

To be part of an Aboriginal dream of self-determination : Aboriginal activism in Redfern in the 1970s

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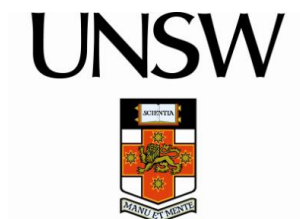
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“To be Part of an Aboriginal Dream of Self-Determination”

Aboriginal activism in Redfern in the 1970s

Johanna Perheentupa

A thesis in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy



School of Humanities and Languages
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

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Aboriginal activism in Redfern in the 1970s****Abstract 350 words maximum: (PLEASE TYPE)**

In this thesis I study Indigenous activism in the inner-Sydney suburb of Redfern in the 1970s. I explore the establishment and operation of five Aboriginal organisations: the Aboriginal Legal Service, the Aboriginal Medical Service, Murawina preschool and childcare centre, the Black Theatre and the Aboriginal Housing Company. The histories of these organisations, how they were set up and by whom, have not previously been comprehensively or collectively studied in an academic context. Yet they were the first to provide welfare services for Aboriginal people by Aboriginal people in the fields of law, health, education, culture and housing. This in itself makes it an important topic to explore.

Furthermore, Aboriginal organisations in Redfern were among the first to experience self-determination as a Commonwealth Government policy, which accordingly supported Aboriginal-run welfare services. However, none of the organisations limited their activities to providing welfare services, such as health or legal services, to their community. Rather they became political power bases that extended their influence beyond the local to the state and national levels. Their representatives took part in articulating Aboriginal nationalism and in the daily practises of the organisations strived for Aboriginal control and *their* definition of Aboriginal self-determination. Yet, in order to receive funding they had to negotiate the scope and the limits of their activism with the representatives of the newly established Department of Aboriginal Affairs at a time when the non-Indigenous state was most committed to universalist welfare under the Whitlam government.

As part of their aspiration for self-determination the Aboriginal organisations in Redfern assumed a central role in strengthening urban Aboriginal identity and community in a settler colonial city which in non-Indigenous minds had been discursively emptied of Indigenous presence. In their activism they challenged the notion of urban space as void of Aboriginality and in their struggle for self-determination claimed Indigenous ownership of social and geographic spaces in the city.

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History is an angel flying backwards to the future.

(Laurie Anderson citing Walter Benjamin)

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Abbreviations

AAF	Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship
AATA	Aboriginal Advancement Trust Account
ABSCHOL	Aboriginal scholarship scheme
ACTU	Australian Council of Trade Unions
ADB	Australian Dictionary of Biography
AHC	Aboriginal Housing Company
ALAO	Australian Legal Aid Office
ALP	Australian Labor Party
ALS	Aboriginal Legal Service
AMS	Aboriginal Medical Service
ANU	Australian National University
AAPA	Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association
APA	Aborigines Progressive Association
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
BLF	Builders Labourers Federation
CAR	Council for Aborigines Rights
DAA	Department of Aboriginal Affairs
FAA	Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs
FCAATSI	Federal Council for Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders
NAA	National Archives of Australia
NAISDA	Aboriginal Islander Skill Development Scheme
OAA	Office of Aboriginal Affairs
SAFA	Student action for Aboriginal Australians
<i>SMH</i>	Sydney Morning Herald
UNSW	University of New South Wales

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Introduction: why Redfern matters?

[Poem
has been removed
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restrictions.¹]

The Aboriginal Tent Embassy in 1972 represents for many the iconic moment of Aboriginal protest in the 1970s. It started as a reaction against Prime Minister McMahon's Australia Day statement, broadcast the previous day, according to which Aboriginal people would not be granted land rights, rather conditional 50 year leases. During the early hours of Australia Day Michael Anderson, Tony Coorey, Billie Craigie and Bertie Williams set up the Aboriginal Tent Embassy under a beach umbrella on the lawns of, now Old, Parliament House in Canberra. The Tent Embassy was initiated by Aboriginal activists from Sydney, but united Aboriginal people nationally.² As the protest continued

¹ Aileen Corpus, 'blkfern-jungle', Five poems, *Meanjin*, Vol. 36, No. 4, December 1977, 470.

² Michael Anderson in Stephen Hagan, 'The Real Story Behind the Tent Embassy', *National Indigenous Times*, 248, Vol. 11, 5; Scott Robinson, *The Aboriginal Embassy, 1972* (MA thesis, Canberra, 1993), 83-96; Scott

Indigenous people and their non-Indigenous supporters gathered from all over Australia to voice objection to government policies that continued to ignore Aboriginal demands for land rights and self-determination. At the time it was the largest ever protest organised by Aboriginal people. By setting up the protest as an Embassy, the Aboriginal activists presented Aboriginal people as a distinct nation. Furthermore, as a symbol of Aboriginal nationhood, they flew the Aboriginal flag that for the first time caught the attention of Australian and International audiences.³

From the 1960s Aboriginal rights activists increasingly got together in public spaces such as streets and parks for demonstrations, such as the Tent Embassy protest. However, their activism was not limited to streets. Despite their great importance, demonstrations represent only one aspect of Aboriginal activism. Members of the rapidly growing Indigenous population in the inner-Sydney suburb of Redfern had started to establish organisations that worked within the Aboriginal community two years before the Tent Embassy.⁴ These organisations and the Tent Embassy were “all part of the same ideologies, part of the same thing,”⁵ as Alanna Doolan, wife of Tony Coorey and herself involved with Aboriginal activism in Sydney, notes. In their own way they were all part of the struggle for Indigenous rights: Aboriginal land rights and self-determination. Furthermore, they were organised by the same people. Indeed Anderson, Coorey, Craigie and Williams, who first set up the Tent Embassy, were active in the Redfern Aboriginal community and involved in the Aboriginal organisations.

The community-based organisations in Redfern started to deliver services from Aboriginal people to Aboriginal people for the first time. They provided legal, health, housing, early childhood and other welfare services as well as cultural services. The Aboriginal Legal Service in Redfern was the first Aboriginal-established and controlled organisation in New

Robinson, ‘The Aboriginal embassy: an account of the protests of 1972’ in *Terrible Hard Biscuits. A Reader in Aboriginal History*, Valerie Chapman and Peter Read (eds.), (St Leonards: Aboriginal History and Allen & Unwin, 1996), 243-244, 247; Heather Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy: land in Aboriginal politics in New South Wales, 1770-1972* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin in association with Black Books, 1996), 338-339, 350; Bain Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2003), 341-342, 345; Richard Broome, *Aboriginal Australians: black response to white dominance 1788-1980* (Sydney, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1987), 184.

³ Russell McGregor, *Indifferent Inclusion: Aboriginal people and the Australian nation* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2011), 168, 182.

⁴ Cf. Crystal McKinnon, ‘Indigenous Music as a Space of Resistance’ in Tracey Banivanua Mar and Penelope Edmonds (eds.), *Making Settler Colonial Space: perspectives on race, place and identity* (Hampshire, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 262.

⁵ Alanna Doolan, speech at the 40th Anniversary of the Tent Embassy, Canberra, 26 January 2012.

South Wales, since the establishment of the Aborigines Progressive Association (APA) in Sydney in 1937. It was also the first community legal centre in Australia.⁶ The Aboriginal Medical Service was established soon after the Aboriginal Legal Service in 1971. It was followed by the Breakfast program and preschool, which later became Murawina, in 1972 and by the Aboriginal Housing Company in 1973. An Aboriginal theatre group started operating in Redfern in 1969 and as the National Black Theatre produced its first show in 1972.

For Aboriginal people the activism in Redfern in the 1970s holds great significance. The model for Aboriginal Services was taken up in other parts of Australia and the Aboriginal Legal and Medical Services soon spread to other states and territories. For Aboriginal people Redfern became known as the “heartland” of Aboriginal Australia. Linda Burney describes the Redfern and Waterloo area as the birthplace of Aboriginal self-determination.⁷ According to Gary Foley, who was personally involved in many of the Aboriginal organisations, Aboriginal activists in Redfern

[...] set up the first free legal aid-centres and the first community-controlled health and childcare centres. All of these concepts have been adopted and adapted by other groups in the Australian community to meet *their* needs and overcome *their* problems.⁸

Redfern long carried the legacy of that 1970s activism. Margaret Vincent, Aboriginal resident from Redfern, commented on the possibility of local riots in 1985: “Once you tame Redfern, you tame the rest of Australia, because Aborigines all watch Redfern.”⁹

Redfern’s mythic or symbolic status has also been acknowledged locally and globally among non-Indigenous people.¹⁰ Yet, it is contested territory in the non-Indigenous imagination; narratives of the failure of Aboriginal self-determination – alcohol and drug abuse, violence and poverty – are recounted in order to justify the continuing colonisation

⁶ John Chesterman, *Poverty Law and Social Change: the story of the Fitzroy Legal Service* (Carlton South: Melbourne University Press, 1996), 3.

⁷ NSW parliamentary Standing Committee on Social Issues, 2004, 165. Quoted in George Morgan, *Unsettled Places: Aboriginal people and urbanisation in New South Wales* (Kent Town: Wakefield Press, 2006), xii, 63.

⁸ Gary Foley, ‘Teaching Whites a Lesson’ in V. Burgmann and J Lee (eds.), *Staining the Wattle* (Fitzroy: McPhee Gribble Books, 1988), 198.

⁹ *SMH*, 11 December 1985.

¹⁰ Kay Anderson, ‘Reflections on Redfern’ in Elaine Stratford (ed.), *Australian Cultural Geographies* (Oxford, New York: 1999), 77, 79.

and re-colonisation of Indigenous land and spaces.¹¹ On the other hand, Redfern reflects white guilt and provides a space where attempts are made to come to terms with, and rectify, past mistreatment of and discrimination against Aboriginal people. For example, Prime Minister Paul Keating chose Redfern as the site for his speech on Aboriginal reconciliation for the Australian launch of the International Year of Indigenous People in 1992.¹²

This thesis explores the time when Redfern became the forerunner of Aboriginal activism in Australia. It studies Aboriginal activism for self-determination in Redfern in the 1970s, and in particular the establishment and operation of the Aboriginal Legal and Medical Services, Murawina preschool and childcare centre, the Black Theatre and the Aboriginal Housing Company. The period of this study also captures changes in government policy from assimilation to self-determination, which was for the first time introduced as a government policy by Gough Whitlam in 1972. Thus, the Aboriginal organisations in Redfern were among the first to operate under it. The study carries over to the time of the Fraser government and the policy of self-management that replaced self-determination from 1975 onwards.¹³ The histories of these organisations have not previously been comprehensively studied in an academic context. Yet these organisations were the first to provide welfare services for Aboriginal people by Aboriginal people in the fields of law, health, education, culture and housing. Or as Tim Rowse argues, the Indigenous sector “is the most important product of the policy era known as ‘self-determination’.”¹⁴

¹¹ Wendy Shaw, ‘Cultures of Acceptability: Disrupting “The Decline of the Block” Discourses’ in George Morgan (ed.), *Urban Life, Urban Culture – Aboriginal/Indigenous Experiences* (Sydney: A Goolangullia Publication, University of Western Sydney, 1998), 221.

¹² Paul Keating's 'Redfern speech', Australian Launch of the International Year for the World's Indigenous People, Redfern Park, 10 December 1992, http://www.antar.org.au/keating_redfern.html, accessed 28 September 1997.

¹³ B.G Dexter, ‘The Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs – its functions and underlying principles’, *Aborigines in the 70's: seminars 1972-73*, Centre for Research into Aboriginal Affairs, Monash University, 1-5; Peter Khoury, *Contested Rationalities: Aboriginal organisations and the Australian state* (PhD thesis, UNSW, 1996), 123-126.

¹⁴ Tim Rowse, *Indigenous Futures: choice and development for Aboriginal and Islander Australia* (Sydney: UNSW press, 2002), 1.

Many meanings of self-determination and sovereignty

Self-determination and sovereignty remain key concepts in Aboriginal politics. The concept of self-determination had been used by an Aboriginal activist Fred Maynard in his campaign for the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association in the 1920s.¹⁵ At the time Woodrow Wilson, the President of the United States, popularised the idea of the 'self-determination of nations' and argued for the right of peoples to maintain their national existence and ethnic culture.¹⁶ Ideas of Aboriginal self-government and self-determination entered the Australian non-Indigenous humanitarian discourse more widely from the international peace movement in the 1940s, during the Second World War and in the post war period.¹⁷ At the same time the nationalistic movements of Indigenous peoples became more established in Western democracies, as the concept of Indigenous sovereignty emerged internationally within Indigenous scholarship, social movements and through arts and culture. Under the banner of self-determination, Indigenous people sought to define themselves as peoples distinct from the culturally different settler societies in which they lived and also to create political institutions that would better promote their interests.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the United Nations and the International Labor Organisation (ILO) promoted assimilation rather than self-determination as a solution for Indigenous peoples until the 1960s.¹⁹

¹⁵ John Maynard, *Fight for Liberty and Freedom: the origins of Australian Aboriginal activism* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2007), 6-8, 29-35, 120; John Maynard, Fred Maynard and the Awakening of Aboriginal Political Consciousness and Activism in Twentieth Century Australia (PhD thesis, University of New Castle, 2002), 154, 165-169; John Maynard, 'Fred Maynard and the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association (AAPA): One God, One Aim, One Destiny', *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 21, 1997, 1, 3, 6, 11; John Maynard, 'Vision, Voice and Influence: the rise of the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association', *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 21, April 2003, 100; John Maynard, 'The Other Fellow: Fred Maynard and the 1920s defence of cultural difference' in Tim Rowse (ed.), *Contesting Assimilation* (Perth: API Network, 2005), 36.

¹⁶ Sally M. Weaver, 'Self-determination, National Pressure Groups, and Australian Aborigines: The National Aboriginal Conference 1983-1985' in Michael D. Levin (ed.), *Ethnicity and Aboriginality: case studies in ethnonationalism* (Toronto, Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 53; Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line* (Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 279, 287, 335.

¹⁷ Alison Holland, 'To Eliminate Colour Prejudice: the WCTU and decolonisation in Australia', *Journal of Religious History*, Vol. 32, No. 2, June 2008, 270-271.

¹⁸ Weaver, 'Self-Determination, National Pressure Groups, and Australian Aborigines', 53.

¹⁹ McGregor, *Indifferent Inclusion*, 59.

Indigenous sovereignty first arose in public discourse in Australia during the 1960s. Aboriginal activists expressed claims for sovereignty at the Tent Embassy in 1972.²⁰ However, the term sovereignty gained further popularity in Aboriginal politics in the mid-1970s, when it emerged as a powerful combination of a number of strands which had been developing in Aboriginal politics, including criticism of the apparent reforms of the 1970s and a strengthening of the reassertion of Aboriginal culture and values.²¹ Sovereignty was a term around which Indigenous activists started to analyse Indigenous histories and cultures, and via which they started to articulate their agendas for social change. Sovereignty defined Indigenous peoples with concrete rights to self-government, territorial integrity and cultural autonomy under international law. It opposed the racist ideologies of beneficarianism which marked national policies during the assimilationist period.²²

Sovereignty is an elusive concept with multiple, though intertwined meanings. At its most general the term refers to the power and authority to govern. In the context of Indigenous political claims, sovereignty can rest on the historical claim that Indigenous people have never relinquished their sovereignty. It can also be used to refer to the unextinguished rights to self-government and autonomy, and corresponds to the political claim for self-determination, with the right and ability to exercise some level of sovereign power, even within the boundaries of existing nation states. For example Larissa Behrendt describes the Indigenous aspiration for sovereignty as a starting point for self-determination.²³ Sovereignty can also refer to a distinct and separate identity as “sovereign people” and more specifically to a capacity to make social, political and economic decisions. Sovereignty is also seen as having a personal aspect, when Aboriginal people assert their sovereignty in day-to-day actions. It is an empowering concept that signifies the point at which the negotiation can begin.²⁴

²⁰ Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, 343; McGregor, *Indifferent Inclusion*, 163-182; Jeff Archer, ‘Ambiguity in Political Ideology: Aboriginality as nationalism’, *Australian Journal of Anthropology*, 1991, Vol. 2, No. 2; Julia Martinez, ‘Problematising Aboriginal Nationalism’, *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 21, 1997.

²¹ Heather Goodall, ‘New South Wales’ in Ann McGrath (ed.), *Contested Ground: Australian Aborigines under the British Crown* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1995), 112.

²² Joanne Barker, ‘For Whom Sovereignty Matters’ in Joanna Barker (ed.), *Sovereignty Matters: locations of contestation and possibility in Indigenous struggles for self-determination*, (Lincoln, London: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 18.

²³ Larissa Behrendt, *Achieving Social Justice: Indigenous rights and Australia’s Future* (Sydney: Federation Press, 2003), 115.

²⁴ Sean Brennan, Brenda Gunn and George Williams, ‘Sovereignty’ and its Relevance to Treaty-Making Between Indigenous Peoples and Australian Governments’, *Sydney Law Review*, Vol. 26, No. 307, 2004, 310-311, 313-316; Chris Cunneen, ‘Indigeneity, Sovereignty and the Law: Challenging the Processes of

By linking sovereignty to concepts of self-determination and self-government, Aboriginal activists insisted on the recognition and respect of Indigenous peoples' inherent right to political autonomy. This right was historical and located, and supported by their unique cultural identities that continued to find meaning in those histories and relations to land.²⁵ According to Lois O'Donoghue, the former head of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), the recognition of the collective rights of Indigenous peoples, including that of the right to self-determination, is the key to their continued and distinct development. Though these rights complement individual human rights, the Aboriginal idea of self-determination differs from individual self-determination in that it is collective and always connected to their Indigenous status.²⁶

Ideas of self-determination and sovereignty were essential to the strong sense of Aboriginal nationalism that, as Jeff Archer, Julia Martinez and Russell McGregor show, emerged in Australia in the 1960s and 1970s.²⁷ This nationalism followed from Aboriginal disillusionment with the Australian government when it failed to effect real change after the referendum in 1967. At the same time Aboriginal activists shifted the emphasis from equal rights to Indigenous rights boosted by black power ideologies, the global radical movement and new identity politics. Nationalism, in this context, should not be seen as merely restricted to attempts to achieve an independent nation state. Rather, as Montserrat Guibernau argues, it is important to understand nation, state and nationalism as separate concepts, though existing in relation to each other.²⁸ Indeed Russell McGregor describes Aboriginal nationalism as cultural nationalism:

Aboriginal nationalism was an anti-colonial nationalism seeking a liberated future for the Aboriginal people along with an expansion of their rights and entitlements; but it

Criminalisation', *Special Issue on Indigenous Sovereignty*, South Atlantic Quarterly, Duke University Press, Vol. 110, No. 2, 313-317.

²⁵ Barker, 'For Whom Sovereignty Matters', 26.

²⁶ Lois O'Donoghue, 'Keynote Address: Australian government and self-determination' in Christine Fletcher (ed.), *Aboriginal Self-Determination in Australia* (Aboriginal Studies Press: Canberra, 1994), 4.

²⁷ Archer, 'Ambiguity in Political Ideology'; Martinez, 'Problematising Aboriginal Nationalism'; Russell McGregor, 'Another Nation: Aboriginal activism in the late 1960s and early 1970s', *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 40, 2009.

²⁸ Montserrat Guibernau, *Nations without States: political communities in a global age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 2, 13-14.

conceived liberation primarily in cultural terms, as superseding of a colonial cultural relationship and the consequent spiritual regeneration of the Aboriginal people.²⁹

However, while McGregor emphasises the cultural side of Aboriginal nationalism, which was terribly important, it would be a mistake to ignore the social, political and economic aspects of the Aboriginal desire for self-determination and land rights. This comes evident when studying the Aboriginal Legal and Medical Services, the Black Theatre, Murawina and the Aboriginal Housing Company, which played key roles in Aboriginal activism for self-determination. As Guibernau argues, nationalism and its aspiration of self-determination, when based on democratic principle, is a progressive social movement that seeks the recognition of a particular community as culturally distinct and having the right to rule itself. She writes, the “struggle for recognition entails the desire to be regarded and treated as equal, as someone who has a voice and is able to participate in political processes affecting his/her future”.³⁰

In recent years in particular, self-determination has become a highly controversial concept in Australia. Critics of self-determination have argued that it has failed Aboriginal people and maintains the disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in health, housing, employment and education.³¹ Peter Sutton critiques the rights based trend in Aboriginal affairs and argues that remote Aboriginal communities and urban areas with a high Aboriginal population, such as Redfern, have become worse since the introduction of locally elected bodies.³² Those defending Indigenous self-determination argue that it has never really been practised in Australia.³³ Tim Rowse claims that assimilation and self-determination, as government policies, are only variations, though perhaps very different, of governmental attempts to modernise Indigenous society.³⁴ Irene Watson notes that even though self-determination is problematic, Indigenous people globally see the recognition

²⁹ McGregor, ‘Another Nation’, 345.

³⁰ Guibernau, *Nations without States*, 25-26.

³¹ Geoffrey Partington, *Hasluck versus Coombs: white politics and Australia's Aborigines* (Sydney: Quakers Hill Press, 1996); Helen Hughes, *Lands of Shame: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 'homelands' in transition* (St Leonards: The Centre for Independent Studies, 2007); Gary Johns, *Aboriginal Self-Determination: the whiteman's dream* (Ballan, Victoria: Connor Court Publishing, 2011).

³² Peter Sutton, *The Politics of Suffering: Indigenous Australia and the end of the liberal consensus* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2009), 120.

³³ Sarah Maddison, *Black Politics: inside the complexity of Aboriginal political culture* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2009), 43.

³⁴ Tim Rowse, *Obligated to be Difficult: Nugget Coombs' legacy in Indigenous affairs* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 131.

of self-determination and minimum human rights standards as fundamental to their survival.³⁵

However, the development of the concept of self-determination has not, so far, received much scrutiny from historians, unlike the concept of assimilation which has received considerable attention during recent years.³⁶ For example, in his work McGregor discusses assimilation as a concept with multiple meanings, yet gives self-determination less nuanced analysis. He acknowledges the significance of self-determination as part of the expression of Aboriginal nationalism and also briefly explores the failures and successes of self-determination policy, but does not distinguish between these two.³⁷ Interestingly, McGregor does not discuss the Aboriginal organisations in Redfern or elsewhere in Australia. Yet, Aboriginal organisations in Redfern played a central role in the process of Aboriginal nation building that extended from local to national level. More importantly, they provided spaces where Aboriginal aspirations for social, political and economic autonomy, as part of Aboriginal nationalism, were put into practice. As Clive Rosewarne *et al* observe Aboriginal organisations were fundamental to the promotion of Aboriginal self-determination and identity.³⁸

In practice self-determination had multiple meanings. For some it signified the decline and eventual withdrawal of missions, while for others it meant the emergence of Aboriginal organisations or rights for Aboriginal people to regain ownership of their land.³⁹ These meanings could overlap and vary in emphasis in different parts of Australia at different times. Many supporters of self-determination thought that it would lessen dependency and make it possible for Aboriginal people to make decisions about their own lives, while its opponents likened self-determination to separatism and segregation as I discuss later in this thesis.

³⁵ Irene Watson, 'Settled and unsettled spaces: Are we free to roam?' in Aileen Moreton-Robinson (ed.), *Sovereign Subjects: Indigenous sovereignty matters* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2007), 23-24.

³⁶ See e.g. Russell McGregor, 'Assimilationists contest assimilation: T G H Strehlow and A P Elkin on Aboriginal policy', *Journal of Australian Studies*, 2002, Vol. 26, No. 75, 43-50; Rani Kerin, 'Charles Duguid and Aboriginal assimilation in Adelaide, 1950-1960', *History Australia*, Vol. 2, No. 3, 2005, 85.1-85.17; Tim Rowse (ed.), *Contesting Assimilation* (Perth: API Network, 2005); Russell McGregor, *Indifferent Inclusion*.

³⁷ McGregor, *Indifferent Inclusion*, 182-187.

³⁸ Clive Rosewarne, Petronella Vaarzon-Morel, Stephanie Bell, Elizabeth Carter, Margaret Liddle and Johnny Liddle. 'The Historical Context of Developing an Aboriginal Community-Controlled Health Service: a social history of the first ten years of the Central Australian Aborigines Congress', *Health and History*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2007, 120.

³⁹ Maddison, *Black Politics*, 26.

In the same manner, the ideas of self-determination promoted by the Redfern Aboriginal organisations were not necessarily the same as the government policies. The government, I will argue, saw the organisations as ultimately limited to service delivery. However, none of the Aboriginal organisations limited their activities to providing welfare services, such as health or legal services, to their community. Rather they became political power bases that extended their influence beyond the local to the state and national levels. Furthermore, while the government had an underlying tendency to treat these services as short term solutions, Indigenous people envisioned them as a permanent part of their community governance.

In this thesis I will explore the differing meanings of Aboriginal self-determination as I study Aboriginal organisations in Redfern and their activism for self-determination. I will also discuss the tensions created when Aboriginal organisations aimed to achieve *their* idea of self-determination while operating mostly under government funded structures.

Previous research on Aboriginal rights activism

Aboriginal historiography has undergone a shift from emphasising Aboriginal victimhood to highlighting Aboriginal agency. The first generation of Aboriginal histories responded to W.E.H. Stanner's notion of the 'Great Australian Silence', which excluded Aboriginal people from Australian historiography from the 1880s to the 1970s.⁴⁰ In the process of writing Aboriginal people back into Australian historiography historians initially focused, in particular, on writing about frontier conflict and bringing out the violence of Australian colonisation.⁴¹ An increasing effort has been made since the late 1980s to bring out different aspects of colonisation, patterns of Aboriginal accommodation and resistance,

⁴⁰ W.E.H. Stanner, *After the Dreaming* (Sydney: The Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1974), 18-29. For the 19th century Australian historiography and Aboriginal people see Johanna Perheentupa, 'Those Poor Creatures – The Children of the Soil': Aborigines in Australian historiography, 1798-1883 (MA thesis, University of Turku, 1998).

⁴¹ See e.g. Peter Biskup, *Not slaves, not citizens: the Aboriginal problem in Western Australia, 1898-1954* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1973); Raymond Evans, Kay Saunders and Kathryn Cronin, *Exclusion, Exploitation and Extermination: race relations in colonial Queensland* (Sydney: Australia and New Zealand Book Co., 1975).

shifting balances of white-Aboriginal relations and Aboriginal agency, as well as the range of roles played by white people.⁴²

Aboriginal activism became a more central topic as historians aimed to bring out Aboriginal people as actors.⁴³ Among the first studies of Aboriginal activism were biographies that focused on the life and achievements of single Aboriginal rights activists. Among these were Jack Horner's biography of William Ferguson and Andrew Markus' *Blood from a Stone*, which centred on William Cooper and also contained a documentary history.⁴⁴ For this study more recent biographies including Peter Read, *Charles Perkins: a biography* and Marilyn Lake, *Faith: Faith Bandler, gentle activist* have been particularly useful.⁴⁵ Biographies of Indigenous activists have been accompanied by more general research on Aboriginal activism, such as Heather Goodall's *Invasion to Embassy*, a detailed study on Aboriginal land rights struggle in New South Wales.⁴⁶ John Maynard's work on Fred Maynard and Aboriginal political activism in the 1920s that situate Aboriginal activism within the international anti-colonial movement has also been significant in broadening our understanding of Aboriginal activism.⁴⁷ Also other works on the history of Aboriginal activism have started to reach out to wider international and transnational contexts, for example Ravi de Costa's *Higher Authority* and Fiona Paisley's *The Lone Protestor*.⁴⁸

⁴² Anna Cole, Victoria Haskins and Fiona Paisley, 'Preface' in Anna Cole, Victoria Haskins and Fiona Paisley (eds.), *Uncommon Ground: white women in Aboriginal history* (Canberra: Aboriginal History, 2005), xx; Minoru Hokari, Cross-culturalizing history: journey to the Gurindji way of historical practice (PhD thesis, ANU, 2001), 12-17. Ann McGrath's book, *Born in the Cattle: Aborigines in cattle country* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1987), is an example of works that start to breakdown the dichotomy between victims and oppressors, resistance and invasion, and looks, for example, also into aspects of Aboriginal accommodation.

⁴³ Hokari, Cross-Culturalizing History, 13-17. Hokari identifies Henry Reynolds' work, *The Other Side of the Frontier: Aboriginal resistance to the European invasion of Australia* (Ringwood: Penguin Books, ((1981) 1995), as one of the first works to bring out the Aboriginal perspective, their resistance and agency.

⁴⁴ Jack Horner, *Vote Ferguson for Aboriginal Freedom: a biography* (Sydney: Australia and New Zealand Book Co, 1974); Andrew Markus, *Blood from a Stone* (Sydney, Wellington, London: Allen & Unwin, 1988). Jack Horner later republished his biography of Ferguson under the title *Bill Ferguson: fighter for Aboriginal freedom* (Published by the author: Canberra, 1994). Bain Attwood and Andrew Markus' *Thinking Black* provides an updated and newly written account of William Cooper's activism with documentary material, as did Markus' earlier work. Bain Attwood and Andrew Markus, *Thinking Black: William Cooper and the Australian Aborigines' League* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2004).

⁴⁵ Peter Read, *Charles Perkins: a biography* (Ringwood: Viking, 1990); Marilyn Lake, *Faith: Faith Bandler, gentle activist* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2002).

⁴⁶ Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*.

⁴⁷ Maynard, 'Fred Maynard and the awakening of Aboriginal political consciousness and activism in twentieth century Australia'; Maynard, *Fight for Liberty and Freedom*.

⁴⁸ de Costa, *Higher Authority*; Fiona Paisley, *The Lone Protestor: AM Fernando in Australia and Europe* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2012).

There has been a shift towards more cross-cultural histories in the most recent development in Aboriginal historiography. Instead of looking at histories of Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal people, there has been an attempt to focus on interactions and dynamics between both groups. Among these cross-cultural historiographies are *Uncommon Ground: white women in Aboriginal history* edited by Anna Cole, Victoria Haskins and Fiona Paisley as well as Minoru Hokari's *Gurindji Journey: a Japanese historian in the outback*. Cross-cultural historiographies that have been particularly useful in writing the background to this thesis are Maria Nugent's *Botany Bay: where histories meet* and Grace Karskens' *The Colony: a history of early Sydney*.⁴⁹ In some recent works on Aboriginal political activism, historians have also emphasised the co-operation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal activists. Bain Attwood's study *Rights for Aborigines* and Sue Taffe's *Black and white together FCAATSI* are examples of this.⁵⁰

A notable development in Australian historiography during the past three decades has been the Indigenous histories produced not only within an academic framework but also in fine arts, theatre, film and literature during the past three decades.⁵¹ As Linda Tuhiwai Smith remarks in the context of Indigenous histories of New Zealand, "The 'Talk' about the colonial past is embedded in our political discourses."⁵² Collecting oral histories and reclaiming the past in the form of autobiographies, or family histories, have become increasingly popular.⁵³ Indigenous life writing has also produced many fascinating works on the history of Indigenous women's political activity, which otherwise, as Moreton-Robinson points out, has not attracted the attention of academic historians, unlike that of Indigenous men.⁵⁴ For this study, autobiographies such as Shirley Smith's book written with the help of Roberta Sykes or the autobiography of Isabel Flick co-authored with

⁴⁹ Cole, Haskins and Paisley, *Uncommon Ground*; Minoru Hokari, *Gurindji Journey: A Japanese historian in the outback* (Sydney: UNSW press, 2011); Maria Nugent, *Botany Bay: where histories meet*; Grace Karskens, *The Colony: A History of Early Sydney* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin), 2009.

⁵⁰ Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*; Sue Taffe, *Black and White Together FCAATSI: The Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders 1958-1973* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2005).

⁵¹ Nugent, *Botany Bay*, 183.

⁵² Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: research and Indigenous peoples* (London, New York: Zed Books, 1999), 19.

⁵³ Bain Attwood, 'Introduction' in Bain Attwood (ed.), *In the Age of Mabo* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1996), xviii-xx. On Aboriginal women, in particular, see Anne Brewster, *Reading Aboriginal Women's Autobiography* (South Melbourne: Sydney University Press in association with Oxford university Press, 1996).

⁵⁴ Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin' up to the White Woman: Indigenous women and feminism* (St Lucia: University of Queensland press, 2000), 152.

Heather Goodall, have been important.⁵⁵ Charles Perkins' autobiography has also been useful.⁵⁶

Indigenous activism in the 1970s, and in Sydney in particular, has escaped the attention of academic historians. Both Heather Goodall, in her *Invasion to Embassy*, and Bain Attwood, in his *Rights for Aborigines*, end their research at the time of the Tent Embassy. Thus, apart from brief mention, neither addresses the Aboriginal organisations in Redfern. Jennifer Clark discusses the coming of Black Power to Australia and the Tent Embassy in detail, but does not mention the Sydney organisations in her otherwise fascinating work *Aborigines and Activism*.⁵⁷

When Aboriginal organisations in Sydney are mentioned in academic histories, the history of their establishment is often misrepresented.⁵⁸ For example, Attwood and Markus write that the Aboriginal Legal and Medical Services were founded by the Whitlam government between 1972 and 1975.⁵⁹ Max Griffiths and Robert Ariss both also claim that these organisations were government initiated, rather than recognising their Indigenous origins.⁶⁰ Kathleen Lothian and Attwood also simplify the history of the establishment of the National Black Theatre as a personified project run by Bob Maza.⁶¹ Though Maza was a central figure in establishing the National Black Theatre, he was invited to act as a director by a group of people who had already started theatre practices.⁶² The limited attention given to the history of Aboriginal organisations reflects the way that demonstrations, sit-ins and petitions have been more readily recognised as historically significant, at the expense of

⁵⁵ Shirley Smith with assistance of Bobbi Sykes, *Mum Shirl: an autobiography* (Richmond: Heinemann Publishers, 1983); Roberta Sykes, *Snake Dancing: autobiography of a black woman* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1998); Isabel Flick and Heather Goodall, *Isabel Flick: the many lives of an extraordinary woman* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2004). See also e.g. Ruby Langford, *Don't Take Your Love to Town* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1988).

⁵⁶ Charles Perkins, *A Bastard Like Me* (Sydney: Ure Smith, 1975).

⁵⁷ Jennifer Clark, *Aborigines and Activism: Race, Aborigines and the Coming of the 60s* (Perth: University of Western Australia Press, 2008).

⁵⁸ Kathleen Lothian, 'A Blackward Step is a Forward Step': Australian Aborigines and Black Power, 1969-1972 (MA thesis, Monash University, 2002), 101.

⁵⁹ Bain Attwood and Andrew Markus (eds.), *The Struggle for Aboriginal Rights: a documentary history* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1999), 276.

⁶⁰ Robert Ariss, 'Writing Black: the construction of an Aboriginal discourse' in Jeremy Beckett (ed.), *Past and Present: the construction of Aboriginality* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press for Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1988), 133; Max Griffiths, *Aboriginal Affairs: a short history 1788-1995*, (Kangaroo Press: Sydney, 1995, 115.

⁶¹ Lothian, 'A Blackward Step is a Forward Step', 153; Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, 315.

⁶² See Chapter 4.

resistance practices that build communities from *within* and that fall outside the categories of resistance as direct protest, as Chrystal McKinnon observes.⁶³

Aspects of Sydney activism have been studied by Scott Robinson in his MA thesis on the history of Aboriginal Embassy and Gary Foley in his BA honours thesis on Black Power in Redfern between 1968 and 1972.⁶⁴ Both of these works have been very helpful in mapping activism in Sydney. Lothian also discusses the role of Black Power in the establishment of Indigenous organisations in Sydney in her interesting research that studies the influence of Black Power in Australia.⁶⁵ George Morgan briefly mentions the Black Theatre and the Aboriginal Legal and Medical Services, and discusses the Aboriginal Housing Company, in his work on Aboriginal housing in New South Wales, *Unsettled Places*.⁶⁶ However, the main focus of his work is the urbanisation of Aboriginal people and role of public housing in it. Since all of these four studies discuss a particular aspect of Aboriginal activism in Sydney, they leave room for further study in building a more holistic picture of Aboriginal activism in Redfern in the 1970s.

Scholars in fields other than history have also conducted research examining areas that are in the focus of this thesis. Rosemary Casey's book *Creating Frames* includes detailed information about the formation of the Black Theatre in Sydney.⁶⁷ However, Casey studies the Black Theatre from the perspective of drama and thus does not explore other aspects of the Black Theatre nor its role in Indigenous activism. Similarly, though Raymond S. Robinson valuably discusses the early history of the Black Theatre in his MA thesis on the Aboriginal Islander Skill Development Scheme (NAISDA), it is limited to the perspective of its dance group.⁶⁸ Kay Anderson's work on the Aboriginal Housing Company, from the

⁶³ McKinnon, 'Indigenous Music as a Space of Resistance', 264. McKinnon's examples of such works are Lorna Lippmann, *Generations of Resistance: Mabo and Justice* (Melbourne: Longman, 1996) and Attwood and Markus, *The Struggle for Aboriginal Rights*.

⁶⁴ Scott Robinson, Aboriginal Embassy; Gary Foley, Black Power in Redfern 1968-1972 (BA (Hons) thesis, Department of History, University of Melbourne, 2001), available online at http://www.kooriweb.org.foley/essays/essay_1.html, accessed 15 August 2005. See also Scott Robinson, 'The Aboriginal Embassy: an account of the protest, 1972' in Valerie Chapman and Peter Read (eds.), *Terrible Hard Biscuits: a reader in Aboriginal history* (St Leonards: Journal of Aboriginal History and Allen & Unwin, 1996).

⁶⁵ Lothian, 'Blackward Step is a Forward Step'.

⁶⁶ Morgan, *Unsettled Places*, 59-63.

⁶⁷ Maryrose Casey, *Creating Frames: contemporary Indigenous theatre 1967-1990* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2004).

⁶⁸ Raymond S. Robinson, *Dreaming Tracks: history of the Aboriginal Islander Skill Development Scheme, 1972-1979* (MA thesis, Performance, School of Applied Social and Human Sciences, University of Western Sydney, 2000).

perspective of a cultural geographer, has been extremely useful but it does not map the location of the Aboriginal Housing Company as part of Indigenous activism in Sydney in the 1970s.⁶⁹ Wendy Shaw, in her interesting research on Redfern and whiteness, dates the beginning of the Redfern organisations to the establishment of the Aboriginal Housing Company when in fact the Housing Company followed the Aboriginal Legal and Medical Services, Murawina and the Black Theatre.⁷⁰

Peter Khoury's PhD thesis, *Contested Rationalities: Aboriginal organisations and the Australian state*, provides interesting insights, particularly, into the Aboriginal Legal and Medical Services from a sociological perspective.⁷¹ However, although he provides historical background, Khoury primarily focuses on the period before the organisations were established. He then directs attention to the 1980s and the dynamics between the organisations and the State. Gregory Lyons' PhD thesis on the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service touches on the difficulties faced by the Aboriginal Legal Services at the Commonwealth level.⁷² Nevertheless, since its focus is Victoria, it has been of limited use for this study. Christine Jennett looks briefly into the establishment of the Aboriginal Legal Service in her PhD thesis on *Black Power as an Anti-colonial Discourse*.⁷³ However, she does not look at activism in itself, nor Sydney in particular, but rather maps the ideological construction of Black Power.

This thesis aims to paint a more complete picture of Aboriginal activism and self-determination in Redfern than the previous studies by situating five different Aboriginal organisations in context with one another and in relation to their interactions with the government. Furthermore, Aboriginal organisations' different areas of focus allow me to explore Aboriginal activism from the perspectives of legal reform, health and welfare, performing arts and culture, education, feminism and housing. Studying five very different

⁶⁹ Kay J. Anderson, 'Place Narratives and the Origins of Inner Sydney's Aboriginal Settlement, 1972–1971', *Journal of Historical Geography*, Vol. 19, No. 3, 1993, 314–335; Kay Anderson, 'Constructing Geographies: "race", place and the making of Sydney's Aboriginal Redfern' in Peter Jackson and Jan Penrose (eds.), *Constructions of Race, Place and Nation* (London: UCL Press, 1993), 81–99; Kay Anderson, 'Reflections on Redfern', 69–86; Kay Anderson, 'Savagery and Urbanity: struggles over Aboriginal Housing, Redfern, 1970–1973' in Peter Read (ed.), *Settlement: a history of Australian Indigenous housing* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2000), 130–143.

⁷⁰ Wendy Shaw, *Cities of Whiteness*, (Malden, Oxford, Carlton: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 15.

⁷¹ Khoury, *Contested Rationalities*.

⁷² Gregory P. Lyons, *A Study of the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service* (PhD thesis, Monash University, 1984).

⁷³ Christine Jennett, *Black Power as an Anti-colonial Discourse* (PhD thesis, UNSW, 1996), 351–362.

organisations, during a relatively short time frame and connected to a specific location, enables me to canvas the complexities and the multifaceted nature of Aboriginal activism in the 1970s.⁷⁴

Space and time in urban activism

‘Situating’ this thesis in a ‘moment’ in Redfern in the 1970s, allows the study of Aboriginal activism for self-determination in its historical context with several interlocking themes.⁷⁵ For the purposes of this thesis, the central themes are: identity, gender, race, urban space, radicalism and Indigenous rights. For example, although women were often the backbone of the Aboriginal political movement as well as the survival of the communities, they have not received the same attention in academic research as Aboriginal men.⁷⁶ Looking at different organisations allows acknowledgement of the similarities and differences between the genders, as well as observation of the roles that men and women adopted in Aboriginal activism in Sydney.

In the early 1970s the emphasis of Indigenous activism shifted, not only from white and black co-operation to Aboriginal control, or from equal rights to Indigenous rights. Aboriginal activists also started to combine within the framework of their organisations practical welfare work with the rights campaign on a larger scale rather than separating these two aspects as had occurred earlier as I will discuss in the next chapter. Christine Jennett describes the early seventies as “an historic moment in which Aborigines were able to temporarily seize the initiative in redefining the racial order as it concerned them.”⁷⁷ By concentrating on this moment of rupture or discontinuity, I hope to avoid the pitfalls of

⁷⁴ See Aileen Moreton-Robinson, ‘Introduction: resistance, recovery and revitalisation’ in Michele Grossman (ed.), *Blacklines: contemporary critical writing by Indigenous Australians* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2005), 128.

⁷⁵ See Alison Holland’s definition of “moment” in Alison Holland and Barbara Brookes (eds.), *Rethinking the Racial Moment: essays in colonial encounter* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 183.

⁷⁶ Nigel Parbury, *Survival: a history of Aboriginal life in New South Wales* (Sydney: Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, 1988) 143; Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin’ up to the White Woman*, 152. See also Roberta Sykes interviewed by Pat Ormesher, 2002, Redfern Oral History, <http://redfernoralhistory.org/OralHistory/RobertaSykesonMumShirl/tabid/145/Default.aspx>, accessed 3 June 2011.

⁷⁷ Jennett, *Black Power as an Anti-colonial Discourse*, 3.

the teleological and essentialist representations of the past.⁷⁸ However, though there was a distinct change in Aboriginal activism at the time, I will also consider the way these organisations emerged from the activism of the 1960s and earlier. Looking into the continuities in the history of Indigenous activism in Sydney emphasises Indigenous presence even at times when non-Indigenous people have refused to acknowledge it.

Today most Indigenous people in settler states are urban.⁷⁹ The city, or urban space, provided the context for the development of Aboriginal activism – for its alternative ideas and strategies – and a stage for the dramatisation of dissent. As Bruce D’Arcus writes, “The city is not simply a passive container for resistance, but a dynamic field that contributes to both form and its content.”⁸⁰ Yet, urban Indigenous histories in Australia have rarely received the attention of academic historians.⁸¹ This neglect is partially due to the way Australian cities have been seen as void of Indigenous people and the perceived lack of authenticity of urban Indigenous people.⁸²

Furthermore, even though Indigenous people’s connection to land is commonly acknowledged, the significance of place and space for Indigenous people in the urban context has often been undermined in historiography.⁸³ Heather Goodall writes in relation to south eastern Australia

When we consider how Aboriginal societies in the south-east survived the invasion, [the] social, political and cultural meanings of land are crucial. [...] the Aboriginal people who survived carried with them a cultural experience of seeing land as the central organising principle in their society.

⁷⁸ Hélène Bowen Raddeker, *Sceptical History: feminist and postmodern approaches in practice* (New York, London: Routledge, 2007), 62.

⁷⁹ Jeffrey Sissons, *First Peoples: Indigenous cultures and their futures* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005), 28.

⁸⁰ Bruce D’Arcus, ‘The Urban Geography of Red Power: the American Indian Movement in Minneapolis-Saint Paul, 1968-1970’, *Urban Studies*, Vol. 47, No. 6, 2010, 1242.

⁸¹ On the lack of urban histories see Gillian Cowlishaw, *The City’s Outback* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2009), 35, Holland, ‘The Yurtokee Club, 1940’s Adelaide’, 187. For examples of urban Indigenous histories see Karskens, *The Colony*; Nugent, *Botany Bay*; Penelope Edmonds, *Urbanizing Frontiers: Indigenous peoples and settlers in 19th century Pacific rim cities* (Vancouver: UCB Press, 2010).

⁸² Tracey Banivanua-Mar and Penelope Edmonds, ‘Introduction: Making Space in Settler Colonies’ in Tracey Banivanua-Mar and Penelope Edmonds (eds.), *Making Settler Colonial Space: Perspectives on Race, Place and Identity* (Hampshire, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 11.

⁸³ Deborah Bird Rose, *Hidden Histories: black stories from Victoria River Downs, Humbert River and Wave Hill Stations* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1991); Hokari, *Cross-Culturalizing History*. Attwood notes how Aboriginal land rights were not acknowledged in urban context. Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, 346-348.

They knew to which land they belonged, even if they did not any longer have access to all the details of its stories.⁸⁴

Each of the political issues with which the Aboriginal activists in Redfern dealt were as much spatial as social, as were the processes of resistance and identity creation.⁸⁵ Aboriginal people started to assert their active place in the city's space by establishing Aboriginal services. As Doreen Massey argues, "the spatial is integral to the production of history and thus to the possibility of politics".⁸⁶ Or as Michel Foucault asserts "space is fundamental in any form of communal life; space is fundamental in any exercise of power."⁸⁷ Indigenous resistance sought to occupy, deploy and create alternative spatialities – social as well as geographical – from those that had been imposed by the process of colonisation and defined by oppression and discrimination.⁸⁸ Policing and the regulation of the use of public space were critical examples of oppression played out spatially and which were challenged through alternative social spaces:

The reclamation and creation of social spaces through which an autonomous sense of Indigeneity can be created, continued and expressed has therefore been central to the ongoing survival of Indigenous peoples and cultures in Australia and elsewhere.⁸⁹

Henri Lefebvre discusses the idea of space as social practice. He notes how everyone knows what is meant when people talk about, for example, the "corner" of the street or a cultural "centre". According to Lefebvre these words refer to specific uses of those spaces, to a spatial practice that they express and constitute.⁹⁰ However, as Sara Mills notes, these spaces should not be viewed as given, but "as a set of superimposed spatial frameworks, as many social spaces negotiated within one geographical place and time".⁹¹ Thus, a street corner could constitute a different social space for different groups of people, such as a meeting point or a space of threat. In this thesis I examine the claim of urban Aboriginal

⁸⁴ Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, 18. See also Heather Goodall, 'The River Runs Backwards' in Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths (eds.), *Words for Country: landscape & language in Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2002), 38-40.

⁸⁵ Cf. D'Arcus, 'The Urban Geography of Red Power', 1250, 1252.

⁸⁶ Doreen Massey, 'Politics of Space/Time', *New Left Review*, No. 196, 1992, 84.

⁸⁷ Michel Foucault quoted in Stuart Elden, *Mapping the Present: Heidegger, Foucault and the project of spatial history* (London, New York: Continuum, 2001), 119.

⁸⁸ Steve Pile, 'Introduction' in Steve Pile and Michael Keith (ed.), *Geographies of Resistance* (London, New York: Routledge, 1997), 3; McKinnon, 'Indigenous Music as a Space of Resistance', 257.

⁸⁹ McKinnon, 'Indigenous Music as a Space of Resistance', 256.

⁹⁰ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Malden, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), 16.

⁹¹ Sara Mills, 'Gender and Colonial Space', *Gender, Place and Culture*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1996, 126.

people to their identity as a community as well as to the ownership of social and geographic spaces in the settler colonial city in their struggle for self-determination.

On terminology

In this thesis, I see ‘direct action’ and ‘resistance within the community’ as interlinked and interdependent aspects of the same project of resistance among the Redfern Aboriginal community. I acknowledge that resistance does not always aim at changing the existing structures so much as it aims at opposing them.⁹² However, the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people should not be seen simply as one of binaries such as domination and subordination, oppressor and oppressed. Rather it should be seen as a dynamic power relation that allows for the transformation of that relationship.⁹³ I examine resistance that aimed to transform the dominating structures that impacted on both individual lives and the community as a whole. In this process, resistance became activism while the activists were the subject of change. Thus, rather than studying resistance as a discourse on inequalities of power and difference, following Bruce D’Arcus’ definition, I study the practical work of recalibrating those relationships; of putting in motion resistance as practice.⁹⁴ At times resistance and activism are also referred to as a struggle, a fight for rights and even as a movement.⁹⁵ All of these terms are used in this thesis.

It has been commonly argued that Indigenous people have resisted the colonisation of their country since the first white people landed on Australian shores, if not with armed resistance or direct action then in their daily practices.⁹⁶ However, some chose, or at times found it necessary, to co-operate with white people and to accommodate to the pressures of colonialism. Yet, it is not important here to be able to separate the ones who resisted,

⁹² For this kind of resistance see e.g. Paul Willis, *Learning to Labor: how working class kids get working class jobs* (Farnborough: Saxon House, 1978).

⁹³ Ariss, ‘Writing Black’, 131-132.

⁹⁴ D’Arcus, ‘The Urban Geography of Red Power’, 1243.

⁹⁵ See e.g. Attwood and Markus, *The Struggle for Aboriginal Rights*, 1; Kevin Gilbert, *Because White a Man’ll never do it* (Sydney, Auckland: Harper Collins Publishers, (1973) 1994), e.g. 31, 111, 117.

⁹⁶ Broome, *Aboriginal Australians*, passim; Lippmann, *Generations of Resistance: Mabo and Justice*, passim. See also Attwood and Markus, *The Struggle for Aboriginal Rights*, 7; Maynard, ‘Fred Maynard and the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association’, 1; Ann McGrath, ‘National Story’ in Ann McGrath (ed.), *Contested Ground: Australian Aborigines under the British Crown* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1995), 46.

and the ones who accommodated. Rather accommodation and resistance can be understood as being tightly riveted together.⁹⁷ It has been essential for Aboriginal people to balance different levels of resistance and accommodation in order to survive and to preserve Aboriginal culture. This negotiation was also an important aspect of Aboriginal activism in Redfern in the 1970s. In particular, it was evident in the relationships Aboriginal organisations had with the Federal government as I will discuss in my thesis.

The term Indigenous people is a fairly recent one that emerged in the 1970s,⁹⁸ though it had already been used by International Labour Organisation (ILO) in ‘The Convention of Indigenous Populations’ in 1957. It was not widely used in Australia during the period of this study, though it does appear occasionally, for example in newspaper articles. People more commonly identified themselves as Aborigines, Aboriginal people or Black. Thus, in this research I will mainly use the term Aboriginal people. The term Indigenous is used in order to include both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who participated in Sydney activism. Black is used to reflect the contemporary political language. However, it also acknowledges that some non-Indigenous activists, such as Roberta Sykes and Faith Bandler, identified as black activists. In order to acknowledge the racial politics of the time, people of European background are often referred to as whites as well as non-Aboriginal and non-Indigenous.

In this thesis I use the term community, though it can be problematic in an Aboriginal context. Community as a term came into common usage in the early 1970s as an alternative to ‘mission’ and ‘reserve’ which were perceived as more assimilationist expressions.⁹⁹ Often the so called Aboriginal communities consisted, and still consist, of mixed groups of people who had been forcibly moved or, as in the case of Redfern, who had voluntarily migrated to the area. Thus, they consisted of members of many different communities. In some cases only some members of the community ‘came from the country’, while others have formed a relationship to the area at a later stage. However, the Redfern Aboriginal activists also used the term community, which is why it is important to include it in this study. In this thesis I write about the Redfern Aboriginal community, meaning the Aboriginal people who lived in and identified with the Redfern area at the time of this study. I will argue that

⁹⁷ Willis, *Learning to Labor*, 185.

⁹⁸ Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 7.

⁹⁹ Maddison, *Black Politics*, 148-153.

the Aboriginal organisations in Redfern played a significant role in building a shared identity among these people.

On source material

The core body of archival material for this research has come from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) papers held in the National Archives of Australia in Sydney. These documents include correspondence between the members of the Aboriginal organisations and the Department officials as well as reports and reviews. Most of this material had not previously been accessed. Relevant archival material is also held in the Mitchell library such as the Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship papers, which were helpful in setting the historical context of this research. The Aboriginal Legal Service papers at the Nura Gili research centre (formerly known as Aboriginal Research and Resource Centre) at UNSW, were crucial when studying the early days of the Aboriginal Legal Service, before the DAA was established. The UNSW archives have a collection of Aboriginal Medical Service papers under material collected by Fred Hollows, which similarly gave a good insight into the early days of the organisation and the role of Hollows in setting up the AMS. I have also studied manuscripts at the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, such as lectures given or papers written by Aboriginal activists.

From the 1960s Indigenous people started to increasingly express themselves in various forms of writing. In addition to material generated in their correspondence with government officials in the 1960s and 1970s there was an explosion of Indigenous publishing.¹⁰⁰ Indigenous publishing was a remarkable phenomenon considering that many Indigenous people had no access to formal education and that illiteracy was still common in the 1970s.¹⁰¹ The ideologies of Indigenous activism were powerfully expressed in literature, theatre and in particular poetry in the 1970s. This research includes for example Kevin Gilbert's *White Man'll Never Do It*, Bob Merritt's play *The Cake Man* and Gerry

¹⁰⁰ Michael Rose, *For the Record: 160 years of Aboriginal print journalism* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1996), xxiii, xxx.

¹⁰¹ Ravi de Costa, *Higher Authority: Indigeneous transnationalism and Australia* (Sydney: UNSW press, 2006), 106; Kevin Gilbert, *Because White Man'll Never Do It* (Sydney, Auckland, London: Harper Collins, (1973) 2002), 108-109, 135.

Bostock's *Here Comes Nigger* (published as extracts in *Meanjin*). The Indigenous papers and magazines I have studied include *Identity*, *Koori Bina*, *Aboriginal Medical Service Newsletter* and *Mereki* (published by the National Black Theatre).

Mainstream newspapers also provide useful evidence and representations. Activists used the media to gain wider publicity and as an avenue to pressure governments. For the purposes of this research I have accessed *the Sydney Morning Herald* as a main source, and also utilised the newspaper clipping collection at the Australian National Library.

Government publications, on both Federal and State levels, also form an important part of the written sources for this thesis. Published government papers and reports, such as the Scott report *Problems and Needs of the Aborigines of Sydney* for the New South Wales government, give important information about the socio-economic issues with which the activists were dealing. Government publications also contain activists' perspectives, for example, submissions by the Aboriginal activists and their supporters on Aboriginal affairs. The New South Wales Aborigines Welfare Board publication *New Dawn* also reported on the development of the Aboriginal organisations.

Though my emphasis has been on studying documentary material, oral history has been an important part of this research. Oral history material used in this research consists of interviews conducted by myself as well as published and archived ones. Radio interviews relevant to the topic have also been useful. Bain Attwood questions the use of oral histories when studying intellectual histories, since people's memories change with time and thus recollections of political pasts tend to emphasise continuities and conceptual similarities.¹⁰² In memory work narrating the past is a matter of perspective and the narrator is an insider who tries to make sense of the past in the present. Thus present and past get entangled. According to Attwood, this differs from the work of a historian who, though surrounded by the present, aims to examine and explain the causes or origins of past events rather than the consequences of the past.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, xiv.

¹⁰³ Bain Attwood, 'Unsettling Pasts: reconciliation and history in settler Australia', *Postcolonial Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 3, 2005, 253.

However, oral histories are important in guiding historians in the ways we could or should read documentary sources, especially since not everything gets written down. Deborah Bird Rose warns against giving written ‘facts’ a privilege that sidelines lived experience. Oral histories offer a way of writing alternative histories that contrast with the canon of national histories.¹⁰⁴ They teach us more about the meaning of events than about the events themselves.¹⁰⁵ This is the case in particular for Aboriginal people, for whom memory has a political and cultural significance that differs from that of non-Aboriginal people.¹⁰⁶

In understanding and analysing memory it is important to see remembering as a politically shaped interpretation of lived experience, and to acknowledge the interviewee’s analysis of the past.¹⁰⁷ I gained a better understanding of the nature of activism from oral history interviews, as they revealed aspects of the past that are not present in, and have guided my reading of, the documentary material. When I interviewed people for this research it was apparent that the struggle for Indigenous rights as an ongoing process was heavily present and influenced the way the past was understood. The contemporary nature of this topic also makes it contentious and contested.

Interviewing in itself has not been a straightforward process. Some Aboriginal people, as well as non-Aboriginal, were hesitant or refused to be interviewed. Some stated that they were willing to talk only to those people who had been involved in activism in Sydney in the 1970s. Many Indigenous people mistrust academics because of the way Aboriginal people and their culture and history have been misrepresented by them in the past.¹⁰⁸

Academics are often seen as people who use other people’s lives to enhance their personal careers without consideration of the consequences that the knowledge they produce has for the people they study. Knowledge carries with it power that has been and is used to

¹⁰⁴ Deborah Bird Rose, ‘Remembrance’, *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 13, 1989, 146.

¹⁰⁵ Alessandro Portelli, ‘What makes Oral History Different?’ in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 67.

¹⁰⁶ Brewster, *Reading Aboriginal Women’s Autobiography*, 6.

¹⁰⁷ Heather Goodall, ‘Aboriginal History and the Politics of Information Control’, *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, No. 9, 1987, 31; Lucy Taksa, ‘The Masked Disease: oral history, memory and the influenza pandemic 1918-1919’ in Kate Darian-Smith and Paula Hamilton (eds.), *Memory and History in Twentieth Century Australia* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 77.

¹⁰⁸ See e.g. Cole, Haskins and Paisley, ‘Preface’, xx-xxii; Michael Dodson, ‘The end in the beginning: re(de)finding Aboriginality’ in M. Grossman, *Blacklines: contemporary critical writing by Indigenous Australians* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2003), 28; Goodall, ‘Aboriginal History and Politics of Information Control’, 18; Deborah Bird Rose, ‘Oral histories and knowledge’ in Bain Attwood and S.G. Foster (eds.), *Frontier Conflict: the Australian experience* (Canberra: National Museum of Australia, 2003), 121. See also Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 1-2.

oppress Aboriginal people.¹⁰⁹ Thus, Indigenous people want to have power over knowledge about themselves and their people, and the possibility of not co-operating with academics is a way of asserting control over that knowledge.¹¹⁰

This raises the question whether non-Indigenous academics should write or are able to do justice to Indigenous histories? Shireen Hassim and Cherryl Walker oppose the claim that only oppressed can speak about their lives or that only people who share the same racial identity can research those racial communities, for in effect this would mean that there is only one 'true' and 'authentic' understanding of the social reality or history, the view from below. Furthermore, academics do not 'speak for' the oppressed, nor possess their political voice. Though academic research can contribute to the struggle for social change by questioning or challenging dominant discourses, it is not the driving force behind it.¹¹¹

Edward Said remarks that the issue at stake is not who is allowed to study whose history but rather how the study is conducted.¹¹² While conducting research among Aboriginal people the researcher needs to have knowledge of and sensitivity to Aboriginal protocols. Researchers are expected to treat respectfully the knowledge they have received. They are required to prove that they are worthy of the trust, and to show that they can give something in exchange, as has been emphasised by Indigenous methodologies.¹¹³ The results of the research need to return to the community. As Rose has noted, the one thing in Aboriginal cultures that is absolutely not free, is knowledge.¹¹⁴

In the course of this research I have also attended the protests of the present day, for example, the Tent Embassy in Victoria Park in Sydney in 2000 and the 40th anniversary of the Tent Embassy in Canberra in 2012. During these demonstrations the 1970s Aboriginal activism was often present in living memory in the speeches giving by people such as

¹⁰⁹ Juanita Sherwood, *Do No Harm: decolonising Aboriginal health research* (PhD thesis, UNSW, 2010), 71-76.

¹¹⁰ 'Thank you to Shannon Woodcock for pointing this out to me.

¹¹¹ Shireen Hassim and Cherryl Walker, 'Women's Studies and the Women's Movement in South Africa' in *Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol. 16, No. 5, 1993, 530, 533.

¹¹² Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (London: Granta Books, 2001), 385. See also Gayatri Spivak, *In Other Worlds: essays in cultural politics* (New York and London: Methuen, 1987), 253-254.

¹¹³ Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 15-16; Stephen Muecke, *Textual Spaces: Aboriginality and cultural studies* (Kensington: New South Wales University Press, 1992), 199.

¹¹⁴ Deborah Bird Rose, *Nourishing Terrains: Australian Aboriginal views of landscape and wilderness* (Canberra: Australian Heritage Commission, 1996), 32.

Isobel Coe or in references made around the camp fire. Participating in demonstrations also gave me a sense of the bodily experiences of direct action, which further built towards wider understanding of different aspects of Aboriginal activism.

Conducting research on Aboriginal history touches many painful issues. One of the starting points of post-colonial study is to see the violence of colonialism, both internal and external.¹¹⁵ Colonialism has uprooted, killed and orphaned people, divided and destroyed families and communities. As Deborah Bird Rose points out, “injuries of the past exist in the present as present wounds”.¹¹⁶ Bain Attwood comments how people who want to study Aboriginal history need to be able to deal with historical trauma and also confront some very difficult matters.¹¹⁷ When studying Indigenous activism one deals not only with the ideologies and the struggle for social change, but also with issues such as the huge disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous health and socio-economic indicators, inadequate housing, racial violence and police harassment, which are still pressing concerns today.

From the outside

We do not enter the process of research without cultural baggage. Rather our traditions and past experiences influence the way we see the world.¹¹⁸ Thus, it is crucial to take seriously the importance of subjective experience in social analysis and theory. Paying greater attention to subjective factors in the research process is a way of ensuring greater objectivity.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, knowledge is made possible not by trying to identify with the Other in order to know her but by recognition of difference.¹²⁰ Recognising the difference starts by knowing who I am in relation to the Other.

¹¹⁵ On colonial violence see e.g. Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 38-43, 88-95.

¹¹⁶ Deborah Bird Rose, ‘Dark Times and Excluded Bodies in the Colonisation of Australia’ in Geoffrey Gray and Christine Winter (eds.), *The Resurgence of Racism: Howard, Hanson and the race debate*, Monash Publications in history: 24, (Clayton: Department of History, Monash University, 1997), 112.

¹¹⁷ Bain Attwood interviewed by Phillip Adams, *Late Night Live*, ABC National, 22 September 2005.

¹¹⁸ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity: essays in the wake of subaltern studies* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 46.

¹¹⁹ Amina Mama, *Beyond the Masks: race, gender and subjectivity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 13-14.

¹²⁰ Spivak, *In Other Worlds*, 254.

I have entered this research process from outside British colonial and Australian culture and history. I am Finnish and my sense of identity is strongly related to my Finnish linguistic, cultural and historical background. Another definer I need to add here is my whiteness. Once when I was visiting my aunt who lived and worked for many years in India, we looked at her pictures from her trips to the rural villages in Gujarat. In one of the pictures she was sitting on the step of a small hut with three Gujarati women. My aunt with her white skin was dressed in beige – trousers and shirt – and beside her sat Gujarati women wearing beautiful colourful saris, and gold and silver jewellery. My aunt pointed to the picture and said to me: “That’s me: a colourless splash in the middle.” Being a textile designer and acutely aware of aesthetics, my aunt was mainly referring to the colour combinations in her picture. Yet, her observation cunningly points to the tendency of seeing whiteness as neutral – as a norm in relation to which everything else has been different. However, when discussing race, whiteness also needs to be ‘raced’.¹²¹ Whiteness is not just ethnicity or race but rather allows a sense of entitlement that follows from the dominance of the culture that is identified as ‘white’.¹²²

Alison Holland notes how race, like gender and class, and, I would add, nationalism and ethnicity need to be understood as contingent, dynamic and heterogeneous and observed in their historical frame.¹²³ Within the European context, the formation of a nation and discourses of nationalism established an inextricable link between race and nation. In the aftermath of the Second World War the pre-war science on race was discredited and the UN charter of Human Rights promoted equality of all the people. Yet race and racial meanings were interwoven in the fabric of nation and ethnicity. Cultural difference became a new category according to which peoples’ superiority or inferiority was judged.¹²⁴ In the Australian context for Indigenous people whiteness has made me an outsider; for non-Indigenous people I have been an outsider because of my Finnish background.

¹²¹ Wendy Brady, “‘Talkin up Whiteness’: a black and white dialogue’ in John Docker and Gerhard Fischer (eds.), *Race, Colour and Identity in Australia and New Zealand* (Sydney: UNSW press, 2000), 272-273.

¹²² Shaw, *Cities of Whiteness*, 185-186.

¹²³ Alison Holland, “Introduction” in Alison Holland and Barbara Brooks (eds.), *Rethinking the Racial Moment: Essays on the Colonial Encounter* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 8-9.

¹²⁴ For further discussion see Ulrike Anne Müller, ‘Far Away So Close: race, whiteness, and German identity’, *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, Vol. 18, No. 6, 620-623.

Though whiteness as a factor worked differently in the interview process it was always present on some level. Aboriginal people's reactions to my whiteness differed. Some were not willing to talk to me because of my whiteness. For others it was more important that I came from Finland and thus I was different from 'the colonisers', despite my whiteness. It was important to educate me so that I could then tell people in Finland how Indigenous people have been treated in Australia. There were also people who emphasised their belief in humanity in general. They did not want to judge others according to colour like they had been judged. For most of the people it was important to tell me the whole story of the colonisation of Australia from an Aboriginal perspective, so that I would understand the context in which they operated as activists.

Chapter outline

In Chapter 1 I explore the history of Aboriginal Sydney and provide the context for the Aboriginal activism in Redfern in the 1970s. I discuss the radical increase of the Aboriginal population in the inner Sydney, in particular, following the migration of Aboriginal people mainly from rural New South Wales and the development of urban Aboriginality. I establish the historical background of issues, such as land rights and socio-economic problems, which were central to Aboriginal activists. I also look into some early responses to these issues as well as study the Aboriginal rights movement in New South Wales and Australia in general.

Following Chapter 1 I will discuss each Aboriginal organisation in its individual chapter in chronological order of formation starting with the Aboriginal Legal Service (ALS). I examine their establishment and look at the social situation that led to the formation of the organisations as well as the intellectual influences and support networks that aided the process. I study the way each organisation followed the ideas of self-determination and operated in practice and the ways in which their aim for self-determination was facilitated and limited by the government.

Each organisation offers a possibility to examine Aboriginal activism for self-determination in Sydney with different emphasis. Chapter 2 on the Aboriginal Legal Service highlights the

legal rights and land rights struggle, as the ALS took up test cases that aimed to improve the treatment of Aboriginal people and cases for Aboriginal sovereignty that challenged the legal bases of the European colonialism in Australia. Chapter 3 on the Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS) focuses on health, which the AMS considered to be affected by a complex set of issues, including housing and land rights. In this chapter I also discuss ideas of welfare which, though important to all organisations studied in this thesis, were particularly closely linked to the operations of the Medical Service. Chapter 4 on the Black Theatre opens a window into the ways in which performing arts contributed to the struggle for Aboriginal self-determination. Furthermore, the Black Theatre also contributed to self-determination as an organisation, beyond its theatrical role.

Different genders and their relationships are present in every organisation. However, Murawina preschool and childcare centre offers an excellent insight to the role of women and feminism in Aboriginal activism, as well as early childhood education as the focus of their activism. Likewise, though each organisation took part in creating an Aboriginal space, social as well as geographical in the cityscape of Sydney, the impact of the Aboriginal Housing Company (AHC) was most central in this process. Chapter 6 on the AHC offers an opportunity to examine Aboriginal activists' aim of establishing the Aboriginal Community physically in the cityscape of Redfern. In the conclusion I pull these different aspects mentioned above together and discuss Sydney as a space of Aboriginal activism for self-determination.

Chapter 1

“We know we cannot live in the past, but the past lives in us”¹

Setting the context

*I should pack up and get out of this damn stinkin' place. Go to Sydney, get work, get a decent place for Ruby and the kids. All you need is spirit, just put your shoulders back, take a good job and get some good money, bring Rube and the kids to a – ah, damn shit! Sydney!*²

(Robert Merritt)

Indigenous people have lived in the Sydney area for at least the last 40,000 years. They continued to live in the region after European colonisation in 1788. From the 1820s until the 1960s, however, this urban Indigenous presence occupied a minimal place in the consciousness of white Australians.

Sydney's Aboriginal people have a long history of political activism. From the 1920s they worked together with Aboriginal people from other parts of New South Wales and Victoria to improve the position of their people under colonisation. In this activism they were influenced by the international black movement and made alliances in varying relationships with their white supporters.

Sydney's Aboriginal population started to grow radically in the post-war period, reaching record numbers by the end of the 1960s and early 1970s. Pushed by assimilation policies and attracted by the greater freedom and opportunities, they migrated to the city mainly from other parts of New South Wales. Urban migration, however, did not sever their connection to their family and place/s of origin.

¹ 'A Celebration of Indigenous Culture & a Tribute to Charlie', Survival 2001 concert, advertising material, free postcard, Avantcard; Charles Perkins, previous Head of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, Canberra, Mildura Aboriginal Corporation Cultural Art Project, <http://www.indigiausart.org.au/>, accessed 16 January 2012.

² Robert J. Merritt, *The Cake Man* (Sydney: Currency Press, 1978), 29.

Aboriginal migration coincided with large shifts in the international human rights discourse that influenced wider Australian society and prompted the establishment of a number of Aboriginal rights organisations in Sydney, and elsewhere in Australia, during the 1950s. In the 1960s decolonisation and the global cultural revolutions saw an escalation in international rights movements which further influenced Australian Indigenous people's political thinking and organisation. The inner-city suburb of Redfern, which had since the post war period been the centre of Aboriginal urbanisation, became the locus for a self-determining Indigenous rights movement in Australia.

The Survival of Aboriginal Sydney

At the time of European colonisation there lived about thirty distinct groups of Aboriginal people in the Sydney region. Their descendants continued to live in the area and for the next four decades made a place for themselves despite the upheavals that colonisation brought to them. They occupied the same spaces as white people and sought alternative locations that were not desired by the newcomers. Until around mid-1820s Aboriginal people formed the majority of the population in Sydney and dominated its streetscapes.³ However, from then on Sydney was reconceived as 'white space' by the emerging white middle class and measures were taken to limit the Aboriginal presence on the streets of Sydney as the spaces of 'civilisation' were marked out from the spaces of 'savagery'. Phrases such as 'coming in', and 'keeping out', reflected the desire to guard the urban space as non-Indigenous.⁴ As non-Indigenous people increasingly positioned Indigenous people as 'out of place' in the city, the contested and racialized nature of the Australian cities was forgotten. That amnesia has lasted well into the present day.⁵ Nevertheless, local Aboriginal people continued to occupy Sydney's urban spaces, disappearing into background or living – 'sitting down' – on the large local estates.⁶

³ Karskens, *The Colony*, 3, 12, 14, 33, 352-353.

⁴ George Morgan, 'A Tithe of Culture: Indigenous Australians and Urban Life' in Christopher Houston, Fuyuki Kurasawa, Amanda Watson (eds.), *Imagined Places: the politics of making space*, (La Trobe: School of Sociology, Politics and Anthropology, 1998), 49-50; Karskens, *The Colony*, 533. See also Noel Loos, *White Christ Black Cross. The emergence of a black church* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2007), 18.

⁵ Edmonds, *Urbanizing Frontiers*, 6.

⁶ Karskens, *The Colony*, 534-539.

The increasing intolerance of white people towards Aboriginal people coincided with the influx of migration from the British Isles and intensified colonisation, after the British government decided to drop the duty on Australian wool in the early 1820s and began to directly assist free immigration in the early 1830s.⁷ Expansion of flocks and the inflow of immigrants culminated in the squatting rush during the 1830s and the 1840s.⁸ Though colonisation continued to challenge the Indigenous ownership of land with increasing pace, it did not lead to Aboriginal people losing their connection to their country. By the 1860s Aboriginal people in rural New South Wales had reached a level of social and economic balance with the local whites that allowed them to stay on their land, either by regaining a portion of their traditional lands for farming or by working in the pastoral industry and living on camps that had access to their traditional lands. In 1881 81 per cent of the Aboriginal population was economically independent through a mixture of wage or ration labour, farming and more traditional subsistence.⁹

As white settlement again intensified in the 1860s, in response to Aboriginal demands the government started to gazette small portions of Crown land as Aboriginal reserves in the 1880s. Notably, 63 per cent of the reserves were declared over land already independently used by Aboriginal people. They now became associated with the Aboriginal Protection Board rather than individual Aboriginal families. The Board was established in 1883 to monitor church activity on the reserves, only three of them church funded, and to give out rations. It was made the arm of the State intervention, with no legislation and little power.¹⁰ Reserves, or missions as they were called by Aboriginal people, provided some refuge from violence and provided welfare support as well as the possibility of maintaining aspects of cultural practice and connection to one's family and people.¹¹ Importantly reserves served white purposes, for they allowed for a pool of labour outside and yet in the vicinity of rural towns that rejected Aboriginal presence.¹²

⁷ Keith Willey, 'Australia's Population: A Demographic Summary' in Ann Curthoys and Andrew Markus, eds., *Who Are our Enemies? Racism and the Australian Working Class*, (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1978); Richard Broome, *Aboriginal Australians*, 37.

⁸ A.T. Yarwood and M.J. Knowling, *Race Relations in Australia: A History* (North Ryde: Methuen, 1982), 34.

⁹ Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, 59, 86.

¹⁰ Goodall, 'New South Wales', 72-73; Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, 96.

¹¹ John Harris, *One Blood: 200 hundred years of Aboriginal encounter with Christianity, a story of hope* (Sutherland, Claremont: Albatross Books, 1990), 608.

¹² Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, 92.

Tracey Banivanua Mar notes that violence was rife in the colonial framework.

In its legalised capacities violence was not just incidental to the way in which colonial expansion was conceptualised. Violence was instead invented, necessitated and governed by, and in, the service of colonial expansion.¹³

After a hundred years of colonisation the number of Aboriginal people in the whole of Australia had decreased significantly.¹⁴ They had been killed in conflict with the settlers and many more died because of disease and malnutrition. In addition, the effects of colonisation – deaths, the loss of land, the disruption of the traditional way of life and the loss of knowledge – damaged the vitality of the communities.¹⁵ The impact and memory of the violence of colonialism has carried over to later generations. Yet, the quantity and quality of violence has been contested in Australia's national history and, at times hotly debated among non-Indigenous Australians.¹⁶

Towards the end of the 19th century ideas of Social Darwinism took stronger hold in Australia and legal discrimination towards Aboriginal people intensified in New South Wales. They were, for example, excluded from the Federal franchise and denied State benefits, including unemployment relief.¹⁷ Russell McGregor argues that, rather than conscious exclusion, this discrimination followed from the indifference that the white Australian felt towards Indigenous people.¹⁸

Despite the white desire to control and segregate Aboriginal people, they continued to live outside reserves and mission stations and maintain economic independence. Some lived on independent farms; others chose to live on the fringes of towns, where they could, at least partially, escape government control. Some migrated to Sydney, increasing the already existing Aboriginal population, after having been displaced from their traditional lands, or

¹³ Tracey Banivanua-Mar, 'Consolidating violence and colonial rule: discipline and protection in colonial Queensland', *Postcolonial Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 3, 2005, 315.

¹⁴ L.R. Smith, *The Aboriginal Population of Australia* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1980), 209-210, 213.

¹⁵ Reynolds, *The Other Side of the Frontier*, 122, 125-126.

