whole, this thesis is positioned at the boundary of two bodies of literature: the anthropology of development, and what I refer to as ethnography of settler-colonial governance, as part of broader anthropologies of Indigenous Australia. In this section, I aim to position my work within these two anthropological currents, drawing out where they converge and differ. I follow David Lewis and Mark Schuller's (2017:634) calls to study "the inherently unstable category of NGO." Lewis and Schuller note that "rather than attempting to fix the category or contest the boundaries implied by it, anthropologists are beginning to interrogate the meaning behind the contestations themselves" (2017:634). In the next section I examine both bodies of literature as well as the conceptual boundaries that have tended to hold them apart.

NGOgraphy and the anthropology of development

Ethnographic studies of NGOs, or "NGOgraphy," (Leve and Karim 2001:55) represent a small but growing subfield within the anthropology of development. Since 2013, "NGOgraphy" has had its own interest group within the American Anthropological Association, holding biennial conferences (Sampson 2017:8). I attended one such conference in Denver in 2015. I noted that the conference included both anthropologists and development practitioners, combining "applied" and "critical" work in a sometimes uneasy tension. In their review of anthropological engagements with NGOs, Lewis and Schuller note that much early work on NGOs "was regarded as compromised by its production within the world of applied consultancy" (2017:636). But with the critical turn in development, largely traced to the work of James Ferguson's *The Anti-Politics Machine* (1994a) and Arturo Escobar's *Encountering Development*

(1995) anthropologists began to critique NGOs (Lewis and Schuller 2017:638). These works signalled a kind of paradigmatic shift, described by Thomas Yarrow and Soumhya Venkatesan as a move from development anthropology to the anthropology of development (2012:3). Research moved, at least partially, from applied approaches that took development as a "self-evident if complex social and economic process" to detached studies that apprehended it as "a Western invention" that reproduced the "supposed superiority" of the West (Yarrow and Venkatesan 2012:3). Development discourse itself became an object of study.

In spite of the popular assumption that NGOs exist to do good (Fisher 1997), critiques of development have since become commonplace within anthropology, often deploying the work of Michel Foucault and the concept of "neoliberal governmentality." As the author Arundhati Roy (2014: para. 5) has pithily stated, NGOs are an "indicator species" for neoliberalism: as the state has withdrawn from the direct provision of services, NGOs have increasingly filled the gap left behind in both the Global South and Northern contexts. NGOs are said to constitute part of a "de facto government" (Ferguson 2009:168) or one of the "para-infrastructures" (Biehl and McKay 2012:1210) central to neoliberal governance. Moreover, narratives of community development and participation, with their emphasis on generating forms self-sufficiency rather than dependence on the state might also be critiqued as fully neoliberal. In this way, development can be figured as an "anti-political mask of power" (Mosse 2013:230).

More recently, there have been calls to move away from critiques of development as neoliberalism or anti-politics (Craig and Porter 2006; Yarrow and Venkatesan 2012). I think that it is not adequate to simply state that development must *really* be about power, as if as ethnographers we discover this fundamental truth. At the same time, however, considerations of power should not necessarily be sidelined because they have become *de rigeur*. To draw on Latour again, I contend that it is important to explain power rather than simply use the term (2005:82). This thesis aims to move beyond a polemic critique of NGOs (see Petras 1999), and draws upon a number of ethnographies that entail both critical and analytical distance from development agencies while not assuming the critique of power as the default, under-analysed position (for example Gupta 2012; Hilhorst 2003; Li 2007; Malkki 2015; Mosse 2005; Rottenburg 2009; Schuller 2012).

NGOs are often visible in the fieldwork locations of anthropologists, whether we specifically study them or not (Lewis 2017:33–4). While the anthropology of development is an increasingly significant field, as Lewis and Schuller note, full length ethnographic monographs of NGOs remain relatively few (2017:638), although a number of edited volumes have been produced on the topic (see Bernal and Grewal 2014; Edwards and Hulme 2013; Lashaw, Vannier, and Sampson 2017). The category of "NGO" is defined by what it is not, non-governmental and generally non-profit, expunging market and state in this semantic move (see Fisher 1997:442). In practice, however, both these boundaries are often blurred. NGOs have a well-known "definitional instability" (Lewis 2017:27 citing Gellner 2010), in that they are so diverse that "no one analytical frame seems sufficient to characterise them all" (Leve and Karim 2001:53). Beyond the broad claim to "do good" (Hilhorst 2003:6) the category of "NGO" does not approach coherence—and perhaps not even then, given the political range of services provided by NGOs. For this reason, it is not clear that the body of "NGOgraphies" that have been produced form a context around this thesis.

Erica Bornstein, a noted anthropologist of NGOs, has suggested (with a nod to Clifford Geertz) that we do not study NGOs as much as we study *in* NGOs (Bornstein 2017:645 in Lewis and Schuller 2017). This observation is borne out in much ethnography that examines NGOs in conjunction with other processes. For instance, Bornstein's (2003) own study of two Christian NGOs in Zimbabwe deals with the relationship between faith, religion and modernity (see also Fountain 2011), but also the "financial flows through religious organizations" (Fortun 2005:316). In common with Bornstein, I also deal with such flows, particularly in terms of child sponsorship in chapter seven of this thesis. My own field site did not contain actual sponsor children in the same way that

Bornstein's did, but children nonetheless assumed aesthetic significance as a marketing device for GPD.

Other ethnographic monographs on NGOs have dealt with their implication in the market. Julia Elyachar's (2005) ethnography based in Cairo, Egypt, deals with the ways in which "culture" becomes co-opted by the market in the form of microenterprise, supported by NGOs distributing small loans (Elyachar 2005:11). In Elyachar's study, NGOs do not oppose the state or the market but rather support both, which can result in forms of dispossession. Also focused on microfinance, Lamia Karim's (2011) work on four NGOs (also lenders) in Bangladesh demonstrates how culturally specific and gendered modes of honour and shame are utilised by microfinance lenders to produce a form of "NGO govermentality." Similarly, Aradhana Sharma's (2008) work on an NGO in rural India shows how programs aimed at the "empowerment" of women fold into forms of neoliberalism that harm the poor, while pointing out the fragmented ways in which "neoliberalism" is manifest.

What is evident is that in studies of NGOs, the NGO itself has often been understood within and through other, more anthropologically popular categories such as religion, the market, or the state. Certainly, this approach is valid, but the important distinction to make, I think, is whether the NGO is treated as an actor that makes some difference to the analysis, what Latour would term a "mediator" (2005:39), rather than only the effect of some other force. By way of example, Mark Schuller's (2012) ethnography of two NGOs in Haiti demonstrates the way in which NGOs are actors in "trickle-down imperialism." Schuller notes that NGOs are often "semi-elites" that mediate contact between Northern donors and communities in the South (Schuller 2012:179), but argues against the "theoretical dismissing of intermediaries" (2012:181). Imperialism goes on, but Schuller demonstrates how this works precisely through a chain of command involving NGOs as actors. Schuller demonstrates that it is important that NGOs do *not* restate policy verbatim from the "higher ups," as this paradoxically allows imperialism to continue in place of genuine participation (2012:183-4). NGOs are not simply an effect, a by-product or value-free intermediary in this analysis.

Dorothea Hilhorst's (2003) ethnography of NGOs in the Philippines is perhaps unusual in its steadfast focus on what it means to be an NGO. Hilhorst achieves this by focusing on the everyday practices within NGOs, but argues that this approach does not lead to fixing the NGO as a singular object with one meaning, but rather suggests that NGOs have "multiple realities" (Hilhorst 2003:25). My approach bears some similarities here: Hilhorst is focused on "the process nature of organisation" (2003:215), focusing not on what an NGO is, but how "NGO-ing is done" (2004:5). In this, she deals with the issue I have outlined in above: the incongruence between viewing the NGO as both self-evident through its own representations, while at the same time as slippery and intangible research object. The political context of the grassroots NGOs in the Philippines differs significantly from my own study but, in this thesis, I encounter many of the topics with which Hilhorst dealt; funding, accountability, and development models included.

Like the other ethnographies of NGOs that I have cited, this thesis spreads outwards from the NGO into other categories like expertise, biopolitics, governmentality, community, participation, the market, and the state. However, I endeavour to hold the NGO, its staff and interlocutors in view in at all times, including them as actors within this orientation.

The Australian state and Indigenous people

The concept of "NGOgraphy" has not gained a significant following within Australian anthropology. Although graduate students have used ethnographic methods in their accounts of international NGOs in Australia (Gallagher 2010; Colyer 2014), and work on the confluence of international development agencies and Indigenous Australia exists outside of the discipline (ACFID 2011; Hunt 2005; 2010; Schwab and Sutherland 2002) there is currently no anthropological account of an international NGO working with Indigenous people in Australia.

The reasons for this lacuna may be empirical. In the 1990s, much of the Global South experienced what has been called an “NGO boom” (Alvarez 1999:181) or “NGO fever” (Bernal 2017:37) whereby NGOs became viewed as the means by which development would be achieved (Fisher 1997:441). While international NGOs have engaged with Indigenous issues in Australia since the 1960s (Kilby 2015:122–3), Australia cannot be said to have undergone an “NGO boom” in the same sense, although there have been some parallel developments in the form of a “new public management” paradigm of neoliberal governance (Carroll and Steane 2002), and the development of what has been termed the “Indigenous sector” (Rowse 2005:207).

Dominant ideas about the status of the Australian state play a role in the apparent absence of NGO research. As Tim Rowse wrote over two decades ago, Indigenous people are generally seen as “a special responsibility of the Australian national government” (1992:63). Some have argued that the Australian governmental jurisdiction over remote Indigenous Australia is comparable to a failed state (Dillon and Westbury 2007). But in the context of NGO studies, there are significant conceptual and material differences between the Australian state and other “failed states.” In Haiti, for instance, Schuller (2007; 2009; 2012) documents the ways in which NGOs are seen by donors as more legitimate and less corrupt than the Haitian government. Importantly, NGOs pay their staff much more than the state can, resulting in a “brain drain” from the Haitian public sector to NGOs, which contributes to a vicious cycle in which state capacity is continually undermined (Schuller 2009:90). In turn, this leads to the emergence of NGO “fiefdoms” which have “near-sovereign control” (Schuller 2012:6). Schuller’s work is trenchant on this point, but it illustrates a broader prevailing discourse in international development, whereby states in the Global South are seen as corrupt and inefficient, clearing the way for NGOs to take over many of their functions (Karim 2001:92).

Compared with the Haitian example, the Australian state must be considered strong and legitimate.[3] There can be no well digging or school building where the government is supposed to provide such needs for its population as par for the citizenry. The 2007 Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER), colloquially known as "The Intervention," in which the federal government implemented a range of disciplinary measures and deployed the military (unarmed) in an attempt to remedy the reported dysfunction in Aboriginal communities, appears to further demonstrate the pre-eminence of the state here.[4] Certainly, this thesis also points to instances of governmental abandonment of Indigenous communities (Povinelli 2011), but in popular representation the Australian state retains legitimacy, particularly in terms of pursuing "Closing the Gap" targets, aimed at achieving statistical equality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians (see Commonwealth of Australia 2016). My point, for present purposes, is that the Australian state has frequently been figured as the counterpoint to the Indigenous "community" in forms of Indigenous development, and the issue has always been framed as fundamentally a domestic one, thus tending to elide consideration in terms of international development.

The conceptual boundary between domestic and international—and indeed between Global South and Global North—is the reason, I think, for the lack of uptake of anthropologies of NGOs in Australia. When Indigenous Australia has been compared internationally, it has often been with other settler-colonial states of the Global North, like Canada, New Zealand and the USA (Dussart and Poirier 2017; Young 1995). Catherine Trundle (2012:211–212) has argued that what is called "charity" or even "welfare" in the North is referred to as "development" in the South. For Trundle, these divisions are "lenses for

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[3] Delegitimatisión of the state has occurred in developed country contexts too, of course. See, for instance, David Graeber's discussion on the rise and fall of the postal service in the USA (Graeber 2015:153–166). But states like the USA remain powerful as the very donors to NGOs who in turn delegitimise (inadvertently or otherwise) other failed states.

[4] Throughout this thesis I refer to the Northern Territory Emergency Response as the NTER rather than the more commonly used "The Intervention." This is because there are multiple types of intervention in Aboriginal communities and I do not want to privilege just one.

constituting global differences rather than reflections of distinct practices" (2012:212). As David Lewis (2015) has argued, the distinction between domestic and international "third sector" work is increasingly blurred and a more unified approach is needed. In the context of NGO studies, to designate Indigenous development as a "domestic" issue and not an international one is therefore to make a value judgement on the strength and functionality of the Australian state. As I show in this thesis, to do "development" in Australia is not necessarily recognisably different from other, existing interventions. As noted, GPD was entangled with "the state" in terms of operations, funding and the broader project of closing statistical gaps.

In this way, ethnography on broadly conceived "intervention" in Indigenous lives is relevant for my thesis, and I do not limit myself to NGO-based research. Tess Lea's (2008) work on public health bureaucrats in the Northern Territory (NT) has been particularly useful for its non-normative, but ethnographic approach to the Territory Health Service, highlighting the peopled inhabitation of bureaucratic spaces. It was through reading this book—and often nodding in recognition—while employed as a youth worker in a Central Australian Indigenous community that I was motivated to pursue this research project. The interventionary logics described by Lea were not limited to government departments; at that time I worked for a "locally grown" Aboriginal organisation, and my research finds many similarities in an "international" NGO.

Emma Kowal's ethnography (2015a) has also been of significant value. It too deals with public health professionals in Northern Australia, but with a stronger focus on the formation of a "White anti-racist subjectivity" (2015:49). Kowal skilfully argues that White anti-racist health workers are caught between the poles of remedialism, which aims at achieving statistical parity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations ("Closing the Gap"), and Orientalism, which seeks to preserve Indigenous difference. Ultimately, White anti-racists fear that "essential Indigeneity resides in the gaps they seek to close" (Kowal 2015a:161). Kowal's incisive formulation captures the anxiety around enacting a colonising subjectivity in the process of trying to "do good" (see also

Land 2015). At times, GPD staff also displayed elements of the "White anti-racist subjectivity" and I draw on Kowal's work regularly.

Both of these works deal with forms of biomedical intervention and are unusual in the context of Australian anthropology in that they maintain the focus on non-Indigenous people in "intercultural" settings. While few ethnographers today would attempt to write about Indigenous Australia *without* reference to the settler-colonial nation state, the state has still often remained a "context," an encapsulating frame for Indigenous life, often glossed as "broader Australian society" (Dalley and Martin 2015:8) rather than taken as an ethnographic subject on its own. Ethnography that does not directly approach the state or other forms of intervention is not necessarily to be criticised, and I rely upon much of this work in the thesis. But the collective ethnographic myopia within Australian anthropology towards non-Indigenous subjects—who are often employed in Aboriginal communities by the government or even by Indigenous organisations—is by now well acknowledged, if not entirely resolved (Dalley and Martin 2015; Hinkson and Smith 2005; Lea 2012a; Merlan 2005).[5] There have been even fewer ethnographic treatments of Indigenous/non-Indigenous relations in a non-interventionist capacity (but see, for example, Dalley 2015; Ottosson 2014; 2016).

Still, in her review of anthropologies of Indigenous Australia, Lea notes an "enduring preoccupation with questions of government" (Lea 2012a:188). Issues of how Indigenous people have dealt with the settler-colonial state and its emissaries have been usefully approached in multiple ethnographic monographs that I draw upon throughout this thesis (Austin-Broos 2009; Collmann 1988; Cowlishaw 1988; Merlan 1998; Morris 1989; Povinelli 2002; Trigger 1992). Questions along similar lines have also been pursued by non-anthropologists (Folds 2001; Moran, Wright and Memmot 2016; Purtill 2017; Rowse 1992). The political schisms that are contained within this broadly defined field came into

[5] Barry Morris (2012) has pointed out that ethnography in south eastern Australia was not framed in the same dichotomous terms that were common in work emerging from the north and centre of Australia, where colonisation came later.

view through Peter Sutton's 2009 work *The Politics of Suffering,* at least partially sparking a "culture crisis" of debate among anthropologists over issues of Indigenous disadvantage and suffering (Altman and Hinkson 2010). In his book, Sutton draws upon his long ethnographic engagements with Indigenous people in far north Queensland to controversially argue for the deficiencies of Indigenous culture in the context of the modern nation state, as well as critiquing the liberal permissiveness that her argues is wilfully blind to these deficiencies. For Sutton, the sanctified notion of Indigenous difference, upheld by many anthropologists, has permitted ongoing suffering in abeyance of basic human rights (2009:10). Other anthropological work (for example, Austin-Broos 2011) has grappled with a similar tension between equality and difference that Judith Kapferer (1996) has argued is fundamental to the Australian nation-state.

In another way, Patrick Sullivan (2011) has also dealt with the tension between egalitarianism and difference in his account of the administration of Indigenous Australia. Sullivan argues that Indigenous governance has undergone a significant shift. Where Indigenous Australians were once treated as political entities—as a distinct group of people with a special status in Australia—Sullivan suggests they are increasingly understood as citizens within the nation-state as per a policy emphasis on mainstreaming (2011:108), which is to say, a governmental reluctance to fund Indigenous-specific departments or social programs.[6] Sullivan deals with the complexity when Indigenous not-for-profit organisations are both the political vanguard of Indigeneity *and* the state contracted arm of service delivery to Indigenous populations (2011:49). Sullivan suggests we move away from viewing this situation as "intercultural," suggesting that "the analogy of intersecting structures is too rigid and needs to be superseded" (2011:23). I take up this question in detail in chapter five of this thesis.

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[6] The shift here could be seen as a reversal. Historian Russell McGregor notes that where early Indigenous activism, such as the Day of Mourning in 1938 expressed a desire for equality within the nation state, Indigenous people in the 1960s began to protest, particularly around land rights, on the basis of being "a colonised people seeking liberation" (2011:164).

The Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) has often been viewed as the paradigmatic moment in the shift that Sullivan describes, from "self-determination" of Indigenous peoples to the "normalisation" of the Indigenous citizenry, although Sullivan himself traces the policy genealogy to the 1990s (2011:1). The NTER, a sudden and dramatic policy intervention into Aboriginal communities, generated two edited volumes written by anthropologists (Altman and Hinkson 2007; Altman and Hinkson 2010) and significant academic debate. Since then, however, anthropological material specifically on the NTER seems to have receded (but see Biddle 2016; or the oeuvre of the Karrabing Film Collective).[7] Indeed, the context of what I refer to as an institutional palimpsest—where interventions are ongoing, overlapping and overwriting what has come before—in Aboriginal communities, the NTER, in spite of its alarming title, is perhaps less exceptional than we might think (see chapter two). Attempts to assess the specific impacts of the NTER have also been foiled by fundamentally inadequate forms of data collection (see Altman and Russell 2012). I do not wish to downplay the significance of this policy shift, and I discuss the NTER in relation to the GPD project in chapter one. But as I demonstrate, its distinctiveness on the ground, relative to other interventions, including the GPD project, was not always apparent (see also Lea 2012b:115; Musharbash 2010:219).

Beyond looking at the impacts of interventions in terms of their stated goals, ethnography has also dealt with the ways in which Indigenous people have managed interventions on their own terms. Jeffery Collmann's (1988) study on fringe camps in Alice Springs was one of the earliest in this tradition (but see also Sansom 1980). Collmann argued that fringe camps—makeshift, slum-like settlements on the outskirts of the town—were not symptomatic of cultural decay, but rather a method of maintaining autonomy from a White welfare apparatus that allowed Indigenous people to avoid moving into government

[7] The Northern Territory of Australia was one of the last areas to be colonized and retains a proportionally high number of Indigenous people, including many who live in remote communities. For this reason the Northern Territory often appears as a kind of "Aboriginal space" in the popular Australian imaginary, and the NTER was aimed specifically at the Indigenous people living there, including the Warlpiri.

provided housing. Since then, ethnographic examples of Indigenous engagement with various interventions have emerged, including biomedicine (Saethre 2013), native title (Vincent 2017), or forms of self-determination (Christen 2009). These last two, like community development, are not supposed to be "interventions" at all.

Elizabeth Povinelli (2011) has also drawn attention away from the highly visible aspects of the NTER in arguing that it is not state intervention but rather abandonment that characterises the lives of remote living Indigenous people who pursue lifestyles that are "Otherwise." Abandonment here is figured as a mode of governance in itself, that "directs life, letting those who wish to swim against the tide do so until they cross a line or exhaust themselves" (Povinelli 2011:118). It is not direct killing but what Lauren Berlant (2007) would call a kind of "slow death" that manifests in the drastically reduced life expectancies of remote living Indigenous people relative to statistically derived norms.

Povinelli's discussion of state abandonment can be understood as a form of neoliberal governmentality, a category through which the Australian state has frequently been understood (Lattas and Morris 2010; Miller and Orchard 2014). Povinelli neatly sums up neoliberalism as separate from older forms of economic liberalism, as the idea not only that "the market should be left alone," but also that "the market should be the general measure of all social activities and values" (2010:41). Frequently, neoliberalism has taken its empirical form in the deregulation of financial markets, privatisation of state assets, and devolution of state services, but also in strengthened state facilitation of private sector accumulation. In Australia, the theoretical and practical oeuvre produced by anthropologist Jon Altman has proposed economic development in Indigenous Australia outside of the neoliberal norm, recommending a "hybrid economy," comprising of cash-generating activities in conjunction with foraging and land management projects for Northern and Central Australia (see, for example, Altman 2009a; 2009b; 2010; 2014).

Certainly, much of this thesis lends itself towards analysis in terms of neoliberalism, but it deserves repeating that my ethnographic research does not suggest that neoliberalism is the dominant condition through which intervention is lived. For instance, GPD official discourse insisted that Indigenous communities would eventually become "self-sustaining," and "do it for themselves," at which point GPD would exit. Not only does this narrative satisfy a kind of postcolonial desire for Indigenous autonomy—at least rhetorically—it could also be considered neoliberal, an instance where "culture" becomes the way that people look after themselves, without state support (Povinelli 2010:46; see also Elyachar 2002:499). Yet, many GPD staff saw this differently. Their "exit" would be the point at which the success of their project (in conjunction with others) would be indisputable and the state would be forced to permanently fund similar projects, finally taking responsibility while employing Warlpiri staff instead of White outsiders. Eventually, GPD would hand their project over to government funding: a seemingly non-neoliberal conclusion. Ethnography can uncover the "scattered practices" that always survive beneath the "monotheistic privilege" of dominant policy models (Mosse 2004:645 citing de Certeau 1984).

While the fields of "NGOgraphy" and the Australian state *vis-à-vis* Indigeneity have generally been held separate, my review of the literature here demonstrates a number of productive similarities and frictions between the two bodies of work. Significantly, both fields have dealt with a tension between academic and applied forms of anthropology. In Australia, Gillian Cowlishaw (2017) has argued that anthropology has often been co-opted by the state through anthropologists acting as "consultants" in state adjudicated land claims and native title processes.[8] Conversely, the anthropologist David Trigger (2011) has noted that to engage with Indigenous communities and their political aspirations in practical terms does not permit the anthropologist to maintain the default position of opposition to the state. My thesis also engages with questions of the practical relevance of research, but in terms of the development project.

[8] Native title claims are advanced under the pre-colonial rights to land held by Indigenous people in Australia and recognised, at least partially, by the Native Title Act 1993.

While debate around anthropological work in land claims has become prominent within the discipline, Lea (2012a:191) notes that the critical anthropology of development remains absent (with some exceptions) in the context of work about Indigenous Australia. In my thesis I aim to contribute to this field. [9]

Finding a field

In 2009, I completed an honours thesis in anthropology at the University of Sydney; essentially a review of some contemporary ethnographies of Indigenous Australia in light of the "postmodern turn" in anthropology (see Clifford and Marcus 1986). After submitting my thesis, a lecturer and mentor asked if I was interesting in living and working in an Indigenous community in the Central Desert, an opportunity I keenly took up. I was soon hired as a youth worker in a remote Warlpiri community in Central Australia, in spite of having no youth work experience. So began an 18-month stint as in the community I refer to in this thesis as "Mulga Flat." My role was, for the most part, to run "diversionary" activities for Indigenous youth: mainly sports, "disco," educational programs, and bush trips. My employer was a locally grown Aboriginal organisation, and one that was regularly praised for its success in dealing with substance abuse among Indigenous youth.

At the time, however, my youth work never *felt* particularly successful. For instance, a group of teenagers would "re-engage" with education, which is to say, start attending school after an significant absence, much to the enthusiastic approval of the other youth workers. Within a few weeks, they had dropped out again, but not before the "success" was claimed by the organisation—and other agencies in the community—as an outcome of the work they were doing. Or, the organisation would report to their funding bodies the story of a young person who had gone from alcoholism (and some legal ramifications) to a client of the organisation's substance abuse program, and was now in full-time employment

[9] Influential theorists on development are often are cited in Indigenist anthropology by scholars such as Jon Altman, Patrick Sullivan, Emma Kowal and Tess Lea, for instance, but the uptake remains small.

as an apprentice tradesperson, their future looking bright. By the time this story was added to the annual report, this individual had given up his apprenticeship, left the community, and was out of contact with the organisation. My "on-the-ground" knowledge added further dimensions: this individual had worked as a tradesperson on and off in the past. The transformative narrative, from substance abuse to gainful employment, left out such inconvenient details.

Whether I am imposing unfair standards on local organisations with these vignettes or whether they demonstrate success or failure is not my concern at this point. There were other events I found peculiar, which I scribbled as inchoate field notes, asking questions without knowing where they would lead. Why did staff appear to go along with these good news stories in team meetings, only to angrily complain about the same meetings for their disingenuousness only minutes later? Why was the distinction between Indigenous and non-Indigenous, or *Yapa* and *Kardiya,* seemingly the fundamental, organising principle for not only the youth program, but community life in general? What was the peculiar linguistic convention attending the word "community" whereby it lost its definite article ("the") and became a kind of euphemism for "Aboriginal" and for progressive approaches to Indigenous issues more generally? And why did non-Indigenous staff judge each other primarily through the intersecting axes of how well they got along with *Yapa,* and how long they had been working in the community?

It was these kind of questions that initially spurred interest in an institutional ethnography in Central Australia. I began my PhD research in 2012, with a particular interest in "international development," owing to the GPD vehicles I had seen in Mulga Flat. I was determined to "study up" (Nader 1972:284), to emulate the likes of Lea (2008) and Kowal (2006) and study an organisation from the inside. This was also motivated by my conviction that Aboriginal people had been drastically over-researched at the expense of ethnographies that considered "intercultural" realities (Hinkson and Smith 2005). I began searching for "a way in," a connection that I could leverage to gain entry as a "participant-observer" in an international NGO. This process was fortuitously short: after a few unanswered emails and phone calls to various NGOs, the connection came through another anthropologist who knew an influential manager in the GPD Australia Program who had a background in anthropology. As GPD ran a project in the Warlpiri communities, fieldwork with them would allow me to return to the communities with which I was already familiar through my stint as a youth worker.

I emailed a research proposal to Global Partners in Development, with the goal of engaging as a "volunteer-participant" and a "critical friend." I would help out with the day-to-day operations of the GPD project wherever possible, while also offering constructive criticism, with the goal of improving practices within the organisation. Simultaneously, I acknowledged that the academic work I produced may not always be of direct use to the organisation in terms of actionable evidence. As I had my own funding through the university, I stated that my participation would not incur any financial costs for GPD.[10] After a meeting with a GPD staff member in Melbourne, my research project was approved by GPD senior management and I was accepted as a volunteer-researcher, working with the Central Australian team on their childhood project for a period of at least 12 months.

The process had been remarkably smooth. In formal terms, I had found my field and gained access. Yet, my fieldwork was to be characterised by never really feeling like an "insider," never having an equivalent of Geertz's (1972) classic moment of running from a police raid on a cockfight in instinctive solidarity with his Balinese cohorts. Other researchers of institutions (such as Lea in her study of bureaucrats and Kowal in her work on public health workers) have often been members of staff before they were ethnographers. David Mosse claims his study of UK development staff was "initially unintentional" (2006:935); ethnography grew out of other engagements rather than being the primary concern. In his study of a boxing gym in Chicago, Loic Wacquant (2004:9) suggests that had he entered the gym "with the explicit and avowed aim

[10] GPD did assist with some funding for my project, in the form of flights and accommodation for interstate meetings.

of studying it," he never would have gained the trust of his interlocutors. Unlike these researchers, I entered the organisation, first and foremost, as an ethnographer. To be sure, my previous experience in Warlpiri communities did smooth entry in some ways, particularly in terms of gaining "community" approval to conduct the research. But my status as a note-taking anthropologist entailed an originating and somewhat ongoing analytical distance from the organisation. One might ask what it means to get "inside" in the context of institutional fieldwork in any case; perspectives of "emic" and "etic" are an oversimplification here.

For the most part, GPD staff were welcoming. I developed good friendships with some GPD staff, particularly those with whom I spent many hours driving to distant communities. But institutions themselves often have not one, but multiple barriers that a researcher might encounter (Thomas 1995:5–6). Recall the opening scene of this chapter: to even enter the GPD head office required a security tag or to be marked as an authorised, pre-arranged visitor. Generally, I did not gain access to "high level," managerial-type meetings, but then neither did other GPD staff at the level of "on-the-ground" implementation where I was primarily situated. Early on in my fieldwork, I was offered part-time employment—essentially remuneration for the work I was already doing as a volunteer—and some staff members also suggested to me that I apply for a full-time role when it became vacant towards the end of my fieldwork. I declined both opportunities, however, with concerns about clauses in the employment contract around intellectual property, and prohibitions on writing anything that would "damage GPD's reputation." I believe this was a standard employment contract, but I was concerned about the potential of such an agreement for my research outcomes, as well as the need to maintain critical distance from the organisation.

Fieldwork methods

The ethnographic basis for this thesis derives from 12 months of fieldwork as a "volunteer-participant" with GPD, from late 2012 until the end of

2013. Most of this time was spent with the Central Australia team as a "volunteer participant," based in Alice Springs, working on what I refer to as the Childhood Project. Here I immersed in the day-to-day rhythms of the office, assisting particularly with report writing, team meetings, and a variety of other tasks, including visiting Warlpiri communities. I also travelled to head offices in capital cities for meetings and other events. In early 2014, after leaving day-to-day fieldwork with GPD, I spent two months living in the community of Mulga Flat, mostly conducting interviews with Warlpiri people. My research was thus necessarily "multi-sited" (Marcus 1998). I deployed three main fieldwork methods throughout my research: participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis.

When I arrived in Alice Springs to begin fieldwork, my field site was perhaps not what I had expected. The GPD office in Alice Springs bore little resemblance to the one in Sydney. It was a modest, three-bedroom suburban house with no GPD signage to speak of, its windows covered with black "crim mesh" for security reasons. The interior was messy and appeared under-resourced, with desks crammed into living spaces along with fax machines, printers, and desktop monitors. Only one staff member was present, the rest "out bush," which is to say, visiting Aboriginal communities. Inserting myself into the intersubjective flows of social life was not always straightforward or productive at GPD. Sometimes, the office was empty. When it was full, staff often tapped away on keyboards with little interaction with each other, while the precise content of their work was difficult to observe. In spite of Nader's call to "study up," it has been acknowledged that "participant observation" does not always travel well to institutional settings (Gusterson 1997:115). Although it was uncommon, there were meetings I was asked to not attend or record. My entry to the field was based on being a researcher, and it could be denied on the same grounds.

However, when I was able to participate in office processes, particularly through report writing, the space of the office became ethnographically productive. Much of chapter three is derived from my experiences in participating in the monitoring and evaluation practices of the organisation and writing a report. In line with the project itself, my research moved outwards from the office space. I attended numerous meetings in Warlpiri communities and Alice Springs, but also in Sydney, Perth and Cairns. I was usually able to take detailed notes and these form the basis for chapter six. I also frequently accompanied staff on their trips to Warlpiri communities, assisting with driving the long hours behind the wheel as well as other practical tasks.

As Karen Ho has suggested in her ethnography of Wall Street firms, participant observation often requires supplementation by other techniques in institutional ethnography (2009:19). All in all, I conducted 42 interviews over the course of my research, across its multiple spaces: in two Warlpiri communities, Alice Springs, Melbourne and Sydney. I did not record these interviews, as I felt that the imposition of a recording device would introduce a level of formality into the interview that I wanted to avoid. Instead, I transcribed them in real time using my laptop. Moreover, while I grew to know the Alice Springs team quite well, the staff I interviewed in the head office, for instance, were acquaintances at best. The semi-structured interviews addressed a number of themes, including GPDs participatory, community development approach, monitoring and evaluation techniques, the concept of "expertise" (see chapter two) and experiences of the "Home Week" event (see chapter six). These themes reflected what I identified as some of the concerns held by staff within the organisation at the time of my research.

However, the structure of the interview depended on the respondent. I interviewed a diverse range of people all involved with GPD's work in Central Australia. These included Alice Springs based staff who regularly visited Warlpiri communities and their managers, also based in Alice Springs. Above these "project managers" in the organisational hierarchy were the "program managers," based in capital cities, some of whom I also interviewed. In the head office I interviewed a number of specialist monitoring and evaluation staff members, as well as staff from the communications and marketing teams, responsible for raising funds for the Australia Program, but also international programs. Other interviewees worked for partner organisations in Central Australia, or other organisations also in the field of early childhood. I also interviewed staff who had previously worked for GPD on other projects.

While living in Mulga Flat in 2014, I interviewed Warlpiri women who were involved with the field of early childhood in their communities. These included members of the early childhood reference group, who were generally older women with significant experience in the bureaucratic structures of Warlpiri communities. Many of these women had long histories of employment in the area of early childhood or education more generally. I also spoke with Warlpiri women who were employed as early childhood workers, most of whom were also young mothers. In all cases, my focus was on the work life of the interview respondent, how they engaged with the GPD project or *Kardiya* interventions more broadly. The relationships between these *Yapa* people and the GPD *Kardiya* staff is detailed throughout the thesis, but particularly in chapter five. In line with Lewis' work on NGO workers in the UK, my approach is to analyse interviewees in terms of how they construct and give meaning to their roles within the development project (Lewis 2011:177).

For the reasons given above, and for the purposes of de-identification, I keep the personal details of interviewees to a minimum. However, I want to offer a general picture of the kinds of persons employed at GPD that either worked directly on the Central Australia team or were affiliated with it. Most were university educated, some with postgraduate qualifications, although their employment backgrounds differed. A few had previously worked in "international development" although none had transitioned from international work with GPD and into the Central Australia team, except at a very senior level. Indeed, moving from international work into Indigenous Australia while remaining within GPD was not a common career path. Many staff had backgrounds as early childhood teachers in other parts of Australia, and brought that knowledge to the GPD project. Others had worked in Central Australia for a few years already, for government agencies or Aboriginal organisations, as part of the broader context of *Kardiya* intervention. As I note in chapter two, the diverse histories of GPD staff—many of whom had not worked in international development—partially problematises the narrative of an "international" NGO working in Indigenous Australia. In contrast to the *Yapa* staff of the project and its affiliated childhood services, most of the *Kardiya* staff members in the Central Australia team did not have children of their own at the time of my research, myself included.

Finally, document analysis served as a valuable research activity. Documents have been called the "paradigmatic artifacts of modern knowledge practices" (Riles 2006:2), and they are by now generally accepted by anthropologists as legitimate subjects of ethnographic study. In this thesis I examine documents in two related registers. In the first, I approach the document as an organisationally accepted "statement of the way things are" (Sullivan 2012:54). This is the case in chapters two and three, where I examine "the evidence base" as a solid grounding for the project. But my goal is not to read off the discrepancies between the document as the authoritative version of what should happen in juxtaposition with my own "being there" experience. Rather, I examine how the document authorises the development project, and also is maintained by development practice. In this way, I examine documents—to paraphrase Akhil Gupta, who is concerned with the state—as constitutive of the NGO, where writing is not secondary to action, but is "itself a form of action" (Gupta 2012:36). In particular, in chapter four, I examine how monitoring and evaluation documentation, as a form of action, performed the NGO as a globally valid enterprise. I ask after what documents *do,* and pay attention to their effects.

Nearly all of the documents I cite are publicly available online, and none would be considered confidential or sensitive. Some may be considered examples of applied development studies. However, documents that are produced by an organisation that asks for de-identification (as I outline below) can present dilemmas for the ethnographer. In this context, I do not cite all documents directly. I have made it clear throughout the thesis where I am dealing with a document as an ethnographic subject and not as a citation. As Riles has noted, the language in documents often acquires "a shape, a rhythm, a feel, not simply a meaning" (2000:80), and this is particularly so in the case of development documents, which adhere to their own linguistic conventions. Throughout this thesis I aim to explain and maintain fidelity to these aspects of documents where they are referenced but not directly cited.

On de-identification

Like many institutional ethnographers, I have struggled with the issue of de-identification or, more precisely, with how much de-identification is appropriate. Most anthropologists use pseudonyms for individuals "to protect the confidentiality of research participants," while leaving other identifiers like locations, organisations, ethnic groups and, indeed, the citation of existing, regionally specific ethnographic material, unchanged. An example of the other extreme is found in the work of the development anthropologist Richard Rottenburg, who in his work *Far-Fetched Facts* (2009) does not inform the reader of the specific countries from which his work is derived, referring instead to a postcolonial African country he calls "Ruritania," a Western donor called "Normesia," and a cast of somewhat archetypal characters offering their perspectives: a representative of the "Normesian Development Bank," an employee of a consulting firm contracted to evaluate, and a development anthropologist with relativistic leanings. Rottenburg adopts this creative approach as he suggests that "identifying real actors would only encourage readers to latch onto questions of individual responsibility" and he rather seeks to highlight "general structural principles" (2009:xviii) in the development world. But by omitting the kinds of detail that anthropologists are known for, the approach also has the potential to reinscribe a stereotypical North/South divide where Rottenburg's fictionalised countries exemplify the commonly assumed difference, by asking the reader to fill the gaps.

In drawing on Rottenburg's work and suggesting a potential critique, I am pointing out that de-identification is more than simply an overlay on a standard anthropological project, where names are changed and marked with a cursory footnote before moving on. For instance, in de-identifying the organisation with which I conducted ethnography, there is limited scope for a detailed historical background of this organisation as a preface to the thesis. There were other sensitivities to respect. The marketing staff at GPD informed me that their organisation had very high brand recognition with the Australian public, and a carefully managed public image. There are only a small number of international NGOs in Australia with the kind of public profile I discuss in this thesis, although almost all of these are engaged with Indigenous Australia in some way. The de-identification of a ubiquitous, well-known brand is almost counter-intuitive, asking the reader at once for recognition while refusing it. However, the GPD brand does sit within broader discourses of humanitarian branding. For instance, child sponsorship, discussed in chapter eight, is a fundraising technique common to many humanitarian and development organisations.

Ultimately, I have chosen a level of identification that I believe is appropriate. The pseudonym for the organisation—Global Partners in Development—is meant to sound generic and mundane, in line with the norms of development language. Indeed, the banality of NGO naming was confirmed by my attempts to name one; most of the epithets I dreamt up were, according to Google, already attached to an existing organisation. Moreover, my work sits in the field of critical development studies, and thus outside of the types of communications routinely produced by the organisation. To echo Rottenburg, if I had retained the actual name, this could lead readers to point to this particular organisation as uniquely problematic. In so doing, this could be read as a critique of a single NGO, a critique that slots into existing, market-like regimes in Central Australia, where organisations compete for government contracts and are evaluated; in short, into a neoliberal image of organisational effectiveness. My thesis could then be read as call for the replacement of this organisation with a better one. Instead, I suggest that GPD was a window into broader development practices and indeed Central Australian "intercultural" intervention. While their claim to globalism was unusual, much of what I discuss could not reasonably be limited to GPD as an organisation. As I have noted, the lines around the organisation were frequently blurred, and GPD sat within a broader institutional palimpsest where the singularity of the organisation was the outcome of particular kinds of practice. De-identification, in this setting, feels appropriate as a move against analytically narrow, instrumental accounts of development.

Clearly, my research does not use real names. In the interests of privacy, identities in this thesis are scattered. By this I mean that there are more names cited than there were staff members in the GPD Central Australia team; individuals may appear as more than one person. Where appropriate and necessary, I give other details. But the focus of this work is not the personal identities and narratives of GPD workers—whom I often call "helping Whites"—in Central Australia. In terms of place names, I have frequently swapped the cities where certain meetings took place, and I have also used pseudonyms for the Warlpiri communities in which I undertook research.

The thesis is also not fundamentally about the inner lives of Warlpiri people. Such is the strength of segregation and binarisation between *Yapa* and *Kardiya* (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) in Central Australia that when I cite an individual I usually include this aspect of their identity. This raises another question: If I de-identify the organisation, should I also do so for the designation "Warlpiri," a small Indigenous language group? Indeed, there are fewer Warlpiri speakers than there are employees of GPD in their global operations. Ultimately, I have decided against this as it is relevant that Warlpiri are not only Indigenous, but that they are Warlpiri, or *Yapa.* As I discuss further below, the terms *Yapa* and *Kardiya* are multivalent and deployed by both Warlpiri and helping Whites in different ways. The point, for present purposes, is that to be Indigenous is not necessarily to occupy the position of *Yapa* in its institutional usage and, in this sense, to de-identify by substituting the more generic terms Indigenous and non-Indigenous for *Yapa* and *Kardiya* is to lose this significant local specificity. The only occasions on which I have heard Warlpiri individuals refer to themselves as Indigenous or Aboriginal has been when they were dealing with people evidently from outside of Central Australia, and hence probably unfamiliar with terms like Warlpiri or *Yapa.* Acknowledging the diversity of Indigeneity in Australia, it is relevant that this research took place in Central Australia, involving both an international NGO and remote-living Warlpiri people. Overclaiming the generic applicability of my findings through full anonymisation risks losing this specificity.

The early childhood project and the Warlpiri communities

Having outlined the theoretical and methodological framework of the thesis, I want to introduce the GPD project in more detail and the Warlpiri communities in which it took place. Prior to colonisation, Warlpiri lived across the Tanami Desert, an area in the central western part of the Northern Territory, of which Warlpiri country is said to occupy approximately 90,000 square kilometres (Meggitt 1962:1). Warlpiri had engagements with non-Indigenous people who established gold mines in the Tanami in 1909 as well as pastoral stations, and were subject to the horrific Coniston Massacre in 1928 (Musharbash 2009:18), commonly recognised as the last massacre of Indigenous Australians in the context of the colonial frontier. By the end of the Second World War, Warlpiri had mostly settled on pastoral stations and, eventually, a government ration depot (Peterson 2017:258). There are approximately 3,600 Warlpiri speakers, mostly living on four "homeland settlements" in the Northern Territory (Burke 2013:305), referred to with pseudonyms in this thesis. Such communities vary in size (the largest with approximately 900 residents, and the smallest closer to 200). They also have different histories, some emerging as ration depots and subsequently administered by Christian missionaries. One community formed during the outstation movement of the 1970s, a period in which Warlpiri people were moving out of the settlements established in the 1940s—which were often arbitrarily located by White authorities outside of Warlpiri territory—and back into their traditional country (see Musharbash 2009; Peterson 2016; Saethre 2013).

Warlpiri have been described as "anthropologically famous," (Christen 2009:x) and have been the subject of multiple ethnographic monographs (Dussart 2000; Hinkson 2014; Meggitt 1962; Michaels 1986; Munn 1973 Musharbash 2009; Saethre 2013). Taken together, this corpus details Warlpiri life in early colonial settings of limited contact with Europeans, but also Warlpiri political projects, such as the outstation movement, and responses to settler-colonialism. It is important not to dehistoricise Warlpiri as "former hunter-gatherers" now in contact with mainstream Australia.[11] As I show throughout this thesis, many Warlpiri women I interviewed had lifetime engagements in the institutionalised field of early childhood, and other bureaucratic practices.

Figure 1: Looking over a Warlpiri settlement. Roads and the buildings are visible in the centre of the image.

Generally speaking, GPD staff did not read the extensive ethnographic corpus on Warlpiri, and certainly it was not consulted in any official capacity. This points to the other optic by which remote living Indigenous people like the Warlpiri are known: through their statistical disadvantage relative to mainstream Australia.. In this state optic, Warlpiri communities are visible through their deficits and thus appear as objects of intervention.

[11] Writers such as Bruce Pascoe (2014) have contested the "hunter-gatherer" label commonly applied to Indigenous Australian people, highlighting diverse cultivation and land management practices willfully ignored by European settlers.

Figure 2: Main street of a Warlpiri settlement.

However, the implication that Global Partners in Development relied on a deficit discourse is immediately problematic viewed in GPD terms. GPD communications material was always “strengths-based,” and at times they seemed to avoid the acknowledgement of Indigenous disadvantage at all, instead emphasising their goal of building on existing community strengths and resources. But this stance also seemed peculiar; GPD had a long history of depicting forms of deficit in the Global South, and if we accept that GPD aimed to help the poor and needy, their presence in Warlpiri communities is surely inexplicable without the acknowledgement of Indigenous disadvantage. Warlpiri settlements have been described as having “no economic rationale” (Young 1981, cited in Musharbash 2009:19), and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data points to rates of unemployment that are ten times the national average, and average personal incomes of roughly one-third of the national average (ABS 2016). Janet Hunt notes that Warlpiri are disadvantaged across a range of socioeconomic indicators beyond this brute income disparity, including overcrowded housing, low levels of education, poor health, and substance abuse (2012:12). In this vein, the GPD childhood project can be seen as sitting within the broader goals of ameliorating Indigenous deficits in Australia, a project which is most prominently articulated through "Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage" reports produced by the Australian government's "Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision" (SCRGSP). These reports, produced every two years, measure disadvantage based on indicators broadly concerned with health, education and employment (see SCRGSP 2011; 2014; 2016).