¹⁶ See e.g. Keith Windschuttle, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History: Volume One, Van Diemen's Land 1803-1947* (Sydney: Macleay Press, 2002); Bain Attwood and S.G. Foster (eds.), *Frontier Conflict: The Australian Experience* (Canberra: National Museum of Australia, 2003); Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark, *History Wars* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2003); Robert Manne (ed.), *Whitewash: On Keith Windschuttle's Fabrication of Aboriginal History* (Melbourne: Black Inc. Agenda, 2003).

¹⁷ Goodall, 'New South Wales', 59, 72.

¹⁸ McGregor, *Indifferent Inclusion*, xvii-xxv.

seeking adventure, or arrested in raids throughout the nineteenth century.¹⁹ In the 1870s and 1880s Sydney's Aboriginal population further increased, as more people were forced to migrate into the city to get employment, or failing that, government or charity assistance.²⁰ There were also Aboriginal people camping at Circular Quay and working at the Eveleigh Street Railway Workshop.²¹

Local Indigenous people continued to live within Sydney at the same time as the city was expanding over larger areas during the early twentieth century. The Dharawal people lived by the Georges River until the end of 1930s. Many lived at the Salt Pan Creek camp. The camps of the Gai-mariagal and the Ku-ring-gai survived in northern Sydney until the 1950s, when they were dispersed and forced to relocate within Sydney.²² However, it was La Perouse that became known by non-Indigenous people as the "home of the blacks" in Sydney by the early twentieth century.²³

The Aboriginal Protection Board was given power over all Aboriginal children, *in loco parentis*, in New South Wales in 1915. Its child removal policies targeted Aboriginal communities and aimed at their eventual disappearance.²⁴ The traditional lands that Aboriginal people had managed to repossess throughout the nineteenth century came under threat in the 1920s as whites began to view their successful farms with interest. There was an increased pressure under the Returned Servicemen's Settlement Scheme and the Board made the decision to fund its child removal program by leasing Aboriginal land, rather than defending it. Aboriginal people lost 13,000 acres of reserve land between 1911 and 1927. Of this land, 75 per cent was fertile, independently settled Aboriginal farm land.²⁵ The forced removal and loss of land after the pastoral expansion, and the memory of it, played an important part in shaping Aboriginal political consciousness. For example, Michael Anderson, one of the original founders of the tent embassy in 1972, notes that the awareness of this past unjust treatment politicised the young people in Walgett. He says,

¹⁹ Karskens, *The Colony*, 525.

²⁰ Nugent, *Botany Bay*, 46.

²¹ Morgan, *Unsettled Places*, 45.

²² Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, 160, 169-170, 236; Peter Read, *Belonging: Australians, place and Aboriginal ownership* (Cambridge, New York, Oakleigh: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 22-26, 206, 220. See also Dennis Foley, *Repossession. Traditional owners of northern Sydney* (Canberra: Aboriginal History Monograph No. 7, 2001).

²³ Nugent, *Botany Bay*, 72.

²⁴ Goodall, 'New South Wales', 75-77.

²⁵ Goodall, 'New South Wales', 78; Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, 121-124.

“[...] we all knew where we came from and who our people were. The old ones told us who we were. We were always told no one was better than us and to always be proud of your people.”²⁶

Aboriginal people organised to fight to maintain ownership or at least access to Aboriginal land and resisted discriminatory policies, including taking away the children. Under the leadership of Fred Maynard they established the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association (AAPA) in Sydney in 1924. Maynard worked as a wharf labourer and was an active member of the Waterside Workers Federation.²⁷ The Association had links with the Coloured Progressive Association, which was comprised mainly of foreign seamen. It was inspired by the international black movement and by Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association in particular. It called for land rights, civil rights and cultural identity. Furthermore, according to John Maynard, the AAPA was one the first organisations to push for self-determination.²⁸

After the AAPA stopped operating, following the deaths of its main campaigners,²⁹ the Aborigines Progressive Association (APA), for Aboriginal members only, was launched at Dubbo in June 1936.³⁰ It attacked the discriminatory employment system, the appalling conditions on the Board reserves and stations, and the Board's powers over Aboriginal people. The APA demanded the abolition of the Board. Under the leadership of William Ferguson, Pearl Gibbs, Jack Patten and William Cooper, from the Australian Aborigines League in Victoria (AAL), it was instrumental in organising the Day of Mourning Protest, open for Aboriginal people only, held in the Australian Hall, Elizabeth Street, Sydney in 1938.³¹ The Day of Mourning publicised the demand for citizenship and pushed it into

²⁶ Stephen Hagan, 'The Real Story Behind the Tent Embassy', *National Indigenous Times*, 248, Vol. 11, 4.

²⁷ Heather Goodall, 'Maynard, Charles Frederick (Fred) (1879–1946)', *ADB*, National Centre of Biography, ANU, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/maynard-charles-frederick-fred-11095/text19649>, accessed 8 May 2013.

²⁸ Maynard, *Fight for Liberty and Freedom*, 6-8, 29-35, 120; Maynard, Fred Maynard and the Awakening of Aboriginal Political Consciousness and Activism in Twentieth Century Australia, 105-106, 154, 165-169; Maynard, 'Fred Maynard and the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association', 1, 3, 6, 11; Maynard, 'Vision, Voice and Influence', 92, 100; Maynard, 'The Other Fellow', 36.

²⁹ Maynard, Fred Maynard and the Awakening of Aboriginal Political Consciousness and Activism in Twentieth Century Australia, 333-335, 347-348; Maynard, *Fight for Liberty and Freedom*, 120-121, 127, 132-139, 141.

³⁰ Horner, *Bill Ferguson*, 35; Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, 234.

³¹ Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, 230-238.

prominence. It was the largest Aboriginal protest that had been organised so far.³² Russell McGregor observes that a line of descent can be traced from the Aboriginal activists of the 1930s to the Aboriginal activists of the 1970s and beyond, though activists of different periods had distinct agendas that grappled with contemporary problems.³³ Michael Anderson recalls that his mother was involved in the APA in Walgett.³⁴ Jenny Munro tells how her grandmother had participated in the Day of Mourning Protest.³⁵

From missions to the city

The post-war era was a time of growing prosperity for wider Australia. By the end of the 1960s unemployment remained below 2.5 per cent, officially defined as full employment, and inflation remained generally low.³⁶ Yet, in 1966 John Stubbs estimated that half a million Australians lived in poverty.³⁷ Aboriginal people were the first of these, according to Jill Roe, to break through the rhetoric of 'lucky country'.³⁸ Many non-Indigenous people came to realise that full employment and the prosperity that had followed from economic growth during the Liberal years had bypassed many Australians, including Indigenous people,³⁹ who lived in conditions not unlike those in developing or third world countries.

Australian governments had formally adopted assimilation as an official policy solution to Aboriginal disadvantage in 1937.⁴⁰ However, the NSW Aborigines Protection Act in 1909 signalled the beginning of assimilation in New South Wales, when the Board started to disperse Aboriginal people from reserve lands among the mainstream population where,

³² McGregor, *Indifferent Inclusion*, 34, 38.

³³ Russell McGregor, 'Protest and Progress: Aboriginal Activism in the 1930s', *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 101, October 1993, 567; Russell McGregor, *Imagined Destinies, Australian Aborigines and the Doomed Race theory, 1880-1839* (Carlton South: Melbourne University Press, 1997), 260.

³⁴ Hagan, 'The Real Story Behind the Tent Embassy', 4. See also Herb Simms, interviewed by the author, Sydney, 15 November 2000.

³⁵ Jenny Munro interviewed by the author, Sydney, 7 June 2000. See also Lester Bostock interviewed by the author, Marrickville, 14 December 2000.

³⁶ Barrie Dyster and David Meredith, *Australia and the Global Economy: continuity and change* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 211.

³⁷ John Stubbs quoted in Philip Mendes, *Australia's Welfare Wars Revisited: the players, the politics and the ideologies* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2008), 23-24.

³⁸ Jill Roe, 'Perspectives on the Present Day: A Postscript' in Jill Roe (ed.), *Social Policy in Australia. Some Perspectives 1901-1975* (Cassell Australia: Melbourne, 1975), 316.

³⁹ Mendes, *Australia's Welfare Wars Revisited*, 23; Jill Roe, 'Perspectives on the Present Day', 316.

⁴⁰ Scott Bennett, *White Politics and Black Australia* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1999), 20.

the Board hoped, they would eventually cease to be a distinct people. The reserve land was preserved for those whom the Protection Board defined as Aboriginal and who, it believed, would eventually disappear.⁴¹

At the time assimilation was seen by many non-Indigenous people as a radical policy that offered equality for those Aboriginal people who accepted its terms. According to Charles Rowley definitions of assimilation ranged from the more benign idea of general equality with non-Indigenous citizens to the extreme understanding of assimilation as the disappearance of Aboriginal people.⁴² Tim Rowse points to the elusiveness of assimilation as a category for which there is no one agreed definition or periodisation.⁴³ Furthermore, he suggests that assimilation has been “built to the very fabric of Australian society” and thus there is no end to it.⁴⁴

It is important to understand that assimilation was not just a policy, but shaped the lived experiences of Aboriginal people. According to John Maynard, for Aboriginal people assimilation and absorption were weapons of destruction from the early stages of the colony.⁴⁵ As Rani Kerin notes, the meaning of assimilation “is born on the bodies and worn in the hearts and minds of those who suffered, and continue to suffer, as a consequence of its implementation.”⁴⁶ Assimilation is held responsible for the loss of Aboriginal culture and identity and for the generations of the ‘stolen children’. It continues to mean extinction to many Aboriginal as well as non-Aboriginal people and is also referred to as a policy of genocide.⁴⁷

Despite the official government policy of assimilation, Aboriginal people remained outside mainstream society. According to Peter Read:

⁴¹ Peter Read, “A Rape of the soul so profound”: some reflections on the dispersal policy in New South Wales, *Aboriginal History*, No. 7, 1983, 24-28.

⁴² C.D. Rowley, *Outcasts in White Australia* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1971), 383-385, 399.

⁴³ Tim Rowse, ‘Contesting Assimilation’ in *Contesting Assimilation* Tim Rowse (ed.), (Perth: API Network, 2005), 2; Tim Rowse, ‘The Certainties of Assimilation’ in *Contesting Assimilation* Tim Rowse (ed.), (Perth: API Network, 2005), 237.

⁴⁴ Rowse, ‘Contesting Assimilation’, 19.

⁴⁵ Maynard, ‘The Other Fellow’, 27.

⁴⁶ Rani Kerin, ‘Charles Duguid and Aboriginal Assimilation in Adelaide, 1950-1960. The Nebulous Assimilation Goal’, *History Australia*, Vol. 2, No. 3, 2005, 85.1.

⁴⁷ Kerin, ‘Charles Duguid and Aboriginal Assimilation in Adelaide’, 85.1-85.2.

In 1965 there was scarcely a town in the central-west of NSW where a local Aborigine could try on clothes, sit down for a meal, get a haircut, go to secondary school, run for office, join a club, drink in the lounge bar or work in the shop.⁴⁸

In 1971 Charles Rowley remarked that Indigenous people everywhere in Australia still “suffer handicaps arising from prejudice which limits their social and spatial mobility and their economic opportunities.”⁴⁹

Aboriginal people associated the police with their suppression. Police were responsible for suppressing Aboriginal resistance from the very early years of the invasion. Later, when armed Aboriginal resistance was overcome, police continued to suppress Aboriginal people under the ‘protection’ and ‘assimilation’ policies. They were, for example, instrumental in taking away Indigenous children.⁵⁰ Police were also used to expel those Aboriginal people who resisted orders on the missions or reserves. At times Aboriginal people felt that they were treated like criminals. “Warrants were issued, Aboriginal people were arrested in dawn raids, forcibly removed, detained, transported with armed guards and eventually incarcerated in near-prison conditions.”⁵¹ Once the Aboriginal Welfare Board was dismantled, rural and urban authorities increasingly called on police to restrict and control the area’s Aboriginal community.⁵²

Agencies, such as hospitals, together with the police and non-Indigenous administrators, also became enemies that Aboriginal people felt they should resist and avoid.⁵³ On Aboriginal reserves, punishment, degradation, humiliation, intimidation and control had been part of the set of health practices to which Aboriginal people were subjected. For example, health workers (doctors and nurses), together with police, government officials, welfare workers and religious congregations were responsible for removing Aboriginal children from their families.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ Read, *Charles Perkins*, 97.

⁴⁹ Rowley, *Outcasts in White Australia*, 416.

⁵⁰ Hal Wootten, ‘Aborigines and police’, *UNSW law journal*, Vol. 16, No. 1, 1993, 266.

Nicole Watson, ‘Tendering of Indigenous Legal Services’, Briefing paper No 4, Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning Research Unit, UTS, September 2005, 3.

⁵¹ Harris, *One Blood*, 571.

⁵² Goodall, ‘New South Wales’, 60.

⁵³ Leonie Cox, ‘Fear, Trust and Aborigines: the historical experience of state institutions and current encounters in the health system’, *Health and History*, Vol. 9 No. 2, 2007, 77-78, 86.

⁵⁴ Bronwyn Fredericks, Australian Aboriginal Women’s Health: Reflecting on the Past and Present’, *Health and History*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2007, 102.

Aboriginal people have suffered from health disparities caused by disease, dispossession, family disruption, poverty, social marginalisation, racial discrimination and limited access to health care since the early days of colonisation.⁵⁵ Many Aboriginal women remember the discomfort and humiliation of giving birth on the hospital verandas or in a makeshift area at the rear of the hospital building.⁵⁶ Health problems, such as high infant mortality, malnutrition and communicable diseases, at the time typical in third world countries, were found amongst Indigenous communities in Australia. Poor diet, crowded housing and deplorable living conditions with no adequate supply of clean water and a low level of hygiene, further contributed to health problems, which due to the lack of adequate health care increased the rates of mortality and morbidity.⁵⁷

The level of education offered to Indigenous people remained low until the 1960s. Following white protests public schools were closed to Aboriginal children in 1902, with a regulation that allowed them to be racially segregated if there was any complaint from any white parent. The ban was maintained officially for over 40 years.⁵⁸ Despite segregated education ending in 1949, after the Department of Education took over the mission schools, still in the 1950s and 1960s Aboriginal children were educated in reserve schools.⁵⁹ Only in 1968 were all separate Aboriginal schools in New South Wales incorporated into the public school system. However, Aboriginal children continued to have poor outcomes in education and relatively few entered tertiary education.⁶⁰

At school education was alienating for many Aboriginal students as it was conducted on white terms and undermined Aboriginal knowledge by representing Aboriginality as timeless and prehistoric and aimed to replace Aboriginal values with European middle class

⁵⁵ Warwick Anderson, 'The Colonial Medicine of Settler States: Comparing histories of Indigenous Health', *Health and History*, Vol. 9, Issue 2, 1-2; Jessie Mitchell, 'History' in Bronwyn Carson, Terry Dunbar, Richard D. Chenhall and Ross Bailie (eds.), *Social Determinants of Indigenous Health*, (Allen & Unwin: Crows Nest, Sydney, 2007), 61; Juanita Sherwood, *Do No Harm: decolonising Aboriginal health research*, PhD thesis, UNSW, March 2010, 42-48.

⁵⁶ Goodall, 'New South Wales', 94; Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, 290, 319.

⁵⁷ Peter M. Moodie, 'The Health Disadvantages of Aborigines' in F.S. Stevens (ed.), *Racism: The Australian Experience. A Study of Race Prejudice in Australia* (Sydney: Australia and New Zealand Book Company, 1973), 235-237; Mitchell, 'History', 41-64; Read, *Charles Perkins*, 97; For more extensive analysis of impact of colonisation on Aboriginal health see Sherwood, *Do No Harm*, 37-55.

⁵⁸ J.J. Fletcher, *Clean, Clad and Courteous: a history of Aboriginal education in New South Wales* (Sydney: Published by author, 1989), 108-109, 190-193.

⁵⁹ James Miller, *Koori, A Will to Win: the heroic resistance, survival and triumph of black Australia* (London, Sydney, Melbourne: Angus & Robertson Publishers, 1985, 200.

⁶⁰ Fletcher, *Clean, Clad and Courteous*, 248, 316-317.

ideals. While the violent history of colonisation was silenced, Aboriginal children were made to study the narratives of the 'discovery' of Australia and the 'great white explorers'.⁶¹ Nevertheless, increasing education opportunities meant that the first generation of Aboriginal students graduated from high school and made it to university. Paul Coe, a Wiradjuri man from the Erambie mission in Cowra, who later became the President of the Aboriginal Legal Service, was elected a prefect and among the first Indigenous people to study for the higher school certificate in New South Wales.⁶² He then moved to Sydney and became a law student at the University of New South Wales. At the Erambie mission Coe had grown up as part of an aggressively self-assertive Aboriginal community. Coe's father, Les Coe, was an ardent opponent of the oppression by the reserve managers and the police.⁶³ Cowra was also one of the few places where, since 1949, Aboriginal people had been admitted to school without medical certificates.⁶⁴

Due to lack of education Aboriginal people were generally employed as unskilled labour. The number of unemployed among Indigenous people was also high.⁶⁵ At the same time the mechanisation and rationalisation of agriculture decreased the employment possibilities in rural areas.⁶⁶ Furthermore, refusal to serve alcohol excluded Aboriginal people from hotels where employment opportunities were negotiated. Exclusion from hotels also had symbolic significance since it was at bars that national ideas of mateship were acted out.⁶⁷

The international focus on human rights led increasing numbers of Australians to look at the discrimination of Aboriginal people in their own country with new understanding. After the United Nations General Assembly adopted the *Declaration of Human Rights* in 1948, human rights became, for the first time, significant as criteria by which states could

⁶¹ Paul Coe in Colin Tatz (ed.), *Black Viewpoints* (Australia and New Zealand Book Co: Brookvale, 1975), 106. Munro interviewed by the author, 7 June 2000.

⁶² 'Paul's a Prefect', *Dawn*, June 1968, 15. Also Michael Anderson was the first Aboriginal school captain in Walgett high school in 1968. He moved to Sydney to play football after finishing high school. Hagan, 'The Real Story Behind the Tent Embassy', 4.

⁶³ Peter Read, *A History of the Wiradjuri people of New South Wales 1883-1969* (PhD thesis, ANU, July 1983), 263-263, 365, 368-369.

⁶⁴ Harris, *One Blood*, 646.

⁶⁵ *Poverty in Australia*, Australian Government Commission of Inquiry into Poverty, First Main Report, Vol. I, Chairman Ronald F. Henderson. (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1975), 261.

⁶⁶ McGrath, 'National Story', 31-32.

⁶⁷ Faith Bandler and Len Fox, *The Time Was Ripe: A history of the Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship (1956-1969)* (Chippendale: Alternative Publishing Company, 2008 (1983), 137-138, 173, 185-186; McGregor, *Indifferent Inclusion*, 148.

be judged.⁶⁸ At the same time government sponsored assimilation propaganda influenced the way white Australia viewed Aboriginal people as members of Australian society. For example, it portrayed the abilities of Aboriginal people in sport and art. Anthropological studies also portrayed Aboriginal people in a positive light. At the same time, increased migration from Europe tested the definition of the Australian nation as ethnically homogenous.⁶⁹

In Sydney Pearl Gibbs together with Faith Bandler, a descendant of South Sea Islanders who later became a central figure in the Aboriginal rights movement, realised that there was a need for an organisation to promote Aboriginal rights state and nationwide. They established the Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship with Bert Groves as the first President.⁷⁰ Gibbs had earlier, together with Groves, been involved in the Council for Aborigines Rights and the APA. Groves and Gibbs also served, at different times, as the Aboriginal members of the Board.⁷¹ Groves settled in Sydney in 1945 and was actively involved in Aboriginal advancement.⁷² The Fellowship brought together Aboriginal people and white people from diverse backgrounds: early school leavers and university graduates, Communists and Christians, Labor party members and trade unionists, members of the working and middle class.⁷³ In its operations, however, it especially benefited from the support of unions such as the Waterside Workers' Federation and the Building Worker's Industrial Union.⁷⁴ Fellowship members were often invited to address the functions of different organisations such as Lions and APEX clubs.⁷⁵ The dances organised by the Fellowship allowed Indigenous people to get together, but also for non-Indigenous people to meet Indigenous people.⁷⁶ The Fellowship also organised conferences that allowed Aboriginal people to discuss and share their concerns.⁷⁷ Importantly, the Fellowship became a central ally for Aboriginal people in the fight against discriminatory legislation in

⁶⁸ McGregor, *Indifferent Inclusion*, 57.

⁶⁹ McGregor, *Indifferent Inclusion*, 88- 93, 101-107, 119-140.

⁷⁰ Bandler and Fox, *The Time Was Ripe*, 3, 9, 16; John Chesterman, *Civil Rights: how Indigenous Australians won formal equality* (St Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 2005), 20.

⁷¹ Bandler and Fox, *The Time Was Ripe*, 42; Goodall, 'New South Wales', 99; Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, 70, 73.

⁷² Alan T. Duncan, 'Groves, Herbert Stanley (Bert) (1907-1970)', *ADB*, National Centre of Biography, ANU, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/groves-herbert-stanley-bert-10375/text18379>, accessed 9 May 2013.

⁷³ Marilyn Lake, *Faith. Faith Bandler, gentle activist* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2002), 73.

⁷⁴ Bandler and Fox, *The Time Was Ripe*, 161-166, 189.

⁷⁵ Bandler and Fox, *The Time Was Ripe*, 135.

⁷⁶ Jack Horner, *Seeking Racial Justice: an insider's memoir of the movement for Aboriginal advancement, 1938-1978* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2004), 49.

⁷⁷ Bandler and Fox, *The Time Was Ripe*, 130-131; Horner, *Seeking Racial Justice*, 82, 109-112.

New South Wales. In the 1960s the Fellowship campaigned for the abolition of the Welfare Board, the dismantling of assimilation policy and the removal of section 9, which banned the supply of alcohol to Aboriginal people, and which was used to refuse Aboriginal people hotel accommodation.⁷⁸

The Fellowship was also active in the establishment of the Federal Council for Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI) in 1958. FCAATSI promoted Indigenous rights nationwide throughout the 1960s. It practised coalition politics in support of rights for Aboriginal people. It brought together people from different backgrounds and with different political ideologies, similarly to the members of the alliances formed in the 1930s to oppose the government policies of absorption, many of whom were instrumental in establishing FCAATSI.⁷⁹

The fear of international opinion and pressure, following the lobbying by the activists, led Australian governments to dismantle discriminatory legislation during the 1960s.⁸⁰ At the same time the New South Wales Aboriginal Welfare Board had reached a crisis point in its administration of reserves. Reserve housing was in poor condition and the Board had insufficient funds to maintain and build accommodation. The policy of assimilation also faced intense opposition in rural towns where the white population demanded that the Board confine Aboriginal people in segregated spaces outside the 'real' town.⁸¹ The Board responded to the desperate lack of housing and failed attempts to accommodate Aboriginal people within towns by putting pressure on Aboriginal people to pull up their roots and move to the cities for training and work.⁸²

Indigenous people, for their part, moved to urban areas to escape racism and discriminatory practices that touched every aspect of their lives. A major wave of Aboriginal residents arrived in Sydney from country areas during the war and the immediate post-war period looking for employment, opportunities for education and to

⁷⁸ Goodall, 'New South Wales', 105-106; Bandler and Fox, *The Time Was Ripe*, 143.

⁷⁹ Holland, 'To Eliminate Colour Prejudice', 256, 265, 268; Taffe, *Black and White Together*, 5-10.

⁸⁰ John Chesterman, 'Defending Australia's Reputation: how Indigenous Australian's won civil rights, part one', *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 116, April 2001, 21, 23; John Chesterman, 'Defending Australia's Reputation: how Indigenous Australian's won civil rights, part two', *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 117, October 2001, 220-221; Chesterman, *Civil Rights*, 18.

⁸¹ Horner, *Seeking Racial Justice*, 42-43.

⁸² Goodall, 'New South Wales', 85, 96, 104; Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, 290, 319.

escape the Board control on the reserves.⁸³ Chicka Dixon, from Wallaga Lake, came to the 'big smoke' for the first time in May 1946, his eighteenth birthday, when he settled in Sydney and moved between Redfern and La Perouse. In Sydney he also got in touch with Aboriginal politics when he attended an APA meeting and heard Jack Patten talk at the Ironworkers hall in George Street. However, Dixon did not become involved in politics until in 1959 when he started collecting signatures for the petition to organise the referendum. He started to work on the Sydney waterfront in 1963, where he became aware of political struggles elsewhere, including Greece, South Africa and Vietnam. Working on the waterfront was a political training ground for him.⁸⁴ Later he became a central guiding figure among the young Aboriginal activists in Sydney. He took part in the Tent Embassy demonstration and was involved with the establishment of the Aboriginal organisations in Redfern.

A rapid increase in Sydney's Indigenous population started from the 1950s onwards. Winding down discriminatory legislation allowed Aboriginal people greater freedom of movement. The Board gave up its power over Aboriginal mobility in 1963 and ceased to exist altogether in 1969.⁸⁵ Wait estimated the Aboriginal population in Sydney to be around 3,000 in 1950.⁸⁶ In 1965 approximately 12,000 Aboriginal people lived in Sydney and by 1976 the number had increased to 14,000.⁸⁷ An estimated 80 per cent of the Aboriginal population in Sydney in the early 1970s had migrated there only recently. In 1972 the New South Wales Government commissioned a study among the Aboriginal population in Sydney. Based on this *Report's* sample, 60 per cent of them had lived in Sydney less than ten years, and 21 per cent had lived there for less than 5 years.⁸⁸

⁸³ Nugent, *Botany Bay*, 127.

⁸⁴ Chicka Dixon interviewed by Gary Foley, 5 May 1995, Australian Oral History Project, NLA.

⁸⁵ Rowse, 'The Certainties of Assimilation', 244; Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, 332; George Morgan, 'The Moral Surveillance of Aboriginal applicants for public housing in New South Wales', *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, No. 2, 1999, 3-4.

⁸⁶ E. Wait, 'The Migration of People of Aboriginal Ancestry to the Metropolitan Area and Their Assimilation', BA honours, University of Sydney, 1950, 7, cited in Morgan, *Unsettled Places*, 47.

⁸⁷ Lucy Turnbull, *Sydney: Biography of a City* (Sydney, New York, London: Random House, 1999), 54; Jim L. Kohen, 'First and last people: Aboriginal Sydney' in John Connell (ed.), *Sydney: The Emergence of a World City*, (Melbourne, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 84-85; Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, 290; Broome, *Aboriginal Australians*, 173-174.

⁸⁸ W.D. Scott, *Problems and Needs of the Aborigines of Sydney: a report to the Minister for Youth and Community Services* (New South Wales, [Sydney]: N.S.W. Dept. of Youth and Community Services, March 1973), 3 - 18.

Even though the majority of the Aboriginal population started to migrate to the inner Sydney after the Second World War, many had arrived earlier. Joyce Ingram describes her connection to Redfern, where she first arrived in 1923:

I lived around here from the age of nine months, I can't remember but I was told this by my mother, I really belong to this land here. My sister was born here, I am fifteen months older than her. We lived all around Redfern, touch of Waterloo, tip of Surry Hills and Chippendale. I met my first husband in Redfern, got married in Redfern. I had my eldest son in Redfern. Lost my grandmother at 106 in Lawson Street, Redfern. I lost my cousin in Thomas Street, Chippendale. Also my mother. She was ninety-six when she passed away. She preferred to go to the old people's home where she passed the rest of her life away. So I really belong to Redfern.⁸⁹

Some families trace back their presence in Redfern for five generations.⁹⁰

The younger generation of Aboriginal people, in particular, migrated to the city from 1960 onwards encouraged by the Board and in search of more freedom and better opportunities.⁹¹ 43 per cent of Aboriginal people in Sydney were younger than 16 years and 79 per cent were under 30 in 1972.⁹² Among them was Gary Foley who at the age of seventeen moved from Nambucca Heads to Sydney in 1966 to work as an apprentice draftsman, after he was discouraged from continuing studying at the local High School.⁹³ He later became an active member of the Aboriginal organisations in Redfern and a central figure at the Tent Embassy demonstrations. For Foley, as for many others, the city offered more freedom, a refuge from rural discrimination and the hope of wider opportunities for employment and education.⁹⁴ Jenny Munro moved to live in Sydney with her brother Paul Coe and sister Isobel after graduating from high school in 1972. Like her siblings, she became involved with Aboriginal activism there:

⁸⁹ Joyce Ingram interviewed by Kaylene Simon, 14 April 2002, Redfern Oral History, <http://redfernoralhistory.org/OralHistory/AuntieJoyceIngram/tabid/139/Default.aspx>, accessed 3 June 2011.

⁹⁰ Sharon Hickey interviewed by Deborah Wall, 12 February 2007, Redfern Oral History, <http://redfernoralhistory.org/OralHistory/SharonHickey/tabid/169/Default.aspx>, accessed 3 June 2011.

⁹¹ Goodall, 'New South Wales', 104; Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, 291.

⁹² Scott, *Problems and Needs of the Aboriginals of Sydney*, 3; See also *Workshop on Aboriginal Medical Services*, Albury, NSW, (Parliamentary Paper No. 249, 1974: Canberra, 1975), 65.

⁹³ Gary Foley, 'One Black Life', *Rolling Stone Yearbook*, 1988, 107-108.

⁹⁴ Morgan, *Unsettled Places*, 44; Goodall, 'New South Wales', 103.

Sydney was like a whole new world for us after the repression that we had grown up with in country towns. There was a whole lot more freedom down here. You could become anonymous in the city.⁹⁵

Though Aboriginal people moved to the city, they maintained contact with their communities and places of origin. Among the Aboriginal population there was a continued movement between the city and the bush. In fact, according to Munro, there had been movement back and forth between Redfern and the country town for the previous forty years.⁹⁶ Once Aboriginal families were established in the city others followed, either permanently or for shorter visits, for example in order to get medical attention or to purchase second hand clothes. Some of those who settled in the city also made visits with their children back to their place of origin to strengthen ties with their Aboriginal heritage.⁹⁷

Indigenous metropolitan migration did not happen only in Sydney, but everywhere in Australia. Between 1961 and 1971 the proportion of the Aboriginal population living in urban areas increased from 23 to 44 per cent (from 19,000 to 51,000) and in the metropolitan areas from five to 15 per cent (from 4,000 to 17,000). Only 20 per cent of people surveyed in Adelaide, Sydney and Brisbane were born in the city.⁹⁸ At the same time the Indigenous population increased in all of Australia. According to Smith, there were about 150,076 Aborigines in 1971.⁹⁹ This increase was partially due to a shift from racial to social and cultural definitions as to who was considered Aboriginal. In addition more people were willing to identify themselves as Aboriginal.¹⁰⁰ Despite its long history, the Indigenous presence in urban areas was recognised in public policy only following the huge increase in the urban Indigenous population in the 1960s. Until then the growing urban Aboriginal communities were not acknowledged by the State as distinctly Indigenous; rather, they were viewed as already assimilated by virtue of their location.¹⁰¹

⁹⁵ Munro interviewed by the author, 7 June 2000.

⁹⁶ Munro interviewed by the author, 7 June 2000.

⁹⁷ Morgan, 'A Tithing of Culture', 53, 55, 56; Morgan, *Unsettled Places*, 45-47. See also Rowley, *Outcasts in White Australia*, 364.

⁹⁸ National Population Inquiry, 1975, 493 cited in L.R. Smith, 'New Black Town or Black New Town: The Urbanization of Aborigines' in I.H. Burnley, R.J. Pryor and D.T. Rowland (eds.), *Mobility and community change in Australia*, (St Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1980), 202.

⁹⁹ L.R. Smith, *The Aboriginal Population of Australia*, 210.

¹⁰⁰ Griffiths, *Aboriginal Affairs*, 113-114.

¹⁰¹ Morgan, *Unsettled Places*, 48, 55.

Life in the city

With the migration of Aboriginal people from different parts of New South Wales, Redfern and the surrounding suburbs became the main centre of the Aboriginal population there, outgrowing La Perouse.¹⁰² Redfern's location near the central station and the central business district (CBD) offered easy access to public transport. There was also employment available in local industry, for example, at the Eveleigh rail yards.¹⁰³ For Aboriginal people Redfern was fluidly defined. According to Chicka Dixon it also included Waterloo, Alexandria and even Newtown.¹⁰⁴ By 1972, 43 per cent of Aboriginal people lived in the inner-city area (Redfern, Newtown, Glebe and St Peters) and 22 per cent in suburbs surrounding the inner city (Annandale, Marrickville, Leichhardt, Balmain, Campsie and Mascot). 30 per cent of the Aboriginal population lived in the western suburbs in the Housing Commission areas (the Northern and Southern suburbs and westward to Penrith) and a further five per cent lived in La Perouse.¹⁰⁵

Aboriginal people who came to Sydney for the first time sought out family members and relatives who had migrated there earlier and were able to provide a support network and accommodation.¹⁰⁶ Because Aboriginal people often lived in the same part of the city with their kin and family, different parts of inner Sydney were associated with different peoples. Many Aboriginal people in Glebe and Redfern came from the north coast, especially the Kempsey area, and belonged to the Bundjalang and Dunghutti peoples. Western New South Wales families tended to live in Redfern and Erskineville. They came from places such as Cowra and Moree. South Coast people tended to live in Matraville and La

¹⁰² Scott, *Problems and Needs of the Aboriginals of Sydney*, 3.

¹⁰³ Lucy Taksa, 'Pictures for Cities: industrial history' in Geoff Weary (ed.), *Pictures for Cities* (Sydney: The Visual History of South Sydney Project, 1984), 14-20; Anderson, 'Place narratives and the origins of inner Sydney's Aboriginal settlement', 318-319.

¹⁰⁴ Chicka Dixon interviewed by the author, La Perouse, 26 June 2000; Chicka Dixon in Colin Tatz (ed.), *Black Viewpoints: The Aboriginal Experience* (Sydney: Australia and New Zealand Book Company, 1975), 33. See also Goodall, 'New South Wales', 103.

¹⁰⁵ 'Summary of the Scott Report', 65.

¹⁰⁶ Rowley, *Outcasts in White Australia*, 307, 371. See also Anderson, 'Place narratives and the origins of inner Sydney's Aboriginal settlement', 318-319; Ted Kennedy interviewed by Pat Ormesher, 30 April 2002, Redfern Oral History, <http://redfernoralhistory.org/OralHistory/TedKennedy/tabid/134/default.aspx>, accessed 2 June 2011.

Perouse.¹⁰⁷ Indigenous people from other parts of Australia, and Queensland in particular, also lived in Redfern.¹⁰⁸

However, life in the city was not free of discrimination. Living in areas that were socio-economically poor, such as Redfern, made Aboriginal people doubly marginalised, because of their race and location.¹⁰⁹ They suffered a wide range of physical, mental and social health problems, which were attributed to poor accommodation, poor nutrition, limited knowledge of health factors, and failure or inability to use existing health services.¹¹⁰ 20 per cent of the Aboriginal people in Sydney, most of them living in Redfern, were reported to be unemployed in 1973. Only a little more than one-third of them were receiving unemployment benefits. Many Aboriginal people were employed in unskilled occupations and average weekly take home pay was approximately \$69.¹¹¹

By 1970 the majority of the houses in Redfern were a hundred year old run down terraces. Redfern in general was described as poverty stricken, even as a slum and having the “heaviest concentration of Aboriginal population, living in the worst housing conditions.”¹¹² Previously accommodating Sydney’s rural gentry, in the early twentieth century this area had developed into an industrial centre accommodating Anglo-Celtic industrial workers. Once better transportation became available, in the 1950s, former residents were attracted to live in the suburbs and made way for the next wave of immigrants, many from Southern Europe.¹¹³ Though Redfern had affordable accommodation, finding even poor accommodation was difficult, because landlords were hesitant to rent to Indigenous people. Housing was also very crowded.¹¹⁴ Nevertheless,

¹⁰⁷ Kohen, ‘First and last people: Aboriginal Sydney’, 86; Morgan, *Unsettled Places*, 47.

¹⁰⁸ Aboriginal Medical Service Submission, Aboriginal Health Committee, 97A48/69, Hollows, UNSW; Kennedy interviewed by Pat Ormesher.

¹⁰⁹ Morgan, *Unsettled Places*, 48.

¹¹⁰ ‘Rats and Water in Aborigines’ Homes’ Sydney Slums’, *SMH*, 1 September 1964; ‘Summary of the Scott Report’, 68.

¹¹¹ ‘Summary of the Scott Report’, 67.

¹¹² Fourth Annual Report (1970/71), SSCA, ALS, 97A48/69, Hollows, UNSW.

¹¹³ Anderson, ‘Place narratives and the origins of inner Sydney’s Aboriginal settlement’, 318; Lucy Taksa, ‘Pictures for Cities’, 20.

¹¹⁴ Scott, *Problems and Needs of the Aborigines of Sydney*, 6-37, 8-3, 8-11; Pamela Beasley, ‘The Aboriginal Household in Sydney’ in Ronald Taft, John L.M. Dawson & Pamela Beasley (eds.), *Attitudes and Social Conditions* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1975), 184-186.

Aboriginal people were reluctant to move away from Redfern to other suburbs in order to find better housing.¹¹⁵

Police brutality and harassment in Redfern were common. Chicka Dixon described the unofficial curfew on the streets of Redfern and pointed out how Indigenous people could be randomly arrested:

If you're black in Redfern, Alexandria, Waterloo or Newtown and you're on that street after ten o'clock, brother, you're taking a chance. This is the procedure. Along comes the 'hurry-up-wagon':

'Right-o, Rastas, in the back.'

'But I'm not drunk.'

'What do you want: Drunk? or Goods in Custody?'

'I'm drunk!'¹¹⁶

Crowded housing and scarcity of alternative Indigenous social spaces made pubs popular meeting places away from the streets and the police surveillance. In Sydney pubs, such as the Empress Hotel at 87 Regent Street and the Clifton Hotel at 1 Botany Road in particular acted as hubs for social networks where different groups met and mixed.¹¹⁷ (See Appendix 1.) Pubs also worked as communication centres at the time when telephones were a rarity. New arrivals in the city would find contacts in the pub to help with their stay.

Support networks in the city

Australian welfare history has been slow to include Indigenous people within its frame of reference.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, Indigenous people have often been described only as the recipients of welfare during the colonial period, while the State or Federal Governments as

¹¹⁵ Mowbray, 'Tenants'Rights Project', 97A48/66.

¹¹⁶ Dixon in Colin Tatz (ed.), *Black Viewpoints*, 36.

¹¹⁷ Fourth Annual Report (1970/71), SSCA, ALS, 97A48/69, Hollows, UNSW; 'Submission concerning Aboriginal needs in Redfern', Alcohol Project, 6.25, 97A48/67, Hollows, F.C, UNSW; *AMS Newsletter*, No. 9, December 1973, 5; Sykes, *Snake Dancing*, 143; Trevor Close interviewed by the author, Sydney, 28 February 2001; *Barani Barragui: Yesterday tomorrow*, historical walking tours, City of Sydney, [2011], 48.

¹¹⁸ Anne O'Brien, 'Kitchen Fragments and Garden Stuff: Poor Law Discourse and Indigenous People in Early Colonial New South Wales', *Australian Historical Studies*, 39, 2008, 150.

well as charities are examined in their role as providers.¹¹⁹ This approach also facilitated the discussion about Aboriginal welfare dependency during the colonial period in Australia. Darryl Cronin argues that government welfare programs, as well as those run by different charities such as Churches, formed the basis for controlling Indigenous people and assimilating them into mainstream Anglo-Australian society.¹²⁰ Yet Indigenous people continued to provide welfare for their people and communities even after the colonisation of their country.¹²¹ For example, Indigenous grandparents looked after their grandchildren, while extended families provided accommodation for, shared their food with and helped to look for employment for their relations.

With limited support from the mainstream, Aboriginal people in Sydney found their own means to support and provide welfare to their communities. These support networks were particularly important to Indigenous people because they were largely excluded from mainstream welfare benefits in Australia until the 1960s.¹²² One such base was the Redfern All Blacks Rugby League Club which had a high social and political significance for Aboriginal people in Redfern. Oral history dates its beginning in the 1930s, during the Depression, while the written records lean towards 1944.¹²³ In the 1960s the All Blacks were reformed mainly at the initiative of Ken Brindle, who became the Club's Honorary Secretary.¹²⁴

The All Blacks provided an opportunity for young Aboriginal men to get together and improve their skills in sport. One such member was Michael Anderson, who joined the All

¹¹⁹ E.g. Brian Dickey, *No Charity There: a short history of social welfare in Australia* (Melbourne: Nelson, 1981); Stephen Garton, *Out of Luck: poor Australians and social welfare 1788-1988* (Sydney, Wellington: Allen & Unwin, 1990); Mendes, *Australia's Welfare Wars Revisited*; Darryl Cronin, 'Welfare dependency and mutual obligation: Negating Indigenous Sovereignty' in Aileen Moreton-Robinson (ed.), *Sovereign Subjects: Indigenous sovereignty matters*, (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2007).

¹²⁰ Cronin, 'Welfare dependency and mutual obligation', 179.

¹²¹ My thanks to Sue Green for bringing this to my attention.

¹²² Will Sanders, 'Citizenship and the Community Development Employment Project Scheme: Equal Rights, Difference and Appropriateness' in Nicolas Peterson and Will Sanders (eds.), *Citizenship and Indigenous Australians. Changing Conceptions and Possibilities* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 142; Bettina Cass, 'Contested Debates about Citizenship Rights to Welfare: Indigenous People and Welfare in Australia' in Diane Austin-Bross, Gaynor Macdonald (eds.), *Culture, Economy and Governance in Aboriginal Australia* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2005), 100-101.

¹²³ Jackie Hartley, 'Black, White...and Red? The Redfern All Blacks Rugby League Club in the Early 1960s', *Labour History*, No. 83, November 2002, 151-152; Charles Little, *Sport Communities and Identities: a Case Study of Race, Ethnicity and Gender on South Sydney Sport*, PhD thesis, UNSW, May 2000, 108; Horner, *Bill Ferguson*, 135-136.

¹²⁴ Lyn Brignell, 'Brindle, Kenneth (Ken) (1931-1987)', *ADB*, National Centre of Biography, ANU, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/brindle-kenneth-ken-12255/text21991>, accessed 24 January 2012.

Blacks when he moved to the city from Walgett.¹²⁵ The club also had an important role in helping its players to strengthen their self-esteem. Young men received training in management skills by being involved in the executive. Furthermore, dances organised by the Club offered a desperately needed meeting place away from the streets, crowded accommodation and pubs. Club members helped others to find employment, accommodation and legal help. Though women were not involved as players, they were active in supporting roles. The All Blacks symbolised resistance for the whole Aboriginal community and challenged the dominant discourses of assimilation. As a model of Indigenous self-help the club advanced the welfare of the community.¹²⁶ According to Jackie Hartley,

Indigenous people in urban areas were not necessarily being absorbed into the wider society, but were forming communities and articulating identities that challenged the dominant assimilationist discourse.¹²⁷

Cities provided potential sites for cross-cultural exchange and support networks.¹²⁸ A central place for Aboriginal education was the Tranby co-operative that was formed by Alf Clint in a Glebe mansion in Sydney in 1958. Tranby was part of the Aboriginal Christian co-operative movement under the Anglican Australian Board of Mission that relied on the financial support of trade unions and the secular co-operative movement. Influenced by an international pacifist concern about the economic protection of Indigenous people, co-operatives were a response to the realisation that the policy of paternalistic control had not effectively improved the depressed situation of the Aboriginal people, but rather made them subservient and dependent.¹²⁹ Tranby became a leader in training Aboriginal people for self-management well before ideas of self-management received any serious consideration at government levels.¹³⁰ It organised an annual summer school, where students were taught public speaking, how to use the media and about the parliamentary processes in Australia.¹³¹

¹²⁵ Hagan, 'The Real Story Behind the Tent Embassy', 4.

¹²⁶ Hartley, 'Black, White...and Red?', 154-159.

¹²⁷ Hartley, 'Black, White...and Red?', 156.

¹²⁸ Sylvia Kleinert, 'Aboriginality in the city: re-reading Koorie photographs', *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 30, 2006, 76.

¹²⁹ Holland, 'To Eliminate Colour Prejudice', 272.

¹³⁰ Noel Loos and Robyn Keast, 'The Radical Promise: the Aboriginal Christian cooperative movement', *Australian Historical Studies*, 1992, Vol. 25, No. 99, 286-287, 294-295.

¹³¹ David Snell, 'Interview of Dulcie Flower' in Diana Plater (ed.), *Other Boundaries: Inner City Aboriginal Stories: part one of an Aboriginal history of the Leichhardt municipality of Sydney*, Jumbunna Aboriginal Education Centre,

Tranby also acted as a meeting place for Aboriginal activists in the 1960s. According to Dulcie Flower, Tranby gave birth to the political development of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait people.¹³² Lester Bostock came to Sydney from Lismore in the early 1960s and started bookkeeping as a summer course at Tranby College to improve his basic education. After finishing his course Bostock was employed at Tranby as a bookkeeper. While in Sydney Bostock became involved with Aboriginal rights organisations. He later took part in Aboriginal activism in Redfern and was involved with the Black Theatre from the beginning. According to him, at Tranby people learnt about political agitation and how to work the political system as well as basic management and basic community management skills. Many young Aboriginal people from the Redfern community went to Tranby, including Gary Foley, Paul Coe and Naomi Mayers, who later became the administrator of the Aboriginal Medical Service.¹³³

The concentration of socio-economic problems among inner-city Aboriginal people also prompted some non-Indigenous people to take action. In fact, fears of emerging black ghettos, similar to Harlem in New York, had been present in Australia since 1948.¹³⁴ Ted Noffs, from the Wayside Chapel at King's Cross, was concerned about the problems faced by Aboriginal people in Sydney and, in particular, by families who moved to the city from the bush. He had visited Chicago in the late 1950s and thought that Aboriginal people in Redfern in the 1960s faced the same issues as urban African-Americans: lack of jobs and proper housing, and poor education.¹³⁵

Noffs together with other supporters established the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs, which started to operate from the Wayside Chapel at Kings Cross in 1963.¹³⁶ The Foundation provided immediate relief for Aboriginal people who found themselves in strife in the city. Following the ideas of assimilation, it supported Aboriginal people to become self-reliant members of the society. Noffs became the first Chairman of the

1994, 7. See also Lester Bostock interviewed in 'Best Foot Forward', Summer Series 7, *Message Stick*, ABC, 14 January 2005.

¹³² Snell, 'Interview of Dulcie Flower', 7.

¹³³ Bostock interviewed by the author. See also Ian Howie-Willis, 'Bostock, L' in David Horton (ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia*, (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1994), 145-146; Foley, 'One Black Life', 108.

¹³⁴ Morgan, *Unsettled Places*, 49.

¹³⁵ Read, *Charles Perkins*, 81.

¹³⁶ Phil Jarrat, *Ted Noffs: Man of the Cross* (Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 1997), 200-201. See also Perkins, *A Bastard like me*, 102; Read, *Charles Perkins*, 81-82.

association. Ken Brindle, from the All Blacks and Charles Perkins, a student at the University of Sydney, were the vice-chairmen. Charles Perkins was of Eastern Arrernte and Kalkadoon descent. At the age of nine he had been taken to live in at St Francis House in Adelaide, where he had access to Western education. Though education offered him limited advantages, as a successful soccer player he was able to seize a wider range of opportunities. In 1957 he travelled to England to play soccer for two years. His time in England had a great impact on Perkins, for it was in this period that he was for the first time able to see himself as a human being in an equal relationship with others. Back in Australia he became actively involved in the Aboriginal Rights movement.¹³⁷

While the earlier established Fellowship focused on changing the system from above by fighting discriminatory legislation, as well as campaigning for the abolition of the Aboriginal Welfare Board, the Foundation was more oriented around issues of individual welfare. Importantly, the problems facing Aboriginal people, then described as ‘Aboriginal problems’, were seen by the Foundation as social rather than racial problems. Furthermore, while the Fellowship accepted communists and was supported by the unions, the Foundation did not allow communist membership. Rather, it was supported by the Sydney establishment and promoted a more ‘trusting’ relationship between the government and Aboriginal people. According to Peter Read, the Foundation represented the left-Christian and liberal intelligentsia philosophically and the mainstream Sydney establishment socially. It had the State Governor as a patron and its advisory panel included doctors, a former deputy police commissioner, a vice chancellor, the Cardinal and the Archbishop, a judge, bankers, lawyers, scientists, academics, teachers, the Lord Mayor, politicians and social figures. When the Foundation purchased 810 George St, in close proximity to the Central Station, Redfern and surrounding areas, it was able to raise 80,000 pounds to fund the purchase.¹³⁸

Many of the activities of the organisations overlapped. The Fellowship and the Foundation both exposed discrimination, organised dances and education classes, made court appearances, supported rural Aboriginal people and made contact with students.¹³⁹ Their members spent considerable time assisting Aboriginal people who faced discriminatory

¹³⁷ Read, *Charles Perkins*, 13, 21, 24, 35, 51-54, 81-82.

¹³⁸ Read, *Charles Perkins*, 82-83, 86.

¹³⁹ Read, *Charles Perkins*, 86.

police and legal action, at times with the support of the Council for Civil Liberties. For example, in 1961 the Fellowship collected evidence about Redfern police violence and random arrests of any Aboriginal people who were on the street.¹⁴⁰ Jean and Jack Horner from the Fellowship were often called on at various hours of the day or night.¹⁴¹ With the help of a network of lawyers who had volunteered to offer their services, the Foundation also organised legal support for Aboriginal people who had been arrested.¹⁴²

The Foundation had a high level of Aboriginal participation, though many simultaneously continued their involvement with the Fellowship and the all-Aboriginal APA.¹⁴³ Multiple memberships reflected Aboriginal people's willingness to cross ideological barriers and accept support from anybody who treated them equally.¹⁴⁴ Regardless of its ideologies, the Foundation was perceived as an Aboriginal organisation and has a prominent place in their memory of 1960s Sydney.¹⁴⁵ Chicka Dixon joined the Foundation and was its manager in 1967. He remembered appearing in court as a manager to defend young Aboriginal men.¹⁴⁶ Gordon Briscoe, who had also lived in the St Francis' house in Adelaide with Perkins, came to Sydney from London in 1964 and joined the Foundation. Briscoe had shortly before relocated to Sydney from Canberra, where he had been studying at the ANU. Louisa Ingram, Ken Brindle, Shirley Smith and Joyce Mercy (later Clague)¹⁴⁷ were also among the hundreds of Aboriginal people who volunteered or worked for the Foundation. By August 1966 there were 400 Aboriginal people on its books.¹⁴⁸

The Foundation premises on George Street would have been the first building in Sydney that Aboriginal people were able to think of as theirs. It was a place that offered alternative social activities, such as dances, games and education, and allowed them to get together in a supporting environment. The Foundation provided food vouchers and emergency clothing, but also helped in finding accommodation and employment. Short courses, for

¹⁴⁰ Bandler and Fox, *The Time Was Ripe*, 84-85; Horner, *Seeking Racial Justice*, 107.

¹⁴¹ Bandler and Fox, *The Time Was Ripe*, 85, 88-92, 172.

¹⁴² 'Managers report', FAA, September 1966, 'Foundation for A.A.' 1963-1967', AAF records 1956-1978, 10(16), ML MSS 4057.

¹⁴³ Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, 318.

¹⁴⁴ Read, *Charles Perkins*, 119.

¹⁴⁵ Bostock interviewed by the author.

¹⁴⁶ Dixon interviewed by the author, 26 June 2000.

¹⁴⁷ Perkins, *A Bastard Like Me*, 100.

¹⁴⁸ Read, *Charles Perkins*, 84.

example in typing, were organised there with the aim of improving the opportunities for employment.¹⁴⁹

At the same time as Aboriginal people were migrating to Sydney, its political and ideological landscape was changing in the 1960s. New left wing ideologies opposed to capitalism, war, racism and sexism gained support and gave further impetus to the Vietnam protests, the student movement and women's liberation. Australian universities became centres of student activism and different religious denominations went through radical changes in theology that impacted upon their teachings on social issues. Counter culture and social radicalism emphasised participation and empowerment of ordinary citizens and underlined the value of community development.¹⁵⁰

Sydney students had started their involvement in Aboriginal issues during the post-war period with Abschol, a scholarship scheme set up by students in 1951 to support Aboriginal students in universities.¹⁵¹ By the early 1960s Abschol had adopted a political agenda that promoted factors such as housing, health, employment and land rights, which they held ultimately determined Aboriginal people's chances of receiving better education.¹⁵²

However, Aboriginal rights gained more attention following the student demonstrations against apartheid in South Africa and in support of the African-American civil rights movement. In 1964 after a student demonstration outside the United States consulate in Sydney, many people questioned the students' lack of concern for discrimination against Aboriginal people in their own country. Students at the University of Sydney established Student action for Aboriginal Australians (SAFA) in response. It became the centre of student activism for Aboriginal rights. Inspired by the freedom rides in the US, SAFA decided to organise a Freedom Ride tour to rural New South Wales. The tour aimed to

¹⁴⁹ Dixon interviewed by the author, 26 June 2000.

¹⁵⁰ Geoffrey Bolton, *The Oxford History of Australia: the middle way, 1942-1988* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 189-214; Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, 325-326; Mary Lane, 'The History of Community Work in NSW' in *Community work: Current Issues, Future Directions. Proceedings from Summer Studies Program* (Sydney: Department of Social Work, University of Sydney, 1987), 7.

¹⁵¹ Wootten to Coombs, 27 October 1970, part 1, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; 'Aboriginals and the Law', *SMH*, part 1, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Paul Coe, 'The Early History of the Aboriginal Legal Service in New South Wales', *Duran-Duran*, May 1991, 29; Read, *Charles Perkins*, 97-98.

¹⁵² Clark, *Aborigines & Activism*, 140, 143.

expose by non-violent demonstrations discrimination and the formal and informal segregation in rural areas. Tour participants also gathered information about the living conditions and attitudes of Aboriginal people. Students were assisted in their planning by Ted Noffs, from the Foundation, Alan Duncan, a full-time tutor for Aboriginal students at the University of Sydney who was involved with the Foundation and the Fellowship, and Jack Horner from the Fellowship, among others.¹⁵³

Charles Perkins was involved with the planning of the tour from the beginning and eventually became its leader.¹⁵⁴ Perkins was acutely aware of the situation in rural NSW after having travelled around the area working for the Foundation. Chicka Dixon remembered seeing Perkins in tears at the sight of the Gulargambone reserve built beside an open sewer, and little children playing surrounded by flies.¹⁵⁵ Gary Williams, a Bundjalang man and also a student at the University of Sydney and Gary Foleys' cousin, joined the Freedom Ride in Bowraville.¹⁵⁶

The Freedom Ride was a turning point in Australian race relations. It brought Charles Perkins to national prominence as an Aboriginal leader, placed Aboriginal rights more firmly on the public agenda and inspired a new kind of Aboriginal politics.¹⁵⁷ Furthermore, it inspired a younger generation of Aboriginal people, future Aboriginal activists, to stand up for their rights. Lyall Munro, who later became involved with the Aboriginal Legal Service, joined the Freedom Ride as a 14 year old boy in Moree, where he witnessed the power of direct action.¹⁵⁸

The Freedom ride also established new alliances between urban and rural areas as well as between Aboriginal activists and white students and future professionals.¹⁵⁹ Many doctors and lawyers, who later became involved with Aboriginal services, had their first contact with rural Aboriginal people during visits that followed the Freedom Ride model.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵³ Ann Curthoys, *Freedom Ride: A freedom rider remembers* (Crows Nest: Allen and Unwin, 2002), 1-10, 28-58.

¹⁵⁴ Curthoys, *Freedom Ride*, 18-21, 39, 92, 149.

¹⁵⁵ Read, *Charles Perkins*, 99.

¹⁵⁶ Curthoys, *Freedom Ride*, 18, 62; Gary Foley, *Foley*, Ilbjerri Theatre Company, Playhouse, Sydney Opera House, Sydney Festival, 27 January 2012.

¹⁵⁷ Curthoys, *Freedom Ride*, 1-10, 28-34.

¹⁵⁸ Read, *Charles Perkins*, 110. See also Foley, *Black Power in Redfern 1968-1972*.

¹⁵⁹ Goodall, 'New South Wales', 107.

¹⁶⁰ Curthoys, *Freedom Ride*, 276.

Importantly, unlike many white supporters, the students were not afraid of Aboriginal leadership. Furthermore, students, like Aboriginal people, were able to cross ideological boundaries. By the end of 1966 the SAFA lost support to the anti-Vietnam protest.¹⁶¹

Aboriginal people also sought assistance from organisations that worked in areas of general welfare in the inner-Sydney area. South Sydney Community Aid (SSCA), a community welfare organisation, was established towards the end of 1960s by Dean Eland, from the Congregational Church, and Ron Denham, from the Presbyterian Church.¹⁶² Aboriginal people formed one group among their customers. The SSCA employed Aboriginal fieldworkers to allow for an Aboriginal viewpoint in the organisation and for more direct channels of communication between the organisation and the people it aimed to assist.

The SSCA was part of a wider movement that promoted participation by ordinary citizens in community development. They found their expression not only in protest and community action, but also in the growth of the principle of 'self-help'. However, their understanding of self-help was different to that which was encouraged by conservative elements in society. Rather than promoting individual and family responsibility and seeking to cut public cost and responsibility, the new idea of self-help aimed to get 'power to people' and for them to manage their own affairs.¹⁶³

The Sydney University Settlement also provided welfare services and employed a social worker for the residents in the inner city in the 1960s. The Settlement had been established in 1891. Though it was strongly supported by University staff, it operated independently from the University's administration. It organised a homework centre and clubs, mostly run by university students, for local children. By the end of the 1970s most children who attended the clubs were Aboriginal. The Settlement idea originated in the late nineteenth century London's East End, where it had been established by academics from Oxford and Cambridge Universities. Its principal idea was to have students and academics live among

¹⁶¹ Read, *Charles Perkins*, 117, 123.

¹⁶² John Butcher, 'South Sydney Community Aid – some memories', Redfern Oral History, <http://redfernoralhistory.org/OralHistory/JohnButcher/tabid/283/Default.aspx>, accessed 3 June 2011.

¹⁶³ Lane, 'The History of Community Work in NSW', 7.

the poor and provide education and civil leadership for them, as well as to expose any abuse that they faced.¹⁶⁴

Aboriginal organisations together with the non-Indigenous welfare and Aboriginal rights organisations provided a desperately needed support network for the rapidly growing Indigenous population in the inner city. Furthermore, many of these organisations provided an important training ground in leadership and politics for Aboriginal people in Sydney.¹⁶⁵ On the other hand, Aboriginal activists found new allies among the supporters of 1960s New Left ideologies, such as university students.

Urban Aboriginality

Post war migration was the backdrop to the development of new forms of Aboriginality in the cities. However, for non-Indigenous people the presence of Aboriginal people in inner Sydney was somewhat paradoxical, as they did not acknowledge urban Aboriginal people as ‘true’, ‘real’ or ‘authentic’. Rather they, like the State officials, saw them as assimilated by virtue of location.¹⁶⁶ The State had a long history of defining Aboriginality in spatial terms (remote – settled) as much as in terms of blood (‘full-blood’ – ‘half-caste’) or culture (those with culture – those who had lost their culture).¹⁶⁷ Based on these categories, non-Indigenous people judged the ‘authenticity’ of urban Aboriginal people as ‘lacking’.¹⁶⁸ They also saw the division between these different categories as static and did not acknowledge the movement and interaction between different groups and areas. Yet most urban Aboriginal people maintained their kinship and community networks.¹⁶⁹ Indeed, Tim

¹⁶⁴ Roma Williams, *The Settlement: A History of the University of Sydney Settlement and the Settlement Neighbourhood Centre 1891-1891* (Sydney University Monographs, number four, University of Sydney, 1988) 3-4, 8, 60, 64, 76.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. Holland, ‘The Yurtokee Club, 1940’s Adelaide, 192-193.

¹⁶⁶ Morgan, *Unsettled Places*, xii, 48.

¹⁶⁷ Rowse, *Obliged to be difficult*, 87, 90.

¹⁶⁸ See e.g. Sam Watson, ‘I Say This to You’, *Meanjin*, Vol. 53, No. 4, Summer 1994, 590; Martin Nakata, ‘Better’ in *Blacklines: Contemporary Critical Writing by Indigenous Australians*, Michelle Grossman (ed.), (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2003), 143.

¹⁶⁹ Morgan, *Unsettled Places*, xii, 57.

Rowse suggests that for Aboriginal people “to be urban is to be cross regional”, as in expressions of hybrid Indigeneity utilising all pasts and regions in Australia.¹⁷⁰

Kay Anderson traces the origins of the ambiguity towards the idea of urban Aboriginal people to European thought that defined the place of ‘civility’ over ‘savagery’. In this hierarchy ‘savages’, as Aboriginal people were categorised, were seen as lacking in ‘civilisation’ – the skills and ‘learning’ – needed for a life in the city. Thus, non-Indigenous people saw Aboriginal people as belonging to the non-urban environment, nature.¹⁷¹ Nevertheless, though urban Aboriginal people were not perceived as ‘real’ Aboriginal people, they were discriminated against because they were Aboriginal.

Non-Indigenous attempts to define and control Aboriginal identity were and are used to undermine the authority of urban activists to speak for Aboriginal people in general. John Maynard notes that 1920s anthropologists’ construction of the stereotypical ‘real blackfella’ was deliberately contrasted with the southern activists of the period.¹⁷² The same discourse was repeated in the 1970s when, for example, Charles Perkins was judged as less Aboriginal due to his appearance and education.¹⁷³ According to Michael Dodson, “There would be few urban Aboriginal people who have not been labelled as culturally bereft, ‘fake’, or ‘part-Aborigines’, and then expected to authenticate their Aboriginality in terms of percentages of blood or clichéd ‘traditional’ experiences.”¹⁷⁴

Indigenous people resisted the idea that they could be divided in different groups based on skin colour or life style.¹⁷⁵ Chicka Dixon explained

As far as we are concerned, we’re black Australians and we’ll be black Australians till we die [...] It’s not my fault that I’m a little bit fairer than my brother in the Northern Territory. Obviously the white man hit the east coast first and raped the culture. No fault of mine. As long as I breathe I’m black, and if they hurt a blackfella in the Northern

¹⁷⁰ Tim Rowse, ‘Transforming the notion of urban Aborigine’, *Urban Policy and Research*, Vol. 18, 2000, 189.

¹⁷¹ Anderson, ‘Savagery and Urbanity’, 130-135, 143.

¹⁷² John Maynard in Maddison, *Black Politics*, 107.

¹⁷³ Read, *Charles Perkins*, 132.

¹⁷⁴ Dodson, ‘The End in the beginning’, 28; Stephen Page, *ID, Belong*, Bangarra Dance Theatre, Sydney Opera House, 20 August 2011.

¹⁷⁵ Gordon Briscoe in Colin Tatz (ed.), *Black Viewpoints: The Aboriginal Experience* (Australia and New Zealand Book Company: Brookvale, 1975), 99; Pat Miller in Garth Nettheim (ed.), *Aborigines Human Rights and the Law* (Sydney: Australia and New Zealand Book Company, 1974), 34; John Moriarty in Garth Nettheim (ed.), *Aborigines Human Rights and the Law* (Sydney: Australia and New Zealand Book Company, 1974), 40-41.

Territory, they hurt me. [...] Of course we down south haven't got our culture, we haven't got our language, but *we have the feeling that we belong...*¹⁷⁶

Rather than losing one culture for the other, urban Aboriginal people “walk between two cultures” as Larissa Behrendt phrases it.¹⁷⁷

The Sixties and the Black Power movement

Jennifer Clark argues that the Australian expression of the sixties, which she defines to have peaked in Australia in 1972, was strongly characterized by changing racial discourse,¹⁷⁸ similar to the civil rights movement in the United States, which paved the way for more widespread radicalism. The civil rights movement was part of the wider racial empowerment that led to the decolonisation of the African countries after the Second World War and increasing attacks on apartheid in South Africa in the United Nations.¹⁷⁹ The introduction of new mass media also meant that world events, such as race riots in the US, were witnessed by Australians in their homes soon after they had occurred.¹⁸⁰

Aboriginal issues became a central political issue in Australia by the early 1970s, following systematic campaigning by young Aboriginal activists, with the help of the new mass media and journalists, who were supportive of Aboriginal rights, and encouraged by the changing political atmosphere.¹⁸¹ As the push for Indigenous rights became greater in the 1960s, the Indigenous rights movement in Australia made a shift in emphasis from assimilation to self-determination.¹⁸² Will Sanders, however, reminds us that even though Indigenous group rights and emphasis on difference entered the Indigenous agenda, they did not

¹⁷⁶ Dixon in Colin Tatz (ed.), *Black Viewpoints*, 49-50. Emphasis in original.

¹⁷⁷ Larissa Behrendt, ‘Aboriginal Urban Identity: Preserving the Spirit, Protecting the Traditional in Non-traditional Settings’, *Australian Feminist Law Journal*, Vol. 4, March 1995, 56-59.

¹⁷⁸ Clark, *Aborigines & Activism*, 12.

¹⁷⁹ Clark, *Aborigines & Activism*, 2, 21-22, 76.

¹⁸⁰ Costa, *A Higher Authority*, 97-98.

¹⁸¹ Colin Tatz, ‘Aborigines: political options and strategies’ in R.M. Berndt (ed.), *Aborigines and change: Australia in the '70s* (Canberra: AIAS, 1977), 391.

¹⁸² Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, 310; Bain Attwood, ‘Rights, Racism and Aboriginality: Critics of Assimilation in the 1950s and 1960s’ in Tim Rowse (ed.), *Contesting Assimilation* (Perth: API Network, 2005), 282-283. See also Attwood and Markus, *The Struggle for Aboriginal Rights*, 20; Chesterman, ‘Defending Australia’s Reputation. Part two’, 221; Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, 330; Peter Read, ‘Cheeky, Insolent and Anti-white: the spilt in the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders – Easter 1970’, *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. 36, No. 1, 1990, 81.

replace considerations about equality and individual rights, which continue to be articulated to the present day.¹⁸³

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal campaigners celebrated their victory in the national referendum in 1967, after ten years of campaigning. In the referendum 90.77 per cent of Australians voted in favour of giving the Federal Government power to legislate on issues relating to Indigenous people, as well as to include Indigenous people in the census. Since Australian Federal Government policy had worked in ways that ensured that discriminatory legislation was removed on “a quiet and gradual basis”, by the time of the 1967 referendum most discriminatory legislation had already been repealed.¹⁸⁴ Nevertheless, for many Aboriginal people, the referendum symbolises the end of discrimination and the granting of equal rights and citizenship to Aboriginal people.¹⁸⁵

Support for the referendum was particularly strong in urban areas on the Eastern seaboard of Australia. In New South Wales 8.5 per cent voted ‘no’.¹⁸⁶ However, in rural New South Wales, where large Aboriginal populations lived and where discrimination and segregation were most entrenched, the ‘no’ vote was significantly higher, 13.8 per cent, than in urban areas, 6.8 per cent.¹⁸⁷ Most of the media supported the ‘yes’ vote. The constitutional alteration gave Aboriginal people access to the wealthiest level of government.¹⁸⁸ However, it was not until the Whitlam government came to office that this Commonwealth power was put to use.¹⁸⁹ For Aboriginal people the disillusionment was great once they realised that nothing was happening soon after the referendum.¹⁹⁰

At the same time Aboriginal people had started to develop an increased sense of national identity. The idea of different Indigenous peoples within Australia as one people first emerged in the nineteenth century and was further cultivated by Aboriginal activists in the

¹⁸³ Sanders, ‘Citizenship and the Community Development Employment Project Scheme’, 141.

¹⁸⁴ Chesterman, ‘Defending Australia’s Reputation. Part Two’, 206.

¹⁸⁵ Bain Attwood and Andrew Markus in collaboration with Dale Edwards and Kate Schilling, *The 1967 Referendum or, When Aborigines didn’t get the vote*, (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 1997), x-xi, 65-69; Taffe, *Black and White Together*, 114-124.

¹⁸⁶ Bennett, *White Politics and Black Australia*, 23. Voters in the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory did not have the vote in constitutional referendum at this time. Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Goodall, ‘New South Wales’, 108.

¹⁸⁸ Bennett, *White Politics and Black Australia*, 164, 179.

¹⁸⁹ Chesterman, *Civil Rights*, 9.

¹⁹⁰ See e.g. Gilbert, *Because White a Man’ll never do it*, 1994, 101.

inter-war period.¹⁹¹ However, it gained new importance when at FCAATSI annual general meetings Indigenous people were able to meet with other Indigenous people from different parts of Australia and to explore their shared histories under colonisation, as well as common causes such as land rights.¹⁹² Indigenous people shared a collective consciousness and belief in rights based on their Aboriginality.¹⁹³ Aboriginality was an effective counter-discourse to the dominant white discourse, which constructed Aboriginal people as inferior.¹⁹⁴ Charles Perkins, for example, expressed a view of Aboriginal people that was national rather than regional.¹⁹⁵

FCAATSI was also an important learning ground for Aboriginal activists. Gary Foley remembers the annual meetings in Canberra fondly. To him FCAATSI provided an opportunity to meet other grass roots activists as well as the national leaders; it gave him a political education.¹⁹⁶ According to Sam Watson, the legacy of the 1967 referendum was to learn how to unite and how to join with like-minded people.¹⁹⁷

Indigenous activists started to travel internationally in increasing numbers in the 1960s and their contacts with other Indigenous peoples and political movements overseas strengthened dramatically.¹⁹⁸ From these interactions they started to gain further influences in their political ideas and ideologies. In addition to his time in England, in 1968 Charles Perkins travelled around the world including the United States, where Black Power ideologies and the awareness of black militancy had exploded in the 1960s.¹⁹⁹ In the United States he saw black banks and factories and met Jesse Jackson. He was most impressed, however, by his visit to a First Nations reserve in Albuquerque, where young educated Native Americans were returning to their people.²⁰⁰ Following the increase in the urban

¹⁹¹ Bain Attwood, *Making of the Aborigines* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989); McGregor, *Indifferent Inclusion*, 173.

¹⁹² Ian Anderson, 'Introduction: the Aboriginal critique of colonial knowledge' in M Grossman (ed.), *Blacklines: Contemporary Critical Writing by Indigenous Australians* (Melbourne University Press: Melbourne, 2003), 18.

¹⁹³ Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, 310. See also Attwood and Markus, *Struggle for Aboriginal Rights*, 20; Chesterman, 'Defending Australia's Reputation, Part Two', 221; Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, 330; Read, 'Cheeky, Insolent and Anti-white', 81.

¹⁹⁴ Brewster, *Reading Aboriginal Women's Autobiography*, 3.

¹⁹⁵ Martinez, 'Problematizing Aboriginal nationalism', 133, 137.

¹⁹⁶ Faith Bandler, *Turning the Tide: A personal history of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1989), 140.

¹⁹⁷ Sam Watson quoted in Costa, *A Higher Authority*, 91.

¹⁹⁸ Costa, *A Higher Authority*, 99.

¹⁹⁹ Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, 315, 324.

²⁰⁰ Perkins, *A Bastard Like Me*, 110-121, 126-127; Read, *Charles Perkins*, 78-80.

Indian population, renewed radicalism started to develop among their youth. Red Power groups borrowed ideas, strategies, tactics and rhetoric from the African American groups. For example, the American Indian Movement was influenced by the Black Panthers. Native American activists focused on empowering the tribe and enforcing treaty rights.²⁰¹

During the same year Kath Walker (later known as Oodgeroo Noonuccal), from Stradbroke Island in Queensland and member of FCAATSI, was invited to attend a conference against racism organised by the World Council of Churches in London. Perkins and Walker both returned from their trips furious that Australia seemed so backward compared to the rest of the world in racial issues.²⁰² According to Kathleen Lothian, Perkins and Walker brought the ideas of Black Power to Australia.²⁰³

The number of visitors in Australia from colonial or post-colonial countries also increased. At the annual Federal Council Easter conferences Aboriginal people met people such as Tom Mboya, from the newly independent Kenya.²⁰⁴ In 1968 the National Aboriginal Day Observance Committee invited four Indigenous guests from Canada, the United States and New Zealand to Sydney to share their experience and knowledge.²⁰⁵ In New Zealand the post-war era Maori leaders had started to view the Maori as people rather than as members of different tribes as a tactical move that best positioned them to influence the government policies.²⁰⁶

However, one of the most influential visitors was Roosevelt Brown who came to Melbourne in 1969. Brown was the Chairman of the Caribbean and Latin American Continuation Central Planning Committee of the Black Power Movement, and a Member of Parliament for the Progressive Labor Party in Bermuda. His visit strengthened Black Power ideologies among Aboriginal activists and in particular the younger generation of leaders, such as Bob Maza and Gary Foley.²⁰⁷

²⁰¹ Donna Hightower Langston, 'American Indian Women's Activism in the 1960s and 1970s', *Hypatia*, No. 2, Spring 2003, 114-117; D'Arcus, 'The Urban Geography of Red Power', 1249.

²⁰² Read, *Charles Perkins*, 122-123.

²⁰³ Lothian, 'A Blackward Step Is a Forward Step', 42-44.

²⁰⁴ Taffe, *Black and White Together*, 264-265

²⁰⁵ Horner, *Seeking Racial Justice*, 136.

²⁰⁶ Margaret Tennant, *The Fabric of Welfare: voluntary organisations, government and welfare in New Zealand 1840-2005* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2007), 164.

²⁰⁷ Taffe, *Black and White Together*, 264.

During his visit, Roosevelt Brown invited five Aboriginal Australians to attend the Congress of African People in Atlanta, Georgia in 1970. Solomon or Sol Bellear from FCAATSI and Bob Maza from the National Tribal Council were among the members of the delegation. During the trip the delegation stayed with the Black Panther party and Black Muslim movement. In New York they visited a number of organisations in Harlem and submitted a petition to the United Nations.²⁰⁸ The Black Panther Party had initiated programs such as ‘pig patrol’, a response to police harassment, and a breakfast program, which fought malnutrition among children. These programs provided immediate and achievable solutions to the problems that urban Indigenous people faced living in the middle of an affluent city. Indeed the Indigenous journalist John Newfong described Black Power ideology as essentially a modern, urban ideology.²⁰⁹ Bellear and Maza were both later active among the Sydney community in the 1970s and brought with them information of what they learnt during their trip to Redfern.²¹⁰

From what was initially a slogan and collection of ideas that were borrowed from America, Aboriginal activists transformed Black Power into a term that was used in pursuit of a spectrum of political concerns – for Indigenous rights as well as civil rights. According to Kathleen Lothian, “Black Power was an overt rejection of the lack of power in Aboriginal lives – politically, economically, socially and ideologically.”²¹¹ Its core message called Aboriginal people to take a lead in solving their problems.²¹² Black Power was as much a cultural movement as a political one. It advocated the idea of ‘Black awakening’, the belief in a pursuit of a separate identity as part of a re-discovery of the worth of Aboriginal culture, as well as issues of land rights, Aboriginal control and the pursuit of equal living standards with white people.²¹³ Furthermore, Aboriginal activists conceptualised their

²⁰⁸ Bruce McGuinness, *Aborigines visit the US: report on trip by five Aborigines to Congress of African people and United Nations*, [1971], pamphlet, AIATSIS, 7, 16; Lothian, *A Blackward Step is a Forward Step*, 146; Kathy Lothian, ‘Seizing the Time: Australian Aborigines and the Influence of the Black Panther Party, 1969-1972’, *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 4, March 2005, 185.

²⁰⁹ *Identity*, November 1972, 1. See also Lothian, *A Blackward Step is a Forward Step*, 141.

²¹⁰ Sol Bellear, radio interview, ‘Bob Maza remembered’, *Anaye!* ABC, 4 August, 2001; Dixon interviewed by the author, 26 June 2000; Close interviewed by the author.

²¹¹ Lothian, *A Blackward Step is a Forward Step*, 9

²¹² John T. McCartney, *Black Power Ideologies: Essay in African-American Political Thought* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 124.