In particular, two of the indicators in these reports deal with issues of early childhood: a reduction in infant mortality, and the provision of early childhood education. The anthropologist Ute Eickelkamp notes that early childhood development is seen as "the "royal road" to the socioeconomic "adjustment" of the Indigenous citizenry" (Eickelkamp 2011a:1)—a discourse I deal with more fully in chapter three. Indigenous children have historically constituted a prominent category that required intervention. The early colonial "Parramatta Native Institution," established in 1814 in Sydney, aimed at "civilising" Aboriginal children (Brook and Kohen 1994). The history of widespread child removals continuing into the 1960s—now condemned but arguably ongoing—contained the goal of assimilating Aboriginal people into White, settler-colonial society (Read 1981). More recently, the NTER was launched by Australia's federal government amid claims of widespread child sexual abuse in the Indigenous communities of Australia's Northern Territory. While disavowing these assimilationist, pathologising approaches, GPD was a child-focused organisation, and the targets of the project were Warlpiri children aged zero to five, as well as their mothers and other carers.

The GPD childhood project began in 2008 when an influential local organisation was seeking to partner with an international development NGO, at the same time that GPD was looking to further engage in Indigenous Australia. The project itself was run out of the Alice Springs office, with generally less than ten full-time staff at any one time. All full-time staff were based in Alice Springs.

Within the Alice Springs office, there were managers, monitoring and evaluation staff, and facilitators. The facilitators were each assigned to one of the four Warlpiri communities, to which they regularly travelled as part of their work. In addition to these staff, there were part-time "community-based facilitators," who were usually Warlpiri people but also some *Kardiya* living "on community." The project was partially funded through royalties distributed to Warlpiri people from a gold mine located on Warlpiri country and operated by a multinational mining corporation. Because the funding was derived from royalties for Warlpiri, and in that sense was "Warlpiri money," it was seen to be an inversion of standard NGO projects driven by external donors; it was funded by the community that was also the object of intervention. Their funding arrangements were coupled with an overseeing Warlpiri steering committee. For these reasons, the project was viewed by some staff as a shining example of the community development ethos.

The staff of the Central Australia project were one team within the broader Australia Program, focused on Indigenous Australia, which employed approximately 40 staff. While the project was initially funded through Warlpiri royalty money, over the course of my fieldwork the funding stream was transitioning from these royalties to the philanthropic donations provided to GPD through their fundraising campaigns. By the end of my fieldwork, the GPD Central Australia project did not receive any money from Warlpiri royalties.[12] The Australia Program was largely administratively separate from the GPD international programming group that implemented development and relief programs in various countries of the Global South. However, some Australia Program staff, particularly those with more senior roles, were based in the head office I have described as the introduction to this chapter, and the Australia Program manager ultimately reported to the same CEO and board that presided over the organisation as a whole. Some staff at a senior level had moved between

[12] On other projects, both domestic and international, GPD received funding from other sources, including through the Australian Aid program and government departments. Given the size of the organisation, detail about these funding arrangements is beyond the scope of this thesis. But for the Central Australia project, funding was procured through Warlpiri royalties and philanthropic donations for the Australia Program.

the international programming group, and the Australia Program, although this was unusual. The Central Australia team was thus embedded within the broader hierarchy of the organisation, but as I show in chapter two, also separate from the international programming group.

In their focus on community leading the way, GPD—initially, at least—positioned "service delivery" as the opposite to "community development". Community development was about building local capacity, Warlpiri people "doing it for themselves" and not relying on external, non-Indigenous service providers. The widespread public perception of "welfare dependency" among the Indigenous population in Australia was thus to be avoided by a community development approach. In the context of the project, this meant that GPD would not employ any *Kardiya* staff to actually run childhood services—such as playgroups, childcare or crèche—in Warlpiri communities, but rather aimed to support childhood services in other ways, and encourage the professional development of Warlpiri staff. This somewhat "hands off" approach seemed to be a perpetual sticking point for the funding body that received the mining royalties and distributed them to GPD, in that they funded GPD on the expectation that they would in fact run services or at least assist with them in a more substantive way. The Warlpiri communities did usually have existing early childhood services or at least histories of such services, and these services were funded through government departments and not GPD. In the absence of a distinct service around which the identity of the project might form, GPD staff sometimes struggled to articulate exactly what their project was about. Improving the health and education of Warlpiri children, yes, but given a significant number of other organisations broadly working toward the same goal, the role of GPD was not clear.

GPD thus worked on the fringes of the institutional field of "early childhood" in Warlpiri communities. One task they undertook was the establishment of a Warlpiri governance group in each community, a group that was to be consulted on all matters concerning childhood services. This generally required that *Kardiya* (non-Indigenous) GPD staff set up and facilitate monthly governance group meetings. In this task, GPD staff sought to coordinate various actors within the institutional space—service providers, the clinic and its child health nurse, training organisations, visiting child nutritionists—and engage them with the Warlpiri governance group. GPD assisted existing services in various ways, sometimes providing funds or equipment where needed, and also by funding a local vocational college to provide staff training and accreditation for Warlpiri workers in early childhood. Periodically, other side projects arose, such as developing a "social comic book" designed to educate young mothers. Towards the end of my fieldwork, after years of engaging in the institutionally complex field of early childhood in Warlpiri communities, GPD began a project of trying to draw together all of the institutional actors in the early childhood space together to achieve greater coordination, moving away from the work of educating Indigenous children to the less marketable task of addressing forms of bureaucratic dysfunction, fragmentation, and overlap in Indigenous affairs. As one manager put it somewhat crudely, "Indigenous affairs is fucked, and we're trying to do something about it." I left as this new project began to take shape, but in late 2016 I heard that the GPD early childhood project had ceased operations in Central Australia, with the lack of clarity around their role there cited by one manager as the ultimate cause.

In this thesis, I take the explicit goal of the GPD project as my starting point: to improve the health, education and overall wellbeing of Warlpiri children through a culturally appropriate, community development approach.

Yapa and *Kardiya*

With the exception of some part-time "community-based facilitators," all of the GPD staff in Central Australia were *Kardiya,* as in White, or non-Indigenous, while targeting *Yapa* people as the ultimate beneficiaries of the development project. This division mirrors the broader segregation that, in the words of Jennifer Biddle, who did fieldwork in a Warlpiri community, "permeates the entirety of lived experience" (1993:196). Similarly, Yasmine Musharbash refers to *Yapa* and *Kardiya* as "two distinct populations" (2009:19) in Central Australia. I want to point to the strength of this separation as a structuring principle in Central Australian life and indeed the development project, a binary which runs throughout the thesis. The common understanding is that the terms *Yapa* and *Kardiya* refer to Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, but I suggest they are more polyvalent than this formulation allows. Musharbash (2017:95) has noted that the terms refer also to coloniser and colonised. I also noted this usage when a senior Warlpiri man referred to "*Yapa* people overseas, like in Vietnam," suggesting an identity that is based not on a particular place, but on structural and historical relations.

The helping Whites in my study used the terms frequently, perhaps due to the fact that, as words with an apparent Warlpiri origin and therefore referencing a difference claimed also by Warlpiri, they euphemise a difference that might otherwise be described as "Aboriginal" and "White," or indeed, colonised and coloniser. But in the usage of helping Whites, *Yapa* did not always simply mean Indigenous. While there were no full-time Indigenous staff on the Central Australia team, there were Indigenous people who worked in other parts of the organisation. White staff would generally not refer to these people as *Yapa.* In this *Kardiya* usage, *Yapa* refered more specifically to the remote-living Aboriginal people, like most Warlpiri, that were objects of the development project. In the usage of helping Whites, *Yapa* did not refer to what might be termed "middle-class" Indigenous people, and that group is generally not discussed in this thesis. *Yapa* almost always refers to Warlpiri people in this thesis, unless otherwise specified.

My own position within this setting is that of a male, *Kardiya* researcher. My family bears its own colonial legacy of predominantly White, settler ancestry, but also of Darug people, who lived in what is now Western Sydney at the time of British colonisation in 1788. My Darug ancestors were not known within my immediate family until relatively recently, and I was made aware of it only in my early twenties, and it seems that this lineage was deliberately denied at some point.[13] I want to acknowledge these ancestors here, while noting that throughout my life I have lived Whiteness and its privileges, and I do not claim special kinship with Warlpiri people.[14] While I lived in Warlpiri communities prior to commencing research and would like to count some Warlpiri as friends, I include myself in the group of "helping Whites," as a well-meaning *Kardiya* person, like most of the GPD staff in this book. On the occasions that the deictic "we" or "us" appears in this thesis, it is generally in reference to the helping Whites. I also want to note that the GPD project was mainly staffed by women, perhaps a concomitant of the early childhood focus, as the GPD project dealt with playgroups and other spaces particularly associated with mothers. At times, I felt out of place in the early childhood facilities of Warlpiri communities, where men were rarely present. But I only spent limited time in these settings, and with the exception of some interviews, these spaces were not research sites. The GPD Australia Program team itself—mostly the focus of my research—was approximately three-quarters female, and I have reflected this gender balance in my use of pseudonyms throughout the thesis.

Thesis outline

To conclude this introduction, I offer an outline of each chapter to orient the reader. In chapter two I continue the work of defamiliarisation, by unbinding the topographical narrative of a globally valid form of development expertise that *enters* into the context of Central Australia. I outline how expertise was claimed in official documents, but was disavowed by almost all staff. "International development expertise" was unlocatable. Building from this point, I suggest that Warlpiri people did not experience the GPD project as anything particularly new or differentiated from existing interventions in Central

[13] Like many Darug descendants today, my ancestry is traced to the well-documented identity of Maria Lock who married the convict Robert Lock and was granted a tract of land under freehold title in 1833. Maria's descendants continued to live there until it was revoked by the Aborigines Protection Board around 1920 (Kohen 1993; see also Hinkson 2001).

[14] I am drawing here on Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate scholar Kim TallBear, who makes the point that Indigenous articulations of identity are framed in terms of kinship, connection to place and political status, and not simply genomics (see TallBear 2013).

Australia—whether top down, bottom up, service delivery or community development. The work of unbinding development from its normative narrative serves as a starting point for the chapters that follow.

Chapter three expands on the theme of expertise, by drawing on a document known as the "evidence base" for the project. In particular, I examine the discourse of brain development and epigenetics that framed the GPD project, as well as a multitude of other early childhood interventions. I argue that the focus on brain development produces the project as a globally valid intervention, but I question the vicarious linkages between scientifically produced forms of knowledge and the development project. While brain development, broadly conceived, appears as a universal human process, I suggest that through the evidence base document, brain development is linked with fundamentally Western forms of educational attainment, producing a form of institutional endogamy that cannot see what lies outside its own optics. In this way, the evidence base appears as a form of biopolitical governmentality, at once universal while directing life towards particular ends. Yet, because the link between "hard science" and project outcomes is vicarious and fragile, I suggest that the evidence base did not overdetermine the project: the realisation of governmentality did not follow from the evidence base.

In chapter four, I further deal with themes of institutional endogamy, less as governmentality and more as the failure of the project to effectively measure its own impacts. Drawing on concepts of "audit culture" (Strathern 2000; see also Power 1997), I document how during my fieldwork the GPD staff undertook a shift in their monitoring and evaluation frameworks, from measuring outcomes, such as improved child health, to measuring outputs, such as attendance at early childhood services. The GPD project sought to measure the wellbeing of Warlpiri children through developing a standardised rubric of attendance, and I also interpret this as an attempt at producing the organisation as a globally valid enterprise. However, this standardisation also produces forms of differentiation in two related ways. First, as an acceptable critique of organisational effectiveness, the discourse of measuring attendance helps to produce competition between organisations. Second, because *Yapa* generally do not submit themselves to the accountability requirements of the project, it produces differentiation in terms of staffing policies in Central Australia.

Chapter five approaches the issue of the *Yapa/Kardiya* distinction in detail. I argue that the helping Whites in my study express contradictory desires, both to be loved and become closer to *Yapa,* but also to maintain a distance that is professionally appropriate, where segregation is itself a form of solidarity (Bessire 2014:206). Drawing on Mol, I suggest that the development project performs a version of Aboriginality through the concept of "community" that must always be held separate. This results in what I refer to as "sanitised relatedness"—using Kowal's (2015a) concept of sanitised difference—between *Yapa* and *Kardiya.* Importantly, the distinctiveness of Indigeneity in my analysis must be understood as entangled with forms of community development practice, including the middle-class lifestyles of most full-time GPD staff.

Chapter six also deals with the idea of Warlpiri people as bearers of cultural difference, a difference that the project sought to include. In this chapter, I ask what it means for Warlpiri to be included and indeed to participate in the project. I draw upon Sara Ahmed's (2012) concept of the "non-performative" in arguing that attempts by the project to be inclusive, ensure equal participation, and pursue abstract values of togetherness often produce feelings of disillusionment, among both *Yapa* and *Kardiya.* To put this into Ahmed's terms, the relentless pursuit of participatory processes itself prevents forms of participation from emerging. Rather than asking whether Warlpiri *really* get to participate or not, this chapter asks what it means to participate in a non-performative space.

In chapter seven, I deal with the discourse through which the "global" claims of the organisation are most clearly brought into view: the humanitarian brand of GPD. I argue that branded, humanitarian imagery is produced according to particular norms that aim at cultivating the "immaterial labour" (Hardt and Negri 2004) of a consumer, inviting them to self-identify with the position of a donor. However, the Warlpiri people in my study, when drawn into humanitarian-brand discourse, problematise the recognisable frames of the brand by resisting the adoption of standardised humanitarian postures, subsequently breaking with the North/South divide upon which the brand usually relies, identifying with the position of donor and not recipient. I thereby consider the ways in which the humanitarian brand does not simply link the positions of donor and recipient, but also constitutes and enacts those positions in a productive network.

In chapter eight, the conclusion to this thesis, I summarise the arguments of each chapter while querying what it means to ask Warlpiri people for their input and governance over a project that performs Warlpiri people, their communities, and their culture as always separate. I argue that the goal of inverting binaries as per community development simultaneously reaffirms those binaries in problematic ways. I suggest a politics that begins with mutual entanglement rather than dichotomy as a way forward. Finally, in the epilogue to this thesis, I reflect on the ethics of research in and of NGOs that aim to "do good" through my experiences in disseminating the products of research to GPD staff. I offer some suggestions on how a critically engaged anthropology of development might proceed.

Chapter Two: Unbinding narratives of project intervention

Conceptual locations

This chapter continues to destabilise the conceptual locations of international development discourse. I begin by tracing calls for international NGO (INGO) engagement with Indigenous Australia. These calls reiterate the narrative of an INGO introducing development expertise into the Australian space, and rely on the idea that the INGO is separate from the "context" of Indigenous Australia. The separation here allows for the assertion that INGOs hold expertise that could be useful in improving Indigenous disadvantage, offering new solutions to old problems. The globally established INGO holds promise for the localised, remote, Aboriginal community, particularly perceived in the context of ongoing failure in Australian government policy.

Based in ethnographic engagements with the Global Partners in Development project, this chapter does the work of unbinding my account of development from this topographical narrative. Throughout my fieldwork, it was not clear how "international development expertise" was being applied in Australia, nor what precisely was "international" about GPD's project. Moreover, the approach did not appear to be particularly novel, and was often bound up with a pre-existing institutional palimpsest in Warlpiri communities. Ultimately, my attempts to locate "international expertise" were unsuccessful, but I argue that this illustrates an important point: participatory development systematically maintains a boundary between the global and the local as the crucial basis of its episteme. In this way, the global and the local are "artifacts of the very practices we wish to understand" (Riles 2000:91).

Community development, INGOs and Indigenous Australia

In the first section, I want to outline the narrative of a visitation of INGOs and community development practices on Indigenous Australia. Community development has the explicit aim of reversing power relations to allow for greater control over development programs for the poor (Mansuri and Rao 2004:2). It broadly overlaps with "participation" as popularised by the work of Robert Chambers (1983) who argues that development should "put the last first." Community development places particular emphasis on the social unit of the community, as opposed to the individual, or "society" more generally (Mansuri and Rao 2004:8). The subject/object relations of development expert and underdeveloped other are done away with as the "local" people take ownership and control of their own development, rather than acceding to foreign impositions. The concept has emerged in the wake of "high modernist" development schemes (Scott 1998) that sought to order society as per scientific principles, although the history of "participation," broadly conceived, is much longer (see Mansuri and Rao 2013:20).

Participatory approaches, or at least rhetorics, became dominant in the NGO sector in the "post-development" era, beginning in the 1990s (Nederveen Pieterse 2010:7). David Mosse sums this situation up:

> Perhaps never before has so much been made of the power of ideas, right theory or good policy in solving the problems of global poverty. There is today unprecedented consensus on how global poverty is to be eliminated and the poor governed … meanwhile, an emphasis on partnership, consultation and local ownership set the ideological conditions for aid such that aid agencies claim they no longer make interventions at all, but rather support the conditions within which development can happen (2011:3 citing Wrangham 2006).

Development agencies tend to only offer support, as participation is fundamentally about fostering local initiative and control (Craig and Porter 1997:229). In terms of development in the Global South, participation is reckoned as the "right theory." While the community development approach is often used in Australian aid programs overseas (Robinson and McWilliam 2015:104), the "unprecedented consensus" suggested by Mosse does not extend all the way to Indigenous Australia.

The 2007 Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) launched in remote Indigenous communities only—in contravention of Australia's Racial Discrimination Act 1975—would appear to highlight to the lack of participatory practice in Australia. The NTER has often served as a backdrop to narratives espousing community development, representing a top-down, disciplinary counterpoint to "bottom-up" participatory projects (see, for example, Campbell and Hunt 2013; Hunt 2010). Many of the measures originally implemented through the NTER in 2007 have been carried forward or expanded by successive governments. Initially, measures that were introduced included implementation of the "basics card," a form of conditional welfare in the place of cash, designed to ensure that welfare payments could not be spent on items such as alcohol or cigarettes. Alcohol was banned from Indigenous communities—although some *Kardiya* residents had exemptions—as was pornographic material. The NTER also aimed to enforce child health checks as compulsory, although the federal government quickly conceded that patient consent would be required. In addition, the federal government took over Aboriginal-owned lands on five-year leases through compulsory acquisition. Such land was previously held under the Native Title Act 1993 and was acquired, evidently, to allow the government unfettered access and greater control over communities and their service provision. In a particularly brazen display of state power, the army was sent in to some communities, ostensibly for logistical support in establishing more efficient channels of service delivery.

The NTER was premised on the accusation of widespread child sexual abuse in Indigenous communities (see Wild and Anderson 2007), a deviance that required urgent and discriminatory state action. The implication was that Indigenous people had failed to provide even the most basic level of care for children. While the link between the measures introduced and the prevention of child abuse is questionable (Cox 2011:12), the moral impetus provided by the notion of "saving the children" (Austin-Broos 2009:239) served as justification for such disciplinary techniques. Importantly, the problems here are the problems of Indigenous people themselves, rather than problems that stem from their structural disadvantage (Povinelli 2010). As such, the approach is what development practitioners would call "deficit based"; seeking to rectify what Indigenous people are lacking relative to a mainstream norm. This is in opposition to the "strengths-based" approach of GPD's community development. The NTER is significant here as the measures introduced were viewed as attempting to discipline Aboriginal subjects (Lattas and Morris 2010) and were implemented without community consultation. They were therefore unabashedly "top down" (Campbell and Hunt 2013:4).

My goal in this chapter is not to offer an in-depth analysis of the NTER, a task which has been undertaken elsewhere (see Altman and Hinkson 2007b; 2010). Rather, I want to point to the highly politicised field in which Indigenous development projects occur in the Australian context, a field which allows for multiple viewpoints on how best to ameliorate Indigenous disadvantage. The problems of Indigenous disadvantage are "wicked" (ACFID 2011) or "intractable" (Moran 2016:14). They seem to get worse rather than better. Debate around the effectiveness of government interventions becomes inevitable. The NTER itself was commonly viewed as the final disavowal of the Indigenous self-determination era, the interventionist measures a sad acknowledgement of its failure (see Sanders 2010a). But ten years on from the NTER, we could argue that it, too, has failed (see, for example, Altman and Russell 2012). The ongoing evidence of Indigenous disadvantage maintains a space for a multitude of alternative policy prescriptions (Sanders 2008). In the context of the NTER, which "took top-down decision-making to a whole new level" (Campbell and Hunt 2013:200), a reflected space within which the advocacy of "bottom-up" community development also emerged.

It is within this reflected space that the discourse of international community development as a solution finds traction. For instance, considering the dominance of participatory development in the Global South, development studies scholar Janet Hunt has argued that "the discourses of development and the lessons from international development practice are rarely heard in the context of addressing the poor socioeconomic situation of Indigenous Australians" (2012:9). In their practice note for Indigenous development, the

Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) likewise states that in Australia most organisations have taken a "welfare, as opposed to a development approach, considering community members as beneficiaries or consumers, rather than as partners in development" (ACFID 2011:3), and go on to suggest that organisations should be "using quality methods developed in international development" (2011:7).

Even prior to the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER), commentators had argued that participatory approaches had never really come to fruition in Australia. Campbell, Wunungmurra and Nyomba make this point:

> Despite … the widespread application of community development approaches in the "developing" world, equivalent kinds of fully participatory processes that empower local people remain unusual in remote Aboriginal Australia … the pervasive practice in Australia is one of non-Aboriginal bureaucrats and service deliverers articulating the rhetoric of "community development," while trying to solve Aboriginal people's "problems" for them (2007:152).

Finally, Jerry Schwab and Dale Sutherland have argued that "NGOs may find they have the experience and expertise to begin to address the urgent needs of many Indigenous communities" (2002:14). All of these calls for further international NGO engagement offer a similar scenario: the expertise and participatory ethos of international development practice has not been properly utilised in Australia (but see Burchill et al. 2006; Eversole 2003), and thus still holds promise for improving Indigenous disadvantage. This narrative not only ignores well-established critiques of participatory development (Cooke and Kothari 2001; Mansuri and Rao 2004), but suggests that practices distinct from what goes on in Indigenous Australia are found in "international development." As I have argued in the introduction to this thesis, "development" does not stand as a practice fundamentally distinct from "service delivery" or even "welfare" (Trundle 2012:211–12), processes well underway within Australia. Calling for practice derived from international development posits distinct conceptual locations, as well as suggesting that INGOs are the vectors of good, participatory practice.

Spatialising "what works"

The discriminatory, "top-down" measures introduced by the NTER were justified, in part, through appeals to simply doing "what works" in remediating Indigenous disadvantage. Politicians such as the then-Indigenous affairs minister Jenny Macklin argued that the government was "not interested in ideology, only outcomes" (cited in Cox 2011:14). The implication here is that the government had, in the past, been transfixed by a desire for Indigenous self-determination driven not by the rationality of what is best for Indigenous people, but rather by White, settler-colonial guilt. In this way, the reality of failures in health and education had been ignored. Indeed, some anthropologists followed a similar line, with Peter Sutton (2009:210) arguing that grand national gestures—such as the broad goal of "reconciliation" between White and Black—amounted to "dangerous mumbo jumbo" that distracted from "urgent realities." In this context the NTER would be the rational antidote to policy that had been thus far too ideological, oriented by whimsy-minded notions of self-determination, without any evidence that such policies would actually improve life (see Sanders 2010a). Policies of "self-determination" had been little more than "conspicuous compassion," gestures that made White Australians feel good without actually doing good (Sanders 2008:189). In 2008, then-Prime Minister Kevin Rudd suggested that Indigenous policy would now "look for the evidence, see what's working, see what's half working, see what's not working and act accordingly. That's our approach and none of it is ideological" (cited in Sanders 2010a:313).

Rudd's comments suggest that the challenge for successful Indigenous policy is empirical before it is anything else; finding what works has been clouded by our postcolonial fantasies, but once we clear this impediment to our capacity to *know*, Indigenous policy that is actually beneficial and based on solid evidence will reveal itself. What is it that is to "work"? This question assumes that the "what" is, as Mosse (2011:3)) suggests, the right theory, a good idea or policy. These things can be held by an institution and are always somewhat detached from materiality; once we find them, they can be reproduced in other places as a kind of "travelling rationality" (Craig and Porter 2006:120). In this context, looking for "what works" positions policy (or projects) and their enacting institutions as the primary, central actors in process of development. "Evidence-based policy" privileges forms of knowledge that aspire to universality, as opposed to the local or to what Donna Haraway would call "situated knowledges" (1988:575). But in his account of evidence-based policy, Ilan Katz (2008:95) makes the point that the "what" in "what works" may be the wrong question: there is now overwhelming evidence that "how" the program is implemented is at least as important as the "what."

While GPD staff were generally critical of the NTER, GPD afforded a similar epistemological prominence to finding "what works," and were committed to evidence-based development. As an international development agency, GPD made the claim to experience and expertise, held within the organisation, that could be put to good use in dealing with Indigenous disadvantage in Australia. To offer one example of this tendency, this idea found favour in the Indigenous Development Effectiveness Initiative, an agreement between the development agency World Vision and The Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). The aim of the agreement was to provide development expertise to the Australian government. The role of the international development agency in the partnership is described below:

> World Vision is Australia's largest international development agency, with more than 60 years of experience. The value World Vision brings to this memorandum is in its experience of administering development through a global network of almost 100 countries with a staff of over 40,000 people. It is a highly regarded and experienced development agency with a proven track record of working with governments and communities, both internationally and domestically, to bring about sustainable change for impoverished children and their families, not only economically but also more broadly in terms of capability and social participation (Commonwealth of Australia and World Vision 2012:2).

This statement sums up the organisational reputation and the source of INGO legitimacy; the organisation is large, experienced, international, sustainable and has a “proven track record.” It calls on the whole organisation and its deployments across time and space, to make the implicit claim that *all of this* will be brought to bear on the situation in Indigenous Australia. The organisation in its entirety is manifest in any of its incarnations. Like GPD, the organisation here is imagined as a contiguous subject. The strategic “centre” here is formed through the aggregate of all the localities in which World Vision works, and expertise is itself composed out of connectivity to diverse sites (Ong 2005:339). In short, World Vision claims expert development knowledge derived from their experience but simultaneously existing independently of it, and therefore able to be deployed at will: “the free floating expertise that can be inserted into any given context” (Ferguson 1994a:259). INGO engagements with Indigenous Australia are not limited to GPD, as multiple organisations, including World Vision, The Red Cross, Oxfam, Caritas, and TEAR, all have programs aimed at Indigenous disadvantage. In their work, GPD drew upon a similar discourse of global expertise and experience in describing their value-add in Australia.

The spatialisation of the INGO here parallels the metaphors of verticality and encompassment that Ferguson and Gupta (2002) identify in terms of the spatialisation of states. The organisation of GPD likewise sits “above” communities that are “on the ground” or at the “grassroots.” The organisation itself encompasses all of the places, the multitude of countries in which it works. Within this discourse, organisational policy takes a diffusionist path (Shore and Wright 2011), originating from a strategic centre that is also geographically multiplex, an expertise borne of local contexts but also filtering back down to them. The organisation holds this expertise.

Locating expertise

Early on in my fieldwork, I attempted to account for “international development expertise,” or, if not to access it directly, at least to pin down its effects, perhaps in the same manner as Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s “state effect” (2001:126). I asked a large number of Global Partners in Development staff and other stakeholders whether they saw GPD as “leveraging their international development expertise” in the Australian context. The wording of this question was based on a GPD-produced document that specified international expertise as their contribution in Australia. Below, I present a broad cross-section of the responses from both GPD staff and other stakeholders associated with the project. I have grouped these responses into three categories of expertise: those who thought expertise was somewhat imperceptible, those who saw it as a work in progress, and those who did not see any evidence of expertise.

Imperceptible expertise

> To be honest, I haven't seen them use that [international expertise]. However, the design of the project would come from all of that. I haven't had a part in the initial design and the key deliverables that we are working towards. My assumption is that they are based on international experience.
>
> Facilitator working in Warlpiri communities

> I suppose I've not seen a heap of that in a very practical sense, I think almost subconsciously, yes, those learnings come with people. There are things that people have taken up in the past, like the LogFrame, that has been a bit of a disaster here.
>
> Manager based in the Alice Springs office

> It's an interesting one, Drew, because I think there is more there, that could be done. What are concrete examples of that? We didn't do project visits internationally and we didn't host people in Alice. There wasn't joint learning spaces that we were part of either. Maybe it happens at another level that I wasn't really operating at, also.
>
> Manager based in the Alice Springs office

In the responses above, expertise may be present although imperceptible and not necessarily directly experienced. It is embedded in program designs, occurs at another, higher level, or comes along with certain people with particular types of experience. While the respondents here did not pinpoint particular instances of expertise, for them, this did not mean it was not there. As such, I categorise these as broadly in line with a diffusionist view of a development project (Shore and Wright 2011); expertise is embedded from the beginning in the project design and carries through into project implementation, subconsciously or otherwise. It is an ethos.

A work in progress

> No. But I think that is something that they are working towards. In my induction I was given a whole lot of material, which I read, but it didn't actually bring clarity. It didn't really support the work that I was doing, because I had no contextual understanding at that time of what I was going into. It was fairly abstract, and it wasn't applied to the Australian context.
>
> Facilitator working in Warlpiri communities

> We're trying very much to and in some ways, we might be ahead of the game, for example in the evaluation that we did last year, we actually incorporated some questions about participation in the project that hadn't been included in the international programs project review. So yes, we are using their [the international programming group] tools, but we are also incorporating best practice, we have some cross learning happening.
>
> Monitoring and evaluation team member based in the head office

> A little, but they try to connect us up with working groups, they call them, and they do try and link us up with these other projects that are happening so we can share knowledge. But yeah, not in my little world, not a great deal of it, and maybe there is and I just don't have the time to dip into that.

Facilitator working in Warlpiri communities

These answers suggest that expertise did exist in some corners of the organisation but required the labour of staff to become manifest within the Australia Program. In addition, these responses highlight what might be called the "silos" within the organisation. There is no inherent transfer of ideas from the international programming group to the Australia Program, or back the other way. The presence of the organisation does not, in itself, call forth expertise or experience. Expertise may well exist, but it requires work to be accessed and put to good use. At best, this was a work in progress.

No expertise

> Rubbish, waste of time. Like, the context of Warlpiri communities, compared to even Top End [in the tropical north of the NT] communities, it's so completely different, I don't even understand why you would try to be using evidence-based approaches from overseas. You go overseas to Africa, Asia, the Third World; kids are walking huge distances to access schools and education. That's not the case here because of the welfare state.
>
> Management team member

> Haven't seen it. I've studied community development and worked in it a long time. I have met and worked with people. Some people I've had the opportunity to work with amaze me. And they've shown me really good practice. They've blown me away. But I've seen none of that here.
>
> Early childhood program worker based in Mulga Flat (non-GPD)

> Nuh. That's not what I see, I see GPD workers coming to grips with Central Australian space, and that takes quite a lot of time. I haven't seen any practical

> application of that international knowledge base. I think they have been applying money in areas of need, but not necessarily expertise.
>
> Manager of an Alice Springs-based education organisation (non-GPD)

The final set of responses suggests that expertise was non-existent in the GPD early childhood project. The first response, from a GPD manager, suggests that the concept of expertise, of a "travelling rationality" is itself a "waste of time," suggesting that contexts, even within Australia, are simply too different for it to have any validity. The others do not dismiss the possibility of expertise altogether, or indeed the possibility that GPD might be doing good in Central Australia, but they do not see such expertise as manifest in the project.

There is, however, a more general theme here. None of the staff members I interviewed claimed expertise as their own. Rather, it was always something external to them, located elsewhere, away from their work. When asked about the expertise that the organisation claimed, staff would switch from the "we" of the organisation, to the "they" of international expertise. Indeed, it was not uncommon for staff to express doubts about their own abilities in the field of community development. Early on in my fieldwork, I met with some resistance to my presence on visits to Warlpiri communities. Staff feared that I may have been evaluating their work performance, and I had to assure them that this was not the goal of my research. Still, my first community visit with a GPD facilitator, to a place I call "Sandy River," was not without a caveat:

> You can come to Sandy River with me, but don't take what I do as an example of GPD practice. I don't really know much about community development—I'm trained in early childhood.

Another staff member expressed that they were surprised to be offered employment at GPD, given its reputation as a highly regarded NGO. Field staff on the ground did not hold "international expertise," in its form as organisational legitimacy. This is not a slight on their competence; most staff had extensive experience both overseas and within Central Australia, possessed postgraduate qualifications, confidently dealt with a range of stakeholders related to the project, were committed to their work, and most were very good at *doing* NGOs (see Hilhorst 2003:5). But in this context, expertise was not enacted (Summerson Carr 2010:17) as much as it was disavowed. It was, perhaps, located elsewhere, somewhere up in the organisational hierarchy. Even then, the effect that it had was difficult to discern.

Supposedly foundational documents—development handbooks, or programming guidelines—offered little additional clarity. The pillars on which the GPD project—in theory, all GPD projects—were based seemed to be full of axiomatic statements that approved of themselves. They promised "effective development practice," to "contribute to the well-being of children," or to "empower communities," as if opposed to the imagined advocates of ineffective development practice, the poor health of children and the disempowerment of communities. As Marilyn Strathern has noted, there is "no argument to critique" (2006:195) in such documents and in this way they fall down as guidelines for action. Offering little substance, they cannot be analysed as we might analyse scholarly publications (Strathern 2006:195). Even so, the broad reaching ambiguity of this kind of development language serves a useful purpose. As Mosse has noted, "the lack of conceptual precision is *required* to conceal ideological differences, to allow compromise and the enrolment of different interests" (2004:663 emphasis in original; see also Lea 2008:74). This is particularly important when such documents always claim to be frameworks only, always requiring "adaptation to context."

While such documents are ostensibly the model for intervention, they always await fulfilment in the local. In fact, the development rhetoric today sometimes appears to suggest something near "endogenous development" (Esteva 2010:15): communities will set the agenda, lead the process, devise both the solutions and their own criteria for success. GPD was often concerned with accessing local knowledge, consulting with local people, and, in particular, including Warlpiri culture in the project. The search for "what works" is thus shifted on to the ambiguous entity of "culture." As I outline in chapter six of this thesis, the project worked with the implicit assumption that once it was able to incorporate Warlpiri cultural knowledge, successful forms of development would follow. As Tania Murray Li (2007:281) has noted, all of this begs the question: "If communities already have the secret to productive, sustainable and healthy lives, what is it that outsiders need to improve or fix?"

Warding off the prospect of "endogenous development" is the distinction between "knowledge" and "expertise" that mirrors the vertical differentiation between the local and the global: locals hold "knowledge" while outside organisations hold "expertise." The development anthropologist Richard Rottenburg argues that this kind of separation holds the epistemological validity of development in place. For Rottenburg, development policy has to incorporate two mutually contradictory narratives: the designability of progress, and the sovereignty of all cultures and nations (2009:80). The first narrative aspires to universalism, while the latter narrative is fundamentally relativistic. Rottenburg argues that "development cooperation resolves this problem by assigning them to different contexts" (2009:80). In this formulation, development requires—and hence performs—a fundamental separation as the resolution of its own contradictions.

The contexts of "local" and "global" are held separate by the development project. Expertise is technical know-how, a toolkit defined precisely by *not* being attached to any specific, local space (Kothari 2005:430; see also Ong 2005). For Donna Haraway (1988), such "universal" forms of knowledge are inherently disembodied and unlocatable, simultaneously everywhere and nowhere. For GPD development staff, expertise appeared as exterior, beyond the local, existing always somewhere else, and away from their emplaced labour in Central Australia. The distinction between expertise and local knowledge therefore does not simply conform to the separation between *Yapa* and *Kardiya* in the Central

Australian context, where *Yapa* are local and *Kardiya* are transient. *Kardiya* staff may have worked in "international development," but even they almost never claimed expertise.

My attempts to locate expertise ultimately destabilised it as a guiding principle for the project in Central Australia. The attempt to find the originating point of the development project via a reverse-teleology to its "source" in international expertise does not lead to the bedrock of accumulated organisational know-how. A parallel process is documented by Shore and Wright (2011:9–11), citing Barbara Cruikshank (1999), in which Cruikshank seeks to discern the decision-making behind a policy to lock all of the dumpsters in her neighbourhood. In spite of her sustained attempts, the investigation leads nowhere; no one she speaks to knows exactly why the dumpsters were locked, and she cannot locate a central decision-maker. Her conclusion is that not all policy derives from a "sovereign power" (1999:17), it does not diffuse from a single point of origin. Similarly, it was not clear that "international development expertise" had played a significant role in the GPD project. This necessitates not only the decentring of expertise but, more broadly, the reframing of organisational narratives about the spatialisation and movement from development models, high up in the organisational hierarchy, to implementation, "on the ground" in the local community.

Delineating the project

Due to their well-known advertising campaigns in Australia, many Warlpiri people were familiar with GPD prior to the commencement of their childhood project in Warlpiri communities. Some Warlpiri I spoke with found it novel that an organisation associated with humanitarianism in the Global South—particularly with food shortages—would be present in Central Australia. Prominent fundraising campaigns had made GPD memorable (see chapter seven), but in terms of their development project in the Warlpiri communities, GPD was less distinctive. GPD officially "entered" the communities in 2008, but in so doing they joined an existing repertoire of institutional interventions. One GPD manager described the situation as follows:

> Here, you've got 40 agencies trying to reach 20 people. In international development, sometimes you have two or three agencies trying to reach 200,000 people. That's the contrast.

There may be a touch of hyperbole in the statement above, but it highlights a point about the complex, overlapping assembly of simultaneous interventions in Central Australia. For instance, in Mulga Flat, a community of roughly 800 people, I counted nine projects or services targeting either health or education outcomes for children aged zero to five, the same age bracket on which GPD was focused. These were: the "Families as First Teachers" (FaFT) program, playgroup, childcare, preschool, a midwife, a child health nurse, an antenatal care program, a child protection program, and the GPD project itself.

In such settings, an ostensibly singular "service" may have a number of organisations or funding streams attached: in one community, for instance, the playgroup staff salaries were paid through the FaFT program, equipment supplied by GPD, staff training provided by a vocational college and funded by GPD, the physical space itself provided by the local school, and other learning resources supplied by a "bilingual resource unit" attached to the school. Such arrangements could be, by turns, both collaborative and competitive, as detailed in chapter three. In arrangements like this, the precise contribution of GPD in bringing forms of development expertise was impossible to disentangle from other interventions. This was particularly the case in terms of assembling multiple funding streams into an ostensibly singular service: for instance, the playgroup.

However, motivated by the assumption that GPD's community development principles derived from their international work represented something new and different in Australia, I asked a number of Warlpiri women who worked in the early childhood sector what they saw that GPD was doing in

Mulga Flat. All responded along similar lines: GPD is for the *kurdu-kurdu* [children]. GPD work in early childhood, train staff, and hold meetings. Given that there were numerous other organisations in this space, I pushed for more details in my interviews. I was keen to know whether GPD stood out as distinct, and particularly if their "community development" approach was experienced as "empowering" for Warlpiri people, and if other government policies contrasted with this as "top down" or welfare oriented. However, none of the women I interviewed would be drawn into a discussion on the merits of one organisation over another. This is illustrated in the following discussion, drawn from an interview with Sophia, a Warlpiri woman who was heavily involved in the institutional apparatus around early childhood in Mulga Flat:

> Drew: Do you think that working with Global Partners in Development is different to working with other organisations?
>
> Sophia: They're not better than any other organisation. They're all the same. We work with a lot of organisations. Global Partners in Development works with early childhood and [a vocational college] to bring training [to Mulga Flat].
>
> Drew: When you say they are all the same, what do you mean by that?
>
> Sophia: Other organisations give different support, too. But mainly it's all about kids and education, young kids to grow up strong. We all work with children.

Here, Sophia resisted my attempt to single out GPD and elicit a response on how they were performing. Most Warlpiri respondents were generally positive about the work of GPD but, at the same time, GPD was not experienced as particularly different to any other organisation. When asked, another Warlpiri woman informed me that she "didn't pay attention" to the differences between organisations. This is not to say that the Warlpiri women I interviewed never differentiated between organisations; they often did so, for example, in terms of the family groups which could become associated with a particular organisation or project. But in these cases the differentiation was performed along kinship lines, not the *Kardiya* categories of organisational effectiveness and participatory or top-down practice.

One Warlpiri woman I interviewed informed me that "playgroup" began in Mulga Flat in 1970, originally run by the Women's Centre. "Playgroup" was in many ways the *same* playgroup that was today run by FaFT (Families as First Teachers) and supported—through providing funding for staff training—by GPD. Another Warlpiri childcare worker, in another community I call "Granite Ridge," told me that a similar playgroup began in the 1980s and passed through multiple organisational incarnations—run by the "Central Australian Isolated Children's Service," then the local Women's Centre, then the "Community Development Employment Projects" (CDEP), then the local school.[15] Both of these women had worked for decades in the field of early childhood, and viewed the GPD-supported playgroup as another iteration in the history of playgroup services in Warlpiri communities.

Moreover, it was not always clear exactly what GPD did in Warlpiri communities. One external stakeholder who worked with an organisation partnered with GPD suggested this to me in an interview:

> Those fundamental questions still linger—What is the project about? Is it about transitions to school, is it about growing identities, so that they [Warlpiri children] are strong individuals and resilient? There are still a lot of questions of what this is project trying to pull off, and to what extent it can achieve it, especially when they are not a service delivery agency.

From the project beginnings, GPD took a strong stance against service delivery viewing it as the top-down antithesis to community development (see ACFID 2011:1). GPD placed the emphasis on facilitating rather than delivering, as well as avoiding the replication of existing early childhood interventions. But this

[15] The CDEP scheme involved people "working for a notional equivalent of their income support payment" (Hunter and Gray 2012:7), known colloquially as "work for the dole," while also supporting community development initiatives in Indigenous communities. In the past, playgroup workers in Granite Ridge were paid through CDEP.

meant that the GPD project sometimes became invisible, appearing as a non-intervention. Without their own direct service, it was difficult to point to the precise contribution of GPD. This is not to say they did nothing: across the four communities, for instance, they organised governance groups, facilitated employment training, took Warlpiri women on "study trips," and were in fact sometimes involved in the direct provision of playgroup services. GPD staff were often exhausted by such commitments.

Still, the actual work of GPD was difficult to isolate from the broader institutional milieu in Warlpiri communities. The various forms of intervention that occur in Warlpiri communities are often deeply entangled, so much so that their organisational origins are not experienced as particularly differentiated. Even the NTER, exemplifying top-down governance, critiqued for its human rights violations (Anaya 2010; Davis 2007), and seen to represent the decisive policy shift in recent Indigenous affairs, was not necessarily viewed by Warlpiri as separate from the GPD project. When I asked one Warlpiri woman why GPD was working in Mulga Flat, she responded that it "might be to do with the intervention [the NTER], because it hasn't been happening before the intervention." Both the NTER and the GPD project took particular interest in the health of children. *Kardiya* GPD staff also complained about the unlucky timing of their entry into Central Australia in 2008, less than a year after the NTER was implemented. At least one manager believed that their progress in building relations with Warlpiri people had been hampered as the project was viewed by Warlpiri as part of the broader NTER.

In contrast to the entanglement of interventions in Warlpiri communities, the performance and accountability of particular organisations is often the pressing concern for both *Kardiya* staff and the funders of development projects, both for the moral compulsion to help, and in the context of a competitive marketplace for government funding (see chapter four). Often, GPD staff had good relationships with Warlpiri people, and it is well established that the quality of the personal relationship with staff is often more significant for

Warlpiri people than organisational outcomes (see Musharbash 2001). *Kardiya* staff also acknowledged that "personalities" were usually more significant than organisational affiliation at the "community level." With the exception of their well-known marketing campaigns, GPD was not experienced as anything particularly new, or different, for both Warlpiri people and also long-term *Kardiya* in Central Australia. The project was rather a reappearance of the same intervention, another iteration of an always shifting but ever-present institutional palimpsest.[16]

GPD promotional material emphasises that the organisation "enters" a community, works with them until they become "self-sustaining" and then walks alongside them as they exit, to go and help another community in need. This is more than just a marketing trope. Many development staff expressed the view that they would eventually not be required in Warlpiri communities; that they could "train themselves out of a job" or that one day, GPD would not have to exist. But the experience of the GPD intervention, for Warlpiri and some long-term *Kardiya*, is in many ways, already there and ongoing—others of its type have pre-existed, coexist and will likely persist beyond the eventual departure of GPD or handover to another provider. GPD staff were largely drawn from a pool of workers who had been employed in Central Australia previously—their presence was not new, and none had come directly from GPD's international programming group. The NTER notwithstanding, it was difficult to find an organisation working with Warlpiri people that did not espouse some form of community development values. As a GPD manager related to me, "every organisation out here would swear black and blue that they are doing community development." For instance, the Warlpiri governance committees that GPD sought to establish to oversee the institutional field of early childhood were perhaps the most tangible example of GPD's community development approach. But almost every intervention entailed some form of Warlpiri

[16] Similarly, in her work on Hutu refugees, Liisa Malkki argues that the multitude of international organisations in refugee camps were "most relevant in the mythico-history as a single, totalized category" (1995:147).

governance group or steering committee, of which I counted fourteen in the community of Mulga Flat alone.