²¹³ Lothian, *A Blackward Step Is a Forward Step*, 7-9.

situation as dispossessed and colonised people, influenced by Native American ideas and the world wide liberation movement.²¹⁴

The new wave of Aboriginal radicalism was loosely centred on the Foundation and the APA in Sydney.²¹⁵ Young Aboriginal radicals, such as Paul Coe, Gary Foley, Billy Craigie and Gary Williams gathered at the Foundation and took part in courses in public speaking organised by Chicka Dixon.²¹⁶ Foley remembers Charles Perkins, who was the manager of the Foundation in 1965-1969 as an important influence in his life at the time.²¹⁷ Norma Ingram (also known as Williams) remembers going to the Foundation where she met Charles Perkins and made friends with many other young Aboriginal people at the Foundation, many of whom later became involved with Aboriginal organisations in Redfern.²¹⁸

These young Aboriginal radicals belonged to a generation of Aboriginal people who had had better access to education than their parents and thus had better command of reading and writing. They had also had more freedom from official racial restrictions, but nevertheless had experienced the weight of racial prejudice.²¹⁹ They read widely, including literature by Malcolm X, Huey P. Newton, Bobby Seale, George Jackson, Elridge Cleaver, and Angela Davis as well as Dee Brown's *Bury my heart at Wounded Knee*.²²⁰ Gary Foley recalls how reading Malcolm X was inspiring because, despite the enormous cultural difference, "so much of what he was saying could have been written about me and other blackfellas around Redfern".²²¹ He recalls an anecdote that reveals the poor socio-economic situation Aboriginal activists were dealing with and also records their resistance to white ownership. Foley tells how he together with the other black activists used to steal books

²¹⁴ Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, 336.

²¹⁵ Curthoys, *Freedom Ride*, 236.

²¹⁶ Dixon interviewed by the author, 26 June 2000; Dixon in Colin Tatz (ed.), *Black Viewpoints*, 45; Read, *Charles Perkins*, 94.

²¹⁷ Read, *Charles Perkins*, 88, 94, 120.

²¹⁸ Norma Ingram in *Yarnin' up: Aboriginal people's careers in the NSW public sector* (Office of the Director of Equal Opportunity in Public Employment: Sydney, 2003), 31-32. See also Michael Anderson interviewed in Hagan, 'The Real Story Behind the Tent Embassy', 4.

²¹⁹ Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, 312-313.

²²⁰ Foley, *Black Power in Redfern 1968-1972*. See also Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, 335; Lothian, *A Blackward Step is a Forward Step*, 101; Lothian, 'Seizing Time', 191, 195-196.

²²¹ Foley, 'One Black Life', 108. See also Bob Maza in 'Bob Maza remembered', *Awake!* ABC, 4 August 2001.

from Bob Gould's Third World Bookshop on Goulburn Street,²²² until Gould started to give books to Aboriginal people at a special price.²²³

Paul Coe, Gary Foley, Gary Williams and Billie Craigie later became members of the Australian Black Panther Party, established in February 1972. The Party's ideologies were a great influence for the Redfern activists. However, nationally the Black Panther Party in Australia never attracted more than a handful of members.²²⁴

The increasing demand for Aboriginal control impacted upon the already established interracial organisations. Boosted by Black Power ideologies, Aboriginal people argued that problems faced by their people remained unsolved because Aboriginal people had no opportunity to run their *own* affairs and find their *own* solutions. Though the support and work done by white people was appreciated, it was perceived that they did not have the experience of racism and of being Aboriginal, knowledge of Aboriginal culture or sensitivity towards the multitude of problems faced by Aboriginal people. Thus, Aboriginal people called for Aboriginal control and leadership, and avenues for Aboriginal voices to be heard.

The question of white dominance came up soon after the Fellowship was established and as a response the all-Aboriginal APA was reinvigorated in 1958. Aboriginal members questioned the policies that the Fellowship promoted and whether it aimed to be a welfare organisation or a political group. They also challenged assimilation as an appropriate policy for the Aboriginal rights campaign.²²⁵ Eventually, the Fellowship folded in 1969 since its Aboriginal supporters had abandoned it for the APA.²²⁶

The Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs faced an unsuccessful challenge for Aboriginal leadership and control in 1970. The original welfare focus of this once important organisation did not fulfil the changed expectations of the Aboriginal staff and community,

²²² Roger Shelley, 'Book arcade is a special destination', <http://www.gouldsbooks.com.au/booknews.html>, accessed 11 September 2006; 'Gould's Books in Literature', <http://www.gouldsbooks.com.au/literature.html>, accessed 11 September 2006.

²²³ Foley, *Black Power in Redfern 1968-1972*.

²²⁴ Lothian, *A Blackward Step is a Forward Step*, 107-108.

²²⁵ Lake, *Faith*, 78; Horner, *Seeking Racial Justice*, 35-36, 52.

²²⁶ Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, 332-333.

who were increasingly leaning towards more Indigenous control.²²⁷ Two years later the Foundation was governed by an all-black management committee, following which whites withdrew their financial support. The final years of the Foundation were marked by alleged malpractice and the Foundation gradually withered until it closed in 1975.²²⁸

When FCAATSI was first established it had only four Aboriginal representatives. With time their numbers increased. However, Indigenous people, despite their attempts, failed to gain control of the organisation.²²⁹ Peter Read points out that organisations such as the FCAATSI were run for Aborigines but not by them.²³⁰ The unwillingness of whites to stand aside led to the establishment of a new all-Aboriginal organisation, the National Tribal Council in 1970, with Gordon Briscoe as its President.²³¹ However, the National Tribal Council came together with FCAATSI to campaign against the re-enactment of Cook's landing in Botany Bay in 1970. The protesters laid wreaths with the names of the languages that were no longer spoken in the Bay to commemorate the Aboriginal people who had lost their lives while defending their land, and thus underline their status as dispossessed people.²³²

Though empowering for Aboriginal people, Black Power was perceived by many white people to be threatening.²³³ Aboriginal control was seen as divisive of the existing Aboriginal rights organisations such as FCAATSI.²³⁴ Many non-Indigenous people who had devoted their time to advancing Aboriginal Affairs could not see why their ideals of black and white co-operation should be abandoned. Sometimes they were slow to step aside. Neither did all Aboriginal people find the Black Power movement appealing. For example, Ted Fields did not identify with blackness and noted that Evonne Goolagong also preferred to identify as Aboriginal.²³⁵ Nevertheless, among the Redfern Aboriginal

²²⁷ Gordon Briscoe, *Racial Folly: a twentieth century Aboriginal family* (Canberra: ANU E press and Aboriginal History, 2010), 1-17, 130-153.

²²⁸ Read, *Charles Perkins*, 121-122.

²²⁹ Taffe, *Black and White Together*, 13, 257-266.

²³⁰ Read, 'Cheeky, Insolent and Anti-white', 75. For the FCAATSI split see Read, 'Cheeky, Insolent and Anti-white', 73-83; Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, 307-312, 330-335; Taffe, *Black and White Together*, 119-266.

²³¹ Taffe, *Black and White Together*, 257-266.

²³² Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, 336; Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, 335.

²³³ Smith, *Mum Shirl*, 78. See also Edmund Campion, *Ted Kennedy: priest of Redfern* (Kew East: David Lovell Publishing, 2009), 69.

²³⁴ Read, 'Cheeky, Insolent and Anti-white', 77-80; Read, *Charles Perkins*, 138; Lothian, Blackward Step is a Forward Step, 69. Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, 330; Taffe, *Black and White Together*, 266; Clark, *Aborigines & Activism*, 209-221.

²³⁵ Stewart Harris, *This Our Land* (Canberra: ANU, 1972), 103.

activists Black Power ideologies paved way for a new wave activism and gave a new name to self-determination.²³⁶

Conclusion

Sydney has had a continuous history of Aboriginal presence throughout the time of colonisation. However, from the 1960s onwards there was a radical increase in the Aboriginal population as many, in particular young and educated Aboriginal people migrated from rural New South Wales to the city. Many of them settled in the inner-Sydney suburb of Redfern and surrounding areas. Following the migration, new forms of urban Aboriginal identity started to form. This shift coincided with the strengthened sense of national Aboriginal identity where common experiences formed part of the basis of shared identity. Aboriginal migrants carried with them experiences of personal discrimination and memories of injustice and mistreatment of their people, such as the second wave of dispossession and police harassment. At the same time, though now living in the city, they maintained their connections to their places of origin, family and kin in rural areas.

The city attracted Aboriginal people with the hope of better education and work opportunities than were available in rural areas. However, they also faced discrimination in Sydney, for example at the hands of the police, that was not dissimilar to their rural experiences. In the local welfare organisations, among which the Foundation was most central, they found material support and made friendships with other Aboriginal people. Newly arrived Aboriginal people also joined the existing Aboriginal rights organisations and thus joined the long history of Aboriginal activism in Sydney.

The different organisations also provided a learning ground for young Aboriginal people, as new forms of Aboriginal activism started to take place. Aboriginal activists found new allies amongst the street protesters and student radicals, who came together with the older supporters of Aboriginal movement: unions and churches. Influenced by the ideology of Black Power and the worldwide Liberation movement, Aboriginal activists started to look

²³⁶ Lothian, *A Blackward Step is a Forward Step*, 50.

for their *own* solutions for their problems and strive for Aboriginal control and self-determination. In the next chapter I will discuss the formation of the first Aboriginal organisation in Redfern, the Aboriginal Legal Service that the Aboriginal activists, together with their supporters, established under these principles.

Chapter 2

“What to do if arrested”¹ - fighting for Aboriginal legal rights

The Aboriginal Legal Service (A.L.S.) is about Aboriginal self-determination and that has two aspects to it, defensive and offensive.²

The Aboriginal Legal Service was the first service organisation initiated and controlled by Aboriginal people in Redfern. Its establishment in 1970 was prompted by the intense police surveillance and brutality experienced by the rapidly growing number of Aboriginal people migrating to inner-city Sydney. Aboriginal people set out to provide a free legal service to those Aboriginal people facing court, with the support of volunteering non-Indigenous lawyers. Its daily operations were run by a management committee, while the elected council decided on the policies of the service. After gaining increased funding from the newly elected Whitlam government the Legal Service started to expand from a local shop front service to a state wide operation.

The Aboriginal Legal Service provided an inclusive socio-legal service and acted as a shield against police violence. However it also acted as an agent of law reform.³ It aimed to define self-determination in practice in its operations. It provided specific services and community structures that supported the Aboriginal community in Sydney and strengthened their sense of Aboriginality as peoples.

In this chapter I discuss the Aboriginal Legal Service (ALS) in Redfern and its role in the struggle for Indigenous self-determination. I also examine the first legal cases arguing for Indigenous sovereignty in Australia. Firstly, I provide a brief history of the ALS in Redfern

¹ Second management committee meeting, ALS Background material, unpublished, ARRC pamphlet files, UNSW.

² ‘The Aboriginal Legal Service’, *Legal Service Bulletin*, July 1975, 240; ‘Legal Aid’, *The Black National Times*, 14-19 July 1975.

³ Watson, ‘Tendering of Indigenous Legal Services’, 4.

and examine the support networks that made the ALS possible. I then examine its role in providing legal services, advocating legal reforms as well as building Aboriginal community in Redfern. I also study how the Federal Government and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA), in particular, facilitated and limited the self-determination of the ALS. Although the Aboriginal Legal Service started to operate state wide from its early stages my focus will be on the Redfern office and what then became the head office of the ALS NSW.

From streets to courts

The need for the Aboriginal Legal Service was triggered by the poor and often violent relations between Aboriginal people and police that, as I discussed in the previous chapter, date back to the early colonial period. Paul Coe, one of the founding members of the ALS, noted that the memory of indiscriminate arrests and raids on missions remained in the minds of Aboriginal people and formed the basis of their attitudes towards the police.⁴ Sam Watson, an Aboriginal activist from Queensland, describes how there was lot of anger, frustration and hatred to shed:

all those years when I was growing up we were absolutely terrified of coppers. Blue uniforms used to smash the shit out of us, boom, boom, boom, and we'd all cop it. We were so powerless, so vulnerable. We had no legal service, we had no friends, we had no white supporters, nothing. We'd just get smashed on the streets and then left there [...] And then in the early seventies we took to the streets and smashed the shit out of the coppers, that was brilliant, that was great. We did that in 1970 in George Street, we did it in 1971 during the Springbok demonstrations, and we did it right the way through the seventies.⁵

The police were responsible for enforcing the spatial and social separation of Aboriginal people and whites.⁶ In Redfern the police enforced an unofficial curfew on Aboriginal people in the evenings after 9.30 to 10.00 pm making the streets unsafe space for

⁴ ALS, Submission to House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, Inquiry into Aboriginal Access to Legal Aid, August 1979, Unpublished report, Aboriginal Organisations, ARRC pamphlet files, UNSW, 1.

⁵ Watson, 'I Say This to You', 592.

⁶ Chris Cunneen, *Conflicts, Politics and Crime: Aboriginal communities and the police* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2001), 181-182.

Aboriginal people. Following customary traditions and due to the lack of alternative venues, Aboriginal people tended to get together in parks and other public spaces where they came to the attention of the police.⁷ Those walking on the streets of Redfern, Newtown, Alexandria and Chippendale after the curfew were summarily arrested by police.⁸ The Redfern Aboriginal Community and many white observers alleged that the New South Wales Police Squad or the Special Branch, 21st Division, used “mopping up” tactics to arrest any Aborigines who showed the slightest sign of inebriation.⁹ Police would also close off streets near popular local hotels where Aboriginal people gathered on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays, such as the Empress Hotel and Clifton Hotel, about half an hour before closing time. They forced Aboriginal people out of the hotels on to the streets where they would make indiscriminate arrests.¹⁰ Peter Read emphasises the significance of the intense police harassment in forging the shared identity of Aboriginal people in Redfern, similarly to the earlier shared experiences of discrimination and police surveillance on the Aboriginal reserves, as discussed in Chapter 1.¹¹

Police presumably thought their behaviour was legitimised, for the presence of high profile non-Indigenous people, such as the Dean of the Law faculty at UNSW Hal Wootten, did not hinder them from indiscriminately arresting Aboriginal customers in the pub in which they were sitting.¹² The police argued that they were dealing with increased crime in Redfern and rationalised that in order to prevent this crime they should remove Aboriginal people from the streets after hours.¹³ While policing the streets of Redfern, the police worked towards maintaining the dominant non-Indigenous interests and spatiality.¹⁴ According to Chris Cunneen, policing uses crime as a racialising discourse that draws

⁷ Kleinert, ‘Aboriginality in the city’, 76.

⁸ ALS, Submission to House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, ARRC pamphlet files, 1; Coe, ‘The Early History of the Aboriginal Legal Service in New South Wales’, 28.

⁹ Fay G. Cohen, Duncan Chappel, Paul R. Wilson, *Aboriginal and American Indian Relations with Police: a study of the Australian and North American experience*, report by the Law and Justice Study Center, Battelle Human Affairs Research Centers, Seattle, Washington for the DAA, Seattle Washington, 1975, 8.

¹⁰ ALS, Submission to House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, ARRC pamphlet files, 1; Wootten to Allan, 22 October 1971, ALS background material, ARRC, UNSW; Hal Wootten in Garth Nettheim (ed.), *Aborigines Human Rights and the Law*, (Australia and New Zealand Book Company: Sydney, 1974), 60; Coe, ‘The Early History of the Aboriginal Legal Service in New South Wales’, 28, Bostock interviewed by the author.

¹¹ Peter Read comment to the author, Indigenous resistance session, AHA conference, University of Wollongong, 11 July 2013.

¹² Coe, ‘The Early History of the Aboriginal Legal Service in New South Wales’, 29.

¹³ Wootten, ‘Aborigines and police’, 268.

¹⁴ Cunneen, *Conflicts, Politics and Crime*, 181-182.

exclusionary boundaries. Exclusion undermines the citizenship rights of those excluded, while criminalization is used to legitimise excessive policing.¹⁵

Due to lack of education, as well as the lack of representation in the legal system and police force, inability to pay for legal advice and differences in culture, Aboriginal people were overrepresented in the courts. The only legal support available was the help received from Aboriginal rights and welfare organisations.¹⁶ There was no legal support available for Aboriginal people in courts of summary jurisdiction and small debts courts where they most commonly appeared in NSW. Furthermore, the Public Solicitor's and Public Defender's services were available only after committal for trial, except in the most serious cases, so that the accused had no advice or assistance in gathering evidence and representation from the time of his/her arrest until well after the committal proceedings.¹⁷ Chamber magistrates gave limited advice and would not investigate or represent. The Council for Civil Liberties was only interested in civil liberties issues and the Legal Service Bureau was available only for returned servicemen.¹⁸ Thus, from the perspective of Aboriginal people justice was rarely or never done.¹⁹

A group of young Aboriginal people decided to take action against the police harassment. They were inspired by the Black Panther ideas of 'pig patrol', of reversing surveillance and targeting the police. They were also encouraged by a talk given in Sydney by the leader of the Gurindji walk off Vincent Lingiari encouraging Aboriginal people to do more to help themselves. Young people included Gary Foley, Isobel Coe, Paul Coe, Les Collins, Tony Coorey, Billie Craigie, Bronwyn Penrith, James Wedge and Gary Williams. They started photographing and witnessing incidents of wrongful arrest and of police violence towards people.²⁰ They also contacted non-Indigenous people interested in Aboriginal issues who were, for example, involved with Abschol. Among them were Peter Tobin and Eddie

¹⁵ Cunneen, 'Indigeneity, Sovereignty and the Law', 318.

¹⁶ Wootten to Wentworth, 19 November 1970, part 1, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; 'Aboriginals and the Law', *SMH*, C1696/10.

¹⁷ Submission to Commonwealth Government in support of application for Grant 1972-1973, part 1, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁸ Wootten to Wentworth, 19 November 1970, C1696/10.

¹⁹ Michael Anderson in Garth Nettheim (ed.), *Aborigines Human Rights and the Law* (Australia and New Zealand Book Company: Sydney, 1974), 54-55. See also ALS, Submission to House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, ARRC pamphlet files, 8.

²⁰ Foley, 'Teaching Whites a Lesson', 203; ALS, Submission to House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, ARRC pamphlet files, 2; 'Aboriginals and the law', *SMH*, C1696/10; Coe, 'The Early History of the Aboriginal Legal Service in New South Wales', 28.

Neumann, who were law students at the University of Sydney with previous involvement in Aboriginal legal rights. They had, for example, conducted a survey on Aboriginal experiences of the criminal justice system in Walgett.²¹

Tobin came from a Jewish family that had suffered persecution in Europe during the Second World War. He started studying law at Sydney University in the 1960s and became involved in Abschol. During his studies he joined a volunteer program in New Guinea in 1966. After returning to Sydney he started a research project in support of Aboriginal land rights. Tobin mapped Aboriginal reserves and compared existing Aboriginal land with that recorded in the NSW Land Titles Office. Together with George Pick and Uri Windt he also published a study on the impact of the Queensland Act on the lives of Aboriginal people. Tobin also took an active part in demonstrations and street politics. In the early 1970s together with other law students he would go to the hotels in Redfern every Friday and Saturday night. They witnessed the arrests of Indigenous people and then went to the police station where they checked the charges and raised bail.²²

Tobin and Neumann invited Hal Wootten, the Dean of the Faculty of Law at UNSW, to join the group.²³ Wootten had travelled widely in Asia as a Secretary-General of Lawasia, a regional law association in Asia and the Pacific. From 1945 to 1951 he had been involved in training New Guinea patrol officers and lived for research purposes in New Guinea for five months in 1947.²⁴ Wootten remembers how students from the Sydney University Law Faculty contacted him and said,

Well you know, you've been talking big about the responsibilities of the legal profession, and how your new Law School's going to communicate them. We've got Aboriginals here in Redfern; we're in touch with young Aboriginals who are very angry about the way the

²¹ Wootton to Coombs, 27 October 1970, part 1, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; The Aboriginal Medical Service: report to annual general meeting, 30 August 1971, part 1, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Anna Sarzin and Lisa Sarzin, *Hand in Hand: Jewish and Indigenous people working together* (Darlinghurst: NSW Jewish Board of Deputies, 2010), 185.

²² Anne Summers and David Marr, 'One white man who won the trust of Aborigines', *The National Times*, June 6-11, 1977.

²³ The ALS: report to annual general meeting, 30 August 1971, part 1, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Coe, 'The Early History of the Aboriginal Legal Service in New South Wales', 29.

²⁴ Senate Standing Committee on Constitutional and Legal Affairs, Canberra, Official Hansard report, 18 August 1972, 11.

police are treating them and they're looking for some lawyers to take a few cases to teach the police a lesson, and could you help them find some?²⁵

Based on his experience organising the legal profession to support Lawasia, Wootten felt that there was a degree of sympathy and idealism in the legal profession that would make it possible to set up a permanent Aboriginal Legal Service, rather than just take the odd case to court.²⁶ Wootten recalls that he had initially some difficulty in believing what he was told about police violence towards Aboriginal people in Redfern. However, he was soon convinced after his visit to Redfern where he

saw that any Aborigine on the streets of Redfern after 10.15 pm, even if quietly walking home, was bundled into a patrolling paddy wagon. The standard charge was public drunkenness, but naturally such treatment often led to reaction by an indignant Aborigine which escalated both to additional charges of resisting arrest and assault police, and to physical retaliation by police. In addition police regularly patrolled hotels frequented by Aborigines, particularly the Empress, and their heavy-handed treatment and oppressive scrutiny of Aborigines often led to violent incidents in and outside the hotel bars.²⁷

On 11 October 1970 a formal meeting was held in a room at the back of St Luke's Presbyterian Church at which the Aboriginal Legal Service was established. Participants of the meeting saw active Aboriginal involvement as crucial to the success of the ALS. They decided that a Council that would be widely representative of Aboriginal people should be established. Later the ALS constitution ruled that at least one third of the Council members must be Aboriginal.²⁸ The Council determined the policy of the Service and supervised and directed those working for it.²⁹

Six of the council members were Aboriginal and eleven were white. The Aboriginal members were its Vice-President Gary Williams, an Aboriginal law student from

²⁵ Hal Wootten in Wisdom Interviews, Big Ideas, ABC National, 1 May 2009, <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/bigidea/stories/s1328177.htm>, accessed 13 April 2010.

²⁶ Senate Standing Committee on Constitutional and Legal Affairs, 13; Wootten in Wisdom Interviews, 1 May 2009.

²⁷ Wootten, 'Aborigines and police', 268.

²⁸ Conference on Aboriginal Legal Affairs, a national Aboriginal legal service for Australia: government proposals: proceedings of a Conference on Aboriginal Legal Affairs, Chairman, W. E. H. Stanner, Canberra, 1973, 62.

²⁹ Wootten to Wentworth, 19 November 1970, C1696/10.

Nambucca Heads and Abscholar at Sydney University;³⁰ Gordon Briscoe, Aboriginal welfare worker at the Foundation; Tom Williams, the manager of the Foundation; and Charles French who had studied at Tranby and received a UNESCO scholarship to visit Canada in 1964.³¹ Paul Coe and Gary Foley from the original establishers were also elected to the council. Hal Wootten was elected as the President of the first Council and Ross McKenna, a senior tutor in French at UNSW, became the Chairman, Richard Chisholm, an academic from the UNSW Law School, the Treasurer and Eddie Neumann the Secretary of the Service.³²

The first council of the ALS aimed to bring together different sections of the Aboriginal rights movement. Its only female member was Faith Bandler, who at the time was the General Secretary of FCAATSI. Bandler was often treated as an Aboriginal person, though she was a descendant of South Sea Islanders.³³ With the support of many of the radical Aboriginal activists from Redfern FCAATSI had split during the previous Easter conference as mentioned in the previous chapter. Briscoe, another ALS council member, had become the president of the newly formed National Tribal Council. Bandler did not remain active in the ALS.

The ALS followed a similar model to the Foundation in attracting influential supporters and in this it succeeded well. The first ALS council included as its members: Garth Nettheim, Professor of Law, John Cawte, Professor of Psychiatry and John Lawrence, Professor of Social Work all from UNSW; Gordon Samuels and Ray Loveday, Queen's Councils and Vice-Presidents of the Bar Council of NSW; and David G. Barr and Roy Turner, both solicitors.³⁴ The establishment of the Aboriginal Legal Service also received support from Sir Leslie Herron, the Chief Justice of NSW and John Bowen, the President of the Law Society. Representatives of the State and Federal Governments also supported the ALS including: Frederick Hewitt, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs in NSW; Ian

³⁰ Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, 338; Clark, *Aborigines & Activism*, 159.

³¹ 'Scholarship winner leaves for Canada', *Dawn*, June 1964, 1.

³² Wootten to Coombs, 27 October 1970, C1696/10; The ALS: report to annual general meeting, 30 August 1971, C1696/10.

³³ See e.g. Submission to Commonwealth Government in support of application for Grant 1972-1973, C1696/10.

³⁴ Wootten to Coombs, 27 October 1970, C1696/10; The ALS: report to annual general meeting', 30 August 1971, C1696/10. Their voluntary panel of lawyers also included 24 Queen's Counsels. Richard Chisholm, 'The Aboriginal Legal Service', *Journal of the International Commission of Jurists: Australian section*, No. 4, 1971, 28.

Mitchell, the Director of Aboriginal Welfare in NSW; Robert Ellicott QC, the Commonwealth Solicitor General; and Nugget Coombs, the Chairman of the Council for Aboriginal Affairs.³⁵

Influential support networks helped to convince the government of the importance of the ALS.³⁶ For example, Barrie Dexter saw great value in the backing the white establishment gave to the ALS.³⁷ Dexter, a senior public servant, was the head of the Office of Aboriginal Affairs and a member of Council for Aboriginal Affairs, an advisory body set up by the Federal Government after the 1967 referendum.

The management Committee was responsible for the day to day work of the ALS.³⁸ The first Management Committee was all white with one female representative, Christine Jennett, a student from UNSW. However, the following year Jean Stewart from La Perouse and Neville Perkins, Charles Perkins' nephew from Alice Springs and a student at Sydney University were elected to the Management Committee. Three new Aboriginal members were also elected to the ALS council: Trudy Longbottom from La Perouse, Charles 'Chicka' Dixon, a waterside worker and union member as mentioned in the previous chapter, and Shirley Smith from Erskineville.³⁹

Shirley Smith, or Mum Shirl, as she was called, was highly respected by Aboriginal people and known as a person they could turn to when in need of help. She was born in Cowra, but moved with her family to live in Sydney in the 1930s. Soon after her brother was incarcerated. Smith started to visit him in the prison, and then also began to visit other Aboriginal prisoners who had no visitors. Mum Shirl was given unrestricted access to prisons in New South Wales in 1976, because of her work with Aboriginal prisoners.⁴⁰ As well as her Indigenous background, there were Catholic underpinnings in her approach to community work. Father Ted Kennedy from St Vincent's Presbytery in Redfern, whom I discuss further in Chapter 6, described Smith as the greatest theologian he had ever

³⁵ The ALS: report to annual general meeting, 30 August 1971, C1696/10.

³⁶ The ALS: report to annual general meeting, 30 August 1971, C1696/10.

³⁷ Dexter to Minister, 25 May 1972, part 1, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

³⁸ Chisholm, 'The Aboriginal Legal Service', 27.

³⁹ The ALS: report to annual general meeting, 30 August 1971, C1696/10.

⁴⁰ Smith, *Mum Shirl*, 19, 59.

known.⁴¹ Smith's close ties to the Catholic orders helped her to mobilise them to support the Indigenous activism in Redfern.⁴²

Black and white co-operation

Despite the Aboriginal demand for control, as there were not yet any Indigenous lawyers in the early 1970s, support from white lawyers and law students was essential for the establishment and successful operation of the Aboriginal Legal Service.⁴³ Aboriginal people had only recently started to enter tertiary education. Margaret Williams was the first Aboriginal person to graduate from university in 1959 and the first Indigenous male, Charles Perkins, graduated in 1966. Soon after the establishment of the ALS, UNSW established a special admission policy for Aboriginal students in 1971.⁴⁴ Pat O'Shane became a student there in 1973 and was the first Aboriginal person to become a barrister in 1976.

The Legal Service initially relied on barristers who were willing to offer their services for free. As Hal Wootten put it, "the whole thing was established on a completely voluntary basis, and nobody, either Aboriginal or white, got a penny for their efforts, they all did it as a matter of dedication."⁴⁵ With support from the NSW Bar Council and some publicity in the journal of the Law Society of NSW, 150 barristers offered their services in writing to the ALS. Many more expressed their support verbally. Wootten noted that this was a remarkable response given that there were approximately 450 barristers in New South Wales at the time.⁴⁶ Lawyers from different parts of New South Wales volunteered their services. The Legal Service's panel of solicitors came from 50 firms in the city of Sydney, 38 firms in 28 different suburbs and 116 firms in 73 different country towns.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Campion, *Ted Kennedy*, 93.

⁴² Sykes interviewed by Pat Ormesher.

⁴³ See also Lyons, *A study of the Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service*, 1984.

⁴⁴ Annual report 1971-1972, ALS, Background material unpublished 1971,1972, ARRC, UNSW; 'Special University Admission for Aboriginal Students', *Identity*, Vol. 1, No. 2, October 1971, 29.

⁴⁵ Wootten in Wisdom Interviews, 1 May 2009.

⁴⁶ The ALS: report to annual general meeting, 30 August 1971, C1696/10, NAA.

⁴⁷ Submission to Commonwealth Government in support of application for Grant 1972-1973, C1696/10.

Many of the lawyers were motivated to volunteer with the ALS as they had experiences of Aboriginal people in court looking completely helpless and defeated by the process.⁴⁸

Many supporters, for example Hal Wootten, were also passionate about Indigenous issues. Seeking to educate the public, Wootten described in a contemporary newspaper article the range of emotions he felt when thinking about the unjust treatment of Aboriginal people:

I do feel anger, shame and impatience that an Aboriginal child can look forward to 10 times a white child's chance of dying in infancy, one-twentieth of his chance of completing secondary education and 10 times his chance of going to jail. He has a substantial chance of living in a shelter unfit for animals and of showing the effects of under-nourishment, chronic illness, eye disease, and hearing impaired by infections.⁴⁹

The Trade Union movement was another important ally of the Aboriginal movement in the 1970s.⁵⁰ In 1963 the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) had presented a full policy on Aboriginal issues that endorsed the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and ILO Convention 107, as well as wage equity, full citizenship, land ownership, better education and the full benefits of awards to protect Indigenous workers.⁵¹

The Builders Labourers' Federation (BLF), in particular, played an important part in supporting the ALS and other Indigenous organisations in Redfern.⁵² In addition to political backing, the BLF offered practical help. In co-operation with the Aboriginal Legal Service the BLF helped to bail out Aboriginal people who were under arrest.⁵³ The BLF was a notoriously militant, communist-led union, which emphasised the social responsibility of labour such as the right of workers to not allow their work to be used in a harmful way. Inspired by the New Left, it supported prisoners, homosexuals, students and the women's movement. It also joined Resident Actions Groups to enforce green bans to

⁴⁸ 'Aboriginals and the law', *SMH*, C1696/10.

⁴⁹ J.H. Wootten, 'Anger, shame and impatience', *Australian*, 21 December 1971.

⁵⁰ See e.g. Bob Bellear, 'Breakthrough' in Robert W. Bellear (ed.), *Black Housing Book* (Broadway: Amber Press, 1976), 4-5; Gerry Wain, 'Redfern Aboriginal Housing Project', *Polis*, 1976, Vol. 3, 46; Kaye Bellear interviewed by Maggie Roche, 27 January 2007, Redfern Oral History, <http://redfernoralthistory.org/OralHistory/KayeBellear/tabid/165/Default.aspx>, accessed 2 June 2011.

⁵¹ Clark, *Aborigines & Activism*, 86.

⁵² 'Public Relations', *Tharunka*, 7 May 1975; Bellear, 'Breakthrough', 4-5; Colin James interviewed by Anael, 3 April 2002, Redfern Oral History, <http://redfernoralthistory.org/OralHistory/More/ColJames/tabid/143/Default.aspx>, accessed 3 June 2011.

⁵³ Rosser to Martin, 4 September 1973, part 2, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

protect old residential areas and park lands from development in Sydney.⁵⁴ The BLF was deregistered in 1974. It resumed its activities in 1976 until it was permanently deregistered in 1986.⁵⁵

Religious denominations also played a part in supporting the ALS, in addition to lawyers, students and unions. For example the Quakers supported the ALS and helped to bail out Aboriginal people who were under arrest. They also took part as observers of police in Redfern.⁵⁶

Early operations

One of the first initiatives of the ALS was to establish regular rosters of prominent legal and academic observers who spent Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights with Aboriginal people in Redfern hotels.⁵⁷ South Sydney Community Aid offered the use of their staff to take messages for the ALS and made their telephone available for ALS volunteers after hours.⁵⁸ Not long after that, the ALS set up temporary headquarters at the Law Faculty at the UNSW. However, once the ALS received a Commonwealth grant in December 1970, the ALS was able to lease shop front premises at 142 Regent Street in Redfern. (See Appendix 1.) The location at Regent Street, between the Empress and Clifton Hotels,⁵⁹ placed the ALS in the centre of the fraught relationship between Aboriginal people and police, while creating space for Aboriginal self-determination.

⁵⁴ Zula Nittim, 'The Coalition of Resident Action Groups' in Jill Roe (ed.), *Twentieth Century Sydney: studies in urban and social history* (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1980), 235; Meredith Burgmann and Verity Burgmann, *Green Bans Red Unions: environmental activism and the New South Wales Builders Labourers' Federation* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 1998), 3-4, 7.

⁵⁵ 'Australian Builders' Labourers' Federation', Australian Trade Union Archives, <http://www.atua.org.au/biogs/ALE0132b.htm>, accessed 20 August 2009.

⁵⁶ Rosser to Martin, 4 September 1973, C1696/10; 'Statement by Eddy Neumann, Saturday 21 July 1973, ALS, Aboriginal Organisations, Unpublished papers, ARRC pamphlet files, UNSW.

⁵⁷ Wootten to Council Members, 12 October 1971, ALS Background material unpublished 1971, 1972, ARRC, UNSW; The ALS: report to annual general meeting, 31 August 1972, ALS background material, unpublished 1971, 1972, ARRC, UNSW. See also Minutes of Management Committee Meeting, 4 June 1973, ALS Background material, unpublished papers, ARRC pamphlet files, UNSW; Wootten, 'Aborigines and police', 268.

⁵⁸ Wootten to Wentworth, 19 November 1970, C1696/10.

⁵⁹ Aboriginal Medical Service, ALS, 6.3, 97A48/69, Hollows, UNSW archives.

The service had three rooms and it shared its front entrance with South Sydney Community Aid. The premises were cleaned up and repainted by ALS members and furniture received as donations. Federal Government funding allowed the ALS to employ David Collins as its first full-time solicitor, Gordon Briscoe as its field officer and Alana Doolan, from Townsville, as a secretary and receptionist in March 1971. Briscoe had been involved in the strike that demanded more Aboriginal control at the Foundation and as a consequence had had to leave his position there.⁶⁰ The Regent Street office opened for business on 26 July 1971, just six days after the Aboriginal Medical Service had started to operate across the road.⁶¹

Once the ALS opened its premises, it gained better visibility and many Aboriginal people were able to contact it directly. To advertise its existence, the ALS printed hundreds of posters that were displayed in relevant places and institutions, such as court houses and police stations. Small cards with the ALS's contact details were also distributed to Aboriginal people. The ALS also operated a 24 hour answering service, donated for their use. It helped to connect the lawyers on roster duty with Aboriginal people who had been arrested during the night.⁶²

Aboriginal field officers played an important role in establishing the ALS among the Aboriginal community. They had the necessary connections, appropriate cultural knowledge and also life-experience about the specific problems that Aboriginal people faced in non-Indigenous society. They visited and interviewed Aboriginal defendants, investigated their cases together with the solicitor and when possible organised bail for those arrested. Field officers also visited prisons and made sure that Aboriginal prisoners knew their legal rights and were treated accordingly. They were responsible for raising

⁶⁰ The ALS: report to annual general meeting, 30 August 1971, C1696/10; Submission to Commonwealth Government in support of application for Grant 1972-1973, C1696/10; The ALS: report to annual general meeting, 31 August 1972, ARRC. Briscoe remembers Anne Weldon (nee Coe) was the secretary when he started working at the ALS. Briscoe, *Racial Folly*, 130-153.

⁶¹ Perkins to Director, 30 July 1971, C1696/10; Wootten to Coombs, 19 March 1971, part 1, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; The ALS: report to annual general meeting, 30 August 1971, C1696/10; Submission to Commonwealth Government in support of application for Grant 1972-1973, C1696/10.

⁶² The ALS: report to annual general meeting, 30 August 1971, C1696/10; Submission to Commonwealth Government in support of application for Grant 1972-1973, C1696/10; The ALS: report to annual general meeting, 31 August 1972, ARRC; Wootten in Wisdom Interviews, 1 May 2009.

awareness of legal rights in general among the Aboriginal community and publicising the Legal Service.⁶³

With the wide support of the legal profession the ALS dealt with a variety of cases from criminal matters to civil cases such as tenancy issues. Cases were referred to the ALS by other Aboriginal organisations, the Police or other State or Federal government departments. They were initially reviewed by the ALS solicitor, then referred to a solicitor on the panel. Only cases that required routine advice or were urgent were dealt with by the ALS solicitor. During the first twelve months after the appointment of a solicitor the ALS dealt with over 550 new cases. These were mostly criminal matters. As the ALS became better known among Aboriginal people the number of cases increased. In the beginning of 1972 it dealt with approximately 20 new cases per week, which would have been over 1,000 new cases in a year. Between 40 per cent and 50 per cent of all these cases were civil cases. These included tenancy, housing, hire-purchase, workers' compensation, loans, insurance, maintenance, deceased estate, taxation and matrimonial matters. 20-25 per cent of the new cases were received from rural areas. The ALS also provided advice for other Aboriginal organisations such as the AMS and Murawina.⁶⁴ The Aboriginal Legal Service also introduced projects such as a bail fund and Halfway Houses.⁶⁵

The ALS was largely run by Indigenous men. Women also played important roles; for example, Ann Weldon, who later became a director of the Aboriginal Housing Company, Aboriginal Children's Service and Murawina, acted as an administrator in the ALS for many years, and no doubt had wide responsibility for its everyday affairs.⁶⁶ Yet her work seems to have been less prominent than that of administrators in other Aboriginal organisations in Redfern, as I shall discuss in the following chapters. Secretarial positions were, at least in the beginning, seen as possible employment avenues for women as was still common in Australia at the time.⁶⁷ Women continued to occupy mainly secretarial positions at the ALS.

⁶³ Wootten to Wentworth, 19 November 1970, C1696/10; The ALS: report to annual general meeting, 30 August 1971, C1696/10; The ALS: report to annual general meeting, 31 August 1972, ARRC.

⁶⁴ The ALS: report to annual general meeting, 30 August 1971, C1696/10; Submission to Commonwealth Government in support of application for Grant 1972-1973, C1696/10; The ALS: report to annual general meeting, 31 August 1972, ARRC; Redfern – briefing notes, part 3, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

⁶⁵ Elisabeth Eggleston, 'Aboriginal Legal Services', *Legal Service Bulletin*, September 1974, 94.

⁶⁶ Weldon to Dix, [November 1979], C1696/10.

⁶⁷ 'Aboriginal Legal Service', *SMH*, 13 October 1973.

For example, in October 1980 the ALS employed fourteen women out of whom eleven were secretaries, two were administrative staff and only one a solicitor.⁶⁸

From the beginning the ALS aimed to operate state wide and reach many of the Aboriginal communities from which its Aboriginal members originally came. In order to get more information and to provide assistance in rural areas, the Aboriginal Legal Service started to visit the Aboriginal reserves where most of the Aboriginal people outside the Sydney area lived. During visits to Toomelah, Bowraville, Nambucca Heads, Coffs Harbour, Cowra, Purfleet, Wallaga Lakes, Bourke and Nowra, it aimed to identify the varying and individual problems in each place. The ALS representatives also informed the local Aboriginal people about the existence and purpose of the ALS.⁶⁹ The ALS also made contact with rural and suburban solicitors, some of whom had a long history of providing free legal assistance to Aboriginal people.⁷⁰ However, the limited number of available solicitors, compared to the large Aboriginal population in some rural areas made the expansion and establishment of rural services difficult. Members of the Australian National University Law Faculty offered to assist in the ACT and neighbouring areas in NSW. Professor Colin Tatz from the University of New England also volunteered to organise a local Legal Service.⁷¹

An essential part of the ALS's work was strengthening pride, dignity and self-respect in the Aboriginal community.⁷² Charles Perkins underlined the importance of identity in general: "without a sense of identity, the people have no reason for existence [...] Our big fight in Australia at the moment is to find ourselves once again."⁷³ The mere existence of a legal service run by Aboriginal people created an Aboriginal space that affirmed Indigenous identity, physically as part of the cityscape and in a more abstract sense by changing the power balance in the court while representing the Aboriginal people.

⁶⁸ Plowman to Johnston, 3 October 1980, part 19, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

⁶⁹ The ALS: report to annual general meeting, 30 August 1971, C1696/10.

⁷⁰ The ALS: report to annual general meeting, 31 August 1972, ARRC.

⁷¹ The ALS: report to annual general meeting, 30 August 1971, C1696/10.

⁷² Wootten to Wentworth, 19 November 1970, C1696/10; ; 'New Legal Service will help Aboriginal 'reassert his dignity', *Australian*, 30 December 1970; ALS Submission 1974-1975, part 1, R77/76, C1696/10, NAA; Coe to Viner, 11 October 1976, part 9, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA. See also Coe in Tatz (ed.), *Black Viewpoints*, 103-113.

⁷³ Perkins, *A Bastard Like Me*, 127.

However, the activities of the ALS extended far beyond legal aid. ALS activists also hoped to work more consciously to strengthen Aboriginal identity. Paul Coe perceived bringing dance groups to New South Wales from the Northern Territory as an important part of identity building, for it would show the young people something from Aboriginal culture to identify with, even if not their specific culture. Coe saw the revitalisation of Aboriginal culture as the “only possible means of counteracting the present government policy of assimilation.”⁷⁴ Constructions of contemporary Aboriginal culture and identity that drew upon the past helped to create an alternative space within white culture and affirm the continuity and persistence of Aboriginal culture.⁷⁵ As Russell McGregor argues, Aboriginal activists harnessed traditional Aboriginal culture to build an Aboriginal national consciousness and in this process the Northern Territory was seen as place from which “the spiritual rejuvenation of the Aboriginal nation could flow.”⁷⁶

Education was another important aspect of ALS operations. On the one hand there was the need to educate Aboriginal people about their rights and responsibilities. On the other hand white Australians, particularly those involved with the enforcement of the law and justice system, had to be educated about the historical as well as contemporary aspects of the problems faced by Aboriginal people.⁷⁷ Via research the ALS hoped to reach a better understanding of these problems as well as the ways in which the law could be reformed in order to address them.⁷⁸ Before the ALS was established there was very little information about Aboriginal people in the legal system.⁷⁹

The Aboriginal Legal Service was soon established in the streetscape of Redfern, providing an Aboriginal space for Aboriginal people to come to and for the first time get legal support. Its principles of Aboriginal control, free legal service, volunteer lawyers and Aboriginal field officers were taken up in other parts of Australia. The South Australian Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement was created in November 1971; The Aboriginal Legal Service in Victoria was formed in June 1972; the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders

⁷⁴ Coe in Tatz (ed.), *Black Viewpoints*, 105.

⁷⁵ Brewster, *Reading Aboriginal Women's Autobiography*, 4.

⁷⁶ McGregor, ‘Another Nation’, 343, 352.

⁷⁷ The ALS: report to annual general meeting, 30 August 1971, C1696/10; ‘New Legal Service will help Aboriginal ‘reassert his dignity’’, *Australian*.

⁷⁸ Wootten to Wentworth, 19 November 1970, C1696/10; The ALS: report to annual general meeting, 30 August 1971, C1696/10.

⁷⁹ Chisholm, ‘The Aboriginal Legal Service’, 30.

Legal Service was initiated in February 1972 in Queensland; the New Era Aboriginal Fellowship started operating a legal service in West Australia in 1972; the Aboriginal Legal Service Scheme in Tasmania started in July 1973; and the Central Australian Aboriginal Legal Service began in July 1973.⁸⁰ The non-Indigenous Australian Legal Aid Office, established by the Federal Government in 1973, was also based on the example of the ALS.⁸¹

Separate versus equal development

Aboriginal activists established the ALS, and other Redfern organisations, at a time when understandings about what equality meant were shifting in Australian public discourse. The idea that all people should be treated the same and that no part of the population would receive special services was challenged by the idea that different needs required special services in order to achieve equal outcomes. Furthermore a dichotomy in perspectives of Aboriginal rights developed in Aboriginal affairs, where the views of Aboriginal people as ‘peoples’ with a right to self-determination or as ‘populations’ with equal citizen rights were debated and at times became intertwined in the arguments of the same individuals.⁸² Nevertheless, the underlying belief in assimilation, as equal treatment, remained strong in Australia.⁸³

Throughout the 1970s services dedicated to the needs of Aboriginal people continued to be seen as potentially separatist by non-Indigenous people – leading towards apartheid rather than integration or assimilation.⁸⁴ Aboriginal people were even met with hostility when they demanded more than offered by Anglo-Saxon liberalism, humanitarianism,

⁸⁰ Colin Tatz, ‘Aborigines: the struggle for law’ in Garth Nettheim (ed.), *Aborigines Human Rights and the Law* (Australia and New Zealand Book Company: Sydney, 1974), 181-182.

⁸¹ Chesterman, *Poverty Law and Social Change*, 74; Aboriginal Legal Service (ALS) Conference of members and delegates, 3-4 December 1973, DAA, Canberra, 2-81.

⁸² Tim Rowse, *Rethinking Social Justice: from ‘peoples’ to ‘populations’* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2012), 3-27.

⁸³ Rowse, *Indigenous Futures*, 231; Rowse, ‘Contesting Assimilation’, 19-20, 23, 168; Chesterman, *Civil Rights*, 216, 255, 260.

⁸⁴ Aboriginal Medical Service Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, presented by Naomi R. Mayers, Andrew Refshauge and Archibides Kalokerinos (Canberra: Australian Parliament, April 1978), 511-512.

human rights and self-management.⁸⁵ The 1967 referendum was for part of Australian society a vote in opposition to the discrimination against Aboriginal people and the special legislations to which they were subjected. The other part thought that Aboriginal people warranted a special case that needed special programs until equality could be achieved.⁸⁶ Importantly neither view supported separate programs for Indigenous people indefinitely.

Moreover, as I discussed in Chapter 1, urban Aboriginal people were often seen either as already assimilated or in the process of assimilation. Thus, for those people to whom assimilation remained the ideal aim for Aboriginal people, albeit out of their own choice and in their own time, there was no justified need for special services in urban areas. The categorisation of Aboriginal people as ‘authentic’ or ‘inauthentic’ tapped into a longstanding way of distinguishing between deserving and non-deserving recipients of governmental assistance.

Wootten advocated the need for a special Aboriginal Legal Service in his letter to Wentworth, the Minister of Aboriginal affairs, and also in the media. He brought out historical injustices and the continuing financial, social and economic disadvantage caused by colonisation.⁸⁷ Though Wootten acknowledged the need for a legal service for all poor Australians, he argued for a special need in the case of the Aboriginal people.

The deep distrust and apathy common amongst Aborigines have their roots in the terrible racial history of the last 200 years, in which Aborigines were ruthlessly dispossessed of their land and livelihood, massacred as outlaws or shot and poisoned like vermin when they resisted, and the defeated remnants finally subjected to dispiriting paternalistic control. In all this long history they never had reason to regard the law as anything but an instrument of their oppression.⁸⁸

According to Wootten, Aboriginal people had not forgotten the colonial past even though white people may have thought they had. He urged non-Indigenous people to keep this in mind so that they could understand the difficulties that Aboriginal people had in accepting the sincerity of whites and in developing confidence in the Australian legal system.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Read, *Charles Perkins*, 186.

⁸⁶ Rowse, *Obliged to be Difficult*, 20.

⁸⁷ Wootten to Wentworth, 19 November 1970, C1696/10; J.H. Wootten, ‘Little to lose but anger and humiliation’, *SMH*, 6 December 1971.

⁸⁸ The ALS: report to annual general meeting, 30 August 1971, C1696/10.

⁸⁹ Wootten in Nettheim (ed.), *Aborigines Human Rights and the Law*, 67.

Non-Indigenous supporters, such as Wootten, at first saw the ALS as a temporary measure.⁹⁰ Wootten described the Aboriginal Legal Service as “strictly a service organisation, designed to place legal skills at the service of Aborigines *while* they are a depressed section of the community.”⁹¹ At the time it was not uncommon to support separate programs for Aboriginal people while at the same time treating them as temporary measures until equality could be achieved.⁹² Non-Indigenous supporters envisioned a future society in which Aboriginal people would be equal to non-Aboriginal people and there would be no need for separate services. However, the ALS’s role extended very quickly beyond that of a temporary service provider to an organisation emphasising Indigenous rights.⁹³

Under the Whitlam government

The ALS started as a voluntary self-help program that offered independent legal aid to Aboriginal people and received no government funding.⁹⁴ The idea of self-help opened up the possibility of Aboriginal control while ideas of self-determination were still developing. At the time, as I discussed in the previous chapter, the understanding of self-help as power to the people was emerging and gaining support over the more conservative view of self-help as individual responsibility.

William Wentworth, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs in the Gorton and McMahon governments, expressed interest in the service soon after its establishment. Following a submission from the ALS, the Commonwealth Government funded the service with a grant of \$24,250 in December 1970. Nevertheless, in Wentworth’s opinion a significant part of the ALS’s funding should come from non-government sources.⁹⁵ His thoughts were

⁹⁰ Wootten to Whitlam, 14 December 1972, part 2, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Dexter to Minister, 25 May 1972, C1696/10.

⁹¹ The ALS: report to annual general meeting, 30 August 1971, C1696/10. Emphasis mine.

⁹² Rowse, *Obligated to be Difficult*, 20.

⁹³ Wootten to Whitlam, 14 December 1972, C1696/10; Peter Tobin, *Aboriginal Legal Service of New South Wales - an outline documentary history and description of ALS operations, 1971-1975*, Vol. 1, 1976, 2.

⁹⁴ Coe to Regional Director, 20 December 1976, part 11, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

⁹⁵ Wentworth to Wootten, 16 December 1970, ALS, background material unpublished, pamphlet files, ARRC, UNSW; The ALS: report to annual general meeting, 30 August 1971, C1696/10; Submission to Commonwealth Government in support of application for Grant 1972-1973, C1696/10.

opposed to the ALS view of itself as a professional organisation that provided services, rather than as a charity. Wootten argued that government funding would enable the people who had given their time, energy and professional expertise to run the program “rather than to go begging and fund raising.”⁹⁶ He estimated private contributions to have enormous financial value through the voluntary work of the legal profession. However, many of the lawyers who volunteered their services also gave donations and membership subscriptions.⁹⁷

Aboriginal people in Redfern welcomed the election of Gough Whitlam to power in December 1972. According to Gary Foley, with their Tent Embassy demonstration, Aboriginal people had brought Whitlam to power. He says the Tent Embassy “helped destroy 30 years of conservative government and gave Aboriginal people a new sense of pride and purpose; it played an enormous role in the raising of the self-esteem of Koori people.”⁹⁸ Aboriginal activists believed after the election that the time for Aboriginal self-determination had come, as had been promised by Whitlam’s election campaign. A little earlier, in 1970, President Richard Nixon had introduced a policy of self-determination for Native American Tribes in the United States.⁹⁹

Funding to the ALS increased dramatically under the Whitlam government. The government pledged to cover the legal representation of all Aboriginal people. On the basis of this promise, the new Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Gordon Bryant made \$850,000 available to cover all the legal costs for Aboriginal people in all courts. The government capped the legal costs covered to 80 per cent of normal solicitor and client costs and any reasonable disbursements.¹⁰⁰ However, there was no plan as to how the promise would be put into practice and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs turned to different Legal

⁹⁶ Submission to Commonwealth Government in support of application for Grant 1972-1973, C1696/10.

⁹⁷ Wootten to Wentworth, 19 November 1970, C1696/10; The ALS: report to annual general meeting, 30 August 1971, C1696/10.

⁹⁸ Wendy Tuohy, ‘A Canvas Legacy’, *The Age*, 13 April 1995, 9. See also Robinson, *The Aboriginal Embassy*, 1972, 194.

⁹⁹ Paul C. Rosier, *Serving their Country: American Indian politics and patriotism in the twentieth century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009), 258.

¹⁰⁰ Attorney-General’s Department, ‘The Aboriginal Legal Service Program’, March 1973, 4 in Peter Tobin, *Aboriginal Legal Service of New South Wales - an outline documentary history and description of ALS operations, 1971-1975*, Vol. 2, 1976; Conference on Aboriginal Legal Affairs, 4.

Services for advice and help.¹⁰¹ Frank Moy, a DAA official, confided to Garth Nettheim, then a member of the ALS council, that the announcement “caught him with his pants down”.¹⁰²

Following government’s promise to cover legal representation of all Aboriginal people, it expected the ALS to deal with a large number of legal cases and other legal matters. In 1974 Aboriginal people were 16 times more likely to be convicted at the Central Court of Petty Sessions than the whole of the Sydney population. Vagrancy and rude language accounted for 63 per cent of Aboriginal convictions compared with 31 per cent for white Australians. Gary Foley observed in *the Sydney Morning Herald* that most convictions were made under the Summary Offences Act.¹⁰³ Police used summary offences as a way of maintaining its authority when faced with the disrespect of and resistance by Aboriginal people.¹⁰⁴ The New South Wales State Government introduced the Summary Offences Act in 1970 to help contain civil unrest and control the increasing number of demonstrations at the time. However, its provisions, such as being found drunk in a public space or using “unseemly words”, were easily transposed to the streets of Redfern.¹⁰⁵

The ALS seized the opportunity granted by the policy of self-determination and its role in providing free legal representation to all Aboriginal people. In this they, in effect, took over the role of the State. With increased funding the ALS started to rapidly expand its services to other parts of New South Wales. By 1974 it had grown from one office with three staff to a head office with six regional offices in Redfern, Moree, Brewarrina, Cowra, Grafton and Nowra by 1974. With DAA funding the ALS was also able to employ full time staff and thus became less reliant on volunteer support. In 1974 the ALS employed 29 staff: seven solicitors, eleven field officers, a bookkeeper, nine secretaries and a public defender.¹⁰⁶ Each regional office had its own management committee and their

¹⁰¹ A National Aboriginal Legal Service for Australia: Government proposal, [1973], ALS, background material unpublished, pamphlet files, ARRC, UNSW.

¹⁰² Nettheim to Wootten, 12 January 1973, ALS, background material unpublished, pamphlet files, ARRC, UNSW.

¹⁰³ ‘Bridging Redfern’s racial gap’, *SMH*, 7 September 1974, 13. See also Cunneen, *Conflicts, Politics and Crime*, 82-83.

¹⁰⁴ Cunneen, *Conflicts, Politics and Crime*, 192.

¹⁰⁵ Khoury, *Contested Rationalities*, 184-186.

¹⁰⁶ ALS staff, part 2, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Submission 1974-75, part 1, R77/76, C1696/10, NAA.

representatives met in the state wide council meetings.¹⁰⁷ The head office in Redfern remained in charge of State wide issues and of communications with the DAA. The public profile of the ALS was also centred on the head office in Redfern.

In 1973 Hal Wootten was appointed as a Supreme Court judge and he resigned as the President of the ALS. He was replaced by Paul Coe, a law student at UNSW, who was in his twenties at the time.¹⁰⁸ Coe's young age underlines the steep learning curve awaiting the young Aboriginal activists. Many Aboriginal people had limited experience of running government funded organisations. It required learning about the administrative, legal and bureaucratic aspects of operating an organisation and assuring continuing funding for its operations.

Coe's election as the ALS President also reflects the determination to have the ALS under Aboriginal control. Under Coe's leadership, Aboriginal self-determination became a central focus of the ALS and Coe expected great independence for the Aboriginal people in running the ALS. He wrote in the ALS submission for DAA funding:

We see the venture as a joint enterprise in which the Government contributes the necessary funds and the ALS contributes the necessary organisation, know-how, experience, professional expertise, drive, enthusiasm, identification with Aborigines, and independence.¹⁰⁹

However, Coe's understanding of self-determination differed from that of the government.

The DAA followed the practices of the Office of Aboriginal Affairs (OAA) in funding Aboriginal organisations. This meant that despite the radical increase in funding for Aboriginal Affairs, the DAA had no existing structures to channel or monitor the use of the funding. The DAA gave advance payments of the entire allocation, policed audits loosely and was also willing to accept the recommendations of its field officers. The DAA and its Minister decided how to best disperse the funds and their decisions were not

¹⁰⁷ Aboriginal Legal Service Constitution, 2-3, in Tobin in Aboriginal Legal Service of New South Wales, Vol. 2; Munro to the Secretary, 25 March 1975, part 4, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁰⁸ Wootten, 'Aborigines and Police', 274; note for file, 7 November 1973, part 2, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; 'Aboriginal Legal Service Expands', *New Dawn*, Vol. 4, No. 6, November 1973, 16; ALS, Submission to House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, ARRC pamphlet files, 3; Coe, 'The Early History of the Aboriginal Legal Service in New South Wales', 30.

¹⁰⁹ 'Submission to Federal Government', part 2, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA. See also Coe to Secretary, 6 August 1974, part 3, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

subject to Estimates scrutiny. The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs Gordon Bryant was highly accessible to Aboriginal people and listened to their views. Funds were drawn from the Aboriginal Advancement Trust Account (AATA), which was a single item within the Commonwealth budget.¹¹⁰ At the same time Bryant, advised by people outside the Department, was becoming increasingly unpopular within the DAA. Departmental staff resented his frequent promises and statements, made without consulting the Department. The Aboriginal Affairs budget rose from \$53 million in 1972-73 to \$117 million in 1973-74.¹¹¹

In line with DAA funding practices the ALS funding had no specified allocations. Rather the ALS was allowed to decide how to allocate its funds. The DAA did expect that the ALS consult it about any expansions and also requested audited financial statements and quarterly reports.¹¹² However, the ALS did not consult the DAA about establishing new offices, nor did it provide all the returns requested.¹¹³ By May 1974 the ALS had fully expended its annual funding of \$262,590 due to expansion. Minister Cavanagh, who had replaced Gordon Bryant in October 1973, approved an interim grant of \$104,000 to cover the expansion that had already taken place and further operation until the end of 1974, but pointed out that further expansion, without DAA approval, would not be tolerated. Nevertheless, by July 1974 the ALS had employed further staff above its approved budget. The DAA advised it to terminate these appointments.¹¹⁴

Wootten, as the President of the ALS, had kept the OAA and the DAA closely informed about its developments.¹¹⁵ However, under Coe's leadership the ALS started to resist attempts by the DAA to monitor the use of funds and was in general slow and reluctant to follow the conditions and procedures attached to grants, such as providing quarterly

¹¹⁰ Tim Rowse, *Remote Possibilities: The Aboriginal Domain and the Administrative Imagination* (Darwin: North Australia Research Unit, ANU, 1992), 6-7.

¹¹¹ A. Barrie Pittock, *Beyond White Australia: a short history of race relations in Australia* (Surry Hills: Race Relations Committee of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Australia, 1975), 34.

¹¹² Dexter to Wootten, 21 May 1973, part 2, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Dexter to Minister, 11 October 1973, part 2, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

¹¹³ Statement by Cavanagh, 5 November 1974, part 3, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

¹¹⁴ O'Rourke to Cavanagh, 16 May 1974, part 2, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Statement by Cavanagh, 5 November 1974, C1696/10. See also e.g. Malone to Minister, 29 August 1974, part 1, R77/76, C1696/10, NAA; Summary of NSW ALS, part 1, R77/76, C1696/10, NAA.

¹¹⁵ See e.g. Wootten to Dexter, 1 September 1971, part 1, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Wootten to Dexter, 18 June 1973, part 2, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

reports and annual reports.¹¹⁶ For example, Coe responded to the DAA's requests to employ accountants to supervise the ALS expenditure in May 1974: "this is an Aboriginal organisation and acceptance of such supervision denies our independence."¹¹⁷ Aboriginal activists saw the right to determine use of their organisation's funds as imperative to the realisation of self-determination. However, the DAA regarded the same approach as reckless use of funds, and responded by tightening its control and scrutiny.

The heightened demand for Aboriginal control and self-determination also placed non-Indigenous Australians on the margins of Indigenous activism. The pressure to have the ALS fully under Aboriginal control increased in 1974 when an open letter written by Billie Craigie – from the Craigie family in Moree, one of the founders of the first Tent Embassy protest and a member of the Black Panthers' party – was circulated to the ALS council members. The letter called for white members on the council to resign.¹¹⁸ In March 1975 it was then moved that Europeans should not be present in the ALS council meetings.¹¹⁹ A similar call for the white supporters to step aside had also been made earlier at the Aborigines and law seminar at Monash University in July 1974.¹²⁰

In July 1974 the ALS applied for \$1,1 million of funding. Rather than granting the funds, the Minister approved an interim grant of \$91,650 for the first quarter of 1974/75. The condition of the grant was that the ALS was not to expand its staff nor increase salaries. The ALS was also requested to appoint an accountant and have its expenditure approved by auditors. Furthermore the DAA requested the audited accounts for 1973. The ALS disregarded these conditions and one month later it had run out of funds for the third time that year. The Minister Cavanagh approved a further grant of \$100,000, but this time administered by the auditor's trust account. In September the DAA received the auditors'

¹¹⁶ See e.g. Thornburn to Coe, 13 May 1974, part 2, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Jansz to Accountant, 7 March 1975, part 5, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Regional Director to Director, 26 May 1976, part 7, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Angel to Secretary, 14 September 1976, part 9, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Coe to Regional Director, 23 December 1976, part 11, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Meeting with ALS, 21 November 1977, part 13, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

¹¹⁷ ALS to Powell, 15 May 1974, part 2, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA. See also Coe to Viner, 11 October 1976, C1696/10.

¹¹⁸ W.D. Craigie, an open letter to the Council Members of ALS, December 1974, reports and minutes of meetings 1972-1975, Vivienne Abraham papers, ML MSS 6222/1.

¹¹⁹ ALS council meeting, 8 March 1975, Council meetings 1974-1975, Vivienne Abraham papers, ML MSS 6222/1.

¹²⁰ Aborigines and the law seminar resolutions, Papers re Centre for Research into Aboriginal Affairs Monash University Seminar, 12-16 July 1974, Vivienne Abraham papers, ML MSS 6222/11.

accounts and found that approximately \$54,000 worth of expenditure was unallocated or without supporting vouchers. \$25,000 of this was later located, but the rest was still under scrutiny in November 1974.¹²¹

The ALS and its President Paul Coe in particular, treated government funding as compensation for colonisation and resisted the attempts of DAA officials to supervise and monitor its spending. It was not uncommon for Aboriginal people to see the DAA's subsidy as compensation for the damage done by European colonisation,¹²² or for Aboriginal people to treat the DAA's funds as Aboriginal. Charles Perkins noted in the DAA's annual report for 1985-86 that Aboriginal people tended to see the DAA as 'their' Department and accountable to them, though the DAA's primary responsibility was to the Minister and the government.¹²³ In retrospect, John Moriarty, who worked for the DAA in the 1970s, points out the difficulty of balancing self-determination with accountability, and the importance of the elected government taking responsibility for providing services to Aboriginal people rather than blaming the funded Aboriginal organisations for failures in Aboriginal Affairs.¹²⁴

On 26 October 1974 the Tent Embassy was re-erected in Canberra in protest against the limited funding and stricter financial controls imposed by the DAA on Aboriginal organisations. The protest demanded Aboriginal control of Aboriginal affairs. The election of Whitlam had raised Aboriginal hopes and now they felt impatient and frustrated about all the unrequited promises.¹²⁵ The confrontation between Charles Perkins and Cavanagh following Perkins' appearance in the annual general meeting of the Foundation sparked the demonstration. Despite his position as a civil servant in the DAA, Perkins had repeatedly publicly criticised the Department and his Minister.¹²⁶ Moriarty describes Jim Cavanagh in

¹²¹ Statement by Cavanagh, 5 November 1974, C1696/10.

¹²² Despoja quoted in Rowse, *Remote Possibilities*, 9. Original unpublished.

¹²³ Charles Perkins quoted in Rowse, *Remote Possibilities*, 6.

¹²⁴ John Moriarty with Evan McHugh, *Saltwater Fella* (Ringwood, Harmondsworth: Viking, 2000), 203.

¹²⁵ Organisation for Aboriginal Unity, Loose in box, 97A48/69, Hollows, UNSW; *AMS Newsletter*, No. 14, November 1974, 1-3; *Student Action for Aboriginal Australians Newsletter*, Vol. 1, No. 3, September/October/November 1974, Student Action for Aboriginal Australians, 6.21, 97A48/69, Hollows, UNSW; 'Truce in row over black legal service', *The Age*, 12 November 1974. Organisation for Aboriginal (or Black) Unity comprised of Aboriginal Housing Company, Black Theatre, Aboriginal Medical Service and ALS. Weldon to Dix, [November 1979], part 17, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA. See also 'No cash until tent goes', *SMH*, 6 November 1974.

¹²⁶ Read, *Charles Perkins*, 159-177, 186.

his biography as “totally unsympathetic to the Aboriginal cause.”¹²⁷ Cavanagh was the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs between 1973 and 1975.

Cavanagh was convinced that the demonstration was organised by the ALS and regarded it as blackmailing. He cut all funds for the administration of the ALS until it accounted for its expenditure. He also made any negotiation of further funds conditional on the demonstration being stopped or as he phrased it when all “intimidatory [sic.]” activities were terminated.¹²⁸ He argued that, though he understood the need for the ALS to expand, he was determined that proper accounting procedures be followed.¹²⁹ Cavanagh also publicly stated his willingness to consider other alternatives in case the ALS New South Wales would have to close down.¹³⁰

Urban Aboriginal activists continued to face the difficulty that non-Indigenous Australians, including some DAA staff members and their Minister, had in accepting them as ‘real’ or ‘authentic’ Aboriginal people. During the Tent Embassy protest in 1974 Cavanagh expressed his opinion that ‘tribal’ people were the real leaders of the Aboriginal people.¹³¹ Cavanagh’s remark runs against the contemporary government view that endorsed the self-definition of Aboriginality in terms of identity and community acceptance.¹³² Indeed, the perceived division between urban and tribal people had closed during the time that Gordon Bryant was the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, although it opened up again after his term.¹³³

Coe insisted that the Embassy was not set up by the ALS but by the Organisation for Aboriginal (or Black) Unity, which was an umbrella organisation for different Aboriginal organisations in Redfern.¹³⁴ It accused the DAA administrators and white organisations of taking advantage of the moneys allocated to Aboriginal people by the Federal Government.

¹²⁷ Moriarty, *Saltwater Fella*, 202. See also Read, *Charles Perkins*, 190.

¹²⁸ Cavanagh, 29 October 1974, part 1, R77/76, C1696/10, NAA; Statement by Cavanagh, 5 November 1974, C1696/10; Cavanagh to Smith, 4 November 1974, part 1, R77/76, C1696/10, NAA; ‘Funds cut off to Aboriginal aid office’, *Canberra Times*, 2 November 1974; ‘Cavanagh: lawyers helping ALS will be paid for their work’, *Australian*, 5 November 1974; ‘No cash until tent goes’ *SMH*; ‘More Aboriginal Legal aid studied’, *SMH*, 8 November 1974.

¹²⁹ Statement by Cavanagh, 5 November 1974, C1696/10.

¹³⁰ Cavanagh, 8 November 1974, part 3, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

¹³¹ Senate 2211, 12 November 1974, part 3, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

¹³² Maddison, *Black Politics*, 111.

¹³³ Read, *Charles Perkins*, 207-208. See also Rowse, *Obligated to be Difficult*, 87-88.

¹³⁴ ‘Truce in row over black legal service’, *The Age*.

One of the objects of the Organisation for Aboriginal Unity was to turn the public gaze back on the DAA and demand “fully certified audited accounts of all monies spent in the Department of Aboriginal Affairs”.¹³⁵

In the end, Bob Hawke, the President of the ACTU and the President of the Federal ALP, arranged a meeting between the Minister and the ALS.¹³⁶ The ALS was able to continue its operations with government funding of \$11,000 a week until the end of December. However, the relationship between the ALS and the DAA did not improve; nor did the ALS’s willingness to comply with funding conditions.

Meanwhile the funding practices of the DAA provoked professional bureaucrats and after a governmental inquiry into Aboriginal affairs stricter financial control and changes to the decision-making process were introduced. Following the Auditor General’s supplementary report, by October-November 1974 an Operations Management Branch had been formed within the DAA’s Operations Division. The Branch issued standard grant application forms, and introduced quarterly grants and quarterly statements. After funding was granted, organisations had to follow a series of complicated regulations in order to receive it. The Branch also made decisions about whether an organisation had complied with grant conditions.¹³⁷ According to Helen Ross, then an official at the DAA, around this time Aboriginal people changed their perception of the DAA: “from that of a well-intentioned muddler to a coercive enemy.”¹³⁸

A year after the Tent Embassy was re-established, in November 1975, Barrie Dexter, now the head of the DAA, became increasingly annoyed with the ALS’s lack of restraint with funding. During the same spring the DAA established Eastern Regional Offices and Area Offices throughout New South Wales. From closer vicinity it hoped to monitor more effectively and have more influence over the operations of the ALS.¹³⁹ In Dexter’s view the ALS was trying to blackmail the DAA to get their desired level of funding. However, no

¹³⁵ ‘Organisation for Aboriginal Unity’, 97A48/69.

¹³⁶ ‘Hawke move to mediate with minister’, *SMH*, 7 November 1974; ‘Cavanagh gives in to blacks’, *The Age*, 9 November 1974; ‘Aboriginal Legal Service gets temporary relief’, 9 November 1974, *SMH*; ‘Victory to the blacks’, *Melbourne Sun*, 12 November 1974; ‘Cavanagh agrees to extension’, *Courier Mail*, 12 November 1974.

¹³⁷ Rowse, *Remote Possibilities*, 6-7; Read, *Charles Perkins*, 173-174.

¹³⁸ Read, *Charles Perkins*, 174.

¹³⁹ Martin to First Assistant, 13 August 1976, part 8, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Martin to Secretary, 4 September 1976, part 9, R76/4 C1696/10, NAA.

further funds were available and the legal services in other parts of Australia were arguing that the ALS was mispending funding that could have otherwise been better used by other services. Dexter expressed his wish that the Australian Legal Aid Office would start operating in Redfern and thus provide an alternative to the ALS.

Even if the Aboriginal Legal Service were, as it threatened, to close down when funds run out, I have no doubt that we could provide an adequate service to NSW Aboriginals without it – and indeed such a situation would be advantageous to us.¹⁴⁰

However, alternative organisations were generally uninterested in taking over the activities of the ALS. Australian Legal Aid Office (ALAO) argued that they did not have the sufficient networks in rural areas, nor staff or funds to take over the activities of the ALS. Furthermore, the ALAO did not provide complete legal aid service and had no connections with the Aboriginal communities. State Public Solicitor John White noted that Aboriginal people did not trust white lawyers unless they were provided by the ALS.¹⁴¹

The success of Aboriginal Legal Services depended upon their relevance and acceptability to Indigenous people. Acceptance necessitated a holistic service that not only offered legal representation but also community survival programs.¹⁴² The ALS staff was prepared not only to attend to immediate legal problems, but also to help its clients, for example, to find accommodation and employment.¹⁴³ Briscoe described the case of a juvenile who was held on a number of charges, but as a result of the work done by the ALS, was released and Briscoe found him a new home and an apprenticeship.¹⁴⁴ Neil Mackerras, an ALS solicitor from Moree, also emphasised the complexity of the issues that the ALS lawyers had to deal with. According to him, every problem was likely to be at least quasi legal. “Therefore, to be effective, a non-establishment legal service such as ours must be all-embracing, at least until adequate non-establishment, non-legal services are truly available.”¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁰ Dexter to Martin, 18 November 1975, part 4, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁴¹ Coe to Minister, 19 May 1976, part 6, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Meeting with Mr. Jarman, 17 January 1977, part 11, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Meeting with John White, 17 January 1977, part 11, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁴² Watson, ‘Tendering of Indigenous Legal Services’, 4.

¹⁴³ The ALS: report to annual general meeting, 30 August 1971, C1696/10.

¹⁴⁴ Submission to Commonwealth Government in support of application for Grant 1972-1973, C1696/10.

¹⁴⁵ Neil Mackerras, ‘Some Problems of the Aboriginal Legal Services’, *Aborigines and the law*, Centre for research into Aboriginal Affairs, Monash University Research seminar, 12-16 July 1974, part 3, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

The ALS continuously felt threatened by the prospect of being combined with Australian Legal Aid.¹⁴⁶ It opposed the DAA's suggestion that it direct some or all of its services to other legal aid services or limit its operations e.g. to cases where there was no alternative legal aid available. "If your department has any understanding or sensitivity to the problems of Aborigines and the law it will realize that three years of legal services can't hope to rectify 200 years of oppression and neglect,"¹⁴⁷ Coe responded. He felt that the DAA threatened to cut funds to the ALS, because of the political activism of its members:

A.L.S., however, exists outside the [system] and is a challenge to it; legally via failure to accept the legal status quo and politically and socially in that it is community-run and controlled, and geared to social change, in so far as its very existence is an indictment of non-Aboriginal society in Australia.¹⁴⁸

The Australian Government Commission Inquiry into Poverty in 1975 supported the ALS's standing and recommended that its separate identity should be maintained.¹⁴⁹

The tendency of government representatives to treat the need for Aboriginal services as temporary fed into the fear that the legal services would be mainstreamed. Cavanagh, for example, anticipated the – albeit not immediate – future when separate services would not be needed.¹⁵⁰ Gordon Briscoe described the situation as follows

Anything that has the slightest suggestions of policies of 'a nation within a nation', or 'self-determination', or 'Black Power', or 'separation', is rejected. All that is left is coercion to move towards the conformity that white values dictate.¹⁵¹

Aboriginal activists defended their desire for policies that supported long-term self-determination. Paul Coe argued for Aboriginal people to be able to control their own

¹⁴⁶ Harkins to Tobin, 17 October 1975 in Tobin, *Aboriginal Legal Service of New South Wales*, Vol. 2; 'Minister for Aboriginal Affairs address to Aboriginal Legal Conference' in Tobin, *Aboriginal Legal Service of New South Wales*, Vol. 2; DAA, 'Inquiry into services for Aborigines' in Tobin, *Aboriginal Legal Service of New South Wales*, Vol. 2; Richard Ackland, 'Federal Govt cuts link with legal aid services', *Financial Review*, 2 June 1976, 9.

¹⁴⁷ Coe to Nicolson, 11 May 1976, part 6, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA. See also Nicolson to Coe, 8 April 1976, part 6, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁴⁸ 'The Aboriginal Legal Service', *Legal Service Bulletin*, 240. See also e.g. Marian Wilkinson, 'Closing Down Black Aid' *National Review*, Vol. 8, No. 517, 23 November 1977; 'Aboriginal service sues Govt', 22 June 1977, *SMH*; 'Aboriginal Service to close', *The Canberra Times*, 8 December 1977; 'Govt cuts threaten legal service', *SMH*, 8 December 1977.

¹⁴⁹ R. Sackville, 'Legal Aid in Australia', *Inquiry into poverty: law and poverty series*, 1975, 184, in Tobin, *Aboriginal Legal Service of New South Wales*, Vol. 2.

¹⁵⁰ 'Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Address to Aboriginal Legal Conference' in Tobin, *Aboriginal Legal Service of New South Wales*, Vol. 2. See also Dexter to Minister, 25 May 1972, C1696/10.

¹⁵¹ Briscoe in Tatz (ed.), *Black Viewpoints*, 100.

destiny, economically and politically, “by allowing them to be separate because they want to be separate.”¹⁵²

The Whitlam government’s pledge to provide free legal service to all Aboriginal people opened up an avenue for the rapid expansion of the ALS. However, it simultaneously shifted the main responsibility for delivering the government’s promise to the Aboriginal Legal Services. Furthermore, despite the radically increased spending, the Whitlam government did not meet the demands of Aboriginal people who were expecting that their long-standing grievances and problems would be remedied and became frustrated by the inadequacies of service delivery.

The Labor Government, on the other hand, was bewildered having to face these attacks despite the record sums they were spending on Aboriginal Affairs.¹⁵³ It was also grappling with the global economic downturn after the long boom that had characterised the post war period in Australia.¹⁵⁴ Unemployment was on the rise following the oil crisis and high inflation. The Opposition, in control of the Senate, refused supply and starved the government of funds, which was beset by crisis in 1975.¹⁵⁵ During its time in government the Labor party had achieved many radical changes, such as free tertiary education and a universal health scheme, while it faced an unusual amount of pressure from the opposition.¹⁵⁶

Change in government policy

Malcolm Fraser began his term as a caretaker prime minister after the dismissal of the Whitlam government in November 1975. Influenced by the theories of the American economist Milton Friedman, Fraser advocated smaller government, fiscal restraint,

¹⁵² Coe in Tatz (ed.), *Black Viewpoints*, 107.

¹⁵³ Bennett, *White Politics and Black Australians*, 61.

¹⁵⁴ Dyster and Meredith, *Australia in the Global Economy*, 160.

¹⁵⁵ Stuart Macintyre, *A Concise History of Australia* (Cambridge, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 240-241.

¹⁵⁶ Jenny Hocking, ‘Introduction: History by Numbers’ in Sybil Noland (ed.), *The Dismissal: where were you on November 11, 1975* (Melbourne University Press: Carlton, 2005), 6-7; Michael Sexton, *The Great Crash: The short life and sudden death of the Whitlam government* (Scribe Publications: Carlton North, 2005), 1.

balanced budgets and individual initiative as a response to the economic downturn.¹⁵⁷

There was also a resurgent desire to distinguish between the deserving and underserving as recipients of welfare, as the Liberal Party's ideology altered from maintenance and extension of comprehensive social welfare services to supporting a social security system that was tied to the nation's ability to pay.¹⁵⁸

In line with these changes DAA policies shifted from self-determination to self-management.¹⁵⁹ Self-management was described as giving more responsibility to Aboriginal people for their actions.¹⁶⁰ The Fraser government also put more emphasis on funding Indigenous people from remote Australia rather than urban areas.¹⁶¹ It cut the budget of the DAA by seven million dollars.¹⁶² The new Liberal government initially took the view that Whitlam's statement about Aboriginal legal representation still applied, however, only within available funds.¹⁶³ According to Lorna Lippmann, from June 1976 to June 1979 funding for Legal Services decreased by 37.4 per cent.¹⁶⁴

By February 1976 the ALS was technically in a state of bankruptcy and publicly announced that it had to suspend its operations.¹⁶⁵ In 1976 the Aboriginal Legal Service in New South Wales had a head office in Sydney and eight regional offices in Redfern, Brewarrina, Cowra, Grafton, Moree, Walgett, Wilcannia and Mt Druitt. It employed 35 staff: eight solicitors, 13 field officers, ten secretaries, two book keepers, an accountant and an articulated clerk. Redfern employed two solicitors while others had one or relied only on a field officer.¹⁶⁶ The ALS had been granted \$841,000 during the 1975/76 financial year, but its

¹⁵⁷ Garton, *Out of Luck*, 168.

¹⁵⁸ Marian Sawyer, 'From the Ethical State to the Minimal State: State Ideology in Australia', *Politics*, Vol. 18, No. 1, May 1983, 27; Dickey, *No Charity There*, 226.

¹⁵⁹ Martin to Minister, 18 November 1977, part 13, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Green to Area officer, 2 April 1979, part 5, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA. See also Jane Robbins and John Summers, 'Aboriginal Affairs Policy' in Dennis Woodward, Andrew Parkin and John Summer (eds.), *Government Politics, Power and Policy in Australia* (Sydney, Brisbane, Perth: Longman 1997), 520; W. Sanders, 'Towards an Indigenous order of Australian government: rethinking self-determination as Indigenous affairs policy', Discussion paper no. 230, Centre of Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, ANU, 2002, 1-2.

¹⁶⁰ Bennett, *White Politics and Black Australia*, 195.

¹⁶¹ Watson, 'I Say This to You', 589.

¹⁶² Jackie Fristacky, 'Crisis in the Aboriginal Legal Service', *Legal Service Bulletin*, Vol. 2, No. 1, June 1976, 16.

¹⁶³ Regional Director to McFadden, 10 June 1976, part 7, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁶⁴ Lorna Lippmann, *Generations of Resistance: the Aboriginal Struggle for justice* (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1981), 157. See also 'Reductions in Aboriginal Affairs expenditure', [1], in Tobin, *Aboriginal Legal Service of New South Wales*, Vol. 2.

¹⁶⁵ *SMH*, 4 February 1976, part 5, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁶⁶ Malone to Minister, 3 March 1976, 'extra', R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

expenditure was \$1,020,999, including debts from 1974/75 covering outstanding legal costs to the external lawyers who worked on special cases and fees to trade creditors.¹⁶⁷ The Federal Government's budget supply crisis, and the change of government from Whitlam to Fraser, had heightened the financial difficulties of the ALS.

The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs in the Fraser government Robert Viner was faced with the decision of either guaranteeing a payment of the ALS's outstanding legal and trade accounts as well as providing further funding for the remainder of the financial year, or guaranteeing the costs already incurred, but advising the Service to direct cases their salaried lawyers were not able to take to appropriate legal aid body. The final alternative was to refuse any further funds, which would lead to the cessation the ALS's operations.¹⁶⁸ Minister Viner agreed to provide further funds, while emphasising the need for the ALS to solve its problems in order to guarantee continued funding. He told Coe that under normal circumstances the ALS would cease to receive further funding. Viner wrote, "It is only because of the need to maintain Legal Services to Aboriginals in New South Wales that I am willing to allow funding to continue."¹⁶⁹

Despite the financial difficulties the ALS continued to provide extensive legal services, underlining the necessity of its existence. During the financial year 1976/77 the ALS (NSW) dealt with 14,500 cases from an estimated Aboriginal population of 27,631.¹⁷⁰ One of the ALS's main functions in 1977 was representing Aboriginal people charged with criminal offences. The Service's own solicitors handled most of these cases in Courts of Petty Sessions, District Courts, the Supreme Court or the Court of Criminal Appeal. Furthermore, the ALS advised Aboriginal people on legal issues that related to discrimination, personal injuries or tenancy disputes. The ALS also provided legal assistance in family law, including divorce, maintenance and custody.¹⁷¹ However, it did not act in disputes where Aboriginal people had conflicting interests or opposed one another. Rather it helped them to find private solicitors while covering the legal costs. The ALS

¹⁶⁷ McFadden to Powell, 23 November 1976, part 10, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁶⁸ Martin to Minister, part 5, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁶⁹ Viner to Coe, 10 May 1976, part 6, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA. See also Martin to Minister, 3 June 1976, part 7, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁷⁰ Grants in aid, part 10, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Effectiveness indicators, part 10, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁷¹ The ALS, April 1978, part 14, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

adopted this policy because to do otherwise would have been divisive and, according to Coe, “completely contrary to the basic concept of the service.”¹⁷²

Being an employee in an under-resourced organisation meant that the pay was not competitive with the private or even public sector.¹⁷³ The heavy work load and large amount of travel, in rural areas in particular, led to a high staff turnover among ALS solicitors.¹⁷⁴ In 1975 solicitors demanded higher pay in a telegram to DAA. Peter Tobin, from the Brewarrina office, described the everyday reality of an ALS solicitor, “Ten thousand cases a year one hundred thousand road miles a year thirty towns no holidays no weekends no overtime pay heat dust floods fires...”¹⁷⁵ Neil Mackerras also wrote about the difficulties of working for the ALS:

Staff and creditors paid late and unpaid, correspondence unanswered, letters unwritten, actions not commenced, defences not prepared, creditors, clients and potential clients, alike, in embarrassment, avoided. Grossly overworked, hopelessly understaffed.¹⁷⁶

Coe complained in 1979 that in addition to uncompetitive wages, the ALS was not able to guarantee long term employment, offer decent remuneration, nor pay superannuation or overtime.¹⁷⁷ In 1981 the DAA still noted that the ALS solicitors’ salaries were not competitive with those offered by State or Private Sector.¹⁷⁸

The desire for social change attracted young lawyers to work for the legal services.¹⁷⁹ As Peter Tobin noted, for practising law, “[...] to mean anything it must be in the realization that we are seeking social change, not merely the well regulated administration of law.”¹⁸⁰ Neil Mackerras also wrote “it is the special obligation of today’s lawyer to see that the great oppression is relieved, non-violently, and through the law.”¹⁸¹ Mackerras came from an

¹⁷² ALS, Submission to House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, ARRC pamphlet files, 40.

¹⁷³ ALS, Submission to House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, ARRC pamphlet files, 28-29; Martin to Minister, November 1981, part 19, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁷⁴ Martin to Minister, 2 November 1976, part 9, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁷⁵ Tobin, 8 April 1975, part 3, R77/76, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁷⁶ Mackerras, ‘Some Problems of the Aboriginal Legal Services’, C1696/10.

¹⁷⁷ ALS, Submission to House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, ARRC pamphlet files, 28-29.

¹⁷⁸ Martin to Minister, November 1981, C1696/10.

¹⁷⁹ Chesterman, *Poverty Law and Social Change*, 31-38.

¹⁸⁰ Peter Tobin in Garth Nettheim (ed.), *Aborigines Human Rights and the Law* (Australia and New Zealand Book Company: Sydney, 1974), 80.

¹⁸¹ Mackerras, ‘Some Problems of the Aboriginal Legal Services’, C1696/10.

established Catholic family in Sydney and was quite possibly influenced by liberation theology.¹⁸²

The financial situation of the ALS continued to be dire.¹⁸³ Furthermore, the auditor's report for the year ending in June 1975 had come back qualified, as he was unable to obtain documents to support 310 payments worth \$19,635. Six months later the number of unclear payments had decreased to 97 cases worth of \$8,079.97. According to the DAA, high telephone bills and tardiness in following the DAA's administrative recommendations were continuing problems.¹⁸⁴

The ALS tried to address its financial problems. Peter Tobin, newly appointed as the head solicitor, and Ann Weldon, its long term administrator, stated that the ALS had made a great effort since February to cut down legal and operational expenses.¹⁸⁵ The regional director of the DAA, Kevin Martin, was satisfied that the ALS had made serious efforts to cut down operational expenses and minimise its referral of cases to outside lawyers. He also noted that some of the increase was due to inflation and the expansion of the ALS to a vast geographic area.¹⁸⁶ Martin was sympathetic to the cause of the Aboriginal activists and was familiar with the Redfern Aboriginal community. During his student days he had been involved in the Foundation.¹⁸⁷

However, the measures taken by the ALS were not enough to keep its operations within the limits of the funds allocated by the DAA. Apart from further funding from the DAA, Martin saw external fundraising or cutting down its services as available options under the circumstances. Martin recommended further funding, as other legal aid agencies were reluctant to accept the responsibilities of the ALS.¹⁸⁸ Martin believed that when efficiently

¹⁸² Personal communication with Anne O'Brien.

¹⁸³ See e.g. Martin telecon Goodfellow, 11 June 1976, part 7, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Nicolson to Martin, 16 June 1976, part 7, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Report on Application for Funds, 17 June 1976, part 7, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁸⁴ Martin to First Assistant Secretary, 22 June 1976, part 7, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA. See also Martin to Coe, 20 December 1976, part 10, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁸⁵ Meeting with ALS, 1 June 1976, part 7, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁸⁶ Martin to First assistant secretary, 22 June 1976, C1696/10; Martin to First Assistant Secretary, 9 July 1976, part 7, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA. See also earlier Martin to Dexter, 18 December 1975, part 5, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁸⁷ Chicka Dixon interviewed by Peter Read, North Sydney, 26 June 1987, Read P01, AIATSIS.

¹⁸⁸ Martin to Minister, 3 June 1976, C1696/10. See also earlier Martin to Dexter, 18 December 1975, part 5, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA

managed “it would be difficult to envisage a better service than the Aboriginal Legal Service in its capacity to deal with the whole spectrum of Aboriginal legal needs”.¹⁸⁹ In the end he supported Coe’s view that the fundamental question was whether the Aboriginal people in New South Wales would be given free legal representation or not.¹⁹⁰

Different administrators and government departments disagreed on the future of the ALS.¹⁹¹ For example, Malone, the First Assistant Secretary at the DAA, criticised the continued condoning of funding to the ALS, while Arthur Simpson, from the Central Office, emphasised the need to provide the legal service within the available funds.¹⁹² On the other hand the Department of Services criticised the DAA for not supervising the ALS sufficiently.¹⁹³

Funding for Aboriginal organisations became increasingly tight when the Fraser government announced in May 1976 that their mini or autumn budget would include \$88 million of funding cuts in Aboriginal Affairs.¹⁹⁴ The government defended these cuts by the need to ensure that a maximum effectiveness was achieved. Aboriginal Affairs Minister, Mr Viner, called the financial year 1976-1977 one of “consolidation and reassessment”.¹⁹⁵

The resignation of Tobin as the head solicitor later in 1976 shed light on the difficulties experienced at the ALS, as its financial situation did not improve despite the efforts of the staff.¹⁹⁶ After his resignation Tobin contacted Martin, the Regional Director, by phone to discuss the situation at the ALS. Martin commented that Tobin maintained a very professional approach to his relationship with the ALS. He quoted Tobin saying “Put it at its worst the Service has no policy, no administration, is not working on a constitutional

¹⁸⁹ Martin to First Assistant Secretary, 9 July 1976, C1696/10. See also 27 April 1976, part 6, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁹⁰ Coe to Minister, part 5, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁹¹ See e.g. Meeting with Minister, 4 November 1976, part 10, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁹² Malone to Regional Director, 19 July 1976, part 8, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Simpson to Malone, 2 June 1976, part 7, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; See also Weissman to Regional Director, 16 July 1976, part 7, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Nicolson to Regional Director, 9 September, part 8, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA. For critique of Simpson see Houston to Nicolson, 4 May 1975, part 6, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁹³ Holliday to Regional Director, 18 August 1976, part 8, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁹⁴ Peter Bowers, ‘Bleak autumn budget cuts \$2,600m of Govt spending’, *SMH*, 21 May 1976.

¹⁹⁵ ‘No overall heavy cut in funds yet’, *SMH*, 21 May 1976; ‘What the Treasurer said, and the new measures in detail’, *Australian*, 21 May 1976.

¹⁹⁶ Martin, note for file, 6 July 1976, part 8, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA

basis and decisions are made on a quite arbitrary basis.”¹⁹⁷ Tobin was in favour of allocating money to each area separately or even supporting break away moves.

According to Anne Summers and David Marr, Tobin was greatly loved by Aboriginal people. After his involvement in Sydney, Tobin had started to work as a solicitor in the Brewarrina office of the ALS in 1973 and committing to defend every case. In one year he raised the per centage of acquittals in the NSW North West circuit from nil to 3.4 per cent, which was not far from the state average. After his resignation from the ALS Tobin left for Europe and United States. He died in an aeroplane crash in Cuba at the age of 29 in May 1977.¹⁹⁸

The auditor for the ALS also resigned, disappointed that the ALS was not enforcing financial controls and that the audit reports in August 1976 continued to be heavily qualified.¹⁹⁹ Coe responded to any suggestion of fraud by pointing to the difficulty of record keeping in such a large organisation as the ALS in New South Wales.²⁰⁰ Each office was run by a management committee consisting of two representatives from each Aboriginal settlement from the region covered by that office. Each management committee sent two delegates to the State Council of the ALS (NSW).²⁰¹ Coe insisted that measures had been taken to account for any missing information and to ensure responsible use of funds, such as, placing STD bars on phones to cut down on phone bills and requiring the use of log books for cars.²⁰²

While the officials at the DAA pushed for better financial management as a solution to the problems of the ALS, they had been made aware of its internal problems. The DAA officials accepted that there was a breakdown of trust between the leadership and other

¹⁹⁷ Martin, note for file, 26 July 1976, part 8, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA. See also Leigh Martin, note for file, part 8, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁹⁸ Note for File, 18 March 1976, part 6, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Leigh Martin, note for file, C1696/10; *SMH*, 6 June 1977; Summers and Marr, ‘One white man who won the trust of Aborigines’; Flick and Goodall, *Isabel Flick*, 113-115.

¹⁹⁹ Meeting with Williams, 13 August 1976, part 8, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

²⁰⁰ Coe to Regional Director, 23 December 1976, C1696/10.

²⁰¹ Margaret Duncan, *The Aboriginal Legal Service (N.S.W.)*, Honours thesis, political science, Macquarie University, November 1975, 45-46.

²⁰² Coe to Regional Director, 23 December 1976, C1696/10.

members of the ALS. The DAA had received accusations of physical intimidations.²⁰³ Furthermore, Martin mentioned that members of the Redfern Aboriginal community had expressed interest in having access to an alternative Legal Service. The DAA was conscious that Paul Coe's views did not always represent the general view of the Aboriginal people in New South Wales and had received complaints about Coe and requests to make him step down.²⁰⁴ In February 1975 a meeting of 2,000 Aboriginal people in Dubbo addressed, among other things, the internal problems of the ALS. The meeting called for limits to be placed on the powers of what the *Daily Liberal* in Dubbo called the Coe Faction in Sydney and Cowra.²⁰⁵

From early on the ALS was criticised for the power that one family held within it. At the time Charles Perkins expressed concern about nepotism as the ALS employed many members of Paul Coe's family in 1974.²⁰⁶ Isobel Coe, Paul Coe's sister, was a member of the management committee; Pam Hunter, a cousin, was a Council member; Anne Weldon, Coe's sister, worked as the secretary; Dulcie Ingram, a cousin, worked as a receptionist. Les Coe, his father, was a field officer in the Cowra branch and Beverley Coe, a cousin, worked as a secretary in the Cowra office. After looking into the matter, the DAA was satisfied that each member was chosen on their merit and that Paul Coe himself had not influenced the decision to employ them.²⁰⁷ Aboriginal activists remember that different Aboriginal services in Redfern tended to be dominated by different Aboriginal groups and the Wiradjuri people from Cowra were in control of the ALS.²⁰⁸

Tensions arising from family differences and competing loyalties between people from different areas of origin challenged the new dynamics of Aboriginal organisations and

²⁰³ Gunter to Secretary, 13 February 1975, part 4, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Gunter to President, 21 February 1975, part 4, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; ABAUST to Minister, 6 March 1975, part 4, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Malone to Martin, 24 December 1976, part 11, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; McFadden to Malone, 31 December 1976, part 11, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA. See also Regional Director to F.A.S., [January 1976], part 11, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Martin to Area Officer, 28 November 1977, part 13, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

²⁰⁴ Regional Director to F.A.S., [January 1976], C1696/10; Martin to Area Officer, 7 October 1977, part 12, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA. See also Martin to Area Officer, 28 November 1977, C1696/10; Leigh Martin, note for file, C1696/10.

²⁰⁵ *Dubbo Daily Liberal*, 21 February 1975.

²⁰⁶ Perkins, Visit to Sydney, 18 March 1964 [sic], part 2, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Dexter to Moy, 15 March 1974, part 2, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

²⁰⁷ Trost to Dexter, 17 April 1974, part 3, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

²⁰⁸ Bostock interviewed by the author; Close interviewed by the author; Donna Ruska interviewed by the author, Victoria Park, Sydney, 16 October 2000.

required skilful negotiations to avoid or resolve disputes.²⁰⁹ The persistence of kinship ties can be problematic for community governance. The history of many community organisations reflects the banding together of certain extended family or kin interests in the community. This can result in key families dominating community organisations and access to the resources, such as jobs and services, in the community. It also results in a perception, common among many non-Aboriginal bureaucrats and perpetuated in the media, that Aboriginal organisations are incompetent and corrupt.²¹⁰

Some regional offices of the ALS wanted to decentralise the Legal Service and relocate its State Office in Dubbo, which was perceived as more central to all Aboriginal people from New South Wales.²¹¹ The head office responded to criticism by moving to Bondi Junction in 1975 in order to be separate from the Redfern local office.²¹² However, it soon perceived operating from the same premise as the Redfern branch as a more practical alternative and in 1976 moved back to same address at 7 Botany Street.²¹³ (See Appendix 1.) Furthermore the head office argued that the DAA requirements and the subsequent attempts of the head office to make their regional offices to follow these requirements led to a break away movement within the ALS.²¹⁴

The DAA avoided interfering in the internal power struggles. In October 1976 Barrie Dexter did not want to cease funding of the ALS or start giving separate funding to different branches.²¹⁵ Rather, the DAA exercised its control over financial matters by starting to release funds on a monthly basis and recommending the use of consultants, as well as more direct involvement of the DAA in the affairs of ALS branches.²¹⁶ The ALS, on the other hand, continued to resist surveillance by the DAA. Leigh Martin, DAA official from Sydney area office, wrote around the time after a meeting with Paul Coe, Lyall Munro

²⁰⁹ Flick and Goodall, *Isabel Flick*, 126-127.

²¹⁰ Maddison, *Black Politics*, 157.

²¹¹ ALS Brewarrina to Cavanagh, 17 April 1975, part 4, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; North and North West ALS to Cavanagh, 17 April 1975, part 4, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; FAA Walgett to Cavanagh, 17 April 1975, part 4, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; ALS Walgett to Cavanagh, 17 April 1975, part 4, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

²¹² Dexter to Minister, 23 April 1975, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Report on application funds, [no date] part III, R77/76, C1696/10, NAA; Gunter to Executive Officer, 18 September 1975, part 5, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

²¹³ Weldon to Regional Director, 3 December 1976, part 10, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Martin to Minister, May 1980, part 19, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

²¹⁴ Martin, notes on meeting 14 September 1976, part 8, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Notes from meeting 29 November 1976, part 10, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

²¹⁵ 'Meeting with the Secretary', 6 October 1976, part 9, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

²¹⁶ McFadden to Powell, 23 November 1976, C1696/10.

and Bobbi Merritt that as an autonomous body they felt that “they should not have to answer to the Department continually and on “minor” matters”²¹⁷

In addition to financial problems and internal power struggles, the ALS had not yet incorporated by December 1976 even though this was a requirement for receiving government funding. Coe argued that incorporation would change the nature of the ALS and limit its flexibility and independence.²¹⁸ He further appealed to the nature of Aboriginal culture and wrote

The Service felt that the idea of a “Company”, a European commercial concept, was totally alien to the Aboriginal ideas of decision making and running of an entity and so totally alien to the basic concept of the Legal Service.²¹⁹

However, since the DAA would only fund organisations that were incorporated, Minister Viner concluded that in order to receive continued funding the ALS would have to incorporate. He also expected the ALS to co-operate with a consultant who would evaluate the Service’s effectiveness and future needs.²²⁰ Though other Aboriginal organisations in Redfern were also suspicious about incorporation, all of them had, in the end, incorporated. In addition, all the other Aboriginal Legal Services in Australia were incorporated.²²¹ Eddie Neumann advised Aboriginal organisations that a company structure provided a “corporate veil” that protected the members from liability and allowed ownership of property, unlike associations.²²²

Viner aimed to reach an understanding between the Legal Services, the DAA and the Minister over the balance between the Services’ independence and accountability. He organised a national conference for all the Aboriginal Legal Services in October 1976. The conference discussed the recommendations of the Hay report which had reviewed the delivery of services financed by the DAA, and the guidelines for the Aboriginal Legal

²¹⁷ Martin, ‘Notes on meeting’, 14 September 1976, part 8, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

²¹⁸ Coe to Regional Director, 20 December 1976, part 11, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; See also Coe to Viner, 5 January 1976, part 11, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Martin telecon Ballantyne, 22 July 1976, part 8, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Coe to Regional Director, 23 July 1976, part 8, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Malone to Martin, 24 December 1976, C1696/10.

²¹⁹ ALS, Submission to House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, ARRC pamphlet files, 31.

²²⁰ Viner to Coe, 19 April 1977, part 12, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

²²¹ Viner to Coe, 19 April 1977, part 12, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Glover to Martin, part 13, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

²²² Eddie Neuman, ‘Companies’ in Robert W. Bellar (ed.), *Black Housing Book* (Broadway: Amber Press, 1976), 15.

Services. The Minister saw the guidelines as a way to identify areas of priority. The Legal Services, however, opposed the way these guidelines were drafted by the DAA and not by them. They also rejected the plan to make a distinction between the legal needs of Aboriginal people in rural and metropolitan areas, referral of clients to other agencies, a ban on welfare activities, the introduction of means testing, the exclusion of certain types of cases and setting priorities on cases. The representatives of the ALS in New South Wales did not attend the whole conference.²²³ Coe, Merritt, Craigie and Syron, and the representatives of the South Coast ALS walked out during the first day of the follow up meeting in February 1977.²²⁴

The conference highlighted several differences between the Aboriginal Legal Services and the government. The Legal Services saw self-determination as their basic objective and government funding as a form of compensation. The government acknowledged the Legal Services as independent organisations that were eligible for financial assistance under the terms and conditions imposed by the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. The Legal Services thought of themselves as accountable to Aboriginal people for Aboriginal funds, while the government emphasised their accountability to the Department for the use of public money. While Legal Services did not want to prioritise their operations geographically between rural and urban clients or the type of services they provided to their clients, this was precisely what the government expected from them.²²⁵ In the end, despite the process of negotiation that had started in 1976, the government decided on the principles and set the guidelines.

As early as 1973 the DAA criticised the Aboriginal Legal Services for not limiting their activities to legal aid, which was seen by the DAA as the purpose of its funding.²²⁶ As funding became tighter under the Fraser Government in particular, the DAA increasingly questioned aspects of ALS operations and the types of services it offered. For example, the

²²³ 'Notes on Aboriginal Legal Services Conference', part 10, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

²²⁴ Nicolson to Regional Director, 9 February 1977, part 11, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

²²⁵ 'Notes on Aboriginal Legal Services Conference', part 10, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; 'Draft Operational Guidelines of Aboriginal Legal Service', part 11, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Paul Coe, 'Aboriginal Legal Aid Report', *Australian Law News*, November 1980, R79/16, C1696/10, NAA; 'Aboriginal Legal Service – Interim Charter', R79/16, C1696/10, NAA. For more on Aboriginal money see also Martin telecon Weldon, 13 October [1975], part 5, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Coe to Viner, 11 October 1977, part 13, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

²²⁶ ALS Conference of members and delegates, 3, 6-7, 23; Jackson to Secretary, 16 September 1974, part 3, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA. See also Duncan, *The Aboriginal Legal Service (N.S.W.)*, 37-38.

DAA was puzzled about the ALS's application to employ a welfare official.²²⁷ In July 1976 the DAA made it explicit to all Legal Services that they should not engage in activities such as welfare or adoption agencies.²²⁸ Different Aboriginal Legal Services in Australia opposed this ban.²²⁹ In Coe's view, legal and social problems were so interrelated that the ALS could not work effectively if only legal problems were addressed. According to Coe, the ALS field officers were already effectively involved in social work in addition to their paralegal responsibilities despite the fact that there were no appropriate facilities for this.²³⁰

Despite the DAA ban on other than legal services the ALS started to work together with the Aboriginal Children's Service (ACS) in 1978 to organise appropriate custody for neglected Aboriginal children who appeared in Children's Courts rather than the children automatically becoming wards of the state and being fostered by European parents.²³¹ The Aboriginal Children's Service had originally started operating from the ALS premises, until it got its own premises.²³² In other states legal representation also became the tool to empower the parents and Aboriginal Legal Services started to represent Aboriginal people in child welfare cases.²³³

The ALS in NSW continued to apply for funding for a social worker for 1980/81 on the basis that it was "absurd" to separate the legal problems that Aboriginal people faced from their background, way of life and standard of living as well as any personal or domestic problems.²³⁴ The ALS was supported in this by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, which concluded that as a law practice for the poor, it was inevitable that Aboriginal Legal Services encountered welfare-related problems. According to the Committee it would have been unwise for the Legal Services not to also

²²⁷ Nicolson to Coe, 8 April 1976, C1696/10.

²²⁸ O'Rourke to all regional directors, 12 July 1976, part 8, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA. See also 'Aboriginal Legal Services – Interim Charter', R79/16, C1696/11, NAA.

²²⁹ 'Notes on Aboriginal Legal Services Conference', part 10, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; 'Draft Operational Guidelines of Aboriginal Legal Service', part 11, R76/4, C1696/10.

²³⁰ Coe to Nicolson, 15 April 1976, part 6, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; 'Submission to full-time social worker', part 6, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA. See also ALS, Submission to House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, ARRC pamphlet files, 73.

²³¹ ALS, Submission to House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, ARRC pamphlet files, 53.

²³² McFadden to Under Secretary, 25 October 1976, part 9, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

²³³ Rowse, 'Contesting Assimilation', 23.

²³⁴ 'Submission for the 1980/81 budget', part 18, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

provide assistance to their clients in their extra legal problems, as these were closely related to and often hard to separate from their legal problems.²³⁵

The ALS continued to overspend its approved budget. Since Coe continued to argue for Aboriginal self-determination and to see the DAA funding as a compensation for the colonisation of Aboriginal country, he defended ALS spending by arguing that the Service used funds according to the budget it had submitted, not the Departmental one.²³⁶ Certain of the value of his service, Coe responded to the threats of limited funding:

Your depriving us of funds leaves us no option other than to close office immediately leaving the Aboriginal community to your tender mercies. All clients of the service will be referred to you personally.²³⁷

Coe found particularly upsetting the DAA requirement of paying back the honoraria payments to office bearers totalling \$7,500 during the previous two years, which were illegal under the regulations that governed charitable organisation in NSW, and ceasing any future payments.²³⁸ The ALS argued that the DAA was aware of the payments being made to cover the expenses incurred by the executive.²³⁹ Coe had responded to an earlier enquiry about Director's fees that "he was not prepared to do all the work he was doing for nothing."²⁴⁰ Eventually the ALS agreed to repay the honoraria repayments, but still refused to incorporate.²⁴¹

²³⁵ *Aboriginal Legal Aid*, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, July 1980, Canberra, 114.

²³⁶ Meeting with ALS, 21 November 1977, C1696/10; 'Aboriginal service sues Govt', *SMH*.

²³⁷ Coe to Minister, 5 October 1977, part 12, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

²³⁸ Regional Director to President, 6 September 1976, part 12, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Regional Director to President, 15 June 1977, part 12, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; President to Regional Director, 28 June 1977, part 12, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; AO Eastern to President, 9 September 1977, part 12, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Fox to Coe, 30 September 1977, part 12, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Viner to Coe, 8 December 1977, part 13, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

²³⁹ Wilkinson, 'Closing Down Black Aid'.

²⁴⁰ Martin, notes on meeting 14 September 1976, C1696/10.

²⁴¹ Nicolson to McDonald, 24 October 1977, part 12, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

Breakaway legal services

In November 1977 the government started to fund alternative or breakaway Aboriginal legal services in response to the ALS's unwillingness to abide by government regulations.²⁴² The DAA approved further grants for the Western Aboriginal Legal Service (WALS), which operated in Dubbo, Brewarrina and Broken Hill, and in January 1978 for Aboriginal Assistance – Western Suburbs, in Sydney. This latter organisation was later known as St Mary's and Districts Aboriginal Legal Assistance (SMLA). The ALS was advised not to operate in the areas covered by these organisations.²⁴³ The South Coast Aboriginal Legal Service (SCALS) had been funded separately already from November 1975.²⁴⁴

Following the government's decision, the ALS head office made general threats to close down branches, raise petitions, withdraw all legal aid to Aboriginal people, open new offices if there were breakaway groups and close down the Service.²⁴⁵ Coe perceived the funding of breakaway organisations as a political move designed to prevent Aboriginal people from taking action in matters such as land rights and undermining the independence of the Legal Service.²⁴⁶ However, when DAA funding to the breakaway organisations became a reality the ALS agreed to the conditions set by the DAA, including incorporation, which it did in January 1978.²⁴⁷ Later that year the ALS became a limited liability company.²⁴⁸ The ALS also undertook measures to cut down on expenses, such as reducing staff and cut down on the number of vehicles.²⁴⁹

The DAA funded 'Breakaway' services from its general budget for legal services in New South Wales and reallocated funds for the ALS NSW.²⁵⁰ Coe argued that by funding 'breakaway' organisations the DAA was fostering and encouraging competitiveness

²⁴² Glover to Martin, 28 November 1977, part 13, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

²⁴³ Tollis to Coe, 4 January 1978, part 14, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

²⁴⁴ Nicolson to Coe, 10 May 1976, part 6, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

²⁴⁵ Meeting with ALS, 21 November 1977, C1696/10.

²⁴⁶ Malone to Martin, 2 December 1977, part 13, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Miles to Viner, 21 December 1977, part 13, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

²⁴⁷ Miles to Viner, 21 December 1977, C1696/10; Coe to Viner, 19 January 1978, part 14, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Coe to Viner, 24 January 1978, part 14, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Fox to Regional Director, 31 January 1978, part 14, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

²⁴⁸ Martin to Minister, 22 May 1978, part 15, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

²⁴⁹ Weldon to Regional Director, 21 December 1977, part 14, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Coe to Regional Director, 24 January 1978, part 14, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

²⁵⁰ Martin to Minister, 9 February 1976, part 5, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

amongst the various organisations, which was against the “traditional Aboriginal approach of working together.”²⁵¹ Aboriginal Legal Services in NSW differed from most states – Queensland, Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia and Western Australia – where a single organisation provided legal services. Only the Northern Territory was divided into two separate services – the North Australian and Central Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Services.²⁵²

The ALS started to receive direct funding from 1 July 1978, after having been funded via a trust account since 1974. However, once again the ALS was soon reluctant to provide financial statements. The DAA also required more action in recovering the honoraria payments.²⁵³ Nevertheless, the relationship between the ALS and the DAA improved. According to the Regional Director of the DAA, the ALS showed restraint in its criticism of the DAA and made considerable effort to better manage its funds.²⁵⁴ In August 1979 the ALS appointed Sally Wilson as its full time accountant in order to better manage finances.²⁵⁵

The ALS remained a large Aboriginal organisation that covered most of New South Wales and had important connections to the Indigenous population in the area. After the breakaway of its branches the ALS had a head office in Sydney and local offices in Redfern, Cowra, Wagga, Moree, Grafton and Kempsey. It employed ten solicitors, seven field officers, two secretaries and an office manager.²⁵⁶

²⁵¹ ALS, Submission to House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, ARRC pamphlet files, 35.

²⁵² *Aboriginal Legal Aid*, 137. In addition Pitjantjara Legal Service provided limited legal aid to Pitjantjara people in WA, SA and NT. *Aboriginal Legal Aid*, 114.

²⁵³ Chaney to Coe, 3 January 1979, part 15, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Devitt to Area Officer, 27 March 1979, part 15, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Rustomji telecon Portridge, 28 March 1979, part 15, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; McFadden to the Directors of the ALS, 10 May 1979, part 15, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Chaney to Coe, 4 June 1979, part 16, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Roper to Area Officer, 11 December 1980, part 19, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; 1 December 1980, part 19, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Walker to Regional Director, 1 December 1980, part 19, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

²⁵⁴ Regional Director to Nicolas, 24 December 1980, part 19, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

²⁵⁵ Coe to Chaney, 1 August 1979, part 17, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

²⁵⁶ ALS position, 8 November 1978, part 15, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA

Responses to discrimination

Relations between the police and Aboriginal people remained difficult after the establishment of the service, and at times perhaps because of it. Hal Wootten was aware of the strong distrust of police among Aboriginal people and emphasised the importance of improving the relationship between the police and Aboriginal people.²⁵⁷ When the situation between the police and Aboriginal people in the two Redfern hotels, Clifton and Empress, became very difficult in 1971, he organised a conference between himself, five police officers responsible for the Redfern district and five local Aboriginal people.²⁵⁸ Wootten also negotiated with the police in order to avoid conflict during demonstrations. For example, he travelled down to Canberra during the last Tent Embassy demonstration in July 1972 and acted as a channel of communication between Aboriginal leaders and the ACT Commissioner of Police.²⁵⁹

Once white people stepped aside from the leadership of the ALS, it seems to have placed less of an emphasis on improving the police-Aboriginal relationship. For example, the view of the DAA was that the ALS did not show up to the meetings organised with the police.²⁶⁰ On the other hand, in later years in particular, ALS staff reported police intimidation. For example, in May 1975 Peter Tobin mentioned in an interview that more than half of the members of the ALS staff and its council had been arrested during the previous few months.²⁶¹ In 1976 Paul Coe and nine other councillors were arrested for drunkenness in the Empress and Cricketers Arms hotels in Redfern on the weekend of Aboriginal Legal Service Conference. One of the arrested produced evidence that just before the arrest he had been interviewed for 2UE radio and was sober. Coe argued that police 'techniques' of discrimination against Aboriginal people had become more sophisticated, for instance by taking more time to memorise their evidence speeches or pressuring arrested Aboriginal people to sign their statement before the ALS could appear to assist.²⁶²

²⁵⁷ Wootten to Allan, 4 May 1971, ALS Background material unpublished 1971, 1972, ARRC, UNSW; Wootten to Whitlam, 14 December 1972, C1696/10.

²⁵⁸ Submission to Commonwealth Government in support of application for Grant 1972-1973, C1696/10.

²⁵⁹ The ALS: report to annual general meeting, 31 August 1972, ARRC.

²⁶⁰ Dexter to Martin, 9 May 1975, 75/733, C1696/8, NAA; Ramsay to McFadden, 25 September 1975, part 5, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

²⁶¹ 'Aboriginal body complains of victimisation: police 'trying to bust' legal service', 8 May 1975, *SMH*.

²⁶² ALS, Submission to House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, ARRC pamphlet files, 42.

Lester Bostock, who was involved with the Black Theatre, and also took part in legal patrols, recounts how the police violently harassed Aboriginal activists and had a list of all their names. He recalls taking part in public protests and activism was like being in a state of war:

You knew that the police were gonna come and arrest you. You knew what you'd do. You knew that when you go, and the pattern had been when you get arrested you would be beaten up by the police and you would be tortured and... Hmm, that was the pattern and you knew that. But you didn't care really, if that was the case. You carried on and did the things that you needed to do 'cause you had to do it.²⁶³

Shirley Smith remembered how the police cars used to drive past the ALS and the AMS "all day and all night, staring at us nasty out of their car windows."²⁶⁴

Neil Mackerras thought the police feared that the ALS was too successful and that much of the trouble was caused by some of the police being unaccustomed to opposition.²⁶⁵ With the establishment of Aboriginal Legal Services, Aboriginal people gained a measure of power in the legal process.²⁶⁶ Isabel Flick, who lived in Collarenebri at the time, remembers how Aboriginal people were always found guilty before the Aboriginal Legal Service came to the area.²⁶⁷ After the establishment of the ALS in NSW, for the first time in white memory Aboriginal people were able to raise opposition to the administration of justice and have "*consultations with their own counsel*".²⁶⁸ The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Les Johnson, commented on the situation in 1976: "I'd be quite certain that in parts of Australia, such as the west of NSW, there are elements in the police force who are resentful of the service."²⁶⁹

²⁶³ Bostock interviewed by the author. See also e.g. *AMS Newsletter*, No. 5, August 1973; *AMS Newsletter*, No. 6, September [1973].

²⁶⁴ Smith, *Mum Shirl*, 76.

²⁶⁵ *The National Times*, 22-27 March 1976.

²⁶⁶ Gregory Lyons, 'Aboriginal Legal Services' in Peter Hanks and Bryan Keon-Cohen (eds.), *Aborigines and the Law: essays in memory of Elizabeth Eggleston* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1984), 137.

²⁶⁷ Flick and Goodall, *Isabel Flick*, 70.

²⁶⁸ Charles Potter, 'A.L.S. in N.S.W.', [15], in Tobin, *Aboriginal Legal Service of New South Wales*, Vol. 1. Emphasis in original. Rosalind Kidd writes how, after setting up Legal Service in Queensland, Aboriginal-police relations were irrevocably changed. Rosalind Kidd, *The Way We Civilise. Aboriginal Affairs – the untold story*, (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1997), 307.

²⁶⁹ *The National Times*, 22-27 March 1976. See also 'Aboriginal body complains of victimisation', *SMH*; 'Police Victimise Aborigines – A.L.S. claim', *Dubbo Daily Liberal*, 9 May 1975.

In their newspaper in 1976 the New South Wales police blamed Federal Government policies for the breakdown of the relationship between the police and Aboriginal people.²⁷⁰ They argued for increased pay due to their increased workload since the Legal Service had been established. Furthermore, the police expressed their concern about the active campaign against the police run by some field officers in the Aboriginal Legal Service. As though evidence of the ‘unsuitability’ of the ALS, police noted that the Moree Aboriginal Legal Service, located opposite the police station, “displayed a ‘Black Power’ flag inside the building but within the view of the passing public”.²⁷¹ For them it was inappropriate for a government paid service to visibly engage in politics.

Kathleen Lothian emphasises the importance of the example of the Black Power and Black Panther movements in America for the establishment of Indigenous services, such as the ALS, in Redfern. Lothian notes that even though the Redfern activists saw themselves as dispossessed and colonized Indigenous peoples for whom land was a central issue, at the same time they also related to the worldwide liberation movement as part of a racially oppressed minority.²⁷² Gary Foley acknowledges that the Medical and Legal Services owed their origins to the Black Panther Party, yet they also “grew out of Aboriginal community activism and reflected the needs of this community”.²⁷³

For many Aboriginal people Black Power represented a policy of self-assertion, of self-identity, that, as Coe described it, “is trying to encourage black culture – the re-learning, the reinstating of black culture wherever it is possible.”²⁷⁴ Gary Williams emphasised that Black Power was not about violence, but about reclaiming power to put pressure on the government to react positively to demands from Aboriginal people. He further explained Black Power as “a statement that we are finding our own feet and want to control our own lives in our own way.”²⁷⁵ Black Power was about Aboriginal self-determination at both the individual and the collective level.

²⁷⁰ ‘Salaries application’, *N.S.W. police news*, January 1976, 13.

²⁷¹ *The National Times*, 22-27 March 1976.

²⁷² Lothian, ‘Seizing the Time’, 194-196.

²⁷³ A. Pisarski, ‘Interview with Gary Foley’, *Twelve to Twenty-Five*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1992, 17-21.

²⁷⁴ Coe in Tatz (ed.), *Black Viewpoints*, 105.

²⁷⁵ ‘Interview with Gary Williams’, *Arena*, September 1973, Vol. 6, 8.

The discourse of Black Power, however, was sometimes expressly violent. Aboriginal people were frustrated with the slow pace of social change. They saw their communities facing an emergency that required immediate attention to prevent more lives being lost. Bobbi Sykes, a black Aboriginal rights activist from Queensland who in the 1970s worked as a journalist based in Sydney, said in her closing remarks to the Aborigines, Human Rights and the Law conference in 1974,

We need more Embassies. We need more direct confrontation. And again I think the white people don't know what violence is. Violence is something terrible that kills people. Well, in my mind, an infant dead from malnutrition is just as dead as if it had been allowed to grow up and had a cop shoot it in the street. And I think that if a few more adults are prepared to get themselves shot in the street, in gratitude of the fact that they weren't starved to death in infancy, you would be able to get a lot further, a lot faster.²⁷⁶

According to Coe the best thing that ever happened in Sydney was the arrival of “two young blackfellas, Dennis Walker and Gary Foley”. They polarised attitudes and were critiqued by white people for their violent rhetoric and use of language. However, they drew attention to the fact that at the same time Aboriginal children were dying of malnutrition.²⁷⁷ Shirley Smith recalled that when she started to hear white people calling young Aboriginal people “militants” and “radicals”, she thought they were meant as insults. However, she said “I was seeing the kids in another way. My nephew, Paul Coe, and Gordon Briscoe talking about the need to get lawyers to represent Aboriginal people in Courts.”²⁷⁸

The police questioned the suitability of some Aboriginal people to act as field officers since they had criminal records.²⁷⁹ Indeed according to Dexter in 1975 one of the allegations made against the ALS was that it was too close to the criminal community.²⁸⁰ The fact that some Aboriginal field officers had criminal records was not uncommon among Aboriginal people considering the level of police harassment, high detention rates and the socio-economic issues they were struggling with. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the offences for which Aboriginal people were mostly arrested were ‘unseemly’ words and

²⁷⁶ Bobbi Sykes in Garth Nettheim (ed.), *Aborigines Human Rights and the Law* (Australia and New Zealand Book Company: Sydney, 1974), 155.

²⁷⁷ Coe in Tatz (ed.), *Black Viewpoints*, 110.

²⁷⁸ Smith, *Mum Shirl*, 73.

²⁷⁹ *The National Times*, 22-27 March 1976.

²⁸⁰ Dexter to Minister, 23 April 1975, part II, R77/76, C1696/10, NAA.

vagrancy.²⁸¹ Criminal records, however, created difficulties for the ALS staff and their field officers in particular, as it made it harder to get admission to prison or other Corrective Service Institutions.²⁸²

From early on the ALS hoped to achieve long term solutions by fighting ‘test cases’ and working for legal reform.²⁸³ The view of the ALS was that while other Aboriginal organisations focused on welfare issues, the ALS included welfare as well as activist, militant and political matters.²⁸⁴ The ALS took up, for example, cases that challenged racial discrimination in New South Wales and in rural areas in particular. In August 1975 a group of Aboriginal people were refused service in Moree Hotels to which they reacted by open conflict with the publicans and the police. The Aboriginal people arrested were charged with unseemly words or malicious damage to the police van. In the media it was reported as the ‘Moree rampage’. At the time the police and local non-Indigenous people at Moree accused the ALS staff of causing the trouble, though the ALS denied that its staff had been involved. Moreover, they accused Aboriginal people from Sydney of causing trouble, even though they acknowledged that some of the “Sydney” Aborigines were born in Moree. They also claimed that local Aboriginal people condemned their behaviour. “They reckon they give all Aborigines bad name – and the ones here aren’t a bad lot.”²⁸⁵

Merv Rutherford, a former council member of the ALS, commented on the change in attitudes among non-Indigenous people since the establishment of the ALS. “Now that blacks are actually defending their alleged conduct, the locals in the bush feel they are getting uppity.”²⁸⁶ Racial conflict in Moree highlights the way in which the Aboriginal services with an urban base, such as the ALS, disturbed the notion of the shared rural

²⁸¹ Cunneen, *Conflicts, Politics and Crime*, 83, 192.

²⁸² Green, note for file, 18 September 1979, part 17, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

²⁸³ Wootten in Nettheim (ed.), *Aborigines Human Rights and the Law*, 63.

²⁸⁴ ‘The Aboriginal Legal Service’, *Legal Service Bulletin*, 240; ‘Legal Aid’, *The Black National Times*; ‘Submission to The Honorable R.A. Viner’, 2, in Tobin, *Aboriginal Legal Service of New South Wales*, Vol. 2.

²⁸⁵ ‘Mad Blacks hit town’s hotels’, *Adelaide Advertiser*, 1 September 1975. See also ‘Aborigines and Police clash in main street’, *The Northern Daily Leader*, 1 September 1975; ‘Angry blacks attack police’, *Age*, 1 September 1975; ‘Aborigines on rampage: terror in town’, *Melbourne Sun*, 1 September 1975; ‘Moree residents shocked by Saturday’s violence’, *Moree Champion*, 2 September 1975; ‘Moree clash inquiry call by MP’, *Courier Mail*, 2 September 1975;.

²⁸⁶ Merv Rutherford, ‘Attacks on legal service a sure sign of success’, Letters, *National Times*, 29 march 1976.

identity or country mindedness which positioned city people as outsiders and the worst of them as trouble making agencies who would stir up discontent.²⁸⁷

Coe argued for a civil rights bill that would better enable Aboriginal people to use the law to protect themselves against police discrimination.²⁸⁸ He saw imprisoned Aboriginal people as political prisoners and argued that if they stole then it was because colonisation of their land had forced them to. According to Coe,

As far as I'm concerned, as far as the blacks in Sydney are concerned, every black prisoner in Australia is a political prisoner. He should not be there because you came, you stole this land in first place, you destroyed our culture, you destroyed so many black people. What justification have you to put the black away because he steals to survive?²⁸⁹

Aboriginal land rights

Aboriginal people started to fight for land rights within the Australian legal system in the 1960s. The Yolngu from Arnhem Land were the first to seek the recognition of their traditional title to land in court in 1968. The final judgement of the case *Milirrpum and Others v Nabalco* was handed down in the Northern Territory Supreme Court in 1971. Judge Blackburn found that the Yolngu's relationship with land was not comparable to property rights. Land rights had also gathered momentum on the government level. Once elected, the Whitlam government set up the Woodward commission on Aboriginal land rights. However, its report published in 1973 was a disappointment for the urban activists as it interpreted land rights to be relevant only in the Northern territory and mainly on existing reserves.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁷ Jennifer Jones, 'More Than Tea and Scones? Cross-racial collaboration in the country women's association of New South Wales and the ethos of countrymindedness', *History Australia*, Vol 6, No 2, 2009, 41.5-41.6.

²⁸⁸ Coe in Tatz (ed.), *Black Viewpoints*, 103-104.

²⁸⁹ Coe in Tatz (ed.), *Black Viewpoints*, 111.

²⁹⁰ Timeline: Legal Developments Affecting Indigenous people, Indigenous Law Resource, Australasian Legal Information Institute, <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/IndigLRes/timeline/1968.html>, accessed 21 September 2012; Pittock, *Beyond White Australia*, 28, 31, 36; 'A Legal Challenge', Collaborating for Indigenous Rights, National Museum of Australia, <http://indigenoustrights.net.au/subsection.asp?ssID=61>, accessed 9 November 2012.

In New South Wales Aboriginal activists from coastal areas and western parts worked together to promote land rights in their own state. They organised a state wide conference in 1970, in which land rights were discussed. Following this conference they formed a Lands and Rights Council, members of which travelled around New South Wales promoting land rights. Many young Aboriginal activists from Sydney, including Lyn Thompson, sister of Billie Craigie and former Secretary of the Foundation of Aboriginal Affairs, joined the Council as well the Aboriginal Lands Board which was established in 1971.²⁹¹

The ALS Council decided in 1974 that land rights was one of the most important aims of Aboriginal people and directed all its employees and council members to investigate and further these aims. The council emphasised the importance of running land rights test cases whenever possible.²⁹² Accordingly in the mid-1970s Coe, together with other Aboriginal activists, started a series of legal cases in which he challenged the legality of the occupation of Australia and argued for Aboriginal rights to land and sovereignty.

The Sydney Aboriginal activists also supported land rights struggles in other parts of Australia, such as that of the Gurindji in the Northern Territory. Bain Attwood suggests that the South-Eastern activists laid claim to land in Australia in general in part because colonialism had diminished their relationship with their specific people and land.²⁹³ However, Heather Goodall emphasises that even though political action on land issues gained strength from the success of the land rights campaign in the Northern Territory, it was grounded in the many local Aboriginal campaigns to claim back traditional lands and re-establish an economic base in New South Wales.²⁹⁴ After the initial dispossession Aboriginal people in different parts of New South Wales had managed to retain or re-establish their connection to land, for example, in their shared land use with the agriculture and pastoral industries by the 1850s and in their successful appeal for portions of Crown land in the 1880s and 1890s, as I discussed in the previous chapter. Large parts of these lands were lost again when the Aboriginal Protection Board revoked many of the small

²⁹¹ List of persons present, Aboriginal Medical Services, 6, 97A48/70, Hollows, UNSW; Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, 336-338.

²⁹² Minutes of the ALS council meeting, 6 July 1974, reports and minutes of meetings 1972-1975, Vivienne Abraham papers, ML MSS 6222/1.

²⁹³ Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, 321.

²⁹⁴ Goodall, 'New South Wales', 112.

reserves for the benefit of white settlers in the early twentieth century and in the 1950s when they were turned into recreational land.²⁹⁵ Many of the younger generation of Aboriginal people, such as Michael Anderson quoted in the previous chapter, knew about these early Aboriginal struggles to keep the land. Furthermore, though migrating to urban areas, they maintained contact to their people and land. Jenny Munro explains that she is always connected to Cowra and that country, where she grew up, even though Sydney is a place where she has to live, because there is no work in Cowra.²⁹⁶

The Sydney activists' land rights campaign reflected multiple levels of identity and belonging, from local to Australia wide.²⁹⁷ According to Julie Martinez, land rights were a unifying force precisely because land is a symbol which carries meaning for all Indigenous Australians.²⁹⁸ James Miller describes land rights as a single issue which by 1970 united Aboriginal people across Australia in a way they had never been united before.²⁹⁹ In the same manner as traditional Aboriginal cultures provided building blocks for Aboriginal national culture, the South-eastern support for the Gurindji campaign created a link, under Aboriginal nationalism, for the New South Wales Aboriginal people's claim to land as the original inhabitants.

The legal arguments for Aboriginal land rights continued to develop when in 1974 Paul Coe sued the Queensland mines and the Federal Government, on behalf of himself and all other Australian Aborigines, in order to stop them from making an agreement with Aboriginal people in the Nabarlek area. He argued that before 1788 Aboriginal people had enjoyed "exclusive possession of the whole land in Australia and had not ceded any of it to the crown or alienated it."³⁰⁰ Coe also argued that according to the pre-colonial legal and social system, though Aboriginal groups had responsibilities in particular areas, all other Aboriginal people had the right to use and enjoy such area. Thus, no group could enter into an agreement that would limit the rights of other Aboriginal people. The court ordered

²⁹⁵ Goodall, 'New South Wales', 59, 72, 77-78, 92.

²⁹⁶ Jenny Munro interviewed by the author, Sydney, 3 July 2000. See also Close interviewed by the author.

²⁹⁷ For more information on identity construction see Hector Grad, 'The discursive building of European identity: Diverse articulations of compatibility between European and national identities in Spain and the UK' in Rosana Dolón and Júlia Todolí (eds.), *Analysing Identities in Discourse* (Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2008), 112-115.

²⁹⁸ Martínez, 'Problematising Aboriginal Nationalism', 143.

²⁹⁹ Miller, *Koori: A Will to Win*, 194.

³⁰⁰ *Coe v Queensland Mines LTD and the Commonwealth*, Supreme Court of the Australian Capital Territory, 1974. See also 'Court rejects move by Aboriginal. No decision on Nabarlek', *SMH*, 6 November 1974.

the case against the Commonwealth to be dismissed, because it did not have jurisdiction over the Commonwealth. The case against the Queensland Mines was also dismissed, with Coe's consent, since Aboriginal people in the Nabarlek area were not included in the case as defendants though they were a party to the dispute.³⁰¹

DAA officials were not wholly opposed to the ALS taking up what they described as political cases. However they advised against cases "that are of an unusual nature and are unduly expensive" and they emphasised that funds should be used for their "proper purpose" i.e. providing legal representation to Aboriginal people.³⁰² P.J. O'Neill, who worked for the Aboriginal affairs policy development, advised Gunter at DAA Area office, while commenting on the Wee Waa trespassing case in 1975, that the DAA should fund it, if it had a chance of succeeding and promoting Aboriginal Land Rights.³⁰³ Arthur Murray, an Aboriginal man working on the cotton fields in Wee Waa, was arrested for trespassing in the grounds of the Returned Servicemen's Club. His defence was that he had been walking on the Aboriginal land. Murray had earlier been involved in the cotton chippers' strike, that was supported by Sydney activists, against dangerous working conditions under high levels of insecticide, sprayed on the fields regardless of the people working on the fields, and poor pay.³⁰⁴ Workers and their families lived on camps by the Namoi River without proper water supply and lacking toilet facilities.³⁰⁵ According to O'Neill, it did not seem likely that the Australian Government would do anything about land rights in NSW, apart from purchasing land via the land fund, so supporting the ALS was justified.³⁰⁶

Representatives of the ALS made a public case for sovereignty in November 1976 when a group of them landed on the shores of Britain and laid claim to annex it. In a letter to James Callahan, Prime Minister of Britain, on behalf of the ALS council, Bob Merritt demanded he confirm the acceptance of the invasion that was implied by the behaviour of

³⁰¹ *Coe v Queensland Mines LTD and the Commonwealth*.

³⁰² Gunter to ALS, 21 July 1975, part 5, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA. See also Gunter to Regional Director, 7 July 1975, part III, R77/76, C1696/10, NAA; Gunter to Regional Director, 13 August 1975, part 5, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

³⁰³ P.J. O'Neill to Gunter, [no date], part 5, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

³⁰⁴ John Pilger, 'The life and death of an Australian hero, whose skin was the wrong colour', johnpilger.com, 4 October 2012, <http://johnpilger.com/articles/the-life-and-death-of-an-australian-hero-whose-skin-was-the-wrong-colour>, accessed 22 October 2012.

³⁰⁵ Flick and Goodall, *Isabel Flick*, 137-138; 'Cotton town gathers seasonal problems', 18 January 1973, *SMH*; 'Labour Council backs striking cotton chippers', 23 January 1973, *SMH*.

³⁰⁶ P.J. O'Neill to Mr Gunter, [1975], part 5, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

the “natives of Britain”. He also pointed out that the invasion was a replica of the invasion of Australia by the British Crown in 1770. Merritt wrote:

[they] invaded Britain armed with boomerangs and planted Aboriginal Flag at the beach of Dover Harbour [...] in the presence of bystanders and in their presence the group declared Sovereignty over the Territory of the United Kingdom for the Aboriginal Nation [...] Although the invading party was armed, force was not necessary for the natives accepted the conquest peacefully and indeed took gifts from the invaders of trinkets and beads and pieces of red cloth.³⁰⁷

The event coincided with the visit of Paul Coe, Cecil Patten, ALS field officer, and Bruce Miles, ALS solicitor, in Britain for a Conference on Legal Aid.³⁰⁸

The significance of the Dover landing by the Aboriginal people was symbolic. As Shirley Smith commented, the more laughable the British found the Aboriginal claim to sovereignty over Britain the more ridiculous the British claim of Aboriginal land in 1770 and onwards. For Smith sovereignty was a tool of identity politics:

The Dover landing may or may not ultimately win us our claim for compensation. The Dover landing can win us our freedom: that is our freedom within ourselves - Knowing that whatever our tyrannical suppressions, we are still a proud and independent and sovereign people seeking our rights.³⁰⁹

The “invasion of Britain” was a playful inversion of history, like many other Aboriginal protests, and centred on the injustices associated with the colonisation of Australia.³¹⁰ The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, Viner, however, mainly saw it as inappropriate use of funds, as Merritt’s letter was written on ALS letterhead paper.³¹¹

The concept of sovereignty opened up a new avenue to claim legal rights under international law. The argument for Aboriginal sovereignty was articulated when Coe in 1979 sued the Commonwealth of Australia and the Government of the United Kingdom,

³⁰⁷ Merritt to Callaghan, [no date], part 11, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

³⁰⁸ Regional Director to Assistant Secretary, 24 November 1976, part 10, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; Regional Director to F.A.S. management, 20 December 1976, part 10, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA; ALS, Submission to House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, ARRC pamphlet files, 19; Blundell to Area officer, [no date], part 11, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

³⁰⁹ ALS, N.S.W, Aboriginals invade England: Letter to J Callaghan, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from R.J. Merritt and comment by S. Smith, p 11039, p ABOR, AIATSIS.

³¹⁰ Cf. D’Arcus analysis of the occupation of Alcatraz. Bruce D’Arcus, ‘The Urban Geography of Red Power: The American Indian Movement in Minneapolis-Saint Paul, 1968-1970’, *Urban Studies*, Vol. 47, No. 6, 2010, 1245.

³¹¹ Merritt to Callaghan, [no date], C1696/10; Viner to Secretary, [no date], part 11, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

on behalf of the Aboriginal community, for unlawfully dispossessing Aboriginal peoples, first by Captain Cook and then by those who had followed him. Coe submitted a statement in which he asserted that Australia had not been *terra nullius*, but rather clans of Aboriginal peoples lived and travelled across Australia, and formed a system of interlocking rights and responsibilities that constituted a *sovereign Aboriginal nation* that was colonised by conquest, not by peaceful settlement. Furthermore, Coe argued that this sovereign nation had never ceded its territory nor conceded to conquest.³¹²

The whole of the said continent now known as Australia was held by the said aboriginal nation from time immemorial for the use and benefit of all members of the said nation and particular proprietary [sic] possessory and usufructuary rights in no way derogated from the sovereignty of the said aboriginal nation.³¹³

He sought to protect from mining and other activities the land and waterways that were used by Aboriginal peoples until internationally recognised arrangements were made to transfer these rights to back to them.³¹⁴

Coe's submission in *Coe v Commonwealth* reflects the changed political climate towards Aboriginal land rights since 1972. Coe noted the role of the Tent Embassy while he further submitted that the Commonwealth of Australia and the Government of the United Kingdom

Recognized the sovereignty of the aboriginal people and nation by recognizing the aboriginal embassy established on that land immediately in front of Parliament House Canberra and subsequently elsewhere always under the flag of the aboriginal nation.³¹⁵

He also referred to the senate resolution in 1975 which acknowledged that Aboriginal people had been dispossessed and urged legislation to compensate them.³¹⁶ In a single court case Coe sought to have Aboriginal sovereignty acknowledged, the legal and historical bases of Australia re-classified as partly 'conquered', and to establish Aboriginal land rights under Australian common law. This was also the first time the concept of '*terra nullius*' was used by an Australian court to describe the legal condition of Australia before

³¹² David Ritter, 'The "Rejection of Terra Nullius" in Mabo: A Critical Analysis', *Sydney Law Review*, Vol. 18, No. 5, 1996, 17; Julie Cassidy, 'The Impact of the Conquered/Settled Distinction regarding the Acquisition of Sovereignty in Australia', *Southern Cross University Law Review*, Vol. 8, 2004, 12-13.

³¹³ *Coe v Commonwealth* [1979] HCA 68, Australasian Legal Information Institute, www.austlii.edu.au/au/cases/cth/HCA/1979/68.html, accessed 27 September 2012.

³¹⁴ Cassidy, 'The Impact of the Conquered/Settled Distinction regarding the Acquisition of Sovereignty in Australia', 13.

³¹⁵ *Coe v Commonwealth* [1979].

³¹⁶ *Coe v Commonwealth* [1979].

British colonisation, a term that gained further significance during the *Mabo* case.³¹⁷ Coe, together with the ALS head solicitor, thought that if they won the case, it would immediately resolve many of the difficulties Aboriginal people were facing.³¹⁸

The High Court dismissed Coe's case. All the judges of the High Court held that they had no jurisdiction over the matter of Australian sovereignty in municipal court. They also thought the statement poorly drafted and Judge Gibbs viewed the claim of Aboriginal sovereignty to be so outrageous and vexatious that it amounted to an abuse of process. In his view it was fundamental to the Australian legal system that the continent became British possession by settlement and not by conquest. The claim for sovereignty represented a challenge to the legitimacy of the nation state.³¹⁹ On the issues of settlement the four judges were divided evenly. They were also divided on the issue of Aboriginal sovereignty. However, importantly, they all agreed that whether native land rights still existed under Australian common law was still an open question.³²⁰

The Australian legal system has often misconstrued the Indigenous demand for sovereignty as a claim for external statehood i.e. advocating an independent nation state, when in fact it is for internal sovereignty, within the Australian nation state.³²¹ Even though Paul Coe sometimes referred to the idea of an Aboriginal state, the central goal of the ALS was to assert the individual and collective self-determination of Aboriginal people within the Australian legal system.³²² Brennan *et al* remind us that non-Indigenous people also use the word sovereignty freely to refer to the external sovereignty of the nation-state, and in a different context when discussing the internal distribution of authority within a nation-state or even the sovereignty of the people.³²³

³¹⁷ Ritter, 'The "Rejection of Terra Nullius" in Mabo', 17-18, 27-33.

³¹⁸ P. Coe and B.R. Miles, campaign letter, 18 October 1978, Land Rights, Coe High Court Case, 1.33, Hannah Middleton Collection, ML MSS 5866/2.

³¹⁹ Guibernau, *Nations without States*, 70.

³²⁰ Ritter, 'The "Rejection of Terra Nullius" in Mabo', 17-18; Cassidy, 'The Impact of the Conquered/Settled Distinction regarding the Acquisition of Sovereignty in Australia', 13-18.

³²¹ Phillip Falk and Gary Martin, 'Misconstruing Indigenous Sovereignty: Maintaining the fabric of Australian law' in Aileen Moreton-Robinson (ed.), *Sovereign Subjects Indigenous Sovereignty Matters*, (Allen & Unwin: Crows Nest, 2007), 46.

³²² Coe in Tatz (ed.), *Black Viewpoints*, 112.

³²³ Brennan, Gunn and Williams, 'Sovereignty', 315.

Conclusion

The Aboriginal Legal Service in Redfern represented a new model of Aboriginal activism. It was set up and controlled by Aboriginal people. With the help of their non-Indigenous supporters, in particular lawyers and law students who had the necessary professional skills, Aboriginal activists provided free and culturally appropriate legal services. For the first time Aboriginal people could rely on having legal representation in the Australian justice system. The ALS was soon established in the streetscape of inner Sydney. It created an Aboriginal space that empowered urban Aboriginal people and challenged existing power relations in the city. Its model was rapidly taken up in other parts of Australia.

Under the Whitlam government's policy of self-determination, the ALS in Redfern, together with other Aboriginal legal services, was given the responsibility of providing free legal representation for Aboriginal people, as pledged by the government. The ALS seized the opportunity to extend its ideas and operations to other parts of New South Wales. With government funding it was also less reliant on volunteer support and its non-Indigenous involvement became more marginal. At the same time the push for full Aboriginal control grew stronger in the ALS, which was at the time was largely run by young Aboriginal men, many of them members of the Australian Black Panther Party. However, the ALS was faced with the challenge of delivering the kind of holistic legal service that it deemed appropriate considering the cultural and socio-economic background of its clientele, with what soon proved to be limited government funding.

Furthermore, the ALS activists and the Whitlam government had not agreed on the principles of self-determination and what this meant in practice. The DAA officials were limited by the available funding and were ultimately accountable to the Australian public for the use of government funds. They tended to see self-determination as limited to Aboriginal control in delivering legal services. Ultimately, in their dealings with the ALS, the DAA officials viewed self-determination policy as a short term solution and as a way to achieve equal treatment, until such a time as separate legal services would no longer be needed. On the other hand, the ALS's understanding of self-determination was that it stemmed from their right as sovereign Indigenous peoples. The ALS regarded government funding as Aboriginal money and refused to submit to government conditions or negotiate

the limits of self-determination with the government. The ALS activists saw their organisation not only as a pathway to equal and just treatment of Aboriginal people in courts, but as a way for established Aboriginal self-determination.

Under the Fraser government, Aboriginal affairs policy shifted from self-determination to self-management. The DAA officials started to impose stricter financial controls on the ALS and continued their struggle to have the ALS to abide by DAA regulations and definitions of accountability. Though the officials had been made aware of the breakdown of trust between ALS leadership and its members, they were unwilling to interfere with the internal affairs of the ALS. Rather, they aimed to establish control over the ALS's finances and in this way limit its activities. The ALS was in a strong position to argue for its continuity, as there were no alternative legal services available for Aboriginal people. However, in 1977 the government agreed to fund breakaway legal services in different parts of New South Wales and thus limit the power of the ALS NSW based in Redfern.

In the course of the 1970s the ALS became a political power base that not only provided legal services, but also affirmed Aboriginal identity and promoted Aboriginal rights locally and nationally. Led by Paul Coe, the ALS challenged in the High Court the legality of Australian sovereignty and its basis as a settled rather than conquered country. His case further underlined the distinct identity of Aboriginal people as peoples and argued for their right to land. Though the case was dismissed it left the question of native land rights open to be pursued almost ten years later in the *Mabo* case.

The importance of the ALS was not limited on the legal field, for it soon prompted the establishment of the Aboriginal Medical Service. However, where the ALS was quickly supported by the government and could later rely on extensive DAA funding under the Whitlam government pledge, the AMS had to make much stronger argument for its case for funding. This led members of the AMS to adopt a different approach in its struggle for self-determination.

Chapter 3

“Listen, bud, why didn’t you go to hospital”¹ – health as activism

While the A.M.S.’s prime function has been and is to offer the Black Community those same benefits of modern science and medicine which the white are able to take for granted, it has been impossible even to take care of the health aspect without being drawn in to the many, varied [sic.], and serious ‘other’ problems suffered by that community.²

The Aboriginal Medical Service was established in 1971, soon after the ALS and following the same model. It was a response to the lack of appropriate health care for Aboriginal people and addressed the wide range of physical, mental and social health problems suffered by them. It made a free Aboriginal controlled medical service available for Aboriginal people for the first time. With government funding the AMS grew to offer a wide range of preventative health programs, such as a nutrition program and a clinic for under five year olds, in addition to consultation with doctors and specialists.

Though the AMS was not as vocal in its politics as the ALS, its overarching aim was political. AMS activists saw self-determination and land rights as essential steps towards better health. Like the ALS, AMS members wished to create a self-determining Aboriginal space in the field of health, and to strengthen Aboriginal identity, pride and culture. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs officials had difficulty treating Aboriginal Medical Service as political and permanent, as they had with the ALS. However, there were also differences between these two services and the way the government saw them. The government did not allow the AMS to have as wide a role in the field of health as it had granted to the ALS in the field of law. Moreover, the AMS’s response to government control differed from that of the ALS. While the ALS was able to take advantage of

¹ Bobbi Sykes with Stephen Johnson, ‘Listen, Bud, Why didn’t You Go to Hospital’, proof of an article, 1975, part 4, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA.

² Aboriginal Medical Service Submission, 97A48/69.

extensive government funding in pursuit of self-determination, the AMS aimed to protect its autonomy with the support of independent funding and a wide support network. Thus, studying the AMS reflects Aboriginal self-determination in Redfern in the 1970s from equally important, but an alternative angle to the ALS.

In this chapter I discuss the AMS's role in Aboriginal activism as a provider of welfare and healthcare services to Aboriginal people and builder of the Aboriginal community. I examine the AMS's responses to the challenges and opportunities of self-determination policy and the changed policy of self-management. I start by looking into the early days of its establishment and also study the role of non-Indigenous supporters of the AMS.

First steps towards better health

In the urban spaces of Redfern many health issues could not be isolated as medical problems, but were part of a complex interrelating pattern linking health with poverty, poor housing and social and personal problems that were connected to the history of colonisation. This was acknowledged by the *Scott report*. The report listed inadequate nutrition, growth retardation, chronic ear and chest infections, gastrointestinal infections, chronic dental decay, and abnormally high incidence of diabetes as among the most common Aboriginal health problems. Furthermore, the Aboriginal infant mortality rate in Sydney was twice the national average.³ Aboriginal people in Sydney lived in crowded housing conditions where contagious diseases easily spread and where they had no privacy or appropriate space for sleeping, with kitchens turned into sleeping areas. Housing was also unhygienic with no adequate clean water.⁴ A lack of ingredients, in particular fresh fruit and vegetables, as well as limited storage and cooking facilities caused poor nutrition. Aboriginal tenants often had no access to working fridges or stoves.⁵

³ Scott, *Problems and Needs of the Aboriginals of Sydney*, 1, 8-1, 8-4, 8-11; 'Summary of the Scott Report', 68; J. Norelle Lickiss, 'Aboriginal Children in Sydney: the socio-economic environment', *Oceania*, Vol. XLI, No. 3, March 1971, 204-207, 210, 214.

⁴ Lickiss, 'Aboriginal Children in Sydney', 203-204.

⁵ Aboriginal Nutrition Project, [1972], Sub-committee on Nutrition, 6.1.2., 97A48/66, Hollows, UNSW.

That social conditions affect health became increasingly accepted in the 1970s. Indigenous health was no longer seen as a sign of racial inferiority as had been common in the past.⁶ Furthermore, research demonstrated that it was living standards, not medical intervention, which accounted for the greatest decline in death rates.⁷ However, there was much to desire in the level of medical services that Aboriginal people received.

When Aboriginal people sought medical attention, their needs were not met by the public hospitals, which kept them waiting for long periods of time and in general treated Aboriginal people in an unsympathetic manner. Public hospitals also charged fees, which, no matter how nominal, Aboriginal people could not afford, especially if many visits were required. The AMS also reported that Aboriginal people had limited knowledge of health factors. They often failed, or were unable, to use existing health services. They were uncertain about when and where to seek medical attention, and left going to a doctor until very late in the progression of their illness.⁸

There was only one general practitioner in the inner-Sydney area that was known to see Aboriginal patients. Otherwise general practitioners were even less approachable than public hospitals, for Aboriginal people were rarely privately insured. Health insurance was not affordable for those people who would have most needed it; rather it benefited the middle class.⁹ Neither were Aboriginal people well able to utilise the Subsidised Medical Services scheme (SMS).¹⁰ The complex forms were too hard to complete for many Aboriginal people, who often were illiterate due to poor education. Submitting the forms required attendance in different places before a patient could receive a payment for a service under SMS. Furthermore, the benefit was calculated based on family income and

⁶ Mitchell, 'History', 42.

⁷ Sherry Siggers and Dennis Gray, 'Defining what we mean' in Bronwyn Carson, Terry Dunbar, Richard D. Chenhall and Ross Bailie (eds.), *Social Determinants of Indigenous Health* (Allen & Unwin: Crows Nest, Sydney, 2007), 6.

⁸ General Information, AMS introduction, 6.15, 97A48/66, Hollows, UNSW; 'Mum Shirl' to Aborigines', *Canberra Times*, 29 September 1972; Scott, *Problems and Needs of the Aboriginals of Sydney*, 1, 8-4, 8-10.

⁹ Dickey, *No Charity There*, 210, 212.

¹⁰ Hollows report to AMS council, 7 October 1971, AMS Council Meeting, 6.23.1, 97A48/66, Hollows, UNSW; Aboriginal Medical Service, part 1, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA; Dexter to Huey, 24 November 1971, part 1, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA; 'Aboriginal Medical Service', *New Dawn*, Vol. 2, No. 8, November 1971, 6-8.

not on family income per head, which meant that large families received smaller benefits than smaller families with the same income.¹¹

The Aboriginal Medical Service was started at the initiative of Gordon Briscoe and Shirley Smith in 1971. Briscoe later wrote how one night he, then a field officer for the Aboriginal Legal Service, and Shirley Smith visited a client in Chippendale. They found their client to be very ill and unable to pay for any treatment, though explanations of the man's situation differ.¹² Smith recalled that the client had been sitting for hours at a Sydney hospital waiting for treatment, but was refused because of his inability to pay.¹³ Gary Foley later recounted that the man had refused to go to hospital, because he would have been treated "like scum" by the white medical staff.¹⁴ These different versions share the same meaning about the many problems that Aboriginal people had in seeking and receiving medical help. More importantly, as Kathy Lothian writes, they all are "bound up with race and Aboriginal poverty and disadvantage in inner Sydney and continue to be familiar to many of its Aboriginal residents."¹⁵ The client's situation prompted Briscoe and Smith to organise a meeting with a plan to set up the Aboriginal Medical Service on the same lines as the pre-existing Aboriginal Legal Service.¹⁶

A small meeting was organised, in late June or early July in 1971, possibly at the premises of the South Sydney Community Aid (SSCA) to discuss setting up a medical service.¹⁷ Memories of who were present at the meeting vary. In addition to Gordon Briscoe and Shirley Smith many remember Dulcie Flower, Fred Hollows and John Russell, a social worker from the SSCA.¹⁸ Flower, from the Torres Strait Islands, was an active member of

¹¹ Notes on Subsidised Medical Services, Aboriginal Medical Services, 6, 97A48/70, Hollows, UNSW.

¹² President of Medical Service – Annual Report, part 2, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA. See also Aboriginal Medical Service, part 2, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA; Sykes with Stephen, 'Listen, Bud, Why didn't You Go to Hospital', C1696/10; Gary Foley, 'The History of the Aboriginal Medical Service – a Study in Bureaucratic Obstruction', part 4A, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA.