"They think it's new, but it's not"

A piece of institutional history that was referenced by GPD staff but rarely explored was their engagement in another Central Australian Indigenous community from the mid-1990s until the early 2000s. This project was also participatory and focused on improving the health of babies. I interviewed Edith, one of the staff members who worked on this project and still lived in Alice Springs in 2014. Initially, she said, the project had focused on preventative health, something that GPD had begun before the NT government even had a preventative health program: "They are doing preventative health now. They think it's new, but it's not." Edith told me that their program began with "Rapid Appraisal Methodology," where they asked the community about their "biggest health problems" and set out to address those. Edith seemed to think that some aspects of the project were successful or had the potential to be, but also lamented the "low motivations" of the Aboriginal people she was working with:

> In Africa, I would do a workshop and people would walk 4 hours to get to the workshop. Here, unless you pick them up, they won't come, the motivation isn't there. My manager even said to me "Edith, you've got the worst job in the world. There's just no motivation in [the community]."

Eventually, Edith said she became "burnt out" and "lost confidence" when she felt she was not making any progress, a situation that was markedly different from her previous work for GPD in multiple locations within sub-Saharan Africa. As a result of this burn out, she took leave from the community and returned to Uganda for more development work to "get [her] confidence back." In 2001, she returned to the project in Central Australia to "hand over" to a new staff member. Upon returning, Edith noted that the project had deteriorated.

> Edith: I was shocked to find out that all the fantastic programs we had worked on—renal failure, rheumatic fever, skin and ear clinics—when I had come back

> in 2001, all the health worker was doing was Meals on Wheels, and selling second-hand clothes, which you don't need a Third World agency to do. It had changed. GPD had stopped paying the [local] staff and put them on CDEP. But that meant the staff never showed up. It was stupid to put it in government hands. By 2001, [the project] had completely lost the plot, I tried to restore it again, but I was rescuing a dead dog.
>
> Drew: Do you think the project had much success?
>
> Edith: We weren't making inroads compared to Africa; it felt slow. As far as whether we made any success, I would say not very much. Maybe if I had stayed there longer [it would have been successful] but I got burnt out. If they [the staff who came later] had kept doing what I started, it might have worked, but they abolished it.

I am not drawing attention to this project to claim that it was a bad development project or that GPD was a bad development agency, or even that one woman's heroic work needs valorising. The apparent failure of the project in this community had occurred within a particularly volatile political environment, over which GPD had no control. Rather, I want to point out that this project was never discussed in any detail by GPD staff during my fieldwork. Correspondingly, Edith knew little about the current GPD project and its staff, and I had contacted her through channels outside of GPD. The existence of this former project is problematic for the narrative that international development expertise had not been utilised in Australia and disrupted the claims of accumulated organisational experience. There is a very real sense in which GPD had been there before, and the Warlpiri project is not so much an entry as a reappearance, dusted off and with updated terminology. The story of a forgotten repetition here is not dissimilar to existing patterns: Patrick Sullivan notes that in Australian Indigenous affairs, reform programs are "pumped along the sclerotic arteries of the same old bureaucracy, but with the vigour of new acronyms" (2011:110).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sought to outline the ways in which the experience of GPD intervention "on the ground" forces us to reorient the spatial and temporal coordinates of intervention and hence the narrative of a new, globally valid form of intervention in Indigenous Australia. During my fieldwork, international expertise in community development did not reveal itself to be the driver of the project in an instrumental, diffusionist way. It was more as Li (2007:6) suggests, an instance where "programs of intervention are pulled together from an existing repertoire, a matter of habit, accretion, and bricolage." There was no clearly traceable trail from international experience and expertise, to the GPD childhood project in Warlpiri communities.

This chapter serves as a starting point for the pages that follow, one that takes the positions of global and local not as the stable starting point of analysis, but as markers that are systematically produced by the development agency. The topographic binary of global and local serves as a framework for multiple other binaries within the development project: model and implementation, development organisation and community, between scientific evidence and local knowledge, "high-level strategy" and "on-the-ground reality," and, in some ways, between *Kardiya* and *Yapa,* especially where the former are "staff" and the latter are designated "community members" by the development project. While these positions are continually produced by the development project, their status as constructions does not imply artificiality and hence automatically an invitation toward condemnation. I want to demonstrate some of the effects of this ordering of the world. In the following chapter, I continue within the theme of expertise through examining the evidence base for the project.

Chapter Three: The evidence base and its fragile biopolitics

While GPD staff would generally disavow holding expertise themselves, in my search for the knowledge on which the project proceeded I was occasionally directed towards particular documents that staff viewed as foundational "building blocks" for the project design. In a sense, these documents were proxies for the forms of expertise that staff were unwilling to adopt themselves. The most prominent of these was one document produced by an Australian university, and often referred to simply as "the evidence base" by GPD staff. While this document is publicly available online, for the purposes of de-identification I treat it as an ethnographic subject here and thus do not cite it directly.[17] However, the features I draw from the document are common to much recent literature around early childhood intervention. To assist in orienting the reader, I refer in footnotes to documents that are publicly available and make similar claims to the evidence base document itself.[18] I focus on one particular type of evidence, the scientific backing of both neuroscience and epigenetics, as it was this evidence that was most commonly cited by staff the strongest reason for intervention on children aged zero to five.

In the previous chapter, I noted the increasing calls for "evidence-based" policy in Indigenous Australia. Ilan Katz (2008:93) has noted that there is no uniform understanding of what "evidence-based" actually means, but he suggests that for a project or policy to be called evidence based, it should be both rigorously evaluated and produce statistically significant changes in the target population. This is not my focus. Here I explore the evidence for project intervention in the first instance, rather than the ongoing substantiation of verifiable project impacts. I first problematise the notion that the scientific evidence behind the project was a known and stable thing, and subsequently argue that the project and the scientific evidence were joined in a kind of "loose

[17] While the document is publicly available and does not contain sensitive material, to cite it directly would breach the norms of de-identification I have followed.

[18] For an example of a similar evidence base, see Appendix 1 of *Investing in the Early Years—A National Early Childhood Development Strategy* (Commonwealth of Australia 2009:31).

coupling" (Rottenburg 2009:70). By "loose coupling," Rottenburg refers to representations of practices that "condense" their meaning, without specifying actual operations (2009:70). The "coupling" of representation and practice is thus not direct, but indeterminate and broad.

In this chapter, I analyse the loose coupling of the evidence base and project implementation. The evidence base espouses biologically indisputable brain development as both the rationale for intervention as well as the implicit end goal. Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), I argue that brain development has its own chronotope—representation of space-time—that produces the project as a globally legitimate enterprise. But because brain development cannot be directly accessed by GPD, it is measured through "proxy indicators." Such proxy indicators relied not on biology, but culturally specific practices generally related to Western education. In this vicarious linkage, which moves from apparently universal biology to the specificity of culture, the implicit worldview of the evidence base is made visible. I suggest that this vicariousness could be interpreted in two ways: First, in an instrumental view, as weakness for the organisation in their inability to measure particular outcomes against evidence. Second, in a critical view, the vicarious link can be viewed as a kind of Foucauldian biopolitics where life is directed towards particular ends. Ultimately, I suggest that the "loose coupling" exceeds analysis both in instrumental and critical frameworks.

Scientific Evidence

Monitoring and evaluation staff within GPD commonly traced the beginnings of the Warlpiri project back to a particular document, commonly referred to as simply "the evidence base." This document was produced through a prominent Australian university in response to a request by multiple organisations in Central Australia for suggestions on how the revenues derived from mining royalties could be used to improve education outcomes (broadly conceived) for Warlpiri people. The document is basically a standard "desktop review" that draws on a range of research and disparate projects, mostly from

Australia but also from overseas, in suggesting potential options. In this traversal, the document is in search of the epistemological “what” of “what works”; the models and ideas that can be applied to Warlpiri communities. As in the previous chapter, “what works” is both the product of local engagements, and separate from them, so that suggested recipes may be deployed elsewhere.[19]

Importantly, the university-commissioned document gave the most prominence to early childhood education as an appropriate use of mining royalties. This was supported by the assertion that brain development, before birth and during the first three years, is crucial for the rest of a child’s life. Throughout my fieldwork with the GPD childhood project, emphasis on the brain development of children was ubiquitous, appearing in meetings, documents, on PowerPoint slides, and in team presentations. GPD’s focus on early childhood was far from unique. Investments in early childhood are increasingly seen by governments as offering the best return in terms of future socioeconomic costs: improved productivity, reduced dependence on welfare, reduced disability, and less costs in crime and corrections (Robinson et al. 2008:xx). The neuroscientist James Heckman (2008:311) represents this as a sliding scale: ages zero to three offer the best “return of investment in human capital.” As the child grows older and enters adulthood, the expected rate of return decreases. Broadly, this is because the child’s brain is said to grow exponentially in the early years, a critical period setting the stable basis for development into personhood, but it is also a period of developmental vulnerability (Perry 2005). Childhood has become “degree zero,” (Feldman 2002:287) the baseline from which to measure the failure of proper nurturance and, with the backing of epigenetics and neurobiology, the primal grounds for identifying and targeting pathology. This has resulted in a proliferation of early childhood interventions (Bruer 1999; Edwards, Gillies, and Horsley 2015). As such, much of my discussion here cannot reasonably be limited to GPD as an organisation, who participate in this much broader trend.

[19] For a similar example of a document that draws upon multiple projects internationally as evidence for early childhood intervention, see Silburn et al. (2011:10).

For instance, the Australian Government's *Investing in the Early Years—A National Early Childhood Development Strategy*, a document also cited by GPD staff throughout my fieldwork, states:

> Our understanding of the interactions between genetics and early childhood experiences has advanced through research in neurobiology, which highlights the importance of the early years in shaping the architecture of the brain (Commonwealth of Australia 2009).

This particular point was metaphorically illustrated during a team meeting at the head office, using a ball of yarn as a prop. A member of GPD staff was giving a presentation on the significance of childhood brain development and instructed us, as a group, to stand up and spread out around the room. Then, the presenter handed one staff member the ball of yarn. The staff member was instructed to throw the ball to another person, while holding on to the end of string itself. The directive to toss the ball corresponded with a "positive" experience for an imagined child; for instance, "the mother reads to the child before bed." With this, a new synapse was formed, a new circuit in the brain was "hard wired," or, in our case, the string of yarn connected two participants. After a few more positive experiences, a network of yarn was formed between the participants, which, the facilitator informed us, represented the developing circuitry of the brain.

But, these circuits can be damaged. Emphasising the hovering risk, the facilitator read out some negative experiences, for instance, "the father comes home and beats the mother in view of the child." At this point, the facilitator produced a pair of scissors and cut the yarn, severing the connections in the brain. A staff member interjected with an example of her own: "In one community I was in, they [the local Indigenous people] were putting Coca-Cola in sipper cups for babies." The sugary spectre of the multinational beverage and its associated lifestyle diseases are significant problems, although its impact on brain development is not clear. Still, it seemed to tie in with the pedagogical message: Aboriginal people need to know more about appropriate early childhood care. In the final phase of the exercise, additional positive experiences were introduced, this time corresponding more closely with institutional service delivery: "The child regularly attends an educational playgroup." With this, the facilitator tied the severed ends of the wool back together, fixing the broken circuit and repairing the brain. This repair process represents the brain development of a young child, and a view that is increasingly common: "The more positive stimuli a baby is given, the more brain cells and synapses it will be able to develop" (Allen and Duncan Smith 2008:57). New neural pathways were formed through positive nurturance, and negative experiences produced a breakdown. The facilitator suggested that we reproduce this exercise in Aboriginal communities as a representation of brain development and its relationship to the environment of the child.

Following the demonstration with the ball of yarn, the facilitator furthered her argument with a PowerPoint presentation. One slide contained a positron emission tomography (PET) brain scan, showing a comparison between a "normal" brain and the significantly smaller brain of a child who was raised in a Romanian orphanage. The facilitator told the group that the discrepancy was the result of emotional neglect, rather than malnutrition or any other kind of ostensibly "physical" deficiency, reiterating the need for parental care and nurturance. The scan was an example of the type of "comparative images" that are "one of the most powerful, persuasive presentations of brain-type data" (Dumit 2004:17). In fact, this particular image is perhaps *the* comparative image of brain data. It originates in the work of child psychologist Bruce Perry (2005; 2002), and has appeared in peer-reviewed journal articles (Heckman 2008:308), in the popular press (Palmer 2012), and, in this case, as part of the rationale for early childhood policy.[20] It originates from a series of studies on institutionalised orphans in Romania that emerged in the 1990s. These children were found to be living in appalling conditions and without parental care, and this study series, with its singular source material, has been one of the most prominent sources of

[20] I requested permission from the "Child Trauma Academy" to reproduce Bruce Perry's well-known image in this thesis. I was informed that permission is no longer granted for its use or distribution, "due to widespread mischaracterization and misattribution."

neuroscientific and epigenetic conclusions about early childhood (Heckman 2008; Rutter et al. 1998; Sheridan et al. 2012). While both the framing (what is "normal"?) and facticity of the image have been questioned (see Williams 2014), its persuasive power remains significant. It demonstrates to the viewer the tangible evidence of the plasticity of a child's brain and hence the importance of nurturance in the early years of life.

Such brain scans are what Joseph Dumit (2004:16–17) refers to as "expert images": persuasive illustrations with intellectual authority and an objective truth status. The social theorist Maurizio Meloni also notes the "current attractive force of neuroscientific explanations" (2012:25), whereby neuroscience is seen to be "more scientific" and "truer" that other forms of investigation (2012:32). By way of example, the fact that there exists an extensive anthropological record of Aboriginal people in Central Australia was largely unacknowledged by GPD staff during my fieldwork, whereas "brain development" was a recurring theme.[21] This is unsurprising; the success of neuroscience both within academia and in popular imaginings is well established, with potential not to simply shed light on human sciences and political theory but to displace these altogether with new neuroscientific categories (see Dumit 2004; Vander Valk 2012). Scott Vrecko (2010:2) lists a range neurobiological accounts of phenomena—including love, hope, fear, and violence—that begin to re-territorialise academic boundaries to the point of what has been referred to as "neuro-reductionism" (Martin 2004:190), a process by which phenomena are reduced to an apparently tangible neuroscientific explanation.

GPD also stressed in various documents and presentations that they viewed childhood as per the "ecological model of the child" (see Figure 2). The model is multi-scalar, placing the child at the centre of ever-expanding contexts, starting with the family, then community, then society or culture, then global networks; a kind of Matryoshka doll of contextualisations. Of course, the

[21] The decline in anthropological authority in terms of representing Indigenous people and culture may be a valid reason for this (see Cowlishaw 2017).

ecological model can be broken down further, as there are other, even smaller dolls to be found within: the brain, for instance, and within that, the synapses. One could posit inheritances too, in the children this child may go on to make. Besides making the straightforward point that humans exist within sociocultural lifeworlds, the model posits concrete linkages between the child and their environment as per epigenetics, "the porosity between the milieu and the body" (Meloni 2015a:139). While Waggoner and Uller note that there is no consensus on how to explain epigenetics research (2015:177), here I define it in GPD discourse as heritable modifications to gene expression caused by environmental exposures (Heckman 2008:290). In utero or perinatal events are said to set stable epigenetic marks that can stay with the child over the course of their life (Meloni 2015a:130).

The child and their environment are joined through the ecological model of the child, and the quality of care provided is foregrounded.[22] In addition, epigenetics produces evidence for intergenerational disadvantage. For example, the ongoing effects of the Dutch "Hunger Winter" of 1944, whereby increased rates of cardiovascular disease are associated with the grandchildren of women who had been undernourished during pregnancy (Veenendaal et al. 2013) is a well-studied example of such intergenerational trauma. GPD documents also noted that many Aboriginal people experienced intergenerational trauma through the effects of colonisation (see also Burbank 2011:58–60).

While GPD treated such scientific advances as the stable basis for the project, these new fields of research are currently replete with ambiguity. Neuroscientific explanations are generally considered more satisfying than they actually are (Weisberg et al. 2008) and epigenetics is noted as a nascent and unstable field (Meloni 2015a:141; Meloni and Testa 2014:432; Stelmach and Nerlich 2015:215;). A range of moves can be accomplished in terms of

[22] This kind of ecological systems theory is particularly associated with the work of the developmental psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner. The model I offer here is based on the type I saw in GPD documents. As in the model I present, the categories do not always appear consistent with one another, but such diagrams are designed to illustrate the interplay between the environment and the child.

intervening on populations on the basis of neuroscientific and epigenetic facticity (Meloni and Testa 2014).

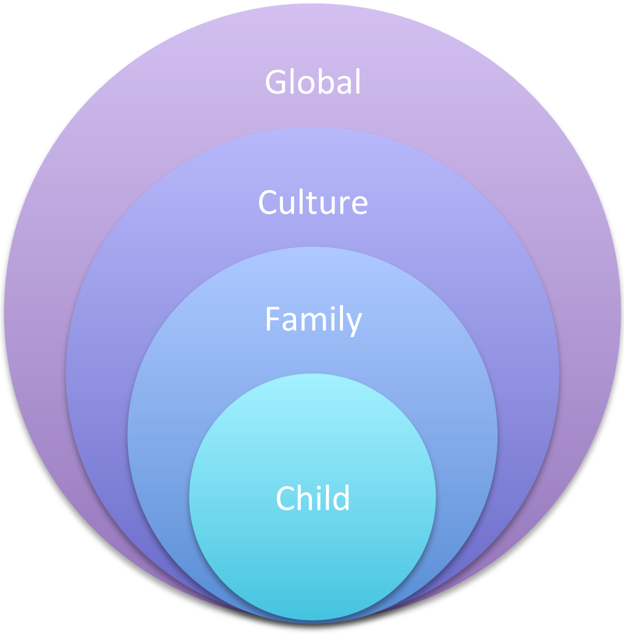

Figure 3: The ecological model of the child

For instance, Meloni notes that epigenetic advice can be interpreted as "fully neoliberal: epigenetic claims of 'regeneration' are mostly mobilized as individual techniques of taking better care of ourselves" (2015b:120). At the same time, such is the exchange between the child's body and their environment that interventions premised on the need for health infrastructure and social care for poor populations can also be advanced under such scientific authority (Stelmach and Nerlich 2015:213). Or because the need for nurturance is so great in the early years, neuroscientific research has been deployed in blaming mothers for their children's poor developmental outcomes, rather than their broader socioeconomic conditions (Richardson et al. 2014; Edwards, Gillies, and Horsley 2015). In the context of an autonomously perpetuating intergenerational trauma, some groups could be deemed too damaged for *any* effective remedial intervention (Meloni 2015a:136), where disadvantage begins before birth and cannot, ultimately, be remediated. Epigenetics can thus also provide the basis for the pathologisation of racial groups who fail to be acceptable liberal subjects (see Mansfield 2012; Mansfield and Guthman 2015). Evidently, this racialised usage contrasts with the idea that the brain and genes are universal features of humanity, the one that GPD deployed. And the critical importance of the early years of a child's life would appear to find its inverse in the concomitantly bleak prospects for some adults, but this point was not countenanced in GPD material.

What emerges from this account is that neuroscientific and epigenetic research is not a singular, stable piece of evidence, but can be many things when turned to political or social theory. It emphasises individual responsibility, and yet calls for more social welfare. It is racist, and yet cannot possibly see race. It pathologises entire groups, and yet isolates the behaviour of individual parents. The ambiguity here speaks to the wide range of interpretations that apparently "hard" science can support (Sarewitz 2004). As Harry Collins and Robert Evans (2007:9) argue, the strength of science "is like that of glass—hard and rigid but vulnerable to a single dislocation—and cracks are always appearing." Neuroscientific and epigenetic findings, in themselves, may be completely valid, or they may not. The question I have sought to pursue is the extent to which they serve as *evidence* for the development project that based its logic upon them.

In this regard, it is not clear that the project is the self-evident extension of the scientific facticity, in spite of the architectural metaphor of the evidence *base*. As I discussed in chapter two, GPD differentiated their "bottom-up" approach from the "top-down" NTER, but the point I am making here is that both approaches could be advanced under the same scientific facticity. Beyond the broadly conceived focus on children, there is little *here* to suggest that the particular community development approach taken by GPD will be more effective than any other (see also Katz 2008:92). This is not to say that GPD did not do good or important work, or did not attempt to rigorously evaluate their project (see chapter four), but it does destabilise scientific facticity as evidence for the project.

The chronotope of the evidence base

In her discussion of the AIDS policy field concerned with sub-Saharan Africa, Maia Green demonstrates that the way in which knowledge achieves the status of evidence is dependent upon "the negotiated positioning of social actors" who decide which kinds of knowledge "will be accorded useful status" (2011:37). Acknowledging the lack of any necessary correspondence between scientific evidence and the type of project that was undertaken, in this section I draw on literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin to suggest the type of chronotope (space-time) that is enacted by the evidence base document. While Bakhtin never explicitly defined the chronotope in his 1938 essay on the topic—translated into English in 1981—here I understand it as the particular kinds of space-time "that is tantamount to the world construction that is at the base of every narrative text" (Bemong and Borghart 2010:4). This is to ask: How are space and time figured through text as words on a page?

In his classic exposition, Bakhtin noted multiple "chronotopes" that had characterised novels throughout different historical epochs. For instance, Bakhtin contended that the "adventure time" of ancient Greek writings was largely abstract, with no identifying historical traces of the era (Bakhtin 1981:91). The hero is unchanged by passing through time (1981:105), and place figures "solely as a naked, abstract expanse of space" (1981:100). As Bakhtin states, for a shipwreck, a sea is needed, but the particular sea makes no difference at all (1981:100). Bakhtin goes on to explicate other chronotopes that have served as organising principles in narrative text, such as the biography and the cyclical time of the "bucolic-pastoral-idyllic chronotope" (1981:103-4). In this latter chronotope, place takes on greater significance, "by the age-old rooting of the life of generations to a single place, from which this life, in all its events, is inseparable" (1981:225).

While Bakhtin was generally concerned with the kinds of chronotopes formed through the narrative structure of a novel, his work has since been applied to a variety of texts (Bemong and Borghart 2010:9). The chronotope is useful here precisely because it tends to the world-making of the text, not to the explicit content as such, but to the underlying chronotopic configuration. In her examination of Cuban folklore and history-making, Kristina Wirtz suggests that chronotopes exist prior to ideologies, “affording their conditions of possibility” (Wirtz 2016:345). Analysing the evidence base in terms of its chronotope allows for an understanding the grounds on which the development project proceeds in the first instance, and its possibilities through both evidence and ellipses.

The evidence base document, as a “desktop review,” is compiled on the basis of other textual material. It is thus heavily citational, drawing on disparate projects, but also other research and reports, “channelling” the authority of others to produce its own authority (Jackson 2005:239). The resulting report is a synoptic traversing of a wide range of other projects, predominantly from various sites within Australia but also internationally, that have the potential to “be adapted” for the Central Australian context. A microenterprise in Western Australia, a cultural centre in Northern Queensland, or the “Head Start” Program in the USA; all are canvassed as having potential for application in Central Australia. In this traversal, the document is in search of the epistemological “what” of “what works,” which is to say, the models and ideas that can be applied from elsewhere.

The variety of projects that are cited flatten out difference through using well-worn categories of apparently universal significance. People everywhere have the same basic problems: poverty, delinquency, mental illness, stress, welfare, contact with the criminal justice system, and, broadly, socioeconomic disadvantage. And they all need the same things: health, nutrition, childrearing skills and school readiness. In short, they have a common problem, which needs a common solution: development (Ferguson 1994a:xiii). But to accept this we must also accept certain definitions of what makes for a good life. The chronotope here can be figured as similar to Bakhtin’s Greek adventure; events are played out upon an “abstract expanse of space” (Bakhtin 1981:99) in which the places themselves are entirely interchangeable. The shipwreck is significant, but not the sea. Or, more specific to the evidence base document, disadvantage is always salient, but not its local conditions. In drawing together a multitude of places, the chronotope is also "dialogic": drawing together diverse situations in terms that communicate with each other (Bemong and Borghart 2010:7).

These transcendental and dialogic chronotopes are partially produced through the preface of the document, which highlights neuroscientific research about the development of the child's brain. The focus on living, breathing humans is partially redrawn and replaced with a "neuromolecular gaze" (Abi-Rached and Rose 2010); the brain and its neuronal connections become visible and emerge as the new objects of the development project or, in the case of the ball of yarn exercise, the "circuits" and "hard wiring" of the brain. Recalling Mol, these objects are performed in the first instance by forms of scientific research as documented in the evidence base and spun in metaphorical terms through the ball of yarn and the authority of PET scans. Such objects are stripped back of culturally or locally specific meaning; they are universal features of a diagnostically established human body. The fact that these new objects emerge out of studies in Romania—as in Perry's brain scan—or elsewhere is not a weakness in their broader validity but a strength for the development project: the uniformity of the subject of development here permits the projects that target them to also become uniform (see Porter 1995:5), a point that reiterates and indeed produces the value of an organisation that works in a variety of locales across multiple countries.

Because both neuroscientific and epigenetic facts emerge primarily from deviations from what is "normal"—from deprived Romanian orphans or the descendants of grandparents malnourished in wartime—we automatically assume that neurons or genetic materials naturally and semi-autonomously tend towards the development of a healthy adult, unless they are negatively impacted by some other input. Because these new objects are universally applicable to all people, their temporal orientation is always the same: everywhere is an unfolding of the same basic process that renders the contextual differences from place to place less significant than the singular, universal process. This could be called a developmental chronotope, not for societies, but for individuals. The concept of a unilinear path to development on which all societies are somewhere located (see Fabian 1983:27) is displaced, as is the concomitant positioning of Indigenous people as somehow inhabiting and expressing an ancient time (Kowal 2015b). Both of these problematic temporal formulations are averted through the chronotope of a ubiquitous yet individual developmental unfolding.

The developmental chronotope also focuses our attention on the types of intervention that such objects will experience, reframing the role of the development agency, as facilitating the autonomous capability of this developmental capacity. Indeed, the development agency only works to prevent *other* forms of negatively impactful intervention through averting morally unsound behaviour, be it the consumption of alcohol, domestic violence, or emotional neglect. Any question of the value or appropriateness of intervention here is rendered hardly worth asking. The development agency only facilitates the largely autonomous capacity of genes and neurons to do what they can do, and thus does not bring with it anything at all, especially not a foreign model of Western progress. Rather than making an intervention, GPD provides "the conditions within which development can happen" (Mosse 2011:3). When the goal of the project is to ensure the healthy and happy development of children, then the physical, mental, and emotional development of the child becomes coextensive with the development project itself. The ultimate fulfilment of a linear progression from childhood to adulthood can also be the end goal of the development project. Because the brain, genes, and by extension, the child, can now be said to bear the marks of a range of environmental factors, they lend themselves to the point that Indigenous disadvantage today is the result of fundamentally racist, apathetic, or poorly designed government policy, but also to the ineluctable solution: non-racist, good policy. Better yet are NGO projects—no state, no market, no culture, and no race—only the altruistic organisation delivering scientifically recognised benefits to a diagnostically established object of development.

The document depends on a universally established chronotope in explicating other development projects as evidence for this one. And yet, in another, separate section, the document cautions against any presumption of transferability of a project model from one context to another. As readers, we are reminded to look always to the context. As Riles has noted in her work in Fiji, "bureaucratic practices point again and again to their own incompleteness" (2000:19). I found this to be a common feature within GPD development discourse; there exist models, tools, and frameworks, but how they are implemented is deemed most important (Katz 2008:93). The emphasis on amorphous "implementation" suggests that implementation cannot, by definition, be written, and is always separate from text. Implementation is in the *doing*, and the distinction here thus rests upon a "dualism of words and things" (Rumsey 1990:352), the division between text and being in the world (James, Hockey, and Dawson 1997:11). Implementation is temporally separate, to be dealt with later on, by someone else. One is text, the other is context.

What this demonstrates is the extent to which the document is central to the enactment of the development project (Hull 2012:259). The models derived from "international development" rely precisely on textual form for their "conditions of possibility," a form that necessarily dis-embeds itself from local interactions. At the same time, evidence here is always oriented towards a site of future implementation and is itself built out of other localised interactions that have occurred in the past. The text both defines its boundary while referring endlessly to things other than itself (Derrida 1979:84). It is separate from the local and yet relies upon connections to it. The text asks the reader to imagine the movement from scientific research to locally based project intervention as a movement that is, by vicarious means, scientifically based.

Vicarious ideation

GPD staff were committed to a participatory project, and frequently sought to efface their own agency so as to allow space for Warlpiri participation. Staff did not view the scientific evidence base as conflicting with participatory development; the abstract goal of the cognitive development, tied into the overall wellbeing of children, is surely beyond reproach. The assertion that the new development objects—brains, genes, neurons or circuits—exist prior to any construction is however readily problematised if we recall Mol's (2002:31) call to "never forget about microscopes." Practices such as brain scans—that have authoritatively revealed the importance of neurons and synapses—exist elsewhere, and are referenced in scientific papers that are in turn called forth in the evidence base, and other material relating to early childhood intervention more broadly. But the practice of this kind of expertise—knowledge of neurons and synapses—is inaccessible to most. Paraphrasing Koddenbrock and Schouten, who are also concerned with ontological politics and humanitarian intervention, (2015:196) the kind of data that is required to gain an understanding of remedial cognition is not the kind that the recipients of development, in this case Aboriginal people living in Central Australia, are likely to generate about themselves, except in paraphrase. The criteria for success emanates from experts located elsewhere and with instruments unavailable to local people; in this way it could be characterised as non-participatory and undemocratic (Collins and Evans 2007:4). However, it is important to note that the development organisation itself is *also* unable to generate this kind of data. Instead, it relies on vicarious authority and narrative elisions to position itself as a conveyance vehicle.

In spite of the presence of a dedicated monitoring and evaluation team, the GPD project did not exist primarily to yield facts about the cognitive development or epigenetic inheritance of Indigenous children. Rather, it existed to improve their health and education outcomes. As such, the move from scientific facticity to project intervention required a level of vicarious ideation, a move to what development staff referred to as "proxy" indicators: for instance, literacy and numeracy test scores from standardised school assessments, as a proxy for cognitive development. Patrick Sullivan has discussed the prevalence of proxy indicators with reference to national targets for Indigenous development set by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG). [23]

[23] These targets include statistical changes in life expectancy, childhood mortality, education, access to early childhood education, and employment outcomes (see SCRGSP 2016:13)

Improvements in life expectancy are assumed to reflect general improvements in life, and access to early childhood education is assumed to entail "positive effects down the generations" (Sullivan 2011:105). Such indicators appear to be "transparent, concrete, measurable and, at least to the non-specialist, appear to be within the grasp of government administrators" (Sullivan 2011:105). Sullivan points out, however, that such indicators in themselves do not assess wellbeing (2011:105).

As Sullivan's discussion demonstrates, contained in the move from broad universals like "wellbeing" to their achievement in terms of proxy indicators is a kind of ideation; indicators, by definition, point to something other than themselves. To return to Annemarie Mol's (2002; 1999) formulation, the object of "cognitive development" is performed through Bruce Perry's brain scan, through the metaphoricity of a ball of yarn, or, indeed, through forms of educational attainment. And in Mol's terms, all of these performances are not perspectives on a single object, but are multiple performances of multiple objects.

The architectural metaphor of the evidence base papers over this multiplicity. The project rests upon scientific facticity as part of its origin story. What is accomplished at the level of the text is the seemingly logical progression from the research, or evidence base, to the implementation of the project as a fundable entity. It is almost axiomatic that NGOs create projects (Lewis and Schuller 2017:642) and, moreover, that those projects need funding. However, in the context of a broadly defined "civil society," "the project" represents just one, narrow form of activity (Sampson 2004:6). Even if we take the findings around brain development and gene methylation as completely valid, at issue here is not the merit of such research in itself but its role in the proliferation of projects that base their logic upon it. Put another way, to recognise that cognitive development as per neuroscience is crucial for under-fives does not ensure the efficacy of a community development project that aims to produce cognitive development outcomes. Even so, the project emerges as the logical and moral progression of "universally valid" scientific knowledge.

The evidence base harmonises scientifically established facts and project intervention into a single axiom, enjoining the purported universality of "cognitive development" with a particular institutional form. Because most development projects do not perform brain scans on children, and would not have the capacity to do so, a child's "cognitive development" is measured (or performed) through the child's contact with *institutions*—principally through schools or healthcare. Throughout the evidence base document, the hard science, the research that points to those seemingly empirical facts about the brain or the body, is seamlessly joined to institutionality; neural pathways are linked to literacy and maths (see Mustard 2002:31).[24] Statistical correlations quickly attain the veracity of causal connections: low birth weight leads to lower test scores (Heckman 2008:298).[25] Cognitive development is equated with educational attainment, to the point where the two need not be differentiated at all. The two become one, allowing for the correlations to be turned back the other way, too: educational playgroups enhance cognitive function, creating more neurons and connections in the brain.

Monitoring and evaluation staff at GPD acknowledged that these were all proxies, but what is contained in the movement from evidence base to proxy is an institutionalised mode of knowledge that represents only an impoverished angle on a holistic child. Even if we accept that the scientific research I have presented does offer us access to the "bare substrate" of humanity (Meloni 2012:37), there is no necessary correspondence between educational attainment in terms of literacy and maths within Western institutions, and cognitive development as a universal attribute of child development. The objectifications of the organisation, the indices of educational attainment, remain fundamentally endogamous, unable to measure modes of being human that exist outside of what is institutionally mandated and measurable; and measurable within a quite

[24] The early childhood researcher James Mustard (2002:31) suggests that there are specific neural pathways related to literacy and mathematics, that develop after the base level pathways such as vision, touch and sound.
[25] The research of the economist James Heckman frequently appears in the early childhood literature that focuses on brain development. His 2008 article "Schools, Skills and Synapses" is particularly well cited.

specific context, for that matter. Bound within this framework, a lack of educational attainment can emerge *only* as dysfunction, as a failure to fulfil ones potential, or to enact a particular kind of subjectivity.

As I have noted, GPD staff were keen to deploy a "strengths-based" approach in their work. In practice, this meant rarely pointing to Indigenous deficits in official material, including the deficit-based statistics that otherwise seem to be the preface for every government report on Indigenous communities. A GPD manager described the strengths-based approach to me as follows:

> It's not about saying that 70 percent of kids in one community are having problems. It's about finding that 30 percent that are kicking goals, and asking, "how do we make that 35 percent?"

Certainly, the persistent descriptions of Indigenous people only in terms of their deficits, "the pathology model of Indigenous communities" (Cowlishaw 2003:3), is deeply problematic in that it permits only particular governmental responses, and the strengths-based approach is an appropriate alternative. However, the focus on "brain development" as an abstract ideal, an always unfolding process, also worked to elide consideration of other questions about *why* GPD was intervening in the first instance. What were the problems faced by Indigenous children?

Over the course of my research, I asked *Yapa* women associated with early childhood as an institutional sector whether they thought that there were problems for children within their community. Many respondents suggested that fighting at school was the biggest issue for children.

> Yes, there are. Because some children are looked after by grandmothers and young mums sometimes don't look after their little kids. Sometimes fighting—like when they get into Facebook.
>
> Childcare worker

> Sometimes problems with not going to school, or fighting, or having problems with their family.
>
> Playgroup staff member

> I don't see any problems with the kids, maybe more problems with their parents. Separating kids, or they don't want to take their kids [to childcare]. For example, maybe from west or east or south or centre camp, some of them don't want to mix. Maybe they just want their kids to be home with them.
>
> GPD community-based facilitator

The emphasis on fighting as a problem here can be attributed to an ongoing feud between multiple families, or "camps," that was occurring in Mulga Flat at the time of my fieldwork. Many families were reportedly not taking their children to childcare or school on the basis that the children of other, opposed families would be in attendance. The final response alludes specifically to this. While the situation in Mulga Flat was perhaps exceptional for its family-based divisions, this observation squares with those made by Pauline Fietz (2005) in her study of young people in the Aboriginal community of Docker River, where the category of "children" is less significant than that of kin. That is to say, Aboriginal people care for children through caring for kin (see also Musharbash 2011:76). The age group "zero to five" represents a category borne of statistical counts rather than specific developmental strata, and that category is less meaningful for Warlpiri than the kinship connections of a particular child. The problems identified by *Yapa* women here make no explicit reference to childhood development, but instead depend on kin as the interpretive lens.

Upon asking the same question as above—"do you think there are problems for children in this community?"—two women I interviewed suggested that there were no problems to speak of for *Yapa* children. One of these women, whom I call Alice, had been working in the childhood sector for many years. I interviewed her on her front porch with the assistance of Maya, my casual research assistant but, more importantly, a woman known to be knowledgeable in the early childhood sector in Mulga Flat. Upon being asked the question above, Alice replied "*Ngurrju mayi?"* (Its good, isn't it?), but looked past me and towards Maya, who quickly intervened with the following response:

> We have to teach them, education is important for kids. All work together. Especially with kids that have been living with their grandmothers, or stepparents, they're the kids that have more problems. I think some kids are still, um, how we talk about kids that don't develop in the brains, because of kids that are not eating well, some mothers aren't feeding their kids proper food, and they're not learning well.

Alice nodded along here, ceding to Maya's expertise in this area; Maya is one who will "speak up strong" in meetings with both *Yapa* and *Kardiya.* It is entirely possible that my status as a *Kardiya* researcher, and one associated with GPD, influenced the response and interplay between the two women here. After the interview, Maya acknowledged to me that she may have "put the words into her [Alice's] mouth" in this case. Other authors have suggested that there may be significant differences between a Western model of child development as influenced by external factors, and the fatalistic understanding among some Indigenous Australian people that the outcomes of childhood are fundamentally immutable (Musharbash 2011:69; Robinson 2008:39). The latter viewpoint seems nearly opposite to the emphasis placed on environmental factors by organisations like GPD. At the same time, a number of other women I spoke to specified that a lack of school attendance was a significant issue in the community, a response very much in keeping with the concerns of helping Whites about Aboriginal communities. Reflecting the impossibility of establishing a unified, authentic Aboriginal voice that either aligns with or departs from the scientific or Western view of child development, my own interviews yielded a variety of responses.

Whether the problem facing children is one of fighting, their specific care arrangements, or indeed of school attendance, *Yapa* responses can be accommodated under biologically based facticity; all can be figured as related to brain or genetic development, as part of the emotional, mental or physical development of the child. In so doing, local knowledge disappears in the moment it is validated, as it is assimilated into the factual scientific paradigm. There is no need to align science with local ideas about childhood, precisely *because* scientific facticity is unavailable to ordinary human perception. When I was asked to write a quarterly report for the project, a manager instructed me to preface the document with the point that *Yapa* people had been raising "happy, healthy children for thousands of years," which included "training their early childhood workers." The GPD childhood project thus only continues and assimilates this ongoing process. The biological substrate of brain development is nomological, as Rottenburg would put it, a kind of "metacode, into which all cultural codes can be translated" (2009:77). Scientific objects come to us as what is simply there, stripped back of their technological mediations (Haraway 1988:582). The evidence base thus entails a double movement: On the one hand, it is so universal as to be beyond our ordinary perception, and hence manifest in any cultural formation, whether recognised or not. On the other, it is self-evidently visible through engagements with Western education and mapped on a scale of development.

Evidence as biopolitics

What are the consequences of the institutional performance of child development? In the previous chapter I noted that there were nine separate organisations or projects working with children aged zero to five in Mulga Flat, in what might be called a "fashion wave" (Challand 2005:60) of early childhood intervention. The term "early childhood," in this context, referred both to the early years of life and to a particular institutional category of intervention. The institutional performance of child development here is hegemonic, and as such I argue that it produces a mode of biopolitical governmentality. When an object like "cognitive development" is performed only as educational attainment, the development of the child is oriented towards what Foucault would call "specific finalities" (1991 [1978]:95); in this case, a normative, neoliberal life project of educational attainment and eventual employment.

Foucault coined the term "biopower" in his 1977-78 lectures at the College de France to refer to "the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy" (Foucault 2007 [1978]:1). Foucault (1991 [1978]:100) argues that from around the sixteenth century, states shifted, from being concerned with sovereignty over territory to the government of the population, particularly the improvement of their health and longevity. Foucault termed this "governmentality." This now commonplace population concern is perhaps most clearly articulated in Australia through the federal government's "Closing the Gap" campaigns, that aim to improve the health and education of Indigenous people. The welfare of the population becomes important because governmentality assumes an essential continuity between various "levels" of government: no longer is the power of the sovereign separate from other forms of power, as in the sovereign power that sits above all else, but rather is continuous with the government of self and the government of family (Foucault 1991 [1978]:91–92). Political action is connected with personal conduct (Gordon 1991:12), so that the moulding of the proper type of self is central to the actions of the state.

In this regard, governmentality differs slightly from Foucault's earlier concept of discipline, although the two are not mutually exclusive. Discipline rested on the constant surveillance of subjects (or its possibility) within regimented systems; the unit on which it worked was not the individual body but rather their rank or their classification within a machine-like system (Foucault 1995 [1975]:148). In organising such a system, discipline required enclosure and was realised most fully within institutions like schools and factories (Foucault 1995 [1975]:141). Liberal governmentality does not aspire to such an extensively surveilled and rigorously administered society (Rose 1996:43–44), but rather takes its object of government as the free subject (Foucault 1982:790). With this subject in mind, to govern is to "structure the possible field of action of others" (Foucault 1982:790). Governmentality does not dominate individuals but rather offers them a finite range of possibilities from which, as free citizens, they may choose. It is not about "imposing laws on men" but, rather, about arranging things so that certain ends may be achieved (Foucault 1991 [1978]:95). Here, power is not repressive but enabling; it "directs life" (Povinelli 2011:118).

Both the developing brain and the epigenome as they are cited and formulated by GPD appear to slot neatly into such governmental regimes. Or, they are a datum onto which governmentality can be exercised. The porosity between the body and environmental signals finds its analogue in the continuity of power posited by Foucauldian governmentality, and indeed, give it a concrete existence: the health of the individual is related to the family, the community, and, finally, the society as a whole, as per the ecological model of the child. The strength of the state is premised upon the strength of individuals. On offer is the promise of development into a healthy, educated, economically productive adult, but in so doing, other modes of being human are disallowed, the possibilities for a life that is radically "Otherwise" (Povinelli 2011) are diminished, as only certain institutionally defined outcomes are considered to represent brain development or indeed growth into acceptable forms of personhood. The offer here is almost impossible to refuse because it appears as a universal, as per Gayatri Spivak: that which we cannot not want (cited in Tsing 2005:1).

Conclusion: The finitude of governmentality

In this chapter, I have argued that the scientific facticity that was a major "building block" of the evidence base did not clearly justify or underwrite any particular kind of intervention. Rather, the uptake of this knowledge is better explained in terms of performing the project itself as globally legitimate, not a colonising enterprise but a scientifically backed, humanitarian project deemed to deliver equality. The type of knowledge presented was the kind that Donna Haraway calls a "god trick," a way of "being nowhere while claiming to see comprehensively" (Haraway 1988:584). The chronotope of brain development is nowhere in particular, nor is it temporally fixed. It is, in a sense, already there and always ongoing. The notion of a trick is apt here; in this chapter I have traced the governing effects of this type of knowledge to a vicarious link, a glitch in the movement from the "hard science" to its apparent manifestation in practical, community development terms, via the detached measurements of progress in other spheres, such as literacy and numeracy tests. I am therefore not describing biopolitical control as the ultimate output of a smoothly functioning system, but rather one that seeps through cracks in that system, never fully realised. As João Biehl (2011:281) has argued, "biopolitics is an insecure enterprise indeed, more a symptom of the limits of government than a marker of its presence and control."

Indeed, this chapter has demonstrated that the evidence base did not, in itself, overdetermine the way that the project proceeded "on the ground." The project was not the clear, unambiguous extension of the evidence base but rather a vicarious ideation. Not a strong, stable, sturdy link but rather a weak one that was at risk of decay and required constant maintenance and repair (see Latour 2005:193–199). In the next chapter, I follow the evidence-based project into its monitoring and evaluation, and ethnographic action. As Tania Murray Li has argued, Foucauldian governmentality is accurate in explaining the project of rule, but not its accomplishment, which is "worked out in the contingent and compromised space of cultural intimacy" (1999:295). The next chapter traces attempts to measure the project's impact as both a moral project and a biopolitical one, and as a system that tries to realise itself (Strathern 2006:190 citing Luhmann 1990), while simultaneously producing forms of difference.

Chapter Four: Monitoring, evaluation and differentiation

In the previous chapter, I began to approach the question of "evidence-based" intervention through an analysis of neuroscientific and epigenetic facticity as a justification for early childhood intervention. This chapter continues within the theme of evidence or "what works." It shifts from focusing on the types of evidence claims that precede a project to an examination of the efforts by Global Partners in Development to be accountable in measuring the efficacy of the project in its implementation. GPD enthusiastically pursued the goal of accountability as a kind of moral obligation, often going beyond the practices of many other organisations in Central Australia. Each year, GPD employed an external team to visit each community and conduct extensive interviews with residents with the goal of discerning project impacts. Interviewees with whom I spoke, both *Yapa* and *Kardiya*, viewed this as unusual and distinctive to GPD.[26]

Moreover, GPD had its own "technical team" of internal staff who were dedicated to producing indicators, plans, tools and other technologies to monitor and evaluate the project itself. Many of these staff came from professional backgrounds exclusively concerned with Monitoring and Evaluation (usually abbreviated by GPD staff to "M&E"), and were known as "M&E specialists." The existence of such a specialised team was only possible within a well-resourced organisation; smaller, locally-based Indigenous organisations were highly unlikely to fit such dedicated positions within their budgets, and in such organisations monitoring-type tasks would usually fall to managers as part of their more generalised roles. As a volunteer, I was included as a member of the technical team. Much of the data from this chapter is drawn from my own experience in writing a quarterly report of the project and the associated search for verifiable quantitative measures of project outcomes. I undertook this task in conjunction with M&E staff members at GPD.

[26] Despite my best efforts I was unable to gain access to document these interviews, as the external evaluation team were bound to confidentiality agreements.

In the first section of this chapter, I note that in ethnographies of accountability, the analytic pre-eminence of accountability as governmentality is often joined to imperfect local realisations. Rather than destabilising the pre-eminence of governmentality, these descriptions can work to reaffirm it. Taking up this methodological problem, I argue that GPD staff deployed quantitative accountability as a technology that aimed at the transcendence of scale (Latour 2005:185). Throughout my fieldwork, there was no explicit requirement from funding bodies that GPD should collect quantitative data at early childhood services. In this context, GPD's accountability was an attempt at positioning the project within a larger and more objective "common" context, at producing the NGO as valid and legitimate. In the same way that the anthropologist Akhil Gupta has argued that writing shapes the state (2012:141), so too I argue that documentation and report writing was fundamental in constituting the NGO.

Continuing the theme of the limits of governmentality that I discussed in the previous chapter, I show how GPD shifted from attempting to measure project outcomes—such as the improved health of Warlpiri children—to outputs only, which is to say, whether early childhood services were available and delivered at all. I describe this as a form of institutional endogamy, remaining always within narrowly defined limits in terms of measuring the impact of the project. At the same time, with the objective of transcendent knowledge that only measured and did not intervene in social life, I show how accountability inhabited and structured a local terrain where its meaning was contested by both *Yapa* and *Kardiya* associated with the project. These contestations produced not standardisation but rather forms of differentiation, both in terms of the racialised categories of *Yapa* and *Kardiya,* and forms of competition between organisations. The system of accountability exists in a tension here—at once recognising only itself, while setting boundaries that always necessarily entailed an excess.

Anthropological approaches to accountability

GPD's preoccupation with monitoring and evaluation is indicative of the broader "audit explosion" (Power 1994) by which processes of accountability and audit, generally derived from financial management, are adopted within the public sector and other areas of social life (Power 1997; Strathern 2000). Broadly, this process refers to the concern to make government workers and programs more efficient by creating the appearance of market-like structures within their work environments (Kipnis 2008:279). The visiting of "audit culture" on academic and other settings has been documented in Marilyn Strathern's edited volume (2000). Since then it has been observed within development practice (see Barnett 2005:730; Vannier 2010) and, as Shore and Wright (2015:22) claim, has given rise to an entire global industry of measuring, auditing, and ranking organisations in the development field as per indicators of progress. The increasing ascendancy of these indicators as privileged forms of knowledge has been extensively documented within anthropology (Merry 2011; Merry, Davis, and Kingsbury 2015; Rottenburg et al. 2015). Indeed, for such indicators to have *global* significance at all relies upon quantification as a technology; numbers have the ability to de-contextualise and become independent of localised knowledge (Porter 1995). As I argue in this chapter, quantitative indicators did not unequivocally dominate the qualitative at GPD, but they did perform the work of placing the project within a shared metric, in a statistical relationship with other projects (Espeland 2015:59), itself an important goal in a globalised organisation like GPD.

In Australia, "audit culture" is explicitly manifest in the governmental paradigm known as "New Public Management," characterised by transformations in the public sector towards the symbolism of a market orientation, devolution of state services via external contracts, and the use of quantitative indicators for monitoring results and measuring efficiency (Christensen and Laegreid 2003). New Public Management has not only become the dominant paradigm within the Australian government (Carroll and Steane 2002; Christensen and Laegreid 2003); as Patrick Sullivan (2011) has argued, it has also reorganised the Indigenous sector. All of this accountability is not supposed to not exist for its own sake. New Public Management reforms are supposed to improve the efficiency of public services (Osborne and McLaughlin 2002:9), and at Global Partners in Development, M&E was aimed at the improvement of their efforts to achieve better health and education outcomes for Warlpiri children. Accountability is thus joined to the same moral impulse that motivated the project in the first instance. Marilyn Strathern (2000:1) describes accountability today as a meeting of the financial and the moral. It is therefore not adequate to locate concerns with accountability as merely the emotionless, quantitative expression of neoliberal public reforms.

Even the best indicative measures are ontologically distinct from lived reality; in this case, the lived experience of Warlpiri children. Indicators, after all, "have to do with pointing" (Porter 2015:34). Anthropological theorisations of quantification have generally argued against what Wendy Espeland and Mitchell Stevens (2008:431) call "statisticism"—the faith that quantitative data is coextensive with reality—and instead focus on what numbers do, noting that accountability practices do not simply measure reality but also structure it in important ways (McDonald 2000:116). In recognising that accountability is not a neutral appendage but rather makes its own interventions, social scientists have largely, perhaps predominantly, figured accountability as a form of "governing at a distance" (Rose 2004:111). Drawing on Foucault, Shore and Wright (2000:59) argue that "audit is essentially a relationship of power between scrutinizer and observed: the latter are rendered objects of information, never subjects in communication." Shore and Wright go on to suggest that that, when fully realised, audit creates new forms of subjectivity, of "self-managing individuals who render themselves auditable" (2000:57).

The anthropologist Steven Sampson has critiqued the idea that accountability is necessarily a form of governmentality. Sampson argues that anthropologists have tended to focus on revealing mechanisms of power in that "everywhere we look, we discover yet another Panopticon, more structural violence, more of that insidious governmentality" (2015:80). The problem, as

Sampson sees it, is that "one gets the impression that every audit project, indicator matrix or ranking system works flawlessly to undermine people's autonomy," while in practice, the audit machine does not always work (2015:80). Some attempts at measuring and ranking, far from fundamentally shaping subjectivity, end up being largely irrelevant. Moreover, it is well known that many forms of accountability are little more than "rituals of verification" (Power 1997:123), boxes that we tick before getting on with our lives (Sarfaty 2015), rather than processes that fundamentally penetrate our autonomy.

Sampson is not the first to call for analysis of audit beyond governmentality (see Giri 2000:188). However, there is an overstatement in his suggestion that anthropologists and other social scientists have consistently argued that audit culture has fundamentally refashioned our subjectivity. Rather, much anthropological literature on the topic of accountability has documented various forms of resistance (see the edited volume by Merry, Davis, and Kingsbury 2015), or at least presented capricious, unintended and diverse consequences of accountability in practice, collectively reckoning with what João Biehl and Ramah McKay have referred to as "the simultaneous absolutization and fragility of market principles in social life" (2012:1211). Fine-grained ethnography is well placed to provide locally derived reflections on the analytical overreach of "global" processes.

The anthropological corpus on accountability offers geographically diverse reflections on this problematic. For example, in her study of South African prosecutors, Johanna Mugler (2015) demonstrates that quantification does not displace alternative expressions of accountability, and thus does not produce auditable, competitive selves. She cautions against the view that numbers will have "the same obvious effects in every organizational setting" (2015:78). Renita Thedvall (2015) argues that preschool workers who are subjected to management programs derived from manufacturing industries have an ambiguous relationship with such quantitative measures, both questioning statistics while eagerly complying with the "ethics of evaluation" (2015:43); the idea that work processes must be monitored in order to be improved. Mihaela

Serban (2015) has documented a backlash against indicators in Romania in response to measurement and governance by rule-of-law indicators. All of these examples are derived from separate collections (edited volumes, journal special issues) in which accounts that document the contested attempts at audit seem to be the rule, rather than the exception.

Sampson's critique seems to rest upon a conflation: that the analytic dominance of Foucauldian theories of power within the academy (see Graeber 2015:56) translate to accounts that assume a kind of concomitant dominance within social life. While it is clear that governmentality is ubiquitous as theoretical terrain in the ethnography of accountability, its proponents have not deployed it uncritically. That Sampson can argue that governmentality appears ubiquitous in spite of the multitude of accounts signalling its failures, I think, stems from the coherence that concepts like "neoliberalism" or "audit" offer the social scientist. Like "class" and "gender," they operate as what Latour would call "all-terrain entities" (2005:137) and become a comfortable resting place for analysis. Such entities are durable, and this is in part due to the ways in which they are deployed; as I have noted, we are frequently told that neoliberal governmentality, or some other cognate force, does not play out as planned or as per an ideal type, in the "messy realities" of social worlds (Anders 2015:30; see also Hoffman 2010; Kanna 2010; Merry, Davis, and Kingsbury 2015:2). The formulation here mimics the development project when viewed as a good model that founders upon implementation in place (Gupta 2012:25). The robustness of the concept is sustained by its imperfect realisation.

Messy, disorderly social worlds, however, do not in themselves offer a sustained critique of the durability and analytic coherence of concepts like neoliberalism or biopolitics.[27] Critiques of domination can have the effect of affirming domination as smooth functioning (Koddenbrock and Schouten 2015:183). Anthropologists have often demonstrated that local actors make a specific difference in a local setting, and even if they do *that* everywhere, the

[27] In her discussion of "Wild Policy," Lea (2014; 2012b) reconsiders the binary that positions the state as orderly and social worlds as disorderly.

specificity of these differences means a "travelling rationality" (Craig and Porter 2006:120) like neoliberalism tends to emerge from such critiques largely unscathed. The analytic pre-eminence of entities like "neoliberalism," in spite of ethnographically grounded rebuttals, is a variation on what Clifford Geertz identified as the methodological problem of moving "from local truths to general visions" (1973:69). Locally, neoliberal governmentality often seems to fall down, while analytically it remains pre-eminent.

Taking up this methodological problem, this chapter both acknowledges the governmentality within modes of measurement while also analysing accountability beyond it. I do not deny the presence of neoliberal rationalities as a governing principle of Indigenous Australia (see Altman 2010; Humpage 2008; Lattas and Morris 2010). At the same time there are many shades of governance by accountability located between the creation of fully auditable, neoliberal subjectivities penetrated by biopower, and the view of accountability as mere ritual of ticking boxes while social life continues apace.

I start with an account of the failure of the "LogFrame," a planning document for the project that specified the indicators of progress to be measured by GPD. The LogFrame's failure in turn saw project staff shifting from attempts to measure project outcomes to measuring outputs only. Rather than measuring impacts, like improved health or better statistical outcomes for Warlpiri children, the project began to measure the performance of the early childhood services (playgroups and childcare facilities) themselves—principally through the counting of attendance figures. This shift to a focus on organisations as auditable entities demonstrates the separation between accountability processes and the reality they hope to measure, while also signalling what Biehl has referred to as the fragility of biopolitical interventions (2011:283).

The LogFrame

A document known as the LogFrame served as the overarching plan for the project from its beginnings in 2008. A LogFrame (an abbreviation of Logical

Framework) is a type of design tool commonly used in development projects, initially developed for the US Agency for International Development in 1970 (Sartorius 1991:139). A LogFrame specifies the overall goal of the project and breaks it down into manageable components (Sartorius 1991:140). The GPD LogFrame (see Figure 3) had four columns oriented underneath the overall goal of the project—the health and wellbeing of Warlpiri children. Reading from left to right, the first column specified high-level objectives, the next showed the indicators that signal the accomplishment of those objectives, and the next inscribed the verifiable data that are used to assess the indicators. Finally, the LogFrame included a column for key assumptions on which the elements of the LogFrame were based, a way of specifying the various risks posed to the smooth implementation of the project (see World Bank 2005:16).

Importantly, a LogFrame maps out causal links between objectives and indicators (World Bank 2004:8). In Figure 3, which for de-identification is not an exact copy though is still typical of the GPD document, the causalities derived from playgroup services are multiple, and there is faith in the potential of playgroup services to deliver measurable outcomes in terms of health, education and Warlpiri culture. Because both parents and children attended the playgroup, it was viewed as a service that both improved school readiness for children and provided training on appropriate child-rearing practices for parents. The causality is not exhaustively spelled out, but education around hygiene and nutrition at the playgroup, could conceivably impact upon rates of skin sores as per the indicator in the first column.[28] Similarly, practices such as reading to children were expected to be adopted by parents who attended the playgroup, which would in turn lead to improvements for children in terms of their education and hence their scores on the *Australian Early Development Census* (AEDC).

[28] Skin infections caused by the *A Streptococcus* bacteria are relatively common in Indigenous Australian communities, and are a highly visible health problem that can lead to more serious conditions (see Bowen et al. 2014).

Project Goal: To improve the health and wellbeing of children aged 0-5 years by building a foundation for children to reach their social, intellectual, spiritual & physical needs through the support of parents and carers and better early childhood services in Warlpiri communities.

Objective	*Indicators*	*Means of Verification*	*Assumptions*
Increased capacity of parents and carers to support children's health and overall development	40% reduction in growth faltering and skin sores	Child Health Statistics Final Evaluation	Service providers and the clinic collaborate with GPD to provide data
	50% improvement in children's language and cognitive skills as per the Australian Early Development Census	AEDC results School attendance	School collaborates with GPD to provide data
	50% of parents engage children in healthy eating routines	Final evaluation GPD staff observation	Through their training training, parents are motivated and able to change behaviours
	50% of parents engage their children with literacy and numeracy practices	Focus groups GPD staff observation	Warlpiri parents self report to evaluators

Figure 4: Sample LogFrame

Arranged as a table, the LogFrame can be understood as a "neg-entropic" (Maclean 1988:2) form of communication, marshalling written and graphical forms in an attempt to stabilise things in the world. Moreover, it makes a claim on the type of relationship that these things have with each other. The causal links between, say, the "capacity" of parents and a decrease in skin sores are not explicitly made clear. But the table does this work for us, neatly positioning the two in a linear progression. With everything underwriting the overall goal of healthy children, the LogFrame claims a mereological relationship between the holistic goal and the various activities and indicators below that achieves a sense of coherence and closure for the reader. Robert Thornton (1988) has identified this as a common strategy in ethnographic texts achieving a measure of clarity and holism.

However, the satisfying linearity of the LogFrame offered a false lucidity. After four years of project implementation, the LogFrame was viewed by some GPD staff as a "disaster" for the project, and when I began fieldwork, management and M&E staff were in the process of distancing themselves from the document as they drew up new "implementation plans." For the most part, staff identified problems with the indicators and their measurability. These problems can be placed into three categories: an overly determined statistical imaginary, the subsequent lack of any baseline, and "the attribution problem" (Altman and Russell 2012:11 citing McDavid 2009).

The trouble with indicators

The proliferation of indicators in international development has been well documented in recent volumes, such as *The World of Indicators: The Making of Governmental Knowledge through Quantification* (Rottenburg et al. 2015) and *The Quiet Power of Indicators: Measuring Governance, Corruption and Rule of Law* (Merry, Davis, and Kingsbury 2015). These have tended to focus on indicators that compare nation-states—the Human Development Index, for example. In terms of Indigenous Australian development, such indicators do not hold ascendancy, but in an iteration of the same processes of enumerative eminence in the measurement of progress—where "only what is measured gets improved" (Nelken 2015:321)—population statistics fulfil a similar role. These are usually figured in terms of "the gap" between mainstream and Indigenous Australia in terms of various statistical averages.

To offer an example, on average, Indigenous Australian people die ten years earlier than their non-Indigenous counterparts; the Australian government seeks to close this gap by 2031 (SCRGSP 2016:13). Life expectancy is a quintessential example of an indicator; the multitude of factors that could impact upon "health" are aggregated into a numeric representation that allows for policymakers to navigate a complex situation (see Rottenburg and Merry 2015:3). Thus, life expectancy can be understood as the aggregate measure of a range of other factors, such as "child development," "obesity and nutrition" and "overcrowding in housing" (SCRGSP 2016:10). Life expectancy demonstrates a biopolitical regime where what is considered important for human life is tied only to biological material (Esposito 2008). It renders other factors largely irrelevant; language loss or environmental damage, for example.

In Australia, the biennial *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators* reports have, since 2003, enabled the government to institutionalise "closing the gap" between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in terms of statistics (Rowse 2012:10). The 2016 report includes seven targets broadly based around health and education: life expectancy, young child mortality, early childhood education, reading, writing and numeracy, Years 1 to 10 attendance, Year 12 attainment (graduating from high school), and employment (SCRGSP 2016:3). Six of these targets include reference to a gap and the need to bring Indigenous Australians into statistical alignment with the rest of the country. The "statistical visibility" of Aboriginal people is thus well established in Australian public discourse (Rowse 2009:5; see also Kowal 2015) and this, coupled with the rhetorical contention that Indigenous Australians are the most researched group of people on the planet (see Lea 2008:128), suggests that as a group they are thoroughly known through statistical reckonings. However, at the local level of the GPD project, quantitative measurements of progress proved to be effectively impossible.

The LogFrame included vague references to such statistical representations, suggesting that improvements in rates of skin sores or other health problems, like growth faltering, could be verified through "child health statistics." Indeed, the state of child health and education in Australia has its own report, the *Australian Early Development Census* (or AEDC, see Commonwealth of Australia 2015), which was also referenced in the LogFrame document.[29] The problem here is one of scale; such statistics frame a particular problem from a national or state level. The few hundred Warlpiri children that are the subject of the GPD project are not a statistically significant sample that would register any change using such measures. The AEDC report seems to tacitly acknowledge the indeterminate value of such large-scale numbers for measurements with much smaller, local samples, stating that "the AEDC data is a powerful tool *for initiating conversations and partnerships* across education, health and community services" (Commonwealth of Australia 2015, emphasis added). The data is framed as a useful conversation starter and background knowledge, rather than the type of information that could be used to plot and measure specific change.

While Sullivan argues that these types of abstractions are the "raw material" with which policymakers work, (2008:128) such statistics do not form a solid basis for project intervention. Jon Altman and John Taylor have demonstrated that such statistics are useful for the reporting of gaps, but are inadequate for community development programs that are regional or community focused (2006:18). Annelise Riles (2000:183) has also noted forms of statistical data that "give no clues as to their scale," offer no way to evaluate their size or significance. The tacit assumption of the LogFrame is that the statistical differences are evident *regardless* of scale. Similar to the elision

[29] The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) measures the development of children in their first year of school at the national and state level, and is conducted every 3 years (Commonwealth of Australia 2015). This indexical work has been critiqued in relation to the pressures it places on schools to align Indigeneity with deficit pedagogies by Lea (2015).

between neuroscience, epigenetics and community development, the attempted move from the scale of national level statistics to the local community reveals a kind of pseudo-empiricism in the Indigenous sector. Indigenous people are at once the relentlessly measured, "enumerated Aborigines" (Rowse and Shellam 2013:946) of the national imaginary, while their localised, remote constituent simultaneously slips beyond the domain of what or who is knowable.

The gap is useful as a normative baseline from which to measure Indigenous disadvantage but, at the local level, this baseline is no longer available to us. Indigenous children may have higher rates of skin sores than their non-Indigenous counterparts, but what does a 40% reduction in the rates of skin sores among *Yapa* children look like? The answer is not in itself indeterminable; detailed, long-term evaluations in *Yapa* communities could conceivably measure this. In practice, GPD did not have a baseline against which to measure progress, such as the percentage of Warlpiri children that suffered skin sores prior to their interventions. The lack of such baseline data is not unusual. In their account of the surfeit of reporting that followed the NTER, Jon Altman and Susie Russell have shown that almost all evaluations of the NTER suffered from an absence of quantitative baseline data (2012:14).

The final significant issue with the LogFrame concerned the links that changes in Warlpiri children's health or education would have with the GPD project itself. As an example, the contention that training programs for parents at the playgroup would lead to a concrete and measurable manifestation in a reduction in skin sores can be problematised in a number of ways. Recall that in Mulga Flat, for instance, there were nine separate organisations or projects working with *Yapa* children aged zero to five; children who were also, of course, under the care of parents or other family members in any case. The organisation that ran the local pool in Mulga Flat claimed a reduction in skin sores for children due to the germicidal effects of the chemicalised water, coupled with Warlpiri children's affinity for swimming.[30] GPD sought to accomplish the same indicator (reduced rates of skin sores) through parental education at the playgroup—a causality that can be further complicated by the well-known phenomenon in public health that people may have a good knowledge of healthful behaviours without necessarily putting it into practice (for examples in Indigenous Australia, see Middleton and Francis 1976:133; Lea 2005). Or, one could argue that the poor quality of government-provided housing in Indigenous communities is far more constitutive of ill-health than any perceived lack of hygiene knowledge that could be rectified by an educational program (Lea and Pholeros 2010:198 citing Barreto et. al. 2007).

In fact, the unlikeliness of adequately capturing linear, causal relationships has long been considered a weakness of the LogFrame approach (Sartorius 1991:146). I do not mean to unfairly level this criticism at GPD alone. It is almost impossible to assess the impact of indicators with precision, as they cannot be isolated from a myriad of other factors (Davis, Kingsbury, and Merry 2015:15; see also Nelken 2015:322). This is otherwise known as the "attribution problem" (Altman and Russell 2012:11 citing McDavid 2009). Some GPD staff recognised this and told me that outcomes should be "at the level of the community," rather than attributed to any specific organisation or their actions. However, as I demonstrate in the second half of this chapter, this approach was difficult to implement in practice, as accountability was primarily rendered through organisations.

Perhaps the most unusual indicator in the GPD LogFrame was one that sought to measure the extent to which Warlpiri parents passed on traditional knowledge and stories to their children. This indicator reflects a present day emphasis within the Indigenous sector that projects should always be culturally appropriate (Robinson 2008:77; see also Hunt and Smith 2007). More broadly, it points to the kind of subjectivity that has been documented in the work of Emma

[30] The health benefits of swimming pools in Aboriginal communities have previously been documented to powerful policy influence (Lehmann et al. 2003), although the study has not been comprehensively replicated (see Sanchez et al. 2012).

Kowal (2015a; 2006; 2011), in which White anti-racists seek to preserve Indigenous culture while remediating statistical forms of Indigenous disadvantage. For *Kardiya* staff who spoke little to no Warlpiri and visited communities intermittently, this indicator proved impossible to document.

There were other indicators within the LogFrame that were more easily measured, particularly those that specified contracts and agreements entered into with other stakeholders; the presence of a signed paper document serving as legible, irrefutable proof of a successfully conducted action. However, here I have offered a presentation of the LogFrame in terms of those indicators that carry forward the evidence base that claims physical, emotional and cognitive impacts upon Warlpiri children, which was the ultimate goal of the project. Moreover, it was these same indicators that eventually resulted in the document being replaced by other "implementation plans" with more modest and specific aims.

The LogFrame is, however, not some kind of trick that purposefully lulls us into the false belief that it would actually improve outcomes for Warlpiri children. The LogFrame is a text, and therefore a limited representation of the world. As Lea has argued in her work with public health bureaucrats in Darwin, "the lived details that are left out of planning efforts … will always return to hurt implementation efforts" (Lea 2008:227). My argument is not that "the improved capacity of parents" will categorically fail to improve child health outcomes; if we conceive of "the capacity of parents" broadly enough, then, of course, improvements in health can be linked to it. In the previous chapter, I argued that the porosity between a child and their environment, as per the brain and the epigenome, claims "to capture the analogical vastness of the environmental signals" (Meloni and Testa 2014:435) in a child's life. The analogical vastness does not allow us to refute the contention that educational playgroups will improve child health or education outcomes; indeed, they might. But such vastness presents another problem: it is antithetical to the linearity of the LogFrame, and it proved very difficult for GPD to indicate *how* their project was impacting upon actual Warlpiri children.

The seemingly irrefutable connectivity between environment and the individual that is claimed under the ecological model of the child eluded the GPD project in terms of measurability and specification. The specific finality of the project—the body of the healthy child—bears the marks of too many factors to specify. The part/whole relationships come unstuck as quantities positioned as having a direct, causative relationship (for instance, "staff training" and a "healthy child") reveal almost nothing; we cannot specify their relationship. The causal links that are suggested by the LogFrame express not the "logical" progression from project intervention to project outcomes, rather they reveal and reinforce the underlying theory of social change espoused by GPD: that measurable improvements in health and education will be the outcome of culturally appropriate community development projects that empower Warlpiri people. Moreover, as the LogFrame format is commonly associated with international development projects (see for example World Bank 2005:1), GPD's LogFrame was a diacritical marker of their somewhat unusual status in Central Australia as an international development organisation.

The LogFrame disaster

> Drew: I've heard staff here refer to the LogFrame as a disaster. Why do you think that is?[31]
>
> Staff Member: We didn't used to have a technical team, Drew. Some of the staff just sat around and came up with a project design, and it hasn't worked out very well.

The conversation between myself and a GPD staff member cited above signals a fissure in the dominant narrative of development expertise, which is conspicuously absent in the comment "some of the staff just sat around and came

[31] This phrasing came from my interview with a senior GPD manager, cited in Chapter Two. I asked if any models from GPD International had been brought into the Australia Program. She responded "there are things that people have taken up in the past, like the LogFrame, but that has been a disaster here."

up with a project design." In citing the lack of a technical team, the staff member points to a dearth of technical expertise as the reason for the apparently poorly designed LogFrame.

Staff consensus was that the LogFrame was too ambitious within the time constraints; the outcomes required a ten-year timeframe of the type usually designated in international programs, rather than the existing five-year project cycle. In another interview, a regional manager for the project drew out these problems:

> I think one of the issues was scope and timeframe, the scope of that probably more equated to a ten-year kind of thing. Looking at the outcomes in that document, that was really quite unrealistic, so I think that was a problem, and so it sort of set us up to fail. I think we needed to rework the indicators as well, and that's a technical thing. I think some of the indicators weren't as robust as they could have been in terms of their measurability.

Here, the manager argued that there were two reasons for the LogFrame failure: over ambition and measurability. The LogFrame was a significant overstatement of the capabilities of GPD, but it was the lack of measurability that required the LogFrame to be scrapped altogether and replaced. The failure, then, was not principally about the failure to improve the lives of Warlpiri children. It was a failure of measurement, an inability to point to any movement, either progress or regression, against the defined outcomes.

What is evident in both these interview responses is that failure is located *within* the organisation. The LogFrame failed because it was not adequate to the context, contained an unreasonable timeframe, or was not imbued with enough technical expertise. Outside of my interviews, some staff reflected that there were perhaps other things, beyond just the design of the LogFrame, that were to blame for the difficulties in implementing the project. For instance, one staff member writing a report on the project complained that the Warlpiri staff in one community were "only interested in keeping their jobs" as playgroup staff, and not in the overall community development goals of the project. She then put the question to me: "How do I suggest that the low motivations of the *Yapa* staff were a major challenge for the project implementation?" Such observations would not usually be included in an official report as the project is supposed to be "strengths-based"—that is, focusing on the strengths of Warlpiri people rather than any suggestion of shortcomings. After a few minutes of searching for the right language, we decide upon writing about the lack of "community engagement," and we highlighted the need for the GPD to develop ways to better engage with the community as the project moved forward. In this instance, failure was relocated within GPD as an organisation.

The Warlpiri Childhood Governance group meetings provide another example of the off-the-record "low motivations" of Warlpiri people. The governance groups were formed through the impetus of Global Partners in Development, and held roughly every month, with the goal of providing Warlpiri governance over all early childhood related activities within the Warlpiri communities. As such, membership was restricted to Warlpiri people, almost exclusively women, with *Kardiya* acting as facilitators only. In Mulga Flat, on the days that meetings were held, the *Kardiya* facilitator would spend the better part of a day preparing for the meeting. With generally no catering options available in Warlpiri communities, this usually involved cooking a meal for up to ten people, plus printing agendas, making PowerPoint slides, arranging guest timetabling at the meeting, and preparing any activities that were to take place. In addition, preparation involved picking up each governance group member before the meeting and dropping them home—it was a community where the walk could not be more than ten minutes, a fact that *Kardiya* staff would often comment on during their harried rounds before a meeting.[32] GPD staff assumed that, for the time being at least, such meetings would not take place without the assistance of a non-Warlpiri facilitator. One GPD staff member expressed her frustration over this situation in an interview with me:

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[32] In a discussion on "green-black" alliances, Eve Vincent has demonstrated the inequalities inherent in preferences for walking over driving by non-Indigenous, health conscious environmentalists when compared with Kokatha people in South Australia, for whom driving entails particular kinds of social significance (Vincent 2017:183–5).

> But you know, the governance group meetings never happen here without [the *Kardiya* facilitator]. Where is the capacity? We should be saying, "Hold it every week," instead of being nurtured all the way through. If they [the *Kardiya* facilitator] weren't here, helping them [the Warlpiri governance group members], they wouldn't care about doing the governance group meeting. That's the reality.

Is it that Warlpiri are just bad development subjects, uninterested in their own improvement? Ultimately, such a question cannot be countenanced within the official narrative, and the vignettes I describe did not shift accountability for the project to Warlpiri themselves. In Central Australia, it would be highly unusual to blame Indigenous people for the failure of the project. Failure cannot be directly attributed to Indigenous people. Some may be tempted to write this off as postcolonial hand-wringing, the preserve of the bleeding heart Whites for whom "all Indigenous disadvantage has been caused by external impacts" (Sutton 2009:7). However, to locate failure within the organisation and never outside of it is also bureaucratically expedient. In her discussion of facts about Indigenous health, Tess Lea has argued that from the perspective of bureaucratic intervention, Aboriginal ill-health needs to be understood as a legacy of colonisation and current government failure, because with both there is "tremendous scope left open for intervention" (2008:138). A different kind of analysis, one that suggests that Aboriginal ill-health is partially caused by "the lethargy and hermeneutic disinterest caused by ill-health … is refused a place in public health discourse because it suggests no slot for bureaucratic intervention" (Lea 2008:138). Similarly, if Warlpiri do not seem motivated to participate in the project, it is because the project is not engaging enough or perhaps, not culturally appropriate; Indigenous recalcitrance is positioned as a "challenge" for the project, at which facilitators may either succeed or fail.

As Lea has further argued, failure is itself constitutive of bureaucratic projects, prefacing the case for the augmentation and extension of operations: in short, failure is the rationale to try harder (Lea 2008:13; see also Sanders 2008).

When the LogFrame failed, the GPD budget for Central Australia increased and more staff were brought on board, including myself as a volunteer. The LogFrame itself was excised as a misguided piece of organisational practice. The passage I quote below, from an M&E staff member, demonstrates this:

> [The LogFrame] is a really strong design. The way that it's used is the problem. It's only a tool, and you're never going to find one tool that is going to be effective and suit all needs, so it needs to be viewed as that, and you need to support it with other tools.

The metaphoricity of the development "tool" is important here. The organisation that manipulates it and the community that serves as the object remain fixed, while the tool itself can be discarded or modified. Because the overarching goal of "health and wellbeing" is moral before it is rational, it can be perpetually recuperated while the technical document that it prefaces and headlines is discarded. Project cycles profess a kind of uroboric structure, feeding on themselves (see Figure 4). Arrows that turn back on themselves as a form of learning point to the possibility of getting it right, if only we get more data, learn more from Indigenous people, or make the project more culturally appropriate (Lea 2008:138). This uroboros also expresses a post-development value; the willingness to learn from the objects of development, thus negating "top-down" or "high modernist" (Scott 1998:4) type development projects. Development thus continues apace.

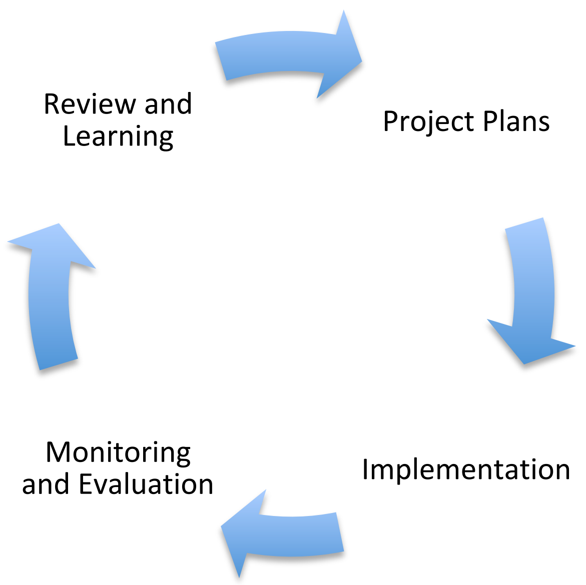

Figure 5: Uroboric renewal of projects

From outcomes to outputs, or accountable entities

At GPD, there was a shift from the spurned LogFrame to the new "implementation plan" documents. I argue that this amounted to a move from attempting to measure outcomes to outputs. Where the LogFrame expected outcomes in the health and education of Warlpiri children to be measurable, the new implementation plans sought to measure organisational performance. The institutional expansion I have described above was coupled with a *retraction* in the form of an admission of the limits of measuring project effects. Rather than expecting the playgroup to produce a clear and tangible effect on rates of skin sores seen at the local health clinic, the new indicator was based around determining whether a playgroup service was open and counting the attendees. Instead of measuring whether the training of Warlpiri playgroup staff would register in directly observable positive parenting practices, the project now sought to measure whether training at playgroup was delivered at all. Accountability was thus reduced to counting (Sullivan 2011:79), and institutions—in this case the formal playgroup service—became the pre-eminent datum of accountability (Giri 2000:182; see also Merry 2011:S83).

The focus on outputs was in line with other organisations and governmental interventions in Central Australia. Altman and Russell note in their examination of NTER evaluations that there has been "far too much reliance on outputs as a crude proxy for outcomes" (2012:14). The use of proxy indicators is widespread. Sally Engle Merry notes that given the difficulties in measuring intangible outcomes like "increased awareness of human rights," NGOs will often count proxies, like the number of training sessions or people trained (Merry 2011:S84). A survey of the annual reports publicly available online from other organisations working in Central Australia confirms that the focus on a quantitative representation of outputs is widespread: the number of attendees at a particular activity, the number of hours an activity took, the number of clients, or the number of graduates from an educational program. Such numbers are usually accompanied by narrative sections describing the progress made by the organisation; a participant in the program who is pursuing a vocation, or a youth program that is enjoyed by children and valued by the community. Frequently, the text is coupled with images of smiling Aboriginal people (see, for example, Warlpiri Youth Development Aboriginal Corporation Annual Report 2013-2014; Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council Annual Report 2014-2015). The figures reported by such organisations have a "being there" kind of authority that outsiders are unable to scrutinise.

GPD included narratives in their reports as well, and deployed "Most Significant Change," an evaluation technique that seeks to access narratives reported by participants in the project.[33] GPD staff did not feel that numeration would exhaustively and unproblematically capture their work and many complained that it did not. Still, quantification has an aura of objectivity; numbers are seen to be truer forms of evidence than qualitative measures (Porter 1995:6). After the failure of the LogFrame, I was asked to write a quarterly project report around three main quantitative outputs in each community: the attendance figures at the playgroup and the number of days that

[33] The "Most Significant Change" technique is a qualitative evaluation tool that aims to hear the stories of participants in the project in a participatory manner, departing from quantitative evaluation techniques (see Dart and Davies 2003).

a playgroup service was open, the number of Warlpiri people put through early childhood training (a requirement of employment at the playgroup), and the number of meetings held by the Warlpiri Childhood Governance groups in each community. I focus here specifically on the first of these indicators, playgroup availability and figures for attendance.

To count the number of attendees at the playgroup service appears at first straightforward, but the GPD M&E staff soon ran into difficulty. This is illustrated by some fieldnotes from a meeting held between GPD staff and a team of specialist external evaluators. The goal of the meeting was to develop suitable planning documents and indicators for the project moving forward, in light of the difficulties I have described earlier in this chapter. Under discussion was the playgroup in the community I call Sandy River, an underperforming service with ongoing problems relating to staffing and infrastructure. As such, GPD's goal was to increase the availability of the playgroup in Sandy River, and the proposed indicator was: "Six young children are accessing the Sandy River early childhood service at least four times per month."

> Evaluator: Are the indicators themselves sufficient? How do I know that six is any kind of progress?
>
> Susan (GPD staff): That would come from the baseline data. We do need this baseline data.
>
> Evaluator: What is the ultimate goal?
>
> Susan: The majority of the Sandy River kids coming.
>
> Evaluator: Which would be?
>
> Susan: I don't have the figures in front of me.
>
> Paul (GPD staff): The question of whether six is a good indicator is for a broader discussion. But there is also the question of the dosage rate? How often should they come? How much do Warlpiri kids need?
>
> Evaluator: If the objective is "Increased number of early childhood activities are available to families and children in Sandy River," why don't we just measure

> how often the service is actually open, rather than how many children are attending and how often?

The old problem of baseline data resurfaced; just how many playgroup-age children were living in each Warlpiri community? Warlpiri people move between communities and regional centres relatively often, meaning such figures, always small, would also always be somewhat in flux. How many children were regularly attending playgroup in the first instance? An answer to this question would be necessary to discern what kind of number would constitute an improvement. And what is meant by "regularly?" How often *should* children attend playgroup in order to get a solid basis before beginning school? This question required that we go beyond only counting numbers, as one needs to know precisely *who* attends. And what does "attendance" mean? Would a 10-minute visit by a mother and child count? GPD's difficulty in answering these questions satisfactorily was compounded by the fact that they did not run playgroup services of their own accord relying on other organisations to collect such data.[34]

In the final comment I present above, the evaluator suggested that GPD simply focus on how often the playgroup is open, rather than attempting to measure and discern which children attend. Put differently, the evaluator here calls for a focus on outputs only, a consistent playgroup service without any attempt to measure its impact. Michael Power, author of *The Audit Society* would call this "the quality of control systems"—a common feature of audit:

> In audit what is being assured is the quality of control systems rather than the quality of first order operations. In such a context accountability is discharged

[34] Beyond these concerns, the "ground level"of service delivery presents numerous opportunities for manipulating figures like attendance and hours of delivery. One training provider, funded by GPD, was known to claim to have delivered five full days of training in a week in one community when GPD staff knew that the drive to the community from Alice Springs took one full day each way. One GPD staff member commented, "I don't know how he manages that – the students must be running alongside the car."

by demonstrating the existence of such systems of control, not by demonstrating good teaching, caring, manufacturing or banking (1994:19).

When GPD measured attendance at the playgroup, they did not measure improved health or education outcomes for Warlpiri children, but rather the ability of the organisation to provide a service, and perhaps the number of children attending that service. The inability of techniques of accountability to see beyond their own systemic formulations is well established (Giri 2000:178; Nelken 2015:324; Power 1997:20; Strathern 1997:312). Global Partners in Development retracted into the spaces that were more legible and conformed to bureaucratic formulations of what accountability looks like. In the Indigenous Australian context, this form of endogamous accountability occurs in a competitive environment among NGOs, Aboriginal organisations, and other service providers for government-funded grants (Sullivan 2009:61; see also APONT 2013; Colyer 2014), adding another layer to the location of responsibility.

Governance by indicators?

Patrick Sullivan (2009:62) has noted that when the Australian federal government funds other organisations to deliver services, it does not just outsource its governmental responsibility, but also accountability: once it has provided funds, it is up to the organisations as funded entities to meet their obligations. The consideration of such obligations returns us to the theme of governmentality. Sullivan suggests that the current accountability requirements of federal government funding operate mainly as instruments of control over local organisations (2009:58; see also Christensen and Laegreid 2003:104). This situation squares with numerous accounts of "donor-driven" NGOs in the development field that must accede to the priorities of funding regimes (Bernal 2017). Such relationships are often described as "partnerships" but, as Steven Sampson has noted, this is euphemistic at best when donors evaluate recipients and recipients do not evaluate donors (2004:4).

The *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators* report produced by the Australian government enshrined participation in early childhood education as an overarching, national goal of closing the gap: “Ensuring 95 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander four year old children are enrolled in early childhood education by 2025” (SCRGSP 2016:14).[35] It is tempting here to suggest that these national targets set by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) are the context within which the smaller, localised GPD project takes place, the encompassing frame within which we can understand GPD’s preoccupation with measuring playgroup attendance in Warlpiri settlements. To write in this way would, to paraphrase Latour, be taking a free ride on the mysterious vehicle by which the local is linked to a broader context (2005:173–5). The targets set by COAG are better described as sitting *beside* the GPD project, they do not effortlessly and seamlessly encompass it. I suggest that the focus on quantification of playgroup attendance by GPD needs to be counted as the work that staff do in an effort to fit the GPD project within a common context, the standardised frame of reference aimed at equality within the nation state.

Global Partners in Development pursued the attendance data from early childhood services with vigour, and M&E (Monitoring and Evaluation) staff cited the COAG commitment of 95% of Aboriginal children having access to early childhood services as part of the reason for this pursuit. However, neither the COAG targets nor any of their related government departments controlled the GPD project through the provision of funding. The project was funded through a combination of Warlpiri mining royalties and GPD’s own marketing campaigns (as outlined in chapter seven). GPD did not report to state officials far away in the capital, but to a committee of Warlpiri women who oversaw the allocation of mining royalties, and to be sure, their own managers. Adherence to the COAG targets was not a straightforward case of GPD being governed by donors who decided what Indigenous disadvantage looked like and subsequently the appropriate measures to redress it. It was a move by GPD to constitute their own

[35] The three most recent *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators* reports (SCRGSP 2011; 2014; 2016) on the early childhood indicator all offered inconclusive results.

organisation as per established logics of intervention and as a globally mobilised development organisation. One of the prominent features of quantification is its ability to commensurate and standardise, aspiring to independence from local customs and knowledge (Porter 1995:22). By quantifying the rate at which Warlpiri children attended a playgroup, the GPD project could, in theory at least, be positioned in relation to other projects or playgroups throughout Australia as well as other childhood projects operated by GPD in their international programming. The quantification of playgroup performance stands as an attempt to create new, non-local relationships within a shared, national level metric (Espeland 2015:59).

In the second chapter, I examined the question of "what works" in Indigenous development and saw that the evidence base for the GPD project surveyed a geographically broad range of similar projects, including, for instance, the Head Start program in the USA. GPD also included a childhood working group, where staff working in the area of childhood from diverse locations around the globe would come together to discuss the commonalities of their projects. Inherent within such a global purview is the assumption that GPD development projects are all related to each other, and that the organisation itself is built out of these relationships rather than based in any single locality. To use Anthony Giddens' terminology, by quantifying playgroup performance, GPD sought to "disembed," which refers to "the lifting out of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of time-space" (Giddens 1990:21). The logic of development intervention requires translocal forms of knowledge and, as such, the quantitative move here is constitutive of GPD as a global organisation.

While the quantification of playgroup attendance was an effort to fit the GPD project into a context quite apart from remote Central Australia, the recognition of how many children were attending the playgroup was not therefore an irredeemably foreign imposition upon Warlpiri communities. A number of Warlpiri women held long associations with the institutional field of early childhood that pre-dated GPD's involvement. One woman in Mulga Flat told me she had worked with a playgroup run by the local Women's Centre since 1970, another woman in the community I call Granite Ridge said that her involvement began with the "Isolated Children's Service" in the 1980s. Many of the people interviewed, both *Yapa* and *Kardiya*, expressed their belief that children should attend a playgroup and that this was basically a good thing. However, that view is not neccesarily an endorsement of the systematic tracking and recording of playgroup hours and attendance. From a local perspective, such quantification is largely superfluous in such small communities in which Warlpiri all know each other by name and in terms of their relatedness. Some *Kardiya* with long-term engagements in Warlpiri communities also valued this kind of knowledge more than raw figures of attendance. The value of quantifying playgroup performance is in its attempt at shifting the scales between the local and the global. To draw on Mosse (2004:647), I want to point out that it is development staff themselves who undertake the work of translation, reading the meaning of the project into institutionally recognised languages. There is work in creating a common context.

Differentiation part one: Yapa and Kardiya

As GPD did not actually run any early childhood services themselves, they saw their role as to support other organisations to do so, and to provide some level of oversight. In Sandy River, the regional government council (hereafter simply "The Council") received funds through the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) to provide a playgroup. The playgroup was housed in a small but recently constructed, purpose-built facility, encircled by a tall chain link fence. For the duration of my fieldwork, GPD staff considered the Sandy River playgroup to be a notoriously unreliable and sporadic service. On my visits there, the playgroup was frequently closed. Or when a playgroup was offered, it was sometimes with only one staff member, when legal requirements mandated there be at least two. Some of the staff were apparently not in possession of an "Ochre Card"—the required certification for early childhood work in the Northern Territory. The playgroup also did not meet other national standards for childcare, for instance, lacking a phone line, which was accidentally severed by a council worker while cutting the grass around the facility. Repairs and maintenance are frequently delayed in remote Warlpiri communities. In spite of these issues, on the days I did see the Sandy River playgroup in action, it appeared to function well; children played with various toys and the staff prepared boiled vegetables, although the *Kardiya* GPD staff member I was with, trained in early childhood, identified problems with the level of supervision.