¹³ Shirley Smith in Colin Tatz (ed.), *Black Viewpoints: the Aboriginal experience* (Australia and New Zealand Book Co: Brookvale, 1975), 39; Smith, *Mum Shirl*, 74.

¹⁴ Pisarski, 'Interview with Gary Foley', 19. See also Foley, 'Teaching Whites a Lesson', 198; Olga Prokopovich, 'Aboriginal Health in Our Hands', *Black National Times*, 31 Jul 1975, 8.

¹⁵ Lothian, 'Seizing the Time', 194.

¹⁶ President of Medical Service – Annual Report, C1696/10. See also Aboriginal Medical Service, part 2, C1696/10; Sykes with Stephen, 'Listen, Bud, Why didn't You Go to Hospital', C1696/10; Foley, 'The History of the Aboriginal Medical Service', C1696/10.

¹⁷ Cf. e.g. List of persons present, 97A48/70; President of Medical Service – Annual Report, C1696/10; Smith in Tatz (ed.), *Black Viewpoints*, 39.

¹⁸ Dixon interviewed by the author, 26 June 2000; Smith, *Mum Shirl*, 74; Fred Hollows with Peter Corris, *Fred Hollows: an autobiography* (Balmain: Kerr, 1993), 100; Briscoe, *Racial Folly*, 157.

FCAATSI and had been its General Secretary and convened its health committee, as well as being a member of the APA and the Union of Australian Women.¹⁹ Records of the meeting list also other people who were present in the inaugural meeting: Ross McKenna, the Chairman of the Aboriginal Legal Services Management Committee; ALS Secretary Eddie Neumann; Ric Reiner, a medical student from Sydney University; Lily Svagelli, an Aboriginal trained nurse; Lyn Thompson, the Secretary of the NSW Aboriginal Lands Board; and Norma Williams, the wife of Gary Williams who was the Vice-President of the ALS.²⁰ Shirley Smith also remembers Elsa Dixon's early involvement.²¹

Universities were an important point of contact in mobilising non-Indigenous support for the Medical Service as with the Legal Service. Again accounts differ. Shirley Smith remembered getting in touch with Christine Jennett, a student from UNSW involved with the Aboriginal Legal Service, who introduced them to Fred Hollows, professor of Ophthalmology, and Ferry Grundseit, a paediatrician from the Prince of Wales Hospital.²² Hollows, however, recalled that Ross McKenna, who worked at the School of French at UNSW, pursued him persistently around campus with invitations to attend the meeting to discuss the establishment of a health service for Aboriginal people.²³ In both versions the connection that sparked Hollows' involvement with the Medical Service was made at the University.

Fred Hollows first became involved in Aboriginal issues after he attended a lecture by Frank Hardy, the author of *The Unlucky Australians*, in Sydney. Following the lecture Hollows was asked to examine the eyes of Donald Nangiari and Vincent Lingiari, who had been invited by the Gurindji committee to come to Sydney to publicise their land rights struggle. The Gurindji committee invited Hollows to visit the Wattie Creek camp in the Northern Territory. There he was shocked to find eye diseases that had not been seen in western society for generations. Ferry Grundseit and Barry Bascoe, an endocrinologist and

¹⁹ Curthoys, *Freedom Ride*, 11; 'Dulcie Flower', Collaborating for Indigenous Rights, National Museum Australia, <http://indigenoustrights.net.au/person.asp?pid=1005>, accessed 27 May 2013.

²⁰ List of persons present, 97A48/70; Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, 341.

²¹ Smith, *Mum Shirl*, 74. See also Dixon interviewed by the author, 26 June 2000.

²² Smith in Tatz (ed.), *Black Viewpoints*, 39.

²³ Hollows, *Fred Hollows*, 100.

general physician, also joined the trip to Wattie Creek and later became involved with the AMS.²⁴

At the meeting Aboriginal people presented their plan for the Medical Service and how it should be realised. According to Briscoe, some white people attending did not think the scheme could work, but nevertheless felt that “we were advocating a new field of medicine, for what we were advocating was equality of medical services that have, in the past, been denied to us by virtue of our inheritance of the poverty culture.”²⁵ The idea of ‘the culture of poverty’, according to which welfare dependency was associated with a distinctive culture which was passed from generation to generation, was popular in the 1950s but fell out of fashion during the 1970s.²⁶

The members of the AMS understood poverty as one of the reasons for Aboriginal health problems as it led to poor nutrition and hygiene, substandard housing and lack of clean water.²⁷ However, they also saw ill health in the historic context of colonisation.²⁸ The AMS submission to Senate Standing Committee on Social Environment in 1978 stated:

the creation of a different life-style, the building of a completely new environment, (urban, suburban), and the eradication of many of the native creatures which provided the life-food of the indigenous people – without creating possible avenues of access to alternative food-stuffs – was, in fact, the basis of ill-health of the Black Community as we see it today.²⁹

The AMS was launched shortly after during another meeting. Hollows and Paul Beaumont, also from the Department of Ophthalmology at UNSW, were given the task of finding medical staff to volunteer while Aboriginal people organised the Aboriginal staff for the

²⁴ Hollows, *Fred Hollows*, 87-91.

²⁵ President of Medical Service – Annual Report, C1696/10. See also G. Briscoe, ‘Towards a Health Programme for Aborigines’, Aboriginal Health Services Research Seminar, Centre for Research into Aboriginal Affairs, 14-17 May 1972, 3.

²⁶ Cronin, ‘Welfare dependency and mutual obligation’, 182.

²⁷ President of Medical Service, part 2, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA; Errol Simper, ‘The enormous challenge of Aboriginal Health’, *The Canberra Times*, 5 September 1977; AMS Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, 467, 469; Bobbi Sykes, ‘The Aboriginal Medical Service’, *New Doctor*, No. 8, April 1978, 16; Mayers to Imrie, 13 October 1978, part 7, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA.

²⁸ Aboriginal Medical Service Submission, 97A48/69; AMS Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, 466-468, 490; Aboriginal Medical Service Co-operative Ltd, *Seven Year Progress Report 1971-1978* (Sydney, 1979), 1.

²⁹ Aboriginal Medical Service Submission, 97A48/69.

AMS.³⁰ The fundamental principle of the AMS, like that of the ALS, was that the service would be controlled and run by Aboriginal people, and that Aboriginal personnel would provide services whenever possible. The first task of the Service was to set up a medical clinic in the Redfern area that would be staffed by a fully-qualified doctor and that would be free.³¹

Aboriginal people took up the leadership positions in the newly established Medical Service from the beginning. Like the ALS, the AMS had an elected council and management committee. Gordon Briscoe was elected as the first Chairman of the AMS Council. Michael Anderson was elected as the Vice-President and Cheryl Walker as the Secretary. However, there were also non-Indigenous members on the council. Fred Hollows was elected as the Medical Director, and John Russell as the Treasurer.³² The Council made the major constitutional and policy changes, such as ratifying the constitution or planning and launching health programs.³³

The Management Committee was responsible for running the daily affairs of the AMS.³⁴ Barbara Flick, from Collarenebri, who was training as a nurse in Sydney,³⁵ became the Chair of the Committee. It met fortnightly or even weekly to resolve funding and staffing problems, and to create programs such as a Nutrition Program.³⁶

The AMS practice opened in a less than 60 square meter shop front at 171 Regent Street on 20 July 1971. (See Appendix 1.) South Sydney Community Aid had made available their premises where they had previously operated the International Coffee Lounge for a short period of time.³⁷ The AMS was located across the road from the SSCA office, where the ALS would open in less than a week's time. It was on the same side of the road as, and halfway between, the Empress and Clifton pubs.³⁸ Shirley Smith described her first day at

³⁰ President of Medical Service – Annual Report, C1696/10; Hollows, *Fred Hollows*, 100.

³¹ Aboriginal Medical Service, part 1, C1696/10.

³² Aboriginal Medical Service Constitution, AMS Constitution, 6.16, 97A48/66, Hollows, UNSW; Introduction, AMS introduction, 6.15, 97A48/66, Hollows, UNSW.

³³ President of Medical Service – Annual Report, C1696/10.

³⁴ Aboriginal Medical Service Constitution, 97A48/66; Introduction, 97A48/66.

³⁵ Flick and Goodall, *Isabel Flick*, 61, 123.

³⁶ President of Medical Service – Annual Report, C1696/10.

³⁷ Aboriginal Medical Service, part 1, C1696/10; President of Medical Service – Annual Report, C1696/10; Aboriginal Medical Service, part 2, C1696/10; SSCA, 'Fourth Annual Report (1970/1971)', ALS, 6.3, 97A48/69, Hollows, UNSW.

³⁸ Aboriginal Medical Service, ALS, 97A48/69; Perkins to Director, 30 July 1971, C1696/10.

the Medical Service. She was sitting in 171 Regent Street when a man, with corduroy slacks and a Mickey Mouse shirt, came to the door:

And he had his hands in his pocket and a big bag. I said the coffee shop is shut. He said I'm Harry Freeman, I'm your doctor. I said you're a doctor? He said I'm Harry Freeman, I'm a headshrinker. I said you have to explain the word headshrinker. He said I am psychiatrist, GP and all that. But that is not important, where is [sic.] all the patients.

I had two red phones, a doctor with a big bag, a table with a rubber mattress on it and sheets, which were fixed up in a day.³⁹

In the early stages the clinic was open three hours every night except Mondays. The AMS also operated in the mornings on Saturdays and Sundays. During the first five weeks it provided 170 medical services.⁴⁰ Most of the patients came from the inner-city area, but some clients travelled as much as 96 kilometres, at a time when most Indigenous people did not have a car. The AMS also started to attract clients from the Western suburbs of Sydney where many Aboriginal people lived.⁴¹

The AMS saw itself initially as a self-help organisation, like the ALS.⁴² It employed Aboriginal people whenever possible from the beginning, as did the ALS.⁴³ This approach affirmed Aboriginal control of the organisation, but also provided benefit to the community in the form of employment opportunities. Positions, such as field-officer, clerical or cleaning staff did not require an extensive formal education that had been out of the reach of most Aboriginal people.⁴⁴ Importantly, as I discussed in the previous chapter, Indigenous staff had community connections, appropriate cultural knowledge and life-experience that were important assets when working for an Aboriginal organisation. They were able to ensure that the Aboriginal Medical Service was an Aboriginal space where the Aboriginal clientele could feel comfortable.

³⁹ Colleen Shirley Smith interviewed by Ros Bowden, *On their own terms: a profile of Mum Shirl's life*, CY MLOH 304/21, Mitchell Library.

⁴⁰ Aboriginal Medical Service, part 1, C1696/10; President of Medical Service – Annual Report, C1696/10.

⁴¹ 'Aboriginal health centre offers more than medicine', *AMA Gazette*, 14 December 1972; 'Medical service where the key is self-help', *SMH*, 30 December 1972; Meeting with Aboriginal Medical Service, 4 July [1975], part 4A, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA.

⁴² Belleair to Hawson, 3 November 1972, part 2, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA; Aboriginal Medical Service Submission, 97A48/69; 'Aboriginal Health is in Your Hands', *Tharunka*, 7 May 1975, 7.

⁴³ Introduction, 97A48/66.

⁴⁴ Mayers to Chaney, 13 February 1979, part 7, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA.

Preventative healthcare programs such as the Nutrition Program, which aimed to tackle the problem of poor diet that was particularly pressing among Aboriginal children, were an important part of the AMS's profile from the beginning. The AMS started a vegetable run in July 1971 with the funds raised by Shirley Smith and supplied 25 families with fresh vegetables.⁴⁵ Later the vegetable run grew into the Nutrition Program, under the direction of Ferry Grundseit. Smith recalled how Grundseit came to discuss a big breakout of impetigo among Aboriginal children in Sydney. He advised Smith that Aboriginal mothers should give their children apples and oranges to eat. Smith responded:

You're joking, because they give them \$57.20 a week and they're paying \$46 a week rent out of that, and the husband's got to pay his way to work. How can they afford to buy apples and oranges for ten kids and give to them every day?⁴⁶

The program aimed not only to provide nutritious food but also to educate about good diet. Its funding came from the Freedom from Hunger Campaign, an Australian aid organisation that had previously mainly funded projects in third world countries, as well as from direct donations.⁴⁷

Setting up the Medical Service created further Aboriginal space in the heart of Redfern and, together with the ALS, affirmed the Aboriginal presence in its cityscape. For the first time Aboriginal people were able to access a culturally appropriate medical service that was run by Aboriginal people. Moreover, the AMS started to make available preventative health care programs that catered for the needs of the Aboriginal community. As for the ALS, co-operation with non-Indigenous supporters, which I shall discuss in the following section, was crucial for the successful launch of the AMS.

⁴⁵ President of Medical Service – Annual Report, C1696/10.

⁴⁶ Smith in Tatz (ed.), *Black Viewpoints*, 40.

⁴⁷ *AMS Newsletter*, No. 7, October [1973], 2; *AMS Newsletter*, No. 11, February 1974, 6; *AMS Newsletter*, [No. 21, 1976], 2; Income and expenditure account for the six months ended 31 December 1976, part 5A, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA; *AMS Newsletter*, May 1977, 3; Income and expenditure account for the twelve months ended 30 June 1977, part 6, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA; Income and expenditure account for the twelve months ended 30 June 1978, part 7, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA; Income and expenditure account for the year ended 30 June 1979, part 8, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA.

Black and white co-operation

The AMS appeal for volunteers received an impressive response with the participation of many doctors and other medical practitioners, such as nutritionists, through Hollows and his colleagues' networks. During the first year the AMS relied solely on volunteer doctors. It had a roster of about 20 to 30 volunteer non-Indigenous doctors, who were hospital residents, specialists and general practitioners.⁴⁸ Many of them were well established in the medical field, for example Professor Llewellyn-Jones was the associate professor of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at Sydney University and Professor Beveridge from Paediatrics at the University of New South Wales.⁴⁹ Through the doctors the AMS was also able to arrange access to free specialist treatment or hospital admission for its patients when necessary.⁵⁰

Hollows' contribution to the establishment of the Medical Service is remembered with high regard by Aboriginal people. Chicka Dixon even recalled that Hollows covered the expenses of the field officer of the Medical Service during the first half year.⁵¹ Hollows reminisced that due to the lack of resources and poverty among Aboriginal people one also had to be ready to contribute financially. He wrote how you "never left a session at the centre with any money in your pocket."⁵²

The rotation of doctors made it difficult to provide the patients with continuity of treatment and a good doctor-patient relationship.⁵³ The AMS was able to employ a full-time doctor with the funding from the Office of Aboriginal Affairs after the first year.⁵⁴ Ross Macleod had worked with inner-city children, African-Americans and Latinos in New Haven, Connecticut, during his training. After returning to Australia he became aware of

⁴⁸ List of Participating Doctors, Aboriginal Medical Services, 6, 97A48/70, Hollows, UNSW; Malcolm Beilby, 'Answering the need', *The Australian*, 31 July 1971; 'Aboriginal health centre offers more than medicine', *AMA gazette*, President of Medical Service – Annual Report, C1696/10.

⁴⁹ Inaugural meeting of the Aboriginal Medical Service, 9 July [1971], Aboriginal Medical Services, 6, 97A48/70, Hollows, UNSW.

⁵⁰ Aboriginal Medical Service, part 1, C1696/10.

⁵¹ Dixon interviewed by the author, 26 June 2000. See also President of Medical Service – Annual Report, C1696/10; Sykes with Stephen, 'Listen, Bud, Why didn't You Go to Hospital', C1696/10. Fred Hollows was the only white supporter mentioned by Gary Foley during his show. Foley, *Foley*, Ilbjerri Theatre Company.

⁵² Hollows, *Fred Hollows*, 102.

⁵³ Hollows report to AMS council, 7 October 1971, 97A48/66; Aboriginal Medical Service, part 1, C1696/10; President of Medical Service – Annual Report, C1696/10.

⁵⁴ Dexter to Briscoe, 15 September 1972, part 1, R76/59, 1696/10, NAA; President of Medical Service – Annual Report, C1696/10.

the “appalling state of Aboriginal health and the general inequities which exist for Aborigines.”⁵⁵ McLeod noted in a newspaper interview at the time that his pay at the AMS was lower than he would have received in mainstream practice. However, this did not matter as being a doctor at the AMS was the job he wanted.⁵⁶ John Mackay was employed as another full-time doctor soon after in 1972.⁵⁷ In addition, the AMS continued to have volunteer doctors on roster to cover for evenings and weekends as well as to provide specialist services.

Work in the AMS posed medical practitioners with challenges that they had not encountered when working amongst non-Indigenous Australians. Hollows noted in a newspaper interview at the time that since the AMS opened “I’ve seen things I thought died out with the depression.”⁵⁸ The white doctors working for the AMS also had to be willing to recognise and overcome the barriers that had been built by racial stereotypes such as associating Aboriginal people with drunkenness, and that could lead to misdiagnosis and fatal outcomes.⁵⁹

Bobbi Sykes thought that good and open relations between Aboriginal and white people made it possible for the Medical Service to work so well. Sykes acted as the public relations officers of the AMS from 1973 to 1974 and again from the end of 1976 until early 1978. She recalled an anecdote about a doctor who once offended a patient by implying that she must have been drunk. The patient complained to Gordon Briscoe and Briscoe contacted Fred Hollows to ask his advice. Hollows suggested that it would be better if Briscoe as an Aboriginal discussed the issue with the doctor in question. According to Sykes, Briscoe felt apprehensive about approaching the white doctor, but related afterwards that the doctor had taken it very well, listened to him calmly, acknowledged that he had been wrong and suggested that he should apologise the patient.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ ‘Aboriginal health centre offers more than medicine’, *AMA gazette*.

⁵⁶ President of Medical Service – Annual Report, C1696/10; Joan Mooney, ‘Doctor helps poor’, *Daily Telegraph*, 7 October 1972; ‘Shame of a white Society’, *Daily Telegraph*, 7 October 1972; ‘Medical service where the key is self-help’, *SMH*.

⁵⁷ ‘Aboriginal health centre offers more than medicine’, *AMA gazette*.

⁵⁸ Beilby, ‘Answering the need’; Sykes with Johnson, ‘Listen, Bud, Why didn’t You Go to Hospital’, C1696/10.

⁵⁹ Cox, ‘Fear, Trust and Aborigines’, 84.

⁶⁰ Sykes with Stephen, ‘Listen, Bud, Why didn’t You Go to Hospital’, C1696/10.

Similarly to the staff at the ALS, doctors and field-officers working full-time for the AMS faced a heavy workload, even though they had the support of the volunteer doctors on roster.⁶¹ Macleod wrote how he, Mackay and Shirley Smith, the field officer, worked and were on call an average of 104 hours per week. In addition to the work he did at the clinic, Macleod reported that he received on average two or more phone calls at home plus home visits each day. He commented that even though doctors volunteered to work at the clinic two to three hours a day, they were not enthusiastic about being on call for the whole night or weekend. Often they also lived too far from the inner-city area.⁶² Shirley Smith observed that it was very hard to describe what she and others like her did, because it was a way of life.

If the door knocks in the middle of the night, we open it. If the phone rings, we answer it. Saturdays and Sundays run into each other. We can be up all night talking with some person who has that sort of problem, out at the prison at early morning, back at the Courts at 10 o'clock, at the Aboriginal Medical Service at mid-day, at the Children's Court in the afternoon, at a meeting to talk with some people about what we are doing in the evening, and likely as not, another meeting in the night.

Then when we get home at maybe midnight, there can be another phone message asking us to be somewhere urgently, or even someone sitting in the front room waiting all evening for the chance to talk. How can we say what we do?⁶³

From early on Aboriginal workers had an ambiguous position as mediators between the Aboriginal domain and the non-Aboriginal health system and doctors.⁶⁴ While non-Indigenous health professionals had defined areas of responsibility in the AMS, the Aboriginal staff and management of the AMS were responsible to their Aboriginal clients, for example when hiring and firing staff. At the same time they were also deploying non-Aboriginal professional authority.⁶⁵ Some patients were initially suspicious of non-Indigenous doctors. Shirley Smith recalled the time Muriel Williams (nee Coe), a respected elder among the Aboriginal people in Redfern and also known as Mother Williams, came

⁶¹ Aboriginal Medical Service, Seven Year Progress Report, 19.

⁶² Macleod to AMS council, AMS council meeting, 6.23.1, 97A48/66, Hollows, UNSW.

⁶³ Smith, *Mum Shirl*, 54-55.

⁶⁴ Rowse, *Remote Possibilities*, 59.

⁶⁵ See Patrick Sullivan, *Aboriginal Community Representative Organisations: Intermediate Cultural Processes in the Kimberley Region, Western Australia*, East Kimberley Working Paper 22, (Canberra: Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies, ANU, 1988), 18-19.

to the AMS when it was open for the first night.⁶⁶ She asked “Who is that gubbah, he does not look like a doctor?” when seeing Harry Freeman. Smith assured her that it was okay to go and see Dr Freeman.⁶⁷

The Aboriginal Medical Service, like other services, was set up at a time when the non-Indigenous population in Australia had become increasingly interested in Aboriginal issues. Among the medical profession this interest was reflected in the dramatic increase in the annual number of articles on Indigenous health in the *Medical Journal of Australia* after 1969.⁶⁸ In the minds of white people there was great enthusiasm and the belief that once the issues of Aboriginal health were recognised their problems would be rapidly resolved. Dulcie Flower recalls Hollows commenting that the AMS would become unnecessary in five years since by then Aboriginal health would be covered by the general health care system.⁶⁹

Some of the doctors working or volunteering for the AMS were influenced by left wing ideologies, as were the ALS supporters. However, among the AMS supporters these ideologies were perhaps more openly expressed. Fred Hollows had been a member of the Communist party in New Zealand and Britain.⁷⁰ In his memoir Hollows acknowledges the analysis of Paulo Freire, the author of the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, in helping him to avoid some of the mistakes middle class intellectuals make when trying to help the underprivileged.⁷¹ Some doctors were part of the counter culture or hippie movement that embraced communalism, non-materialism and spirituality. For example, the first volunteer doctor, Harry Freeman became involved with the Nimbin Aquarius festival in 1973 and moved to live and practise in a commune in Nimbin, which was soon to become the centre of counter culture in Australia.⁷² John Mackay also later moved to Nimbin.⁷³

⁶⁶ Smith, *Mum Shirl*, 39-40.

⁶⁷ Smith interviewed by Ros Bowden. See also Sykes with Stephen, ‘Listen, Bud, Why didn’t You Go to Hospital’, C1696/10.

⁶⁸ David Piers Thomas, *Reading Doctors’ Writing: Race, Politics and Power in Indigenous Health research, 1870-1969* (Acton, ACT: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2004), 135.

⁶⁹ Dulcie Flower interviewed in Donnaleen Camp and Rose Ellis, ‘The Aboriginal Medical Service, Redfern. Models of Excellence in Indigenous Community Health’, *Aboriginal and Islander Health Worker Journal*, Vol. 19, No. 4, July-August 1995, 13.

⁷⁰ Hollows, *Fred Hollows*, 57, 60, 69.

⁷¹ Hollows, *Fred Hollows*, 258.

⁷² ‘The other life of a rural doctor – Harry Freeman’, GPprofiles, Northern Rivers General Practice Network, <http://www.nrdgp.org.au/columns/gpprofiles/gpprofile169.html>, accessed 18 February 2009; Harry Freeman, Aquarius Stories, Nimbin Aquarius Foundation,

A letter by 'John' written to Hollows in 1974 provides an interesting glimpse of the thoughts and beliefs of one non-Indigenous person supporting Aboriginal struggle. 'John' was most likely a doctor that worked for or volunteered at the AMS, though I have been unable to establish his identity. He was inspired by Freire and called for more dialogue between blacks and whites. He noted that, as a white person, he needed to know more about "the consciousness of blacks involved in the struggle and how blacks see our role." By engaging in dialogue he hoped to minimise paternalism and "false generosity". On the other hand, he hoped to contribute to "the thinking of some blacks by emphasising the larger struggle against capitalism, imperialism, male domination and other forms of oppression." The other parties that he thought could be involved in the exchange of ideas were Builders Labourers Federation members and radical feminists.⁷⁴

Aboriginal activists had at times an uneasy relationship with the left wing ideologies promoted by some of their white supporters. Many Aboriginal people were critical of any ideology, including Marxism, that tried to redirect their movement away from its Aboriginal emphasis. Paul Coe was reported saying in a racism conference in Brisbane in 1972 that "Two hundred years ago your missionaries came out here and rammed your white Christian religion down our throats. Now you want to shove white Marxism down our throats."⁷⁵ Sykes commented a couple of years later on the party political alliances that Aboriginal activists made,

If the Liberal Party offer us food, we will take it. If the Labor Party offer us food, we will take it. If the Communists offer us food, we will take it. Because the people are bloody hungry!⁷⁶

The Aboriginal Medical Service also attracted people from religious denominations. For example, Sister Ignatius Jenkins, from the Sisters of Charity, worked at the Medical Service a few nights a week. She brought with her the support of St Vincent's Hospital and a

http://www.rainbowregion.com.au/aquarius/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=32&Itemid=34, accessed 18 February 2009..

⁷³ Mackay to AMS council, AMS Council Meeting, 6.23.1, 97A48/66, Hollows, UNSW; 'Aboriginal health centre offers more than medicine', *AMA Gazette*.

⁷⁴ John to Fred, 29 September 1974, AMS council meeting, 6.23.1, 97A48/66, Hollows, UNSW. See also Ros Harrison, 'How to improve Redfern AMS', Prof. C. Hollows, 97A48/67, Hollows, UNSW archives.

⁷⁵ John Alford, 'Racism Conference', Extract from *Lot's Wife*, 1972 in Paul Coe's ASIO file, Vol. I, C/59/51, A6119, NAA.

⁷⁶ Sykes in Nettheim (ed.), *Aborigines Human Rights and the Law*, 155.

connection to the Catholic Church.⁷⁷ Edmund Campion describes her as “skilful in transferring bits and pieces of hospital wear from St Vincent’s Hospital at Darlinghurst to the AMS.”⁷⁸ In his report Briscoe thanked Sister Ignatius for her “particular and unique understanding” of the problems that Aboriginal people faced.⁷⁹ Sister Ignatius had become familiar with Aboriginal people and culture during her childhood while playing with Aboriginal children under Aboriginal supervision at the Australian country side.⁸⁰ Father Christopher Sheehy, of St Patrick’s College, Manly, helped to deliver the vegetable run organised by the Medical Service. Hollows described Father Sheehy and his colleagues as radical priests.⁸¹ At the time different religious denominations were witnessing radical changes in theology that emphasised their role in the secular world answering the needs in humanity through service and social activism. For the Catholic nuns and priests supporting the AMS was inspired by the liberation theology and the Second Vatican Council (1962).⁸²

In addition to their support for the Medical Service, individual nuns also opened up institutional associations that would otherwise have been hard for Aboriginal people to access. For example, people were more likely to donate when approached by representatives of religious organisations. Sykes observed that when buying fruit and vegetables for the nutrition project at the market black Medical Service staff might have been perceived as threatening to white people, but when seeing “two little nuns” people would say “Don’t just take half a box – take a whole box.”⁸³

Non-Indigenous students and student organisations also provided support for the AMS. As well as financial support, they were involved with practical aspects of setting up and operating the AMS. In the early years university students together with Aboriginal people cleaned the AMS premises.⁸⁴ The UNSW student publication *Tharunka* financed the publication of a broadsheet that publicised the AMS. Students were also doing the

⁷⁷ President of Medical Service – Annual Report, C1696/10; ‘Aboriginal Ministry’, Sisters of Charity, <http://www.sistersofcharity.org.au/ministries/aboriginal.html>. Accessed 1 December 2008.

⁷⁸ Campion, *Ted Kennedy*, 100.

⁷⁹ President of Medical Service – Annual Report, C1696/10.

⁸⁰ Campion, *Ted Kennedy*, 100.

⁸¹ Leigh Bonheur, ‘Kids who go hungry’, *Daily Mirror*, part 1, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA; Smith interviewed by Ros Bowden; “‘Native aid’ gets more aid”, *The Herald*, 8 November 1972; Hollows, *Fred Hollows*, 103.

⁸² David Hilliard, ‘Religious Crisis of the 1960s: the experience of the Australian Churches’, *The Journal of Religious History*, Vol. 21, No. 2, June 1997, 212-213, 217.

⁸³ Bobbi Sykes, ‘Bobbi Sykes talks about the Aboriginal Medical Service, Redfern’, *Aboriginal Issues: Health*, Vol. 1, No.1, 1976, Centre for Research into Aboriginal Affairs, Monash University, 8.

⁸⁴ Smith interviewed by Ros Bowden; *AMS Newsletter*, No. 1, [1973], 1; *AMS Newsletter*, No. 9, 2.

statistical breakdown of the information that the AMS had gathered by the mid 1970s. With the help of students connections were made with the University of Sydney in order to establish an adult education program in community development that provided training opportunities for Aboriginal staff in the Redfern organisations.⁸⁵

The Trade Union movement was seen as important ally in lobbying the government. Trade Unions helped to print the *Aboriginal Medical Service Newsletter*.⁸⁶ The Builders' Labourers' Federation played an important part in supporting all the Indigenous organisations in Redfern, politically as well as practically, as I discuss in the previous chapter.⁸⁷ For example, the BLF helped to organise for a building supervisor to assist with the alterations to the new premises for the AMS in 1973.⁸⁸

Non-Indigenous supporters remained as active members of the AMS, where they did not face the same challenge to step aside as had occurred in the ALS. In fact, any person who accepted the rules of the AMS continued to be admitted as a member during the 1970s.⁸⁹ Sister Ignatius later became the director of the AMS.⁹⁰ Hollows also remained as the medical director of the AMS. Nevertheless, supporters such as Fred Hollows were committed to the idea of Aboriginal control and thought that it was essential for the Medical Service to be successful. As Briscoe, Hollows and Flower noted in their application to the government:

It would be easy for the A.M.S. to become a "white" charity organisation but we are mindful of the danger of being engulfed with well-intentioned white supporters to the detriment of the often timid Aboriginal workers.⁹¹

⁸⁵ Dennis Walker, Public Relations Report, Prof. C. Hollows, 97A48/67, Hollows, UNSW; 'Aboriginal Health is in Your Hands', *Tharunka*, 7-10.

⁸⁶ *AMS Newsletter*, No. 3, [1973], 1; *AMS Newsletter*, No. 10, January 1974, 6; *AMS Newsletter*, October 1977, 1.

⁸⁷ 'Public Relations', *Tharunka*.

⁸⁸ Minutes of the Council Meeting, 6 March 1973, AMS Council Meeting, 6.23.1, 97A48/66, Hollows, UNSW.

⁸⁹ Belleair to Howson, 3 November 1972, part 2, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA; Mackenzie to Mitchell, Malone, 7 July 1975, part 4b, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA.

⁹⁰ Campion, *Ted Kennedy*, 101.

⁹¹ Introduction, 97A48/66.

Health in the hands of women

Aboriginal women had a central role in the AMS from its inception, unlike in the ALS. This reflected the way responsibility for the health of the Aboriginal community was in the hands of the women.⁹² Of the 34 members of the first AMS council fourteen were Aboriginal women, two were black women and seven were Aboriginal men. Eleven members were white. It seems likely that the non-Indigenous members were mostly men. They all were titled as Doctor, Professor or Mister and in the early 1970s most academic and medical professions were still dominated by men in Australia.⁹³

Women were also strongly present among the Indigenous staff of the AMS. From the beginning the AMS was able to employ an Aboriginal nurse Sally Gould, who was replaced by Marjorie Baldwin during the first year.⁹⁴ Baldwin came from Cairns in Queensland and had spent a year working in New Zealand.⁹⁵ The receptionists were also commonly women.⁹⁶

Health services became the preferred choice of employment for Aboriginal women, once they were able to access professional or higher education. In this they followed the division of labour that had existed on many missions, where female missionaries were responsible for health and education. These areas were underdeveloped and minimal, which was reflected in the way that responsibility for them was often assigned to the wives of the male missionaries without further consideration or pay.⁹⁷

Naomi Mayers, who was from Cummeragunja and a niece of Doug Nicholls, started her long career at the AMS in 1973 as a secretary and organiser. She then became the administrator of the AMS. Mayers had become involved with Indigenous rights when she

⁹² Bobbi Sykes, 'White Doctors & Black Women', *New Doctor*, No. 8, April 1978, 34.

⁹³ List of proposed members of the Council, Aboriginal Medical Services, 6, 97A48/70, Hollows, F.C, UNSW; Aboriginal Medical Service – Constitution, AMS Constitution, 6.16, 97A48/66, Hollows, UNSW.

⁹⁴ President of Medical Service – Annual Report, C1696/10. See also Minutes of the meeting, 25 June 1974, AMS council meeting, 6.23.1, 97A48/66, Hollows, UNSW.

⁹⁵ Roger Bush, 'An Aussie Angel in the Redfern Ghetto', Aboriginal Medical Services, 6, 97A48/70, Hollows, UNSW.

⁹⁶ List of Members of Aboriginal Receptionist Roster, Aboriginal Medical Services, 6, 97A48/70, Hollows, UNSW. The names included in this roster list for receptionists were Isobel Coe, Alanna Doolan, Donna Rusca [sic.], Lyn Thompson and Norma Williams.

⁹⁷ Gwenda Baker, 'Only Teachers, Nurses and Wives': Women on Methodist Missions in Arnhem Land', *Hecate*, Vol. 33, No. 1, 2007, 202, 204-206.

joined the Aboriginal Advancement League in Victoria at 17. Later, together with Gordon Briscoe, she chaired the National Tribal Council. She had also worked for the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs in Melbourne and trained as a nurse. Mayers was a member of the *Sapphires*, an Aboriginal girl group that toured around Australia in the 1960s and 1970s. Part of the group also toured in Vietnam entertaining the American troops, though Maeyrs did not join them.⁹⁸ She received an Order of Australia Medal in 1984 and is still the CEO of the AMS.

Shirley Smith was the first field officer of the AMS. In this role she was responsible for client follow-up, liaising with other agencies and resolving social welfare problems in general. Field officers often also initiated the first contact between the patient and the AMS. The field officer conducted field trips to rural areas, home visits, hospital visits and prison visits. Field officers were also visited at the AMS office and received calls after hours at home.⁹⁹ Smith remembered the many home visits she made in Gordon Briscoe's Volkswagen: "That little car drove us all around the suburbs, out to people's homes in the middle of the night, so many midnight trips..."¹⁰⁰ Few Aboriginal people in Sydney had a car at that time, as was noted by Hollows who also remembered Briscoe's Volkswagen.¹⁰¹

Smith had for a long time worked to help children and unmarried mothers in Redfern, in addition to her visits to prisons. Her appointment as a field officer allowed her to continue to expand her work among the community with the support and networks that the AMS had to offer. Smith was a member of the Pauline Society, and on the Council of the Aboriginal Legal Service.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ 'National Tribal Council Conference', *New Dawn*, April, 1971, 1; Shelley Gare, 'Aboriginal Woman: the power behind the man', *Cleo*, 29, March 1975, 49; top(100), *the (sydney) magazine*, Issue 57, January 2008, 48; Philippa Hawker, 'Reel deal: singing Sapphires shine in the afterglow', *SMH*, 4 August 2012, <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/reel-deal-singing-sapphires-shine-in-the-afterglow-20120803-23ksm.html>, accessed 31 October 2012.

⁹⁹ Aboriginal Medical Service Submission, 97A48/69; Field Officer activities, 10 April 1975, Prof C. Hollows, 97A48/67, Hollows, UNSW; Sykes, 'The Aboriginal Medical Service', 18; Aboriginal Medical Service, Seven Year Progress Report, 18; S.J. Duckett and J.M Ellen, *The Aboriginal Medical Service in Sydney* (Sydney: School of Health Administration, UNSW), Australian Studies in Health Service Administration, No. 36, 1979, 2.

¹⁰⁰ Smith, *Mum Shirl*, 76.

¹⁰¹ Hollows, *Fred Hollows*, 100.

¹⁰² Aboriginal Medical Service, part 1, C1696/10; President of Medical Service – Annual Report, C1696/10; Sarah Malik, 'Saint of Redfern remembered 'Mum' Shirl (1924-1998)', March 2008, *The South Sydney Herald*. The Society of St Paul was founded by Fr. Giacomo Alberione in Italy in 1914, and later established in Australia in 1952. Its members are know as Paulines. <http://society.stpauls.com.au/default.htm>; <http://www.stpauls.it/istit/ing/default.htm>, accessed 21 September 2009.

However, despite their central role in activism Aboriginal women often remained invisible to the outside community. Pat Eatock, for example, argues that the land rights movement would not have survived without hundreds of Aboriginal women, who have often remained nameless to the wider public.¹⁰³ Elsa Dixon, together with her husband Chicka Dixon, was one of the older generation of activists guiding the young Aboriginal men and women in Sydney.¹⁰⁴ She was described by her husband as a central figure in the AMS, and acted as its President until 1993.¹⁰⁵ A contemporary ASIO document described her as the “dominant partner” of the marriage.¹⁰⁶ In the written records the first mention of Elsa Dixon’s involvement is from 1973 when she was heading the women’s committee together with Jenny Bush, from Darwin.¹⁰⁷ The following year her name is mentioned as the Vice-President of the Medical Service.¹⁰⁸ She was also involved in the council and the management committee of the Medical Service. Later in 1977 the Elsa Dixon became a member of the Board of Directors.¹⁰⁹ Yet, there are few traces of Dixon’s work in the contemporary media or other published sources.

Avoiding dependency

The Liberal government had to be convinced of the genuine need for the Aboriginal Medical Service, unlike the ALS which had found it relatively easy to attract government funding. It was difficult to convince white officials of the special health needs among Aboriginal people in Sydney and that the existing medical services and hospitals were not

¹⁰³ Pat Eatock, ‘There’s a Snake in My Garavan’ in Jocelynne A. Scutt (ed.), *Different Lives* (Ringwood, Harmondsworth, New York, Markham, Auckland: Penguin Books, 1987), 24.

¹⁰⁴ ‘Who was Elsa Dixon’, State Training Services, Department of Education and Communication, https://www.training.nsw.gov.au/forms_documents/programs_services/aboriginal_services/elsa_dixon_background.pdf, accessed 9 November 2012.

¹⁰⁵ Dixon interviewed by the author, 26 June 2000.

¹⁰⁶ Information re Aboriginal organisations and identities, 24 February, 1972, Coe, Paul Thomas Ernest, Vol. 2, C/59/51, A6119, NAA.

¹⁰⁷ ‘Success – colour it black’, *SMH*, 25 July 1973, Look! section; Hollows to Laing, 29 March 1973, Aboriginal Medical Service, 6, 97A48/70, Hollows, UNSW.

¹⁰⁸ AMS Council Meeting, 20 August 1974, AMS Council Meeting, 6.23.1. 97A48/66, Hollows, UNSW; AMS Council Meeting, 3 September 1974, AMS Council Meeting, 6.23.1. 97A48/66, Hollows, UNSW; AMS Council Meeting, 1 October 1974, AMS Council Meeting, 6.23.1. 97A48/66, Hollows, UNSW.

¹⁰⁹ See e.g. AMS council meeting, 6 March 1973, AMS Council Meeting, 6.23.1, 97A48/66, Hollows, UNSW; AMS management committee meeting, 10 September 1973, 97A48/67, Hollows, UNSW; Council Meeting, 22 January 1974, AMS Council Meeting, 6.23.1, 97A48/66, Hollows, UNSW; AMS Council Meeting, 6 August 1974, AMS Council Meeting, 6.23.1. 97A48/66, Hollows, UNSW; Board of Directors, 28 July 1977, part 5A, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA; Board of Directors, [November 1978], part 7, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA.

able to respond to these needs.¹¹⁰ Even though after the 1967 referendum Federal funding for Indigenous health expanded, much attention had been directed towards the Indigenous people in remote areas.¹¹¹ Nevertheless, by actively persisting the AMS managed to receive its first grant of \$1,000 in October 1971.¹¹² In March 1972 Nugget Coombs, from the Council for Aboriginal Affairs, reported back to the DAA the AMS's need for new premises and a doctor,¹¹³ whom the AMS then employed in the following September. Altogether the Medical Service received \$13,000 from the OAA during its first year.¹¹⁴ As the need for the AMS became better recognised government funding steadily increased. The OAA operating under the Liberal government granted it \$29,000 for the following financial year, from 1972 to 1973.¹¹⁵

The OAA perceived the AMS's no fees structure as problematic. Barrie Dexter feared that it would encourage welfare dependency. Dexter also perceived it to be important that the Medical Service would show some voluntary financing and effort to achieve it, and thus assure the OAA that it would avoid creating dependency.¹¹⁶ Dependency came to be seen as a moral or psychological condition, rather than as social relations of subordination in the post-industrial society, once much of the legal and political dependency of white men and women was abolished. This view of dependency had started to develop in the 19th century as wage-labour had become increasingly normative and definitive of independence, and those who were excluded from wage labour appeared to personify dependency. Among the principal icons of dependency in the new industrial semantics was the 'colonial native', a European category into which Aboriginal people were fitted. While in the earlier use the 'natives' were perceived to be dependent because they were conquered, in 19th century imperial culture it was argued that they were conquered because they were dependent. Racism then helped to transform dependency as political subjection, as it had been

¹¹⁰ Briscoe, Hollows, Flower to Coombs, 30 August 1971, part 1, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA; Dexter to Huey, 24 November 1971, C1696/10; .

¹¹¹ Anderson, 'The Colonial Medicine of Settler States', 3.

¹¹² Dexter to Huey, 3 August 1971, part 1, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA; Long to Huey, 27 August 1971, part 1, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA; Dexter to Coombs, 8 October 1971, part 1, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA.

¹¹³ Dexter to Huey, Long, 17 March 1972, part 1, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA.

¹¹⁴ Dexter to Briscoe, 15 September 1972, 1696/10; President of Medical Service – Annual Report, C1696/10; Gary E. Foley, 'The history of the Aboriginal Medical Service – A Study in Bureaucratic Obstruction', part 4A, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA.

¹¹⁵ Dexter to Briscoe, 15 September 1972, 1696/10; Press statement, 13 October 1972, part 1, R76/59, 1696/10, NAA.

¹¹⁶ Dexter to Huey, 3 August 1971, C1696/10; Dexter to the Director of Aboriginal Welfare, 5 October 1971, part 1, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA.

perceived during the pre-industrial era, into dependency as psychology.¹¹⁷ Moreover, in the Indigenous context, the term 'welfare dependency' came to reflect not only on the individual, but also on the Indigenous people as a minority group.¹¹⁸

The AMS responded to the government requirement of voluntary funding by collecting donations. It had a social committee that organised fundraising events such as theatre parties, concerts and literary nights together with other supporting bodies such as university student unions.¹¹⁹ (See Appendix 2.) The AMS's fundraising fitted smoothly with the pre-existing culture of seeing health work as charity. Lady Mary Fairfax was listed as a member of the AMS appeal committee in 1972.¹²⁰ Marjorie Baldwin, the Aboriginal nurse at the AMS, competed in the Miss Australia Contest in 1972, and was able to use this avenue to help raise funding for the Service.¹²¹ The AMS received \$300 from Abschol at UNSW and \$135 from the same organisation at the University of Sydney as well as \$950 in other donations during the first financial year of its operations.¹²² Donations were used to operate the vegetable run and provide social work. In 1973 Sykes thanked the donors:

And then, there are the people who gave – and gave – and gave. Pensioners who know the misery of true poverty, giving their 'mighty' mite to ease the suffering of others, children who collected cents from their school-mates until they had dollars, people who regularly put aside a dollar (or a few) from their own incomes each week, people who dipped into their pockets every time we asked (and often before we'd asked) – these are the people who made it possible.¹²³

Non-Indigenous people would have been more willing to donate to the AMS as they would have perceived Aboriginal health work, and an organisation run by women, as non-threatening.

¹¹⁷ Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, 'A Genealogy of 'Dependency' Tracing a Keyword of the U.S. Welfare State' in Nancy Fraser *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the 'Postsocialist' Condition* (Routledge: New York, London, 1997), 128-129, 135-142.

¹¹⁸ Cronin, 'Welfare dependency and mutual obligation', 185.

¹¹⁹ Minutes of the Meeting, 22 November 1971, AMS minutes of the Meeting, 97A48/67, Hollows, UNSW; AMS Auxillary, November 1972, Aboriginal Medical Service, 6, 97A48/70, Hollows, UNSW; 'Following mother's example', *SMH*, 21 November 1972; *AMS Newsletter*, No. 16, June 1975, 4; Advertisement, *Tharunka*, 7 May 1975. See also 'Aboriginal Medical Service', *Identity*, Vol. 1, No. 3, January 1972, 41.

¹²⁰ Minutes of the Management Committee Meeting, 24 August 1972, AMS Management Meetings, 6.23.2., 97A48/67, Hollows, UNSW.

¹²¹ President of Medical Service – Annual Report, C1696/10; 'More than just a pretty face', *SMH*, 17 August 1972.

¹²² Total income up to 22 November 1971, part 1, R76/59, 1696/10, NAA; Introduction, 97A48/66.

¹²³ *AMS Newsletter*, No. 9, 2.

The AMS was also able to attract support from businesses. A donor donated a typewriter. Together with the ALS, the AMS had a use of an answering service that was utilised to contact the doctors on roster.¹²⁴ The Medical Service also had a team of volunteer car drivers to transport patients, particularly mothers with children, to and from the clinic.¹²⁵ Even after the AMS started to receive more substantial government funding, it continued to receive offers of co-operation, though based on the primary source material it is not possible to tell whether these offers were taken up. Pathology Services offered to train a nurse to work at the AMS and pay her salary and Barand Hearing Aids offered to organise a field trip to country areas and to fit appropriate aids to Aboriginal children.¹²⁶

The Medical Service also needed to obtain resources such as pharmaceutical products until full funding became available from the government. The Prince of Wales Hospital provided medical supplies for the use of the AMS in the early stages.¹²⁷ In his autobiography Hollows recalls how he and some other members of the AMS “plundered the Prince of Wales Hospital for equipment – stethoscopes, thermometers, scales, all the accoutrements of a medical practice, we shamelessly stole.”¹²⁸ When doctors realised that Aboriginal patients had no money to purchase the medication prescribed to them, these were also picked up from the Prince of Wales Hospital.¹²⁹ The AMS also used donation money to help Aboriginal patients to buy medicines.¹³⁰ Drug companies donated vitamins, though in some cases these were reported to have passed their use by date, revealing the darker side of the charity.¹³¹

The AMS set up a public relations section in order to attract independent funding and to create a support base within the black and the white communities.¹³² Bobbi Sykes was

¹²⁴ Aboriginal Medical Service meeting, 5 March 1972, AMS Council Meeting, 6.23.1, 97A48/66, Hollows, UNSW; Introduction, 97A48/66; AMS invitation to the meeting, Aboriginal Medical Service, 6, 97A48/66, Hollows, UNSW; Ignatius Jenkins to Dear friend, 6 November 1972, Aboriginal Medical Service, 6, 97A48/70, Hollows, UNSW; Minutes of General Meeting, part 1, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA.

¹²⁵ Aboriginal Medical Service, part 1, C1696/10.

¹²⁶ Minutes of the Council Meeting, 20 August 1974, AMS Council Meeting, 6.23.1, 97A48/66, Hollows, UNSW; Wickens to Hollows, 4 January 1973, Preventicare, 6.13, 97A48/69, Hollows, UNSW.

¹²⁷ Beilby, ‘Answering the need’.

¹²⁸ Hollows, *Fred Hollows*, 101.

¹²⁹ Hollows, *Fred Hollows*, 101.

¹³⁰ Aboriginal Medical Service, part 1, C1696/10.

¹³¹ *AMS Newsletter*, No. 4, June 1973, 1.

¹³² *AMS Newsletter*, No. 1, 1; Dennis Walker, Public Relations Report, Prof. C. Hollows, 97A48/67, Hollows, UNSW; Mayers to Powell, 14 January 1974, part 2, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA; ‘Public Relations’, *Tharunka*; Meeting with Aboriginal Medical Service, 4 July [1975], C1696/10.

employed as the first public relations officer in 1973.¹³³ Later Dennis Walker, Gary Foley, John Newfong and Bob Morgan also acted as public relations officers.¹³⁴ One of the responsibilities of the public relations officer was to produce the *Aboriginal Medical Service Newsletter*, which had a circulation of approximately 700 in June 1973.¹³⁵ It reported on the Medical Service's projects and development as well as Indigenous affairs in general. It contained political comments and made space for Indigenous viewpoints. The Medical Service's ability to attract independent funding and support was crucial for its operations, though small in scale during the early years. Later during the 1970s fundraising became the central strategy in providing the AMS some independence, as I will discuss later in this chapter.

Frustrated with Labor

After the election of the Whitlam government, and the establishment of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, the AMS continued to attract more government funding.¹³⁶ By October 1973 the newly formed DAA was sufficiently convinced of the importance of the AMS that it guaranteed salaries for the AMS's professional staff, two medical officers and three nurses, for three years from July 1973.¹³⁷ For the financial year from 1973 to 1974 the DAA granted the AMS \$72,525. Arrangements were also made for the AMS to use the government store at the Prince of Wales to provide pharmaceuticals.¹³⁸ The funds granted to the AMS were less than a third of the funding granted to the Aboriginal Legal Service. The difference is explained by the fact that the ALS was made responsible for delivering the government pledge of free legal representation for Aboriginal people in New South Wales. The AMS, on the other hand, was funded for local operation and in competition with existing mainstream health care services.

¹³³ Sykes to the Aboriginal Medical Service Council, 6 March 1973, AMS council meeting, 6.23.1, 97A48/66, Hollows, UNSW; Minutes of the Management Committee Meeting, 10 September 1973, AMS management meetings, 6.23.2, 97A48/67, Hollows, UNSW.

¹³⁴ E.g. *AMS Newsletter*, No. 18, November 1975, 3; *AMS Newsletter*, No. 19, January 1976, 2; *AMS Newsletter*, February 1978, 4.

¹³⁵ *AMS Newsletter*, No. 4, 1.

¹³⁶ Dexter to Briscoe, 15 September 1972, part 1, R76/59, 1696/10, NAA; Statement of Receipts and Payments, part 2, R76/59, 1696/10, NAA; Report on application for funds, 8 March 1976, part 4, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA.

¹³⁷ Dexter to Mayers, 3 October 1973, part 2, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA.

¹³⁸ Jago to Hollows, 30 March 1973, Aboriginal Medical Service, 6, 97A48/70, Hollows, UNSW.

At the same time as the AMS and other Aboriginal organisations were established in Redfern, there was a rapid increase in the number of welfare organisations in Australia. Over 400 self-help groups were set up in Australia in the 1970s.¹³⁹ Melanie Oppenheimer argues that the dramatic increase in the voluntary sector was stimulated by the Australian Assistance Plan set up by the Whitlam government.¹⁴⁰ However, it is important to note that Indigenous people started to set up the Redfern organisations *before* the Whitlam government came to power. The Aboriginal Legal and Medical Services were established in 1970 and 1971, retrospectively. The Black Theatre had already commenced operations, and Murawina and the Aboriginal Housing Company were conceived of, before the Whitlam government came to power. Nevertheless, with the Labor government welfare became a more central concern and its agenda advocated the need for structural change to fight poverty.¹⁴¹ As a consequence Indigenous organisations also benefited from increased levels of funding.

The 171 Regent Street office was soon found to be too small to successfully run the growing Medical Service. For example, the AMS was offered dental services with the help of qualified dentists soon after its establishment, but the premises at 171 Regent Street were inadequate for this.¹⁴² The AMS was able to acquire bigger premises at 191-193 Regent Street in early 1973. However it was not able to start renovating the premises to be suitable for medical centre until half a year later.¹⁴³ Sykes reported in the *Aboriginal Medical Service Newsletter* that the move was delayed because their first application to the South Sydney City Council to renovate was lost in the mail in January 1973. Another copy was handed in by Dr MacLeod, but it was not recorded as received by the City Council when inquired by the AMS. Finally Mayers took a lawyer with her to hand in a third copy of the application to the Council, upon which the second copy was also found.¹⁴⁴ A permit to renovate was finally received in June 1973.¹⁴⁵ At the time, the Council had an ALP majority that, however, opposed the Federal government's support for the Aboriginal projects in

¹³⁹ Garton, *Out of Luck*, 160.

¹⁴⁰ Melanie Oppenheimer, 'Voluntary Action, Social Welfare and the Australian Assistance Plan in the 1970s', *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 2, June 2008, 176.

¹⁴¹ Mendes, *Australia's Welfare Wars Revisited*, 25-27.

¹⁴² Aboriginal Medical Service, part 1, C1696/10; Minutes of General Meeting, 7 October 1971, C1696/10. See also Report to Council, 8 October 1971, part 1, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁴³ Mayers to Johnston, 14 July 1975, part 4B, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁴⁴ *AMS Newsletter*, No. 3, 1.

¹⁴⁵ *AMS Newsletter*, No. 4, 1.

Redfern.¹⁴⁶ This chain of events indicates continuing local non-Indigenous resistance to the Aboriginal presence in Redfern. Murawina, the Black Theatre and in particular the Aboriginal Housing Company also experienced similar prejudice and resistance in their attempts to establish themselves in the cityscape of Redfern as I will discuss in the following chapters.

Soon after its struggle with the local Council, the AMS started to express frustration with the slow pace of change under the Federal Labor government. The *Aboriginal Medical Service Newsletter* expressed doubts about whether the government was just paying lip-service to the policy of self-determination, while in the end deciding 'what is best' for Aboriginal people.¹⁴⁷ Aboriginal activists increasingly demanded Aboriginal control of the DAA.¹⁴⁸ The AMS's resistance to increased government control and scrutiny grew after the establishment of the Operations Management Branch and the increased monitoring of the use of funds. The DAA was seen as limiting rather than facilitating Aboriginal self-determination. In protest against the government the AMS took part in re-erecting the Tent Embassy on the lawns of the Parliament house in October 1974, which I discussed in Chapter 2.¹⁴⁹

Among the AMS activists there was, at times, a strong feeling that the DAA was not there to help and support the AMS operations, but rather to monitor, control and even undermine. The issue causing most frustration among AMS staff were the delays in receiving funding from the DAA for each quarter.¹⁵⁰ For example, the interim grant for July, August and September 1974 was received in November 1974.¹⁵¹ Naomi Mayers wrote in her correspondence to the DAA in May 1975, "I feel that the AMS seems to be banging

¹⁴⁶ Chris Hector and Jean Buckley, 'The unrest of black Redfern', *Nation Review*, 30 March 1973 – 5 April 1973; 'Work started on Aborigines' homes project', *SMH*, 17 April 1973; Cameron Forbes, 'Heartland of underprivileged', *The Age*, 6 June 1973.

¹⁴⁷ *AMS Newsletter*, No. 8, November 1973, 1.

¹⁴⁸ Pittock, *Beyond White Australia*, 33.

¹⁴⁹ Dexter to Mayers, 6 August 1974, part 2, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA; Minutes of the Council Meeting, 5 November 1974, AMS Council Meeting, 6.23.1, 97A48/66, Hollows, UNSW; Organisation for Aboriginal Unity, 97A48/69; *AMS Newsletter*, No. 14, 1-3; *Student Action for Aboriginal Australians Newsletter*, 97A48/69.

¹⁵⁰ Foley, 'The History of the Aboriginal Medical service', C1696/10; AMS Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, 524.

¹⁵¹ *AMS Newsletter*, No. 14, 4.

its head against a brick wall whenever we submit for funds to enlarge our activities”.¹⁵²

Gary Foley stated in the *Aboriginal Medical Service Newsletter* that the DAA continually “sought to restrict our operations, limit our efficiency, destroy our morale and effectiveness and to silence our criticism of themselves.”¹⁵³

Aboriginal activists and non-Indigenous bureaucrats operated under different ideas of self-determination from the early days of the DAA. The AMS was aiming to build a lasting Aboriginal space – an institution that would serve its people’s changing health needs in the present and in the future. Mayers argued that many of the so called special needs and special problems were not special at all. She pointed out that, for example, Aboriginal staff, central to the AMS operations, created for Aboriginal people a sense of familiarity and security that white people could take for granted.¹⁵⁴

However, self-determination as a government policy, like the earlier policy of assimilation, implied acculturation.¹⁵⁵ The DAA viewed the AMS, similarly to the ALS, as ultimately a temporary measure.¹⁵⁶ It hoped that when the health of Indigenous people improved and non-Indigenous medical services became more inclusive there would be no need for special services such as the AMS. Gordon Bryant saw Aboriginal services existing under similar separate policies and special legislations such as those governing aged pensions, widowed pensions and child endowment, rather than under the concept of Indigenous self-determination. He saw the white backlash towards Aboriginal policies and legislation as a serious issue and noted in 1974:

There has developed a genuine concern in the minds of many serious and thoughtful people in our community, public servants, jurists, politicians and church leaders, and their concern has found a voice through the media that to single out a racial group for advantageous treatment is not only intrinsically wrong but could well attract obverse activity on ill-informed prejudice.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵² Mayers to Bissaker, 13 May 1975, part 4, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA. See also Mayers to Imrie, 13 October 1978, C1696/10; Sykes, ‘Bobbi Sykes talks about the Aboriginal Medical Service, Redfern’, 7; Smith, *Mum Shirl*, 46.

¹⁵³ *AMS Newsletter*, No. 18, 1.

¹⁵⁴ Aboriginal Medical Service Submission, 97A48/69. See also See e.g. Briscoe, ‘Towards a Health Programme for Aborigines’, 6; *AMS Newsletter*, No. 8, 1; *AMS Newsletter*, No. 18, 2.

¹⁵⁵ Rowse, *Indigenous Futures*, 231.

¹⁵⁶ See e.g. Cooper to Long, 22 September 1971, part 1, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA;

¹⁵⁷ Gordon Bryant in Garth Nettheim (ed.), *Aborigines Human Rights and the Law* (Australia and New Zealand Book Company: Sydney, 1974), 156.

According to him, anyone supporting the advancement of Indigenous people had to be prepared to persuade 13 million non-Aboriginal people that Aboriginal services were justified.¹⁵⁸ Stuart Bradfield argues that even when “distinct Aboriginality is recognised, that recognition only takes place to the extent that the State can maintain, and extend, its control over a separate Indigenous political identity.”¹⁵⁹

The introduction of Medibank in July 1975 created a hope among the members of the AMS that it could become independent of the DAA.¹⁶⁰ In August 1975 Gary Foley made statements in the *SMH* in which he declared that the AMS would refuse any further finance from the government.¹⁶¹ He also told the representatives of the DAA that the AMS needed no more funding from the DAA.¹⁶² However, the Medibank claims alone were not equivalent to the funding that had been received from the DAA. The DAA documents also indicate that the number of patients declined after the introduction of Medibank.¹⁶³ Possibly Aboriginal patients found it more affordable to use other health services. It also became apparent that claiming fees from Medibank was problematic. In order to be able to process the claim the AMS needed the patient’s Medibank number or some other form of identification with a date of birth, both of which were sometimes hard for Aboriginal people to obtain.¹⁶⁴

Despite the AMS’s frustration with the government control, its DAA funding for the financial year ending in 1975 was \$142,557, almost double that of the previous year.¹⁶⁵ Between August 1975 and April 1976 it provided 15,950 services for patients in the clinic, while a further 3,425 services were provided by the clinical staff in patients’ homes. The Nutrition Program covered 75 families. Two special clinics had also been developed: an Under Five’s Clinic that aimed to encourage mothers to bring young children to the clinic

¹⁵⁸ Bryant in Garth Nettheim (ed.), *Aborigines Human Rights and the Law*, 160.

¹⁵⁹ Stuart Bradfield, ‘Separatism or Status Quo?: Indigenous affairs from the birth of land rights to the death of ATSIC’, *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. 52, No 1, 2006, 96.

¹⁶⁰ R.B. Scotton and C.R. Macdonald, *The Making of Medibank*, Australian Studies in Health Service Administration, No. 76, (Kensington: School of Health Services Management, 1993), 25; *AMS Newsletter*, No. 17, August 1975, 1; *AMS Newsletter*, No. 18, 15. See also Sobey to Johnson, 28 September 1975, part 4, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA; Walton to Nettle, 25 February 1976, part 4, R65/59, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁶¹ ‘Aborigines will pay for their own health service’, *SMH*, 6 August 1975. See also *AMS Newsletter*, no. 17; *AMS Newsletter*, no. 18;

¹⁶² Martin to Secretary, November [1975], part B, R76/59, NAA C1696/10.

¹⁶³ Report of application for funds, 8 March 1976, part 4, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁶⁴ AMS Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, 541.

¹⁶⁵ Income and expenditure account for the year ended 30 June 1975, part 4, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA.

for a routine check-up and a Fitness Clinic aimed at preventing, for example, obesity, diabetes, and atherosclerotic conditions.¹⁶⁶ The AMS employed 25 people of whom the only non-Aboriginal people were three full-time doctors and two part-time doctors.¹⁶⁷

Aiming for expansion

Aboriginal activists did not see the AMS as a Redfern- or Sydney-only organisation, in the same way that Aboriginal issues were not seen as only local issues. Rather, similarly to the ALS, the AMS aimed to advance Indigenous health state- and even nationwide.¹⁶⁸ Working in the areas outside Sydney was part of the Medical Service's program from the beginning and its staff made regular trips to rural NSW. One purpose of the early trips was to motivate the communities to start self-help programmes. For instance, the AMS was involved with setting up fruit growing and vegetable farms at Enngonia and Wallaga Lake.¹⁶⁹ The sense of empowerment brought by the ability to help other communities becomes apparent from the way Gordon Briscoe explained the necessity of country programs: "Not only because we owe support to our brothers and sisters out there, but also because they are in great need of the things which we, the Black Community in Redfern, can begin to provide."¹⁷⁰

By 1978 about 55 per cent of the AMS's clients came from the inner and southern metropolitan areas. However, clients also came, for example, from New England and the North Coast of New South Wales as well as a few clients from Victoria, Queensland and South Australia.¹⁷¹ Some clients just happened to be in Sydney at the time they needed medical attention. In the case of New South Wales, however, the vast geographic range of

¹⁶⁶ Mayers to Johnston, 14 July 1975, C1696/10.

¹⁶⁷ Campion, *Ted Kennedy*, 117.

¹⁶⁸ Aboriginal Medical Service Submission, 97A48/69; 'The Aboriginal Medical Service and Aboriginal Nutrition', 6.1.2, Subcommittee on Nutrition, 6.1.2, 97A48/66, Hollows, UNSW.

¹⁶⁹ Aboriginal Medical Service, part 2, C1696/10; President of Medical Service – Annual Report, C1696/10. See also Walton to Nettle, 25 February 1976, C1696/10; Mrs Shirley Smith, Field Officer, Aboriginal Medical Service, Activities from October to December, 1973, Aboriginal Medical Services, 6, 97A48/66, Hollows, UNSW.

¹⁷⁰ President of Medical Service – Annual Report, C1696/10. See also Briscoe, 'Towards a Health Programme for Aborigines', 6.

¹⁷¹ Duckett and Ellen, *The Aboriginal Medical Service in Sydney*, 13.

the clientele is indicative of the importance of the Aboriginal Medical Service and their specialist services outside the Sydney region.

In order to provide better medical services locally, Aboriginal communities elsewhere started to set up their own clinics with the assistance and support of the Redfern AMS. The AMS even planned in 1973 to launch a \$2.5 million appeal to provide funding for Aboriginal Medical Services nationwide. However, this plan never seemed to take off.¹⁷² Nevertheless, with the support of donations the AMS was able to support other Aboriginal medical services. In 1975 the AMS financed the opening of a clinic in Mt Druitt out of the local Foundation of Aboriginal Affairs building.¹⁷³ It was also directly involved in setting up a Medical Service in Kempsey and assisted the development of a service in Wilcannia.¹⁷⁴ The AMS provided 1,045 services during country field trips in Bourke, Wilcannia, Brewarrina, Wee Waa, Pilliga, Enngonia, Moree and Tabulam between August 1975 and April 1976.¹⁷⁵

The AMS also played a role nationally. Neville Perkins, a nephew of Charles Perkins and a law student at the University of Sydney who was also involved with the Aboriginal Legal Service in Redfern, together with the local people in Alice Springs set up the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress in 1973. Gordon Briscoe and Fred Hollows supported the Congress in its efforts to establish and run a health service during its early years.¹⁷⁶ The AMS was also influential in setting up medical services at Perth, Townsville and Gippsland.¹⁷⁷ In addition, it allocated \$25,000 from its donations account to help to set up an Aboriginal Medical Service in Port Augusta and also offered advice and practical help in 1977.¹⁷⁸ Together with the other Indigenous Medical Services the AMS formed the National Aboriginal and Islander Health Organisation (NAIHO) as their peak body in

¹⁷² Aboriginal Medical Service, part 2, C1696/10.

¹⁷³ 'Review of operations – 1975', part 4, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA; Meeting with Aboriginal Medical Service, 4 July [1975], C1696/10; *AMS Newsletter*, No. 16.

¹⁷⁴ Duckett and Ellen, *The Aboriginal Medical Service in Sydney*, 2.

¹⁷⁵ 'Review of Operations – 1975', C1696/10.

¹⁷⁶ Rosewarne, Vaarzon-Morel, Bell, Carter, Liddle and Liddle, 'The Historical Context of Developing an Aboriginal Community-Controlled Health Service', 119, 129.

¹⁷⁷ Duckett and Ellen, *The Aboriginal Medical Service in Sydney*, 2; *AMS Newsletter*, No. 13, [1974], 4.

¹⁷⁸ *AMS Newsletter*, [No. 21, 1976], 5; *AMS Newsletter*, No. 22, November 1976, 2-4; Vaughan to Director, August 1977, part A, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA.

1974.¹⁷⁹ Naomi Mayers was nominated as the national coordinator of NAIHO in 1975.¹⁸⁰ NAIHO had a similar structure to FCAATSI.

The DAA opposed the plans of the AMS to expand outside Redfern, while it funded the ALS's state-wide operations. Officials wanted to limit the power of Sydney activists, or radicals as they were also viewed, and worried that they would be in control of health programs in other parts of Australia, which was thought to inhibit local initiative.¹⁸¹ This concern was despite the AMS's expressed emphasis on the importance of local Aboriginal involvement and control.¹⁸² Furthermore, the AMS competed for funding with New South Wales State health services that were directed to Aboriginal people, while the ALS had the main role in providing legal services for Aboriginal people. Aboriginal activists' desire to expand the Medical Service to other parts of New South Wales and Australia would have followed quite naturally from their existing family connections and networks. It also reflected Aboriginal nationalist aspirations at the time. For them to contain their activities in Redfern would have been to deny their people the medical services that they themselves had been able to achieve locally. The AMS's involvement in Aboriginal health outside the Sydney area remained a cause of continuing disagreement between the DAA and the AMS.

Not only medical care

The Aboriginal Medical Service did not see itself just as an organisation that provided health services, nor was health seen as an individual problem, but rather as a community problem.¹⁸³ One of the aims of the Medical Service was to "eliminate the cycle of poverty, lack of self-esteem and cultural identity" in order to improve Aboriginal health.¹⁸⁴ The AMS field officers inevitably dealt with patients' social and economic problems as well as

¹⁷⁹ *Workshop on Aboriginal Medical Services*, 32.

¹⁸⁰ Donnaleen Campbell and Rose Ellis, 'Models of Excellence in Indigenous Community Health: The Aboriginal Medical Service, Redfern – part one', *Aboriginal and Islander Health Worker Journal*, Vol. 19, No. 4, July-August 1995, 7.

¹⁸¹ Kirk to Minister, 2 April 1973, part 2, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA; Martin to Minister, [1976], part 4, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA; Martin to Minister, 23 June 1980, part 9, R76/59, C1696/11, NAA.

¹⁸² See e.g. *AMS Newsletter*, No. 16, 9; *AMS Newsletter*, [No. 21], 1974, 5; *AMS Newsletter*, April 1979, 3.

¹⁸³ AMS Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, 468.

¹⁸⁴ Aboriginal Medical Service, part 2, C1696/10.

health issues.¹⁸⁵ In response to problems of poverty, the AMS engaged in social work and covered emergency expenses on evenings and weekends when other agencies were closed.¹⁸⁶ The staff at the AMS also made the premises available for people needing shelter, until the DAA ruled this practice out.¹⁸⁷ Gillian Cowlshaw notes that practices that are characteristic of traditional Aboriginal societies and are ‘still’ practised in settled areas, such as ‘demand sharing’, are not celebrated as aspects of Aboriginality but are rather seen as something undesirable, “a relic that anchors people in the past, handicapping individual strivings in this competitive world.”¹⁸⁸

The AMS treated land rights as an extension of its health care work. Members of the AMS emphasised the economic security that land rights would provide and that would best enable Aboriginal people to run health programs and improve health in general.¹⁸⁹ Bobbi Sykes requested in the *Aboriginal Medical Service Newsletter*

“that the Government should sit down and deal with the people on land rights and Compensation claims so that the Blacks, free of this political hassling, can get down to the real business of improving health, housing, employment, and generally taking care of our community.”¹⁹⁰

The *Aboriginal Medical Service Newsletter* started to discuss the connection between health and land rights in the mid-1970s, at the time when the land rights campaign gained new momentum in New South Wales. According to Heather Goodall, the land rights issue had been put on the back burner during the previous decades while the campaigners directed their focus on ending legislative discrimination and building community organisations. In the mid-1970s Aboriginal activists applied pressure on the incoming Fraser government to ensure that the Northern Territory Land Rights Act drafted under the Whitlam government would be saved. Once it was passed in 1976, though severely watered down,

¹⁸⁵ Report on application for funds, part 4, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA; Simper, ‘The enormous challenge of Aboriginal health’.

¹⁸⁶ Mayers to Powell, 14 January 1974, C1696/10; Aboriginal Medical Service, Seven Year Progress Report, 18.

¹⁸⁷ Smith, *Mum Shirl*, 92.

¹⁸⁸ Cowlshaw, *The City’s Outback*, 186.

¹⁸⁹ Prokopovich, ‘Aboriginal Health in Our Hands’, 8, 10; *AMS Newsletter*, No. 17, 2; *AMS Newsletter*, March 1977, 3; Gordon Briscoe, ‘Aboriginal Health and Land Rights’, *Identity*, Vol. 3, No. 3, July 1977, 14-15; AMS Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, 494-495; Gary Foley, ‘Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services – A Short History’, *Aboriginal Health Project Information Bulletin*, no. 2, August 1982, 13, 15, 19.

¹⁹⁰ *AMS Newsletter*, October 1977, 2.

Aboriginal people across the country started to campaign for land rights in their respective States.¹⁹¹ At the same time the AMS also became more focused in its land rights campaign.

The Aboriginal Medical Service also saw education as a key element in improving employment, housing and Aboriginal health.¹⁹² It aimed to promote the knowledge of the special needs of Aboriginal people among health authorities and to inform the public and governments about matters affecting Aboriginal health. The AMS also aimed to conduct research and surveys to aid in providing health care effectively, and to provide health education programmes in the Aboriginal community.¹⁹³ The representatives of the AMS were invited as guest speakers at events organised by white organisations.¹⁹⁴ These events provided opportunities to educate the white Australian community about Aboriginal social and health situation.¹⁹⁵

The *Aboriginal Medical Service Newsletter* aimed to educate white readers in order to change attitudes and combat racism. “Those who are not part of the solution are part of the problem”¹⁹⁶, it stated echoing the rhetoric used by Eldridge Cleaver, the leader of the Black Panther Party. Sometimes the *Aboriginal Medical Service Newsletter* recommended books to read, for example, in January 1974 it recommended Kevin Gilbert’s *Because a White Man’ll Never do it*, C.D. Rowley’s trilogy *Aboriginal Policy and Practice*, Franz Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth* and Dee Brown’s *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*.¹⁹⁷

Members of the AMS struggled to create a space where they could strengthen and foster the development of Aboriginal and Islander identity and pride as well as promote their culture, not merely provide medical services.¹⁹⁸ Indeed, the AMS submission to the Australian Government Inquiry into Rural Health Services stated that the lack of pride and self-esteem caused by the previous 150 years of history was one of the major factors

¹⁹¹ Flick and Goodall, *Isabel Flick*, 148.

¹⁹² Aboriginal Medical Service Submission, 97A48/69. See also AMS Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, 469-474.

¹⁹³ Aboriginal Medical Service Constitution, 6, 97A48/70, Hollows, UNSW; Aboriginal Medical Service Constitution, 97A48/66.

¹⁹⁴ ‘Public Relations’, *Tharunka*; Nolan, ‘File Note’, part 6, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁹⁵ Duckett and Ellen, *The Aboriginal Medical Service in Sydney*, 2.

¹⁹⁶ *AMS Newsletter*, No. 10, 2.

¹⁹⁷ *AMS Newsletter*, No. 10, 6.

¹⁹⁸ Rules of Aboriginal Medical Service, Prof F.C. Hollows, 97A48/67, Hollows, UNSW; ‘Expanding the Medical Service’, *New Dawn*, Vol. 3, No. 8, January 1973, 1.

behind Aboriginal ill-health.¹⁹⁹ To counter this process in 1974, for example, the AMS organised a display of Aboriginal artefacts to celebrate Aboriginality.²⁰⁰

Furthermore, the Aboriginal controlled and run Medical Service provided a sense of identity, community and pride at a time when Aboriginal people were accustomed to the lack of alternatives to non-Indigenous mainstream services. AMS members saw Aboriginal management of projects such as the nutrition project as part of community development.²⁰¹ Denis Freney and Noel Hazard commented in an article in the *Tribune*, the magazine of the Communist party in Australia, that any positive steps Aboriginal people made in order to tackle the problems they faced due to discrimination also helped to build an emerging identity among the Sydney Indigenous community.²⁰² It was also noted in the workshop on Aboriginal medical services organised by the Federal Government Department of Health that

the existence of this service, with its community orientation and control, has created a significant degree of black community cohesion, has aided the re-establishment of pride in a racial identity, and has elevated the self-esteem of many black individuals.²⁰³

Struggle for self-determination

The conflict between the AMS staff and the DAA officials intensified after the Fraser government was elected. Under its tighter economic policies the government cut back funding for Aboriginal assistance from 0.9 per cent of the national budget in 1974-75 to 0.57 per cent in 1978-79.²⁰⁴ Nevertheless, the DAA funding to the Aboriginal Medical Service continued to increase during the next two years. For the financial year ending in

¹⁹⁹ 'Submission to the Australian Government Inquiry into Rural Health Services', Prof. C. Hollows, 97A48/67, Hollows, UNSW.

²⁰⁰ 'Minutes of the Meeting of the Council, 22 January 1974, AMS Council Meeting, 6.23.1, 97A48/66, Hollows, UNSW.

²⁰¹ 'Submission to Freedom from Hunger', Subcommittee on Nutrition, 6.1.2, 97A48/66, Hollows, UNSW. See also AMS Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, 487, 491; F.C. Hollows, 'On the need to implement federal policy in Aboriginal health', address to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, 19 September 1979, CN 1079/1, Hollows, UNSW.

²⁰² Denis Freney and Noel Hazard, 'Sydney's Black Ghetto', [*Tribune*], part 1, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA.

²⁰³ *Workshop on Aboriginal Medical Services*, 60.

²⁰⁴ Lippmann, *Generations of Resistance: the Aboriginal Struggle for justice*, 82-83.

1976 the DAA granted to the AMS \$235,190, an increase of \$92,000 from the previous year.

However, the DAA started to put more pressure on the Medical Service to comply with government regulations and become more professional in its operations, reflecting its new policy of self-management. The staff at the AMS felt that DAA officials interfered with the running of the AMS.²⁰⁵ They had an increased sense of being constantly financially stretched and operating on overdraft as the funding did not respond to their needs and arrived late.²⁰⁶ Bobbi Sykes wondered in the *Aboriginal Medical Service Newsletter* whether the DAA had from the beginning wished that the AMS did not exist.²⁰⁷ Despite the changing rhetoric of government policy the AMS held onto its main principle which was that Aboriginal people should run their own organisations.²⁰⁸

Shirley Smith was one of the casualties of increased pressure to comply with the DAA demand for professionalism and accountability. She was suspended from the AMS in 1979.²⁰⁹ According to Smith, she was unable to produce the reports required by the DAA from all staff on their activities. The nature of her work, and the fact that she could not properly read or write, made reporting very difficult. Shirley Smith was extraordinary in her willingness, capacity and ability to work for her community. She worked in multiple areas, for example, visiting prisons and supporting single mothers or children in need. The AMS provided her with a base from which to operate, while Smith offered her experience and position among the community. Smith was awarded the Member of the British Empire medal in 1977 and the Order of Australia in 1985.