GPD staff grappled with the continually poor figures in terms of both opening hours and in attendance that the Council provided from the Sandy River playgroup. One (reappearing) causative factor for this was the “low motivations” of the Warlpiri playgroup staff. On one visit with Susan, the *Kardiya* GPD facilitator for Sandy River, we arrived at the playgroup at 9am, the scheduled opening time for the service. It was closed with no staff to be seen. Susan suggested we return to our accommodation, “to give people some time. Maybe they prefer to open from ten to one, rather than nine to twelve. That’s the community choice, if they want to run it like that.” Here, the facilitator used a community development narrative to explain why the service was not open; it was a Warlpiri service for Warlpiri people, and it was up to them to run it how they saw fit.

With nothing happening at the playgroup, Susan and I returned to the house we were staying in, hoping that some staff would open the service in the meantime. Seated on the faded couches in the tiled, largely unfurnished living room, the bright light outdoors dimmed by the black “crim-mesh” covering the windows, Susan’s mood changed from her accommodation of the unpredictable opening hours to frustration with the lack of Warlpiri motivation:

> Susan: It can be pretty disheartening to come here with a list of things you want to get done, and half the people you need to see are not in the community. The motivations are very low in [Sandy River]. Also, I don't have much control over what happens, because it’s not our service.
>
> Drew: What would be the ideal situation, then?

> Susan: If the playgroup was running consistently, I could focus on other things, like finding out about those families whose kids are not attending. But that's not happening. For the playgroup to run consistently we would need to have a full-time *Kardiya* coordinator out here—and we've been working on that happening—but it's taking much longer than expected.

For some time, the limited opening hours and subsequent low attendance could be abided within a community development narrative: Warlpiri needed to learn to run their own service and could do so as they saw fit. A more critical take would be to note that Sandy River was perpetually under-resourced by state agencies, even relative to other Warlpiri communities. Sandy River was, after all, an outstation established by Warlpiri people in the 1970s, but today such small outstations are discouraged by the NT government in line with the "Growth Towns" policy, aimed at moving people away from small, isolated settlements and into larger towns, ultimately centralising the Indigenous population (see Sanders 2010b). The poorly resourced Sandy River community, compared with the institutionally saturated context of Mulga Flat—a community designated as a "Growth Town"—seemed confirmation of this policy of abandonment (Povinelli 2011). Susan's call for a full-time *Kardiya* coordinator signalled a shift within GPD that occurred early in my fieldwork. The quantified performance of the Sandy River playgroup went from being a somewhat imperfect example of community control to an untenable abandonment of state (and NGO) responsibility. In Sandy River, the COAG commitment of early childhood services for Indigenous children was going unfulfilled. This situation was compounded by the absence of a preschool teacher in Sandy River, and the difficulties in recruiting a new one for such a remote area. For most of my fieldwork, the Sandy River school had only one teacher, the principal, for all classes.

As a result, Susan, cited above, called for a *Kardiya* coordinator for the Sandy River playgroup, in line with GPD more broadly. The unspoken corollary here was that Warlpiri people were not dependable enough as workers to ensure a consistent playgroup service. In writing on the "Warlpiri work ethic," Musharbash has observed that almost all *Kardiya* staff in the community she studied saw that Warlpiri people had a poor work ethic due to their lack of exposure with the working practices of mainstream Australia (Musharbash 2001:158). *Kardiya* GPD staff were more likely to sympathetically explain such unreliability in terms of disenfranchisement with *Kardiya* institutions as part of broader impacts of colonialism. This attempted reconciliation of the political with personal work experiences sometimes came unstuck; *Kardiya* staff did occasionally express their frustrations on the work performance of their Warlpiri co-workers. Deandra, a *Kardiya* facilitator, was exasperated at the level of work she was required to complete when compared with the "community-based," Warlpiri facilitator, Sarah.

> [The GPD program manager] is always on my back [about work performance], but Sarah just coasts around, doesn't record any of the work that she is supposed to, and no one gets upset. She is so hard to catch in community—always away for funerals, or out hunting, or lying down because of her bad back.[36]

In mentioning that Sarah has not recorded any of the work that she does, Deandra suggests that Sarah is subject to a different set of accountability requirements, in spite of them both being GPD employees. While GPD employed a number of Warlpiri people on a part-time basis, they were not expected to file reports to management on their own work or the performance of the playgroups. Responsibility for providing the playgroup opening hours and attendance data from each community rested with the *Kardiya* facilitator assigned to that community.

What is implicit in these accounts, and in the staffing policies of many organisations in Central Australia, who tend to hire outsiders rather than local people, was that Warlpiri people were unlikely to render themselves auditable

[36] Aboriginal people in Central Australia maintain extensive kin networks over vast distances. Funerals—sadly very frequent due to ill health and other structural disadvantages within the population—often seem to be nearly constant.

(see Shore and Wright 2000:57).[37] In the case of playgroup staff for the GPD project, this would mean recording playgroup attendance, the hours that it was open, and ensuring that these hours were consistent with what was prescribed by their funding body. But how do we interpret the Warlpiri shirking of accountability requirements? One common response within GPD was that colonisation had rendered them disempowered and disenfranchised from their own development, coupled with an ongoing dependency on the state. If that is true, we are also led to a specific definition of empowerment. In another example of institutional endogamy, the reference points of "power" in empowerment are derived from existing organisational hierarchies; one day, *Yapa* would take the place of *Kardiya as* the project facilitators, the childcare coordinators, and the regional managers, thereby participating fully in organisational structures. As with Kowal's White anti-racists, the ultimate endpoint for GPD staff was to be out of a job (Kowal 2015a:146). Such an endpoint refuses to imagine empowerment outside of institutionality. As Barbara Cruikshank (1999) has argued, empowerment first requires subjectification. In this case, Warlpiri must accept the validity of quantitative accountability as a technique of care for children. While Warlpiri did generally support and pursue playgroup activities, they did not accept the legitimacy of the administrative system of accountability that GPD tied to these activities (see also Trigger 1992:184).

And yet, the *Kardiya* staff themselves also found that the requirements to report back on playgroup figures, as well as their own work performance, were onerous and took time away from the "real" work. When I was tasked with gathering the appropriate data to write a quarterly report, one *Kardiya* staff member resisted my request for playgroup attendance figures, not seeing the point in it and preferring to provide me with narratives and other information. But the report required attendance data from each community, and the other facilitators had provided it for their communities. I could not leave the one community without its own table of data in the context of the holistic report. My repeated requests for data were politely rebuffed by this staff member until I

[37] Similarly, Akhil Gupta notes that poor rural people in India avoided accountability and indeed "getting involved in forms of writing" (2012:144).

travelled from Alice Springs to the community itself to visit the playgroup facility and obtained the attendance records. Another staff member told me that the playgroup indicators "do not capture the work that we do," and noted that she only filled in her reports at the end of each reporting period: "when the report is due, I'll have a few mad days of trying to backtrack and fill in everything." The facilitator for another community asked, "Isn't our whole purpose to have strong, happy and healthy children? Oh, and to do lots and lots of paperwork." Paperwork and the real work were held separate by *Kardiya* GPD staff.

The idea that accountability is a distraction from the real work is commonly expressed outside of development settings (see Shore and Wright 2000:72) but, eventually, the *Kardiya* staff I consulted did begrudgingly participate in such processes, while offering a kind of resistance similar to what Lea has documented in her study of NT health professionals: a "critical commentary reveals the personality that remains resistant to the hegemonic order" (Lea 2008:31). Warlpiri however tended to avoid *any* response to such requests. The anthropologist Jon Altman has argued that Indigenous people living in the most remote areas of Australia have "become expert in state evasion," and drawing on James Scott, "learnt the art of not being governed" (2010:370). Warlpiri can resist through their localism, outlasting *Kardiya* staff, and the multiple projects they bring. *Kardiya* are (almost without exception) there only on the basis of their employment, and tend to eventually leave the desert, or at least change jobs.

In her study of meatpacking in Poland, Elizabeth Dunn (2005) documents the effects of food processing standards as implemented by the European Union with the stated aims of harmonisation of normative regulatory standards across Europe and, more significantly, "person making," in terms of creating self-regulating subjects. Dunn argues that this does not produce harmonisation but rather differentiation; meat producers who are unable to comply with the regulations are pushed outside of the normative frame and into the informal market (2005:186). Thus, she argues that "standardization does not homogenize persons, as it claims to. Instead, it creates significant inequalities between them"

(2005:189). Similarly, I argue here that while accountability aimed at the creation of a standardised, common frame of reference, it simultaneously inhabited local interactions and hardened the binary between *Yapa* and *Kardiya.*

As Jeffrey Collmann noted in his study of "fringe camps" in Alice Springs, what the welfare apparatus defined as "the organic boundary between two societies (Aboriginal and European)" was "in fact a constituted boundary within the field of the welfare apparatus itself" (1988:16). The concept of an "organic boundary" remained salient for Collmann as it made intervention "absolutely necessary" in Indigenous affairs (1988:16). Similarly, *Yapa* approaches to accountability might be taken as the *result* of forms of difference between two "societies." However, I argue that accountability itself can be figured as a primary site at which difference is performed and a boundary is constituted.[38] Accountability, while aspiring to universality, becomes "provincialized as a particular dynamic cultural formation" (Mosse 2013:230). I return to this point below.

Differentiation part two: organisational accountabilities

I want to follow the story of the Sandy River playgroup further as GPD attempted to install a *Kardiya* coordinator to render the space legible. GPD staff viewed the Council manager who was responsible for the service as unresponsive to the requests of the Sandy River community and unwilling to make meaningful changes that would see the service run more consistently. Warlpiri people in Sandy River had, in fact, asked for a full-time *Kardiya* coordinator through their consultation meetings with GPD and the Council. GPD petitioned the funders of the playgroup, the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), to have the funding transferred from the Council to the local school so as to be run through the school, with GPD continuing to provide staffing support. This petition was made using the

[38] I am drawing here on arguments, most famously put forward by Judith Butler, related to a gender binary that is not fundamentally a result of biological difference but is continually performed in social discourse (Butler 1999 [1990]).

available data on playgroup attendance and total days open to point to the inadequacies of the service. However, DEEWR was not amenable to this change in funding arrangements, and the service remained the responsibility of the Council. Relations between the Council manager and GPD staff were understandably strained after this event. Until this point, the Council had been providing playgroup attendance data to GPD, but afterwards they ceased to do so. The sporadic Sandy River playgroup continued apace.

In the words of one GPD staff member, GPD had tried to "steal" the Sandy River playgroup service from the Council and this created a ripple effect in the desert. Over 600 kilometres away, in the community I call Granite Ridge, GPD had gained some notoriety for this attempted coup. The GPD-supported playgroup in Granite Ridge had a complex history. Lacking a permanent building, it was initially run in the local "park," in a partnership with the Department of Education's Families as First Teachers (FaFT) program. GPD staff claimed that the playgroup had achieved high levels of attendance while located in the park although, with no physical building, the service was vulnerable to the weather and lacked any storage space.[39] The storage issue was eventually solved through the installation of a shipping container, jointly paid for by GPD and FaFT. Around the same time, the preschool, targeting children of a similar age, was experiencing low rates of attendance. As such, the school principal invited the playgroup to co-locate to the recently constructed, well-equipped preschool facility, and crucially, playgroup funding was transferred to the school. This arrangement reportedly worked well, until the following school year, where preschool enrolments markedly increased and the slightly younger playgroup children were "kicked out" of the space, according to GPD staff (although presumably, some of those playgroup children would have gone into pre-school). The shipping container, too, had reportedly been moved into the school and "painted a different colour," according to one GPD staff member. In addition, a

[39] The high attendance of the playgroup in the park was disputed. As GPD staff only visited the community periodically, *Kardiya* based in Granite Ridge suggested that the GPD staff member had visited the playgroup on an unusually busy day, and subsequently reported high attendance.

new school principal had arrived who was largely unfamiliar with the recent history of the playgroup service.

The playgroup service was shuffled around various rooms within the school, apparently not seen as a priority by the new principal, much to the chagrin of GPD staff. Eventually, the service was offered no room at all, but was instead run once again out in the elements, under a tree in the school playground. The situation came to a head when a representative from the education union was visiting the Granite Ridge school, and saw that the playgroup was being conducted outside, under a tree, on a day with temperatures exceeding 40 degrees Celsius. Citing this as hazardous to the health of the young children, the union representative forced the playgroup to close down. The school principal reportedly suspected GPD of sending the union representative unannounced in an attempt to discredit the school and regain control of the funding for the service. The precise origins of the visitation of the union representative remained opaque, and GPD staff I spoke with claimed no knowledge of any such plan. But the strength of the rumour was enough to seriously sour relations between the school and GPD; the school principal subsequently also refused to provide playgroup attendance data to GPD. Mary, the facilitator for Granite Ridge, was not surprised, commenting that "the Council were giving us the data in [Sandy River], and we used it against them to try and take the service!"

The narrative I recount above can be read as an example of the effects of New Public Management and the "contract state" (Cordella and Willcocks 2010:82), a major feature of which is an increasingly fragmented environment for service provision characterised by competition for government funds (Taylor 2002:113). This occurred in spite of recognition within GPD of the "attribution problem"—that is, the problems of determining the effects of a specific project on the broadly defined category of childhood—and the subsequent acknowledgement that outcomes should be "at the level of the community" rather than attributed to any particular organisation. Sally Engle Merry has pointed out that quantitative indicators accomplish a ready-made critique

(Merry 2011:S88), and as such, they lead us to the conclusion of poor organisational management. The low attendance figures at the Sandy River playgroup are evidence enough of the poorly performing service. While GPD's attempt to transfer the funding from the Council to the school was ultimately unsuccessful, it was able to proceed on the basis of apparently objective, quantitative playgroup data that could be presented to an external funding body.

The attempts to transfer funding, to "steal" a service, were all conducted in the name of Warlpiri children. Mary, the facilitator for Granite Ridge, complained bitterly about the constant shuffling of the playgroup location within the school: "What about [the playgroup] kids? Don't they matter?" But this recourse to saving the children is interrupted by the institutional overlaps in Granite Ridge: the school had a preschool facility, a new childcare centre had been constructed and opened earlier in the year, and the "Isolated Children's Service" continued to run intermittent playgroups. None of these examples were the same as the consistent playgroup service that GPD pursued, but in the terms set out by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), the requirement for one year of early childhood education for all Australian children was at least *available* in Granite Ridge. In this discussion of organisational competition, whether Warlpiri children are better or worse off recedes from view. The attendance figures at the centre of these issues are deployed to facilitate comparisons between organisations rather than to point towards improvements in childhood health or education.

In the immediate aftermath of this dispute I undertook a trip to Granite Ridge with Mary. Given the controversy, we were instructed by GPD management to avoid the local school and its staff altogether. We did however visit Sandra, the Warlpiri "community-based" facilitator for Granite Ridge. Upon arriving in the community, we drove over to Sandra's place as our first port of call. It was situated on the southern edge of the settlement, in front of it and across the road was the semi-arid scrub, including a restricted men-only area. In the front yard sat a brown Toyota Landcruiser, missing one wheel and propped up on concrete blocks. In the driveway was a smaller Honda four-wheel drive.

Sandra sat out the front of her house in the only plastic chair I could see, so Mary and I crossed our legs and sat on the concrete slab porch of her house. Generally, it is uncommon for *Kardiya* to go inside *Yapa* houses, so we had our meeting out the front.

"That's the hunting car, for the bush," says Sandra, pointing to the Toyota. "And the Honda?" I ask. "That's for town," she tells me. Some of Sandra's younger relatives are making a fire in the backyard, preparing kangaroo tails; periodically pulling them out of the flames to scrape off the burnt hair and charcoal. Not far from where I sit a hose is running continuously, the water flowing down the gentle slope towards a grassy patch under a tree. The force of the water gushing from the hose begins to dig a hole in the red dirt. I perceive it as wasteful and unsettling. A small dog, perhaps a Chihuahua, sniffs around the yard, fearful, and unwilling to come close to Mary or myself. Mary begins our meeting by enquiring about some childhood nutrition workshops that were recently held in Granite Ridge, supported by GPD. She wants to know how many people were in attendance. Sandra starts to reel off the full names of the people who were there. Mary stops her. "No, I don't need names. Just a number." Sandra is pensive for a moment, continuing to recall the names but now mouthing them in near silence and counting them on her hand. "Seven," she says, after a moment.

Mary then moves to quizzing Sandra on the playgroup, as GPD no longer receives any information from the school and is largely unaware of what goes on there. As Sandra is also employed at the school as a teacher, she offers to collect the playgroup attendance figures surreptitiously and pass them on to GPD. Mary politely declines the offer: "No, no, we need to get them the right way." "The numbers will bring them shame, I tell you" replies Sandra. On a previous visit, Mary had asked Sandra to document the reasons why people had not been regularly attending the playgroup. Sandra says she has done this, and retrieves her large, black diary. She begins leafing through it, searching for the page on which she has documented these reasons. After a few minutes of this, Mary seems to conclude that Sandra has not written anything down, and gently berates her for this: "It's important to record this type of information."

Sandra responds that she did in fact ask people this question as requested, but has misplaced the written record of their responses. Nonetheless, she can recall their answers from memory. She lists the following and I scrawl them in my notebook:

- Because it's in the school
- Too tired
- Have to look after another baby, so they can't take the other child to playgroup
- Have too many duties at home and their husbands won't help
- Too far to walk
- Some say they will come, but then they don't
- One mother related a story about a child hitting their face on the bus when the bus driver braked suddenly
- No fence at playgroup
- No building at playgroup
- Too hot at playgroup
- Too windy at playgroup
- Too cold at playgroup.

Once Sandra has finished speaking, Mary asks, "What about the fact that playgroup has moved around so much?" Sandra replies "Oh yeah, you reminded me. Some people don't know where playgroup is and they don't know where to go." "I bet they could find a card game!" says Mary. Sandra chuckles. "Oh yeah, they'll go anywhere for a card game.' The joke signals the end of the conversation, and soon after, we leave and return to our own accommodation.

Conclusion: Outside accountability

In his work *Rabelais and his World,* the literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) argues that medieval laughter fundamentally exposed the truth about power. But the truth that is expressed through laughter is always unofficial, granting momentary freedom to the oppressed, to contest the official account of events, ridiculing what is usually taken seriously (1984:84-91). Laughter thus exposes "the basic frailty of an established truth" (Toren 2005:268, citing Zwart 1996). I interpret the final instant of humorous candour here as a momentary transcendence of the accountability regime for both Mary and Sandra. Following Bakhtin, the object of laughter is the same one that has been the object of seriousness: the reasons for non-attendance at playgroup. The joke refers to the card circles that are often visible in Warlpiri settlements and in this case works to ridicule all the reasoning for low attendance at the playgroup that came before it.[40] It refers again to the ever-present threat of perceived "low motivations" among Warlpiri people; what if they just don't really care about the playgroup? The laughter also restored the pretence that this was all about community involvement, and not a berating exercise.

It bears repeating here that while the goal of healthy Warlpiri children is surely beyond reproach, the link between *that* goal and documenting the hours spent at playgroup is not readily apparent. GPD was unable to conclusively demonstrate the connection. Attending playgroup may indeed be an entirely worthy activity, but this chapter has been about the impact of accountability as a principle that structures social relations in Central Australia, rather than a simply being a neutral measuring tool. Mary's questions about why people do not attend playgroup are oriented towards institutionality, ultimately seeking answers that retain what Lea (2008:138) terms the "slot for intervention" and to discredit the management of the service as conducted by the Granite Ridge school. Some of Sandra's responses are, in a sense, not quite right. Fatigue and other child-rearing commitments are, to varying degrees, conditions of life itself rather than anything specific to the playgroup service. Eventually, Mary prompts her: "What about the fact that playgroup has moved around so much?" The GPD narrative says that the poor management of the playgroup by the school is the reason for low attendance rates. Fixing this problem through constructing or

[40] Such card games are common across Indigenous settlements in the Northern Territory. It has been established that they can serve redistributive purposes (Altman 1995).

managing a "permanent" playgroup facility is within the realm of possibility for GPD.

What is also clear from this chapter is that both *Kardiya* and *Yapa* resisted the impositions of accountability, and as Mary's small joke above suggests, recognised that this enterprise was a limited representation of the varied topographies of intervention in Central Australia. The evaluation of organisations based on their attendance figures implies a form of institutional endogamy, what Strathern has termed the capacity of systems "to define their own boundaries" (2006:190). The boundary here is between organisations, but also takes the form of a *Yapa*/*Kardiya* distinction. Mary, and GPD, believed that they already knew the reason for poor playgroup attendance in Granite Ridge—namely, that it lacked a permanent, indoor location for many months. Mary's questions can also be read as an attempt at supplementing this explanation with what Kowal might call the "authority of the authentic Indigenous voice" (2015a:122). Hence, Mary has asked Sandra, a *Yapa* woman, to document some *Yapa* opinions on why they do not go to the playgroup.

Indeed, it is precisely because *Yapa* are positioned outside of accountability practices, and differentiated by them, that their inputs gain a special significance. Drawing on the work of Elizabeth Povinelli (2002) , Emma Kowal has demonstrated that Indigenous knowledge is prized by White anti-racists less for its content and more for "the possibility of power and mystery contained in oblique references" (Kowal 2015a:122). Standard accountability processes fail to capture Indigenous people, but at the same time the project gestures always towards a vaguely defined "Warlpiri culture" as fundamentally important. Because of this, there is always something external to the monitoring system, always more questions to be asked, always more to learn, facilitating the uroboric structure of a self-renewing project. Accountability inhabits locally existing racial categories, but it also becomes a significant vector through which such categories are maintained. Of course, Warlpiri participate in accountability norms, too. As in the narrative above, Sandra came to know the answers one is supposed to give ("because it's in the school" was her first response) but to paraphrase Strathern (1997:312), we cannot simply ask people what they think, because audit has got there first with the question. Accountability practices here draw a boundary they perpetually aim to transcend. The next chapter deals with further performances of this boundary.

Chapter Five: Performing difference, sanitising relatedness

Development as intercultural

In recent years, anthropologists of Indigenous Australia have emphasised the study of "the intercultural." The concept emerged in a 2005 special issue of the journal *Oceania* as a formal critique of the kind of anthropology that focused only on "culture" as pre-colonial Indigenous tradition, as well as the structuralist view of cultures as distinct and bounded entities (Hinkson and Smith 2005). The call for intercultural ethnography was made in light of what Melinda Hinkson and Benjamin Smith, the editors of this special issue, called the "increasing entanglement of Indigenous and non-Indigenous life worlds" (2005:157). In particular, the issue drew upon an approach formulated by the anthropologist Francesca Merlan (1998) in her study of the Northern Territory town of Katherine, in which she described the inextricability of Black/White interactions and refused to write in terms of tradition or modernity.

The call was for anthropologists to stop grounding their descriptions in "pre-contact" culture, and moreover, to shift emphasis away from analysing the "intercultural" as an "interface" between two separate domains (Hinkson and Smith 2005:157–8). Drawing on linguistic theory, Merlan (2005:169) argued that intercultural analysis should privilege interaction as its basic starting point, rather than two distinct entities. If I read her correctly, Merlan argues that we should not follow the (illusory) path from interaction to an implied interacting entity—however axiomatic that may seem. In any interaction, participants are oriented towards each other, not to the external category of "culture" (Merlan 2005:179). In her account of the intercultural, Merlan was concerned with how forms of differentiation are reproduced, as I am in this chapter (Merlan 1998:2–3).

Over a decade after the publication of the edited volume, with citation of the intercultural having become something of an "obligatory nod" within Australian anthropology (Lea 2012a:191), no agreed upon understanding of the concept has emerged (Dalley and Martin 2015:2–3). Intercultural anthropology has not, as yet, transcended the boundaries beheld by its formulators. Some anthropologists have continued to view the intercultural as a meeting of two interacting but still discrete domains, and critiqued the concept on this basis (see Mansfield 2013; Morphy and Morphy 2013). This might be explained by the considerable ambiguity within the original formulation of the concept. Merlan (2005) argues that a significant epistemological shift is necessary for effective intercultural analysis; a novel way of describing interaction derived from poststructuralist linguistics. At the same time, Hinkson and Smith seem to suggest that the intercultural is a historical response to empirical changes, in their claim that Indigenous people are "*increasingly* enmeshed both within wider Australian society and a globalised world" (2005:157 emphasis added). The implication here is that in the past, Indigenous people were indeed less enmeshed, or, in pre-colonial settings, perhaps not enmeshed at all. In Merlan's formulation, the problem is in the inherent flaws in anthropological models of culture, while Hinkson and Smith suggest an empirically changing object of study. As Patrick Sullivan argued, the intercultural seems to tend always towards "a domain that occurs between structured entities" (2005:161), and this common-sense understanding has yet to be destabilised.[41]

Indeed, a normative understanding of the intercultural remains predominant in Indigenous policy and development discourses; namely, that Indigenous policy or projects happen at an "interface" between Indigenous and non-Indigenous culture, a point where two structures intersect (Morphy and Morphy 2013:177; Sullivan 2011:23). For example, in their "practice note" offering advice how organisations should approach Indigenous development, the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) points to a particular challenge for development agencies: the "sheer gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews" (ACFID 2011:3) as something unique to Australia, when compared with other (international) contexts of development. Starting

[41] The problem may lie with the term "inter." In formulating her theory of "intra-action," Karen Barad moves away from "interaction" as it "presumes the prior existence of independent entities or relata" (2007:139).

with a “sheer gap” as a challenge, it follows that bridging that gap through relationships is the key to successful projects. The ACFID practice note is clear on this:

> At the heart of Indigenous Development practice are relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and trusted outsiders, which are based on respect that both sides have something to contribute and something to learn from each other (2001:6).

This statement starts by assuming a separation between Aboriginal people and “trusted outsiders,” before highlighting the concomitant need to build relationships and work together, which subsequently appears as a self-evident good. The reference to “both sides” suggests that the development project assumes place and race as the interface. Community development discourse frequently points us towards the importance of relationships and working together, thus implying an indisputable, original separation (Burchill et al. 2006:58; Hunt 2016:7). Entanglement is not (yet) in the development vocabulary.

Work in the vein of Indigenous development tends to deal with the “cultural interface” (Colyer 2014:6), or the “intercultural practice of local governance” (Moran 2010:65). One example of the explanatory deployment of this model comes from the former community manager Tadhgh Purtill. In his work concerning the Ngaanyatjarra lands, titled *The Dystopia in the Desert* (2017), Purtill argues that in the collision of mainstream Euro-Australian culture and traditional Ngaanyatjarra culture, a third space has emerged that is fundamentally dysfunctional. It is this third space, Purtill suggests, that prevents positive outcomes in spite of the resources that are dedicated to the development of the Ngaanyatjarra communities. As I further discuss in chapter six, by presenting intercultural relationships as *the* challenge, community development and other Indigenous policy has a comfortable place to land project failure: neither Indigenous culture, nor organisational dysfunction, but problematic cross-cultural relations.

Along similar lines, GPD saw their project as always "two-way," always striving to work in partnership with *Yapa,* who were often figured as "the community." This partnership required two entities that work together, but which remain always distinct and never become consubstantial. The development organisation cannot become part of the Aboriginal community, or speak on their behalf, which could amount to appropriation. Nor can the Aboriginal community become the development organisation in any simple way, as this could be called assimilation, when the adoption of bureaucratic norms is posed as alien to Indigenous life (see Batty 2005; Nadasdy 2003). The separation is maintained by the "politics of difference" that Kowal (2015a:9) argues prevails in Australia as a liberal, multicultural settler-colonial state.

It may appear axiomatic to begin with the assumption of difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, and then work at building relationships. The historian Patrick Wolfe argues that "there is no question as to the mutual distinctiveness of the two parties to the Australian colonial process" (1994:94).[42] The question, for Wolfe, is whether or not the "initial polarity has been dissolved" (1994:94). In this chapter, I seek to reorient this initial starting point, beginning with an assertion derived from the feminist work of Karen Barad on "intra-action" (2007): differences are always made*,* not simply discovered. With this as my starting point, I attend both to how relationships are formed, and to the making of differences. Indeed, for Barad, distinctiveness emerges only through relations, through mutual entanglements (2007:33). In this way, difference cannot be discussed independent of forms of relation. This chapter demonstrates what kinds of difference and relatedness are performed by the development project.

[42] Tropes of "first contact" and radical difference have been challenged in anthropological literature. For instance, the anthropologist Michael Jackson documents how in "first contact" situations, Indigenous peoples have often perceived the newcomers to be dead or distant relatives, asserting forms of relatedness over polarity (Jackson 1998:108–124).

I argue that the development project continually performs the distinctiveness of "the community" as the moral framework for the project itself. To recall Annemarie Mol, the objects of intervention are never independent of the practices that manipulate them (2002:156). What this means is that the "Aboriginal community," the object of intervention and the crucial counterpoint to the development agency in the duet of "community development," cannot be viewed as fundamentally distinct from development practice itself. This chapter shows how the distinctiveness of *Yapa* people and communities—relative to the development agency—is performed by the project. Importantly, the GPD project was labelled "two-way" from its very inception, in the anticipation of Indigenous cultural difference. To put this another way, the project not only "encountered" difference and adjusted accordingly; cultural difference, as an object of development practice, was already internal to the project (see Riles 2000:181).

To paraphrase Mol, the question is not "What is the truth about Aboriginal difference?" but rather, "How is Aboriginal difference, as an object of development, handled in practice?" (Mol 2002:5; see also Koddenbrock and Schouten 2015:185). Just as Mol argues that doctors do not "make" or "construct" bodies or diseases, but rather perform them in certain ways (2002:32), the development project does not "create" or "construct" the Aboriginal community. Rather, the project and its staff perform a particular version of it that is entangled with development practice, and also the middle-class lifestyles of most development staff. This performance is not focused on the supposed substantive cultural content of Indigenous life, but precisely its projected distinctiveness from the external development agency.

It is important to note that Warlpiri people also perform their separation from *Kardiya.* As David Trigger (1986) has argued in his analysis of social domains in Doomadgee, Indigenous people effect forms of social closure as a way of maintaining autonomy from Whites, who usually come with an interventionist agenda. As Trigger notes, cultural difference alone does not explain the separation between Black and White in remote Australia (1986:115). In this chapter I show how *Kardiya* also perform separateness, and discuss some of the effects. I suggest that the development project produces a peculiar relational medium between *Kardiya* and *Yapa* that I call "sanitised relatedness," drawing on Emma Kowal's concept of "sanitised difference" (2015a:38). By sanitised relatedness, I refer to social relationships that are indexed by professional identities formed through the development project. By outlining how forms of differentiation and relatedness are performed between *Yapa* and *Kardiya,* this chapter pursues some of the goals of intercultural analysis without being caught in its currents, which drift towards discrete entities and the subsequent bifurcated topography for Indigenous policy.

The community in the project

In Central Australia, outside of the regional centre of Alice Springs, Aboriginal people live almost exclusively in "communities." The semantic association between remote-living Aboriginal people and "community" is strong: phrases like "community person" or "community member" are both racially and spatially coded (see also Ahmed 2012:35). In the vernacular of Central Australia, the word is often not prefaced with a definite article—there is no "the" in front of "community." In this usage, it broadly refers to remote-living Aboriginal people, as in a statement like "it's important that community have a voice in this decision," to assert the moral grounding for a particular course of action. Or in another usage, "community will understand it better if you use pictures," where using a phrase like "Aboriginal people" would highlight the patronage buried within the statement.

Prior to the 1970s, Aboriginal people were commonly described as living in settlements, or missions, rather than communities (Peters-Little 2000; see also Musharbash 2009:167). More recently, the accuracy of describing Aboriginal people as living in communities and displaying communal ethics has been questioned. Timothy Rowse has argued that the remote communities that Aboriginal people live in today are often assemblages of families in which kinship relations predominate, meaning that people do not necessarily work towards the building of a more holistic community (Rowse 1992:55–59; see also

Holcombe 2004; Smith 1989). The ethnographic record describes the fundamental social unit of the desert-dwelling Warlpiri as the small family band of probably less than ten individuals, with large congregations of people occurring only during times of abundant water supplies (Meggitt 1962:50). Even outside of the academy, community has frequently been called out as the wrong unit of analysis or object of governance for Indigenous people (Pearson 2012; see also Brough, cited in Sullivan 2011:75).

Yet, such critiques have not stuck. The question of whether Aboriginal settlements really function as communities or as assemblages of families is beyond this chapter; my experience suggests it would probably depend on the settlement in question. In any case, the term "community" itself remains prominent, perhaps the most significant "development buzzword" (Cornwall 2007:480) in Central Australia. In pointing to its durability rather than its artificiality, I examine the Aboriginal community less for its internal consistency or composition, and more as a crucial pole in maintaining the community development apparatus where it is contrasted with external organisations (see also Peters-Little 2000; Smith 1989). Community, I argue, is stabilised as a singular object through the practices of community development.

The Global Partners in Development early childhood project was often cited in broader GPD meetings as a textbook example of how community development should proceed. This was because the project had been initiated by "the community," and moreover, was funded by "community money" in the form of mining royalties that were paid to Warlpiri people as traditional owners of the country on which a gold mine was located. Early in my fieldwork, I asked a long-term *Kardiya* worker in an organisation that partnered with GPD how these arrangements came about, enquiring as to how the Warlpiri Learning Committee (WLC), initially the funding body for the childhood project, was formed.[43] She offered the following response:

[43] 'Warlpiri Learning Committee' (WLC) is a pseudonym.

> [WLC] was formed through some Warlpiri women approaching the [royalty distributing organisation] in 2001. They were tired of seeing the royalty money going into people's pockets, and then being spent on second-hand cars that would often break down. The women wanted some of this money to be directed towards education for the community. So they approached the local mine and, without touching the royalty money already going into pockets, they took an extra half a percent off of the profits of the mine every year and this became the [WLC] funds.

Certainly, the story is one of Warlpiri people seeking broader and lasting benefits from mining royalties. My point in recalling this narrative here is to consider the descriptive metaphors that are at work in describing the project beginnings. Note that royalty money was already going to Warlpiri people and will continue to do so for the productive life of the mine. But this fact is partially elided through substituting Warlpiri people themselves with "pockets" and the purchase of "second-hand cars." The "pocket" points to an individual spending money, perhaps flippantly, on cars of questionable long-term utility. For the money to really go to the community, it must go to something more enduring: in this case, education for children.

The moral grounding or practical exigencies behind the women's choice to support education over the often-unscrupulous trade in second-hand vehicles in Central Australia aside, I want to demonstrate the way in which the community here is not a singular, stable object.[44] It is not mapped directly on to Warlpiri people. The community is performed through its association with particular kinds of value—here the education of children. It is also performed in the moment that WLC, as an organisation, is itself brought into being. Community members, then, sit on the board of WLC, as an organisation that promotes education, and offer their voices as community representatives. The singularity of the object—"the community"—is the work of coordination (Mol 2002:119), in this case of bureaucratic forms and development NGOs. Importantly, it also coalesces around particular values, to the exclusion of others.

[44] In Alice Springs, I heard anecdotal stories of car dealerships charging Aboriginal people exorbitant prices for poor quality vehicles, particularly after royalty payouts.

When Warlpiri act in ways that do not square with the goals of development, they are not performed as "community." Aberrance can thus be excised from the abstract ideal.

Community as Aboriginal space

The conceptual rendering of community is also mapped onto a spatial referent: the geographically discrete Aboriginal settlements that dot the vast, arid landscape around Alice Springs, settlements that are generally understood by *Kardiya* as fundamentally Aboriginal spaces. Such places are geographically distant from *Kardiya*-dominated spaces like "town," or indeed, the heavily populated cities in the southeast of Australia. Visiting such communities required multiple phone calls to *Yapa* staff before departure to confirm the appropriateness of the visit, which could be deferred due to funerals, family disputes, or vaguely defined ceremonial activity known as "business." Business activities were *Yapa* events from which *Kardiya* accepted that they were generally excluded. "Men's business" in particular—the initiation ceremonies held every January—was scheduled in alignment with the annual exodus of *Kardiya* from Central Australia for their summer holidays. Lea refers to business as a "satisfyingly opaque category" (2006:40), and in this sense, for most *Kardiya,* particularly those who live in "town," business signals a gulf of Indigenous difference rather than any significant substantive knowledge of the activities business entails in itself.

Most settlements include a proportionally small population of *Kardiya* workers in residence. GPD avoided having *Kardiya* staff permanently live "on community," so the majority lived in Alice Springs. There were a few reasons for this. During a team meeting, one GPD manager expressed her view that if a *Kardiya* person lived in community they were becoming "part of the problem." The important thing in the community development project was that *Yapa* learned to "do it for themselves" rather than relying on *Kardiya* service providers. In practice, this meant that the space of the Warlpiri settlement itself was made to correspond precisely with the conceptual community that was engaged by the development project. It follows that if "the community" is to lead the project, and to pursue their own development, it is problematic for *Kardiya* to also live there, representing a violation of the sanctity of Aboriginal space and a situation ripe for the perpetuation of welfare dependency. The pattern of *Kardiya* visitation to communities by GPD staff was a physical manifestation of how to do community development: visit, work together, but always leave.

As a concomitant of the stance against *Kardiya* living "on community," GPD *Kardiya* staff frequently undertook lengthy journeys by four-wheel drive from Alice Springs to reach distant settlements. Often, I accompanied GPD staff on such trips, sharing the driving duties. These journeys traversed the liminal space of the desert, being neither the office setting nor the Aboriginal space of community, and were often valuable research sites where my discussion with GPD staff was less inhibited by organisational norms (see chapter six). Often, however, the arrival "in community" prompted a number of behavioural changes in GPD staff. Consider the following example with a GPD staff member I call Alicia. After a two-day drive across the desert, with an overnight stopover at a roadhouse, we finally arrive on the outskirts of community, where our proximity is signalled by signs reading "Aboriginal Freehold Land," "Don't Drink and Drive" and "Watch for Children." Alicia asks me to pull over so that we can swap driving positions (see Figure 6). She wants to be seen as the one in charge, and for this to remain consistent on every visit to the community.

Once the vehicle is stopped, she produces two large Global Partners in Development logos emblazoned on magnetic strips, which we slap onto the side of the car. Alicia asks me to put away my "big notebook," which has been resting on the dashboard. It is much better to have a smaller one, she says, or "people will think you are coming to take their kids," a reference to the widespread removals of Aboriginal children by Australian governments. Next, she asks me to remove my sunglasses, the rationale being that it is rude and will prevent proper engagement with *Yapa* (see also Lea 2008:98). Squinting now into the low hanging, late afternoon sun, we enter the community and drive multiple laps around the streets, "to let people know we are in community." We wave at almost everyone we see, mostly people sitting in their front yards, while dogs emerge and surround the vehicle to bark and nip furiously at the wheels of our moving car, before returning to the shade of trees or porches. Everyone we wave at returns our gesture, some enthusiastically, having recognised Alicia, who is well known here, and others probably only out of politeness. "When I come to community, I like to speak to *Yapa* first, before any *Kardiya,"* she comments.

Figure 6: Toyota Landcruiser on the road to a Warlpiri community

Our entry into the space of community here was carefully managed. My notebook became significant as an instrument of the colonising state from which we, as good, helping *Kardiya,* must be differentiated. The space of community was Aboriginal, but we performed it in a particular way: we did multiple laps, saying hello to everyone we passed, a display of our friendliness. We had, in fact, encountered Aboriginal people earlier on our trip. That same day, we passed a group of Aboriginal men leaving the roadhouse we had stayed in, carrying with them a box of beer. Some of these men we recognised as being from the same community we were now visiting. But we met these people with the "practiced indifference" (Lea et al. 2012:156) that *Kardiya* often enact when encountering Indigenous drinkers. Out here, "in community," in the moment that we come to embody the development organisation and bear its logo, *Yapa* also come to represent the idealised, communal counterpoint to the development project. Alicia's final comment about always speaking to *Yapa* first signalled her desire to build relationships and trust with *Yapa*.

In spite of the policy of a separation between *Kardiya* staff and the *Yapa,* community space, midway through my fieldwork, GPD-initiated consultations revealed that many *Yapa* had asked for *Kardiya* GPD staff to live permanently "on community" if they wanted to attain better project outcomes. Indeed, the trip I undertook with Alicia took one and a half days of driving each way, necessitating an overnight stop at a roadhouse. Such journeys left little time on the ground when contained within a five-day working week. However, permanent *Kardiya* housing in communities was scarce and tied to particular organisations. Constructing such housing was an expensive, long-term proposition that GPD was not in a position to undertake, seeming to run against the project timeline, which was originally five years in total. GPD responded to the request from *Yapa* by increasing the number of weeks *Kardiya* staff would spend "in community" per month—from one to two. GPD staff often voluntarily took time out of their weekends to begin their long drives on a Sunday instead of Monday, thus allowing more time "on community."

There is another unspoken inference here: it is unthinkable that a *Kardiya* person might rent a room or otherwise live in a *Yapa* house or camp. *Kardiya,* we generally assume, would find the living conditions of many *Yapa* houses to be intolerable (Merlan 1998:177). As Jennifer Biddle (1993) has demonstrated in her fieldwork with Warlpiri, living "*Yapa-piya,"* (1993:195) the *Yapa* way, entails significant corporeal risks from the perspective of a white, middle-class body. Biddle details her struggles with painful boils, a skin infection that spread through close bodily contact, while also noting that her Warlpiri interlocutors saw this as evidence of her becoming "like Blackfella" (1993:195). Indeed, Biddle's Warlpiri interlocutors also saw the serious car accident that she suffered during fieldwork as something that generally does not happen to *Kardiya* (1993:196). Beyond actual cohabitation, most *Kardiya* staff rarely enter *Yapa* houses or even their yards. As Kim Mahood (2007:274) has documented, when *Kardiya* visit a *Yapa* house in search of a particular resident, there is a well-known protocol: drive your vehicle close to the house and blast the horn until someone appears. The presence of potentially "cheeky" (aggressive) dogs in the yards of many *Yapa* is another reason *Kardiya* are often unwilling to exit the vehicle.

The oftentimes poor conditions of remote Indigenous housing have been well documented (see for example Lea and Pholeros 2010), and perhaps because of this deprivation, as well as the presence of Western-style structures, *Yapa* houses are perceived by *Kardiya* as a somewhat imperfect Aboriginal space. By this I mean that "the bush" or "country" remained the quintessential Aboriginal space in the eyes of *Kardiya*, associated with a pre-colonial Aboriginal life unmarked by White invasion. For many organisations, including GPD, enabling and documenting the "bush trip" or "country visit" was the primary means of demonstrating the inclusion of Warlpiri culture in their projects (see chapter six).[45] One GPD staff member told me that *Yapa* "really come alive" when they are "on country." Bush trips or country visits could require significant planning, the provision of four-wheel drive vehicles, licensed drivers and suitable, knowledgeable traditional owners of the country or area to be visited. Bush trips were also the activity through which *Kardiya* sought to engage with *Yapa* on specifically *Yapa* terms. Certainly, visits to country and hunting expeditions are highly valued by Warlpiri people (Douglas 2011; see also Musharbash 2009:127–32), and as Kowal has argued, such trips are also enjoyed by White people as an opportunity to efface their dominating Whiteness by visiting a space where Aboriginal people are the "absolute experts" (2015a:147). For the health professionals in Kowal's analysis, who bring with them forms of biomedical expertise, the bush trip presents a space where Indigenous people

[45] Warlpiri, along with other Aboriginal people, often refer to their "country," as the area through which they are affiliated through Dreaming or kinship connections. Some of these areas are now rarely visited owing to their remoteness from settlements, or being located on settler-colonial private property.

teach and lead the way, while White people learn. Bush trips are an opportunity for *Kardiya* to demonstrate their "ease and familiarity with Aboriginal people" (Lea 2008:4). They are a way in which *Kardiya* participate in a *Yapa* space without risking their corporeal integrity through exposure to the conditions in *Yapa* houses and camps.

Few *Kardiya* are able to hide their unease at the living conditions in some *Yapa* houses. Among *Kardiya* staff, *Yapa* are also said to get "shame" regarding the state of their homes in the presence of White people. In his analysis of Black and White domains in Doomadgee, Trigger quotes an Aboriginal elder who claims that "Blackfella 'shamed of their dirty home and he don't like Whitefella to come in" (1986:104). While the bush trip appears as an Aboriginal space, the expression of continued connection to pre-colonial ways of life, what Bessire might call "ahistorical and antirelational difference" (2014:215) it is also an agreed upon meeting place for Black and White, born precisely of their interaction. In this way, the distinctiveness of Aboriginal space is partially performed by *Kardiya* intervention. Indeed, the performance of Aboriginal space is a way by which *Kardiya* interveners negotiate their own identities and their presence in Central Australia, sanctifying a vaguely defined Aboriginal difference and enacting a community development ethos, while also preserving middle-class corporeality. I suggest that these produce a form of "sanitised relatedness," drawing on Kowal's concept of "sanitised difference." For Kowal, sanitised difference refers to aspects of Indigenous life that are considered "good" forms of difference by White anti-racists: kinship, language, or forms of Indigenous ecological knowledge, for example (2015a:38). Unsanitised difference refers to things that White anti-racists disapprove of: poor living conditions, ill health, gambling, as well as "substance abuse, domestic violence and child abuse" (2015a:38). For Kowal (2015), the ultimate goal of White anti-racists is to preserve sanitised difference while remediating unsanitised difference.