²⁰⁵ 'Telecom Naomi Mayers', 14 December 1979, part 9, R76/59, C1696/11, NAA. See also Mayers to Nicolson, 14 January 1977, part 5A, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA; Mayers to Nolan, 22 March 1979, part 8, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA; Martin to Minister, 20 March 1979, part 8, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA.

²⁰⁶ See e.g. Foley, Mayers to Viner, 8 February 1976, part 4, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA; Foley, 'The History of the Aboriginal Medical Service', C1696/10; 'Aboriginal Service threatened', *SMH*, 26 July 1975; Naomi Mayers, 'Aboriginal Medical Service and Government funds', Letters to Editor, *SMH*, 11 August 1977.

²⁰⁷ *AMS Newsletter*, March 1977, 2; *AMS Newsletter*, October-December 1978, 3.

²⁰⁸ Introduction, 97A48/66; Aboriginal Medical Service Submission, 97A48/69; *AMS Newsletter*, October 1977, 10; AMS Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, 510. See also Briscoe, 'Aboriginal Health and Land Rights', 16.

²⁰⁹ Smith, *Mum Shirl*, 112.

The AMS resisted DAA requirements of accountability, by keeping its dealings with the DAA to a minimum and providing only the necessary information.²¹⁰ Duckett and Ellen wrote “Any information provided may be used as evidence to justify cuts in funds, and so, not unreasonably, the AMS is loath to supply such information on an ongoing basis.”²¹¹ They had conducted an evaluation of the service published by the School of Health Administration at the University of New South Wales in 1978. In the same survey they noted that “Fighting Funding Cuts” took 7.2 per cent of the total staff time during a fortnight in December 1978. By comparison “Health Promotion” took 5.6. per cent and “Community Development” 7.9 per cent of their time.²¹²

While restricted by the organisational structures that were imposed on it, for example by the funding bodies, the Aboriginal Medical Service was still able to adjust to the needs of the Aboriginal community. For example, in principle the AMS had financial members who elected the board of the AMS. However, in practice everyone in the community could participate in electing the board members. As Mayers phrased it

If there is something upsetting the community it does not matter whether they are financial members or not. They will be there and the rules fall by the wayside. This is not part of white organisational structure. Therefore if there was something wrong upsetting the community and they wanted to get certain people on to the board of directors, in the end we would forget about who is financial and who is not.²¹³

Kevin Martin, Regional Director of the DAA, expressed his frustration with the resistance he encountered from the AMS. Martin wrote to the Minister, “Most of these problems would not arise if Mrs Mayers communicated better with this office, responded to letters or discussed expenditure problems as they rise.”²¹⁴ He had also earlier described the Department’s relations with the AMS as sometimes even “violent” and never “particularly cordial”. Yet in the same letter he acknowledged that the AMS was one of the most efficiently administered Aboriginal organisations.²¹⁵

²¹⁰ See e.g. Meeting with Aboriginal Medical Service, 4 July [1975], C1696/10; Mackenzie to Mitchell, Malone, C1696/10; Rustomji, ‘Telecon Naomi Mayers’, 24 May 1979, part 8, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA.

²¹¹ Duckett and Ellen, *The Aboriginal Medical Service in Sydney*, 3.

²¹² Duckett and Ellen, *The Aboriginal Medical Service in Sydney*, 15.

²¹³ AMS Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, 518-519.

²¹⁴ Regional Director to Minister, 24 May 1979, part 8, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA. See also Rustomji to Mayers, 10 May 1979, part 8, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA.

²¹⁵ Martin to Minister, [1976], C1696/10.

During the same year DAA funding to the AMS started to decrease. The AMS went public when it seemed that the funding from the DAA would be radically cut from \$302,000 in the previous financial year to \$260,430 for the financial year 1977 to 1978.²¹⁶ The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Viner, soon granted the AMS further funds and stated that there had been no plans to cut funding.²¹⁷ Mayers argued that the Minister had responded to the pressure the AMS put on the government.²¹⁸ The AMS had already used the media and support networks among the white community in its negotiations with the DAA under the Whitlam government. “[I]f we were to inform these people of the situation we are in, I think there would be a tremendous public outcry,”²¹⁹ wrote Mayers when facing funding problems in 1975. In the end, however, the DAA grant for the running expenses of the AMS clinics was \$271,828 during the year ending in 1978, so approximately \$30,000 less than previous year.²²⁰ The AMS also had to find funds elsewhere to expand its Nutrition Program.²²¹

Yet Aboriginal people in Redfern continued to suffer from poor health. Malnutrition among Aboriginal children, in particular, caused alarm. An article in *SMH*, titled ‘Redfern’s Biafran Babies’, reported that 70 per cent of the children who attended the Under Five’s Clinic at the AMS between 1976 and 1977 were malnourished and had growth and weight below average. Furthermore, 25 per cent of children were in the lowest three per cent by weight and height. Of these children 64 per cent were anaemic, 60 per cent had had a parasitic infection and 32 per cent had at least one perforated eardrum.²²² All of these

²¹⁶ John Nolan to Area Officer, 6 July 1977, part 5A, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA; Graham Williams, ‘Redfern’s ‘Biafran’ babies’, *SMH*, 12 July 1977; Graham Williams, ‘Aboriginal centre staff face dismissal’, *SMH*, 23 July 1977; Asher, Bouilly, Kalokerinos, Rassaby, Refshauge, Smith, ‘Aboriginal Medical Service: money imperative to the clinic’, Letters to the editor, *SMH*, 23 July 1977; Graham Williams, ‘Staff to be asked to accept half-pay’, *SMH*, 25 July 1977; Graham Williams, ‘Aboriginal centre staff agree to 50 pc wage cut’, *SMH*, 26 July 1977.

²¹⁷ ‘More cash fo Aboriginal centre’, 27 July 1977, *SMH*; Ralph Hunt and R.I. Viner, ‘Aboriginal health in Sydney’, Media Release, DAA, part 5A, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA.

²¹⁸ Mayers, ‘Aboriginal Medical Service and Government funds’.

²¹⁹ Mayers to Johnston, 15 July 1975, part 4B, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA. See also ‘Aborigines health’, *SMH*, 29 July 1977; Mayers, ‘Aboriginal Medical Service and Government funds’. For other cases of lobbying see Correspondence July-August 1975, Part 4A, R76/59, C696/10, NAA; Sykes, ‘Bobbi Sykes talks about the Aboriginal Medical Service, Redfern’, 11; *AMS Newsletter*, October 1977, 1; David Broadbent, ‘Redfern: black ghetto of shame’, *The Age*, 12 August 1977; Williams, ‘Aboriginal centre staff face dismissal’; ‘More cash for Aboriginal centre’, *SMH*, 27 July 1977; ‘Grant for Aboriginal service’, *SMH*, 28 July 1977; Mayers, ‘Aboriginal Medical Service and Government funds’; ‘A.M.S.’, *Aboriginal Islander Message*, No. 1, March 1979.

²²⁰ Income and Expenditure account for the twelve months ended 30 June 1978, C1696/10.

²²¹ Graham Williams, ‘Funds refused for Aborigines nutrition plan’, *SMH*, 24 August 1977.

²²² Williams, ‘Redfern’s ‘Biafran’ Babies’; Lou Rassaby, ‘Malnutrition Among Aborigines in the Inner-City of Sydney’, *New Doctor*, No. 8, 1978, 36.

children's resistance to infectious disease was lower and the effect of disease worse than it was on an average child. They were also more likely to get exposed to infections due to crowded housing conditions, which were escalated by high unemployment. Lack of work meant lack of money and thus inability to provide for the children. When children fell ill they were unable to attend school regularly, which affected their future opportunities. Aboriginal women were eight to ten times more likely have diabetes than white women and five to six times more likely to have heart disease.²²³

The AMS, like the ALS, was part of the continuing Aboriginal resistance to colonisation.²²⁴ Gary Foley explained in a contemporary newspaper interview, "We always see ourselves in the context of the political struggle because we're simply an extension of that struggle, working in a positive way to ease the plight of the people we are politically working for."²²⁵ The overarching aim of the Aboriginal Medical Service was political, the struggle for self-determination – "the power of self – destiny"²²⁶, as Sykes phrased it. Like the ALS, the AMS saw the government funding not as welfare, but rather as compensation. Bobbi Sykes argued in the *Aboriginal Medical Service Newsletter*: "Funding of Black organizations should not be considered an act of charity – compensating the Black community for historical land loss would merely be an act of JUSTICE."²²⁷ Since the AMS felt that DAA funding was Aboriginal money it perceived it as its right to decide how they used it.²²⁸

The DAA listed the AMS as one of the most politically sensitive organisations out of the 56 organisations with which the DAA Area Office had dealings in 1977. The Aboriginal Legal Service and Murawina were also listed among these.²²⁹ Martin explained the poor relationship by the fact that the AMS had employed "some of the more 'radical' Aboriginal activists who have taken the opportunities offered by an organisational base to publicly abuse your predecessors and the Department"²³⁰ The DAA disapproved of the political nature of the AMS's work and regarded the use of government funds in political activism

²²³ Graham Williams, 'Deprived – from cradle to early grave', *SMH*, 13 May 1976.

²²⁴ Briscoe, 'Aboriginal Health and Land Rights', 16.

²²⁵ Prokopovich, 'Aboriginal Health in Our Hands', 8. See also Aboriginal Medical Service, Seven Year Progress Report, 18.

²²⁶ Sykes, 'Bobbi Sykes talks about the Aboriginal Medical Service, Redfern', 6.

²²⁷ *AMS Newsletter*, October 1977, 2. Emphasis in the original.

²²⁸ Nolan to Area Officer, 31 July 1978, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA; Mayers to Martin, 5 June 1979, part 8, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA; Foley, 'Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services – A Short History', 15.

²²⁹ McFadden to the Secretary, 3 August 1977, part 5A, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA.

²³⁰ Martin to Minister, [1976], C1696/10.

as inappropriate. Sykes' response to the accusation that the AMS was being too political was to ask the DAA: "When will they learn that our whole world to-day is one of political interaction?"²³¹

AMS activists strongly resisted assimilation. During the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs in 1978 Mayers, who represented the AMS, was asked about her view on the future of Aboriginal people. The Committee inquired whether the answer was assimilation, integration or apartheid. Interestingly self-determination was not offered as an option. Mayers responded:

We feel that assimilation is genocide. We feel that integration would be better. We hope that Aborigines, like all the other nationalities living in Australia, will be able to have their own identity, their own cultural background. We would like to see the same situation as applies to the Italians or the Jewish people or whatever. We feel that we should all be able to live in this country and understand each other's cultures instead of the Aboriginal identity being lost completely.²³²

Mayers saw assimilation in its extreme form as signifying the disappearance of the Aboriginal population rather than meaning general equality with non-Indigenous population.

The AMS wanted to have their own building in Redfern in order to have suitable premises for a medical service, as the 191-193 Regent Street was getting too small, and to ensure permanency for their Service. Furthermore, in January 1975 the AMS was expected to vacate 191-193 Regent Street.²³³ However, it was difficult to find the right location and to get funding for a new building.²³⁴ Finally the Sisters of Mercy, convinced by Father Ted Kennedy (discussed further in Chapter 6) in particular, gave the AMS in 1976 a twenty-year lease for new premises at 36 Turner Street that used to be St Vincent's school.²³⁵ (See Appendix 1.) In two years' time the AMS got the ownership of 36 Turner St, after the Sisters of Mercy empowered Father Ted Kennedy to hand it over. The paperwork was

²³¹ *AMS Newsletter*, October- December 1978, p. 3.

²³² AMS Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, 512.

²³³ Long to Minister, 23 July 1974, part 2, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA; Meeting with Aboriginal Medical Service, 4 July [1975], C1696/10; Mayers to Johnston, 15 July 1975, C1696/10; 'Aboriginal service threatened', *SMH*; Sykes, 'Bobbi Sykes talks about the Aboriginal Medical Service, Redfern', 9.

²³⁴ Dexter to Mayers, 6 August 1974, C1696/10; Minutes of the Council Meeting, 20 August 1974, AMS Council Meeting, 6.23.1, 97A48/66, Hollows, UNSW; *AMS Newsletter*, No. 13, 4-5; Mayers to Johnston, 15 July 1975, C1696/10. See also Mayers to Bissaker, 13 May 1975, C1696/10; Foley, 'The History of Aboriginal Medical Service', C1696/10.

²³⁵ *AMS Newsletter*, No. 18, 1; Archbishop of Sydney to DAA, 2 June 1976, part 4, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA; Simper, 'The Enormous Challenge of Aboriginal Health'.

finalised in 1978, when it became Aboriginal land.²³⁶ The building was located in close vicinity to the other Aboriginal organisations and was less than four blocks away from Redfern Station. It was described as run down and labyrinthine.²³⁷ Nevertheless, considerably bigger and more established than the previous premises, the new building further challenged the patterns of non-Indigenous property ownership that were dominant in Sydney and underlined Aboriginal belonging in the city.

The AMS contributed \$150,000 from the funds it had collected from donations towards the renovations of 36 Turner Street while the DAA matched the amount.²³⁸ The DAA had already earlier acknowledged that the AMS was very efficient in raising funds, though this was the most successful of the appeals it organised during the 1970s.²³⁹ The honour of opening the newly renovated premises was given to two respected members of the AMS community, Louisa Ingram and Fred Hollows, on the 10 November 1978.²⁴⁰ Chicka Dixon acted as the Master of Ceremonies.²⁴¹

The Aboriginal Housing Company had been chosen to do the building renovations at 36 Turner Street. However, this co-operation did not go smoothly. The AMS ended up with a bill that was \$70,000 higher than expected, as it had signed an open contract that did not state the final sums. The AMS representatives acknowledged that the sum was largely due to the training component within the AHC structure. However, they expressed disapproval with the way the AHC had dealt with the renovations. The DAA was willing to examine the situation, but noted that “a more business like system should develop between Aboriginal organizations”.²⁴² Though it looked like the dispute could be amiably solved, the case eventually ended up in the NSW Supreme Court in 1980.²⁴³

²³⁶ Campion, *Ted Kennedy*, 118-119.

²³⁷ Simper, ‘The Enormous Challenge of Aboriginal Health’.

²³⁸ Income and expenditure for the twelve months ended 30 June 1978, part 7, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA; Meeting: DAA/AMS/AHC, 29 November 1978, part 7, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA.

²³⁹ Martin to Area Officer, 22 October 1976, part 5A, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA.

²⁴⁰ *AMS Newsletter*, October – December 1978, 3.

²⁴¹ Invitation to official opening, part 7, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA; Pictures of the Official Opening, part 7, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA.

²⁴² Meeting: DAA/AMS/AHC, 29 November 1978, C1696/10. See also John Nolan, note for file, 12 April 1979, part 8, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA.

²⁴³ Plowman, note for file, 21 March 1980, part 9, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA; Martin to Acting Area Officer, 11 December 1980, part 10, R76/59, C1696/11, NAA.

From 1975 the AMS was funded by four different bodies: Social Security in New South Wales, Medibank and the Commonwealth Department of Health as well as the DAA, though the majority of funding was covered by the DAA. Towards the end of the 1970s the DAA planned to rationalise its funding structures and for the Department of Health to take over funding the AMS.²⁴⁴ However, though the AMS was willing to be independent from the DAA, it did not want to be under the Aboriginal Health Branch of the Department of Health, which would have been responsible for the administration of the grants.²⁴⁵ The AMS also objected to the Health Department's rules that allowed them to inspect the medical records of the AMS at any time.²⁴⁶ The funding plan was put aside.

Once the Federal Government started to express more concern over duplication and fragmentation of funding, it again raised plans for the rationalisation of funding of the AMS.²⁴⁷ In the end the Commonwealth Department of Health took over the funding of the salaries of the clinical team of the AMS during the financial year 1980/81. The DAA continued to fund administrative, field and dental staff as well as other operational goods and services.²⁴⁸

The AMS managed to expand steadily and maintain control of its operations during the Fraser years, despite the funding struggles and changed government policies. The AMS's move to a new building, made possible by independent fundraising, proved crucial to the successful operation of its expanded services.²⁴⁹ The AMS continued to run the Under Fives' Clinic and Fitness Clinic in 1979. In addition it operated an Ear, Nose and Throat Clinic; Diabetic Clinic; an Ethno-psychiatry Clinic; a Women's Clinic; a Specialist Physician Clinic; an Alcohol and Drug Abuse Clinic and a Dental Clinic. The Nutrition Program expanded to include a Supplementary Food Program, Nutrition and Dietary Advice, Physical Fitness and Weight Watchers as well as supplying emergency food supplies. The number of services its Medical and Dental Clinics provided also increased to 19,166

²⁴⁴ Ross to McFadden, Martin, 30 October 1975, part 4, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA; Plowman to Area Officer, Regional Director, 24 February 1976, part 4, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA.

²⁴⁵ Mayers to Imrie, 26 February 1979, part 7, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA; Perkins to Director General, 22 March 1979, part 8, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA.

²⁴⁶ Nolan to Area Officer, 14 March 1979, part 7, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA.

²⁴⁷ Helen Ester, 'Check sought on Aboriginal Health Funds', *The Sun*, 30 October 1978.

²⁴⁸ Rustomji to Senior project officer, 23 November 1979, part 9, R76/59, C1696/11, NAA; AMS – 80/81 funding, part 10, R76/59, C1696/11, NAA.

²⁴⁹ Mayers to Regional Director, 23 May 1978, part 6, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA; Mayers to Martin, 5 June 1979, C1696/10.

between July 1978 and March 1979.²⁵⁰ The number of staff also increased. As well as administrative staff, the AMS employed 12 medical staff in July 1979: four doctors, a part-time gynaecologist, a part-time physician, a full-time clinic supervisor, two full-time nursing sisters, two full-time nursing aides and a full-time receptionist.²⁵¹

Conclusion

The Aboriginal Medical Service was established following the model of the Aboriginal Legal Service: it was initiated by Aboriginal activists and had Aboriginal leadership. For the first time Aboriginal people had access to culturally appropriate medical care provided by Aboriginal people. However, there were differences between these two Services and they grew more significant in the course of the 1970s. They were also run by different individuals, though many members were active in both organisations at the same time.

While the ALS was supported by government funding from early on, the AMS had difficulty at first in convincing the Liberal government of the need for a dedicated Aboriginal medical centre in an urban area, where there were medical practitioners and hospitals available. The AMS had to prove that the existing services were not accessible to Indigenous people, nor were they culturally appropriate. Under the Whitlam government's self-determination policy, funding for the AMS increased and allowed for longer term planning. However, the DAA limited the funding of the AMS operations locally to the inner-Sydney area, and thus, stymied the AMS's plans to operate state- and even nationwide. At the same time, the ALS provided legal services state-wide with government funding due to the Whitlam government's pledge to provide free legal services for all Aboriginal people.

The OAA, and later the DAA, expected the AMS, unlike the ALS which firmly objected to it, to do voluntary fundraising to cover part of its expenses and in order to avoid dependency. The AMS's fundraising fitted smoothly in the pre-existing culture of seeing health work as charity among the religious institutions and in the Western world in general.

²⁵⁰ Request for Funds, part 8, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA.

²⁵¹ Listing of new salaries, 23 July 1979, part 9, R76/59, C1696/11, NAA.

Non-Indigenous people would have also donated willingly to the AMS, as they would have tended to see Aboriginal health work, and an organisation run by women, as non-threatening. With the help of successful independent fundraising, the AMS gained economic independence and was, for example, able to provide bigger premises for its services in 1976, where it was able to have permanency and, in two years time, re-establish Aboriginal ownership of land in the city. Despite government resistance, it was also able to financially support setting up medical services and facilitate Aboriginal self-determination elsewhere in Australia, and not only assist in advisory roles. Together with the ALS, the AMS challenged existing power relations in the city and in Australia more broadly.

However, unlike the ALS, the AMS relied on non-Indigenous people to help raise independent funding and other resources, though the AMS employed Aboriginal professionals, namely nurses, among its staff from the beginning. Thus, AMS members needed to define Aboriginal control in a way that allowed black and white co-operation. Non-Indigenous supporters were allowed to remain as active members of the AMS throughout the 1970s, in contrast to the ALS, which had excluded non-Indigenous people from its council in 1974. At the time the ALS was run by young Aboriginal men, many of them vehement Black Power advocates.

As I discussed in the previous chapter the DAA officials ultimately treated self-determination as a means of achieving equal rights. Thus the DAA officials saw the AMS, like the ALS, as a temporary solution, while AMS activists were building a long term space from which to effect a lasting change in Aboriginal health. The AMS, like the ALS, regarded government funding as Aboriginal money and resisted government surveillance. Neither did the AMS limit its activities to providing medical care only. Rather it actively pursued a wider political definition of health. It saw combating racism, eliminating poverty and improving self-esteem as crucial in order to improve Aboriginal health. The AMS promoted land-rights and self-determination as a means to better health. However, unlike the ALS, the AMS provided the DAA with the necessary information to fulfil government requirements of accountability and to assure continued funding. Among the DAA officials it gained a reputation as a political, and yet efficiently run organisation.

Under the Fraser government and its policy of self-management, the AMS came under increasing pressure to comply with government regulations. AMS activists resented the way these regulations limited their control of the service, and they struggled for self-determination. The DAA officials also increasingly objected to the AMS's political activism. In the end of the 1970s the DAA started to rationalise its funding practices and to fund the AMS together with the Commonwealth Department of Health. Nevertheless, during the Fraser years the AMS continued its negotiations with the government and successfully expanded its operations locally with government funding and independent fundraising.

The AMS, like the ALS, worked towards strengthening urban Aboriginal identity and culture. It created an Aboriginal space in inner Sydney, further empowering urban Aboriginal people and underlining Aboriginal belonging in the city. However, the main cultural advocate for Aboriginal self-determination in Redfern in the 1970s was the Black Theatre. In the following chapter I will examine the role of the Black Theatre as part of Aboriginal activism in Redfern in the 1970s.

Chapter 4

The Black Theatre – the cultural spearhead of Aboriginal activism

[Poem
has been removed
due to Copyright
restrictions.¹]

The Black Theatre had its beginning in the desire of a group of Aboriginal people in Redfern to support Indigenous activism via theatre and dance. It was set up at the same time as the Aboriginal Legal and Medical Services and first performed publically as a part of the demonstrations at the Tent Embassy in Canberra and the Black Moratorium in Sydney in 1972. In its plays the Black Theatre gave voice to Aboriginal contemporary concerns and recounted their version of colonial history. Contemporary dance that incorporated aspects of traditional Aboriginal culture were part of its program from the beginning. The Black Theatre in Redfern was among the first Aboriginal theatre groups in Australia.

The Black Theatre was a cultural advocate for Aboriginal self-determination. Since urban Indigenous people were often seen as 'inauthentic', cultural organisations, such as the Black Theatre, had an important role in strengthening and displaying their culture as distinct and authentic. Cultural performances provided a context in which to negotiate and circulate contemporary Indigenous people's identities: a form of culture making.² The Black Theatre grew into an Aboriginal arts and culture centre with government funding and access to its

¹ Aileen Corpus, 'Ours', Five poems, *Meanjin*, Vol. 36, No. 4, December, 1977, 473

² Fred R. Myers, 'Culture-Making: Performing Aboriginality at the Asia Society Gallery', *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 21, No. 4, November 1994, 679.

own building. It started to offer a variety of cultural activities in addition to theatre and dance. The building of the Black Theatre became a meeting place for Indigenous people in inner Sydney and acted as a community centre.

In this chapter I discuss the ways in which the Black Theatre as a cultural organisation took part in Aboriginal activism for self-determination. I also study the role of government funding in the operations of the Black Theatre. I start by looking into the early days of its establishment and then explore different aspects of its operations including its productions. Black Theatre, as a term, is commonly used in the Australian context to refer to all the theatre performed, written and/or produced by Indigenous people.³ However, in this chapter I use it specifically to mean the Black Theatre in Redfern.

From sideshows to centre stage

Indigenous people have contributed to the performing arts in urban Australia since the first European settlements were established, for example, in the form of corroborees, circuses and side shows. Charles Leon, who was also a member of the Fellowship, toured with his own vaudeville show in New South Wales in the 1930s. However, until the 1960s legislation often closed Indigenous people in reserves and missions, restricting their permission to work. Thus, Indigenous theatre work was mainly limited to the fringes of Australian society prior to the 1970s.⁴

Australian non-Indigenous playwrights started to critique the treatment of Aboriginal people in the 1920s, when Katherine Prichard wrote her play *Brumby Innes*. George Landen Dann's *Fountains Beyond* explored the unjust treatment of Aboriginal people and was performed by the New Theatre group in Sydney in 1942. In 1946 actors from the New Theatre and the Aborigines' League in Melbourne performed together in *White Justice*, a dance drama that depicted the strike of Aboriginal workers in northwest Australia. These

³ Liza-mare Syron, 'Afterword: contemporary Indigenous theatre and performance practice in Australia: cultural integrity and historical significance' in Maryrose Casey, *Telling Stories: Aboriginal Australian and Torres Strait Islander Performance* (North Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2012), 143; 181 Regent St: Addressing Black Theatre, Carriageworks, Sydney Festivals, 8-29 January 2012.

⁴ Casey, *Creating Frames*, 3-4; Bandler and Fox, *The Time Was Ripe*, 22-23.

performers also took part in *Fountains Beyond* in 1946 and other productions in Melbourne. New Theatres were a part of an international movement of workers' theatre inspired by Soviet *agit prop* groups. In Australia they became an avenue for alternative theatre.⁵

Many Australian theatre companies – often described as representing the new wave⁶ – started to celebrate Australian voices and became more political from the 1960s onwards. Earlier in 1955 Ray Lawler's *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* had been commended as signalling the rebirth of Australian drama. Following international influences Australian theatre started to engage with issues surrounding the anti-war movement, homosexuality and drug use. It moved towards more realistic, satirical and avant garde styles, and did not shy away from displaying nudity or using swearwords.⁷ It also opened up to the perspectives of marginalized groups and demanded that the representations of these 'Others' be examined critically.⁸ One of the best known plays of the new wave was Alex Buzo's anti-racist play *Norm and Ahmed* which explored the relationship between an old working class Australian and a young Pakistani student, and first premiered in the Old Tote Theatre in Sydney in 1968.⁹ In Sydney the Old Tote Theatre also founded the Jane Street Theatre as a place for Australian plays in 1966. Funding for performing arts from the Australia Council for the Arts (ACA), which was established in 1968, supported the transformation of Australian theatre.¹⁰

Increasing Australian content and the politisation of theatre opened up possibilities for Indigenous performers and playwrights. In 1970, the Melbourne New Theatre cast an Aboriginal actor Jack Charles in *The Blood Knot* by a South African writer Athol Fugard.¹¹

⁵ Robert L. Maza, 'Aborigines and theatre' in Philip Parsons and Victoria Chance (eds.), *Companion to Theatre in Australia* (Sydney: Currency Press in association with Cambridge University Press, 1988), 13; Angela O'Brien, 'New Theatre' in Philip Parsons and Victoria Chance (eds.), *Companion to Theatre in Australia* (Sydney: Currency Press in association with Cambridge University Press, 1988), 400.

⁶ Casey undermines the mythology of new wave arguing that construction of new wave theatre in Australia as the new beginning excludes previous work done. Thus, instead of acknowledging earlier Indigenous or women's theatre it turns it into something that was made possible by young Anglo males who lead the new wave. Maryrose Casey, 'Nindethana and the National Black Theatre: interrogating the mythology of the New Wave', *Australasian Studies*, 36, April 2000.

⁷ Richard Waterhouse, *Private Pleasures, Public Leisure: a history of Australian popular culture since 1788* (Longman: Sydney, 1995), 221, 231.

⁸ Gilbert, *Sightlines*, 2.

⁹ John McCallum, 'Norm and Ahmed' in Philip Parsons and Victoria Chance (eds.), *Companion to Theatre in Australia* (Sydney: Currency Press in association with Cambridge University Press, 1988), 409.

¹⁰ Geoffrey Milne, *Theatre Australia (Un)limited: Australian theatre since the 1950s* (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi, 2004), 122.

¹¹ O'Brien, 'New Theatre', 400, 402.

Jack Charles and Zac Martin, from Northern Rivers and later a member of the Black Theatre in Redfern, also acted in Rodney Milgate's *A Redefined Look at Existence*.¹² In Sydney the Wayside Theatre, a small alternative theatre that was part of the Wayside Chapel at Kings Cross, performed Kevin Gilbert's *Gods Look Down* in Sydney in 1970.¹³ The Nimrod Theatre, established by John Bell and Ken Horler in 1970, became a leading alternative theatre with a radical agenda that opened up space for Aboriginal theatre and also co-operated with the Black Theatre.¹⁴ Brian Syron, an acclaimed Aboriginal actor and director who had returned to Australia from the United States, taught classes to young men at the Foundation in 1972.¹⁵

The Black Theatre in Redfern got started when a group of interested Aboriginal people came together to read scripts and poems in 1969.¹⁶ Lester Bostock recalls that none of them had previous experience in making theatre except for Jenny Sheehan, a young white drama student from the University of New South Wales.¹⁷ Paul Coe, also a student at UNSW, had met Sheehan at drama classes and invited her to come along to the gatherings.¹⁸ She was also involved with the Independent Theatre in Sydney.¹⁹ In one of the meetings a committee was formed. Paul Coe was chosen as President and Lester Bostock as Treasurer. The committee also included Lester's siblings Gerry Bostock and Euphemia or Phemie Bostock as well as Joan Vesper, Alanna Doolan, Tony Coorey and

¹² Christopher Dawson, 'A taste of black humour for Sydney', *SMH*, 14 October 1972; Maza, 'Aborigines and theatre', 13.

¹³ Casey, *Creating Frames*, 16, 18; 'Stories from the Wayside', Kevin Jackson's Theatre Diary, 30 August 2011, <http://www.kjtheatredairy.com/2011/08/stories-from-wayside.html>, accessed 24 July 2013.

¹⁴ Ron Blair, 'Jane Street Theatre' in Philip Parsons and Victoria Chance (eds.), *Companion to Theatre in Australia* (Sydney: Currency Press in association with Cambridge University Press, 1988), 305; John McCallum, 'Nimrod Theatre Company' in Philip Parsons and Victoria Chance (eds.), *Companion to Theatre in Australia* (Sydney: Currency Press in association with Cambridge University Press, 1988), 407.

¹⁵ Katherine Brisbane, 'Brian Syron' in Philip Parsons and Victoria Chance (eds.), *Companion to Theatre in Australia* (Sydney: Currency Press in association with Cambridge University Press, 1988), 575; 181 Regent St, 8-29 January 2012.

¹⁶ Casey, 'Nindethana and the National Black Theatre', 25; Casey, *Creating Frames*, 268.

¹⁷ Lester Bostock, *Breaking the Yoke: Redfern in the 1960s*, manuscript in the possession of author, 3; 'Basically Black', *New Dawn*, 3(7) 1972, 2. Casey, based on Bostock's radio interview, says that Sheehan was enrolled at the University of Sydney. Casey, *Creating Frames*, 51. However, Sheehan herself tells in *Mereki* that she had majored in Drama at UNSW. 'Drama', *Mereki*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 15 November 1974, 8. Jenny Sheehan was also known as Jennie van de Steenhaven and thus comes up under this name in some sources. See e.g. 'Basically Black', *New Dawn*, 2; Robinson, *Dreaming Tracks*, 26.

¹⁸ Gerry Bostock, 'Black Theatre' in Jack Davis and Bob Hodge (eds.), *Aboriginal Writing Today* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1985), 69.

¹⁹ 'Drama', *Mereki*, 8.

Lorraine Mafi Williams, the daughter of Bandjalang man and 1930s and 1940s activist Rev. Rob Turnbull.²⁰

Throughout the twentieth century Indigenous activists utilised symbolic and representational elements in their protest actions, among which some of the better known are the Day of Mourning in 1938, the Yirrkala Bark Petition in 1963 and the Tent Embassy in 1972.²¹ However, in the 1960s there was a shift where art and action were combined and performance became a tool for political change.²² In addition to the Black Theatre in Redfern, other Indigenous theatre groups established at the time include Taskforce in Adelaide, Nindethana, with Jack Charles, in Melbourne and Noongar Theatre in Perth.²³ These groups initiated the beginning of what Liza-mare Syron describes as the Black Theatre movement.²⁴

At first the Black Theatre had difficulty in securing funding for their activities. Coe and Sheehan submitted their first application to the ACA around the same time as did the Australian Performing Group from Melbourne and the Nimrod theatre, between 1970-1971. The Black Theatre's application was turned down because they were perceived to be too inexperienced, while the non-Indigenous groups were granted funding. Yet, both non-Indigenous groups had a similar level of experience accumulated through production practice as did the members of the Black Theatre. Both of them even made a point of undermining the kind of formal training that complied with the standards of British training. Artistic merit, which the ACA required, was problematic for the Black Theatre to show in a culture where non-Indigenous people commonly saw Aboriginal people as childlike and incompetent because of their Aboriginality, and thus not capable of competing with non-Indigenous artists. Furthermore, at the time all things Aboriginal were seen as the responsibility of the Office of Aboriginal Affairs. However, the OAA's main concern was Aboriginal welfare and it thus questioned whether theatre should be included among its responsibilities. The OAA also tended to see urban Aboriginal people as

²⁰ Bostock, *Breaking the Yoke*, 3–4; 'Mafi-Williams, Lorraine (1940–2001)', *Obituaries Australia*, National Centre of Biography, ANU, <http://oa.anu.edu.au/obituary/mafi-williams-lorraine-14924/text26113>, accessed 10 January 2013.

²¹ Maryrose Casey, 'Carnivalising Sovereignty: containing Indigenous protest within the 'White' Australian nation', *About Performance*, No. 7, 2007, 69.

²² Syron, 'Afterword', 142–143.

²³ Maza, 'Aborigines and theatre', 13.

²⁴ Syron, 'Afterword', 143.

inauthentic compared to the so called traditional Aboriginal people with whom the Black Theatre competed for OAA funding.²⁵

In order to gain more experienced input, in 1972 the members of the group invited Robert or Bob Maza, of Yidinjdji and Meriam descent, from Melbourne to work as the director of their theatre. They received a grant of \$500 from the ACA to assist with his train ticket and relocation.²⁶ Maza had been involved with Jack Charles in setting up the Nindethana. He was also an established actor in television dramas, such as *Matlock Police*, *Division Four* and the ABC serial *The Bellbird*.²⁷ In Sydney he took part in an apprenticeship program for directors and actors at the Nimrod Theatre.²⁸ Thus, Maza had the professional experience the group needed in order to pursue funding and continue its operations. Maza had also been involved with Aboriginal activism in Melbourne. He was the President of the Victorian Aboriginal Advancement League between 1968 and 1970 and was among the activists instrumental in introducing Black Power to Australia.²⁹ As a representative of the National Tribal Council he was invited by Roosevelt Brown to attend the Congress of African People in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1970, as I mentioned in Chapter 1.³⁰

Maza became familiar with black and Indigenous theatre during his trip to the United States and Canada.³¹ In New York he stayed with Barbara Ann Teer, who had founded the National Black Theatre in Harlem in 1968.³² Here Maza had an opportunity to observe the National Black Theatre, which he found to be polemical, issue driven and meaningful. He also came across theatre by the Jamaican community in the United States. However, Maza thought the First Nations Theatre in Canada to be particularly exciting and relevant.³³ He saw similarities in Australian and American Indigenous cultures that made theatre an

²⁵ Casey, *Creating Frames*, 47-50.

²⁶ Casey, *Creating Frames*, 40-41.

²⁷ Dennis Monigue, 'New arts centre is 'renaissance' for Aborigines', *The Age*, 15 June 1974; Bostock interviewed by the author; Lester Bostock in 'Bob Maza remembered', *Awake!* 4 August 2001, ABC; Casey, *Creating Frames*, 25, 40-41;

²⁸ Robinson, *Dreaming Tracks*, 27.

²⁹ Maza in 'Bob Maza remembered'; Gary Foley in 'Bob Maza remembered', *Awake!* ABC, 4 August, 2001; Lenore Nicklin, 'Black is white and white is black', *SMH*, 26 October 1972; Monigue, 'New arts centre is 'renaissance' for Aborigines'.

³⁰ McGuinness, *Aborigines visit the US*, 7, 16; Lothian, 'Blackward Step Is a Forward Step', 146.

³¹ McGuinness, *Aborigines visit the US*, 7, 16; Lothian, 'Blackward Step Is a Forward Step', 146.

³² Mance Williams, *Black Theatre in the 1960s and 1970s: a historical-critical analysis of the movement* (Westport, London: Greenwood Press, 1985), 49-50.

³³ Casey, *Creating Frames*, 36-37; Carole Johnson interviewed by Lee Chittick, Redfern, 15 January 1996, Chittick_L05, AIATSIS. See also George Whaley, 'A City's Place of Dreaming: Black Theatre in Sydney', *Theatre Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 7, 1977, 99.

appropriate form of expression for them. Maza later discussed in a radio interview how Indigenous Americans, like Australian Indigenous people were “telling people, listening and hearing people and so theatre was perfect for us.”³⁴ He perceived that the common element between the two theatres was that instead of telling ‘nice’ stories, they told “hard stories, stories that reminded me of Aboriginal stories about life”.³⁵ When Maza returned from his trip, he was determined to produce theatre that would focus on socio-political issues in Australia – to do political theatre with Aboriginal form and context.³⁶

Inspired by the New York example Maza called the theatre in Redfern the National Black Theatre. Carole Johnson recalls that Maza liked the name because it pulled all Indigenous people in Australia together – Torres Strait Islanders and the many Aboriginal nations.³⁷ As a National Black Theatre it served the whole of Indigenous Australia.³⁸ Maza described it as the “the cultural spearhead” of the Aboriginal movement.³⁹ At the time ‘black’ had started to represent a conscious and overt political statement among Indigenous Australians as I discussed in Chapter 1.⁴⁰

A house at 181 Regent Street became the headquarters of the Black Theatre. (See Appendix 1.) It was used as offices and as a place to live for some of the members, including Maza.⁴¹ Rachel Maza, Bob Maza’s daughter, recalls living at 181 Regent Street:

I remember the definitely heated and very high energy gatherings that would happen at the house. When everyone was happy, everyone was happy - when it was angry it was really angry. It was just high energy times. It was very, very vibrant times.⁴²

Under Maza’s directorship the Black Theatre ran drama workshops for about 40 adults and 20 children.⁴³ It also started to prepare for its first full length production *Basically Black* and organised dance workshops and performances.

³⁴ Maza in ‘Bob Maza remembered’.

³⁵ Bob Maza quoted in Casey, *Creating Frames*, 37–38.

³⁶ Casey, *Creating Frames*, 38.

³⁷ Johnson interviewed by Lee Chittick, 15 January 1996.

³⁸ Draft memorandum of association of National Black Theatre, 21 September 1973, part 1, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA.

³⁹ Bob Maza in Alessandro Cavadini, *Ningla A’Na*, Australian Film Institute, 1972.

⁴⁰ Lothian, ‘A Blackward Step Is a Forward Step’, 136.

⁴¹ Sloan to Secretary, 27 May 1975, part 2, R 76/36, C1696/10, NAA; Robinson, *Dreaming Tracks*, 36.

⁴² Rachel Maza in *The National Black Theatre*, *Message Stick*, ABC, 1 July 2012, <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/messagestick/stories/s3538616.htm>, accessed 11 January 2013.

⁴³ Kevon Kemp, ‘Theatre the Black Muslim way, for the good of Aborigines — and whites’, *National Times*, November 13–18, 1972.

Challenge through dance

Dance was a central part of the Black Theatre from early on. Dance, as an art form that had the capacity to blend contemporary forms with traditional Aboriginal dance, was introduced to Aboriginal people in Redfern by Carole Johnson, an African-American dancer and choreographer. She was touring Australia with the Eleo Pomare Dance Company in 1972. Pomare and his group were following keenly the events at the Canberra Tent Embassy and identified with the Aboriginal struggle. Pomare made a point of reserving seats for Aboriginal people wanting to come and see his shows.⁴⁴ Carole Johnson wrote two years later that after seeing Pomare's *Blues for the Jungle* many Aboriginal people for the first time thought about expressing themselves and their social concerns via dance and theatre.⁴⁵

The cultural connections between African-American and Indigenous people in Australia have a long history. Since the nineteenth century evangelical missions encouraged cultural interactions, through music in particular, and allowed gospel and hymn singing performances by visitors, including African-Americans. For example, the Fisk Jubilee singers, an *a cappella* ensemble of Fisk University students who were best known for their singing of spirituals, visited the Maloga Mission in 1886. From the 1950s especially, a series of African American entertainers visiting Australia sought out and met with Aboriginal people. Pastor Doug Nicholls encouraged many to come to his Gore Street Church of Christ in Melbourne, including an African American opera singer Mattiwilda Dobbs and pianist Winifred Atwell. Harry Belafonte, Marian Anderson and Odetta met with Aboriginal people when they completed major tours in Australia in the early 1960s. Paul Robeson attended a meeting of the Australian Aboriginal Fellowship in Sydney during his tour. The 'Go Tell it on the Mountain Singers', touring in Australia, sang a farewell song to the Freedom riders when they left Sydney University in 1965.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Robinson, *Dreaming Tracks*, 15, 18.

⁴⁵ Carole Y. Johnson, 'Now is the Time to Dance', *Catalyst*, February 1974, 1 quoted in Robinson, *Dreaming Tracks*, 18.

⁴⁶ Ann Curthoys, 'Paul Robeson's visit to Australia and Aboriginal activism, 1960' in Frances Peters-Little, Ann Curthoys and John Docker (eds.), *Passionate Histories: myth, memory and Indigenous Australia* (ANU e-press: Canberra, 2010), 164-166.

During her visit Johnson became involved with the Aboriginal community in Sydney. She decided to stay in Australia while Pomare's Company continued its tour to America. Johnson started to run dance workshops in an old Church Hall in Redfern in May 1972 with funding for six months from the ACA. The classes ran twice a week with participants from 11 to 30 years. Phemie Bostock, her daughter Tracey, Wayne Nicol, Norma Williams, Elsie and Joanne Vesper were among the regular attendants.⁴⁷

The dance and theatre groups started to create street theatre together after Bob Maza arrived in Sydney.⁴⁸ Their first performance, *The Challenge – Embassy Dance*, was part of the re-erection of the Tent Embassy on 30 July 1972.⁴⁹ It portrayed the violence and brutality present in Aboriginal lives.⁵⁰ Gary Foley also remembers how the Black Theatre organised a performance in the heart of Sydney to test the public response and raise awareness of police harassment. They arranged an arrest of a well-known Aboriginal activist by two non-Aboriginal people pretending to be police.

It was great piece of street theatre because most people passing by completely ignored the situation except for a non-Aboriginal lawyer, who happened to be passing in the bus, who had been helping in the establishment of the ALS who took it for real. This ended up in Hal Wootten calling around every police station demanding that this Aboriginal person be released and the police denying madly that anyone had been arrested. It created a fiasco, and a most embarrassing situation, but it was good, and as street theatre most educational though all involved might not conceive that.⁵¹

The Embassy Dance was further developed to incorporate some traditional aspects. The dance group started to develop their own style that fused modern with traditional dance to express contemporary issues. Together with other choreographies prepared by Johnson's students it was performed at the Friends Quaker Meeting House in Sydney in September 1973. It was the first paid performance by the group and earned them \$60. Soon the dance group became part of the Black Theatre and started to run their workshops at its headquarters, 181 Regent Street.⁵²

⁴⁷ Johnson interviewed by Lee Chittick, 15 January 1996; Raymond S. Robinson, *Dreaming Tracks*, 23-26.

⁴⁸ Robinson, *Dreaming Tracks*, 27.

⁴⁹ Lester Bostock, 'Black Theatre in New South Wales', *New Dawn*, September 1973, Vol. 4, No. 4, 13.

⁵⁰ Robinson, *Dreaming Tracks*, 31.

⁵¹ Gary Foley in 'Black Theatre Company', *Hindsight*, ABC, 26 October 1997.

⁵² Lester Bostock, National Black Theatre Report, part 1, R76/36, C1696, NAA; Bostock, 'Black Theatre in New South Wales', 13; *SMH*, 6 April 1977; Robinson, *Dreaming Tracks*, 32, 36. The Embassy dance was also

The dance group of the National Black Theatre was invited to perform on various occasions such as one organised by the Australia-China Society and the Sydney Chinese Welcoming Committee for the Chinese Diplomatic Delegation to Australia, to mark the beginning of Australian-Chinese official relations under the Whitlam government. The dance group performed *Brolga*-dance which was described in the program as a corroboree, and which told about the bird at feeding time. A dance about kangaroo at feeding time and *Spirit Dance* were also performed.⁵³ In 1973 the Dance Company of New South Wales handed over to the Black Theatre dance group the role for showing Aboriginal tribal dance in NSW schools.⁵⁴ Several of these performances were presented by David Gulpilil, from the Yolngu of the Northern Territory who had starred in the film *Walkabout* in 1971, and Roslyn Watson, of Biri descent from Brisbane who had training in ballet and also danced with the Dance Company of New South Wales.⁵⁵

Phemie Bostock took over the running of the dance classes after Johnson left Australia when her funding from the ACA ended. It was difficult, however, to find teachers who would stay long term. For example David Gulpilil taught the group for a little while. Finally Bostock met Lucy Jumawan, from the Philippines, who was willing to take over teaching the dance classes on a regular basis.⁵⁶

Basically Black

The first full length drama production by the Black Theatre, *Basically Black*, had its premiere on 31 October 1972.⁵⁷ It was a satirical revue produced in co-operation with the Nimrod theatre. *Basically Black* was concerned with many of the central issues of Aboriginal

later performed by the Aboriginal and Islander Skills Development Scheme on their visit to Tahiti. *SMH*, 6 April 1977.

⁵³ Programme of Sydney Chinese Welcoming Committee for the Chinese Diplomatic Delegation and Australia-China Society, part 1, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA.

⁵⁴ Bostock, National Black Theatre Report, C1696/10.

⁵⁵ Statement on Urban Theatre in Aboriginal Communities, 12 June 1974, part 2, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA; Leonarda Kovacic and Nikki Henningham, 'Watson, Roslyn', The Australian Women's Register, <http://www.womenaustralia.info/biogs/AWE1065b.htm>, accessed 24 July 2013.

⁵⁶ Robinson, *Dreaming Tracks*, 45.

⁵⁷ 'Actress stops changing jobs: finding an identity', *SMH*, 1 November, 1972.

activism, including land rights, racism, malnutrition and police brutality.⁵⁸ The critics complimented it for its ability to deal with these issues with humour and playfulness.⁵⁹ In fact humour was central to all the productions at the Black Theatre. Marcia Langton describes how: “Aboriginal humour was a great resource for survival and for appreciating the world. It was also a great way for laughing at and thereby distancing the race hatred.”⁶⁰

Basically Black used sketches written for the Nindethana production of *Jack Charles Is Up and Fighting* as a starting point for the play.⁶¹ Its sketch-style had for decades been a regular form of entertainment in Koori pubs and gatherings.⁶² Lester Bostock recalls how it was difficult to find a suitable play to perform when their group first started. Plays by white playwrights, such as Shakespeare and O’Neil, were not appropriate, nor were African-Americans plays, for none of them had an Indigenous perspective and their language was not familiar. “None of these scripts spoke about our own experience”, Bostock tells.⁶³ Thus they decided to base their scripts on their experiences. Aileen Corpus, a Gurindji woman who performed in *Basically Black*, explains how for them “the theatre was about presenting all those ordinary things that were happening to us. And that was political and that was radical.”⁶⁴

The final script of *Basically Black* included sketches by Indigenous and non-Indigenous authors such as Ron Blair, Jim Crawford, Gary Foley, Ken Horler, John Huston, Bob Maza and Bill Reed. Members of the Aboriginal community were also welcome to come and share their ideas in the rehearsals.⁶⁵ That is how Gary Foley got invited to join the production, after the many comments he made from the audience.⁶⁶ The original scripts of the performance appear to have been lost. However, it is possible to get some idea from

⁵⁸ Margaret Jones, ‘Aboriginal Players in ‘Basically Black’’, *SMH*, 2 November 1972; ‘Basically Black’, *Tribune*, part 1, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA. *Basically Black* was also broadcasted by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in 1973, Margaret Jones, ‘Superboong and the racists’, *SMH*, 5 May 1973.

⁵⁹ Katherine Brisbane, ‘Meeting our blacks’, *Australian*, 4 November 1972; Dawson, ‘A taste of black humour for Sydney’.

⁶⁰ Marcia Langton quoted in Casey, *Creating Frames*, 115.

⁶¹ Foley in ‘Bob Maza remembered’.

⁶² Casey, ‘Nindethana and the National Black Theatre’, 26.

⁶³ Bostock, *Breaking the Yoke*, 3. See also Bostock interviewed by the author; Lester Bostock in ‘Black Theatre Company’, *Hindsight*, ABC, 26 October 1997.

⁶⁴ Aileen Corpus in ‘The National Black Theatre’, *Message Stick*, ABC, 1 July 2012, <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/messagestick/stories/s3538616.htm>, accessed 11 January 2013.

⁶⁵ Casey, *Creating Frames*, 53.

⁶⁶ Foley in ‘Black Theatre Company’.

contemporary descriptions as well as from the televised version of the show broadcast by the ABC in 1973. Maryrose Casey's detailed research has also been very helpful.⁶⁷

Ken Horler, from the Nimrod Theatre, directed *Basically Black* with Bob Maza as the co-director. In addition to Bob Maza, the cast included Gary Foley and Zac Martin, from the Melbourne New Theatre, who had written plays and was at the time acting in and writing scripts for the ATN 7 television series *Catch Candy*. Bindi Williams, from Cowra who had a guest part in Channel 7 series *Boney* based on Arthur Upfield's novels about an Aboriginal detective hero, was also part of the cast.⁶⁸ The only female member of the cast was Aileen Corpus.⁶⁹ Brett Whitely designed the poster. The music was arranged by Zac Martin.⁷⁰

Basically Black was set on a stage that had a tent depicting the Aboriginal Embassy and a square area of sand that represented inland Australia. Planks were set as walkways on three sides of the performance space. Many reviewers noted the impact of the physical proximity of the performers to the audience.⁷¹ The revue began with the raising of the Tent Embassy – a symbol of Aboriginal protest – under a portrait of Prime Minister McMahon. The revue brought on the stage slogans such as “Stand back, Mr Gub, for the proud new black” or “Black is now the fashion”. It ended with the Black Power salute of clenched fists and upraised arms.⁷²

In one of the sketches Bob Maza played the Minister for the Environment, Aboriginals and the Arts. Wearing a white mask, he sat in front of three telephones: pink for the arts, black for the Aborigines and green for the environment. As the black phone rings, the Minister answers a call from Doctor Kalokerinos from the Aboriginal Medical Service, who studied malnutrition among Aboriginal children. He talks to the phone: “Look Doc, we can't even get fresh orange juice in the members' dining room. OK, some babies live, some babies die, that's the way the boomerang bounces. Tell you what though, tell your piccaninnies they can have all the Crown of Thorns starfish they want.”⁷³

⁶⁷ Casey, *Creating Frames*.

⁶⁸ Jones, ‘Aboriginal Players in Basically Black’; Dawson, ‘A taste of black humour for Sydney’; Kemp, ‘Theatre the Black Muslim way’.

⁶⁹ ‘Actress stops changing jobs’, *SMH*.

⁷⁰ Casey, *Creating Frames*, 53.

⁷¹ Casey, *Creating Frames*, 54-55.

⁷² Jones, ‘Aboriginal Players in ‘Basically Black’.

⁷³ Dawson, ‘A taste of black humour for Sydney’.

The actors wore white masks when playing white characters such as the Minister above. (See Appendix 3.) This had also been the practice in *Jack Charles Is Up and Fighting* at Nindenthana. Use of masks signalled to the audience that what they were about to see was to be taken as burlesque – white characters, white theatrical forms and whiteness itself – not at face value.⁷⁴ Masks stripped white characters of facial expressions – the range of emotions and reactions human faces reveal. They allowed a more subtle and distanced transformation that avoided bodily imitation.⁷⁵ The use of white masks made *whiteness* visible. It reversed the gaze from Indigenous people to non-Indigenous people as the Other, and thus addressed the racial politics and hierarchies that were in play in Australian society.⁷⁶

The use of white masks also toyed with reversing the culture of blackface performance still in practice in the Australian entertainment industry. The white actor James Laurenson, who performed Boney in the series in which Bindi Williams appeared, achieved credibility as an Aboriginal character by wearing chocolate coloured Max Factor and having his scalp dyed and hair given a frizzy perm.⁷⁷ At the same time Aboriginal actors were struggling to find work. Minstrel shows had been popular entertainment in Australia in the latter half of the nineteenth century.⁷⁸

The use of costume in *Basically Black* subverted imperial and patriarchal codes that had dominated Aboriginal lives. In one sketch Bindi Williams was dressed in a scarlet uniform as John Macarthur. Maza played Bennelong who, beautifully tailored, was locked in a gilded cage on display at a Garden party in London as the exotic ‘Antipodean’. (See Appendix 4.) He was fed like a parrot and responds with lines such as “Good tucker, Boss”. At one point Bennelong steps out of the cage to show the eighteenth-century gentleman that the savage can outdo them all at a minuet.⁷⁹ The sketch challenged the audience to think about

⁷⁴ Helen Gilbert, ‘Black and White and Re(a)d All Over Again: Indigenous minstrelsy in contemporary Canadian and Australian Theatre’, *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 55, No. 4, December 2003, 681, 683.

⁷⁵ John Bell, ‘Beyond the Cold War: bread and puppet theater and the new world order’ in Jeanne Colleran and Jenny S. Spencer (eds.), *Staging Resistance: Essays on Political Theatre* (Ann Arbor: the University of Michigan Press, 2001), 51.

⁷⁶ Gilbert, ‘Black and White and Re(a)d All Over Again’, 679-682, 685.

⁷⁷ Nicklin, ‘Black is white and white is black’.

⁷⁸ Waterhouse, *Private Pleasures, Public Leisure*, 71-72.

⁷⁹ Brisbane, ‘Meeting our Blacks’. Brisbane identifies the actor of John Macarthur as Bindi Williams. However, after comparing the images available at the Nimrod Theatre Collection in Mitchell Library, I suspect the actor might be Gary Foley. Nimrod Theatre Photographs, 1970-1984, PXA 896/2, ML 1889/88.

the consequences of colonisation as it showed, by means of parody and masquerade, how Aboriginal people were imprisoned in the western world as a result of the ‘civilisation’ process.⁸⁰ Bennelong, of course, travelled to England with Governor Phillip, not John Macarthur, so the sketch was in this sense ahistorical. John Macarthur, however, as one of the foremost early colonial land owners and well-connected among the military, and who took part, for example, in the Rum Rebellion, perhaps better served to represent the process of colonisation and underline the dispossession of the Indigenous people.⁸¹

The political message of the Black Theatre made it relevant to Aboriginal people and identifiable as Aboriginal. Though theatre itself was a European art form, the Black Theatre grew out of political struggles that addressed bad housing, ill health and unemployment, as Lester Bostock noted at the time.⁸² In the words of Lester Bostock

Everything that Aboriginal people did and they do now, has a strong political message. We didn’t go out to develop that type of message. We were just telling stories of our lives...what has evolved is that a strong political message is there.⁸³

Performing theatre had also a further political meaning for Aboriginal people. Their physical presence on stage, which signified Otherness to the non-Indigenous audience, resisted appropriation. Their social bodies became sites of contestation that showed the historical inscriptions and competing ideologies of both Indigenous and colonising cultures.⁸⁴

To review plays by the Aboriginal theatre group was confusing for theatre critics because they did not know on what criteria to base criticism. Was it more important how the play fared in relation to the theatre scene in general, or should it be reviewed as specifically Aboriginal theatre?⁸⁵ Margaret Jones, one of the critics who reviewed *Basically Black*, pointed out “The change from the usual rattling revue pace was at first disconcerting then

⁸⁰ Helen Gilbert, ‘Dressed to kill: a postcolonial reading of costume and the body in Australian theatre’ in J. Ellen Gainor (ed.), *Imperialism and Theatre: Essays on World Theatre, Drama and Performance* (London, New York: Routledge, 1995), 107.

⁸¹ Macintyre, *A Concise History of Australia*, 38, 45-46; Margaret Steven, ‘Macarthur, John (1767–1834)’, *ADB*, National Centre of Biography, ANU, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/macarthur-john-2390/text3153>, accessed 6 June 2013; Eleanor Dark, ‘Bennelong (1764–1813)’, *ADB*, National Centre of Biography, ANU, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/bennelong-1769/text1979>, accessed 6 June 2013.

⁸² Bostock, ‘Black Theatre in New South Wales’, 13. See also Brisbane, ‘Meeting our Blacks’.

⁸³ Bostock interviewed by the author. See also Maza in ‘Bob Maza remembered’.

⁸⁴ See Gilbert, *Sightlines*, 67.

⁸⁵ For more detailed discussion about the critics response see Casey, *Creating Frames*, 66-93.

hypnotic.”⁸⁶ According to her the revue had little resemblance to the orthodox form of revue, because of the leisurely nature in which sketches were performed. Nevertheless, she felt that the some of the sketches were far too long and in places there was need for “drastic pruning”.⁸⁷ Kevon Kemp, on the other hand, argued that in *Basically Black* time and space are treated differently. “The whole way in which things are done, are explicitly of the Australian Aboriginal manner,” he wrote.⁸⁸

The last performance of the *Basically Black* was on 2 December at the night of the 1972 federal election. After twenty three years of Liberal government, and a narrow defeat in the previous election, expectations were high for an Australian Labor Party victory. The performance was cut and ran without an interval in order to close at 9.30 pm to allow the audience to follow the election results. During the show the preliminary results were posted on cards attached to side curtains. After the show a party was held to celebrate the victory of the Labor party – the price of food and drink had been included in the ticket price.⁸⁹

Basically Black was a successful show that gained an audience of over 2,000.⁹⁰ According to Gary Foley, it won over its predominately white audiences through its ability to make them laugh at themselves.⁹¹ At the time Foley described the power of performance: “I must have talked to thousands of people from the political platform, but I never felt I was getting through as well as I am at the Nimrod theatre.”⁹² However, some members of the Black Theatre thought that Aboriginal people felt uneasy about the play. Aileen Corpus described *Basically Black* as a show that was difficult for Aboriginal people in Redfern to identify with.⁹³ Bob Maza explained, in retrospect, that if *Basically Black* was thought to be offensive by the Indigenous people, it was because of its Black Power message.⁹⁴ Despite its success, *Basically Black* did not receive the place it deserved in Australian theatre history, but has

⁸⁶ Jones, ‘Aboriginal Players in ‘Basically Black’.

⁸⁷ Jones, ‘Aboriginal Players in ‘Basically Black’.

⁸⁸ Kevon Kemp, ‘Basically Black’: stage in old tradition’, *The National Times*, 13-18 November 1972.

⁸⁹ Casey, *Creating Frames*, 57.

⁹⁰ Casey, *Creating Frames*, 56.

⁹¹ Gary Foley, ‘Black Power, Black Theatre and Black Humour’, *Tracker Magazine*, 19 August 2012, <http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/essays/tracker/tracker17.html>, accessed 14 January 2013.

⁹² Gus de Brito, ‘Basic Black’, *Daily Mirror*, 9 November 1972.

⁹³ ‘Aileen Corpus: Using theatre to reunite the people’, *New Dawn*, Vol. 4, No 5, October 1973, 3. See also Bostock, National Black Theatre Report, C1696/10.

⁹⁴ Bob Maza interviewed in *Message Stick*, ABC, 31 October 1999.

remained largely unknown. Maryrose Casey argues that this is due to tendency to forget past achievements in order to create new beginnings and valorise the present when writing about Indigenous theatre.⁹⁵

On a tour to Queensland

After a successful season the Black Theatre decided to take *Basically Black* on a tour of New South Wales and Queensland. At the time Queensland Aboriginal people were living under the *Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders' Act*, which was geared towards assimilation. It restricted their lives and movement, as the Act defined who could or could not enter and live on reserves. The Department of Aboriginal and Island Affairs also managed the wages of the Aboriginal people living on reserves and had the right to approve or cancel their exchange of property.⁹⁶ According to Foley everyone in the Black Theatre thought that Queensland was at the time the most racist of all the states on the east coast and thus the revue should be taken there. By going on a tour the group hoped to show to Indigenous audiences that it was possible for them to put together a play and perform on stage.⁹⁷

The tour went ahead after Maza had been given what he regarded as firm assurance that the ACA would provide funding for it.⁹⁸ To cover the expenses until further funding arrived, he borrowed money granted by the ACA to the Black Theatre for administration and running workshops.⁹⁹ The OAA granted \$4,700 for the tour bus, after discussions with Jennifer Isaacs, the representative of the ACA.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ Casey, 'Nindethana and the National Black Theatre', 28.

⁹⁶ Garth Nettheim, 'Queensland's law for Aborigines' in *Aborigines and the History of the Queensland Acts* (Brisbane: Foundation for Aboriginal and Islander Action, 1976), 20; Henry Reynolds and Dawn May, 'Queensland' in Ann McGrath (ed.), *Contested Ground: Australian Aborigines under the British Crown* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1995), 198-200; Kathy Frankland, 'A Brief History of Government Administration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Queensland', *Records Guide Volume 1: A Guide to Queensland Government Records Relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People* (Queensland State Archives and Department of Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs, 1994), http://www.slq.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/93734/Admin_History_Aboriginal_and_Torres_Strait_Islanders.pdf, accessed 6 June 2013.

⁹⁷ Foley in 'Bob Maza remembered'.

⁹⁸ Casey, *Creating Frames*, 58.

⁹⁹ Craft Advisor's report, 8 February 1973, part 1, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁰⁰ Dexter to Maza, 29 November 1972, part 1, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA.

Conditions on the tour were rough. The group headed off to north Queensland with a bus that had “National Black Theatre on Tour” painted by Zac Martin on its side.¹⁰¹ Foley remembers how in 1972–73 a bus full of blacks was a real magnet for the police:

So I’ve always had this amazing memory of this incredible trip that we made up to north Queensland. The minute we cross the Queensland border our two vehicle convoy, Bob Maza’s Mercedes and our bus, was tailed by Queensland police for the entire duration of the trip.¹⁰²

The tour group survived on a small budget by camping on river banks. Maza emphasised that it was only possible to even start the tour because the actors “were willing to starve and rough it.”¹⁰³ Things didn’t get easier when they arrived at the Innisfail Festival of the Arts, where they had been invited to perform, but nobody had heard of the group and no accommodation was organised.¹⁰⁴

After a performance at Innisfail the tour headed further north, though there was still no sign of funding. The Black Theatre arrived at Yarrabah mission, where they applied for permission to perform from the Aboriginal council of the reserve. The council agreed, but the white administrator objected to it and went as far as door knocking around the reserve telling everyone to stay away from the performers, whom he described as communists and Black Power radicals from Sydney. As a consequence all the residents came to see the show. It was most successful and the audience could not get enough. Entering the reserve without permission, however, made the Black Theatre group potentially subject to criminal charges. To further add to the difficulties, the tour bus was in poor condition and had to be towed away from the mission by the manager.¹⁰⁵

There was still no sign of funding from the ACA and the tour had to be cancelled after the performance at the Yarrabah mission. Everybody had to find their way back home on their own. Back in Sydney, the ACA argued that the Black Theatre had misspent the \$2,800 the ACA had granted for administration and conducting writers’, technical and arts workshops.¹⁰⁶ Maza felt that a great fuss was made about the money while at “the same

¹⁰¹ Casey, *Creating Frames*, 58.

¹⁰² Foley in ‘Bob Maza remembered’.

¹⁰³ Bob Maza quoted in Kevin Gilbert, *Because White Man’ll Never Do It* (Sydney, Auckland, London: Harper Collins, (1973) 2002), 119.

¹⁰⁴ Casey, *Creating Frames*, 58.

¹⁰⁵ Casey, *Creating Frames*, 61–61.

¹⁰⁶ Craft Advisor’s report, C1696/10.

time government gives \$40,000 for a bunch of footballers to go over to New Zealand to play.’¹⁰⁷ According to him, the difference was that the Black Theatre made a social comment. In discussion with Kevin Gilbert, Maza further reflected that the tour failed because of bad organisation, lack of experience and over-optimism.¹⁰⁸ Importantly, the tour reflected the Black Theatre’s desire to reach towards Aboriginal people elsewhere in Australia. It is another example of Aboriginal self-determination starting locally, but then expanding its influence geographically, similarly to the ALS and AMS.

From theatre to cultural centre

After the tour to Queensland, the Black Theatre had to reorganise and establish a new leadership to assure further funding from the ACA and the DAA. Maza resigned while Bindi Williams became the director and Gary Foley the co-director. The Black Theatre started to slowly work towards a better administrative framework and also to incorporate as was required by the government.¹⁰⁹ In mid-1973, with funding from the ACA, Lester Bostock started to work as an administrator and the Black Theatre was able to recommence workshops in drama, dance and writing at the St Vincent’s Catholic Church in 117 Redfern Street.¹¹⁰

The newly formed group was keen to operate more like a cultural centre, rather than concentrate solely on producing theatre and dance performances. The Black Theatre hoped to work towards better welfare for the Aboriginal community and, in particular, to reach young people before they became a legal or medical problem. Lester Bostock argued that a wide range of workshop activities, such as dance, speech, writing and theatre, were an alternative to going to clubs and hotels.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Maza quoted in Gilbert, *Because a White Man’ll Never Do It*, 2002, 117.

¹⁰⁸ Maza quoted in Gilbert, *Because a White Man’ll Never Do It*, 2002, 118.

¹⁰⁹ Craft Advisor’s report, C1696/10.

¹¹⁰ Bostock, National Black Theatre Report, C1696; Dexter to Minister, 13 September 1973, part 1, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA; Income and Expenditure Statement, 1 May 1973 to 31 August 1973, part 1, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA.

¹¹¹ Bostock, National Black Theatre report, C 1696/10; Bostock to Chris, 2 August 1973, part 1, R76/36, C 1696/10, NAA; McGuigan, note for file, 23 September 1974, part 1, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA. See also ‘Objectives’, *Mereki*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 15 November 1974, 1; Ayleen [sic.] Corpus, ‘Black Theatre, Sydney’, Northern Rivers Black Lectures, Lismore, 25 August 1976, MS 3293, AIATSIS, 4.

The Black Theatre needed larger and permanent premises in order to operate as a cultural centre. The Church hall was not suitable as a regular rehearsal space as it was small and used by other groups.¹¹² Suitable space was found when the Methodist Church of Australasia offered a lease of 31-33 Botany Street (now Cope Street) in 1973. (See Appendix 1.) The two story building was known as the Epworth Building and had previously operated as a factory.¹¹³ It was located in the centre of Redfern near the Aboriginal Legal and Medical Services, Murawina and the Aboriginal Housing Company. It was also situated halfway between the Empress and Clifton pubs. Rev. Reilly, the Connexional Secretary of the Church, saw the potential of the building as a community centre and had earlier contacted Charles Perkins to inquire whether it might be useful to the Aboriginal community in Redfern.¹¹⁴ At the time Perkins was working as an Assistant Secretary for the DAA. The DAA supported the idea of an urban Aboriginal cultural centre that would help to solve problems of drunkenness and violence in the inner-city area. Gordon Bryant approved a grant of \$36,000 to the Black Theatre to lease and renovate the Epworth building in October 1973.¹¹⁵

However, the group had difficulties in incorporating the organisation and forming a strong management committee, so the DAA funds were soon frozen.¹¹⁶ The centre wanted to maintain 'National' in its name as it still assumed a position of national importance and aimed to attract nationwide attendance to its cultural and recreational activities.¹¹⁷ However, since its activities had been mainly limited to New South Wales it was not able to incorporate with 'National' in its name.¹¹⁸ There had also been a change in leadership as Williams and Foley were replaced by Tony Coorey as the Chairman of the board. In addition Phemie Bostock, Thancoupie (previously known as Gloria Fletcher), Wayne Nicol, Lorraine Richardson, Graeme Walker, Syvanna Doolan and Leila Roberts all became

¹¹² Dexter to Minister, 13 September 1973, C1696/10.

¹¹³ Dexter to Chief Property Officer, [no date], part 1, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA. See also Bostock interviewed by the author. Anna Cole suggests that the premises were rented by Bettie Fisher in 1973, but this is not supported by the DAA records. Anna M. Cole, *The Glorified Flower: Race, Gender and assimilation in Australia, 1937-1977*, (PhD thesis, University of Technology, Sydney, 2000), 271.

¹¹⁴ Reilly to Perkins, 5 July 1973, part 1, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA.

¹¹⁵ Dexter to Bostock, 9 October 1973, part 1, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA; McGuigan, 1 November 1973, part 1, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA.

¹¹⁶ Bostock to McGuigan, 20 December 1973, part 1, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA.

¹¹⁷ Draft of the idea for working group of Black Theatre, 4 February 1974, part 1, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA.

¹¹⁸ Arthur for Secretary, Attorney-General's Department to the Secretary, DAA, 29 November 1973, part 1, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA.

as directors in September 1973.¹¹⁹ During this time the Black Theatre remained under the close guidance of the Urban Theatre Committee of the Aboriginal Arts Board, where Carole Johnson, in particular, was working towards getting the Black Theatre up and running.¹²⁰ Johnson had returned to Australia in 1973 and was working as a consultant for the Urban Theatre Committee and had received a six month grant from the Aboriginal Arts Board to tutor the dance group at the Black Theatre.¹²¹

The Black Theatre started to operate fully again once a new steering committee was elected in June 1974. Bob Maza was chosen as the Chairman, Pam Hunter as the Secretary, Bettie Fisher as the Vice-Chairman, Charlotte Nipps as the Treasurer and Lorraine Mafi, Stan Roach, Pansy Hickey, Gary Foley, Kevin Cook and Ben Blakney as committee members.¹²² It was finally eligible to receive control of its funding.¹²³ Until now the payment of rent, for example, had been organised via the bank manager.¹²⁴ Bettie Fisher, a former jazz and blues singer who had toured with Jimmy and Fred Little, became the Centre's full time administrator.¹²⁵ Fisher, from the South Coast of New South Wales, had earlier been on the executive committee of the Foundation for a one and half years.¹²⁶ She was married to Thomas Hogan, the NSW state co-ordinator of the Builder's Labourer's Federation, in a tribal wedding held at the Black Theatre.¹²⁷

Aboriginal activists started to clean and prepare 31-33 Botany Street for the opening exhibition with the help of BLF members, students and progressive architects of the newly formed group Archanon, 'Architecture for the anonymous client', which was inspired by the international progressive architecture movement. Archanon was a co-operative formed by architects such as Colin James and Nick Hollo from Sydney University. They had come

¹¹⁹ Minutes of the Special General Meeting, 23 September 1973, part 1, C1696/10, NAA.

¹²⁰ E.g. Johnson to McGuigan, 4 February 1974, part 1, R76/36, C1696, NAA; Black Theatre: Past, Present, Future, 27 March 1974, part 1, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA; Johnson to McGuigan, 20 May 1974, part 1, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA; McGuigan, Report on Black Theatre, part 1, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA.

¹²¹ Aboriginal Arts Board National Black Theatre Grants paid, part 4, R76/36, C1696/11, NAA; Robinson, *Dreaming Tracks*, 47-48.

¹²² [Note in file], 7 June 1974, part 1, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA.

¹²³ McGuigan to Shipman, 12 June 1974, part 1, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA.

¹²⁴ Martin to Manager, 7 February 1974, part 1, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA; Huey to Manager, 27 February 1974, part 1, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA.

¹²⁵ Bettie Fisher, 'Administration', *Mereki*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 15 November 1974, 25; McGuigan to Shipman, 12 June 1974, C1696/10; 'Bettie Galvanises the Black Theatre', *SMH*, 11 January 1975; 'Great Loss to Black Theatre', *Aboriginal News*, Vol. 3, No. 2, October 1976.

¹²⁶ 'Mrs Betty Fisher: Entertainer and Painter', *Aboriginal Affairs Monthly*, No. 3, Vol. 1, October 1974; 'Bettie galvanises the Black Theatre', *SMH*; Cole, *The Glorified Flower*, 275.

¹²⁷ 'Stop Press', *Mereki*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 15 November 1974, 29.

in touch with the people of the Black Theatre via South Sydney Community Aid.¹²⁸ Lyne Symes also remembers the central role of women in preparing for the first exhibition:

I remember we were running around like mad hens. Picking up stuff from the artists to get it over there, to get it all up and everything... and I remember Betty doing that almost single-handed... And I s'pose it's still that same old story of the people who do the actual physical work again are the women. With little recognition.¹²⁹

The Black Theatre Aboriginal Arts and Culture Centre was formally opened at 31-33 Botany Street on 26 July 1974.¹³⁰ The exhibition room was painted beige, chocolate brown and orange reflecting colours popular in the 1970s palette. The exhibition displayed work by Aboriginal artists using diverse media, but also included Aboriginal artefacts. Within three weeks a thousand school children had visited the art exhibition. They came from schools in Redfern, Chatswood, Granville, Alexandria, Waterloo and La Perouse.¹³¹ Two years after the last performance of *Basically Black*, the Black Theatre was also negotiating with Robert Merritt for the rights to perform his play *The Cake Man* as its next full length play.¹³² Its theatre had the capacity to seat a hundred people.¹³³

The government saw the development of an urban arts program as vital and gave the Black Theatre generous funding during its first year of operations.¹³⁴ The DAA granted it \$62,752 for the rent of the building, operating expenses and equipment. The ACA paid for Brian Syron to run theatre workshops for one year. Money was also granted to Carole Johnson to run dance workshops and organise dance performances. At the same time Syron and Johnson acted as consultants for urban theatre groups.¹³⁵ The ACA also funded a variety of workshops.

¹²⁸ Cole, *The Glorified Flower*, 272.

¹²⁹ Lyne Symes quoted in Cole, *The Glorified Flower*, 274.

¹³⁰ Nick Hollo, 'From campus', *Mereki*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 15 November 1974, 5.

¹³¹ Fisher to McGuigan, part 1, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA; Zac Martin, Field officer report, 21 August 1974, part 1, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA; Hollo, 'From Campus', 5; Sandy Gray and Nick Hollo, 'Archanon II and Sydney University Students at the Black Theatre Arts and Cultural Centre', *Architecture in Australia*, April 1975, 68.

¹³² McGuigan, note for file, C1696/10. See also *Mereki*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 15 November 1974.

¹³³ Gillian Oxford, 'The Purple Everlasting: the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage in Australia', *Theatre Quarterly*, No. 26, Vol. 7, 1977, 88.

¹³⁴ McGuigan, 1 November 1973, C1696/10; Edwards to Secretary, 24 February 1975, part 2, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA.

¹³⁵ Aboriginal Arts Board National Black Theatre Grants paid, C1696/11.

The Black Theatre continued to pass on traditional Aboriginal culture and nurtured the existing urban Aboriginal culture.¹³⁶ Its dance group taught contemporary and tribal dance for children so that they could learn what “their own identity is”.¹³⁷ Soon after opening it had 36 children attending dance and writing workshops. These children came from schools at La Perouse and the Mount Druitt area.¹³⁸ An Aboriginal parent was overheard saying to his child, while leaving him at a drama workshop: “You go in there and get what I can’t give you. Those theatre people can give it to you.”¹³⁹

As a cultural centre the Black Theatre engaged in a large variety of activities and was a base for cultural exchange. Karate and photography were part of the planned program and the centre also organised fashion shows.¹⁴⁰ Thancoupi, who was enrolled at East Sydney Technical College and became the first Indigenous ceramic artist,¹⁴¹ ran a pottery workshop. Black Lace, a local band, trained and also ran workshops at the Black Theatre. They represented the Black Theatre Arts and Culture Centre at the Aboriginal Country and Western Festival in 1976.¹⁴² The Black Theatre also operated “Ebony Profile”, a black casting agency.¹⁴³ International black performers such as Roberta Flack, Russ and Roland Kirk, Osibisa and the Ghanaian drummers visited the Black Theatre.¹⁴⁴

The first training course in performing arts specifically catering for Indigenous people was organized at the Black Theatre. The Urban Theatre Committee, together with the Black Theatre, and with further funding from the Department of Education, organised a six-week course in writing, contemporary and traditional dance, drama, speech training, theatre

¹³⁶ Petition for Black Theatre, part 1, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA. See also Submission: administrative running cost 1976-1977, 15 July 1976, part 3, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA; Kevin Cook, ‘Foreword’, *Mereki*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 15 November 1974, 3.

¹³⁷ Bostock, National Black Theatre Report, C1696.

¹³⁸ ‘Mrs Betty Fisher’, *Aboriginal Affairs Monthly*.

¹³⁹ Whaley, ‘A City’s Place of Dreaming: Black Theatre in Sydney’, 99.

¹⁴⁰ Membership application, part 1, R76/36, C 1696/10, NAA; Aboriginal Arts Board National Black Theatre Grants paid, C1696/11; Black on in the World of Fashion, program, part 3, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁴¹ Adrian Newstead, ‘Passing of Thancoupie’, *Aboriginal Art News*, 29 April 2011, <http://www.aboriginalartnews.com.au/2011/04/passing-of-thancoupie.php>, accessed 21 February 2013.

¹⁴² Administrator’s report 1976, part 4, R76/36, C1696/11, NAA. See also Corpus, ‘Black Theatre, Sydney’, 3; Aboriginal Arts Board National Black Theatre Grants paid, C1696/11.

¹⁴³ Nicklin, ‘Black is white and white is black’; ‘Basically Black’, *New Dawn*, 2; Jones, ‘Superboong and the racists’; Draft memorandum of association of National Black Theatre, C1696/10. See also Corpus, ‘Black Theatre, Sydney’, 4, 9.

¹⁴⁴ Kevon Kemp, ‘Black theatre: a jumping total arts experience’, *The National Times*, April 28 – May 3, 1975, 18; Mary Haugh, ‘How Bettie Fisher forced Black Theatre on the map’, *National Times*, 12-17 January 1976, 26.

administration, lighting, sound and stage management in 1975.¹⁴⁵ Twenty-three students from different parts of Australia completed the course. For the first four weeks they studied five days a week, twelve hours a day all the different subjects taught at the course. During the final two weeks they chose a specific area of focus.¹⁴⁶ Jack Davis, a playwright and poet from Western Australia, was one who attended and in his poem reflects on the the course:

[Poem
has been removed
due to Copyright
restrictions.¹⁴⁷]

The Black Theatre also participated in the daily life of the Redfern community. Lester Bostock remembers how “a lot of time was spent doing street agitation and doing a lot of work on the street. And a lot of our time was also spent doing social work”.¹⁴⁸ Gerry Bostock remarks

[W]e were working with the kids, rehearsing our reviews, doing sketches or street theatre, performing in hotels even, in the lounges of pubs, and we were just expressing our feelings of what we thought of contemporary society and what we thought about the government, and what we thought about our own environment.¹⁴⁹

The Black Theatre, like the Aboriginal Legal and Medical Services, employed a field officer to liaise with the community in 1974.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁵ Edwards to Secretary, 24 February 1975, C1696/10; Johnson to Bissaker, 13 March 1975, part 2, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA. See also Raymond S. Robinson, *Dreaming Tracks*, 67, 69.

¹⁴⁶ Robinson, *Dreaming Tracks*, 65-66.

¹⁴⁷ Jack Davis, ‘Playwriter’s seminar – 1975’, *Identity*, Vol. 2, No. 6, October 1975, 25.

¹⁴⁸ Bostock interviewed by the author.

¹⁴⁹ Bostock, ‘Black Theatre’, 70.

¹⁵⁰ Martin, Field Officer Report, C1696/10; Zac Martin, ‘Executive Field Officer’ in *Mereki*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 15 November 1974, 27.

In its diverse activities the Black Theatre was a forerunner of the revival of Aboriginal culture in Southeast Australia.¹⁵¹ It was described in the contemporary media as being part of the “Aboriginal rebirth” and representing the “Aboriginal renaissance”.¹⁵² Bob Maza discussed in the Black Theatre newsletter, *Mereki*, how the Black Theatre would act to remind that Aboriginal people have survived, that they have rights to the land as Indigenous people and that they have a rich culture to be proud of.¹⁵³ The Aboriginal Arts Board also thought that the Black Theatre offered a way to provide opportunities for the “de-culturized Urban Black Community to find new forms of cultural expression, which will restore self respect and purpose in this community.”¹⁵⁴

Meeting place

The building of the Black Theatre on Botany Street became a meeting place for Indigenous people. Before the Black Theatre had its own premises there was really no place where Aboriginal people could meet. Local pubs were noisy, full of drunken people and frequented by the occasional white who objected to the Aboriginal presence.¹⁵⁵ On the streets of Redfern police enforced an unofficial curfew and organised mass arrests outside the pubs at closing time as I discussed in Chapter 2.

The Black Theatre became a community centre, where theatre and culture were only one of its multiple functions, Lester Bostock reflects in retrospect. At the Black Theatre Aboriginal people could organise activities on their own terms.¹⁵⁶ Indigenous people found there shelter from the racism prevalent in Australian society. It also gave Indigenous people

¹⁵¹ Parbury, *Survival*, 148.

¹⁵² Minogue, ‘New arts centre is ‘renaissance’ for Aborigines’. See also Kemp, ‘Black theatre: a jumping total arts experience’, 18; Statement on Urban Theatre in Aboriginal Communities, C1696/10.

¹⁵³ Bob Maza, ‘Editorial’, *Mereki*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 15 November 1974, 15.

¹⁵⁴ Edwards to Secretary, 24 February 1975, C1696/10.

¹⁵⁵ Notes for Proposal, [no date], part 2, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA; Haugh, ‘How Bettie Fisher forced Black Theatre on the map’, 26. See also Draft memorandum of association of National Black Theatre, C1696/10; Black Theatre: Past, Present, Future, C1696/10; Kevin Smith in ‘Black Theatre Company’, *Hindsight*, ABC, 26 October 1997.

¹⁵⁶ Bostock interviewed by the author.

pride in their sense of identity and helped them to re-establish contact with Indigenous traditions.¹⁵⁷

The Black Theatre was also seen as a neutral ground, where anyone could get involved with everything, Bostock further explains. It was a place where Aboriginal people could discuss the problems faced by the community.¹⁵⁸ Indeed, the Black Theatre was run by Indigenous people from different areas, including Bostock of the Bandjalang people, Fisher from the South Coast and Maza of the Yidinjdji and Meriam people. This was in contrast to, for example, the Aboriginal Legal Service, where Wiradjuri people from Cowra, and the Coe family in particular, were dominant, as I discussed in Chapter 2.

The increasing Indigenous profile and access to property in Redfern was not welcomed by everyone. Bettie Fisher received death threats soon after she took over the administration of the Black Theatre.¹⁵⁹ Maza wondered whether opening an Aboriginal cultural centre might make some people “think of ghetto, full of blacks who hate people not like themselves. Maybe just the counterpart of the Ku Klux Klan, where, perhaps whites are getting a bad time and blacks are getting heavy.”¹⁶⁰ Shortly before the Black Theatre Arts and Culture Centre opened, the establishment of the Aboriginal Housing Company had received vocal resistance from the local residents as I will discuss in Chapter 6.¹⁶¹

In contrast to white resistance, the Black Theatre Arts and Culture Centre wanted to be accessible to people with different ethnic backgrounds, despite its clear aim of promoting and nurturing Aboriginal culture. Its newsletter *Mereki* – the peace maker – published soon after the opening, had a section which contained articles in Greek and Italian, as well as in English, under the title “the House of the Family of the Man”.¹⁶² The inspiration for this section was quite possibly a photographic exhibition called *The Family of Man* that explored the commonalities that bind different people and cultures around the world together. It was first displayed at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1955 and later toured in

¹⁵⁷ John McCallum, ‘Black Theatre: Robert Merritt’s ‘The Cake Man’, *Meanjin*, Vol. 36, No. 4, December 1977, 475-476. See also Whaley, ‘A City’s Place of Dreaming’, 98.

¹⁵⁸ Bostock interviewed by the author.

¹⁵⁹ Haugh, ‘How Bettie Fisher forced Black Theatre on the map’, 26.

¹⁶⁰ Maza, ‘Editorial’, 14.

¹⁶¹ See e.g. Anderson, ‘Place narratives and the origins of inner Sydney’s Aboriginal settlement’, 317.

¹⁶² *Mereki*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 15 November 1974, 16-23.

37 countries, including Australia.¹⁶³ Ted Noffs had also put forward the idea of the Family of Man, a belief in universal spirituality and the worth of each person as a son or daughter of God, in the late 1960s.¹⁶⁴ Noffs himself phrased it as “a stream of spiritual pattern which has as its objective the harmonising of the religious and philosophical movements in the world.”¹⁶⁵

The Black Theatre Arts and Culture Centre gave the Redfern Aboriginal community access to substantial premises in the city where Indigenous presence was being undermined by the non-Indigenous people. Like the ALS and the AMS, the Black Theatre empowered urban Aboriginal people and underlined the Aboriginal belonging in the city. Having an Aboriginal community space was significant in a country where Indigenous people were not granted land rights and their position as the original owners of the land had not been recognised.

The Cake Man

The Black Theatre produced two major plays that reflected on the significance of the colonial past to the contemporary Aboriginal situation and that contained an important political message for social change. However, *the Cake Man* and *Here Comes the Nigger* both approached these issues in different ways. *The Cake Man*, written by Robert Merritt and directed by Bob Maza, had its premiere at the Black Theatre on 9 January 1975.¹⁶⁶ It was the first Indigenous-initiated and -controlled full length commercial theatre production in Sydney. The Aboriginal Arts Board funded the production with \$8,621.72 for the production costs.¹⁶⁷ The play tells a story of Sweet William, his wife Ruby and their son Pumpkinhead living in poverty on an Aboriginal mission in the western part of New South

¹⁶³ ‘Edward Steichen at *The Family of Man*’, 1955, The Museum of Modern Art, www.moma.org/research/archives/highlights/06_1955.html, accessed 14 November 2006; Monique Berlier, ‘The Family of Man: readings of an exhibition’ in Bonnie Brennen and Hanno Hardt (eds.), *Picturing the Past: media, history and photography* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 224.

¹⁶⁴ Winifred Ward, *Men Ahead of Their Time* (Melbourne: The Joint Board of Christian Education, 1996), 87, 89. See also Jarrat, *Ted Noffs*, 270-272.

¹⁶⁵ Ted Noffs, *What is the Family of Man?* (Sydney: Wayside Chapel, 1974), 3, quoted in Ward, *Men Ahead of Their Time*, 104.

¹⁶⁶ Black Theatre Arts and Culture Centre, invitation letter, part 1, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA; ‘Black Theatre first’, *SMH*, January 8, 1975.

¹⁶⁷ Casey, *Creating Frames*, 106; Aboriginal Arts Board National Black Theatre Grants paid, C1696/11.

Wales. It was a contemporary play set at the time of assimilation policy, rural unemployment and large numbers of Aboriginal people migrating to the city in the hope of a better future.

The script was based on Merritt's own experiences, as he, a Wiradjuri man, grew up on the Erambie mission near Cowra. During the production of the play Merritt was serving a sentence in Bathurst prison, where he received writing support from playwright Jim McNeil, who was also serving a sentence at the time.¹⁶⁸ Though Merritt was a minimum security prisoner, some of whom were allowed to attend technical college, he was not allowed to participate in the production of his play or initially even to see it performed.¹⁶⁹ Maza carried out most of the negotiations with the prison authorities and visited Merritt to discuss the play with him.¹⁷⁰ In the end, after repeated requests, Merritt was allowed to attend a performance to which he arrived hand cuffed to the detectives.¹⁷¹ The actors felt the police presence was very threatening and only agreed to start the play if Merritt was released from the handcuffs. Justine Saunders recalls how the police officers burst into the back stage where she was changing costumes in between acts.¹⁷²

The play had Indigenous and non-Indigenous cast members. Justine Saunders played Ruby, Zac Martin played Sweet William and Teddy Phillips and Liza Maza played their son Pumpkinhead. The non-Indigenous members were Max Cullen as civilian, Dan Adcock as priest/mission manager and Rob Steele as soldier/inspector.¹⁷³ The decision to have non-Indigenous actors was the outcome of a difficult debate. Bettie Fisher, the administrator of the Centre, argued for an all-Indigenous cast. However, Maza argued for collaboration and working with skilled actors no matter what their background.¹⁷⁴ He had earlier noted about black-white co-operation

¹⁶⁸ Adam Shoemaker, 'The Cake Man' in Philip Parsons and Victoria Chance (eds.), *Companion to Theatre in Australia* (Sydney: Currency Press in association with Cambridge University Press, 1988), 119.

¹⁶⁹ 'Play begins with author in jail', *Australian*, 18 January 1975; 'The writer denied his vision', *Nation Review*, January 24-30, 1975, 407.

¹⁷⁰ Lester Bostock in 'Black Theatre Company'.

¹⁷¹ Casey, *Creating Frames*, 104.

¹⁷² Justine Saunders in 'Black Theatre Company', *Hindsight*, ABC, 26 October 1997.

¹⁷³ Merritt, *The Cake Man*, 4.

¹⁷⁴ Casey, *Creating Frames*, 102. See also Whaley, 'A City's Place of Dreaming', 100; Haugh, 'How Bettie Fisher forced Black Theatre on the map', 26.

One time I was a very heavy black power man, I couldn't see black and white people working together – ever. Then I went to the States in 70 and saw how screwed up they all were over there and realised that there had to be another way.¹⁷⁵

The set for the play was built with the help of the architects from Archanon and Sydney University architecture students from materials found, borrowed and bought only when necessary. The stage and seating were built into a mission, so that when the audience walked in they felt they were on the mission themselves. An old fuel stove, the heart of a mission hut, was found from a railway yard. The entrance to the space was turned into a corrugated iron veranda. Seating was made of scaffolding that had boards covered with hessian. The seats were arranged on three sides between steel pillars that were painted black.¹⁷⁶ Bettie Fisher thanked the white supporters, who had done lot of the technical work, “They’ve worked hard, bloody hard.”¹⁷⁷

The Cake Man depicted the consequences of colonisation and the contemporary search for Aboriginal identity.¹⁷⁸ It starts with a scene of the first encounter, in which an Aboriginal family meets the white characters: a priest, a soldier and a civilian. The priest, who leads the negotiations, tries to talk to the members of the family, but their response is silence. Rather than ignorance, this silence could be read as an active protest against the imposed language.¹⁷⁹ After a few attempts the priest gives up trying to communicate *with* the Aboriginal family, but rather he starts to talk to the soldier and the civilian *about* them. In Stephen Muecke’s words the members of the Aboriginal family are refused the first and second person in the symbolic order of pronouns.¹⁸⁰ Yet, at the same time Merritt challenges the process of marginalisation by having nameless white characters, who later become a manager of a missionary, an inspector of the Aboriginal Welfare Board and a civilian from the nearby town.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁵ Bob Maza quoted in Nicklin, ‘Black is white and white is black’.

¹⁷⁶ Gray and Hollo, ‘Archanon II and Sydney University Students at the Black Theatre Arts and Cultural Centre’, 68-69; See also Haugh, ‘How Bettie Fisher forced Black Theatre on the map’, 26.

¹⁷⁷ Bettie Fisher quoted in David Marr, ‘Black Theatre Gets a New Start’, *The Bulletin*, 18 January 1975, 45.

¹⁷⁸ Syron, ‘Afterword’, 144.

¹⁷⁹ Gilbert, *Sightlines*, 88.

¹⁸⁰ Stephen Muecke, ‘Available Discourses on Aborigines’ in P. Botsman (ed.), *Theoretical Strategies* (Sydney: Local Consumption Publications, 1982), 100.

¹⁸¹ This transfer in characters was also noted by John McCallum in McCallum, ‘Black Theatre: Robert Merritt’s ‘The Cake Man’, 476.

The Cake Man addresses the emasculation of Aboriginal culture under colonisation.¹⁸² Early colonists commonly perceived Aboriginal men as a threat and Aboriginal women in need of protection of the ‘civilised’ white men.¹⁸³ In the play the priest blesses the soldier’s gun to shoot the father and then hands a bible to the mother. Later, on the mission Sweet William is struggling to support his family and find his place in the society. He finds solace in drink. “Sweet bloody William, they call me, huh, the jacky with the ‘baccy ...’n the wine”¹⁸⁴, he laments to his wife. Adding to his sorrow, Sweet William realises that his son is a witness to his struggles and resents his failings:

Pumpkinhead...he don’t want no stories about the Kuri bushrangers...not ‘cause he likes me tellin’ him stories, Rube. No, that boy make me tell about when the Kuris were brave, and he’s only meanin’ to make me know about myself.¹⁸⁵

In the character of Sweet William Anna Cole sees the systematic and gendered practices of assimilation policy, rather than inability of Aboriginal men to fit in the modern society as he was often seen in the contemporary non-Indigenous reviews.¹⁸⁶ Ruby supports Sweet William and affirms his role as a father and a husband, though in many ways she is the one looking after the family. She says, “I know what’s your fault and what isn’t. I know how you’re feelin’, I know you tried a long time”.¹⁸⁷

Ruby cherishes the Bible that she has received, as was common among Aboriginal women. As Shirley Smith recounted many women at Erarnbie mission “clung to religion because there was so little that Aboriginal women could cling to.”¹⁸⁸ Through Christianity Aboriginal people became familiar with humanitarian and liberal political ideas and concepts, which they could utilise to articulate their plight.¹⁸⁹ At times religion itself became a tool of resistance for it supported Indigenous women’s rights and value as a human

¹⁸² Syron, ‘Afterword’, 144.

¹⁸³ Joanna de Groot, “‘Sex’ and ‘Race’: the construction of language and image in the nineteenth century” in Susan Mendus and Jane Rendall (eds.), *Sexuality and Subordination: interdisciplinary studies of gender in the nineteenth century* (London, New York: Routledge, 1989), 104; Patricia Grimshaw and Andrew May, “‘Inducements to the Strong to be Cruel to the Weak’: authoritative white colonial male voices and the construction of gender in Koori society’ in Norma Grieve and Ailsa Burns (ed.), *Australian Women: contemporary feminist thought* (Melbourne, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 102-106; Ann McGrath, “‘Modern Stone-Age Slavery’: images of Aboriginal labour and sexuality’ in Ann McGrath and Kay Saunders, with Jackie Huggins (eds.), *Aboriginal Workers: special issue of Labour History*, Vol. 65, 1995, 37-38; Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism: race, femininity and representation* (London, New York: Routledge, 1996), 22.

¹⁸⁴ Merritt, *The Cake Man*, 25.

¹⁸⁵ Merritt, *The Cake Man*, 34.

¹⁸⁶ Cole, *The Glorified Flower*, 284.

¹⁸⁷ Merritt, *The Cake Man*, 30.

¹⁸⁸ Smith, *MumShirl*, 14.

¹⁸⁹ Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, 6.

being.¹⁹⁰ However, conversion to Christianity did not mean that older modes of thought and actions were fully laid aside.¹⁹¹

Ruby transmits the word of God through oral story telling rather than liturgical readings. Though she does not undermine the priority of writing in the Bible, she appropriates its word and replaces the codes, conventions and cultural associations of a particular written event, the story of Jesus, with a distinctively different oral one, the central theme of the play: the story of the Cake Man.¹⁹² Ruby recounts the story with her son Pumpkinhead:

RUBY: Long time ago, when Dreamtime's ending, Jesus, he sent the Cake Man over the sea to find the Kuri children. And he come...

PUMPKINHEAD: With the cake. With the cake Jesus put to carry in his heart. Plenty!

RUBY: He come, with the cake, the cake that was love from Jesus, and he's lookin' 'round then for good children to love and give cake to...

PUMPKINHEAD: Only the bad men stuck a stick in Cake Man's eyes!

RUBY: That's the truth, the bad men, the wicked men done that...

PUMPKINHEAD: And then the Cake Man lose his way, and can't see because his eyes is blind, and he can't see the Kuri boys, only the gubba kids he kin see ever since them bad men done that! Cake Man's a blind man...

RUBY: Yes, and all the time since then , the Cake Man been walkin' around the bush lookin' for somethin' he's forgot about what it was...¹⁹³

Arguably the Cake Man's blindness symbolises the blindness of white Australian society.

When the civilian first enters the mission station he wants to find and punish Pumpkinhead who had taken coal from him. In fact, he wants to punish all the people living on the mission for the trouble he feels they are causing. However, at Ruby's house he is struck by the poverty in which Pumpkinhead's family is living. He sees the empty cupboard, nothing but boiled spinach for dinner and the baby crying in his cot with his eyes stuck together with discharge. The civilian regrets his hasty judgement and apologises. The next day as Pumpkinhead returns the coal to the civilian, he finds a box full of food in the coal box. In the box is a cake that the civilian takes out and shows to Pumpkinhead, who is delighted to realise that he is the Cake Man.

¹⁹⁰ Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin' up to the White Woman*, 30.

¹⁹¹ Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of revelation and revolution: Christianity, colonialism and consciousness in South Africa*, Vol. 1, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991-1997), 247.

¹⁹² Gilbert, *Sightlines*, 87.

¹⁹³ Merritt, *The Cake Man*, 21-22.

However, there is no Cake Man. “He’s just a white guy who’s given them some presents,”¹⁹⁴ Bob Maza commented when directing the play. Hence, Sweet William who has left for Sydney, where he hopes to build a better future for his family, gets sucked into the city’s racial and spatial politics. A stranger to the place, he ends up in front of the Empress Hotel, the meeting place for Aboriginal people in Redfern, symbolised by a big E made out of beer cans.¹⁹⁵ Before he has time to enter, a group of Aboriginal men are thrown out from the pub, soon the police arrive and Sweet William gets arrested.

The Cake Man was perceived as an Aboriginal play for Aboriginal audience, unlike *Basically Black*.¹⁹⁶ On its opening night the theatre was so full that not everyone could fit in. Those without seating listened to the show through the walls.¹⁹⁷ *The Cake Man* was described as part play, part historic pageant, part satiric revue.¹⁹⁸ A theatre critic commented how: “The only concessions to Western theatre are a curtain at the back, a few props, some unobtrusive background music and some thoroughly efficient lighting and sound effects.”¹⁹⁹

In 1977 *The Cake Man* was produced at the Bondi Pavillion, directed by George Ogilvie,²⁰⁰ and was broadcast on ABC television the same year. It was again co-directed by Brian Syron and Robert Merritt and went on tour at the World Theatre Festival in Denver, Colorado, and was performed in Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne.²⁰¹ It continues to have relevance and will premier at the Belvoir St Theatre in November 2013.

While enforcing the Aboriginal telling of their past, *The Cake Man* also expressed the hope that if white people would learn more about Aboriginal people and their treatment, they would understand and act for change. From early on the Black Theatre hoped to act as the go-between between whites and blacks, educating white audiences by telling them the

¹⁹⁴ Marr, ‘Black Theatre Gets a New Start’, 44.

¹⁹⁵ Gray and Hollo, ‘Archanon II and Sydney University Students at the Black Theatre Arts and Cultural Centre’, 68.

¹⁹⁶ Corpus, ‘Black Theatre, Sydney’, 5.

¹⁹⁷ Casey, *Creating Frames*, 105.

¹⁹⁸ Judy Barbour, ‘White: sugar, flour and gubbas’, *Nation Review*, 24-30 January 1975, 405.

¹⁹⁹ Romola Constantino, ‘Black Theatre’s debut’, *SMH*, 13 January 1975.

²⁰⁰ Margaret Jones, ‘Cakeman more suitable for workshop treatment’, *SMH*, 2 May 1977.

²⁰¹ Robyn Watson, ‘How the icing came to an orphaned Cake Man’, *Australian*, 30 August 1982; ‘Aboriginal Actors on tour’, *Mackay Daily Mercury*, 14 September 1982; Marie McNamara, ‘The Cake Man comes home with top honors’, *Melbourne Sun News –Pictorial*, 18 August 1982; Oliver Harvey, ‘Waking people from their plastic worlds’, *Brisbane Courier Mail*, 2 October 1982.

Aboriginal side of Australia's past and present.²⁰² The importance of educating whites was supported among many Aboriginal activists. Paul Coe, for example, asserted that white people should also be taught about the way the Aboriginal people had been treated in the past and their resistance.²⁰³

Politics of the past

Aboriginal activism for self-determination was tightly intertwined with identity politics and Indigenous representations of the past. This was pinpointed when Paul Coe said, "*If you can give these people a past you will give them a future.*"²⁰⁴ Activism for Aboriginal rights has been inherently historical in nature since the nineteenth century when the campaigners for rights for Aboriginal people reminded the white Australians that Aboriginal people were the original owners of the land.²⁰⁵ However, in the late 1960s and 1970s, in the process of building an Aboriginal national consciousness, Aboriginal activists started to look back into their pre-colonial past and revive traditional Aboriginal culture with new enthusiasm.²⁰⁶ The construction of national Aboriginal identity was driven by urban Aboriginal people's interest in history as a basis of shared identity.²⁰⁷

All the plays performed at the Black Theatre entailed a historical perspective. In this process the Black Theatre took part in Aboriginal tradition, such as the Day of Mourning Protest in 1938 or the 1970 mourning ceremony in La Perouse opposite the Cook's landing celebration which challenged the historical narratives that non-Aboriginal people told about the past.²⁰⁸ In its sketches of Bennelong, in *Basically Black*, or in the juxtaposition of the early stages of colonisation with the time on the missions, in *The Cake Man*, the Black Theatre put forward an Aboriginal representation of the past and analysed the present in

²⁰² Maza to the director OAA, [November 1972], part 1, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA. See also Jones, 'Superboong and the racists'.

²⁰³ Coe in Tatz (ed.), *Black Viewpoints*, 108.

²⁰⁴ Coe in Tatz (ed.), *Black Viewpoints*, 107. Emphasis in the original.

²⁰⁵ Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, xii.

²⁰⁶ McGregor, 'Another Nation', 354-358; McGregor, *Indifferent Inclusion*, 179.

²⁰⁷ Ian Keen, 'Introduction' in Ian Keen (ed.), *Being Black: Aboriginal cultures in 'settled' Australia* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1998), 21.

²⁰⁸ For more on the two protests mentioned see Nugent, *Botany Bay*, 174-175.

relation to this historical narrative.²⁰⁹ Aboriginal playwrights asserted a non-linear notion of time in which the past constitutes the present while at the same time it is constituted by the present.²¹⁰

By recollecting Aboriginal historical narratives, the Black Theatre affirmed positive Aboriginal identity in opposition to the negative representations of many of the non-Indigenous histories. As Maza emphasised, there was a need for Aboriginal versions of history to counter the histories written by whites who portrayed Aboriginal people as “...marauders, savages, untrustworthy, lazy, (get this one) treacherous...”²¹¹ In questioning the established stereotypical ways of viewing the Indigenous people Maza expressed a concern that has been part of the political agenda of Aboriginal theatre ever since, thus also intervening in object-signifying processes that have restricted the representations of Indigenous people.²¹²

In its plays and workshops the Black Theatre was dedicated to the process of mental decolonisation. According to Fanon, whose work was widely read by the Redfern activists, resistance could not simply address itself to changing external physical spaces, but it must also engage with the colonised spaces of people’s inner worlds.²¹³ Similarly to the Black Art Movement in the United States, the Black Theatre declared and encouraged pride in Aboriginal culture and way of life, but importantly also in blackness.²¹⁴

By embracing Aboriginal narratives of the past and affirming Aboriginal identity, the Black Theatre resisted attempts at assimilation and marginalization at a time when urban Aboriginal people were commonly perceived as unauthentic, assimilated or not ‘really’ Aboriginal, as I discussed in Chapter 1. When Aboriginal people adopted aspects of European culture they were perceived to lose their own in exchange. For example one of the critics of *The Cake Man* questioned the worth of the Black Theatre:

²⁰⁹ This was also noted in Whaley, ‘A City’s Place of Dreaming’, 100. See also Bostock, ‘Black Theatre’, 67; Smith in ‘Black Theatre Company’.

²¹⁰ Gilbert, *Sightlines*, 54.

²¹¹ Maza, ‘Editorial’, 14-15. See also Paul Coe in Alessandro Cavadini, *Ningla A’Na*, Australian Film Institute, 1972; Statement on Urban Theatre in Aboriginal Communities, C1696/10; Corpus, ‘Black Theatre, Sydney’, 8-9.

²¹² See Gilbert, ‘Dressed to Kill’, 123.

²¹³ Franz Fanon cited in Pile, ‘Introduction’, 17.

²¹⁴ Lothian, ‘A Blackward Step Is a Forward Step’, 158, 163.

[T]here is still the question of whether they should be setting themselves up to run a theatre which, pared down as it is to the basics, is still imitating the whites via the example of American black theatre.²¹⁵

Debates about authenticity, such as the above, were often designed to marginalize those who spoke in support of Indigenous issues.²¹⁶

The Black Theatre led the development in which Indigenous histories were produced, not only within an academic framework, but also in painting, theatre, film and literature. Memory can also act as a site of resistance, as bell hooks remarks, referring to Jonathan Arac's interpretation of Michel Foucault's idea of counter memory. Remembering enables us to understand and change the present by relating it to the past in the process of constructing a counter memory that challenges prevailing truths and ideas of justice.²¹⁷ By opposing Western historical narratives produced and adopted by whites – by creating a counter memory as part of the public act of remembering – the Black Theatre created space for resistance. Thus, resistance not only took place but appropriated space and made new spaces for Aboriginal activism for self-determination.²¹⁸

Crisis in the Black Theatre

After a promising start, the operations of the Black Theatre Arts and Culture started to run into difficulties. Carole Johnson reported at the time that the Centre relied heavily on her and Brian Syron's input as the consultants for the ACA Urban Theatre Committee. She argued that the centre needed a permanent staff member who would liaise with the visiting artists and take responsibility for the development and co-ordination of the program that would ensure the future of the Centre. The administrator could then focus on taking care of financial aspects, such as fund raising and reporting, as well as communicating with the

²¹⁵ Marr, 'Black Theatre Gets a New Start', 44-45.

²¹⁶ Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 73.

²¹⁷ bell hooks, 'Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination' in Lawrence Grossberg, Gary Nelson and Paula A. Treichler (ed.), *Cultural Studies* (New York, London: Routledge, 1992), 344. See also Jonathan Arac, 'Introduction' in Jonathan Arac (ed.), *Postmodernism and Politics: theory and history of literature*, Vol. 28 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1989), xviii; Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' in Donald F. Bouchard (ed.), *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977), 160.

²¹⁸ See Pile, 'Introduction', 16.

board and carrying out its policies.²¹⁹ Johnson acted as the program developer between January and March 1975. However, she withdrew from this role because she felt that she was “going beyond” the administrator Bettie Fisher’s experience and thus anything she would create would lack a firm basis once Johnson moved on. Raymond Robinson suggests that Johnson and Fisher were not able to come to an agreement about the future direction the Black Theatre would take.²²⁰

Johnson together with the dance group decided to separate from the Black Theatre in October 1975. Following the six week training course, Johnson had developed a ‘Careers in Dance’ course as a training opportunity for Aboriginal dancers with the support of three months’ funding from the Aboriginal Arts Board. She explained afterwards that the dance group moved because it was very disruptive to work at the Black Theatre. The highly political atmosphere at the time meant that it was impossible to know whether you were able to teach your class or not because of a demonstration or something else to do with the political struggle. Though she supported the marches, Johnson was concerned about the way they disrupted and impacted on her students’ professional development.²²¹ The ‘Careers in Dance’ course started to operate at the Bodenweiser Dance Studio in Chippendale and later developed into the National Aboriginal and Islander Skills Development Association (NAISDA) in Glebe.²²² After Carole Johnson other teachers, for example Christine Donnelly, taught modern and contemporary dance at the Black Theatre.²²³

The dance group’s move away from Redfern was resented by the local Indigenous community.²²⁴ As Indigenous people struggled to transform Redfern into an Aboriginal space of self-determination, they saw any breaking away from this space as undermining their struggle. There was even pressure on Aboriginal people to live in Redfern at the time.²²⁵ *Koori-Bina* questioned the motives of people such as Carole Johnson in working with the Aboriginal community and seeking to “divide our own people by setting up a

²¹⁹ Role of Artistic Consultants, 17 April 1975, part 2, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA.

²²⁰ Robinson, *Dreaming Tracks*, 75.

²²¹ Bostock interviewed by the author; Carole Johnson interviewed by Lee Chittick, Redfern, 4 March 1996, Chittick_L06, AIATSIS.

²²² Robinson, *Dreaming Tracks*, 73-75.

²²³ Haugh, ‘How Bettie Fisher forced Black Theatre on the map’, 26.

²²⁴ Bostock interviewed by the author.

²²⁵ Graham Mooney interviewed by the author, Stanmore, 1 November 2000.

dance group for Aborigines at any place save that of our own [Black Theatre Arts and Culture] Centre”.²²⁶ Lester Bostock remarks that “it was very important that the Theatre was in Redfern because it was in the heart of the ghetto.”²²⁷

Ghetto as a term is often perceived to carry negative connotations. Wendy Shaw sees the portrayal of the Block, meaning the Aboriginal Housing Company, as a ‘black ghetto’ by non-Indigenous people since the 1970s as a negative project aimed at degrading its value and right to exist by reducing it to ‘a problem area’ and also undermining its Indigeneity by association with urban blackness.²²⁸ However, using the term ‘ghetto’ to describe Redfern can also work as a source of strength from an Indigenous perspective. Stephen Nathan Haymes notes that the physical space of the black ghetto is a public space that forms a culturally specific institution. People living in the ghetto struggle to transform their space on the margin into a space of cultural resistance.²²⁹ By constructing alternative images and their own representations of Redfern, Aboriginal people resisted the white images and representations of it.

The Black Theatre lost its administrator after Bettie Fisher’s death in May 1976.²³⁰ The sudden death of Fisher, still in her mid-thirties was surrounded by controversy. Some members of the community speculated that she had broken tribal laws and exhibited sacred material to the public at the Black Theatre following which she had been ‘sung’. Others thought that Fisher’s death might have been related to the many death threats she had received. The official reports suggested that she had passed away after a heart attack.²³¹ Lester Bostock followed Fisher as the administrator.

In its interaction with the DAA, the Black Theatre, like the ALS and the AMS, had resisted the increasing requirement of accountability. Bettie Fisher had seen the expectation to comply with the DAA rules as pressuring the Black Theatre to fit within the standards and demands of white society and within non-Indigenous ideas of Aboriginal culture and

²²⁶ ‘Forward to the dreamtime’, *Koori-Bina*, Vol. 1, No. 4, September 1976, 9.

²²⁷ Bostock interviewed by the author.

²²⁸ Shaw, *Cities of Whiteness*, 137.

²²⁹ Stephen Nathan Haymes, *Race, Culture and the City* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 9, 113. The word ‘ghèto’ was first used in Venice in 1516 to describe the area where Jews were constrained to live in.

²³⁰ ‘Great Loss to Black Theatre’, *Aboriginal News*.

²³¹ Cole, *The Glorified Flower*, 278.

theatre.²³² She had expressed her frustration when writing about the Black Theatre budget for the year 1976/77: “the only way that this centre can operate is not only by looking at what is needed by us, it is also what is required of [your] department, by way of continual funding.”²³³ DAA funding was at times granted retrospectively, a few months into the funding period, which created difficulties for Centres such as the Black Theatre.²³⁴

The Black Theatre was found to be in severe financial difficulty and its affairs to be in a state of disarray; its spending had not followed the budget guidelines and recordkeeping was unsatisfactory. It had gone \$11,533 into deficit during the 1975/76 financial year.²³⁵ During that year the DAA had granted the Centre \$40,000 to cover the administrator, public officer and secretary’s salaries.²³⁶ However, the DAA records don’t indicate whether, apart from the administrator, other staff were hired. The DAA was unhappy with the Black Theatre administration and called for the provision of missing quarterly financial reports for the year. The DAA also found the details that described the Theatre’s activities for the 1975/76 financial year to be inadequate.²³⁷

The ACA had stopped funding the Black Theatre by June 1976.²³⁸ Chicka Dixon had been recorded to report to the Aboriginal Arts Board in December 1975:

The Theatre had been completely equipped but little attempt was being made to allow it to develop as a workshop theatre, which was the original intention of the Board. The Centre was no longer available to the Urban Theatre Training Programme, and its role as a community centre out of which professional work could develop, was being undermined by commercially-oriented activities. No ongoing programme of activities has been

²³² Dexter to Maza, 29 November 1972, C 1696/10; Ross to Fisher, 12 August 1975, part 2, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA; Mafi to Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, submission, part 4, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA; Corpus, ‘Black Theatre, Sydney’, 3.

²³³ Fisher to Russell, [no date], part 3, R76/36, C 1696/10, NAA.

²³⁴ Cavanagh to O’Reilly, 24 April 1975, part 2, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA; Ross to Fisher, 12 August 1975, C1696/10.

²³⁵ Leigh Martin, Black Theatre, part 4, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA; Ministerial briefing, 26 October 1976, part 4, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA.

²³⁶ Summary DAA grants to Black Theatre and Cultural centre, part 3, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA.

²³⁷ Martin, note for file, part 3, R76/36, C 1696/10, NAA. See also Meeting with Lester and Gerry Bostock, 23 June 1976, part 3, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA; Martin meeting with Mafi and Bostock, 15 July 1976, part 3, R76/36, C 1696/10, NAA; Regional Director – Eastern to Permanent Head, 20 August 1976, part 3, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA.

²³⁸ Martin to Area Officer, 17 June 1976, R76/36, part 3, C 1696/10, NAA; Edwards to Bostock, 19 October 1976, part 4, R76/36, C 1696/10, NAA.

developed, and a haphazard schedule of fashion parades, rock shows and other such activities had little to offer urban people.²³⁹

The ACA rejected Gerry Bostock's application for funding to produce his play *Here Comes the Nigger* with the Black Theatre.²⁴⁰

The financial difficulties deepened at the Black Theatre once Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser announced that the responsibility to fund Aboriginal Art activities was fully the responsibility of the ACA on 3 June 1976.²⁴¹ This caused confusion at the Black Theatre, since the ACA was currently not funding it. The DAA was willing to consider continuing funding to maintain the basic operations of the Black Theatre until the ACA could take over, as long as it received the required paperwork.²⁴² At the same time the Federal Government made drastic cuts to funding in both Aboriginal affairs and Arts.²⁴³ The Black Theatre was on its own without the dance group and support from Johnson. It was back to operating on a shoe string budget, until it could manage to trace back and produce the required paper work for the DAA.

Here Comes the Nigger

The Black Theatre kept on going with its plan to produce *Here Comes the Nigger*, despite the lack of funding. It hoped to collect enough money via fund raising and appealed to the public to gather donations for the Black Theatre Action Committee Fund.²⁴⁴ *Here Comes the Nigger* premiered in 1976. It was written by one of the founding members of the Black Theatre, Gerry Bostock. However, the group had difficulty getting a director. Bob Maza had to decline because of other commitments and Jack Charles found after a few weeks of

²³⁹ Chicka Dixon's report to the Aboriginal Arts Board quoted in Robinson, *Dreaming Tracks*, 77.

²⁴⁰ Martin telecon Wallace, 21 July 1976, part 3, R76/36, C 1696/10, NAA; Martin telecon McGuigan, 2 August 1976, part 3, R76/36, C 1696/10, NAA.

²⁴¹ Viner to O'Reilly, 18 August 1976, R76/36, part 3, C 1696/10, NAA. See also Martin to Regional Director, Area Officer – Eastern, 23 July 1976, part 3, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA.

²⁴² Dexter to Martin, 24 August 1976, R76/36, part 3, C1696/10, NAA; Martin to Rees, telecon, 24 August 1976, part 3, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA; Martin to Cunningham, 30 August 1976, part 3, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA; Thomas for Regional Directors, 8 September 1976, part 4, R76/36, C1696/11, NAA.

²⁴³ Josephine Caust, 'Plight of the Black Theatre', 27 November 1976, *SMH*. For economic policies see also Macintyre, *A Concise History of Australia*, 246.

²⁴⁴ The 1976 subscription season, part 3, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA; Interview Lester Bostock, 26 August 1976, part 3, R76/36, C1696/10, NAA; Caust, 'Plight of the Black Theatre'; Corpus, 'Black Theatre, Sydney', 5.

rehearsal that he could not continue with the project and returned to Melbourne. In addition to the stressful situation at the Black Theatre, he found unbearable the constant police surveillance that the Black Theatre, like the AMS and the ALS, experienced.²⁴⁵

Marcia Langton tells how

Life was always interesting at the Black Theatre. Every evening before a performance we would wait anxiously for some of the actors to arrive. We kept a bail fund on hand to get actors out of the local cop shop if necessary. The Redfern police ran amok regularly, on the streets.²⁴⁶

The play was finally co-directed by Gerry Bostock and Bryan Brown.²⁴⁷ I was not able to locate the original script of the play, but two scenes of it were published in *Meanjin* in 1977.²⁴⁸

Here Comes the Nigger continues from where *the Cake Man* ended in that it was a play set in an urban environment. The name of the play was taken from a mocking chant sang by white children in a school playground.²⁴⁹ It portrayed Australian racial relations and the life of urban Aboriginal people by telling the story of Sam, a blind Aboriginal poet played by Athol Compton. Due to his blindness Sam has started to see beyond the colour or the race of the people and thus his blindness is used to question the significance of colour.

What is colour

What is blue and what is white

Can colour be distinguished

In the darkness of night?²⁵⁰

The play develops around the friendship of Sam and his white female tutor Odette, played by Julie McGregor. Sam's militant brother Billy, played by Kevin Smith, and his wife, Verna, played by Marcia Langton, do not approve of Sam's white friend and see her as a threat to his blackness.²⁵¹ As Verna puts it

²⁴⁵ Casey, *Creating Frames*, 112–113.

²⁴⁶ Marcia Langton quoted in Casey, *Creating Frames*, 113–114.

²⁴⁷ Casey, *Creating Frames*, 114; Bryan Brown in 'Black Theatre Company', *Hindsight*, ABC, 26 October 1997.

²⁴⁸ G.L. Bostock, 'Here Comes the Nigger', *Meanjin*, Vol. 36, No. 4, December 1977, 479-493.

²⁴⁹ Margaret Jones, 'Illuminating statement on black attitudes', *SMH*, 5 November, 1976, 7; Marian Wilkinson, 'Making Urban Blacks Right', *Black News Service*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1977, 18.

²⁵⁰ *Here comes the Nigger*, program, Black Theatre, Bayagul, Powerhouse museum, 12 August 2001.

²⁵¹ Wilkinson, 'Making Urban Blacks Right', 18; Newfong, *Aboriginal Black Theatre presents*, part 4, R76/36, C1696/11, NAA; Bostock, 'Here Comes the Nigger', 480-487; Smith in 'Black Theatre Company'.

Look, Sam. All whites want to do is to change you into a black version of themselves. They want to civilise the native, and when they've had their bit, when they've got what they wanted and ripped-off as much as they could, they'll piss you off. And what will you be then; just another screwed-up black-fella!²⁵²

Odette also has a brother Neil, played by a non-Indigenous actor Bryan Brown, who is openly racist. Finally, forced by him, Odette ends her friendship with Sam. When they are departing, Neil approaches with his friend and in a fight that follows Odette gets strangled by her brother.²⁵³ Kevin Smith later noted how “the play itself had more bigots and racists in it than you can poke a stick at, on either side of the fence, whether they be black, white or brindle. But racism in itself was exposed.”²⁵⁴

Aboriginal audiences received the play well. Bryan Brown recalls that during the performance they were “laughing their heads off at times were you would have thought it was pretty, pretty horrible what was going on.”²⁵⁵ Gerry Bostock explains this by noting that Aboriginal people laughed at the scenes because they were reminded by situations that they had themselves been in.²⁵⁶ By displaying the racist and even violent treatment of Aboriginal people on stage, *Here Comes the Nigger* turned personal experiences into general ones and triggered liberating cathartic laughter in its Aboriginal audiences.²⁵⁷ The Aboriginal audience also actively responded to the play. Brown recalls how after one scene, in which his character was beating Billy, an Aboriginal lady came to the stage in rescue and started to hit Brown with her umbrella.²⁵⁸ The incident reveals how theatre can turn representations into a live experience that strongly appears ‘real’, and thus can produce a new or renewed feeling of immediacy and perhaps a need to act accordingly.²⁵⁹

White audiences found *Here Comes the Nigger* challenging. Gerry Bostock relates how after seeing the play some white people would write to him that they could not sleep after the

²⁵² Bostock, ‘Here Comes the Nigger’, 487.

²⁵³ Bostock, ‘Here Comes the Nigger’, 480–493; Newfong, Aboriginal Black Theatre presents, C1696/11; Wilkinson, ‘Making Urban Blacks Right’, 18.

²⁵⁴ Smith in ‘Black Theatre Company’.

²⁵⁵ Brown in ‘Black Theatre Company’.

²⁵⁶ Gerry Bostock in ‘Black Theatre Company’, *Hindsight*, ABC, 26 October 1997.

²⁵⁷ See Ronald Paulson, *Don Quixote in England: the aesthetics of laughter* (Baltimore, London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 144–145.

²⁵⁸ Brown in ‘Black Theatre Company’. See also Bostock, ‘Black Theatre’, 72.

²⁵⁹ Nora M. Alter, ‘Vietnamese Theatre of Resistance: Thich Nhat Hanh’s metaphysical sortie on the margins’ in J. Ellen Gainor (ed.), (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 11.

performance.²⁶⁰ Some walked out in the middle of the play upset by what they had seen and with the representation of white people which they took personally. Lester Bostock later analysed that as they saw themselves portrayed on the stage, they reacted to this by saying “I’m not like that”.²⁶¹

Part of the Black Theatre experiences for the audience, black or white, was its location in the Aboriginal space of Redfern. The non-Indigenous audience, many of whom had never been there before, had to face the reality of Redfern as they walked through it to see a play. Lester Bostock notes how the experience of walking through the “ghetto” and the fear of it was part of the theatre as well.²⁶² Gerry Bostock remarks that attracting white audiences to Redfern was a great psychological advantage for the play itself.²⁶³ On the other hand the Aboriginal audience was on its own territory, and in a position of power in relation to the white audience.

During the production of *Here Comes the Nigger* the Black Theatre continued to struggle under extreme financial difficulties. It claimed that it had provided all the required documents to the DAA, including audited financial statements for the previous two years.²⁶⁴ Due to constant pressure from the representatives of the Black Theatre and their supporters, the Prime Minister, Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and the Secretary for the DAA, tried to find a solution.²⁶⁵ However, at the same time the South Sydney Council, which had twice misplaced the AMS applications four years earlier, presented an eviction notice to the Black Theatre in April 1977. The Council argued that the Theatre had failed to supply car-parking spaces as requested. Fisher had responded to this request earlier by noting that most people attending the Centre had no cars.²⁶⁶ Later in 1977 the Black Theatre Aboriginal Arts and Culture Centre closed down.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁰ Quoted in Adam Shoemaker, *Black Words, White Page* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1992), 246.

²⁶¹ Bostock interviewed by the author. See also Jones, ‘Superboong and the racists’.

²⁶² Bostock interviewed by the author.

²⁶³ Marr, ‘Black Theatre Gets a New Start’, 44; Bostock, ‘Black Theatre’, 72.

²⁶⁴ Aboriginal Arts and Culture Centre, Administrator’s report, part 4, R76/36, C1696/11, NAA.

²⁶⁵ Martin to Area Officer, 17 February 1977, part 4, R76/36, C1696/11, NAA. See also Fraser to Viner, 3 February 1977, part 4, R76/36, C1696/11, NAA.

²⁶⁶ Cole, *The Glorified Flower*, 286.

²⁶⁷ Wilkinson, ‘Making Urban Blacks Right’, 18.

The site of the Black Theatre continued to have great significance to the Aboriginal community in Redfern. In November 1977 the Methodist Church handed the ownership of the building to the Black Unity Committee. Thus began a twenty year-long argument between the Aboriginal Development Committee, ATSIC and the local organisations over its ownership.²⁶⁸ Though the Black Theatre was never re-established, its premises continued to be known as the Black Theatre building. The Redfern Aboriginal community organised dances there and some organisations, such as Murawina, also used the premises temporarily. From 1983 to 1991 homeless Indigenous people squatted in the building. They were known as the “Black Theatre mob”.²⁶⁹ After the building was demolished in 1991, the lot was still known as the Black Theatre site.²⁷⁰

Conclusion

The Black Theatre was in a central cultural role in legitimising the struggle for self-determination and building the Aboriginal community. In its plays, dance performances and activities as a cultural centre it celebrated Aboriginal culture while drawing on traditional as well as contemporary urban culture. It resisted the marginalisation of urban Aboriginal people, and took part in articulating Aboriginal nationalism.

The plays performed by the Black Theatre represented a counter memory that opposed non-Indigenous historical narratives about the colonisation of Australia. Their representations of history acknowledged the shared experience of Indigenous people in Australia as they canvassed the unjust treatment of Aboriginal people and the impact the past had on their contemporary lives. With the support of humour the plays raised contemporary issues such as racism, while at the same time reversing the stereotypical categorisations to which Indigenous people had been subjected.

The Black Theatre relied on government funding to cover its operations, like the ALS and the AMS. With DAA funding, it was able to secure the use of a building on Botany Street

²⁶⁸ Cole, *The Glorified Flower*, 287

²⁶⁹ *The Mac Silva Centre* (East Sydney: Outreach, Sydney Institute of Technology, 1994), 6-12.

²⁷⁰ Lester Bostock in ‘Black Theatre Company’; Cole, *The Glorified Flower*, 287.

as a cultural centre. Government funding from the DAA and ACA also largely covered its cultural and community activities. However, the Black Theatre resisted government surveillance and failed to produce reports of the use of funds and activities, like the ALS. Without adequate reports and proof of activities, the DAA and the ACA cut their funding to the Black Theatre, which as a cultural organisation was unable to negotiate further government grants. It was in a much weaker position than the ALS, which had become established as part of the legal system and lacked meaningful competition. Moreover, the South Sydney Municipal Council's eviction notice stripped the Black Theatre of its premises and made it difficult for the Centre to reorganise and continue as a Cultural Centre.

The Black Theatre, like the ALS and the AMS, intensified the Aboriginal presence and enlarged Aboriginal space in Redfern. Furthermore, its Botany Street building, in the heart of Redfern, became a meeting place for Indigenous people in inner Sydney and acted as a community centre with multiple functions. The importance of Redfern as an Aboriginal space was underlined, though also challenged, when the Black Theatre dance group broke away from the Cultural Centre. Many in the Aboriginal community resented its move away from the Aboriginal 'heart' and from the political struggle.

The Black Theatre offered urban Aboriginal people, in particular children and youth, an opportunity to learn about Aboriginal culture and strengthen their sense of Aboriginality. However, Murawina preschool and childcare, which I will discuss in the following chapter, offers a primary example about the role of education in Aboriginal activism in Redfern.

Chapter 5

“Striving for the unity of Aboriginal women”¹ – Murawina’s educational space

[Poem
has been removed
due to Copyright
restrictions.²]

Murawina preschool and childcare centre responded to the educational disadvantage that Aboriginal children experienced in mainstream schools. It had its beginnings as a Breakfast program under the Aboriginal Medical Service in 1972. At the time Indigenous children living in the middle of affluent Sydney suffered from malnutrition that had a detrimental effect on their ability to perform at school. In the course of the 1970s Murawina grew from the first Aboriginal run preschool into a multipurpose education centre that provided childcare, after school care and preschool education, as well as hostel accommodation for young single mothers pursuing tertiary education.³

The women at Murawina created an alternative educational space that promoted Indigenous knowledge and strengthened children’s Aboriginal identity.⁴ They answered the need for culturally specific education through practical solutions. Furthermore, in its daily operations Murawina took part in affirming the Aboriginal community in Redfern and the

¹ ‘Breakfast at six to unite the blacks’, *SMH*, Look! section, 12 March 1973; See also Barbara Rowlands, ‘Caring for kids ended in triumph’, *Aboriginal News*, Vol. 3, No. 7, 1979, 7.

² Bobbi Sykes, ‘Black Woman’, published in *Koori-Bina, A Black Australian News Monthly*, Vol. 1, No. 9/10, 1980, 16.

³ Ian Howie-Willis, ‘Murawina Preschool’ in David Horton (general ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1994), 734. See also Rowlands, ‘Caring for kids ended in triumph’, 8. Aboriginal women had formed organisations before for example in Adelaide an Aboriginal Women’s Council was formed in 1966. Meredith Burgmann, ‘Black Sisterhood: the situation of urban Aboriginal women and their relationship to the white women’s movement’ in Marian Simms (ed.), *Australian Women and the Political System* (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1984), 34; Shirley Paisley, ‘Indigenous Action’ in Joy Noble and Fiona Johnston (eds.), *Volunteering Visions* (Leichhardt: Federation Press, 2001), 12.

⁴ Cf. Jessica Gerrard, ‘Gender, community and education: cultures of resistance in Socialist Sunday Schools and Black Supplementary Schools’, *Gender and Education*, Vol. 23, No. 6, October 2012, 713.

struggle for self-determination. However, as with other Aboriginal organisations, it was necessary for Murawina to negotiate its practices within a framework that would maximise its funding from the Federal Government. A significant achievement of these negotiations was the new building that Murawina moved into in 1980, having determinately pursued a promise to this effect given by the Aboriginal Affairs Minister, Jim Cavanagh, in 1974.

As a black-women only organisation, and a space controlled by Indigenous women, Murawina reveals the distinct needs and concerns produced by racial discrimination that were not met by the western feminist mainstream in the 1970s. However, at the same time it acknowledged the significance of gender, and the importance of the women's movement, but on Indigenous terms. In this chapter I study the role that Murawina had as part of 1970s activism and its relationships with bureaucracies at a time of rapidly shifting political priorities. I explore the ways in which it joined the race-based struggle in the field of early childhood education, while at the same time promoting the position of Indigenous women.

Aboriginal women as activists

Aboriginal women have always held a strong position in Aboriginal families and communities alongside Aboriginal men. In their role as gatherers women were consistent supporters of their families in pre-colonial society, while men were responsible for hunting big game. Women also had wide-ranging traditional and ritual responsibilities.⁵ Under colonisation matriarchal structure started to emerge within Aboriginal societies as the colonial hierarchy undermined role of Aboriginal men as the heads of the family, as Robert Merritt reflected in his play *The Cake Man*.⁶ Aboriginal women found it easier to cope in

⁵ Catherine H. Berndt, 'Mythical Women, Past and Present' in Fay Gale (ed.), *We are Bosses Ourselves: the status and role of Aboriginal women today* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1983), 14-15; Nancy M. Williams and Lesley Jolly, 'Gender Relations in Aboriginal Societies Before 'White Contact' in Kay Saunders and Raymond Evans (eds.), *Gender Relations in Australia: domination and negotiation* (Sydney, London, Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), 13-18.

⁶ Bob Maza, 'Black Industry', *Victorian Council of Social Service Newsletter*, Vol 19, No 2, June 1972, 4; Pat O'Shane, 'Is there any relevance in the women's movement for Aboriginal women?', *Refractory Girl*, No. 12, 1976, 32; See also Carol Ambrus and Pat Eatock, 'Racism and sexism as determinants of the state and position of Aboriginal men and women in Australia' in *Women and Politics Conference 1975*, Vol. 2, (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1977), 136-138; Diane Barwick, 'And the lubras are ladies now' in Fay Gale (ed.), *Woman's Role in Aboriginal Society*, (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1970), 31-37; Jackie Huggins, 'Black Women and Women's Liberation', *Hecate*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 1987.

colonial society than Aboriginal men. Though gaining employment was a problem for all Aboriginal people, Aboriginal women, statistically, were better educated and when employed were more likely to be employed in white-collar work than Aboriginal men.⁷ In as late as 1989 Roberta Sykes still asserted that while in the power hierarchy white women aspired to the power and position of white men, she did not know of any black woman who would aspire to be in the place of the black man.⁸

Aboriginal and other Australian black women have long been closely involved in activism against racism.⁹ Working in white households as domestic servants gave Aboriginal women insight into and familiarity with European culture, aspects of which they adopted. Aboriginal women's respectability among the non-Indigenous people became a political tool that Aboriginal men sought to have as their support.¹⁰ Pearl Gibbs, who was born in Botany Bay and relocated to Sydney as a domestic servant in 1917, started her activism by helping Aboriginal domestics who were under the control of the NSW Aboriginal Protection Board. She was also active in the Aborigines Progressive Association and became the first female member of the NSW Welfare Board in 1954.¹¹ Margaret Tucker, who grew up in Cumeragunja and Moonacullah stations, was the Treasurer of the Australian Aboriginal League and became an appointed member of the Aboriginal Protection Board in Victoria.¹² Ella Simon, the President of the local branch of the Country Women's Association in Purfleet, was involved in turning the old Ration Store into a Gillawarra Gift Shop in the early 1960s that eventually, according to her, became a meeting place for women and a miniature welfare place.¹³

⁷ *Poverty in Australia*, Vol. I; Burgmann, 'Black Sisterhood'; Heather Goodall and Jackie Huggins, 'Aboriginal Women are Everywhere' in Kay Saunders and Raymond Evans (eds.), *Gender Relations in Australia: domination and negotiation* (Sydney, London, Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), 402.

⁸ Roberta B. Sykes, *Black Majority* (Hudson: Hawthorn, 1989), 16.

⁹ Goodall and Huggins, 'Aboriginal Women are Everywhere', 398. See also *AMS Newsletter*, No. 17, 2.

¹⁰ Barwick, 'And the lubras are ladies now', 36.

¹¹ Dallas de Brabander, 'Gibbs, P' in David Horton (general ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia*, (Aboriginal Studies Press: Canberra, 1994), 412; Horner, *Bill Ferguson*, 39-40; Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, 230-231; Marcia Langton and Kristen Barry, 'Aboriginal Women and Economic Ingenuity' in Barbara Caine (general ed.), *Australian Feminism: a companion* (Melbourne, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 7. See also Kevin Gilbert, Jack Horner, Heather Goodall, 'Three Tributes to Pearl Gibbs', *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 1983, 4-22.

¹² Margaret Tucker, *If Everyone Cared* (London, Melbourne: Grosvenor, 1986), 165, 168-169, 191-192; Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, 230.

¹³ Ella Simon, *Through My Eyes* (Blackburn: Collins Dove, 1989), 85-88.

In the 1960s some black women became high profile activists nationally. Among the most widely known were Kath Walker and Faith Bandler, as I mentioned in Chapter 1, both of whom were active in the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aboriginal Affairs as well as in their local organisations. The strong role that Aboriginal women had in Aboriginal society was prevalent, for example, during demonstrations at the Tent Embassy in 1972, where men were surrounded and protected by women when the police came to break the demonstration and remove the tent.¹⁴

Many Aboriginal women were involved in the Aboriginal organisations in Sydney, as I have discussed in previous chapters. Naomi Mayers had a central role in the Aboriginal Medical Service from 1973 when she started as its secretary-organiser, as well as promoting Aboriginal health at the national level. She was also the public figure of the AMS. Bettie Fischer acted as the administrator of the Black Theatre until 1976 when she passed away. Mum Shirl or Shirley Smith, on the other hand, had a significant and respected position among the Sydney Indigenous community and was active in the Aboriginal Medical and Legal Services as well as being involved in the early stages of Murawina. However, Murawina stood out from the other Aboriginal organisations as it was the first black women-only organisation in Redfern.

Breakfast program

The Breakfast program was prompted by the realisation in early 1972 that many Aboriginal children living in the Redfern area went to school hungry without breakfast. Shirley Smith recounted a story of a young Aboriginal girl, who had been called “a lazy black” by her teacher, when in fact she was hungry and because of this was not able to concentrate on her studies.¹⁵ To address the problem Paul Coe and Billie Craigie, from the Aboriginal Legal Service, approached the Methodist Wayside Chapel, and its minister Ted Noffs who

¹⁴ Gisela Kaplan, *The Meagre Harvest: the Australian women's movement 1950s-1990s* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1996), 143. Smith, *Mum Shirl*, 79.

¹⁵ AMS minutes of the meeting, 22 November 1971, AMS minutes of the meeting, 97A48/67, Hollows, , UNSW; Introduction, 97A48/66; Briscoe to Smith, 19 September 1972, Subcommittee on Nutrition, 6.1.2, 97A48/66, Hollows, UNSW; ‘The breakfast programme – from small beginnings’, *New Dawn*, Vol. 3, No. 7, December 1972, 13; Shirley Smith interviewed in Alessandro Cavadini, *Ningla A’Na*, Australian Film Institute, 1972.

was one of the establishers of the Foundation, to ask for their help.¹⁶ Shirley Smith also lists Gary Foley and Gary Williams among those first involved in setting up the Breakfast program.¹⁷

The Wayside Chapel then sought advice from the Aboriginal mothers. Kay Edwards, from its Social Work Programs, contacted Shirley Smith, who had the authority within the Aboriginal community to contact the mothers and get together all the children in need.¹⁸ Dietician Elizabeth Goodman from Wollongong Hospital, who was involved in the Aboriginal Medical Service, was also invited to participate.¹⁹ After discussions and planning with Aboriginal mothers it was decided that a Breakfast program should be started.

The Breakfast program, like other Aboriginal organisations in Redfern, was adapted from the ideas of Black Power programs that Aboriginal activists had come across on their trip to the United States.²⁰ Black Panther Party programs such as the Breakfast program provided immediate and achievable solutions to the problems that urban Indigenous people faced living in the middle of an affluent city.

The breakfast was served to the children in Hollis Park in Newtown. The Wayside Chapel's van with kitchen facilities collected children from Redfern and Newtown to enjoy their breakfast at 7 am. Mum Shirl recalled how she used to get up at six o'clock in the morning to go to the park, where they would set out the table to wait for the van.²¹ Children were served pure orange juice, cereals and egg dishes to combat vitamin deficiency. In cooler weather porridge and hot dishes such as meat, cheese or baked beans were on the menu.²² By February 1972 fifty children were participating in the Breakfast Program.²³ They were from backgrounds where there was potential for disadvantage: children from large families

¹⁶ 'Children to get free breakfasts', *SMH*, 1 February 1972; 'Aboriginal breakfast program', *New Dawn*, May 1972, Vol.3, No. 2, 3; 'The breakfast programme – from small beginnings', *New Dawn*, 13.

¹⁷ Smith interviewed in Cavadini, *Ningla A'Na*.

¹⁸ Smith interviewed in Cavadini, *Ningla A'Na*.

¹⁹ 'Children to get free breakfasts', *SMH*; Hollows report to AMS council, 8 October 1971, AMS Council Meeting, file 6.23.1, 97A48/66, Hollows, UNSW.

²⁰ McGuinness, *Aborigines visit the US*, 14; 'Children to get free breakfasts', *SMH*; Lothian, 'Seizing the Time', 195-197. See also Simon Wendt, 'The Roots of Black Power? Armed Resistance and the Radicalization of the Civil Rights Movements' in Peniel E. Joseph (ed.) *The Black Power Movement: rethinking the civil rights – Black Power era* (New York, London: Routledge, 2006), 163.

²¹ Smith interviewed by Ros Bowden.

²² 'Children to get free breakfasts', *SMH*; 'Aboriginal breakfast program', *New Dawn*, 3-4.

²³ 'Young Aborigines get free meal', *SMH*, 15 February 1972; Aboriginal breakfast program, *New Dawn*, 3-4;

or orphans, children of single mothers or whose guardians were their pensioner grandparents and children of alcohol dependant or unemployed parents.²⁴ When winter came the Breakfast program was moved into a small church hall in Newtown.

Obtaining the food for the program was the main difficulty. Kay Edwards, who had also been in charge of the Wayside Chapel's project that cared for the poor, elderly and migrant communities, was able to use her connections to receive help from producers nearby.²⁵ Farmers from the Dural area donated fruit and eggs; a bakery delivered six loaves of bread a day; a Gosford orchard sent two cases of oranges a week. A Sydney hospital sent some hot meals daily and companies, schools and individuals donated groceries. Reportedly the Breakfast program also received support from the South Sydney Council.²⁶ Shirley Smith remembered that nuns, such as Sister Ignatius from the Sisters of Charity who was involved with the AMS, also sent a lot of food.²⁷

After the Breakfast program had been in operation for some time Billie Craigie started working at the Wayside Chapel as an Aboriginal co-ordinator. Part of his responsibility was to drive around Chippendale, Redfern and Newtown to collect Aboriginal children for breakfast and then take them back home in time for school.²⁸

The Breakfast program soon acquired its own building. Leon Fink, a Sydney Jewish businessman, anonymously donated the use of a factory building at 72 Shepherd Street in Chippendale in September 1972. (See Appendix 1.) Roberta Sykes recalled how Fink, after he realised that the Aboriginal community had absolutely no resources available, also agreed to have the building remodelled so that it was suitable for day care and preschool purposes. He had cupboards, a stove, refrigerator and water services installed. In addition, small chairs and tables were built and cutlery provided. The Wayside Chapel also helped to get furniture, food and kitchen equipment. The exterior of the building was painted black.²⁹

²⁴ Submission, part 1, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA.

²⁵ Jarrat, *Ted Noffs*, 274.

²⁶ 'Young Aborigines get free meal', *SMH*; Aboriginal breakfast program, *New Dawn*, 4; Rowlands, 'Caring for kids ended in triumph', 7.

²⁷ Smith interviewed by Ros Bowden.

²⁸ 'The breakfast programme – from small beginnings', *New Dawn*, 13.

²⁹ 'Aboriginal breakfast program', *New Dawn*, 4; 'The breakfast programme – from small beginnings', *New Dawn*, 13; 'Breakfast at six to unite the blacks', *SMH*; Williams to Fox, 3 May 1978, part 4, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA; Sykes, *Snake Dancing*, 193-197.

Until the end of December the Wayside Chapel ran the Breakfast Program together the Aboriginal women. However, it was considered vital by all parties – including the Wayside Chapel – that Aboriginal women should run the program themselves and feel that they had the ownership of it.³⁰ In January 1973 the program became Aboriginal controlled and was renamed Murawina which is Arrernte for ‘black woman’. The name was written in the Shepard Street building in big glowing orange letters.³¹

Aboriginal early childhood education

Despite greater access to mainstream public education after the dismantling of segregated education in 1949, Aboriginal children continued to be underrepresented in schools in New South Wales. According to the 1971 census in New South Wales only 6.9 per cent of those Aboriginal people who were not at school at the time had received an education until year nine or ten or higher.³² Aboriginal students’ performance at school was also commonly behind that of other students of their age.³³ Only seven per cent of Aboriginal men and nine per cent of Aboriginal women in Sydney, interviewed for the *Scott report* conducted in 1972, had passed their School Certificate or Intermediate.³⁴

Better educational opportunities had been one of the key factors that motivated the migration of Aboriginal people from rural areas to Sydney. However, migration in itself was not enough. The *Scott Report* noted that “we encountered with disquieting frequency, Aboriginal children in slow-learner classes in Sydney schools.”³⁵ The teachers also reported a decline in interest and finally a complete withdrawal from school of Aboriginal children in their early teens. Only a small proportion of 600 eligible Aboriginal children in Sydney attended preschool in 1972. Only nine Aboriginal children attended the eight preschools

³⁰ Administrators report, June 1973, part 1, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA; ‘Aboriginal breakfast program’, *New Dawn*, 4; ‘The breakfast programme – from small beginnings’, *New Dawn*, 13; ‘Breakfast at six to unite the blacks’, *SMH*.

³¹ ‘Success – colour it black’, *SMH*.

³² B.H. Watts, *Access to Education: an evaluation of the Aboriginal secondary grants scheme* (Canberra: Commonwealth Department of Education, 1976), 16.

³³ Fletcher, *Clean, Clad and Courteous*, 289.

³⁴ Scott, *Problems and Needs of the Aboriginals of Sydney*, 7.

³⁵ Scott, *Problems and Needs of the Aboriginals of Sydney*, 7.

that were contacted in South Sydney, an area with a heavy Aboriginal population.³⁶ It became increasingly clear to the educationists at the time that Aboriginal children did not succeed in the western oriented education system, where the solution to poor performance was still largely aimed at changing the Aboriginal children rather than changing the system.³⁷

Murawina was established at a time when governments, educators and community organisations widely recognised the benefits of preschool education. Community groups and parents had started to establish community-based kindergartens already after the Second World War.³⁸ The concept of providing services according to community needs emerged in Australian early childhood philosophy in the early 1970s.³⁹ Aboriginal Affairs officials saw education as a solution to the problems facing Aboriginal people and identified inadequate preschooling as a cause of poor performance at school.⁴⁰ Indeed, in 1971 Barrie Dexter saw preschooling as one of the highest priorities of the OAA.⁴¹ Nugget Coombs was also of the opinion that “the problem of Aboriginal education has to be solved at the preschool level”⁴². Compensatory education programs elsewhere, particularly in America, also influenced developments in early childhood services for Aboriginal children.⁴³

Murawina’s focus shifted from health and nutrition to cultural education once it had become independent from the Wayside Chapel. A committee formed by Naomi Mayers from the AMS, Bobbi Sykes from the AMS, Lyn Thompson from the Land Board, Pam Hunter, Sandra McGuinness and Norma Williams decided to turn the Breakfast program

³⁶ Scott, *Problems and Needs of the Aborigines of Sydney*, 7-8.

³⁷ G.R. Teasdale and A.J. Whitelaw, *The Early Childhood Education of Aboriginal Australians: a review of six action-research projects* (Hawthorn: Australian Council for Educational Research, 1981), xiii; John Sherwood, *Aboriginal Education: issues and innovations* (Perth: Creative Research, 1982), 28.

³⁸ Barbara McNulty, ‘Children’s services in Australia – a question of status: history of child care and present government policy’, *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, Vol. 10, No. 2, June 1985, 11.

³⁹ Berenice Nyland, ‘Looking backward, looking forward: Australian early childhood trends since 1960’, *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, Vol. 26, No. 1, March 2001, 9.

⁴⁰ K.R. McConnochie and A. Russell, *Early Childhood Services for Aboriginal Children* (Australian Government Publishing Service: Canberra, 1982), 7, 12.

⁴¹ B.G. Dexter, ‘Pre-school Education for Aboriginal Australians’, *Australian Pre-school Quarterly*, Vol. 12, No. 1, August 1971, 4, quoted in McConnochie and Russell, *Early Childhood Services for Aboriginal Children*, 13.

⁴² H.C. Coombs, ‘Record of talk to Admin trainees’ Coombs box 41, folder 337, MS 802, NLA, quoted in Rowe, *Obliged to be Difficult*, 92.

⁴³ McConnochie and Russell, *Early Childhood Services for Aboriginal Children*, 4.

into a preschool program that gave children hot lunches.⁴⁴ Isobel Coe was its first President, Naomi Mayers the Vice-President, Pamela Hunter the Secretary and Bobbie Sykes the Treasurer.⁴⁵

Norma Williams (nee Ingram) became the long-term administrator of Murawina.⁴⁶ She was born in Cowra and belonged to the Waregerie people on the Lachlan river.⁴⁷ She was the first one in her family to graduate from high school.⁴⁸ Williams' mother Louisa Ingram was involved in the Day of Mourning Protest in 1938 and had a great influence on her daughter. She brought up her children at the Erambie mission in Cowra where their home was a "corrugated iron shack with no electricity or window panes."⁴⁹ In the 1960s the Ingrams left Erambie so as not to have to pay rent on what Louisa Ingram regarded as Aboriginal land.⁵⁰ They moved to Sydney where Williams met Charles Perkins and made many friends with other young Aboriginal people at the Foundation, many of whom later became involved with the Aboriginal organisations in Redfern.⁵¹ Williams had volunteered as a receptionist at the AMS together with Isobel Coe, Alanna Doolan, Donna Ruska and Lyn Thompson.⁵² She was married to Gary Williams from the ALS.⁵³

The idea of a food co-operative and a preschool centre with an emphasis on Aboriginal culture had been first floated in an AMS nutrition subcommittee meeting around 1972.⁵⁴ Members of the AMS also saw childcare as necessary help in bringing up children in those families in which the father was absent, due to alcohol abuse or while in treatment or in prison.⁵⁵ Promoting good nutrition has commonly been seen as an important part of

⁴⁴ Administrator's report, 30 June 1973, part 1, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA; 'Murawina: black women strike out', *The Black National Times*, No. 231, 23-28 June 1975, 14; Rowlands, 'Caring for kids ended in triumph', 7-8.

⁴⁵ Constitution, [May 1973], part 1, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA.

⁴⁶ Administrator's report, 30 June 1973, C1696/10.

⁴⁷ 'Success – colour it black', *SMH*; 'Providing an identity', *SMH*, 15 December 1979.

⁴⁸ 'Aunty' Norma Ingram: 1984 scholar following in Bobbi's footsteps to Harvard', The Roberta Sykes Indigenous Education Foundation, 3, June 2012, 1, http://www.robertasykesfoundation.com/uploads/3/3/0/4/3304946/rsf_newsletter_june_2012.final.pdf, accessed 16 November 2012.

⁴⁹ Gare, 'Aboriginal Woman', 51.

⁵⁰ Read, *A History of the Wiradjuri people of New South Wales 1883-1969*, 369.

⁵¹ Ingram in *Yarnin' up*, 31-32.

⁵² List of Members of Aboriginal Receptionist Roster, 97A48/70.

⁵³ List of persons present, 97A48/70; Redfern organisations, 18 July 1974, part 1, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA.

⁵⁴ Elizabeth Goodman, AMS subcommittee on nutrition, [no date], part 1, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA. See also Hollows to the Manager, 18 July 1972, Aboriginal Medical Service, 6, 97A48/70, Hollows, UNSW.

⁵⁵ Submission concerning Aboriginal needs in Redfern, 97A48/67; Aboriginal Medical Service Submission, 97A48/69; Bobbi Sykes, 'Aboriginal Medical Service', *Ahead*, Vol. 10, No. 2, July 1973, 4.

kindergarten work. For example, many kindergartens provided hot lunches during the Depression of the 1930s.⁵⁶

Murawina became exceptional as a preschool as it was run by local Aboriginal women. Other early childhood services for Aboriginal children were controlled from outside Aboriginal communities in the 1960s. This included, for example, ten preschools run by the Save the Children Fund in New South Wales in 1969.⁵⁷ It wasn't until in the 1990s that Save the Children's preschools were handed over to Indigenous community management.⁵⁸ On the other hand, the Aboriginal Family Education Centres, based on the example of the Maori play centres in New Zealand, evolved around the concept of educating adults as well as children rather than providing childcare.⁵⁹

For a little while Murawina was able to get by with a grant of \$1,000 that it received, with Shirley Smith's help, from the Macquarie University Student's Union.⁶⁰ However, it soon secured funding from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA). In addition to providing more funding for Aboriginal Affairs, the government enunciated childcare policies for the first time. The Whitlam government was also the first to give funding to children's services.⁶¹ At the same time the voluntary organisations sector in general expanded as the funding from the governments increased in the 1970s.⁶²

Murawina women responded to the educational disadvantage that the Aboriginal children experienced in mainstream schools by creating an alternative educational space that promoted Indigenous knowledge. They were able to start to give preschool tuition and cultural courses in June 1973.⁶³ Murawina hired eight women to work: a full-time administrator and driver, two women who looked after the children part-time, and four

⁵⁶ McConnochie and Russell, *Early Childhood Services for Aboriginal Children*, 20.

⁵⁷ McConnochie and Russell, *Early Childhood Services for Aboriginal Children*, 5, 32.

⁵⁸ 'About us', Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Sector Advisory Group Inc, <http://www.aecssu.org.au/about.htm>, accessed 10 June 2008.

⁵⁹ Teasdale and Whitelaw, *The Early Childhood Education of Aboriginal Australians*, 47-60.