By pointing to sanitised relatedness, I seek to highlight the imagined ideal of Indigenous life that Kowal suggests is held by helping Whites, and moreover, the desire of *Kardiya* staff to always develop better relationships with

Indigenous people, but in ways that are crucially indexed by their professional identities as community development workers. Sanitised relatedness acknowledges that difference—good or bad—is not "held" by Indigenous people in any straightforward way but is performed, in this context through development practice.

Like family

Within the first few weeks of arrival in Central Australia, most *Kardiya* who work with Aboriginal people on a regular basis are bestowed a "skin name," one of the eight subsection groups—or sixteen, when divided by gender (Pawu-Kurlpurlurnu, Holmes and Box 2008:12). All of those people—both *Yapa* and *Kardiya*—with whom they share this group will become classificatory siblings, while others may be mothers, fathers, grandparents, or the "right skin" who it is appropriate to marry. Upon receiving the designation, some *Kardiya* will be particularly eager to adopt the new epithet, adding it to their online social media profiles as a way of asserting that they have been "accepted into the community" or even become "like family." *Kardiya* with longer engagements often view this naïve uptake with derision, asserting that a skin name is only a necessary locating device in Indigenous sociality—whether one is loved or despised—and therefore not indicative of being "accepted" or otherwise. In both cases, *Kardiya* assert forms of connection to Indigenous people. The former do so in straightforward terms, adopting an Indigenous name, and the latter in terms of greater knowledge of Indigenous people, with an understanding of what a skin name *really* means.

As Thomas Michel has noted, among White local government staff in the Northern Territory, there exists "a certain moral competitiveness to bridge the intercultural divide, gain deeper understandings, demonstrate closer connections to Indigenous people" (2016:35). When I first arrived in Central Australia as a youth worker, I noted that White staff seemed to evince a desire to demonstrate greater knowledge of *Yapa* and whatever dramas were going on in the community (Lea 2008:84; see also Brody 1975). I was an entry-level youth worker, towards the bottom of the organisational hierarchy, but *Kardiya* managers seemed to have regular discussions with serious, senior Warlpiri men and women (see also Batty 2005). I would receive fragmented pieces of information from these managers as the backing for a particular operational directive: perhaps an oblique reference to a community conflict, or an allusion to the criminal records of some *Yapa*. Detail was often withheld, leaving me to imagine the breadth of information beyond my purview. Those *Kardiya* who had relationships with influential *Yapa* were able to assert those relations as a form of authority over other *Kardiya* staff who were not in the know.

Similarly, GPD staff often asserted their connections with Indigenous people. In one instance, Paul, a GPD staff member, recounted to me the experience of being invited to the funeral of an Indigenous person whose family he knew well:

> They said to me "Paul, you're like family, you should be here." Actually, they asked me to sit up the front with them, with the whole family. And I was like, "Wow, you're asking me to sit in the front row?" And when I went to visit them at sorry camp, they were actually worried about me.[46] I was worried about them, but they were worried about me. And I just thought, "Wow, how amazing is that."

I am not adding this story to suggest that the relationship was in some way different to how Paul describes it. It is possible that Paul was considered to be "like family" in this case. But I interpret the act of telling of the story, the fact that it is recounted as a story worth telling at all, as a claim that Paul was "bridging the intercultural divide." Paul repeats his surprise at being treated like a family member, suggesting that this experience is indeed something out of the ordinary, and beyond the experience of most *Kardiya.*

[46] A "sorry camp" is a temporary space for mourning the death of a relative, often set up on the edges of an Aboriginal settlement, as part of broader "sorry business."

Kowal (2011) has also argued that White public health staff in the Northern Territory express a desire to be accepted and loved by Indigenous people. To be loved is the proof that White anti-racists must not be perpetuating forms of colonisation onto Indigenous people; "if they love us, we cannot be so bad" (Kowal 2011:14). But the desire for love in Kowal's account is tempered by desire to help Indigenous people and indeed not to do them harm. Love is valued to the extent that it legitimises a largely White, middle-class project of helping the Indigenous other. The professional identity of *Kardiya* as linked to this project of helping is highly significant in Central Australia, particularly for those who live "on community," as their presence is entirely dependent on their employment. When housing is provided by an employer, the loss of one's job also means the immediate exit from the community itself. In this way, on the occasions that a *Kardiya* person was fired for some egregious transgression, other *Kardiya* often said that they were "kicked out of the community," thus mobilising the moral force of the community as the backing for a decision that may not, in fact, have involved any *Yapa* input.[47] Where White staff are only supposed to undertake employment until Indigenous people can take over, contracts are usually a few years at most (Ottosson 2016:165).

I occasionally discussed the general transience of *Kardiya* staff with GPD staff members and other *Kardiya* in Central Australia. During one of these conversations, when I noted that few *Kardiya* permanently stay in Aboriginal communities, the *Kardiya* I was speaking with corrected me, noting at least one long-term *Kardiya* in one community:

> There is this White guy, but I mean, he's practically *Yapa*. I mean he's a *Kardiya* who has lived in community forever and is married to an Aboriginal woman. I don't know what you call that—White trash, maybe?

[47] I have known *Kardiya* (non-GPD) to lose their jobs due to drug and alcohol use or through viewing pornography while "on community." Consuming alcohol and viewing pornographic material on publicly funded computers were both banned in Aboriginal communities under the NTER.

Viewed generously, the "White trash" comment could be interpreted as an indication that the proximity of White men to the relative poverty of *Yapa* marks them as also poor; someone who is a reject from their own society slumming with those of another. The implication would then be an equally dim view of *Yapa* communities on the part of the *Kardiya* I quote above. But in other ways this individual expressed respect for *Yapa* and their culture throughout my fieldwork. The comment thus appears as an example the simultaneous valorisation and derision of Aboriginal ways of life (Cowlishaw 2012:402). Minimally, I interpret the comment here as marking a transgression, a commentary on becoming *too* close to *Yapa.* Because transgression relies upon the border it violates, it does not diminish the boundary between Black and White, but serves to reaffirm it (Biddle 1993:193 citing Foucault 1977).

In her account of similarly positioned White men living in Aboriginal communities, Cameo Dalley (2015:44) characterises them as "misfits" who have disavowed their own cultural backgrounds. In Warlpiri communities, there is an almost complete lack of romantic or sexual relationships between *Kardiya*—and in particular the middle-class helpings Whites—and local *Yapa* (see also Trigger 1986:103). On the exceedingly rare occasion that *Kardiya*/*Yapa* relationships do occur, the couple tends to move away from Warlpiri communities if they wish to continue their relationship (Burke 2013). In this way, they escape not only the demands of Warlpiri kin, but the derision such relationships are met with by many White people.[48] The desire to be loved that Kowal has noted also has its limits for helping Whites: when it is not directly linked with a project of helping Indigenous people and performing their difference, it is frowned upon.

Beyond sexual relationships, there was also a suspicion at GPD of *Kardiya* who had lived on community for extended periods. GPD did employ, in part-time roles, a few permanently residing *Kardiya,* almost exclusively the domestic partners of other *Kardiya* who had housing provided by a separate organisation.

[48] In opposition to the *Kardiya* view, in discussions with *Yapa* I have found that the *Kardiya* who have engaged in sexual relationships with *Yapa* are generally viewed affectionately by *Yapa* for their willingness to engage in Warlpiri sociality. Trigger (1986:109) has noted a similar disposition in Doomadgee.

In an interview with one of these workers who had lived “on community” for many years, she said of her initial job interview at GPD:

> They questioned me really heavily about my ties to [the community]. They were questioning the sanity of someone embedded in community.

As Kim Mahood has argued, *Kardiya* often fear becoming somehow polluted by lingering too long in Aboriginal communities, worrying for their career prospects beyond the short-term and sideways trajectories of remote community work (Mahood 2012). Organisational hierarchies tend to move upward and outward from the remote community itself. Generally, the staff who lived “on community,” both *Kardiya* and *Yapa,* were at the bottom of organisational charts. Above them were the facilitators, based in Alice Springs but taking regular trips to community. Next were regional managers, and ultimately the CEO, all of whom rarely visited Warlpiri communities. The higher in the hierarchy one goes, the broader the geographic scope of the position (Ferguson and Gupta 2002:987). Career paths can thus lead *Kardiya* away from long-term engagements with the “local” space of the remote community. The fact that Aboriginal communities are seen as spaces that are ultimately *not to be transgressed* in the name of development cannot be separated from middle-class career trajectories that pull *Kardiya* at GPD “up” and away from long-term community engagements. [49]

Relationships that are too close blur the boundaries between *Kardiya* development staff and *Yapa,* as the object that is intervened upon. *Kardiya* visit community, but we always leave. It is unthinkable that GPD should render itself a permanent fixture in an ongoing and unending state of development. In the same way that transgression does not dissolve a boundary but further enacts it, so too does the emphasis on working “in partnership” with *Yapa.* The development agency and the community are supposed to work together but never become consubstantial, thus always preserving “the separateness of the domain of

[49] For some *Kardiya* I have spoken with, work for a year or two in remote Aboriginal communities serves as a useful springboard for work in other areas, particularly international development. Remote Aboriginal communities demonstrate an ability to “rough it,” and gain ‘intercultural’ skills.

otherness to be operated upon" (Lea 2008:113). Some *Yapa* did find employment through the NGO, but their job titles tended to come with a prefix: "cultural advisor" or "community-based facilitator." Their inputs were always predicated on their local or cultural knowledge, as differentiated from more globally valid forms of expertise. Alongside *Kardiya* desires to be loved and to be treated "like family," to be called by and respond to their "skin name," was the imperative to remain, ultimately, separate from Indigenous people. To illustrate this point, I offer the following example from a governance group meeting.

The room was filled with predominantly Warlpiri people, with Hayley, the *Kardiya* facilitator, and myself the only other *Kardiya* in attendance. Hayley was a part-time GPD staff member who lived permanently "on community" and had done so for the past few years. The discussion concerned which organisations should be given an office within the soon to be built Child and Family Centre, which was to be a hub for early childhood activities. Hayley put the question to the group: "Which organisations should have offices?" Hayley had a good knowledge of the institutional landscape of early childhood here and had young children of her own, and the group put the question back onto her: "What do you think?" She responded:

> Hayley (*Kardiya* staff): I can't make decisions like that. It's up to the community.
>
> *Yapa* governance group member: But you're one of us! You're a good friend. You're like family.
>
> Hayley: But I'm not *Yapa.* I don't make decisions.

Hayley refuses relatedness here, not through a self-evident gulf of cultural difference or a "sheer gap" in worldviews, but through the moral framework of the development project. My understanding was that Hayley was indeed considered a good friend, or "like family," but in her professional identity as a GPD facilitator she posited separation as the ultimate form of solidarity with *Yapa* (Bessire 2014:206). It is only *Yapa* who can make decisions on such matters. Such separations are performed in the name of "community members" making decisions for the community, in terms of a development project that aims to empower Indigenous subjects.

"Do you have any Aboriginal friends?"

In his seminal explication of development as anti-politics (1994a), Ferguson argued that development discourses produced an object that was separate from "external" influence. In his account, Lesotho was positioned by development agencies as a nation of subsistence farmers and hence "outside" the global market. While this separateness was taken as the reason for poverty in Lesotho, Ferguson demonstrated that in fact, people in Lesotho were poor *because* they were part of a global economy, precisely through their structural disadvantage as precarious wage labourers in neighbouring South Africa (Ferguson 1994b). In short, the poor were disadvantaged due to their connection to broader economic structures, and not because of an imagined separation from them. Separation did serve a purpose though: as a convenient myth for development agencies, who could argue that through exposure to markets, development would be achieved (Ferguson 1994b).

In Central Australia, this critique is already contained within development practice: we know that external forces like colonisation and racism are the reason for Indigenous disadvantage, and GPD stressed this in official documents. As Lea has noted, in such settings "professionals must tiptoe around a reified traditional culture and view all bad habits as introduced" (2008:186). *Kardiya* feared the introduction of bad habits, which produced a form of sanitised relatedness where professional identities become the only appropriate way of relating to *Yapa.* It is a form of relatedness that dovetails with the preservation of middle-class lifestyles. When segregation as solidarity (Bessire 2014:206) maps neatly onto segregation as inequality, we might ask after the effects of the performance of difference I have outlined.

In spite of the *Kardiya* desire to build relationships, to be loved and to be treated like family, Central Australia remains a heavily segregated space. Among the cadre of helping Whites, the backyard barbecues, camping trips and dinner parties were unlikely to include any Indigenous guests, and would almost certainly not include remote-living Indigenous people who fit the category of "community" or *Yapa*. The "nice" cafes I visited rarely seemed to have Indigenous customers. GPD staff tended to hold the belief that they should set a good example for *Yapa.* More than once, GPD staff advised against the consumption of Coca-Cola or other sugary beverages while "on community" for the poor health practices it promoted. The consumption of alcohol was perhaps even more morally fraught: a manager at the organisation I first worked at in Central Australia informed me—apropos of nothing—I would be "fired on the spot" if I was ever caught drinking with *Yapa.* Tellingly, the bar in Alice Springs that was the place to go for helping Whites from the southern cities of Australia almost never included Indigenous patrons, in spite of the lack of any explicit entry policy. Warlpiri I spoke with told me they felt "shame" attending such venues. The venue most closely approximated a fashionable beer garden in Sydney or Melbourne, and young helping Whites probably enjoyed it for this reason. The fact that the absence of Indigenous clientele might *also* be part of its appeal was generally not countenanced by *Kardiya,* difficult as it was to reconcile with a helping White identity.

On one long drive to a *Yapa* community, Meredith, a GPD facilitator, detailed her experience in relating the highly segregated social field to her friends back in a city on Australia's densely populated east coast:

> People ask me, "Do you have any Aboriginal friends?" I have to answer that I don't. I don't have any, and I don't know anybody who does have Aboriginal friends. I mean, when I lived in Vanuatu for a year, I had dozens of Ni-Van [people Indigenous to Vanuatu] friends. People can't believe that I don't have any Aboriginal friends out here. I mean, I guess I'm close to being a friend with Jane [the *Yapa* community-based facilitator with whom Meredith works closely], but then, I've never even seen inside her house. I've just never felt that commonality of interest.

Meredith's experience here is typical. *Kardiya* and *Yapa* often work together, but do not socialise outside of professional settings (see also Jordan 2005:8). Meredith's account is suggestive of a tacit acceptance of a segregated social field, an acceptance that develops the longer one stays in Central Australia. It takes an outsider's questioning to bring it back into view. Indeed, when I first arrived in a remote community, I found the segregation to be jarring and unexpected, a common experience for White people from the south (see Biddle 1993:196). I quickly adopted the local terms *Yapa* and *Kardiya,* which were themselves a salve to my anxieties around the appropriateness of separation. As Warlpiri words—some of the few Warlpiri words most *Kardiya* tend to learn—they seem to express the Indigenous assertion of segregation, and thus euphemise it. As *Kardiya* interveners, our moral framework is tuned to dichotomy, and the axiom is that we must always ask *Yapa.* In this way, *Yapa* and *Kardiya,* as terms with a Warlpiri origin, satisfy our ethical checks. But as Meredith's statement above shows, segregation often continues to trouble helping Whites.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sought to show how the development project performs the Aboriginal community as separate and distinct as an essential part of its moral framework. I have explored the effects of this performance, where relatedness between *Kardiya* and *Yapa* is sanitised and, in some ways, crippled. Segregation in Central Australia is of course also performed in other, more egregious ways (see Perera and Pugliese 2011) and I have no interest in arguing for difference or sameness in the abstract. I have sought an ethnographically grounded analysis which avoids locating Indigenous difference in forms of pre-colonial tradition, or to draw on Lucas Bessire, "a kind of life imagined to exist independently of representational processes and relational ways of being" (2014:201). Aboriginal distinctiveness, in this context, emerges as the coordinated outcome of a community development ethos and the classed lifestyles of *Kardiya* staff. To echo Barad (2007), difference emerges through mutual entanglement.

The implications of a development project and an Aboriginal community that are mutually entangled are significant. The GPD project relied upon the notion that Warlpiri were separate and always, immutably, Warlpiri. This immutable distinction allowed their Warlpiri-ness, and their difference to be included in the project. In the following chapter, I take up this issue through an examination of GPD meetings as spaces of participation.

Chapter Six: Participation as a "non-performative"

Introduction: culture as a problem/solution

The attitude to Indigenous culture as an abstracted concept within the mainstream Australian imaginary has shifted over time, from open denigration to high valuation (Cowlishaw 1998:147), at least in those parts of society responsible for generating public representations. Congruent with the "cultural turn," in which culture is "put into" a development discourse that recognises the inadequacy of Western ethnocentrism (Nederveen Pieterse 2010:64), the initial design document for the Global Partners in Development project specified that the project would be "led by" Warlpiri culture. In practice, the inclusion of culture was never a *fait accompli*. The critique that the project had failed to be culturally appropriate or inclusive in some way periodically surfaced in the commentaries of other service providers and organisations working in the area. Such accusations were difficult to defend against, owing to GPD's status as a large, international and hence external NGO. As I have noted in chapter four, culture was difficult to measure in project reports. For example, if consultations with Warlpiri people yielded a request for Christmas decorations at a playgroup, as was the case at the end of 2013, where is the diacritical, legible marker of Indigeneity? Other activities, such as the "bush trips," valued by both *Yapa* and *Kardiya,* were seen as a way of demonstrating the cultural inclusivity of the project. A certain number of "bush trips" were initially part of GPD programming, but these were eventually found to be beyond the scope of GPD's operational capacities. As such, GPD generally relied upon consultation with Warlpiri people to ensure inclusion and cultural appropriateness and formed four separate Warlpiri governance groups, one for each Warlpiri community, and these were regularly consulted about early childhood related matters.

Culture has not always been viewed in such a positive light and has previously been seen to represent a barrier to development. In the early 1970s, Margaret Middleton and Sarah Francis' study of Indigenous children in a remote Central Australian community identified respiratory and gastrointestinal infections, skin diseases and anaemia as prevalent, as well as malnutrition (Middleton and Francis 1976:21–26); problems that bear strong similarity to those associated with remote-living Indigenous children in the Northern Territory in the present day (see Boulton 2016). Middleton and Francis identified strong roots in Aboriginal culture as a determinant of such health problems, as they saw that this would make individuals less likely to take on board Western health knowledge (1976:127). The present-day emphasis on culture sees the situation reversed; culture now generally holds a positive value within Indigenous-helping organisations. For instance, the venerated "Strong Women, Strong Babies, Strong Culture" program is said to have succeeded precisely because of the "recognition of the traditional nurturing and healing practices of Aboriginal women" (Territory Health Service 1999 cited in Lea 2008:141). In the context of substance abuse programs, Maggie Brady (1995) has outlined the move by which culture becomes a form of treatment for drug and alcohol addictions. In these cases, culture plays an active role, and most interventions now aim to at least exhibit "cultural competence" (Robinson, et al. 2008:77) or a "cultural match" (Hunt and Smith 2007:24). As Trigger (1997:92) has noted, culture is now a kind of strategic resource and not only for Indigenous people in the realm of "traditional" politics. Organisations like GPD seek to include culture as integral to their projects.

Cultural inclusion was known within the project as "two-way" programming, referring to *Yapa* and *Kardiya* approaches to both child rearing, as well as governance of the project itself. At the beginning of my fieldwork, properly "two-way" programming was identified as an unfulfilled goal by the external project evaluators. As a direct result of this perceived problem, the project staff undertook significant effort to include the *Yapa* way. This meant a rearranging of the LogFrame, a document I discussed extensively in chapter four. Rather than the "two-way" approach sitting as a separate project goal, it was to become incorporated into *every* project goal. A monitoring and evaluation staff member undertook this task and presented her new LogFrame template in a team meeting. However, she had struggled with the "two-way" section, and remarked, “I don’t know how to address it, so I’ve left it blank.” Her table thus looked like this:

Goal	Indicator	Means of Verification	Two-Way Approach	Assumptions
Enhanced capability of children to transition into first year of school	15 children attend playgroup per month	Collect attendance sheets from playgroup service providers		Playgroup service providers collaborate with GPD

Figure 7: The LogFrame amended for a “two-way” approach[50]

The table is a classic bureaucratic form, “devoid of content” (Handelman 1981:9). The table awaits cultural content from an indefinitely deferred Indigenous contribution. It shifts the site at which cultural inclusion will happen somewhere else, at some other time, and importantly, when a Warlpiri person can provide input. Given the organisational hierarchies and spatial metaphors at work within GPD, it is difficult for this to be otherwise. Projects emanate in the first instance from the “high-level” and “strategic” senior managers located in capital cities, far from the “on-the-ground” and “remote” sites of implementation, where Warlpiri people live.

The corollary of this hierarchy is a kind of pathologisation of the sites of implementation. It is established that “implementation is *the key factor* underpinning successful interventions” (Katz 2008:95, emphasis added); this can be flipped to state that implementation must also be where failure happens. Because GPD relied upon the idea of development expertise removed from any particular context, accumulated as a form of corporate knowledge within the global organisation (see chapter two), failures needed to be located somewhere

[50] As with the sample LogFrame I provided earlier in the thesis, this is not an exact copy of what was presented, but retains the tone of that document.

further "down" from this body of expertise. As Rottenburg has shown in his account of a water supply project in an unspecified African country ("Ruritania"):

> When things do not work as predicted, the need for social-scientific explanations is shifted onto those local phenomena that do not accord with the pre-established laws (2009:74).

Rottenburg points to the separating device between model as rational and orderly, and "local phenomena" as unruly and unknown. As implementation is the point at which the development project engages with the local, it is the space where things can go wrong. In another way, this point has been made by David Mosse, who argues that the things that make for "good policy" as a representation make it unimplementable as operational practice (2004). In spite of this, Mosse notes that it is in the interests of many development actors to maintain dominant representations of "good policy" (665:2004). Both Rottenburg and Mosse point to the separating device that exists between the "policy" or "model," and the localised implementation.

The success of this separating device is revealed when failure of a "good policy" does not therefore render that policy "bad." At GPD, for instance, the LogFrame was identified by one staff member as a "strong tool" that had been poorly implemented (see chapter three). The separation of policy and implementation also reserves a space for culture. Because development models must appear neutral and value free so as to facilitate their easy movements between contexts, the specificity of culture can only be local. As I have shown, in the past, child health projects might fail *because* of Warlpiri culture. Simply put, Warlpiri were seen to have too much culture and were thus unlikely to take on the benefits of Western science or development. Enlightened practitioners of development now make the point that the problem is not, in fact, culture, but something else: the structural disadvantages wrought by colonisation. If projects fail to achieve their objectives of improved child health or engagement with particular services, it is not that Warlpiri people have too much culture, but rather that projects do not have enough; projects and their non-Indigenous staff have failed to be "culturally competent," perhaps even perpetuating colonising impulses of the past, and thus they have failed to secure the enthusiastic participation of Warlpiri people. The idea that someone "has" culture is relevant here: within the development project, Warlpiri people were the sole bearers of Warlpiri culture, and their participation as committee members for the governance of the project was the mechanism through which culture was to be included. To paraphrase Sara Ahmed, the organisation fails "nonwhite others" because of "a difference that is somehow theirs" (2006:107). The organisation may fail to include Warlpiri, but that still failure hinges on Warlpiri difference held by Warlpiri people.

For Warlpiri committee members who bear culture and are expected to mediate between the organisation and the community in producing a culturally appropriate project, there is little distance between the poles of culture as problem and culture as solution. Whether the Warlpiri community has too much culture or the organisation has too little, it remains a Warlpiri problem, because *Kardiya* staff can only make space for it, and not possibly solve it. The fact that culture has gone from a negative to a positive is not a fundamental shift, but an easy inversion where the value of culture is flipped back and forth (Povinelli 2010:46). Indeed, because many of the institutions of the West—waged employment, for instance—appear to not function in Aboriginal communities, when unmoored from *their* (Western) cultural context (for an example of this argument see Purtill 2017:22–3), idealised models of "the market" or "bureaucratic rationality" come to be viewed as tangible realities, that somehow function unproblematically in the West (Rottenburg 2009:64). If the difference in Warlpiri communities is culture, we assume institutional functionality must be self-evident in its absence. It was not surprising, then, that beneath the official discourse, for GPD staff the suspicion still lurked that perhaps Warlpiri culture really was the problem, hinted in utterances about the "low motivations" of Warlpiri people, or complaints about the work performance of Warlpiri staff. In the context of apparent project failure—and ongoing Indigenous disadvantage more broadly—culture as the solution means that culture remains a problem, a challenge for the development project composed of mostly White staff, of how best to include, to make space, and to not colonise.

As I have noted, GPD formed four separate Warlpiri governance groups—one for each community—in addition to another governance committee (including some of the women who were also involved in the community-specific groups) that oversaw the project as a whole. In spite of the existence of these groups, project evaluators, based on their interviews with Warlpiri people, noted that the project continued to perform poorly in attempts to integrate the *Yapa* way. What then, does it mean for Warlpiri people to participate in the project? Philip Batty has argued that "Aboriginal subjectivity" is constituted through governmental processes that offer only a limited range of subject positions, even when engaged in the state sponsored project of self-determination (Batty 2005). In a Foucauldian vein, Aboriginal selves are, at least in part, "an effect of power" (Batty 2005:211). This account would suggest that Indigenous subjectivity is somewhat colonised, thus negating the possibility of meaningful inclusion. Conversely, Jeffrey Collmann (1988) has argued that Indigenous people living in the fringe camps of Alice Springs maintained their autonomy by avoiding forms of governmental control, while pursuing their own projects through carefully managed engagement with selected White bureaucrats. To adopt a view along these lines would suggest that Indigenous participation is highly circumscribed or opportunistic and is not necessarily congruent with the formal goals of the development project. An even stronger example comes from the work of writer Kim Mahood (2012), who in her article "Kartiya are Like Toyotas" suggests that *Kardiya* staff in remote Indigenous communities are manipulated and perhaps exploited by Indigenous people who have seen many such well-meaning *Kardiya* before. For Mahood, eventually these *Kardiya* break down—like the rusted car wrecks that are a common sight in Central Australia—and leave the community.

Presented thus, these two examples suggest a choice between the "oscillating banners of assimilation and autonomy" (Christen 2009:23) when considering Indigenous participation in mainstream institutions. But considering only questions of assimilation or autonomy can have the effect of moving the analysis to the questions of the outcomes of institutional engagements for Indigenous people and thus glides over the pertinent question of what those engagements mean in themselves. The analysis is unduly fast-tracked to the reliable precepts of colonialism or resistance, while failing to ethnographically consider the institutions in which Indigenous people participate, which as Lea notes, are so often glossed in catch-all terms like "the state" (2012a:191). Contained within this gloss is the reaffirmation that Western institutions essentially function as they say they do, which leaves little room for critical ethnographic treatment of their analysis and leads us back to Indigenous culture as the blockage point for project failure. Development discourse suggests a more conciliatory emphasis on "working together," rather than only blaming culture, but as I have shown in the previous chapter, it relies upon a distinction between organisations as ultimately *Kardiya* and "the community" as *Yapa.*

This chapter is about GPD attempts to include Warlpiri people, as bearers of culture, in the overall governance and implementation of the project. I draw on the work of Sara Ahmed (2012), who argues that institutional processes of inclusion produce a "non-performative." Ahmed's concept of the non-performative draws upon Judith Butler's (1999 [1990]) performativity. Butler famously argued that "gender" is performed—the reality of gender and its effects are produced by iterative performances. A "non-performative," conversely, does not produce the effect that it names (Ahmed 2012:117). One way to think about this is that while Butler argues that gender is indeed performed, those performances nonetheless produce the socially and materially significant phenomenon of gender. Conversely, Ahmed's focus is on institutional performances of inclusion that do *not* produce inclusion in a socially or materially significant way. By describing two types of meeting, I argue that the conscious pursuit of values of togetherness, participation and hearing from many voices worked to negate the possibilities of actually including a multiplicity of voices within the organisation. As this process of participation as a non-performative occurs across the organisation, I am less concerned with the question of whether or not Warlpiri get to participate and rather ask what it means to participate in non-performative processes.

Meeting one: Home Week

Global Partners in Development held frequent meetings. These included weekly team meetings involving the Central Australian staff, weekly Australia Program meetings involving staff across the country (phoning in via conference call), and monthly meetings with the Warlpiri governance groups in Warlpiri communities. The most significant, however, and the largest by number of participants, was the "Home Week," which was held in Sydney twice a year. This event was renamed midway through my fieldwork: originally, in keeping with the parallel event for the international programming group, the word "home" was used in reference to attending staff returning to Australia and to the head office from their field sites in the Global South. The GPD Australia Program team recognised the geographical othering of their differentially located staff and Indigenous partners inherent in this home/field designation and changed the name of their event to the spatially neutral "Australia Program (AP) Gathering." Among most staff, however, the old name stuck, and "AP Gathering" and "Home Week" appear interchangeably in this chapter. These biannual events were usually a week long and involved reports from each working team—for instance, the Central Australia team—and multiple "team-building" exercises. Generally limited to full-time staff, none of whom were *Yapa*, Warlpiri people were not included in these events during my fieldwork, although I understand that after I left, Warlpiri "community-based facilitators" had begun to be invited and were flown to the events. The Home Week involved travel from remote parts of Australia to the city at considerable expense to the organisation. Over the course of my fieldwork I attended two of these events. Here I give an account of the first day of one such Home Week.

The meeting is held in a convent turned convention centre, the ecclesiastical exterior of the building giving way to familiar looking meeting rooms inside. A lectern sits at one end of the room, and next to it a large whiteboard, above that a retractable screen and accompanying projector affixed to the ceiling some metres back. The room is interspersed with hexagonal tables, each encircled by plastic blue chairs, with spare chairs stacked against the wall. In the centre of each table sits a disposable plastic plate with grapes, nuts, dried fruit and sweets. Unusually, also on the table are a number of small stones, one for each chair, one for every participant. We take our seats and the morning begins with an acknowledgement of country by a senior manager, one that departs from the norm of acknowledgements (see Kowal 2015a:88–89), by recognising both traditional owners of the Sydney area, as well as Warlpiri and other Indigenous groups involved with GPD's work around the country.[51] Following this, the senior manager makes the symbolism of the stones clear:

> The rocks in front of you are there to signify your troubles. Before we start, I want you to take them outside, to leave them behind so that we can focus on the week at hand.

In the same manner as a sorcerer who sucks a foreign stone from an ailing patient, we must remove the rocks, incongruous as they are with the designated space of the meeting. We take them outside and place them on the grass in the centre of the courtyard, as if placing flowers on a grave. Most of us stand still for a moment, gazing at the sky or the ground with a dutiful pensiveness.

The day continues with presentations from each project team, beginning with the staff from the Central Australian GPD childhood project. They set up as if on an interview panel or talk show, with the program manager asking questions of each of the staff on how the project is travelling in each community. The responses are uniformly positive: the governance groups are showing signs of increased empowerment and children are increasingly school-ready due to the playgroup service. Or, in the communities where a regular playgroup is not functioning, the community is showing signs that *that* goal will soon be fulfilled. The discussion shifts to a recent nationwide meeting, known as SNAICC (Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care), that the Central

[51] The "acknowledgement of country" is a common practice before meetings in Australia, where participants acknowledge the Indigenous traditional owners of the land on which they meet, often noting "elders past and present."

Australia team, including myself, had recently attended, along with many Warlpiri women. The reviews presented here are glowing, one team member mentioning the "great keynote speakers" on the first day (but see chapter seven), and how much the Warlpiri women enjoyed the trip. The positivity is absolute. One staff member later commented to me that she had wanted to say that she did not, in fact, enjoy the SNAICC conference at all, but she did not "want to be the negative one."[52]

After this, we move to the theme of "valuing people," which has been previously identified through an employee survey as an area in which staff felt the organisation could improve. In an attempt to address this, we break into small groups, each equipped with a large sheet of butcher's paper and marker pens in a variety of colours. We write "VALUE" in capital letters down the centre of the page and then form an acrostic poem using the letters. My group produces the following piece:

Recognising di**V**ersity
Emp**A**thy
Ce**L**ebrate each other's success
Understanding
Journ**E**y

Our poem complete, I am instructed by the facilitator of the activity to take the poster to the front of the room and stick it to the wall with "blu-tack" adhesive, an action the other groups soon follow. Once all the acrostics are on display, each staff member is asked to go to the front of the room and place a dot, using a marker pen, next to the "value phrase" that "resonates most strongly" with them. When this process is complete, the most popular value words—the words with the most dots—are collated and written on one piece of butcher's paper that is

[52] Most *Kardiya* GPD staff I spoke with in fact did not seem to enjoy this conference. This was largely due to the fact that they felt responsible for the Warlpiri women who joined on the trip and found their demands onerous. In addition, some suspected that some of the Warlpiri women were not particularly interested in the conference and were more interested in going shopping—perhaps unsurprising given the near total lack of retail outlets in Warlpiri communities.

placed centrally and above all the others. It is presented as the distillation and outcome of all of *our* work on "valuing people." Only one of our phrases makes the cut: "recognising diversity." We are further instructed to get back into our teams, and to use these chosen values to "come up with something that the Australia Program could do to show value." The suggestions we offer up are congruent with the exercise and its emphasis on working together, on teamwork and sharing. For instance: "praise each other's strengths everyday," "share what you are doing with the rest of the team," and "make time for team meetings." This is the culmination of the exercise, but these suggestions, the facilitator informs us, will be added to the "action plan" that will then be initiated across all levels of the Australia Program.

Furthering the theme of "value," we are next given a craft project to complete by the end of the week: we should each trace our own hand onto a piece of cardboard, cut the outline with scissors, and use the hand-shaped cut-out to create a piece of art that demonstrated "how you were valued and how you value others." We are offered "glitter, paint and other stuff" to assist in our adornment. The hands are decorated in a variety of ways. Some attach the items provided: brightly coloured feathers and paper butterflies, others draw pictures of flowers and trees and festoon with glitter. My own is mostly composed of some friendly phrases in both English and Warlpiri. The hands are due to the facilitators mid-week so that there will be time to affix them to a canvas; on the last day the bricolage will be presented to the head of the Australia Program, to sit on the wall of her office. The kindergarten-style project seems to mimic the child focus of the organisation as a whole.

Later that same afternoon, we undertake a session in imagining the future of GPD in Central Australia. We do a visualisation exercise, facilitated by a manager.

> Shut your eyes and imagine that in five years' time, GPD has won "the cultural competence award." What does this look like? What does the office look like? What do you feel, what do you see?

Participants come up with the following answers, which go on the whiteboard:

- GPD staff are undergoing training in Indigenous languages
- Indigenous concepts form strong features of program design
- Diversity within GPD is valued
- Indigenous GPD board members
- You call the Alice Springs office, and the phone is answered in Warlpiri
- Recognition of awkward truths of the past
- Home Week is held in Alice Springs, not Sydney
- Services are driven and run by community
- An identity shift for GPD – child sponsorship is problematic
- More RAP (Reconciliation Action Plan) activities.[53]

The imagined future here is one of an organisation that is fully inclusive of Indigenous culture; the phone is now answered in an Indigenous language, not English. Notably, some of the suggestions here are more concrete and substantial than the poems that emerged under the theme of "valuing people" and in the months that followed the AP Gathering, some were taken up: we began reciting Warlpiri words in team meetings, and, in an example of one meeting producing yet another, the next AP Gathering was indeed held in Alice Springs. As I will show, however, in the main the contributions of staff—whether potentially useful suggestions, like learning an Indigenous language, a critical insight, such as pointing out some of the problems with child sponsorship (see chapter seven), or a feel-good bromide ("journey")—are all parsed into forms of institutional "happy talk" (Bell and Hartmann 2007:895). As Yasushi Uchiyamada has noted in his study of a Japanese development agency, in such contexts, words become "mere vibrations of recurring motifs" (2004:18).

[53] Reconciliation Action Plans are programs put in place by many organisations across private, public and non-profit sectors in Australia to "provide a framework for organisations to create social change and economic opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians" (see Reconciliation Australia 2017).

The motifs here, of teamwork, togetherness and participation, are iteratively pursued by the organisation through the form of the meeting itself. The organisation aims to hear every voice, and both the meeting and its outcomes are intended to be the collective product of all the team members. But it is precisely through the emphasis on working together, on hearing every voice, that voices become silenced. I argue that the meeting is what Sara Ahmed would call a "non-performative': while attempting to produce participation, it does precisely the opposite. As Ahmed has argued, words of commitment can be easily uttered if they are "emptied of force" and there is nothing behind them (Ahmed 2012:127). Staff suggestions on what the organisation might do are drowned in the relentless pursuit of participation through institutional "happy talk" and the overarching theme for the week: "Learn Together, Grow Together, Walk Together."

Situationally relative subjects

The stones cast out at the beginning of the week were unambiguous in their exorcising of forms of negativity from the proceedings to follow. But, like the sorcerer's trick, not all were convinced. The relentless positivity of Home Week jarred with many staff. Despite the inclusive tasks, most staff felt alienated by the Home Week process, saw it as largely irrelevant to their real work, and lacking in concrete meaning. As I neared the end of my fieldwork, I asked a number of GPD staff members who had attended Home Week to offer their opinion on the event.

> Look, I've gone to, I think it must be six, or five; I think they are incredibly valuable. Alice [Springs] is a little tiny office in GPD, you can feel very isolated and not connected and not feel that you have that network to draw on, so when you meet those individuals face-to-face, it changes the dynamic, and makes you realise that you do have access to a whole range of skillsets, it's really good in that face-to-face aspect of networking.
>
> Joy, a facilitator working in Warlpiri communities

I don't particularly like them, but I do get the gist of them. There have been some sessions that I go to, where I think, "This is not for me." Sometimes, I attend things, and I think, "I would be better off just going and getting a coffee." Some people say "You've given me so much knowledge and information," but I think, "Well, I haven't gained anything." I would rather be on the ground, but I know in sessions like that other people gain information. And hey, it's a free trip to the city, I get to visit my friends and have days off before and after. It is nice to have get-togethers, and to get to know your team.

Ben, a facilitator working in Warlpiri communities

Bloody Home Week! Home Week was probably a reflection of the space within the Australia Program more generally. There's some sort of anxiety from management about dealing with anything negative, so they were persistently shutting down that space, and only providing space for things to be warm and fuzzy, in various opportunities where the program came together, either in Home Weeks, or other kind of meetings. That was a recurring thing, there wasn't space to bring up issues really. I think it was just that management team, they probably didn't have the experience in being able to work in things that people weren't happy with.

Peter, a monitoring and evaluation specialist based in Brisbane:

Absolute waste of time. Like, cutting out those hands, and putting [them on a canvas and presenting them to the CEO] how does that honestly help? The reality is that everyone goes back to Alice Springs or [other areas where GPD run projects] and complains about GPD, there is very little professional development that comes out of that, when we talk about actions to follow up, none of it really happened. Some of the guys were just happy to get to the city so they could do some shopping, eat good food, one less trip out to community for some of them. Waste of time and waste of money. People were too scared to say stuff because [senior management] was there. [People were saying] "It's great to catch up,

> maybe we should have weekly or fortnightly catch ups." Everyone was just saying all the right things, but it didn't mean anything at all.
>
> Maria, an office-based staff member in Alice Springs:

> For me a lot of conversations didn't really feel like they were grounded in the reality of the work we do, and everyone was kind of negative about management, basically, from [a number of the project teams]. And I felt like maybe management, they were very like, patting themselves on the back, and all this over-enthusiastic stuff, which is really important. But it didn't feel so good, when people were feeling deflated and my colleagues were feeling a bit upset. And I think that doing two of them a year is so much time away from the work that we actually do, and it feels a bit indulgent, and I gave that feedback on the thing too, maybe once a year would be great to get to know the faces, to learn. Some of these big NGOs are very reflective, and it's kind of like, "Alright already, let's just do our work." Well maybe that was the issue, that there was this disingenuous kind of vibe. "Learn together, grow together, walk together." But who cares really? Let's go and do our work!
>
> Jennifer, a facilitator working in Warlpiri communities:

I have presented my account of Home Week in a duet with staff responses to demonstrate how the meeting was constituted as an event of some significance by participants, separated from regular work (Kapferer 2010:18), and generally disliked. Helen Schwartzmann has argued that meetings are a way to produce the organisation (1987:288), and here, GPD enacted its own community development narrative by insisting upon the inclusion of the voices of all staff through their participation in the meeting process. The groups we were divided into were not based on our positions as managers, facilitators, administration staff or indeed ethnographers; organisational hierarchy was temporarily flattened (in theory at least), and each of us was to give our input based on nothing more than our status as team members. The event repeatedly asked for staff reflections and insights, which were then written down and fixed to the wall at the front of the room, an attempt to physically and graphically enact the importance of participatory practices.

Home Week was also an attempt at "producing the organisation" as an epistemic network. Recall in chapter two that the search for "what works" in projects aimed at Indigenous disadvantage was framed as an epistemological problem. Once we know "what works," we can document and reproduce it, in a culturally appropriate way, across a variety of contexts. Home Week brought together different project teams to share "learnings." The Home Week meeting thus attempted to produce a network where knowledge was disseminated between people and project teams. Joy—the first respondent cited above—was generally enthusiastic about Home Week, and her account of Home Week was in line with imagining the organisation as producing a network of shared knowledge and best practice.

Joy's enthusiasm around the event was the exception. Most staff found the "warm and fuzzy" discourse of the event grating and disingenuous. Home Week was separate from work, not a microcosm of organisational practice but largely viewed as a contrived distraction. The fact that staff persisted in referring to the event as Home Week in spite of the official name change to "Australia Program Gathering" was perhaps a small act of resistance against the tightly controlled discourse of the event, revealing "the personality that remains resistant to the hegemonic order" (Lea 2008:31; see also Munro 2001:635). The meeting produced the organisation, but it also produced a kind of complaint which suggested arduous efforts taking place elsewhere (Mansbridge 1973; Schwartzmann 1989:9). This repeat refrain also had a performative component. The staff responses were themselves ritualistic.

Ben, quoted above, suggests that such meetings have little value in terms of "knowledge and information" and that he would prefer to be "on the ground." The orientation of "the ground" or "community" as the site at which the real, practice-based work gets done provides a platform from which facilitators, the lowest ranked full-time staff, can recuperate a form of authority against that of senior managers. The space for this authority is opened up by the paradoxical form of hierarchy proffered by the organisation itself: the strategic, "meta-level of planning" (Munro 1999:624) was located with senior managers in capital cities on the east coast of Australia, but the organisation also emphasised control and governance by Warlpiri people, located in Central Australian communities. Senior managers living in capital cities could not claim mastery over Indigenous people as a "field of expertise" (Michel 2016:35). Facilitators were closer to the ground, closer to the real, and maintained this form of "being there" authority.

As Schwartzmann (1987:273) has pointed out, the idea that meetings are "tedious and ineffective," and subsidiary to the overall goals of the organisation, is by now well established. However, while staff offered critiques of Home Week in interviews, no such objections were voiced during the meetings, or even outside of them, in pubs or restaurants around Sydney where we met for drinks following a day of Home Week activities. As Lea has argued, meetings entail "unbearable pressure for agreement exacted by the polite force of the gathering itself" (2008:101). Interaction methods themselves, in spite of including a multitude of voices, end up manufacturing a consensus (Lea 2008:100–103). In the case of the GPD meetings the presence of management was noted by interviewees as a factor in the unwillingness of participants to disrupt the mellifluous flow of the meeting with a discordant point of view. In line with Lea, I contend that this cannot be understood only as an outcome of managerial oversight but was sustained by the conventionalised interactions of group members. As none of us was willing to "be the negative one," the participatory process itself regulated behaviour.

My interview responses show that this process was not immutable. In his study of grant evaluation meetings, Donald Brenneis also notes that participants enact their own self-discipline in terms of "situational participation rather than necessarily being irreversibly transformed into an agent of the state" (1994:32–3). It is not the panoptic gaze of managers that regulates behaviour but what Uchiyamada (2004:15) calls "auto-kinetically generated productive power"; auto-kinetic because it is not an external power pressing upon staff members, but is generated through their interactions. Thus, this is a different kind of "hidden transcript" to the one famously portrayed by James Scott as being held by slaves and peasants in imaginative acts of resistance *vis-à-vis* the hegemonic "public transcript" (1990:4). Where Scott nestles such transcripts within broadly enduring, stable structural relationships, the apparent concordance in views I have described here are mediated by the sociality of the immediate interaction itself, rather than a structural relationship between manager and staff member. Participation has been critiqued as a new form of tyranny (Cooke and Kothari 2001), but I argue for a situationally relative approach.

The "action plan"—essentially a distillation of the meeting minutes—that emerged out of our Home Week sessions was eventually written up into a document by an administrative staff member in Sydney and emailed to all staff, but it had little discernible impact upon the day-to-day work of the Central Australia project team in the months that followed. When compared with the action plan, other concerns were much more significant in shaping the project: relationships with other service providers, shifts in funding arrangements, or changes in staffing. If we follow GPD staff consensus that nothing of value to the work is accomplished in such meetings (see also Schwartzmann 1981:80), there is a temptation to pursue a kind of classic anthropological functionalism. If we take the privileged view that meetings (like witchcraft) cannot possibly *work* in the way that managers say they do, they must express some other social value, as myths or ceremony (see Meyer and Rowan 1977).

Certainly, meetings do act as rituals that imagine the organisation as a kind of participatory network of shared knowledge. But rather than pursuing the meeting as a kind of organisational incantation, I want to return to the non-performative, in viewing the meeting as something that fails to do what it says it does (Ahmed 2012:113). Ahmed is concerned with commitments to the value of "diversity" within academic institutions, whereby the non-performative commitments to diversity end up masking ongoing forms of discrimination. "How can we be racist if we are committed to equality and diversity?" she asks (Ahmed 2012:116), pointing to the ways in which written commitments to diversity can be used to signify that the problem—a lack of diversity—has already been solved (2012:121). Given that such problems are in fact ongoing, such commitments can work to "hinder rather than enable action" (Ahmed 2006:110).

To apply this to the ethic of participation that is espoused in the meeting I have outlined, it is evident that precisely through the pursuit of a "warm and fuzzy" participation discourse, the organisation fails to achieve it. Participatory discourse here in fact produces staff complaints where the whole process was "disingenuous" (Jennifer) or "didn't mean anything at all" (Maria). While Ahmed points to institutions that claim problems are already solved, in the case of Global Partners in Development, the process of participation is not complete and is always ongoing. Pushed into the future, it still functions as an effective shield against critique. To explicitly claim that the task is already solved might invite the accusation that it is not. Conversely, to claim it is still a future-perfect work in progress allows for the capacity to incorporate critique, and to work harder at achieving genuine participation.

To argue that meetings are systematically non-performative has important implications for a project that aims at Indigenous and specifically Warlpiri participation. Recall that the regulation that occurred at Home Week was not fundamentally the outcome of managerial oversight but was rather the format for participation in the event at all. Ahmed notes that racism is often perceived as the outcome of something that the organisation has *failed* to do (2006:107). Applying this to the Home Week event I have described, one could make the point that GPD had indeed failed to invite any Warlpiri people to the event. GPD has since sought to rectify this by including part-time Warlpiri staff in Home Week. And yet, I have described the participatory activities of the Home Week event as largely non-performative: they produced alienation among most *Kardiya* staff. In turn, the question becomes not one of simply asking whether Warlpiri get to participate or not but pursuing what it means for Warlpiri to participate in non-performative space.

Meeting two: The Warlpiri governance group

GPD did employ some Indigenous, full-time staff who attended the Home Week event I have described, but they were not Warlpiri. There were no *Yapa* invited, no "community people," where "community" is the counterpoint to the development organisation. The form of the relentlessly participatory network I have outlined at Home Week served as a kind of ideal model that was reproduced in other meeting settings (see also Lea 2008:114). Consider, for instance, the agenda (written on a whiteboard) from a smaller meeting, named the "Hearing Our Voices Workshop" held later in the same year in Alice Springs, including both *Kardiya* and *Yapa* staff of the organisation:

Hearing Our Voices: Expectations

- Create a team story
- Share learnings
- Team-building
- Establish processes for working together, supporting each other and communicating
- Share backgrounds
- Share history and knowledge
- Clarification of management roles

The final point here—clarification of management roles—is something of an outlier. All of the others emphasise working as a team, sharing knowledge, establishing better communication, and learning from each other. The team-building exercises in meetings were also frequently reproduced. Twice—once in Alice Springs and once in a Warlpiri community—we undertook an exercise involving multiple balloons. It is scripted as follows: the inflated balloons are thrown in the air and the group works together to keep the balloons from floating to the ground by batting them upwards towards the ceiling. One by one, the facilitator of the activity removes participants from the exercise until just one is left, struggling in vain to keep all the balloons afloat while other participants watch on. “What does that tell us?” the facilitator asks the group, after the exercise, and in turn receives the expected responses: “No one can do that on their own,” and “We all worked together.” Similar team exercises played out with other props; a ball of yarn forming a network (also used to demonstrate brain development in chapter two) and in one more elaborate case, a maypole with ribbons attached, woven together in a concerted team effort.

The model of the Home Week meeting is also replicated through the Warlpiri governance groups that were formed in all four communities in which GPD was operating. These groups discussed a variety of issues around early childhood: examples might include the designation of office spaces in the new “child and family centre,” for instance, or the scheduling of an incoming visit of a childhood nutritionist, or how playgroup arrangements might reflect intra-community conflicts, or an upcoming interstate “study trip” for *Yapa* staff to visit other early childhood facilities. The governance group members, almost exclusively women, were there to offer a voice for the community, and this voice had to be Warlpiri. The groups were perhaps the most concrete manifestation of the community development ethos that GPD followed, an attempt at ensuring Warlpiri governance over the project and over early childhood related issues into the future.

I attended seven such governance group meetings over the course of my research, in two Warlpiri communities. GPD sanctioned languages were prevalent here, too. To give one example, at one governance group meeting in Mulga Flat, the group was preparing a presentation to be given at SNAICC, the national early childhood conference that they were attending in Cairns, later in the same month. Kate, the *Kardiya* facilitator, asked the group what they wanted to say to the audience in Cairns. Margaret, usually the most vocal woman in the group, offered the following response:

> We want to carry on and be strong. It’s all about working together, respecting each other, growing our own young people. [We’re] not going to stop anybody, come along, you’re welcome, you are part of governance group if you want to be.

We do not need to question Margaret's sincerity and commitment to working with children to note that she seemed well versed in the language of "togetherness," inviting others to join the group in line with the "happy talk" of GPD meetings. The adoption of phatic interaction methods is not so significant in itself; the participants of Home Week, including myself, also adopted such language when in the space of the meeting. The significance here is that the inclusion of Warlpiri is in part because they are different, because they offer a cultural input that *Kardiya* cannot provide. As per the community development narrative, Warlpiri participants in these meetings were expected to occupy a stable subject position *as Warlpiri* rather than adopting—or being impacted at all by—the forms of socialisation that are inherent to the meeting space. And yet, not—it was acknowledged by *Kardiya* GPD staff that some of the governance groups were indeed better versed in how such meetings should run, and these groups were those who contained Warlpiri women who already had long and significant engagements with similar bureaucratic forms, on committees and governance groups for other organisations. These "strong" governance groups were also the ones located in the larger Warlpiri settlements with a greater intensity of bureaucratic engagements. Warlpiri too learn to do "bureaucratic things" (Brenneis 1994:33).

GPD staff were aware that the space of the meeting itself could impact upon kinds of subjectivity, but this played out in terms of the *Kardiya/Yapa* division. For example, on one occasion, I was asked not to attend a governance group meeting because there may have been "too many *Kardiya"* at the meeting and in these circumstances Warlpiri would be less likely to speak up. Indeed, one *Kardiya* staff member from another childhood-focused organisation complained that, initially, GPD had barred her and others from entry into the space of the governance group meetings, as GPD wanted to preserve it as a *Yapa* space. This can be seen as an effort to guard against the "unwitting, cannibalizing character of colonizer subjectivities in Australia" (Land 2015:131 citing Watson 2005). At the same time, the staff member noted that this seemed to go against the purpose of the group, which was to offer advice and governance over early childhood related matters. Eventually, GPD relaxed their stance, stating that the group was now "strong enough" to accommodate multiple *Kardiya.* Still, *Kardiya* from other organisations were often cycled through governance group meetings individually, only being allowed into the room for the agenda item that specifically related to them and their organisation, and leaving once that discussion was complete. At the same time, Warlpiri participants frustrated the desire of *Kardiya* staff that the space be entirely Warlpiri, or at least Warlpiri initiated and controlled. It was well established within GPD that such governance group meetings only occurred when a *Kardiya* staff member undertook organisational duties, which included providing food, preparing the meeting agenda, and driving group members to and from the meeting. Without such concessions, *Kardiya* assumed that the meetings would not be attended and, moreover, that *Yapa* would not undertake these tasks of their own accord.

What is the utility of characterising the space of the meeting as either fundamentally *Yapa* or *Kardiya*? To begin, the notion that Indigenous people might themselves stylise their interactions depending on the situation is well established by anthropological literature (see Trigger 1992:223-4). In his 1980 ethnography of "fringe camps" in Darwin, Basil Sansom documents one residential "mob" of people with their "roan style" (own style). Sansom argues that such mobs cannot comprehend "whole selves," but rather are composed of those aspects of the self that are yielded to the mob while members are in "active association" (1980:137). This is perhaps not dissimilar to the observation that in bureaucratic organisations, participants present only their role, rather than the totality of their selves (Maravelias 2003:552). In another example, Fred Myers (1986) notes that Pintupi people—who neighbour the Warlpiri—suppress debate and dissent in meetings, as sustaining the occasion itself is more important than any outcome. For the Pintupi, the point of the meeting is to sustain relatedness (Myers 1986:444). This bears similarity to the Home Week meeting I have described above, in which the *Kardiya* staff tended to "say all the right things" (Maria), while harbouring a "hidden transcript" of opposition to the Home Week.

To rest upon racial identities, where race is the "determinate constitutive factor of subjectivity" (Alcoff 2006:183) is no longer adequate when we consider the "auto-kinetic" interactions of the meeting space itself. Why would we expect that Warlpiri would be somehow unaffected by these norms of interaction? To paraphrase Ahmed (2006:120) again, because Warlpiri are different, by including them in the institution GPD also aims to "have" this difference thus fulfilling the participatory, inclusive ethic of the organisation. For the purposes of organisational legitimacy, Warlpiri must remain always, immutably Warlpiri. The problem with this type of reasoning is that it moves the analysis offsite, to a consideration only of who bears Warlpiri cultural difference and who brings a colonising identity, and thus runs the risk of glossing over the socialisation that takes place in the meeting space itself. It locates participants in those meetings within existing categories of colonisers, colonised, or perhaps expressing something pre-colonial. And as such, it glosses over detailed ethnographic examination of institutional processes.

Moreover, the governance groups that GPD facilitated were not particularly novel in Warlpiri communities. Lily, whom I cite below, participated in six similar groups with different organisations and Margaret, cited above, named eight committees or groups on which she sat. Below I recount an interaction that took place in a governance group meeting in Mulga Flat, the final meeting for the year, with predominantly Warlpiri participants. The example is telling as it involves a moment of dissent, an unusual breach of group dynamics in meetings that usually ran smoothly. Lily, a senior member of the group, wants to expand the governance group to include more people, particularly men, as the group moves into the role of governing a soon-to-be-built "Child and Family centre." She has already raised this point twice in the meeting, but it has thus far been ignored as the discussion quickly turned to other topics. Lily has experience on multiple governance groups in Mulga Flat, most of which include both men and women.

Lily: If we want men to be involved, we gotta talk to them. Our governing bodies, it's got to be a man and a woman. Up in the Top End [the tropical, northern part of the Northern Territory], they've got man and woman.

Evelyn: We want to keep this group women only.

Lily: But it can't just be woman on the governance body. Early childhood, that's women. But we're talking about a community governance body [so] we can have men. Men don't need to be involved in early childhood or anything like that, but they can be involved in the governance body.

Here Lily acknowledges that early childhood staff working at the playgroup and in childcare tend to be women. But she differentiates between the workspaces of early childhood services and the governance body itself. Evelyn, another Warlpiri woman, disagrees and this is followed by a prolonged silence. No one appears to agree with the assertion that men should also join the group.

Lily: [Now visibly upset] I might not able to be involved in this next year, because I'll be busy with [another local organisation focused on youth].

Evelyn: We gotta all throw our voices in.

Lily: Next year I gotta work with [another organisation]. Teenagers who need proper support. I gotta put my resignation, this is my last meeting, I gotta work with teenagers next year. I'll be working with [another organisation] next year.

[more silence]

Lily: I'll be working with my husband.

Aviva, the *Kardiya* facilitator and GPD staff member, attempts to intervene, while not entirely shutting down the call for the inclusion of men:

Aviva: So, you've been saying it's important that we put all our voices in. But we also need a group that involves men.

Louise, another *Kardiya* present at the meeting but not employed by GPD, follows this up:

> Louise: Have a think about how the community can all have a say in that [child and family centre]. That's really the important thing.
>
> Evelyn: Give a chance for other people to speak.
>
> Lily: I won't be working with early childhood next year; I'll be working with the young people who need proper support.
>
> Aviva: We need to keep moving on. Next year, when we're fresh and strong, we can talk about this stuff.

What is evident in this example is that Lily was only directly challenged once on her view that men should be included, by Evelyn. Beyond that, Lily's gauntlet was rebuffed through reiterations of the value of hearing a multitude of voices. Aviva noted that "it's important *we all put our voices in*." Louise reinforced this point, encouraging Lily and the group to "think about how the community can *all have a say* in that centre," a response that further smothered her dissent. This was in spite of the fact that thinking about how different people "can have a say" in the centre was precisely what Lily's point on including men was concerned with. Evelyn added another iteration of the same point: "Give other people a chance to speak." And with the exception of Evelyn, the other Warlpiri women were silent. Finally, Aviva moved the conversation along, unresolved, and the issue was deferred to another meeting in the future.

In her writing on diversity and inclusion, Sara Ahmed speculates that when something is the responsibility of "everyone," "everyone" can quickly translate into "no one" (2012:136). "Everyone" serves as a valuable abstraction because it refers to no one in particular. Similarly, in the example above, the value of hearing from "everyone" was used to suppress an actual voice; we do not want to hear *your* voice, we want to hear *every* voice. This does not mean that individuals cannot speak, but that participation is premised upon particular kinds of agreed-upon interaction. Even Lily's critique was framed in terms of inclusion and her belief of the need to hear from Warlpiri men. Although it was resisted here, this point was not beyond the realms of possibility, as GPD did run governance groups in other communities that did, very occasionally, include men as members. A more significant disruption to the meeting space itself was Lily's signalled resignation, which threatened a withdrawal from participation that countered the function of the meeting, and in that sense, challenged the claim that it was inclusive. The threat of withdrawal was thus met with yet more emphasis on the importance of participation. The meeting "refuses to hear complaint in the very moment it says that it does hear complaint" (Ahmed 2006:111).

The day after the meeting I went to visit Lily at her home in Mulga Flat and asked to interview her about her involvement in the group. She informed me that she had decided to retract her resignation and would continue to sit on the governance group in the coming year. I asked her why she felt she had to resign the day before:

> Lily: If you want to talk about particular things, some of the ladies didn't agree with me, so I was a bit upset about that. There's not much agreement [in that group]. Not many agreeing with each other. Sometimes makes us feel that we don't belong in that group.
>
> Drew: Why don't you think there is much agreement?
>
> Lily: I think there are a lot of struggles, because it's a big challenge, you have to keep on talking, talking, talking strong, until you finally come to where you reach your goal. But sometimes it's just very hard when you just keep on talking, [and] we're still where we don't have what we want. You know like all these diagrams that they put up, "we want to do this, we want to do that" and it doesn't happen. You get so stressed and you don't know where these things are going to lead you.
>
> Drew: Where do you think it is going to lead you?
>
> Lily: [Appearing irritated] I just don't really know what they're really working on. I just need more understanding of what's really there, being part of this

group. I just don't really understand, I just know that we go to meetings and talk about everything that we really need to talk about, but I still don't understand. If someone can tell me.

The final comment here speaks to multiple ambiguities. The first is that the GPD project did community development and provided "support" without actually running any services. Avoiding "intervention" meant that what GPD was actually *doing* was unclear. Moreover, the comment demonstrates what participation in a non-performative amounts to, where the concrete outcomes of the meeting are indeterminate and difficult to trace. Her response here is, in a way, similar to that of the *Kardiya* staff I cited earlier, who found that the Home Week meetings were nearly meaningless, a lot of talk, and ultimately separated from the real work, from real action and outcomes. Most *Kardiya* staff, like Lily, were alienated by the meetings. Lily's comment that "there is not much agreement" in the governance group was surprising to me, as I had observed multiple such groups in Mulga Flat and Lily's was the first instance of obvious discord. Lily here is neither master manipulator of incoming institutions, nor a colonised subjectivity, nor has her Warlpiri-ness caused some problem for the project. Instead, she has run up against participation as a non-performative.

Conclusion: The incorporation of critique

In her study of White anti-racists in the Northern Territory, Emma Kowal (2015a:143) notes that "the charge of 'missionary' is a serious one to make against a White anti-racist." This is a reference to the various missions set up around Australia throughout the colonial period that aimed to convert Aboriginal people to forms of Christianity. Kowal goes on to state that

> comparing someone to a missionary implies that they are imposing their belief system on Indigenous people, and that their failure to respect Indigenous culture will have deleterious effects (2015:144).

Recall that a similar—if more formal and kindly worded—charge was made against the GPD project. Through their interviews, the external evaluation team revealed that many Warlpiri had suggested that Global Partners in Development needed to pursue a "two-way" approach that was more inclusive of the *Yapa* way. This implication that the organisation was failing to include that *Yapa* way was not restricted to the formal evaluation team. On occasion, Warlpiri people called for inclusion of the *Yapa* way in meetings that I attended, for instance, in terms of how employment obligations could be reconciled with *Yapa* kinship demands. Certainly, GPD took this seriously and began further consultations with Warlpiri, in addition to increasing the amount of time spent "in community" by *Kardiya* facilitators. At the same time, the implication that the project was failing at including Warlpiri culture was not cause for fundamental soul searching about the nature of intervention in Aboriginal communities. It was, rather, absorbed into existing discourses that stressed working together and hearing from a multitude of voices.

The critique is an undoubtedly meaningful and important one, and yet it is also strangely practiced and anticipated. It is a critique that the organisation must accept, particularly if it comes from Warlpiri, for there is no clear method of measuring cultural inclusion (see chapter four). Because it signals an indeterminate "Indigenous culture" that *Kardiya* cannot possibly ever really know (Povinelli 2002:58), there is always more that can be done in terms of including Indigenous culture. If Indigenous culture is somewhat unknowable, it will never be clear whether the project is itself entirely culturally appropriate. As I have argued, it is appropriate that *Kardiya* do not know everything about *Yapa* culture and it is unthinkable that they should somehow become *Yapa.* At this point, the critique that the organisation is fundamentally "Western" and not culturally appropriate loses its bite as it is incorporated into an institutional "politics of feeling good" (Ahmed 2006:121). As *Kardiya,* we must always attempt to include and make space for Indigenous culture. We must therefore always be committed to sharing, learning, working together, supporting each other, and communicating better. As with other development language, such statements appear banal. I do not wish to denounce attempts such as this at being “good white people” (Slater 2017:337) in the complex, colonised Central Australian space. But the “warm and fuzzy” discourse both invites critique and prevents that critique from having much effect by incorporating it into an existing project that suggests we always “Learn Together, Grow Together, Walk Together.”

I have argued this project of “working together,” when enacted in the meeting spaces of GPD, is non-performative. In this way, failure of participation is located within the discourse of participation itself or, in Ahmed’s terms, failure is not “external” to the non-performative (2006:105). In this case, it is not located at the point where the project meets Warlpiri cultural difference. Commonly, however, development and policy discourse in Australia locates the failure here: in the past, through the open denigration of Indigenous culture, now in terms of its valorisation, but in both cases, culture forms a challenge for the project, either a problem to be overcome or a solution to be accessed and unlocked.

The solutions to failures in producing participation themselves rest upon the *Yapa/Kardiya* binary that has been ubiquitous throughout this thesis. It is this difference that is supposedly so significant as to overcome the adoption of standardised interaction methods in meetings—*Yapa* are *Yapa* more than they are anything else. I have suggested in this chapter that both *Kardiya* and *Yapa* adopt particular stances in meeting settings, but for the development project to formally acknowledge this would be to partially undermine the process of hearing multiple voices. Difference cannot be seen to dissipate in particular social settings. The binary is maintained as per the internal logic of the development project. In the next chapter of this thesis, I consider how further binarisation is produced through the branding practice of the humanitarian organisation.

Chapter Seven: Framing the humanitarian brand

Introduction

As part of my role as a "volunteer-participant" I accompanied the Global Partners in Development Central Australia team and a number of Warlpiri women to the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) annual conference held in Cairns, in northern Queensland. On the first day of the conference, the attendees crowded into a large auditorium and were welcomed by Indigenous children from the region who performed a number of dances to the music of didgeridoos and clap sticks, with some unrehearsed dance moves reprimanded light-heartedly by their band leader, much to the delight of the crowd. Following this energetic performance, the National Children's Commissioner took to the stage to deliver the opening lecture. The commissioner announced a new project termed "The Big Banter," a tour around Australia to hear the views and opinions of children and young people. Immediately following the celebratory performances, her speech was memorable for its deficits-based representation of Indigenous youth. To a room full of Indigenous parents and children, she reeled off a number of statistics based on "The Gap" between Indigenous and non-Indigenous outcomes: that Indigenous children are eight times more likely to be the subject of neglect, 31 times more likely to be in detention, twice as likely to have a low birth weight, and have nearly twice the rate of infant mortality. She also noted that youth suicides have increased 160% in the Northern Territory. She concluded with a description of the small regional town of Bourke, which she had recently visited, noting that the young Indigenous people there "just walked around the street after school, getting in trouble with police" and suggesting that a McDonalds or other fast food restaurant could help the young people in the town, by offering employment and "access to cheap food."

At the conclusion of the speech, the Warlpiri women I was seated with did not comment—to me, at least—but the *Kardiya* staff were clearly uncomfortable with the presentation. One offered an apology to the Warlpiri women present. Another noted "that just sucked the energy out of the room" and that "this is not the right forum for that kind of talk." In particular, the presentation went against the GPD commitment to a "strengths-based" approach. The term "strengths-based" was used in a variety of ways by GPD staff. In terms of programming, it referred to the emphasis on building on the existing capabilities within Indigenous communities rather than attempting to rectify deficits. It also referred to the ways in which Indigenous people should be represented; when GPD fundraised for their Indigenous Australian programs, there was a particular emphasis on "strengths-based" imagery.

For instance, in the international programming group, GPD marketing staff told me that the word "help" would sometimes be used in fundraising material, in that GPD would "help" disadvantaged people. Conversely, in the Australia Program the organisation would only "support," "facilitate," "walk with," or "work alongside" Indigenous communities. Or, in the international programs, the influence of "culture" could be figured as negative—for instance, when "cultural acceptance" was culpable in the forced, early marriage of young girls in various parts of the world. In Australia, marketing material stressed that the problems "faced" by Indigenous communities were always the result of external influences: colonisation, racism, or bad government policy. Here, the success of any project was said to depend on the respectful inclusion of culture (see chapter six). However, like many humanitarian organisations, the GPD brand had a history of using imagery that was far from "strengths based," as they were well known for images of starving sufferers in the Global South.

This chapter examines the efforts of GPD to represent development subjects as dignified and with "strength" through the humanitarian GPD brand. Drawing on the work of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2004), I argue that the humanitarian brand hinges crucially on the cultivation of the affective, "immaterial labour" of the consumer. The commodification of children by the NGO through particular kinds of photographic representation is significant in forming this affective disposition, while also allowing the brand to exist in an ambiguous space between depicting need and strength, disempowerment and dignity. I argue that dignified representations are, however, prefigured and framed through the hegemony of the consumer within the productive network of the humanitarian brand. By offering the consumer a self-identification with the position of a donor, the brand does not simply connect donor and recipient but also constitutes and performs those positions.

Importantly, the consumer (or donor) in my analysis is not a living, speaking subject but is always partially imagined. GPD conducted market research to better understand their donors, and the donor disposition is both cultivated and anticipated by GPD marketing staff. I suggest that GPD staff produce humanitarian imagery in line with particular, recognisable norms (Butler 2009) which perform both the consumer and the represented subject not in terms of their lived experience but through the humanitarian brand. The ethnographic material I utilise here is primarily derived from the visit of a GPD communications team staff member to the Warlpiri community I refer to as "Sandy River." The purpose of this visit was to obtain photographs and interviews for use in GPD marketing. I document how this process is fundamentally shaped through engagement with an imagined consumer, and through existing brand values that are structured around the "sponsorship" of children in the Global South. However, the Warlpiri people in my study, when drawn into GPD brand discourse, problematise this framing by resisting the adoption of standardised humanitarian postures, subsequently breaking with the North/South divide upon which the brand has usually relied by identifying with the position of donor and not recipient.

Humanitarian imagery from compassion to dignity

Images of suffering and need have long been synonymous with the fundraising activities of humanitarian organisations. While "spectatorial sympathy" (Halttunen 1995:307) has a long history, the specific genre with which I am concerned has its beginnings around the 1950s, emerging in parallel with what Wolfgang Sachs (2010:xv) refers to as the "age of development," famously inaugurated in a speech by US President Harry Truman that divided the world into developed and underdeveloped (see also Escobar 1995:3). Lilie Chouliaraki cites paradigmatic campaigns by Oxfam in 1956 and Red Cross in 1961 that both relied on "raw realism to depict human bodies in an extreme state of starvation" (2010:110). These kind of "shock effect" (Chouliaraki 2010:107) images quickly became the stock-in-trade for humanitarian NGOs. Up until the 1980s, virtually all fundraising appeals by INGOs "showed 'negative' imagery characterised by helpless, passive, 'victim' depictions of Southern clients, particularly from Africa" (Dogra 2007:162). These images were prevalent enough to develop their own genre conventions: the "traumatised Madonna" of a "rail-thin" mother holding a "skeletal child" (Briggs 2003:179), or of the victimised, powerless and hungry child, seemingly deprived of any filial care (Burman 1994). Collectively, such images rely on "compassion," a "painful emotion occasioned by the awareness of another person's undeserved misfortune" (Hoijer 2004:514 citing Nussbaum 2001).

The presentation of skeletal figures demonstrates a lack of the literal necessities of life, pointing to an indisputable need. In such circumstances, the inaction of the viewer becomes a personal failure, and they become complicit in the perpetuation of suffering (Chouliaraki 2010:111). For instance, Susan Moeller (1999:9) cites an example that blatantly reproaches the audience with an image of a hungry child, and the statement "whether she lives or dies depends on what you do next." Similarly, Erica Burman documents NGO advertising that represents children as being held to ransom, a price that can be paid by the benevolent intervention of a donor (1994:247). In such circumstances, to act or not seems like no choice at all.

While these images are generally associated with the Global South, and particularly parts of Africa, depictions of extreme suffering have appeared in the context of Indigenous Australia. In 1957, the Australian politician William Grayden made a short film, titled as either *Their Darkest Hour,* or *Manslaughter,* which included images of sick and malnourished Ngaanyatjarra people in the Warburton ranges of Central Australia. While the film was not intended for widespread release, it brought the poor living conditions of some Ngaanyatjarra people to the attention of broader Australia (McGrath and Brooks 2010). The film was a prompt for governmental reform, but was also condemned by the Ngaanyatjarra people as a shameful and atypical representation of their lives (Lydon 2012:199–205). The last point highlights a significant problem with these kinds of portrayals, in that they are frequently disrespectful and disempowering for the people they depict.

Unflinching portraits of suffering and their accompaniment—the acute moral failure of inaction—began to fall out of favour from the mid-1980s. The most common critique of "compassionate" appeals has been that they fail to address real social justice (Bradley 2005; Briggs 2003:180; Chouliaraki 2010:107–114; 2013:11; Fassin 2012:8; Nussbaum 2003:12; Wells 2013). Compassionate framings of hungry children or desperate mothers subsume their identities within an "anonymous corporeality" (Malkki 1996:388 citing Feldman 1994), that serves to "muffle, displace and pulverize history" (Malkki 1996:389). By presenting people as manifestations of raw, needy humanity, compassionate appeals privilege the relationship with the viewer as the donor over the structural or historical conditions of the sufferer's life. The response is emotional and individuated rather than rational, addressing apolitical human need rather than the structural conditions that have produced neediness in the first instance (Bradley 2005:343; de Waal 1997:211).

Nandita Dogra points to the Ethiopian Famine of 1984-85 as an event that led to significant debates around the imagery of suffering in the Global South (Dogra 2007:162). Following this, a gradual shift took place within INGO imagery, from the disempowering presentations of victims, or "negative" appeals, to a "deliberate positivism" (Dogra 2007:163). Those in the "Third World" are now not depicted as victims but as people with their own agency and dignity (Chouliaraki 2010:112). This shift was evident at Global Partners in Development, which did have a history of "negative" appeals but now avoided such portrayals. Within the organisation, this was framed as a move from "needs-based" to "strengths-based" depictions. Style manuals and visual guidelines were explicit: people were not to be represented as disempowered victims.[54] GPD photography, in line with other NGOs, now depicted people in active rather than passive roles: reading, writing, farming, collecting water, or weaving (see Malkki 1995:10). Such images often also depicted apparatus or equipment of the type that was provided by GPD; a child writing in a schoolbook or filling a container from a pipe gushing clear water, presenting a visual cue for the viewer about the tangible impact of donated funds.

While appeals that hold a viewer to ransom have been replaced with those that invite their benefaction, I contend that there is no definitive break between needs- and strengths-based imagery, particularly as depictions of starving sufferers in the past continue to shade popular perceptions of humanitarian organisations like GPD. I suggest that the question of whether NGO imagery motivates social justice over compassion or not needs to be understood in the context of humanitarian branding. This chapter rests within what Chouliaraki (2013:6) has termed "the marketization of humanitarian practice."

The pursuit of funding has frequently been a topic of interest in studies of NGOs, when NGOs become donor driven (Sampson 2004) or accede to the priorities of the "international donor regime" (Bernal 2017:39). I have described structurally similar processes in Australia in chapter four. Because many NGOs rely on grants from various funding bodies, accounts of the impacts of NGO funding have typically focused on demonstrating accountability (Sullivan 2009), or forms of technical proficiency (Schuller 2007). The apparent malaise of "compassion fatigue" (Moeller 1999:2), the idea that media today is saturated with images of suffering that have numbed and curtailed our collective response, forces the marketing departments of NGOs to consider that potential donors may be less likely to help, having seen it all before (Hoijer 2004:529; see also Dyck and Coldevin 1992). At GPD, an acute issue loomed in that the revenue provided by traditional fundraising techniques—most significantly, child sponsorship—was gradually decreasing. This precipitated a move to what GPD called

[54] The exception to this was cases in which there was an exceptional and proximate cause for victimhood: a particular war or a natural disaster, for instance.

"supporter centricity," a phrase adapted from parallel terminology the private sector: "client centricity" or "customer centricity."

From sufferers to supporters

The organisational turn to supporter centricity appeared midway through my fieldwork at GPD. The implications of this shift were drawn out in an organisation-wide meeting, to which the Central Australia-based staff, including myself, phoned in via conference call. Crammed into the program manager's small office, we converged around her computer monitor so as to follow the accompanying PowerPoint slides. The presenter, based in the head office, began with an acknowledgement of country, although given the geographic dispersal of the participants in the conference call, it was necessarily non-specific: "an acknowledgement of all the country we're on across Australia, and of elders past and present." She went on to address the reason for the nation-wide meeting:

> We've already taken you through some of the high-level messages around supporter centricity. Today is about the detail. We've all grown up with [Global Partners in Development], doing child sponsorship. Up until six or seven years ago, we enjoyed support from the Australian public. But we've been losing market share, while other organisations have been gaining theirs. We've been very comfortable, and we've had a generous public.

A chart demonstrating market segmentation appeared onscreen. There are three categories:

> B2C – Business to Consumer
> B2B – Business to Business
> B2G – Business to Government

As the presenter discusses this, and with the microphone muted so that other conference-callers will not hear, one Alice Springs staff member expressed her distaste at the business-oriented language:

> It feels like I'm in an old economics lecture.

The presenter went on:

> We can't keep doing what we're doing—losing market share. We had three options: stay, compete, or grow. We have decided we want to grow our organisation, and we're hoping to achieve [new income targets] over the next five years. We've chosen a view of supporter centricity.

The next slide is revealed. On it, text summarising supporter centricity:

> We are best at placing the needs of our supporters at the heart of our organisation and in tailoring and giving solutions for them that are relevant, meaningful and transformational. We will reward their trust by delivering best practice effective programs and supporter experiences that inspire and delight.

At this point a senior manager in the head office interjects:

> As development professionals, I know some of this is difficult language. I know it is difficult to talk about being in competition. But think about it like this: while we exist for the field, we cannot exist without donors.

While NGOs and charities are ostensibly non-profit, as they seek donations from a beneficent general public as through marketing techniques, that public is increasingly imagined as consumers (Chouliaraki 2013:186). Indeed, the separation between the for-profit and non-profit sectors is increasingly blurred and there is no longer any clear division of labour between the two (Vestergaard 2008). Most of the GPD staff that were designated as "donor facing" (as opposed to "field-facing") and based in the head office did not come from backgrounds in humanitarian aid or development but rather communications, public relations and marketing. These professional categories crosscut the apparent boundary between the non- or for-profit sectors and employees move freely between the two. The professionalisation of development is thus not only evidenced through efforts to institutionalise and measure development practice (see Barnett 2005;

Hilhorst 2002), or the proliferation of degree programs in development studies at the university level, but also through the incorporation of other forms of professional practice into NGOs.

As the vignette above demonstrates, the language of supporter centricity jarred with the Central Australia-based staff. The presenter, using organisationally mandated terminology, attempted to offset this with creative adaptations of private sector speak: the organisation was to “grow,” rather than “compete” and consumers were repositioned as “supporters.” Indeed, the concept of competing with other NGOs for market share was a vexed issue for most of the staff I spoke with. Most staff did not see their careers as driven by material gains but more altruistic motives, and their goal was not to “grow market share” but, basically, to help disadvantaged people. The apparent binary between the “donor-facing” and “field-facing” sides of the organisation acts as a salve to these anxieties, as the donor-facing side is necessary to procure funds even if this means adopting a discourse derived from the private sector, while the field-facing side remains free to operate on humanitarian grounds. As the senior manager points out above, the issue of declining revenue is one of existential significance for the organisation. NGOs do projects, and projects require funding (Sampson 2004:16). Still, the donor- and field-facing sides of the organisation are not entirely discrete, or else why make the field staff sit through the presentation at all? Many of the Central Australia-based staff appeared to resent it. The move to supporter centricity seemed to establish an overarching framework for both sides of the organisation. The delivery of “best practice effective programs” is still to be pursued, but it is refigured as primarily a reward for the trust and benefactions of donors.

The organisation had shifted away from disempowering, shock-effect portrayals, and now sought to depict people in dignified postures. However, GPD continued to rely upon a fundamentally dyadic interaction between supporters, as relatively wealthy, and recipients, who require assistance. The acknowledgement that many NGOs derive a significant proportion of their funding through engagements with a broader consumer culture has resulted in the emergence of forms of humanitarian branding (Barnett 2005:725; Cottle and Nolan 2007:864; Vestergaard 2008:491), and GPD's move to "supporter centricity" is one example. Considering that humanitarian imagery is embedded in and constitutive of branding requires engagement with such imagery beyond its explicit content, beyond the question of whether it is dignified or disempowering in itself. Images remain significant, but it is necessary to examine such images through the brand practice in which they are embedded, a practice that relies crucially on the immaterial labour of the consumer as a donor.

The humanitarian brand as immaterial labour

The concept of immaterial labour is particularly associated with Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, although Maurizio Lazzarato (1996) originally coined the term. In their 2004 work *Multitude,* Hardt and Negri contend that immaterial labour has begun to displace the Marxist paradigm of industrial labour. Distinctive to immaterial labour is that it "creates immaterial products, such as knowledge, information, communication, a relationship, or an emotional response" (Hardt and Negri 2004:108). Under conditions of immaterial labour, the linear, Fordist assembly line is transformed into an indeterminate, distributed network—production does not take place only within factory walls, nor can it be measured by time inputs (Hardt and Negri 2004:113). Economic activity becomes coextensive with social life itself (Hardt and Negri 2004:94–113). Importantly, this means that "neither cultural nor material production are reducible to each other" (Giles 2016:85). Embodied feelings and interactions are rendered productive, and values are "put to work" (Lazzarato 1996:145). Consumers are no longer located at one end of a linear production process but are embedded within a networked mode of production.

The modern brand is perhaps the paradigmatic expression of immaterial labour, and it has been theorised in these terms by the sociologist Adam Arvidsson*.* Brands, Arvidsson argues, rely on the autonomous productivity of consumers to produce their own value (Arvidsson 2006:131–6; see also Lury 2004:9–10). Arvidsson (2006) offers the useful explanatory example of

Wedgwood cutlery, one of the earliest brands, which is worth quoting here. By marketing cutlery exclusively to the aristocracy in England, Wedgwood was the first to "put the aristocracy to work," attaching a brand to their lifestyles and bestowing it with particular values in British society (Arvidsson 2006:67). Consumers do not simply buy tools for eating, they buy the opportunity to participate in a high-end brand and a statement about their lifestyle. In turn, the value of the brand is not principally derived from the material process of making cutlery, but through the immaterial labour of consumers in the meaningful use of purchased products: consumers enhance the value of brands (Manning 2010:44). In this vein, brands seek to move away from selling just things to selling more enduring values, concepts, identities or personal cultures (Lury 2004:45). Paul Manning (2010:37) refers to this as the "ontological purification" of the brand from the product. For instance, numerous "luxury" brands today are not associated with any particular product, but rather the concept of luxury itself.

Of course, GPD does not market luxury, but the GPD brand takes a similar form in relying on the immaterial labour of consumers and mobilising their affective dispositions towards needy children. Approaching the humanitarian brand in terms of immaterial labour allows for two contributions to ongoing debates in this area. First, it negates the perceived tension in humanitarian fundraising between the market and the gift. Charitable donations, when figured as gifts, may be viewed as distinct from commodity-based, capitalist relations (Strathern 1997:295), leading to theorisations of humanitarian assistance as per the logic of the gift (see Bajde 2009). But the point of locating the humanitarian brand within consumerism is not to reveal the cold calculations of the market lurking beneath the surface of charitable giving. The most successful brands are seldom experienced as external impositions onto autonomous social lives, and as Bourdieu (1984) has amply demonstrated, consumption itself is constitutive in forming classed—and deeply felt—identities.

Second, approaching the brand in terms of immaterial labour illuminates questions around the ethics of representing subaltern people. The shift I have described, away from images of suffering and need, is undoubtedly important. However by examining the network of production within which humanitarian imagery is embedded, the straightforward move from depicting “need” to depicting “strength” is problematised, as well as the idea of a dignified representation, because those representations are always incomplete without the input of the consumer. The key “work” of the consumer is precisely to identify, through the humanitarian brand as a *donor,* a self-identification which is co-constituted though the designation of a worthy recipient. In this way, both the donor and the recipient are interpellated as a dyad by the brand.

While the images that GPD presented were no longer ostensibly disempowering, the dyad of donor and recipient continued to infer the category of need. For the GPD marketing staff, the evidence of a needy subject remained an important factor in the willingness of a supporter to donate. The needy subject lingers on, not through representations of suffering but through presenting the requirements of care and nurturance for children. At the same time, in their apparent health, vitality and potential for life, children fit within a “strengths-based” discourse. The semiotic malleability of children is productive for the NGO, and children are framed as the primary vectors of brand values.

Sponsor children as brand

> There are some things that are harder to fundraise for. People aren’t interested in giving emergency appeals for places like Syria, because they think it’s political. They think: “Why should we help them sort out their problems?” With [programs focused on Indigenous Australia] we have to recognise that some people think that Indigenous people already get too many government handouts. And fundraising for islands in the Pacific, they think: “I can swim to the bar and get daiquiris, so what’s the problem there?” But we can make more money on natural disasters. Early childhood is easy, because you can show photos of cute kids.

The quote above is derived from an interview with a member of the GPD marketing staff. While GPD seeks to fundraise for a diverse range of sufferers, the staff member here suggests that the volume of donations favours certain lives experiencing certain kinds of suffering. Wars in the Middle East are too political and complicated, and their citizenry's status as real victims is questionable. Indigenous Australians are supposed to be supported by the state: Don't they already get enough taxpayer-funded government assistance? Pacific islands are seen as idyllic holiday destinations by many Australian consumers and hence not visibly needy enough. Significantly, the marketing employee above also notes that GPD "can make money on natural disasters." Unlike wars, natural disasters carry no moral culpability on the part of their victims and no obvious perpetrators, which is their value in retaining the attribute of "natural" intact.[55] In such circumstances, victimhood and neediness is seemingly indisputable.

The statement above is an example of what Luc Boltanksi would call a "politics of pity" (1999:4), by which the binary between those who suffer and those who do not is based on fortune rather than merit. To be a pitiable sufferer, one must be unlucky relative to others, undeserving of misfortune and thus suitable recipients of compassion (Boltanski 1999: 3–19). If the cause of suffering is ambiguous and clouded with lurking suspicions that "victims" may themselves somehow be responsible, the politics of pity can render such people as unworthy of assistance. In some measure, this explains why aid agencies found it very difficult to raise funds, for instance, for the complex humanitarian crisis in Darfur, an ongoing conflict involving multiple warring groups in which the boundary between victims and perpetrators may not have been abundantly clear (Franks 2006:283). Compare this with the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, in which the seemingly indifferent seismic shift of tectonic plates produced a singular event, inflicting disaster upon a blameless, transnational population (including holidaying Westerners), and subsequently drawing unprecedented largesse (Barnett 2005:723; Fassin 2012:ix).

[55] The "naturalness" of natural disasters has been called into question when certain populations are at a drastically increased risk (Bankoff 2010). Anthropogenic climate change provides another complication to the apparently neutral category.

While the GPD brand relies upon a connection to real people and real suffering caused by poverty, war or "natural" disaster, these misfortunes only partially constitute the subject as a worthy recipient. Beyond the question of whether people are depicted as needy and helpless, or as empowered and with agency, I note, following Judith Butler, that "the epistemological capacity to apprehend a life is partially dependent on that life being produced according to norms that qualify it as a life" (2009:3). Butler is concerned with how the lives of Afghans and Iraqis killed in US-led warfare are framed as "already lost or forfeited" (2009:31) and, therefore, not worthy of grief. GPD, in a sense, attempts the opposite: to produce images of needy others in terms of particular norms that are already recognisable to the viewer (Butler 2009:5), and that are worthy of compassion. Suffering, in itself, does not produce value for the GPD brand. Value is produced through the affective disposition of the consumer towards a needy other.

Natural disasters seem to produce needy and worthy subjects, but GPD seeks to fundraise for a wide variety of sufferers beyond these particular victims. Unlike other brands, GPD could not pursue total "ontological purification" from the subjects it presented. It could not attempt to simply sell a value or concept while ignoring a connection to real people and real places; a sense of authenticity was important to the brand. In producing lives recognisable *as lives,* the brand relies crucially on representations of children. Children everywhere are deserving of a good childhood, being "degree zero" (Feldman 2002:287): innocent before they are subjected to the negative aspects—war, forced marriage, labour or the questionable cultural values—of whatever society they so happen to be born into (see also Malkki 2015:82–85). Children as a universal category cut across diverse locales, including the multitude of places in need and the space of the comparatively wealthy consumer. Victims of war may be difficult to fundraise for; however, needy children *in* warzones can elicit donations. In such contexts, children are able to serve as depoliticising agents (Bornstein 2001:601), facilitating fundraising across culturally and geographically disparate spaces, and linked to a large variety of social issues beyond childhood itself.

In this vein, GPD's child sponsorship program accounted for over two-thirds of the organisation's total revenue and was described by marketing staff as the "holy grail" of fundraising, entailing the largest ongoing financial commitment of any of their other "products" or "ways to give." Child sponsorship involves a donor, typically in a Western country, agreeing to direct debit a prescribed amount (approximately 50 Australian dollars per month in 2016) in order to "sponsor" a child located somewhere in the Global South. Sponsors are encouraged to develop a personal relationship with their child through letters, birthday cards, and even a visit to the child.[56] However, GPD always mediates this relationship. Interacting with a sponsor child through social media is strongly discouraged, as are any additional gifts or payments to the child. Many charities and development organisations have made effective use of this technique to raise funds—estimates suggest that there are as many as eight million sponsor children worldwide (Rabbitts 2012:926).

The GPD website offers a seemingly endless scroll of images of potential sponsor children from various countries in the Global South. The sheer number of sponsor children available defies their diversity to reproduce the single category of childhood. The images are all broadly similar: portraits of expressionless, generally non-White children, accompanied by their name, age, gender and home country in text underneath. There is, of course, no differentiation between them in price; child sponsorship always costs the same amount. The children look directly at the camera, and as such, directly into the eyes of the viewer and potential donor, a kind of "demand gaze." The framing of the portrait also means that the children are inevitably pictured alone, outside of the context of their family and thus lacking an element of kinship or care, even if the photograph is only a fragment of social life and the child's parents are located just outside of the frame (see Briggs 2003:185). This is the work of a visual

[56] For potential donors who look closely enough, GPD marketing material now includes the reminder that the money donated does not go directly to the child but are directed into the long-term development project corresponding with the community in which the child lives, avoiding the localised inequalities that individualised giving can engender (see Bornstein 2001:600).

economy; GPD does not claim the children are orphaned or abandoned, but the image itself does the work of producing the children as discrete, lonely subjects.

The mechanism of the child's disadvantage is accomplished, by GPD, through the use of the nation state as a framing device. The viewer can learn more about the sponsor child and their conditions of life through statistical comparisons that use Australia as the privileged reference point.[57] Life expectancy, literacy, access to safe water and average annual income point out the gaps between Australia, exemplar of the Global North, and the child's own country. The comparison here could be grounds for further questions of the global structural inequalities producing these statistical gaps, the kind of questions that critics of compassion have often called for (Fassin 2012:8; Nussbaum 2003:12). But when positioned after the image of the child, such statistics serve as the endpoint of the enquiry: the child deserves sponsorship because they live in a poor country, which the comparatively wealthy Australian is in a position to provide. In the moment that the child is produced as poor and needy, the viewer is positioned as a wealthy, potential donor.

When fundraising on behalf of Indigenous people who are citizens of same country as the implied donor, the nation-state level indicators that so neatly encapsulate populations and show their disparity are not available to the soliciting NGO. Nor is the implication of distance between donor and recipient. The mutually entangled histories of settler-colonial Australians and Indigenous people could present conundrums for Global Partners in Development. For instance, child sponsorship was not a "product" offered by the Australia Program. GPD staff told me it was, in this context, "culturally inappropriate." Contained within the discourse of child sponsorship is the implication of inadequate levels of parental care, and this is particularly so in the case of fundraising for (Indigenous) Australian citizens, when the encapsulating frame nation-state is absent and hence provides no easy explanation for disadvantage.

[57] GPD staff recognized that framing child sponsorship in terms of the nation state was increasingly problematic. In the Phillipines for instance, children were predominantly sponsored by other Filipinos, not donors in Western countries.

The implication of bad parenting runs perilously close to the logics that facilitated removal and institutionalisation of Indigenous children in Australia (see Read 1981). This history is now roundly condemned as the "Stolen Generation" and prompted a public apology in 2008 from then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd. Indigenous activist groups such as the Grandmothers Against Removals argue that such practices are in fact ongoing.

Despite the absence of child sponsorship within Australia, the brand often deployed images of Indigenous children. These images too are the product of careful framing by NGO staff so as to put the consumer to work, producing the child as per particular norms. Considering that photographic frames are constituted not only by their explicit contents, but also by what is bracketed out (Butler 2009:73), it is necessary to analyse such imagery beyond the image itself. In the next section I focus on the work of GPD communications staff in the production of child-focused fundraising imagery.

Framing childhood

Travelling in a Toyota four-wheel drive down a sandy, desert road, a few hours' drive to the west of Alice Springs, I am with Steven, an experienced member of the GPD communications team and photographer, visiting from the head office.[58] My position as a "volunteer participant" at GPD saw me undertake numerous roles, and in this case I was able to offer some knowledge of the area based on my previous employment as a youth worker, as well as my experience driving the potentially dangerous dirt roads. Our communications brief is to gather photographs and "good news stories" to be used in future GPD marketing publications, principally around fundraising. Steven has travelled widely to many of the countries in which GPD works. He recounts stories from these places, weaving in the different forms of training he has received for entry into spaces deemed "high risk." Steven usually resides on Australia's densely populated east

[58] For the purposes of de-identification, the character I call "Steven" here is a composite identity based on my interactions with GPD communications staff.

coast, and is very inquisitive about the desert, asking many questions along the way: “Do the people here want to work?” “Does the shop stock healthy food?” And referring to the children, “Why are there *so many* snotty noses?” The questions reflect common White Australian concerns for Indigenous people: their health, welfare dependency and education. I respond as best I can, but I have some questions of my own and I express my interest in learning more about the GPD brand. The reply I receive is refreshingly blunt: “You want to know about the Global Partners in Development brand? Cute kids. That’s the GPD brand.” In the same conversation, Steven also expresses his concerns around child sponsorship as a fundraising technique. Noting that child sponsorship is not considered “appropriate” for Indigenous children, Steven asks, somewhat rhetorically, “If it’s not acceptable here, why is it acceptable over there?”

Figure 8: The road entering Sandy River

The barbed wire fence enclosing the airstrip to one side of the road, installed to prevent feral camels and other animals from wandering onto the runway and obstructing the sporadic light plane arrivals, indicates our proximity to the small Warlpiri settlement I refer to as "Sandy River." It qualifies as "Very Remote" by the standards of the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Red dirt ridges lined with Mulga trees and spinifex grass obscure our view of the built settlement itself. Eventually we spot some corrugated iron roofing, appearing first as an incongruous white shimmer amid the earthy tones of the landscape, and I begin to slow the vehicle down. Sandy River was bereft of many of the services that are par for the citizenry in the cities and large towns of Australia: no permanent police force or doctors, a perpetually understaffed school, and the poor-quality residences reproduced across the Northern Territory as per government-provided housing (Lea and Pholeros 2010). Significantly for the GPD childhood project, the Australian government had recently committed to the provision of one year of early childhood education for Aboriginal children (see SCRGSP 2014:14). With no consistently functioning early childhood services, this goal remained unmet in Sandy River. GPD, as a child-focused organisation, was keen to redress this.

Soon after entering the settlement and parking the vehicle, the *Kardiya* GPD facilitator assigned to working in Sandy River meets us. Steven tells her that he wants to document "anything that GPD funds: playgroup, childcare, preschool." The facilitator's reply is abrupt: "Well, GPD doesn't fund any of it." Steven is more accustomed to working in the Global South proper, where the state is often weak, and NGOs and multilateral organisations dominate development practice (Karim 2001; Schuller 2007). In Australia, however, the contribution of GPD towards Indigenous issues is dwarfed by that of the federal government. In Sandy River, GPD aimed to support and improve the quality of early childhood services without being involved in the day-to-day functioning of those services. The community did in fact include a relatively new and purpose-built playgroup facility, although GPD did not have access to it, owing to a dispute with the local council who owned it (see chapter four). Moreover, the state requirement for a university-trained playgroup worker to manage the facility in practice ruled out the vast majority of the Warlpiri residents of Sandy River as suitable candidates. Staffing had been an ongoing issue and, in spite of the efforts of GPD, a consistent playgroup had been absent in Sandy River for the past year, and probably longer than that.

Neither the intangibility of GPD's contribution nor the absence of a regular playgroup is allowed to interrupt the good news stories that Steven came to document. We set up an impromptu, outdoor playgroup for the photo shoot. We lay out plastic woven mats on a vacant block of compacted red earth directly across the road from the only shop in the settlement, in the lee of a few eucalyptus trees. Such a location represents a focal point for the community, and ensures that all who visit the shop will probably also notice the playgroup, and potentially walk across to join in. The GPD facilitator feels that this higher visibility will attract more mothers and children, amid the real risk that no one will actually show up and that we will fail to meet the communications brief. Various toys, procured by the GPD facilitator, are laid out on the mats for the children to play with: a train set, building blocks, picture books and playdough. Thankfully for Steven, within an hour a small group are sitting on the mats, young Warlpiri children playing with their mothers and with each other.

Steven takes his camera and quickly gets to work, demonstrating an urgency borne of the time pressured, fly-in-fly-out experiences with which he is accustomed. Hitherto a neophyte in the desert, he quickly slips into the role he has performed many times before. He clicks away with his digital camera, leaving the consent forms for later: best to get consent for the photos we are actually likely to use, rather than consent that might not be needed. He swivels around while sitting on the ground, remaining always at the level of the toddlers: GPD image guidelines specify that photographs from a high angle are to be avoided as they are potentially disempowering—a noted feature of "negative" humanitarian appeals (Chouliaraki 2013:58). The subjects—the mothers and children—all seem to enjoy being photographed and Steven playfully engages the toddlers, eliciting the desired smiles and digitally storing the image as it is simultaneously displayed on the small screen on the back of the camera. The photographer's eyes dart from the viewfinder to this screen, quickly assessing the suitability of each image, before reframing a new tableau. "That'll be a charity gift kid," he says, referring to the common NGO marketing practice of offering "gifts" that donors can buy for the poor in the Global South through the NGO. My eye is not trained to recognise the significance here but this child, it seems, will feature as the face of one such charity gift. For people in the Global South, such gifts were items such as livestock (often a goat), seeds to grow food, or agricultural equipment. In Australia, the solutions to poverty could not be so materially straightforward, and the gifts were less tangible: "maternal health education," or "leadership training" were instead on offer for potential donors.

What Steven cannot control in the framing is left for alteration later on. Flies, ubiquitous in the desert, are a problem: where they once aided portraits of helpless victims in previous appeals, now they blight organisationally mandated images of positivity. Grizzling dogs patrol the edges of the playgroup, and are kept at bay by the toddlers who periodically pelt them with stones in acts of permitted violence.[59] The scene clearly unsettles Steven, who comments, "I have to remind myself: that is different to my dog at home," while working to keep the dogs out of the background of his images. And the litter to be found around the community—food wrappers, packaging, car parts, broken glass—a commonly perceived "visual blight" (Lea and Pholeros 2010:189) in Indigenous communities. must also be removed ("I'll crop it out later"), lest it upset branded images of the deserving poor. The children often seem to have runny noses, and these need to be wiped. Steven wipes one child's face while explaining to me that "Sponsors might not like kids with snotty noses. But it's also for the kids' dignity," conflating dignity with what is acceptable to sponsors.

Our brief from the communications department suggests that we acquire images of Warlpiri children washing their hands, practicing good hygiene. With no accessible building, and hence no plumbing or running water, we instead fill a bucket with soap and tepid water in a house across the street before carrying it

[59] Dogs kept by Indigenous people in remote Australia are recognisably different to those commonly encountered in Australian cities. Yasmine Musharbash has documented the ways in which Warlpiri children are taught to hit dogs and puppies, with the effect of giving the dogs a "healthy respect of toddlers" and avoiding attacks (Musharbash 2017:97).

over to the playgroup. The children are encouraged to wash their hands while the photographer watches on, taking photo after photo. Not long after this exercise, mothers and their children begin to drift away. Toys are packed away and the mats are rolled up. Steven and I retire to our accommodation for the evening, a demountable building encircled by a tall barbed wire fence. We lock the gate behind us, a partial acknowledgement of guilty concerns, whether justified or not, about the potential for theft of expensive photography equipment.

The evening is spent scrolling through photos, deleting the unusable and picking out the good ones, determining from whom we will need consent forms the following day. The images are all "strengths-based": a mother reading to her daughter, captured in a pedagogic exercise; a child washing his hands, practicing good hygiene; a plump toddler grinning directly at the camera. As Steven scrolls through the photos, he makes the comment, "We could never bring any of the major donors here." The comment refers to the special arrangements that GPD offered donors who made particularly significant contributions to the organisation: the chance to see the impact of their donation "on the ground" through a physical visit to a field site. Such a visit seems unfeasible here. The day has been mildly arduous. Harmless looking images that square with the GPD brand have proven to be a hard-won commodity, amid the scruffy looking settlement, the non-existent playgroup and the ambiguous GPD contribution.

The following morning we return to the same hard dusty spot with the same mats and toys, and set up for another playgroup and photo shoot. The urgency has waned a little because Steven got most of what he needed the day before. Today is spent chasing up consent forms with the appropriate parents and their children. Within the organisation it was acknowledged that consent processes for the Australia Program were much more onerous than the international programming group, a corollary of the fact that as Australian citizens, Indigenous people were far more likely to view the GPD-produced photographs of themselves. Each parent is asked to select the communications collateral in which their image can be used, and there are a number of these: for instance, in annual reports, on social media (usually Facebook), in magazines or on the GPD website. The purpose of such consent forms was to ensure that the people represented maintained control over the ways in which they were portrayed.

One of the previous day's attendees, a young mother whose child has already been photographed extensively, returns to the playgroup, although this time she appears to have undertaken significant preparation. Her daughter is clothed in a bright pink dress, with matching shoes and a headband adorned with a demure bow. The clothes appear to be brand new. The mother herself wears a colourful dress, also seemingly reserved only for significant occasions when contrasted with yesterday's timeworn tracksuit. Surprised the day before, and observed by the lens, today she has sought a particular kind of representation. Steven good-humouredly clicks away at the mother and child in much the same manner as the day before. But in the months that follow, as a new marketing campaign is launched for the Australia Program, these images do not appear in GPD material, while those taken the previous day and featuring the same mother and child become somewhat ubiquitous. While GPD has moved away from representations of dire need, they cannot do away with the category of need, or of iconised Aboriginality altogether. The immaterial, affective labour of the consumer in assuming the position of a donor would be interrupted by a bright party dress, as discontinuous with the branded frame. Communications staff know this, and editorial decisions force these images, and this attempt at subject-directed representation, into ultimate redundancy.

Humanitarian postures

In the vignette above, the expertise of Steven in his role as seasoned member of the communications staff is in mediating between the lived experience of Sandy River and a set of existing brand representations. He crafts his images with awareness of the needs of the consumer. GPD did not rely on field staff to provide images. Steven travels to Sandy River, and multiple other field sites, because of his proximity to the GPD brand discourse and well-honed knowledge of it. In this way, he is among the most widely travelled of GPD staff. Imaging was to be "strengths-based," breaking with the "shock-effect" appeals of the past. Strengths must be on brand and recognisable: good hygiene, the bond between a mother and child, or the life potential of an infant. What might be deemed weaknesses, like skinny dogs and litter, or expressions of inauthenticity, such as a new party dress, need to be removed altogether. Because the meaning making of the axis of strength/weakness is located with an imagined donor, dignity is conflated with an external visual culture. The category of need remains prominent but not explicitly named. The brightly coloured dress not only interrupts the expected image of a child living in a remote area, but it is likely to prompt questions from potential donors about the real level of neediness of the subject. Need and strength exist in an interplay that is oriented always towards the consumer: need can be assumed, but subjects should still be engaging in healthy behaviours, demonstrating their family values, getting an education and ultimately pursuing an economically productive life project deemed acceptable to settler-colonial Australians.

In her work on refugee camps in Tanzania, Liisa Malkki (1995) has documented how Hutu refugees imagine themselves and their histories as refugees, both in terms of local narratives as well as through the globalised category of "refugee." In so doing, Hutu refugees vigorously maintained their links to international organisations as a form of "supralocal documentation" of their history (Malkki 1995:150–2). The Warlpiri residents of Sandy River, conversely, did not readily adopt the postures of humanitarian discourse. In donning a colourful dress, the Warlpiri mother attempts her own representation, but the images are ultimately discarded. To paraphrase Susan Sontag (2011 [1977]:93), Warlpiri people here have been assigned their beauty.

Many people in Sandy River were in fact familiar with GPD due to their well-known fundraising efforts, which had appeared on television. Maya, a Warlpiri woman who also acted as a research assistant while I was on fieldwork, informed me that when GPD first arrived in Central Australia in 2008 and began their childhood project, local people were reluctant to allow the organisation to photograph their children, as they saw that GPD was concerned with "hungry people" and since they were *not* hungry, they did not wish to be represented in this way. While this story was only recounted to me second hand, the Warlpiri people involved had recognised the judgement that GPD makes on the diverse range of people it assembles in fundraising campaigns as pitiable objects and rejected that characterisation. Throughout my fieldwork multiple Warlpiri people expressed their surprise at seeing GPD in their communities, holding the view that GPD's work was overseas with hungry people.[60] In spite of moves to "strengths-based" imagery, the starving sufferers of previous appeals live on as torments of memory.

Two Warlpiri women I interviewed were themselves child sponsors with GPD, while living in a small settlement that was itself subject to GPD intervention. Interviewing Genevieve, one of these women, I asked her how they came to sponsor children in the Global South.

> We were sitting out the front [of a house] in Darwin, when two people from [Global Partners in Development] walked up. They asked if we wanted to sponsor a child. We looked at each other and thought, "We make a lot of money, and we're lucky in Australia, we can give some to hungry people overseas." They gave us forms to fill out, and they organised the whole thing, with direct debit from our accounts. We chose two kids each, from Rwanda.

In the vignette recounted above, Genevieve reflects on how lucky she is in Australia before agreeing to sponsor a child. In so doing, she offers a rendition of GPD marketing discourse: framed by the nation state, resting on being "lucky" rather than any structural inequality, with GPD offering an opportunity for donor beneficence. The well-known, often unabashed sales tactics of such door-to-door charity vendors go unmentioned in the story; donation is the choice of the benefactor.

[60] The anthropologist Melinda Hinkson has also documented Warlpiri efforts at fundraising for "poor buggers starving in Africa" (2010:323).

Here, Genevieve engages in the affective labour of the wealthy consumer, not the *other* kinds of labour that are routinely assigned to recipients of donations, like filial care, farming, weaving or collecting water. At the same time, her grandchildren were precisely the children whose health and education outcomes were to be improved through the GPD childhood project. Genevieve thus occupies an ambiguous position in relation to the GPD brand, both a benefactor and recipient, refusing to accept the latter characterisation, and not conforming to the North/South divide on which the brand has generally relied. The dual positioning here highlights the way in which the identities of donor and recipient do not necessarily pre-exist in the GPD brand in any straightforward way. Rather, identities are enacted precisely through engagement with the brand. The brand invites and cultivates the identity of "donor," an identity that is performed through the brand itself. A donor requires a recipient, and the brand achieves this through the creation of consumable images of commodified children.

To echo Mol (2002; 1999), the two subject positions—donor and recipient—are both performed by the humanitarian brand. The example of Genevieve and her friend demonstrates that neither "donor" nor "recipient" are stable subject positions that the brand simply connects. Organisations like GPD do not "create" poverty, but they do perform the distinction between rich and poor through their brand practice. It seems that as long as the brand is tuned to a dichotomy between donor and recipient, it enacts the very inequality that the organisation works to alleviate. The humanitarian brand places donor and recipient in separate contexts, but for the Australia Program the separation between donor and recipient was never fully accomplished.

Conclusion

If we accept that photography is always a visual economy, and always objectifying (Barthes 1981:14), the images captured at Sandy River did not fundamentally misrepresent Indigenous life, nor depict Indigenous children in ostensibly disempowering or undignified postures. In this chapter, I have argued that such images are constituted by being embedded in what Hardt and Negri (2004:113) would call the "distributed network" of their production, beyond only the contents of the frame. The hegemony of the consumer in this network was able to override the attempts at representation by Warlpiri people as recipients. Children are crucial here as the face of the GPD brand. Where Indigenous adults have resisted particular kinds of representation, children are less able to say no, revealing an unspoken rationale for their continued pre-eminence in NGO images.

Mark Schuller (2009:85) has argued that NGOs are "semielites": in spite of their material privileges, they are only intermediaries in global systems and, usually, they are donor driven. Communications staff at GPD acknowledged, in some way, the commodification of children that was inherent in their work but justified this by acknowledging the need for funding. As the GPD manager put it, "we exist for the field, but we cannot exist without donors." The comment both signals the commitment held by GPD staff to improving the lives of disadvantaged people and points to the production of the identities of both donor and recipient through the immaterial labour cultivated by the GPD brand. Where the identity of the donor is invited and suggested by the brand, to be a recipient is assigned, although not always accepted.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

When I contacted Global Partners in Development staff members in late 2016 I was informed that the childhood project had ceased operations in Central Australia. Staff I spoke with cited the lack of clarity around their role there as the ultimate cause of their exit from the early childhood space in Warlpiri communities.[61] Throughout my fieldwork, it was never entirely clear whether GPD wanted to run early childhood services in Central Australia, to develop Warlpiri governance structures and train Warlpiri staff, or to coordinate the entangled institutional field of early childhood in Warlpiri communities. All of these projects arrange themselves around the image of the disadvantaged Indigenous child, and yet as I outlined in chapter four, it is difficult to specify the impact of any of these endeavours on improving that child's life, even though doing so was precisely the stated goal of the project. However, if we accept that the indicators GPD attempted to measure were always partial and vicarious, their failure to measure points neither to success *nor* failure of the overall project goals. Put differently, the question of whether the project worked in achieving its stated goal is not definitively answered by the failure of indicators and as such, GPD's eventual exit is not in itself a de-legitimation of development projects, or of early childhood services.

Over the course of my relatively short-term engagement with the project, it was impossible for me to specify any changes for Warlpiri children. Conversely, one preschool teacher I spoke to in Mulga Flat lauded the self-evident improvements for Warlpiri children since GPD had arrived:

> I think [GPD] has made a big impact here. I can feel a definite lifting of the spirit in this community. Less matted hair, less sores and less scabies among the kids.

Another GPD staff member (since resigned) I spoke with had nearly the precise opposite opinion:

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[61] The organisation did retain a presence in Central Australia, but the early childhood project as I have described it in this thesis ceased its operations.

> We all know that [the GPD childhood project] was not achieving anything. Ask 99 percent of the people in [Mulga Flat] if they even know what [GPD] does. They will not be able to tell you.

While the statements above express perhaps two extremes, the general view of stakeholders and others I interviewed at the time of my research were that the project had achieved little. As Kathryn Robinson and Andrew McWilliam note in their review of community development projects funded by Australian aid, "the pace of social change does not conform to the usually limited time frames of the project cycle" (2015:114). It would be a mistake to blame a project of less than ten full-time staff for ongoing Warlpiri disadvantage. And there are other stories one could tell here. Many people I spoke with in Central Australia lauded GPD for their support of teaching Warlpiri language in schools, and for their development of learning resources in Warlpiri. GPD were undeniably committed to including Warlpiri voices and establishing Warlpiri governance structures, difficult and problematic though some of those processes were. Warlpiri research participants tell me that the GPD initiated governance groups have remained functional in the absence of GPD. *Yapa* I interviewed almost uniformly spoke highly of GPD and its staff. GPD was also criticised by other organisations for competing for funding (inadvertently or otherwise) with Indigenous-led organisations. The very presence of GPD could in itself be viewed as delegitimising Indigenous organisations in favour of broader, international expertise (see APONT 2013). As Dorothea Hilhorst (2003:25) has observed, NGOs have "multiple realities." I do not claim to have uncovered the fundamental one.

While the instrumental, analytically narrow question of whether the project worked or not has not been my main focus in this thesis, I have not ignored it entirely. The initial curiosity that set this project in motion indeed concerned whether approaches derived from "international development" would be effective in dealing with disadvantage in Indigenous Australian communities. I do not shy away from the conclusion that the calls for international NGO engagement with Indigenous Australia (outlined in chapter two) are misguided; there is nothing inherent to international development agencies that will enable them to better deal with Indigenous disadvantage, and nothing particularly novel to be introduced to the "context" of Central Australia. This is not to say that NGOs that work internationally, including GPD, categorically *cannot* produce good outcomes in Indigenous communities. Competent staff—both *Yapa* and *Kardiya*—may forge long commitments to place through their work, organisations may cooperate rather than compete, and monitoring and evaluation may be better designed and more rigorous. But the purported globalism of international NGOs offers little in the part of Indigenous Australia under examination here.

Is the default suggestion that only "locally grown" organisations will be successful? The issue with this assertion is that it relies upon the same performance of separation between the local and the global. The spaces that are set aside for Warlpiri—the local people—to govern the project, ignore the ways in which the development project has produced those very spaces, how it has framed the problem so that only certain solutions that square with the ideal of "the local community" are appropriate. They assume that decision-making can be isolated and reduced to a few pivotal points (Mol 2002:169). This is in spite of an organisational hierarchy that moves up and away from Warlpiri communities; only the lowest ranked staff actually visited Warlpiri communities on a regular basis, while "high-level," strategic decisions took place in large, distant cities. To simultaneously assert the importance of Warlpiri governance while maintaining an organisational hierarchy that places the community-based staff at the bottom is only possible when Warlpiri communities are viewed as somehow separate and distinct from such organisational forms. Warlpiri communities seem geographically discrete—to a Western eye at least, where the desert is an expanse of nothingness (Bird Rose 1996:24). But to draw on Latour, "no place is self-contained enough to be local" (2005:204).

In chapter two, I suggested that GPD was engaged in a broader epistemological project within Indigenous affairs that sought to find "what works" in addressing Indigenous disadvantage, and once found, to replicate it. To this end, GPD called upon their expertise in international development. However, the expertise that GPD cited in official material was difficult to find and identify in ethnographic action. Almost all staff disavowed it and refused to claim it as their own. It was unlocatable. This expertise without location was, however, essential to performing the development agency as separate from the local contexts in which development might occur. Such expertise is always distinct precisely by not being tied to any locality, by *not* being situated (Haraway 1988). Extending my analysis of expertise into chapter three, I demonstrated how the "chronotope" of brain development unfolds everywhere and always, thus eliding the colonising spatial and temporal implications of a Western development agency interacting with an Indigenous culture. When linked with the project outcomes that focused on literacy and numeracy, I argued that the evidence base, as the metaphorical "base" for the GPD project, entailed a double movement: at once universal and largely beyond ordinary human perception, and yet only visible through particular cultural manifestations, through contact with Western-style education.

In this way, I *read* the evidence base as a form of biopolitical governmentality that directs life towards particular ends. My emphasis here is on the word *read,* because the realisation of governmentality did not follow in project implementation. The link between the scientific research and the project activities was vicarious and weak. This was demonstrated in chapter four, where I dealt with accountability in practice through the monitoring and evaluation of the project. Despite genuine efforts, GPD staff were unable to measure outcomes for Warlpiri children, and shifted to documenting project outputs only. The organisation became even more institutionally endogamous, measuring only what was visible in terms of institutional forms. The efforts of GPD to produce standardised quantifications undoubtedly had a moral grounding, but I also interpreted them as an attempt at producing the project as globally valid and thus situating it within a broader context. The broader context was not simply there, a space in which action took place, but had to be *worked at* by GPD. While in many cases both *Yapa* and *Kardiya* staff resented such quantification and viewed it as superfluous, only *Yapa* tended to refuse to render themselves accountable. In this way, quantitative accountability itself—a process that was not definitively linked to the improved lives of Warlpiri children—produced differentiation between *Yapa* and *Kardiya.*

Through their emphasis on expertise, evidence and evaluation, GPD sought to do "what works" in addressing Indigenous disadvantage. But the focus on "what works" did not tell us, as helping Whites, *what to do.* Expertise was disavowed. Evidence did not prefigure the project except in the most general terms. Evaluation indicators failed to point to improvement—or, indeed, the lack thereof. To echo Mol, there is no piece of knowledge that will solve, once and for all, the question of "what is to be done?" (2002:177). Of course, these forms of institutional knowledge were not meant to wholly answer this question; they existed in tandem with the imperative to always ask Warlpiri for their input into the development project, and indeed for the project to be governed by Warlpiri. In chapter five I argued that the development projects in Australia begin with the assumption of a vast cultural gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous, hence motivating the desire to bridge it. Warlpiri externality to the project was performed as the moral ground on which the project could proceed at all. In this way the "Aboriginal community" was not the stable externality of development but the essential part of its own framework.

In always asking and consulting with Warlpiri people, the project is motivated by what Mol calls a "politics of who" (2002:166). For Mol, the "politics of who" asks "who is being put, or should be put, in the position to decide what counts as good" (2002:166). The answer, for GPD staff, is "the community," *Yapa,* or Warlpiri people. In asking Warlpiri for "their own solutions" and "their own definitions of success," we, as helping Whites, also implicitly label Warlpiri with problems that are *their own.* The problems of structural inequality are made into something that Warlpiri must do something about "for themselves." As I argued in chapter six, Warlpiri culture, once a barrier to development, now cast as the key to development in the participatory GPD project, remains a Warlpiri issue in both formulations. This partially explains the Warlpiri tendency to avoid drawing significant distinctions between "top-down" interventions, like the NTER, that seek to normalise, and "bottom-up" ones, like the GPD childhood project, that seek to promote Warlpiri culture, as outlined in chapter two.

While GPD, in official documents, claimed forms of global expertise, they were also undoubtedly committed to consulting with Warlpiri and including their voices. In chapter six, I argued that participation was a "non-performative" (Ahmed 2012), and did not produce participation in socially and materially significant ways. The discourse around working together, of hearing every voice, and of decision-making through participatory practices not only prevented critique but could also work to silence substantive inputs that were offered by both *Yapa* and *Kardiya*. To echo Mol (2002:169) once more, the efforts to give certain groups a voice as per the "politics of who" remain silent on what "they" might actually say. Warlpiri people have often been described as "over-consulted," including by GPD staff during my fieldwork. GPD formed governance groups, but they were not alone in this; many senior Warlpiri people were engaged in multiple such groups, to the point where regular attendance required a serious investment of their time, usually without compensation. This extensive consultation points to the way in which the *processes* that are meant to ensure Warlpiri inputs become the moral legitimacy for the project, rather than the Warlpiri inputs themselves.

When the epistemological project of finding and replicating "what works" is joined with a "politics of who," a particular space is created for Warlpiri input. The issue is figured as one of asking Indigenous people "what works." From here, it is not much further to suggest that Indigenous people, or Indigenous culture perhaps, has some solution to ameliorate the disadvantage in Indigenous communities in a form of knowledge hitherto silenced by colonising outsiders. But nor does consultation with Warlpiri provide an easy answer to the question of *what to do.* To paraphrase Lucas Bessire (2014:277), Warlpiri do not "let us off the hook" with forms of knowledge to redeem entangled histories of colonisation and invasion.

In late 2017, after a long consultation process with multiple Indigenous groups across Australia, a congregation of influential Indigenous leaders released the "Statement from the Heart" after a gathering at Uluru, the famous monolith on the country of the Aṉangu people, around five hours driving south of Alice Springs. The statement, broadly understood as expressing the will of Indigenous people across Australia, called for an "Indigenous voice" in parliament, the specificities of which were to be worked out later. However, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull promptly dismissed the statement, on the basis that such a voice was "neither desirable nor capable of winning acceptance at referendum" (cited in Morris 2018). Against the backdrop of this unwillingness to listen to Indigenous voices, the GPD project and their community development project is surely the moral alternative, problematic though processes of consultation may be. One could also make the argument that although GPD performs the object of its concern, at least it does not perform that object as the pathological other of mainstream Australian values, as has often been the case in Australia (see Eickelkamp 2011b:132). GPD's strengths-based discourse was a well-intentioned attempt at avoiding such pathologising.

Compared with this example, the GPD staff acted as the critics of development want them to, as I noted at the beginning of this thesis. They were deeply committed to the project, sought to make space for Warlpiri contributions and governance, and always built relationships with *Yapa.* The GPD project incorporated critiques of development. And yet, a key question has nagged me: Can there be solidarity between settler-colonial, middle-class, helping Whites pursuing careers in development, and structurally disadvantaged and remote-living Indigenous people? The forms of solidarity articulated through the humanitarian brand in chapter seven continue to enact the positions of donor and recipient in spite of attempts to redress this problematic positioning. The fact that most White Australians are not interested in a permanent relocation to a remote Indigenous community is elided through the assertion of the sanctity of Indigenous space. Anthropologists such as myself are of course not exempt; while we may develop long-term engagements with particular places (see the epilogue to this thesis) they tend to remain as "field sites," distinct from "home."

As I questioned in chapter five, it may be the preservation of middle-class lifestyles more than Indigenous cultural difference that leads to the social segregation—and inequality—between *Yapa* and *Kardiya* in Central Australia.

Of course, this thesis has argued that binarisation is performed in multiple ways. The problem with a politics that retained a dichotomy only to invert it is that it seemed to move always from one pole to the other. From global expertise to local knowledge, from needs- based to strengths-based, from culture as problem to culture as solution, from segregation as racism to segregation as solidarity and, perhaps most significantly, from *Kardiya* control to *Yapa* control. Such moves are no doubt well-intentioned and in that they are commendable, and as ethnographer I make no claim to be uninvolved in them. But they also appear as easy inversions, and the space traversed between the two poles asks for Indigenous people to solve "their own" problems, while asking for very little change from helping Whites. A politics that begins with mutual entanglement rather than incommensurability would be a starting point, and a space for alternative possibilities.

Epilogue: Ethnography (of) doing good?

In her article reckoning with the history of Australian anthropology, Gillian Cowlishaw (2015) argues that postcolonial critiques of anthropology as a discipline fail to appreciate that anthropologists often spoke in opposition to normative, colonising discourses, based precisely on the bonds with Indigenous people that were formed through ethnographic practice. Indeed, the friendships and deep engagements between anthropologists and Indigenous research participants might be the main attribute the discipline can brandish to ward off critiques of producing "expert" knowledge about Indigenous people for colonial administrators. Certainly, many anthropologists in Australia have developed long-term relationships with the Indigenous people of their field sites, returning year after year for ongoing fieldwork and friendship reasons. Such ongoing engagements have tended to be the idealised norm for anthropology more generally, where researchers build up a field site as a kind of social, ethical and scholarly capital. Institutional ethnography appears less likely to offer this kind of longevity for ethnographers.

One significant issue institutional ethnographers face is the reaction of research subjects to the publication of analytical material. Indeed, some of the best-known anthropologists of development have found their ethnographic engagements broke off after their monographs were made public. Dorothea Hilhorst notes that the Philippine NGO she studied, after receiving a copy of her thesis, "charged me with having manipulated and abused my research subjects" (2003:227). Erica Bornstein (2017) reveals that World Vision, the NGO she researched in Zimbabwe, essentially never responded to her book in any significant way, a tacit refusal of further engagement with the research. Perhaps the best-known example is that of David Mosse, who in a journal article details his interactions with his research participants at the British Department for International Development, who objected to the publication of his book on the basis that it was "unfair, biased, contained statements that were defamatory and would seriously damage the professional reputation of individuals and institutions" (Mosse 2006:935). In these three prominent examples the research engagement essentially stalled when research participants finally read ethnographic writing. As Amanda Lashaw has noted, it is often "the products rather than the processes of fieldwork" (2012:514) that can strain the relationships between anthropologists and research participants.

In this epilogue, I reflect on the ethics of research in and of development agencies. I ask where my desire for my research to benefit my research subjects—which is to say, to do some good beyond its scholarly value—ties in with the NGO's own, existing project of doing good. My initial approach to this question was to suggest that my project would have some practical value for the organisation, to help them become better at doing good. But does this position bind the researcher to offering only the most normative of prescriptions? And if long-term engagements are less likely for institutional ethnographers, can the break of relations be understood as an acceptable outcome of ethnographic research? Such questions probably have no definitive answers, but I want to discuss them by reflecting on my own ongoing experiences of offering research products back to the NGO staff that made my research possible.

The learning forum as a "para-site"

As part of my research proposal, I offered to give "learning forums" in which I presented my research, as a work-in-progress, to the GPD Australia team. This was a kind of "para-site" of the type conducted by Deeb and Marcus (2011) in their research at the World Trade Organization, an attempt to collapse the researcher-subject distinction in ethnography and encourage feedback and partnership. I gave three such "learning forums" over the course of my research, and I want to narrate one such forum to illustrate some of the issues involved in organisational ethnography. I do not go into the details of that presentation here, some of the themes of which are covered in chapter five of this thesis. Briefly, however, the presentation was around the use of the term "community" as a kind of "buzzword" in Central Australian development discourse. I asked why the term "community" had gained such prominence and probed the work it was doing.

At the time, the presentation was well received by employees and generated an engaging discussion. I received a number of emails from staff in other offices wanting to hear a recording of my presentation and the subsequent discussion, while another staff member said that they enjoyed that I "spoke about realities." Another requested a follow-up meeting so that I could expand my argument. In my attempt to give an ethnographic account that did not privilege my own meta-language above the language of the actors involved (Latour 2005:30), I was satisfied that my interpretation seemed to resonate with GPD staff and reflected some their own concerns. I had another research debrief planned, and the feedback here was encouraging. Many staff were genuinely engaged with the presentation. I felt that in the context of an environment of always positive, organisationally mandated forms of interaction that I have outlined in chapter six, the presentation was somewhat refreshing for many staff. Some, however, sat silent. One employee who was supportive of my work and this presentation, nonetheless privately suggested that I "watch my back." He was only half joking.

It was not until a month later that I began to hear of the objections to the presentation by way of a phone call from my manager within GPD. The main contention was around the document that I had used as an example in my presentation. The document was a two-page summary of GPD project activities in Central Australia. I had, perhaps crudely, counted the number of times "community" was used (but see Riles 2000:80) to demonstrate that it was indeed the most "hardworking" word in the document (Lea 2008:40). Apparently, those who had produced the document were particularly opposed to my presentation, although they did not specifically dispute its content. Rather, they claimed that the document was "created by the team" and "meant for internal use within the team" and therefore, implicitly, was not fair game for analysis. My manager at GPD, although supportive of my research, told me: "You took that document that the team made and you criticised it." I found these comments strange on two counts. First, although the document was not necessarily widely available, it was printed in large numbers so as to be disseminated to any party interested in understanding GPD's work in Central Australia. Second, I had not shared the document externally in any case, as the learning forum was for GPD staff only. Further to this point, the document had already been shared with all GPD staff in the Australia Program via email.

But my claims regarding the status of the document as public or otherwise were perhaps beside the point. The "official status" of the document only became a question worth asking the moment I had analysed it. Certainly, the document contained no sensitive information, and I chose it precisely because it did *not* constitute a break with the community development discourse that was characteristic of the organisation in its official narratives. Rather, my presentation was an example of what Mosse (2006:935) calls "anti-social anthropology," a disengagement from the social relations from which that document was borne. In chapter six, I outlined how the organisation produced an "action plan" through a participatory process. This document, too, was in some sense formed through the online contributions of team members, including myself. In analysing it outside of its accepted discourse, I had departed from the "expectation of a shared definition of truth" (Mosse 2006:943). Indeed, the document was banal and innocuous, the "grand achievement" (Lea 2008:40) of any written policy. Perhaps "their" objections—I was never told, nor sought to discover, precisely who complained about what, exactly—stemmed from this point: my analysis revealed that the document indeed did have content and meaning, when it was crafted to be entirely unremarkable, to elide detailed consideration.

I claimed, during the presentation and again upon hearing of complaints about it, that my ethnography was "just one interpretation," an always-partial account that would not necessarily be shared by all. Yet, while individual staff held their opinions on the organisation, there was hardly a multitude of interpretations of GPD in more public discourse. My claim that my interpretation was "just one" was more likely to be interpreted against the background of mandated GPD communications. The NGO itself had style manuals, writing guidelines, indeed, entire organisational departments devoted to mediating the ways in which the organisation and its work was represented. For a GPD employee, or in my case, a "volunteer-participant," to write outside of the mandated conventions was, in the first instance, not permitted. Accepting that my negotiated status as a researcher offered me a partial exemption here, my use of academic conventions could also be problematic and alienating for my research participants. The citation of arcane anthropologists is unlikely to be understood by GPD staff as anything other than a claim to a kind of epistemological authority in terms of my interpretation of the project. Perhaps this explains why the complaints were not an objection to the research findings but rather the research method. I did not seek to claim ethnographic authority over my informants (they were *there* too), but as anthropologists, authority is also located in our citations and theorisations.

Importantly, the complaints I received had not been voiced to me individually, nor my supervisor or ethics committee, as my research information sheets had naively encouraged people to do if they felt aggrieved. Rather, they went through organisational channels, to my manager within GPD, and indeed to the head of the Australia Program, before they were relayed back to me. When my manager called me, he spoke of the concerns that had been raised around the organisation: "Who is controlling Drew?" "What are his restrictions?" "Can he just say what he wants?" Indeed, I was asked by my manager to hand over "all of the data you have collected, and all of the data you will be using." By this stage in my research, my field notes were extensive, and I refused this request based on the confidentiality I had assured for the individuals in my research.

If I had provided all of my field notes, it is questionable what this would have achieved. Like the document I had analysed, my data were quotidian, largely mundane, and included nothing confidential. Occasionally, GPD staff requested that I remove from my field notes a particular event or comment they had made. Sometimes I was asked to not attend certain activities. I have always respected these requests, and these conditions were spelt out in my initial research agreement. But this kind of ethical crutch also seemed inadequate. It was not clear, even to me, in what ways I would eventually analyse my field notes; for instance, I was introduced to Sara Ahmed's "non-performative" (2012) long after I had taken my notes on the meetings I describe in chapter six. It was not always clear to me, as with other anthropologists, what would be significant once I got to the process of writing up (Hilhorst 2003:231). This could be read as a kind of duplicity on the part of the ethnographer. The document that I analysed in my "learning forum" was shared with me via email to ask for my input, months before the presentation. Occupied with other tasks at the time, I gave little advice. Even so, why had I not offered comments on it when it was being created? Put simply, the document did what good development documents do, and I too had written reports for the organisation using similar kinds of language. To reply in an email with an analysis of it in terms of the performativity of the word "community" would have been wholly inappropriate. And in line with this thesis, I sought to understand why we were using the term as we did, and the effects that usage might have. Still, some read my analysis as a criticism of their community development practice or, perhaps, of their document writing skills.

Ethics, normativity and analytical distance

Ultimately, I have come to view my experience of the "para-site" not as one of collaboration but, rather, an affirmation of the analytical distance between ethnographer and the organisation. An obvious question had come up during my presentation: What are your solutions? What should we do? I fumbled through a response that was probably unsatisfactory to my audience. The question raised the issue of the usefulness of my research, which is a significant one for ethnographers. In terms of the fieldwork itself, I found usefulness generally unproblematic. As an unpaid volunteer with prior work experience in the area, I had frequently assisted the GPD staff with various tasks, most often the physical and practical labour of their work in Warlpiri communities. The question of whether my research products would be "useful" was more difficult to answer.

In terms of preparing my initial research proposal, the question of the usefulness of my research could be addressed through a vaguely defined evaluative frame. My work could be figured as an evaluation, perhaps one of a different order, but an evaluation all the same and one oriented towards better practice as part of the epistemological project of development I have outlined in chapter two. This epistemological project both invites my usefulness as an anthropologist and has the potential to define only an analytically narrow view of what that usefulness might mean. As Katherine Lemons (2017) has observed, the very openness of NGOs to research can present problems for the anthropologist. To focus on the question of usefulness may commit the ethnographer to an "epistemological mimesis" (Lemons 2017:204) of NGO categories, but to avoid it altogether leaves us open to the accusation that our research has been in the service of our own careers only and at the expense of research participants. The question of usefulness is not entirely up to the ethnographer, as research participants may choose their own level of engagement. GPD staff were frequently busy, and my project was extraneous to their paid work. During my fieldwork, I doubted whether some GPD staff had taken the time to read my information sheets in detail, let alone lengthy chapter drafts, or even the plain English summaries that I would later send.

The fact that some staff had likely not read my information sheet points to some of the ethical concerns I dealt with while doing fieldwork. I often questioned how my project worked through the organisational hierarchy. Any individual could decline to be included in the research, but management had already approved my presence and note taking. Would lower level staff feel comfortable asserting the opposite stance? In spite of my efforts to explain, it was not always clear that staff understood that my research project was coextensive with the work I undertook as a volunteer at GPD. The people I worked with most closely did have a good grasp of my project, but often my work involved meeting people from other departments within GPD or from other organisations. Did all people I interacted with need to sign a consent form and be made aware that anything they said around me may end up printed in a publication? Announcing this point at meetings, which were often attended by people unknown to me, was a source of perpetual awkwardness. The pursuit of informed consent as per an ethics research protocol could, in some ways, produce a distance between my interlocutors and myself.

The learning forum I outlined was at once encouraging—for the recognition of what I was describing from many staff—but also unsettling for the accusation that I had inappropriately used research data. University-mandated ethics approvals tend to focus on the practice of data collection itself, certainly not unimportant, but in line with other ethnographers, I found that the dissemination of research conclusions has been one of the most difficult parts of my project—it was where data became meaningful. In this epilogue, I have suggested that the ethics of offering some non-scholarly benefits of the research may sit uncomfortably with the question of maintaining analytical distance. Amanda Lashaw has noted that her research on educational reform in California required "the stomach to denaturalize compelling movements for social and economic justice" (2012:518). In a similar way, I have belaboured the question: When GPD was itself already committed to "doing good," what "good" would come from critical, non-normative scholarship on that organisation? Finding this good within the framework of the NGO, as a "critical friend," providing insight to help the NGO become better at doing good, is a solution with potentially normative effects or, conversely, the possibility of a disengagement from fieldwork relations.

As I write this, the process of offering research products back to GPD staff is an ongoing one. I have and will continue to disseminate research materials both to the organisation and individuals involved. Perhaps, it is too much to ask research participants to *love* research that is about them, based on activities that occurred only weeks or months before they read it, as was the case in the learning forum. A critical anthropology of development might proceed with an understanding of both retreat and re-engagement with development practice over a long timeframe. Insofar as this thesis has sought to de-emphasise particular identities in favour of the workings of the development project and its influence on situational subjectivities, I contend anthropological research maintains relevance for development practice even after the staff it was based on are long gone. My research project has, in a sense, outlived the project itself, which concluded in 2016. In chapter two, I outlined the lack of organisational memory of similar projects that GPD had undertaken in Central Australia in the late 1990s. In this area, a long-term ethnography that does not ask for constant fieldwork engagements could nonetheless prove useful in offering a critically engaged anthropology of development.

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