⁶⁰ Administrators report, June 1973, C1696/10; Rowlands, 'Caring for kids ended in triumph', 7-8; Smith interviewed by Ros Bowden.

⁶¹ Deborah Brennan, 'Children and Families: forty years of analysis and commentary in the Australian Journal of Social Issues', *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 40, No 1, Autumn 2005, 74; McNulty, 'Children's services in Australia – a question of status', 11.

⁶² Melanie Oppenheimer, 'An Overview of the Voluntary Principle in Australia: why the past matters' in Jeni Warburton and Melanie Oppenheimer (eds.), *Volunteers and Volunteering*, (Leichhardt: Federation Press, 2000), 16

⁶³ President's report for AGM 1974, part 1, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA; 'Grant of \$12,470 given by the Federal Government', *SMH*, 12 June 1973, 2.

cooking and cleaning part-time. For transport purposes Murawina also bought a kombi van, which later was upgraded to a bus with 22 seats.⁶⁴ Each morning 30 to 40 children were brought to Murawina.⁶⁵ Aboriginal women wanted to give these children a strong identity and teach them that there was nothing wrong with being black. As Murawina women stated in July 1974,

We Aboriginal mothers can at last provide our children with a strong identity and an opportunity for both mothers and children to be part of an Aboriginal dream of self-determination.⁶⁶

In its activities Murawina, like other Redfern Aboriginal organisations, nurtured urban Aboriginal culture and resisted the stereotypes that denied their Aboriginality. Murawina children were able to participate in and be part of the Aboriginal community in the everyday practices of the centre. They learnt from Aboriginal mothers about Aboriginal history, tradition and contemporary culture. As Norma Williams, now Ingram, later observed, Murawina was able to incorporate the Aboriginal kinship system and culture. “I don’t think we even thought that that is what we were doing at the time, we just did what was comfortable for us as Aboriginal people”, she wrote in 2003.⁶⁷ From 1974 onwards Murawina was also involved in producing the first series of books based on an Aboriginal preschool, *Murawina reader*, together with Bill Coppel from Macquarie University.⁶⁸ At the time there was no curriculum material that was specifically relevant to the lives of Aboriginal Children.

Traditional Aboriginal cultures were the inspiration for the revitalisation of urban Aboriginal culture for Murawina women as they were for other Aboriginal activists. They wanted to develop children’s Aboriginal identity by teaching Aboriginal heritage, tribal

⁶⁴ Dexter to Minister, 2 May 1973, part 1, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA; Dexter to Minister, 12 June 1973, part 1, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA; Murawina, 30 July 1974, part 1, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA; ‘Murawina: black women strike out’, *The Black National Times*, No. 231, 23-28 June 1975, 14; Rowlands, ‘Caring for kids ended in triumph’, 7-8.

⁶⁵ Dixon to Assistant Director, 12 July 1974, part 1, R76/2, C1696/10; Murawina, 30 July 1974, C1696/10; Mackenzie to Secretary, 12 June 1975, part 2, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA.

⁶⁶ Murawina, 30 July 1974, C1696/10.

⁶⁷ Ingram in *Yarnin’ up*, 33.

⁶⁸ W.G. Coppel, ‘The Murawina Readers – first stage in the development of community related curriculum materials in an Aboriginal context’, *Aboriginal Child at School*, Vol. 7, No. 1, February 1979, 47; Martin to Minister, 3 October 1980, part 9, R76/2, C1696/11, NAA.

culture and customs and Aboriginal languages.⁶⁹ Even their name – Murawina – was taken from the Arrernte language of Central Australia. Murawina employed Wunjika Marika from the Yolngu of the Northern Territory, to give classes in Aboriginal history and culture in 1973.⁷⁰ From 1974 it also sent children to Stradbroke Island in Queensland, where Kath Walker ran holiday camps for Aboriginal children,⁷¹ to learn about Aboriginal culture.⁷² In 1979 Mildred Butt, then the administrator of Murawina, explained to a journalist:

We bring their tribal people down, to teach them corrobories, they are taught their dreamtime stories, that's being read to them. We have some come in, tribal people, that takes the boys out and shows them the tracks, how to work out tracks, teach them what trees and what plants are and take them to the beach – what shells and things are and Aboriginal people always lived with the land and loved it and we're trying to keep this instilled in the child.⁷³

More than education

Murawina's constitution, written in 1973, outlined the wider agenda that it was pursuing. Though Murawina responded to the difficulties that Aboriginal people faced when pursuing education, it also aspired to address the social, economic, cultural, dietary and housing disadvantages that Aboriginal people suffered.⁷⁴ For example, Murawina aimed to provide information to the black community about available dietary and educational resources and to establish a library for the use of black people. It also wanted to conduct research on the particular educational, nutritional and housing needs of black people and to take steps to meet those needs. Additionally Murawina wanted to promote and develop Aboriginal culture: music, art and crafts especially. As members of Murawina stated in the

⁶⁹ Murawina statement, part 1, R76/15, C1696/10, NAA; Murawina, 30 July 1974, C1696/10; 'Breakfast at six to unite the blacks', *SMH*; Butt to Campbell, 8 November 1979, part 7, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA; 'Providing an identity', *SMH*.

⁷⁰ Submission, part 1, C1696/10; Administrator's report, 30 June 1973, C1696/10; 'Aid for Murawina', September 1973, *New Dawn*, 16.

⁷¹ Jim Davidson, 'Kath Walker Interview', *Meanjin*, Vol. 36, No. 4, December 1977, 437-438; Margaret J. Beeson (compiled), *Some Aboriginal Women Pathfinders. their difficulties and achievements* (Adelaide: Women's Christian Temperance Union of Australia, [1980]), 66.

⁷² Rowlands, 'Caring for kids ended in triumph', 8.

⁷³ Mildred Butt interviewed by Ann-Maria Nicholson, Channel 7, 19 October 1979, part 6, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA. See also Butt to Campbell, 8 November 1979, C1696/10.

⁷⁴ Constitution, [May 1973], C1696/10; Williams to Nicholson, 24 May 1977, part 4, R76/15, C1696/10, NAA.

constitution it would do “what ever is necessary to restore and awaken interest in and concern for black culture.”⁷⁵

Murawina members also emphasised the importance of its educational role not only for Aboriginal children, but also among non-Aboriginal children. Norma Williams, who was invited to give talks in schools, saw this as an opportunity to challenge the non-Indigenous narratives of past and tell the Aboriginal side of the story, just as the Black Theatre did in its plays. She preferred to have Aboriginal people telling whites about Aboriginal people rather than white people teaching whites about Aboriginal people.⁷⁶

Murawina’s operations, especially in the early stages, depended on volunteer participation. As Norma Williams said, “Self-help is our object. There are always about eight women here each day who volunteer to help with the kids at the school.”⁷⁷ However, at times there was a lack of attendance in the daily activities and meetings. In June 1973 this led to a situation in which the administrator Norma Williams informed members of Murawina that she would not be able to continue in her current capacity, unless they chose a strong and active executive committee that would carry part of the responsibility of running Murawina.⁷⁸ Active parent participation required time, money and available transport.⁷⁹ Lack of these would have severely militated against the involvement of Aboriginal parents, many of whom had little income, a lack of transport and low levels of education.

Co-operation with non-Indigenous supporters did not play a significant part in Murawina’s operations, once it became independent from the Aboriginal Medical Service and started to receive funding from the Whitlam government. However, University students organised remedial reading classes for preschool children.⁸⁰ University students also helped with other aspects of daily operations such as picking up children.⁸¹ Students were already involved

⁷⁵ Constitution, [May 1973], C1696/10. See also Williams to Fox, 15 September 1978, part 5, R76/15, C1696/11, NAA.

⁷⁶ ‘Murawina: black women strike out’, *The Black National Times*, 14.

⁷⁷ Gare, ‘Aboriginal Woman’, 50.

⁷⁸ Administrator’s report, 30 June 1973, C1696/10; Minutes of Special Meeting, 11 March 1974, part 1, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA.

⁷⁹ McConnochie and Russell, *Early Childhood Services for Aboriginal Children*, 23.

⁸⁰ ‘The breakfast programme – from small beginnings’, *New Dawn*, 14.

⁸¹ ‘Murawina: black women strike out’, *The Black National Times*, 14.

with helping with homework at the Sydney University Settlement as I mentioned in Chapter 1.

Murawina worked in close co-operation with other Aboriginal organisations in Sydney. The Aboriginal Legal Service provided Murawina with legal advice. For example, Eddie Neumann, lawyer and the Secretary of the ALS, prepared the required documents for the incorporation of Murawina.⁸² The AMS immunisation program was organised in co-operation with Murawina.⁸³ The AMS also lent their van, when available, to Murawina once it was no longer possible to use the Wayside Chapel's van to collect the children and until Murawina was able to purchase their own vehicle.⁸⁴ The AMS provided funds for a loan to enable Murawina to keep the breakfast program in operation while waiting for their first government grant.⁸⁵ Murawina, on the other hand, loaned its typewriter to the Black Theatre in 1974.⁸⁶ These examples show different aspects and levels of co-operation, but also highlight the lack of resources that Aboriginal organisations suffered from in the 1970s. They are also telling of the level of, and desire for, self-sufficiency within the Aboriginal community in Redfern.

The diversity of issues that members of Murawina wanted to tackle reflected the numerous and acute disadvantages that urban Aboriginal people suffered. It also showed how for Indigenous activists these problems were not seen as separate but rather as a part of one problem: Aboriginal disadvantage. Such was the desire for change and seriousness of the many burning issues among urban Aboriginal people that it would have seemed impossible not to address them. Thus, in addition to early childhood education, Murawina, similarly to the other Aboriginal organisations, participated in the Aboriginal community in multiple ways. It minded children for working mothers, organised preschool education, assisted with housing, educational and nutritional problems, and acted as a referral centre directing Aboriginal people to appropriate services when unable to otherwise provide them with assistance.⁸⁷

⁸² Minutes of Management Meeting, 18 March 1974, part 1, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA; 'Murawina: black women strike out', *The Black National Times*, 14.

⁸³ Minutes of the Council Meeting, 6 March 1973, 97A48/66; *AMS Newsletter*, April 1979, 4.

⁸⁴ Administrators report, June 1973, C1696/10.

⁸⁵ Minutes of the Council Meeting, 6 March 1973, 97A48/66.

⁸⁶ Minutes of ordinary meeting, 1 July 1974, part 1, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA.

⁸⁷ 'Murawina: black women strike out', *The Black National Times*, 14; Rowlands, 'Caring for kids ended in triumph', 7.

Is the footpath to be our children's only heritage?⁸⁸

Murawina had outgrown its premises at Shepherd Street by 1974. Not only was the building too small for the number of children who attended Murawina daily, but there was no outdoor play area. *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported that children were playing on the pavement of a busy road.⁸⁹ Two children had already been hit by a car by July 1974.⁹⁰ A Murawina flyer asking for donations posed the question “Is the footpath to be our children's only heritage?”⁹¹ (See Appendix 5.) This question underlined the strong consciousness Murawina members felt of their marginal position in Australian society: Aboriginal children in government-funded childcare were left to play on the liminal space of the pavement, not really outdoors or indoors. Liminality has been described as a category that is officially not black, yet not conceivably white, and which came to be spatially symbolised in the image of the ‘fringe-camp’.⁹²

Rather than liminality Murawina aspired “to be part of an Aboriginal dream for self-determination”.⁹³ It approached the government in order to get funding to purchase a block of land at 77-85 Eveleigh Street right next to the recently established Aboriginal Housing Company (AHC).⁹⁴ (See Appendix 1.) Chicka Dixon, at the time an Aboriginal liaison officer at the DAA, supported the application, not only because of the needs of the children, but also because it would encourage more mothers to take part in community building. He saw it as “a major step toward Aboriginal self-help participation”.⁹⁵ The Whitlam government granted Murawina \$115,000 for the purchase in July 1974.⁹⁶

For Cavanagh, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, who was also committed to funding a new purpose built building for Murawina, new premises represented the possibility of

⁸⁸ Murawina flyer, part 4, R76/15, C1696/10, NAA.

⁸⁹ ‘Aboriginal dream centre for Redfern’, *SMH*, 8 March 1974. See also ‘Murawina Grant Nothing but a Con’, *The Glebe*, 6 July 1977.

⁹⁰ Dixon to Assistant Director, 12 July 1974, C1696/10.

⁹¹ Murawina flyer, C1696/10.

⁹² Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: the politics and poetics of an ethnographic event* (London, New York: Cassell, 1999), 176.

⁹³ Murawina, 30 July 1974, C1696/10.

⁹⁴ Minutes of Meeting, 18 March 1974, part 1, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA; Dixon to Assistant Director, 12 July 1974, C1696/10.

⁹⁵ Dixon to Assistant Director, 12 July 1974, C1696/10. On Dixon's involvement see also Martin to Acting Area Officer, 16 February 1981, part 9, R76/2, C1696/11, NAA.

⁹⁶ Dexter to Minister, 13 November 1974, part 2, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA.

better integrating the Aboriginal community into mainstream Australia. In his backing Cavanagh evoked enlightenment ideas of ‘civilising’ Aboriginal people and reflected his support for equal rights rather than Indigenous rights as a solution to the problems facing Indigenous communities. He wrote that even though perhaps some sections of the Aboriginal community left much to be desired, “I am sure with proper care and employment opportunities, they can all become useful members of our society.”⁹⁷ These words echoed the same sentiments as those of David Collins, the deputy judge-advocate of the newly established colony in Port Jackson in 1788, who was responsible for its legal establishment, when he described the Aboriginal people: “With attention and kind treatment, they certainly might be made a very serviceable people”⁹⁸

Colin James helped Murawina to find an architect to design its building. James, who taught architecture at the University of Sydney, sat on the board of South Sydney Community Aid and was involved with the development of the AHC from its early stages.⁹⁹ He introduced Vivian Ford and some other architecture students to Murawina members, who then suggested ideas for the new Murawina childcare centre and hostel for Aboriginal mothers. Murawina women chose Ford’s suggestion of free flowing space with lots of sunshine. The concept of the building allowed community activities to form the nucleus of the building with the playrooms, office space and garden opening off from this to the north.¹⁰⁰

Bill Lucas, a lecturer at the University of New South Wales and a member of the Sydney School of architecture that aspired for a closer relationship with nature,¹⁰¹ introduced Ford to a building system that he had himself been working on for many years, for example at the Bourke Aboriginal Housing scheme. The building design was made on a 60 degrees triangulated grid rather than squares. Instead of what Ford described as an antagonistic square, all paths would cross in sympathetic connection with one another. The possibilities of different and growing functions of spaces were also seen as less restricted if the building

⁹⁷ Cavanagh to Challenger, 8 July 1974, part 1, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA.

⁹⁸ David Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, Vol. I, (London: T. Cadell jun. and W. Davies, 1798), 600. See also Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales*, viii, 616.

⁹⁹ Colin James interviewed, Redfern Oral History, 3 April 2002, <http://www.redfernoralthistory.org/Default.aspx?tabid=143>, Accessed 12 May 2008; top(100), *the (sydney) magazine*, 55.

¹⁰⁰ Ford notes, part 2, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁰¹ Peter Myers, ‘Obituary’, ArchitectureAU, <http://architectureau.com/articles/obituary-23/>, accessed 17 December 2012.

was a hexagon.¹⁰² Thus, the building experimented with new concepts as well as construction methods, which, Ford acknowledged, would be unfamiliar to many builders.¹⁰³

The plans of building an Indigenous childcare centre and preschool stirred racial fears in some of the local residents. Eight participants in a special meeting of the South Sydney Council in May 1974 opposed Murawina's development plan. They commented how ten years ago there were no Aboriginal people in Redfern. Thus there was no need for the preschool to be in Redfern, since Aboriginal people did not belong there. Residents who objected to the building project underlined that they were not opposed to the idea, just the location. Redfern was seen as too industrial and thus not suitable for children. Hence it would be better to build Murawina childcare centre elsewhere. However, representatives of Murawina argued for the need to have the preschool where the children lived. They emphasised the Aboriginal sense of belonging in Redfern and pointed out that Aboriginal people had always lived in Redfern. As Lorraine Merritt explained, her mother had lived in Redfern for 35 years, and her aunt for 30 years.¹⁰⁴

Wendy Shaw argues that the Aboriginal presence became visible only when Redfern became the focus for Aboriginal activism in the late 1960s and 1970s and Aboriginal people in general became more vocal about their demands, even though they had continued to live in the city after colonisation.¹⁰⁵ However, the Aboriginal presence did not manifest only as vocal campaigning for their rights. Rather under the Whitlam government a concrete shift occurred in the perception as to who could own and have use of property in the inner city. While Murawina's development plan was discussed in the Council meeting, the Black Theatre was preparing its premises at Botany Street to open as a cultural centre and the AHC had started to buy terraces from the block next to where Murawina was planning to build.

Seventeen participants spoke in favour of the Murawina development at the Council meeting. They argued for the desperate need for a preschool for Aboriginal children who

¹⁰² Proposal for the Relocation and Expansion of Murawina Pre-school, part 1, R76/15, C1696/10, NAA; Ford' notes, part 2, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁰³ Ford to Secretary, 17 April 1975, part 2, R76/15, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁰⁴ Minutes of the special meeting, 13 May 1974, part 1, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA. See also Redfern organisations, 18 July 1974, C1696/10.

¹⁰⁵ Shaw, *Cities of Whiteness*, 54-56, 58-64, 97-101

were otherwise disadvantaged in education. They thought that an Aboriginal preschool would make Redfern a better place to live and ease racial tension in the area. One of the non-Indigenous supporters emphasised the importance of early childhood education and expressed the view that if Aboriginal children had the opportunity of preschool education they would have fewer problems, such as alcoholism, in the future.¹⁰⁶ South Sydney City Council approved the development of the preschool and community centre on 14 May 1974. The application for the development of the hostel was also approved on 6 June 1974.¹⁰⁷

Murawina also needed Council approval for its building application before it could proceed with the project. This was received, with some amendments at the open Council meeting in the following year, in February 1975.¹⁰⁸ Architects and Council representatives had disagreed as to whether the plans complied with fire regulations. An article in *Kooka-Bina*, later known as *Koori-Bina*, a newspaper published by the Redfern based Black Women's Action Committee,¹⁰⁹ claimed that the South Sydney Council had a tendency to hold up Aboriginal projects, as it had done with the Aboriginal Medical Service previously.¹¹⁰

The Builders Labourers Federation (BLF) helped Murawina to find builders. Bob Pringle, the President of the BLF, gave them a list of recommended people which the ALS had also checked.¹¹¹ Kevin Cook, who was an organiser of the BLF and also involved in the Black Theatre at the time, stated that the Murawina project would be exempted from any possible industrial strike.¹¹² Murawina also advertised for interested builders. Based on applications they chose the Aboriginal Housing Company (AHC), which implies their determination to support Aboriginal companies and the project of Aboriginal self-determination more widely in the community. After having seen the plans, the AHC, however, decided that

¹⁰⁶ Minutes of the special meeting, 13 May 1974, C1696/10.

¹⁰⁷ Ford's notes, part 2, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA; Secretary to Minister, 30 August 1974, part 1, R76/15, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁰⁸ Ford's notes, C1696/10.

¹⁰⁹ Burgmann, 'Black Sisterhood', 37.

¹¹⁰ 'Murdoch Slanders Aboriginal Housing Company', *Kooka-Bina*, Vol 1, No 1, June 1976, 1, 3. For the AMS see Chapter 3.

¹¹¹ Hunter to Minister, 28 August 1974, part 1, R76/15, C1696/10, NAA; Ford's notes, C1696/10.

¹¹² Minute book, 26 August 1974, part 1, R76/15, C1696/10, NAA; Kevin Cook interviewed by Hal Alexander and Russ Hermann, 'From building sites to Aboriginal education', *A few rough reds*, 45-46, <http://roughreds.com/rrone/cook.html>, accessed 15 April 2007, 45.

they would be unable to carry out the plan. Thus, A.H. Edwards, a non-Aboriginal building company, was selected as a builder.¹¹³

The builders estimated building costs of approximately \$300,000, a sum of which had been approved in principle by the DAA.¹¹⁴ However, Murawina, their architects W.E. Lucas and Associates and the government disagreed as to how to proceed with the construction of the building. In April 1975 Ford explained in her correspondence to the DAA that she wished to employ a constructor who was familiar with the materials that would be used in the Murawina building.¹¹⁵ However, according to Ford, Senator Cavanagh, then the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, was unhappy with the way the contract had been negotiated. It was suggested that Department of Housing and Construction be consulted in the negotiations.¹¹⁶

The Department of Housing and Construction was concerned by the architect's experimental methods, as these were seen as leading to a project that would become open ended.¹¹⁷ It also argued that the architects had not provided enough documentation about Council approvals and thought their plans to be inadequate. The Department was not convinced that the architects knew whether they were planning a two-storey building or a two-storey building with a potential third floor.¹¹⁸ To maximise the cost efficiency, they also recommended that new builders be invited to tender for the job rather than negotiate the contract.¹¹⁹

Meanwhile the Whitlam government had become unable to proceed with the necessary funding as the opposition blocked the Supply Bill in the Senate.¹²⁰ This prompted Murawina to request urgent action in their correspondence with the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs on 3 November 1975. Furthermore, they did not approve of instructions given by the Department of Housing and Construction, but felt that these overruled

¹¹³ Ford's notes, C1696/10.

¹¹⁴ Brogan to Regional director, 21 May 1975, part 2, R76/15, C1696/10, NAA; Murawina to Minister, 3 November 1975, part 2, R76/15, C1696/10, NAA.

¹¹⁵ Ford to Secretary, 17 April 1975, C1696/10.

¹¹⁶ Ford's notes, C1696/10.

¹¹⁷ Brogan to Regional Director, 21 May 1975, C1696/10.

¹¹⁸ Murawina centre, part 2, R76/15, C1696/10, NAA.

¹¹⁹ Ford's notes, C1696/10.

¹²⁰ Hocking, 'Introduction', 11; Sexton, *The Great Crash*, 215.

recommendations of consultants employed by Murawina and undermined their self-determination. They accused the Department of Housing and Construction as superimposing old-fashioned bureaucratic procedures.¹²¹

Building under Coalition

After the dismissal of Whitlam on 11 November 1975, Murawina was required to renegotiate its position with the Fraser government in order to guarantee funding for its building. The Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, now Senator Viner, following the advice of the Department of Housing and Construction, reserved the right to make the final decision on the tender. This upset the architects, who argued that they had the required understanding of materials and building techniques. However, the government made it clear that if its conditions were not met, Murawina had no alternative but to dismiss Bill Lucas. Murawina did so the following month and a new architect firm, Brewster, Murray and Partners, took over.¹²² The Murawina building project was also not to be treated as a training program for Aboriginal people, despite Murawina's wishes.¹²³

Delays in the project proved to be costly. Murawina had lost its opportunity to build when funds would have been available following the difficulty of getting Council permission, disagreements about the project with government departments and a design that the government officials thought too idealistic or unusual for a government project. Delays were increased by the fact that from the very beginning the DAA did not give clear instructions on how they would like Murawina to proceed with hiring the builders. No funds were available during the financial year 1976/77.¹²⁴ The initial estimated building costs had increased from \$300,000 to \$497,867 by May 1977.¹²⁵ The DAA was no longer able to provide full funding for the project and started to search for alternative solutions.

¹²¹ Murawina to Minister, 3 November 1975, C1696/10.

¹²² Williams to Lucas, 3 March 1976, part 2, R76/15, C1696/10, NAA. See also Ross to Williams, 31 October 1975, part 3, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA; Williams to Lucas, 26 April 1976, part 2, R76/15, C1696/10, NAA.

¹²³ Ford to Secretary, 17 April 1975, C1696/10.

¹²⁴ Report on application for funds, 4 August 1976, part 3, R76/15, C1696/10, NAA.

¹²⁵ Submission to Minister, 10 May 1977, part 4, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA.

The number of children under five who attended Murawina daily had increased to 40-50 in 1977. Murawina had expanded to employ ten staff: an administrator, a secretary, a co-ordinator for the building project, a cook, an assistant cook, a driver, three teachers and a cleaner.¹²⁶ The role of volunteers participating in the daily activities became smaller as the number of paid staff increased, as in other Aboriginal organisations. Despite the aim to have Indigenous staff only, Murawina was not able to employ qualified Indigenous teachers until in the 1980s.¹²⁷ Early childhood education teacher training processes excluded Aboriginal people until the late 1970s.¹²⁸

Murawina continued to operate in inadequate premises for five more years. For example, children had to be taken by car to the nearest park for outdoor play, where the toilets were permanently locked.¹²⁹ Meanwhile the New South Wales Youth and Community Service (YACS) turned a blind eye on the understanding that a new building had been promised by the DAA in 1974.¹³⁰ Thus, during this time the DAA was able to fund Murawina at minimal capital expense, while at the same time providing less than adequate preschool premises for inner-Sydney Aboriginal children, since the building Murawina operated in was donated for their use and was thus rent-free.

While the funding remained unresolved, Murawina continued to lobby the government for a new building. In their telegram sent to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, Senator Viner, and to the Deputy Prime Minister, Senator Anthony, on 24 March 1977, Murawina representatives asked

are we still to exist in these deplorable inadequate conditions while trying to make a better future for the Aboriginal community as is the Liberal Country Party philosophy of self-help independence and growth.¹³¹

In addition newspapers were used to publicise the issue.¹³²

¹²⁶ Butt to Fox, 21 November 1977, part 4, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA.

¹²⁷ Ali Golding, 'Murawina', The Block, SBS, <http://www.sbs.com.au/theblock/gordon.html#/gordon/timeline/murawina>, accessed 20 November 2012.

¹²⁸ McConnochie and Russell, *Early Childhood Services for Aboriginal Children*, 23.

¹²⁹ Williams to Nicholson, 24 May 1977, C 1696/10.

¹³⁰ Asst Director to Malone, 11 May 1977, part 4, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA.

¹³¹ Murawina to Minister, 29 March 1977, part 3, R76/15, C1696/10, NAA.

¹³² 'Kindergarten needs help to keep going', *The Paddington Paper*, April 1977; 'Pre-Schoolers Risking Death', *Daily Mirror*, 25 May 1977; 'Have to move premises, no where to go', *SMH*, 24 June 1977; 'Murawina Grant Nothing but a Con', *The Glebe*.

The government received letters of support for Murawina from S. Pappas, Vicar General of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of Australia, John R. Reid, the Regional Bishop for the Church of England in the inner-city area and from Senator Jim Keefe, member of the Queensland Aboriginal Rights Council and involved with FCAATSI.¹³³ Murawina also received continuing support from the previous Ministers for Aboriginal Affairs.¹³⁴ Throughout 1977 it became apparent that refusing to fund the building, as was being contemplated by the DAA, would create a great deal of negative publicity, which would have been politically unattractive for the government.¹³⁵

The need for new premises became more apparent once Murawina received six months' notice at their premises on Shepherd Street in March 1977.¹³⁶ However, Fink did not require Murawina to vacate the premises, whether because they had nowhere to go or because notice was sent to prompt the DAA into action. In the end Murawina moved out of Shepherd Street over a year later in July 1978, when the building was severely damaged by fire. No people were injured, but Murawina needed to find new accommodation. They moved temporarily into the Black Theatre or the Black Unity Building, which I discussed in the previous chapter. With support from the Aboriginal community the building was brought up to an acceptable standard.¹³⁷

In the end the Murawina building was co-funded by \$300,000 from the DAA, \$180,000 from the Youth and Community Service and \$50,000 from the Norman Catt's Trust. The Norman Catt's Trust was established in 1968 to support the education of Aboriginal children in New South Wales. The DAA also funded the purchase of 87 Eveleigh Street by Murawina as an administrative centre and later as caretaker's premises.¹³⁸ Murawina also

¹³³ McFadden to Minister, 25 August 1977, part 4, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA; Reid to Viner, 21 July 1977, part 4, R76/15, C1696/10, NAA; Keefe to Viner, 28 March 1977, part 4, R76/15, C1696/10, NAA. For information on Keefe see Bandler, *Turning the Tide*, 147. See also 'Senator Keefe Undoes Fraser', *Kooka-Bina*, Vol 1, No 1, June 1976, 5, 8.

¹³⁴ Malone to Secretary, May 1977, part 4, R76/15, C1696/10, NAA.

¹³⁵ Submission to Minister, 10 May 1977, C1696/10.

¹³⁶ MacKenzie to Regional Director, 29 March 1977, part 4, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA; Williams to Nicholson, 24 May 1977, C1696/10.

¹³⁷ Fox to Rustonji, 13 July 1978, part 4, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA; Barnett to Rowlands, 14 July 1978, part 4, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA; Fox to Area Officer, 25 July 1978, part 4, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA; Martin to Scott, 25 July 1978, [not sent], part 4, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA.

¹³⁸ Williams to Fox, 15 September 1978, C1696/11; Scott to Area officer, 23 January 1979, part 5, R76/15, C1696/11, NAA; Receipts and payments for the year ended 30 June 1979, part 7, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA.

raised funding for the building and received as donations \$4,245 between March and June 1977 and \$4,258 during the financial year 1977/78.¹³⁹

Construction of the Murawina childcare and preschool centre commenced in 1978 and Murawina was able to move to the new building in August 1979.¹⁴⁰ The Murawina centre was officially opened by the Mayor of South Sydney, Alderman Bill Hartup and the elders of the board of directors of Murawina: Mrs Muriel Merritt, Mrs Edith Bostock, Mrs Louisa Ingram and Mrs Nell Smith in October 1980.¹⁴¹ Murawina members also reluctantly invited the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs to the opening after the DAA requested to have him included.¹⁴² The opening of the Murawina centre marked another victory for Aboriginal self-determination in Redfern and further established their presence in the inner city.

Self-determination under rationalisation

Similar to the Aboriginal Legal and Medical Services, the relationship between Murawina and the DAA soured towards the end of the 1970s, as the Liberal Party tightened its economic policies and its Aboriginal policies shifted from self-determination to self-management.¹⁴³ *Koori-Bina* condemned the Fraser government's plans to cut government spending.¹⁴⁴ In July 1976 it accused Fraser "of a deliberate racist attempt to oppress blacks, to drive our living standards even further below the poverty line, and ride to "economic recovery" on our backs". At the same time the Murawina building project dragged on as discussed above.

¹³⁹ Murawina building appeals account, 28 March to 30 June 1977, part 4, R 76/2, C1696/10, NAA; Income and expenditure for the twelve months ended 30 June 1978, part 5, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA

¹⁴⁰ Murawina brief, part 9, R76/2, C1696/11, NAA.

¹⁴¹ 'An Aboriginal dream come true', *SMH*, 23 October 1980, 14; Martin to Assistant Secretary, 22 October 1980, part 9, R76/2, C1696/11, NAA; *Murawina Newsletter*, Vol 10, No 1, 26 September 1980, part 9, R76/2, C1696/11, NAA.

¹⁴² Rowland to Regional Director, 6 June 1979, part 5, R76/15, C1696/11, NAA; Imrie to Regional Director, 26 June 1979, part 5, R76/15, C1696/11, NAA.

¹⁴³ Green to Area officer, 2 April 1979, C1696/10. See also Robbins and Summers, 'Aboriginal Affairs Policy', 520; 'The Liberal and National Country Parties Aboriginal Affairs Policy' in Tobin, *Aboriginal Legal Service of New South Wales*, Vol. 1; DAA, 'Inquiry into services for Aboriginals' in Tobin, *Aboriginal Legal Service of New South Wales*, Vol. 1.

¹⁴⁴ 'Lynch Fraser Not Blacks', *Kooka-Bina*, Vol. 1, No. 1, June 1976, 1-2; 'We accuse...', *Koori-Bina*, Vol. 1, No. 2, July 1976, 1-2. See also 'Genocide!', *Koori-Bina*, Vol. 1, No. 3, August 1976, 1, 3.

The DAA officials had supervised Murawina closely in its operations when it was first established, unlike their treatment of the Aboriginal Legal Service. Whether they were guided by their experiences with the ALS or felt Murawina needed more guidance because it was a women's organisation, or because it had no white supporters involved in its management, it is hard to tell. Murawina members were also willing to allow more DAA involvement in the early stages. However, as Murawina members became more experienced in running their organisation and dealing with different government bodies and their desire for self-determination grew stronger, the DAA's role in the day to day running of Murawina decreased. DAA officials perceived Murawina to be, in general, a good example of the way an Aboriginal organisation should work. For example, a DAA administrator complemented Murawina as one of the best-managed groups in Sydney and its financial controls were described as effective.¹⁴⁵

Murawina members, however, resented their dependency on DAA funding and the power it gave to DAA officials. An incident between Elizabeth Alley, an Area Officer for the Eastern Region, and Murawina in May 1977 is a telling example of this. Alley required detailed information that would explain the over expenditure of funds at the time. When it was revealed that the over-expenditure was largely spent on salaries as well as groceries and milk, the DAA required that salaries should be paid according to the amounts defined in funding decisions. Alley also suggested that Murawina manage its expenditure on groceries and milk by requesting payment for meals from employees and adult visitors.¹⁴⁶

Murawina responded to these requests by registering a complaint against Alley. They objected to "the overtones of a white woman, with very little experience of the Aboriginal situation, TELLING Aboriginal women how to run our own organisation."¹⁴⁷ Murawina denied Alley access to their premises and also refused to have any further dealings with her. These actions were supported by other Aboriginal organisations, including the Aboriginal Legal and Medical Services, the Black Theatre, the Aboriginal Housing Company and Aboriginal Children's Service.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Submission, 10 May 1977, part 4, R76/2C1696/10, NAA. See also Dexter to Minister, 5 April 1974, part 1, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA; Shegog to Secretary, part 1, R76/2, C1696/10; Ridgeway, 29 October 1976, part 3, R76/2, C1696/10.

¹⁴⁶ Alley to Carroll, 12 May 1977, part 3, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁴⁷ Butt to Martin, 23 May 1977, part 3, R76/2, C1696, NAA. Emphasis in the original document.

¹⁴⁸ Butt to Martin, 23 May 1977, C1696.

McFadden, then the Regional Director for the Eastern region and Viner, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, both supported Alley's actions as reasonable and in keeping with DAA practices. McFadden pointed out that in cases where over- or under-expenditure was not approved formally by a new budget, if justified, the DAA might have to withdraw funding.¹⁴⁹ Murawina members treated the DAA's response to their complaint as an attempt to target Aboriginal activists via their children, thus evoking the long history of child removal of which the Aboriginal people were acutely aware and that still continued in high numbers in the 1970s.¹⁵⁰ They compared the DAA practices to the history of the mission stations:

Twenty years ago, when we lived on the mission stations, we had manager to run the station and tell us how to live our lives and how to raise our children. If we did not comply to the rules of the manager we were threatened with the withdrawal of our rations, therefore no food, and the parents were told that their children would be taken away from them and put into homes.[...] Today in 1977 these tactics are still being practised through the Department of Aboriginal Affairs.¹⁵¹

Murawina's objections highlighted the way the past was present in contemporary Aboriginal activism. It was also politically powerful to compare the DAA which was expected to represent a more progressive form of governance with the times of the Welfare Board. Furthermore, Murawina women's reaction reflected the strong determination among Indigenous people that they should be the ones to make any decisions regarding their children and families and regarding running the organisations.¹⁵²

In the end, however, Murawina provided the DAA with the information that was required. Nor was Alley refused entry to any of the organisations that had signed the petition.¹⁵³ Though this incident did not lead to any drastic consequences, it did reflect increasing difficulties in the relationship between Murawina and the DAA. This disagreement came shortly after Murawina's public campaign to pressure the DAA to act upon its promise to fund the new building.

¹⁴⁹ McFadden to Butt, 29 June 1977, part 3, R76/2, C1696, NAA; Viner to Butt, Ministerial No. 2890, part 3, R76/2, C1696, NAA.

¹⁵⁰ Read, A History of the Wiradjuri people of New South Wales 1883-1969, 362.

¹⁵¹ Butt to McFadden, 11 July 1977, part 4, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁵² Nigel D'Souza, 'The politics of Aboriginal Children's Services in Australia', *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, Vol. 24, No. 1, March 1999, 27.

¹⁵³ Martin to Minister, 10 June 1977, part 3, R76/2, C1696, NAA.

At the same time the Coalition government started to adopt a user pay model. In line with their tighter funding policy the DAA wanted Murawina to adopt a fee structure in April 1977.¹⁵⁴ Similar changes affected childcare services in general and they were debated within the framework of the competitive market.¹⁵⁵ The user pay model underlined the way the DAA had started to treat the children at Murawina as clients similar to any other mainstream children, rather than as disadvantaged Indigenous children in need of special support. The DAA expected Murawina to evolve from an Indigenous welfare organisation into a competitive mainstream early education service.

Murawina members were opposed to charging fees. They thought that fees would frighten away parents who were not able to pay. They also argued that as long as they had to operate in premises that were inadequate it was not reasonable to ask parents to contribute. However, after a series of discussions Murawina agreed to ask for \$2 per week per child. The Save the Children Fund, which the DAA thought was a comparable organisation, charged \$2.50 per week at the time.¹⁵⁶ Nevertheless, in practice Murawina continued to oppose the idea of fees and did not collect any.¹⁵⁷ This led the DAA administrator to complain in April 1978 that representatives of Murawina held “an altruistic and benevolent attitude towards its clients which are *allegedly* in dire financial straits.”¹⁵⁸

During the same year, in September 1978, the DAA recommended that Murawina participate in a modified scheme governing budget allocations. In this scheme it was not necessary, for example, to have approval when reallocating money between sub-items, e.g. rental, heating, telephone, under the same item, e.g. services.¹⁵⁹ This added more flexibility to the daily business of Murawina, for it had not previously been possible to react immediately to unexpected problems. Now if a sudden need arose it was possible to fund it

¹⁵⁴ Nicolson to Area Officer, 13 April 1977, part 3, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA; Martin to Area Officer, 14 April 1977, part 3, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA; Fox to Carroll, 15 September 1977, part 4, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA; Fox to Carroll, 28 October 1977, part 4, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁵⁵ Nyland, ‘Looking backward, looking forward’, 9.

¹⁵⁶ Nicolson to Area Officer, 13 April 1977, C1696/10; Fox to Regional Director, 27 September 1977, part 4, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁵⁷ *Murawina newsletter*, C1696/11.

¹⁵⁸ Fox, file note, April 1978, part 4, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA. Emphasis mine.

¹⁵⁹ Variations to budget items within budget, part 4, C1696/10, NAA; Fox to Area Officer, 6 September 1978, part 5, C1696/10, NAA.

without time spent in applying for reallocation and later reporting in detail.¹⁶⁰ This change also underlines how strictly allocated the funding for Murawina had been.

After their move to the new building in 1979, Murawina was able to become a licensed preschool centre instead of the unofficial, unlicensed preschool and child minding centre it had been so far. The licence was required for funding from the Office of Child Care of the Commonwealth Government (OCC), and from the Youth and Community Services.¹⁶¹ Thus, during 1978 the DAA decided that Murawina should compete with the general community for funding from the OCC and the YACS in the following 1979/80 financial year.¹⁶² The DAA view was that Murawina “was in the happy position” that it “had reached the point where it could compete with the community at large” and should look less for support from the DAA and more from its community.¹⁶³ The DAA’s role in the new structure was to fill the gaps that were unfunded because of the special needs of the Aboriginal people and thus to support distinct Aboriginal goals and the inability of Aboriginal parents to contribute towards their children’s preschool education. However, the goal was that the DAA would gradually withdraw funding. Aboriginal Hostels Limited (AHL) was responsible for the funding of the Murawina hostel.¹⁶⁴

The DAA’s aim to mainstream Murawina further reflects the tendency to see the role of the DAA as a temporary measure until such time as the Aboriginal organisations reached the necessary ability and ‘maturity’ to enable them to compete with mainstream organisations. Furthermore, a surprisingly short time was allocated in which to reach the day when there would be no need for special subsidies because the problems of Aboriginal disadvantage would be solved.

The DAA argued for the need to rationalise Aboriginal organisations in order to qualify for funding under the mainstream system. For example, Murawina was expected to operate with the same level of staff as a mainstream preschool. The DAA was concerned that

¹⁶⁰ Alley to Carroll, 12 May 1977, C1696/10; ‘Murawina: black women strike out’, *The Black National Times*, 14.

¹⁶¹ Fox to Regional Director, 4 April 1979, part 5, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁶² Fox to Scott, 5 September 1978, part 5, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA; Fox to Regional director, 4 April 1979, C1696/10.

¹⁶³ Fox to Scott, 5 September 1978, part 5, C1696/10, NAA

¹⁶⁴ Green to Area officer, 2 April 1979, C1696/10; Fox to Regional director, 4 April 1979, C1696/10; Martin to Minister, 17 August, 1979, part 6, R76/2, C1696/10 NAA; Rustomji, note for file, 1 August 1979, part 5, R76/15, C1696/11, NAA; Martin to Area officer, 17 February 1980, part 5, R76/15, C1696/11, NAA.

Murawina employed too many staff and emphasised that it was undesirable to institutionalise Aboriginal organisations just because they employed Aboriginal people.¹⁶⁵ In early 1979 Murawina employed seven non-teaching staff members: an administrator, co-ordinator, secretary-bookkeeper, cook, assistant cook, driver, and cleaner. The DAA recommended that Murawina reduce staff to one full-time administrator and three part-time positions for secretary-bookkeeper, cook and cleaner. Work that had previously been the responsibility of other staff members was to be divided between the teaching staff and those of the remaining non-teaching staff. For instance, untrained teaching assistants could drive children to and from Murawina and teaching staff could help with meal preparations.¹⁶⁶

Murawina perceived the new staffing recommendations as an attempt as, Sylvia Scott phrased it, to “completely destroy the whole concept of Murawina by forcing us to conform and not allowing us to run Murawina our way”. Scott also claimed that the government was planning to close down Murawina and reclaim its building.¹⁶⁷ As with the earlier conflict with Area Officer Alley, the DAA’s actions were interpreted in the context of past child removal policies and seen as a threat to the children. “Our Aboriginal children are threatened they have been threatened for over 200 years and they are still being threatened,” Murawina members protested when interviewed on television.¹⁶⁸ Murawina refused to reduce staffing, which led to a cash flow crisis.¹⁶⁹

The changes in the government’s funding practices also meant that parents were expected to contribute financially towards food and excursions.¹⁷⁰ The DAA saw the transporting of children to Murawina as primarily the parent’s responsibility, even though it was acknowledged that some children would not attend Murawina if transport was not available.¹⁷¹ At this stage many children came from the Aboriginal Housing Company homes, but also from suburbs such as Glebe, Dulwich Hill and Erskineville.¹⁷² It is

¹⁶⁵ Fadden to Minister, 27 April 1979, part 5, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA. See also 11 am, Channel 7, transcript, 5 November 1979, part 6, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁶⁶ Green to Area officer, 2 April 1979, C1696/10; Fox to Regional director, 4 April 1979, C1696/10; Chaney to Editor, *National Times*, 6 December 1979, part 7, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁶⁷ Scott to Chaney, 9 October 1979, part 6, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁶⁸ 11 am, Channel 7, C1696/10.

¹⁶⁹ Martin to Minister, 15 November 1979, part 6, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁷⁰ Green to Area officer, 2 April 1979, C1696/10; Fox to Regional director, 4 April 1979, C1696/10.

¹⁷¹ Fox to Regional director, 4 April 1979, C1696/10.

¹⁷² Butt interviewed by Nicholson, Channel 7, C1696/10.

important to note here that without an adequate number of children, Murawina could not get funding from the OCC.

The new requirements of increased parent contributions – fees, payments for food and excursions as well as transport – fit poorly with the original reasons why Murawina had been established. Socio-economic and health issues combined with the lack of culturally appropriate early childhood education caused Aboriginal children to be educationally deprived.¹⁷³ By the end of the 1970s these concerns had not changed even though the DAA's policies had. The multifunctional Aboriginal Children's and Community services existed for very different reasons to mainstream child care services.¹⁷⁴

The extent of rationalisation prompted by the DAA was questioned by an independent review conducted by a Consultancy Team from December 1979 to January 1980 on the request of the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, Senator Chaney.¹⁷⁵ The review highlighted that Murawina was located in a high demand area that rated "highest in need of emergency cash assistance, juvenile court appearance, and second highest for child care protection orders, permanently separated or divorced people and primary school non-attendance".¹⁷⁶ It is interesting to note that Aboriginality in itself did not qualify for the mainstream Special Needs Subsidy as ruled in the Child Care Act in 1972, which covered only children whose parents were single, migrants within their first three years of residence or parents who were sick or permanently incapacitated. The review recommended that the Department of Social Security should provide the Special Needs Subsidy for those children in need, such as Aboriginal children, but who did not qualify under the Child Care Act funding guidelines. Furthermore, the review recommended that in order for Murawina to be a fully operational preschool they should employ two trained teachers, a childcare worker, a mothercraft nurse, two assistants, a helper and an administrator as well as a part-time driver, a cook and a cleaner.¹⁷⁷ This was three more full-time non-teaching staff, more likely to be Indigenous, than the DAA had recommended.

¹⁷³ Submission, part 1, C1696/10.

¹⁷⁴ D'Souza, 'The politics of Aboriginal Children's Services in Australia', 30.

¹⁷⁵ Fountain, Lester, Thornton to Minister, 30 January, 1980, part 8, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA; Chaney to Everingham, Ministerial No. 2596, part 8, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁷⁶ Review of Murawina Limited, part 8, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁷⁷ Review of Murawina Limited, C1696/10.

The regional director of the DAA objected strongly to the staffing level recommendation. He thought it was far in excess of the YACS regulations. He was also upset that the regional office had been excluded from the review process.¹⁷⁸ This might have been intentional, because of the clashes they had previously had with Murawina. Alternatively the DAA Secretary's wishes that neither the regional office nor Murawina would be part of the review team, but would have been on the Steering Committee, might have been misunderstood. Though it is not stated in the records whether the situation was solved according to the recommendations, it seems that the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs granted increased funding.¹⁷⁹ In 1980/81 Murawina employed one teacher, one assistant teacher, two mothercraft nurses, two classroom assistants and one helper as well as a general administrator, full-time bookkeeper, cook, part-time cleaner and part-time driver.¹⁸⁰ Thus Murawina had managed to retain or regain full-time positions for a bookkeeper and cook as well as a part-time driver despite the funding struggles with the DAA in 1979.

Murawina was not entirely unhappy to be funded by three different bodies, for it meant more independence from the DAA. Its members held a hope that under the OCC and the YACS they would be treated appropriately as a childcare and preschool centre in an area of high need rather than being patronised by the DAA.¹⁸¹ In the end Murawina had managed to maintain its level of operations despite government's rationalisation of funding. It continued into the next decade under Aboriginal control, even if it now had to negotiate the limits of it with three different government bodies.

Black women-only

The establishment and development of Murawina coincided with the Women's Liberation movement and what has often been described as the second wave of feminism.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁸ Regional Director, Strokowsky, 22 May 1980, part 8, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁷⁹ Martin to Acting Area Officer, 26 June 1980, part 8, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA; Jansz to Regional Director, 20 June 1980, part 8, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁸⁰ Murawina Ltd review 1982, R76/2, C1696/11, NAA.

¹⁸¹ Green to Area officer, 2 April 1979, C1696/10.

¹⁸² Verity Burgmann, *Power and Protest: movements for change in Australian society* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1993), 77; Marilyn Lake, 'Feminism' in Graeme Davison, John Hirst and Stuart Macintyre (eds.), *The Oxford*

However, Indigenous feminists have argued since the 1970s that the western women's liberation movement has not responded to the needs of Indigenous women.¹⁸³ For Indigenous women the struggle was not so much against Aboriginal patriarchal oppression, but for survival in a white dominant racist and sexist society.¹⁸⁴ As Jackie Huggins observes in relation to the socio-economic status of Aboriginal people "While white women are fighting to get out of the kitchen. Black women are fighting to get into it."¹⁸⁵ Aileen Moreton-Robinson also notes that while white women campaigned for the right to say yes to sex, Indigenous women wanted the right to say no.¹⁸⁶

Anne Pattel-Gray argues that white feminism marginalised Aboriginal women, though it has claimed to represent all women since the 1960s.¹⁸⁷ According to Katy Reade, in the 1970s white feminists attempted to deal with difference by an ambivalent policy of inclusion, by absorbing Aboriginal women's difference and oppression into the existing feminist framework. For example, though space was made for Aboriginal women in the Women and Politics conference in 1975, funded by the government as part of the International Women's Year, the framework of the conference continued to essentialize the shared identity of women.¹⁸⁸ Jackie Huggins notes that white women benefited from racial imperialism and assumed the role of the oppressor of black men and women despite

Companion to Australian History (Melbourne, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 247; Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: the history of Australian feminism* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1999), 9-11.

¹⁸³ 'Aboriginal women attack 'white elitism'', *SMH*, 2 September 1975.

¹⁸⁴ Anne Pattel-Gray, 'The Hard Truth: White Secrets, Black Realities', *Australian Feminists Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 30, 1999, 260.

¹⁸⁵ Huggins, 'Black Women and Women's Liberation', 78.

¹⁸⁶ Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin'up to the White Woman*, 169, 171. For Indigenous women and white feminism see also, for example, Bobbi Sykes, 'Black Women in Australia – A History' in Jan Mercer (ed.), *The Other Half: women in Australian society* (Harmondsworth, Ringwood: Penguin Books, 1975), 319; 'Black Women in Society' in *Women and Politics Conference 1975*, Vol. 2, (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1977), 201; O'Shane, 'Is there any relevance in the women's movement for Aboriginal women?'; Bobbi Sykes in Rowland Robin (ed.), *Women who do and women who don't join the women's movement* (London, Melbourne: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 64-65; Huggins, 'Black Women and Women's Liberation', 77; Pattel-Gray, 'The Hard Truth'.

¹⁸⁷ Pattel-Gray, 'The Hard Truth', 259. See also Lilla Watson, 'Sister, Black Is the Colour of My Soul' in Jocelynne A. Scutt (ed.), *Different Lives* (Ringwood, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1987), 51; Jackie Huggins, 'A Contemporary View of Aboriginal Women's Relationship to the White Women's Movement' in Norma Grieve and Ailsa Burns (eds.), *Australian Women: Contemporary Feminist Thought* (Melbourne, Oxford, Auckland, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, 77-78.

¹⁸⁸ Katy Reade, 'Limited Gestures: white feminists and Aboriginal women in the 1970s women's movement' in Patricia Grimshaw and Diane Kirkby (eds.), *Dealing with Difference: essays in gender, culture and history* (Melbourne: History Department, The University of Melbourne, 1997), 120, 124.

being themselves oppressed by white men.¹⁸⁹ Thus they implicitly supported the colonial project.

Indigenous women described themselves as united with Indigenous men rather than in a sisterhood with white women. Thus, when the President of the National Council of Aboriginal and Island Women, Geraldine Briggs, was asked whether they identified with the women's liberation movement she replied: "No [...] We respect our men. We're quite happy for the man to be the head of the house. If a man has a strong character he should make the decisions – provided the woman agrees."¹⁹⁰ To emphasize blackness over women's issues had strategic importance in the political environment in which there was one identity for each movement, being a black person for the black movement and being woman for the feminist movement. Even though in reality people moved between different identities, they maintained the narrative that everyone in the movement shared the same uniform identity.¹⁹¹ This form of self-essentialising is a rhetorical performance in which an imagined community is invoked and represents identity politics that are not fixed but situational. For example community leaders may essentialise communal identities in their competition for state grants and formal leadership positions, but equally importantly such leaders narrate and argue over these identities in the social spaces which they themselves have created: in *invisible* public arenas of community organisations and halls.¹⁹²

Though Indigenous women did not feel part of the women's movement there was a spirit of sisterhood which informed Murawina.¹⁹³ The establishment of Murawina as a *black women-only* organisation underlines the way the importance of gender was entwined with race.¹⁹⁴ Murawina's constitution stated the aim "to do what is necessary to raise and restore

¹⁸⁹ Huggins, 'Black Women and Women's Liberation', 77.

¹⁹⁰ Robert Milliken, 'Women's groups seeks govt aid', *SMH*, 31 January 1972, 3. See also Ambrus and Eatock, 'Racism and sexism as determinants of the state and position of Aboriginal men and women in Australia', 139.

¹⁹¹ Stuart Hall, 'Ethnicity: Identity and Difference', *Radical America*, Vol. 23, No. 4, 1989, 17.

¹⁹² Pnina Werbner, 'Essentialising essentialism, essentialising silence: ambivalence and multiplicity in the constructions of racism and ethnicity' in Pnina Werbner and Tariq Modood (eds.), *Debating Cultural Hybridity: multicultural identities and the politics of anti-racism* (London, New York: Zed Books, 1997), 230.

¹⁹³ O'Shane, 'Is there any relevance in the women's movement for Aboriginal women?', 34; Eve Fesl in Rowland Robin (ed.), *Women who do and women who don't join the women's movement* (London, Melbourne: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), 111-112.

¹⁹⁴ Constitution, [May 1973], C1696/10; Administrators report, 30 June 1973, part 1, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA.

the status of black women.”¹⁹⁵ Or as Williams phrased it, “At Murawina we are striving for the unity of black women”.¹⁹⁶

Murawina encouraged Aboriginal mothers, many of whom had never before participated in community development, to become involved in the daily activities of the preschool.¹⁹⁷ It held hobby classes, such as sewing classes, which gave Aboriginal mothers an opportunity to meet other Aboriginal women in the inner-Sydney area.¹⁹⁸ As a meeting place for Aboriginal women Murawina provided a space free from the sexual harassment that they faced in non-Indigenous society, as in the course of colonisation Aboriginal women had been stereotyped as ‘promiscuous’ and sexually willing and thus had become victims of sexual abuse.¹⁹⁹

Indigenous men did not always welcome women only meetings or organisations. Dulcie Flower describes the unease that men felt when women held their women-only meeting at FCAATSI conferences. She recounts that they were not allowed to meet in peace, because the men were knocking on the door all the time and asking for their wives. The men wanted to know what the women were talking about or why the men were excluded.²⁰⁰ Chicka Dixon recalled how many young men ridiculed his support for the women’s movement. He mentions that he was the only man allowed to be present at the Murawina meetings.²⁰¹

For Indigenous women their right to family was a central issue. Alanna Doolan saw the role of Aboriginal women as defined by motherhood. She wrote,

We will not see our children dying from malnutrition and scurvy. We will not lose hope. We want decent homes for our families, adequate healthcare for our children and a better standard of living than we have been forced to live under all these years.²⁰²

¹⁹⁵ Constitution, [May 1973], C1696/10.

¹⁹⁶ ‘Breakfast at six to unite the blacks’, *SMH*; Rowlands, ‘Caring for kids ended in triumph’, 7.

¹⁹⁷ Dixon to Assistant Director, 12 July 1974, C1696/10; President’s report, part 1, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁹⁸ McGuigan to Martin, 9 March 1973, part 1, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA; Hunter to DAA, 1 May 1974, part 1, R76/15, C1696/10, NAA; Administrators report, part 1, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA; ‘Murawina: black women strike out’, *The Black National Times*, 14.

¹⁹⁹ Burgmann, ‘Black Sisterhood’, 25.

²⁰⁰ Dulcie Flower interviewed by Peter Read, Sydney, 14 October 1987, Read P03, AIATSIS.

²⁰¹ Dixon interviewed by the author, 17 August 2000.

²⁰² Alanna Doolan, ‘And the response of a black woman’, *Koori-Bina*, Vol. 1, No. 4, September 1976, 5. See also Gare, ‘Aboriginal Woman’, 49.

Murawina women also campaigned in October 1973 against the removal of Aboriginal children; *Identity* magazine pictured Norma Williams holding a placard saying “Return all Aboriginal children home. Not your home” on the steps of the Parliament House in Canberra.²⁰³ (See Appendix 6.) The *Aboriginal Medical Service Newsletter*, edited by Bobbi Sykes, called for better legal protection against unwanted abortions and sterilisations performed on Aboriginal women. The newsletter described white women’s campaign for abortion on demand as an expression of self-centred desires that were detrimental to Aboriginal women.²⁰⁴ For white feminists to ask Aboriginal women to stand apart from Aboriginal men was to repeat the attempts of Welfare agencies to separate Aboriginal families.²⁰⁵ Murawina activists fought to keep Aboriginal mothers and children together at a time when, white women came to see motherhood as the major barrier of women’s freedom.²⁰⁶

From at least 1974, Murawina plans included a hostel for Aboriginal women to support Aboriginal women’s right to keep their children. Murawina women argued for the need to build the mother’s hostel by three supportive statements in a letter addressed to the DAA:

1. We want to keep our children
2. We want to be able to support them
3. We do not want to have to adopt them or put them in an institution because we have no place to go to or no future to give them.²⁰⁷

Murawina Hostel aimed to provide accommodation and childcare for Aboriginal mothers who came to Sydney to complete tertiary education at a time when few Aboriginal people were able to gain any higher education. Many white mothers also started to pursue education, for example, in order to gain financial independence. However, for Indigenous mothers financial independence meant that they would not have to consider abortion, give their children out for adoption or place them in institutions. Importantly children would retain their Aboriginality when they would not have to grow up within the non-Indigenous community.²⁰⁸ The Hostel was realised when Murawina moved to their new building on Eveleigh Street in 1979.

²⁰³ Jack Davis, ‘Demonstration: the reasons why’, *Identity*, Vol. 1, Nov. 9, January 1974, 34-35.

²⁰⁴ *AMS Newsletter*, No. 7.

²⁰⁵ Huggins, ‘A Contemporary View of Aboriginal Women’s Relationship to the White Women’s Movement’, 71.

²⁰⁶ Lake, *Getting Equal*, 217.

²⁰⁷ Murawina statement, C1696/10.

²⁰⁸ Murawina statement, C1696/10.

Murawina Hostel offered a safe space for Aboriginal women, not only from men, but from white society. Sam Watson, an Indigenous activist from Brisbane, describes the violence towards Aboriginal women by the white society:

One of our Panther sisters was targeted by the coppers, taken to Mount Coot-ha and raped by three coppers. We had her cleaned up and attended to by a doctor and then we took her to lodge a complaint with the police inspector. He just spat in her face and called her a gin and told her that she was a liar because she was black.²⁰⁹

White feminists were also setting up refuges where women could get shelter from violence or find accommodation when leaving marriage.²¹⁰ The first women's refuge, Elsie, was opened in Glebe in Sydney in 1974.²¹¹

Murawina was largely a young women's organisation and in the beginning it was difficult to get the older generation of women involved. "Not all the black women are so militant. Mostly it's the young ones... It's fairly difficult to get the older women involved," Alanna Doolan pointed out in 1975. However, the older generation of women became more involved as the time went by.²¹² Women from two generations of some families, such as the Ingrams and Merritts, were active in Murawina. The daily operations of Murawina, running the child care centre, was the main responsibility of the younger women, while the older women were involved in the management committee. For example, Louisa Ingram was sometimes the President of the management committee, which determined the policy of Murawina, appointed staff, approved statements and supervised the way Murawina operated. Her daughters Norma Williams, Esther Carroll, Millie Butt and Sylvia Scott were all involved either as administrators and members of the management committee or as the President of the management committee. Muriel Merritt was also a member of the Murawina management committee while her daughter Lorraine Merritt worked as a child minder and cook, and was also a member of the management committee in 1974.²¹³

²⁰⁹ Watson, 'I Say This to You', 592.

²¹⁰ Lake, *Getting Equal*, 229-230.

²¹¹ Heather Saville, 'Refuges: a new beginning to the struggle' in Carol O'Donnell and Jan Craney (eds.), *Family Violence in Australia* (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1982), 95.

²¹² Gare, 'Aboriginal Woman', 51.

²¹³ E.g. 'Success – colour it black', *SMH*; Neumann to Heusler, 20 August 1974, part 2, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA; Williams to Dexter, 9 January 1975, part 2, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA; Director's report, part 6, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA; Murawina salaries for 1976/77, part 4, R2/76, C1696/10, NAA; Breakdown of salaries and wages for 9 months to 31 March 1977, part 3, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA; Application for funds, part 4, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA; Alley to Nicholson, 6 April 1977, part 3, R76/15, C1696/10, NAA; Williams to Fox, 29 September 1978, part 5, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA; Butt to Martin, 5 December 1978, part 1, R78/48, C1696/11; Martin to Minister, 3 October 1980, C1696/11; 'The Murawina mothers', *Aboriginal Quarterly*,

Murawina members were influential in many Sydney and New South Wales organisations.²¹⁴ For example, Murawina opened a branch in Narrandera in the Riverina region in south-western New South Wales in 1975.²¹⁵ However, as with the AMS, the DAA limited the expansion of Murawina. In 1976 the DAA advised that Narrandera should form its own committee and work through its regional officer in Griffith.²¹⁶ Murawina also opened a branch in Mt Druitt in 1977 or 1978.²¹⁷ In July 1979 Norma Williams left Sydney for Nambucca to assist the local Aboriginal group, Gumbaynggir, to take over the management of the local preschool run by the Save the Children Fund.²¹⁸

Conclusion

Murawina women joined Aboriginal men in their shared struggle for Aboriginal self-determination. They aimed to provide an Aboriginal educational space that worked towards improving the educational possibilities of all Aboriginal people. Murawina strengthened Aboriginal children's sense of identity as a distinct people. It taught them Aboriginal versions of Australia's past and created links to traditional Aboriginal cultures. In the everyday practices of Murawina, children participated in contemporary forms of Aboriginal culture. In its activism, Murawina worked closely together with the other Aboriginal organisations in Redfern.

Though Indigenous women have always been actively involved in political activism, Murawina was different as it was a black women-only organisation. Murawina women framed Indigenous feminism around specific issues, such as family, that were central to Aboriginal women, rather than following the mainstream Women's Movement. Murawina provided a meeting place for Aboriginal women and, in the form of child care and

March 1980, Vol. 2, No 3, 14. On the responsibilities of the Management Committee see Constitution, [May 1973], C1696/10; 'Murawina is established', A History of Aboriginal Sydney, <http://www.historyofaboriginalsydney.edu.au/central/murawina-established>, accessed 27 May 2013.

²¹⁴ Submission, 10 May 1977, C1696/10.

²¹⁵ Income and expenditure for six months ended 31 December 1975, part 3, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA. When floods had made 43 Aboriginal families homeless in Wilcannia, Murawina organised a truck to take food, clothing, medical supplies and blankets to the area. '600 miles on mercy mission', *SMH*, 7 November 1974.

²¹⁶ Murawina board of directors to Lyons, 23 November 1976, part 3, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA.

²¹⁷ Income and expenditure for the twelve months ended 30 June 1978, part 5, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA.

²¹⁸ Ramsey to Rustomji, 19 July 1979, part 6, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA.

women's hostel, created support mechanisms that protected them and their children from colonising practices such as the removal of children.

The Whitlam government was welcoming of the idea of a culturally specific Aboriginal early childhood education centre. Murawina was also initially open to the guidance of the DAA officials. This guidance was initially intense compared to that imposed upon the ALS, possibly due to Murawina being run by women only. However, as it became apparent that the DAA's definition of self-determination differed from that of the Aboriginal activists, Murawina strove for greater Aboriginal control, like the other Aboriginal organisations. Under the Fraser government, Murawina perceived DAA officials' attempts at control as reminiscent of earlier government child removal policies. It saw co-funding from other Federal and State government bodies, the OCC and YACS, as an opportunity for greater independence from sole control by the DAA.

The process of planning and constructing the Murawina building highlights the difficulties of Aboriginal self-determination within the framework of government control. At first Murawina was presented with a possibility of having full control over decisions regarding its building. The project moved on with the help of networks it had created with the BLF and progressive architects. However, changing governments subjected Murawina's building project to increased levels of supervision. Delays in having building plans approved and funding guaranteed postponed the building project and it took five years until Murawina was able to move into its new building in 1979.

Once finished the Murawina building was a further victory in the Aboriginal struggle for self-determination. Together with the AMS and the AHC, it challenged the patterns of non-Indigenous property ownership in inner Sydney and underlined the Aboriginal belonging in the city. However, the greatest challenge to non-Indigenous perceptions of urban space as white came from the Aboriginal Housing Company, which I will discuss in the following chapter.

Chapter 6

Struggle over space: Aboriginal Housing Company

[Poem
has been removed
due to Copyright
restrictions.¹]

Every organisation discussed in this thesis challenged the notion of urban space as void of Aboriginality and claimed the ownership of social and geographic spaces in the settler colonial city in their struggle for self-determination, while taking part in building an urban Aboriginal community. However, none of the other organisations challenged the non-Indigenous claim to urban land to same extent as did the Aboriginal Housing Company. The Company began when Aboriginal activists, with their non-Indigenous supporters, started to campaign for, and in 1973 successfully secured, the ownership of terrace houses on a block bordered by Louis, Eveleigh, Caroline and Vine Streets, a stone's throw away from the Sydney CBD. (See Appendix 1.) The AHC's success brought out the intense resistance directed towards the Aboriginal presence in Redfern by the local non-Indigenous people and police.

Such is the legacy of the AHC that, for example, Ceridwen Spark calls "the Block", as the area of the Aboriginal Housing Company is now known, as "the site of Aboriginality in the city".² However, it is important to examine the AHC in the wider context of Aboriginal activism in Redfern. As Roberta Sykes retrospectively emphasised, 'the Block' needs to be seen in a context of all the things occurring at the time rather than as standing by itself.³

¹ James McJannett, 'In Any Park', *Identity*, Vol. 3, No. 1, January 1977, 36.

² See e.g. Ceridwen Spark, 'Documenting Redfern: representing home and Aboriginality on the Block', *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 1, 2003, p. 32, 35.

³ Sykes interviewed by Pat Ormesher.

When writing this chapter, unlike the previous chapters, the relevant documents on the Aboriginal Housing Company were not available for study among the Department of Aboriginal Affairs papers. Approximately 14 metres of the material was permanently withdrawn from the general correspondence files in series C1696 and C1830 from the National Archives Australia by the controlling agency ATSIC between 1986 and 1990. I suspect that the files on the Aboriginal Housing Company were part of this section of the material. However, it was not possible for me to get more detailed information on what exactly was withdrawn.

Due to limited access to source material I have not been able to map the everyday practices of the Aboriginal Housing Company as an organisation, nor its relationship with the DAA. Nevertheless, it is important to include the Aboriginal Housing Company in this study, because of its central role in Redfern activism and its push for Aboriginal belonging in the city. Furthermore, it is important to examine the intense resistance directed towards this urban Aboriginal housing project by non-Indigenous locals and police. In writing this chapter I have used published material such as newspaper articles and reports, oral histories and secondary sources. Of the latter, Kay Anderson's work on the Aboriginal Housing Company has been of great assistance.

Housing for squatters

Lack of appropriate housing was a general problem among Aboriginal communities in New South Wales. 18,000 out of its 23,120 Indigenous people were in need of rehousing in 1968. In the Sydney Metropolitan area 80 percent of Aboriginal people needed rehousing.⁴ In order to address the housing problem the New South Wales government established the Housing for Aborigines Scheme in 1969, in which some public housing was earmarked for Indigenous people. However, state housing provision was thoroughly inadequate to overcome the shortage caused by earlier government neglect. The Scheme also reflected the assimilationist strategy of moving Aboriginal people from reserves and fringe camps into the social mainstream. Public housing was scattered among the mainstream population

⁴ Ian McKay, 'Housing for aborigines in New South Wales', *Architecture in Australia*, June 1968, 488. See also *Poverty: the ACOSS evidence* (Sydney: Australian Council of Social Services, 1974), 87-90

and thus did not allow Aboriginal people to maintain a sense of community by living in close proximity with one another. Furthermore, in addition to their need of housing, Indigenous applicants were required to demonstrate their 'suitability' which was assessed based on normative ideas about race, class and gender. Many of the applicants were unwilling to conform to Western ideas of the 'respectable' nuclear family and weaken their ties to their broader family and kin.⁵

Prospective Aboriginal tenants were discriminated against in the inner-Sydney rental market. Because of the prejudices of landlords it was difficult for Aboriginal people to get decent housing. When enquiring about a property over the phone, Aboriginal clients were told it was still available, but once they went across to the real estate agency they were told the property had already been taken. The letting of sub-standard housing and lack of maintenance of the premises by the landlord were also common experiences for Sydney Aboriginal people.⁶ In the Sydney Metropolitan area 80 percent of Aboriginal people needed rehousing.⁷ Overcrowding was also a big problem. Twice as many people occupied Indigenous residences compared to the average in the Sydney region.⁸ For example, in Newtown, it was reported, 13 people shared one room and a kitchen. Places in appalling condition that should have been inspected for health standards were let for between \$25 to \$45 dollars a week.⁹ Poor or non-existent plumbing, a lack of hot water together with crowded housing conditions increased the likelihood of cross and mass infections of disease such as respiratory illness and gastrointestinal infections, as I discussed in Chapter 3.¹⁰

Aboriginal activists saw the need for better housing as a central issue. For example, Gordon Briscoe raised the idea of a scheme that would improve housing conditions as part of the Aboriginal Medical Service's plans in 1971.¹¹ South Sydney Community Aid, including Joyce Gubbay (later known as Clague) and Dick Blair, a name he took up as a

⁵ Morgan, 'The Moral Surveillance of Aboriginal applicants for public housing in New South Wales', 3-4.

⁶ Robert Mowbray, 'Tenant's Rights Project: project report', 6 May 1974, AMS Council Meeting, 6.23.1, 97A48/66, Hollows, UNSW.

⁷ McKay, 'Housing for aborigines in New South Wales', 488. See also *Poverty: the ACOSS evidence*, 88.

⁸ Scott, *Problems and Needs of the Aboriginals of Sydney*, p. 10.

⁹ 'Aborigines 'forced to accept poor housing'', *The Canberra Times*, 14 April 1973.

¹⁰ Aboriginal Medical Service Submission, 97A48/69.

¹¹ Beilby, 'Answering the need'. See also Notes, part 1, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA.

boxer though his real name was Richard Phillips, were also working towards an Aboriginal Housing Project.¹²

Kaye Bellear, who was involved with setting up the AHC, recounts how the Housing Company began from the desire to accommodate homeless Aboriginal people, or 'Goomies' as they were then called after the name they had given to the methylated spirits that they drank. They were squatting in buildings in Eveleigh, Vine and Louis Streets.¹³

Kaye Bellear was a non-Indigenous woman married to Robert or Bob Bellear, cousin of Dick Blair, and worked as a nurse at Rachel Forster Hospital. The Bellear family were actively involved in Aboriginal organisations in Redfern. Kaye Bellear ran a children's service and adoption agency from the premises of the ALS, until the Aboriginal Children's Service got its own premises, as I mentioned in Chapter 2.¹⁴ Bob Bellear, a descendant of the Noonuccal people who grew up on the North Coast, was a director of the Aboriginal Legal and Medical Services, and of South Sydney Community Aid. He became a law student at UNSW in 1974.¹⁵ He was also employed by the ALS, but resigned in 1976.¹⁶ Bob Bellear was active in the ALP and chaired its Aborigine Committee in 1973.¹⁷ He was to become the first Aboriginal Judge in Australia in 1996.

The buildings on Louis Street had been previously purchased by a developer, Ian Kiernan from IBK Constructions, who was planning to renovate the houses for higher end residential use.¹⁸ The developer had evicted existing residents, many of them Aboriginal.¹⁹

¹² Kaye D. Bellear, Submission to Senate Standing Committee on Social Environment, Australia Parliament, [1973], manuscript, AIATSIS; Wain, 'Redfern Aboriginal Housing Project', 4; Field Officers' six month report August 1971- January 1972, part 1, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA; Aboriginal Housing Project, part 1, R76/59, C1696/10, NAA; Tony Pritchard-Nobbs, 'Former Champ Dick Blair Heads List of Top Tweed Fighters!', World Boxing Foundation, <http://www.worldboxingfoundation.com/former-champ-dick-blair-heads-list-of-top-tweed-fighters-2>, accessed 19 June 2013. In the AIATSIS catalogue Bellear's submission is dated to originating from 1971, however it is more likely to originate from 1973 as in the submission by Naomi Mayers and Dr R. Lang for the Senate Standing Committee on Social Environment, 17 April 1973, which is listed under the same call number in the AIAT SIS library. See also Aboriginal Medical Service Submission, 97A48/69.

¹³ Bellear interviewed by Maggie Roche. See also Colin James and Richard Jermyn, 'Developing Aboriginal Community at Redfern NSW', *Architecture in Australia*, October 1973, Vol. 62, 72; Wain, 'Redfern Aboriginal Housing Project', 4.

¹⁴ McFadden to Under Secretary, 25 October 1976, C1696/10.

¹⁵ 'Aboriginal project 'in danger'', *Daily Mirror*, 12 October 1973; Peter Manning, 'From the Depths to the heights', *SMH*, 17 March 2005, <http://www.smh.com.au/news/Obituaries/From-the-depths-to-the-heights/2005/03/16/1110913670201.html>, accessed 19 June 2013.

¹⁶ Martin telecon Gordon, 11 November 1976, part 10, R76/4, C1696/10, NAA.

¹⁷ Horner, *Seeking Racial Justice*, 170.

¹⁸ Ian Kiernan was later the founder of Clean Up Australia Day.

However, Indigenous people continued to squat in boarded up buildings. In October 1972 a group of squatters was arrested when the police found them after following one from the group, George Lacey. He and 15 other men were taken to Redfern Police Station and charged with vagrancy and trespassing. When they appeared in court they were defended by Peter Hidden from the Aboriginal Legal Service and, at Hidden's request, were released to the care of Ted Kennedy, Fergus Breslan and John Butcher, the priests at the Catholic Presbytery in Redfern. Hidden knew the priests previously for he attended the St Vincent's Presbytery.²⁰

Ted Kennedy, Fergus Breslan and John Butcher were central to the early stages of the Aboriginal Housing Company.²¹ Ted Kennedy, born in 1931 from an Irish background, grew up in Marrickville in Sydney. His father was a local doctor who together with his wife welcomed poor people to his practice. Ted Kennedy studied at Manly College and was ordained a Catholic priest in 1953.²² In 1971 he became the administrator of the Parish in Redfern and the head of an experimental team ministry that he formed with Breslan and Butcher, which, like the nuns involved with the AMS, was inspired by the Second Vatican Council and liberation theology. Anderson points out that the priests' commitment to Aboriginal people extended beyond Christian charity to political pressure inside the Catholic Church. She quoted Breslan saying

The emphasis is now back to the people, back to communities, back to the Last Supper. At St Vincent's we are trying to get to the people. The Church must now open its doors to the people. This is the World Catholic movement.²³

Before coming to Redfern Ted Kennedy had had no special interest in Aboriginal people or issues, though he was committed to serve the poor and struggle for social change.

However, in Redfern he became tightly connected to the local Aboriginal community and involved with Aboriginal issues.²⁴

¹⁹ Hector and Buckley, 'The unrest of black Redfern'; 'The Redfern Housing Project', *New Dawn*, February 1974, Vol. 4, No. 9, 1; Wain, 'Redfern Aboriginal Housing Project', 4.

²⁰ Anderson, 'Place narratives and the origins of inner Sydney's Aboriginal settlement', 321.

²¹ Belleair, 'Break Through', 4-5; Wain, 'Redfern Aboriginal Housing Project', 4; Belleair interviewed by Maggie Roche. See also Hector and Buckley, 'The unrest of black Redfern'; Graham Williams, 'When the dreaming has to stop', *SMH*, 17 May 1977.

²² Campion, *Ted Kennedy*, 11-12, 24.

²³ Breslan quoted in Anderson, 'Place narratives and the origins of inner Sydney's Aboriginal settlement', 322.

²⁴ Campion, *Ted Kennedy*, 53, 69, 182.

The priests at the Redfern Parish accommodated the Aboriginal men in the school hall at the rear of the Presbytery, where the men had already earlier been receiving their meals. The building was opened to all in the area and soon had 45 people sharing one kitchen and three bathrooms. The number of non-Indigenous supporters also grew. Kaye Bellear tended to the men's medical needs and supplied them meals, vitamins and also dilantin for symptoms of alcohol withdrawal. Ingrid Sandberg, a young Swedish woman, brought in knowledge from emergency housing operations in Europe. After the model of the Emmaus Movement, the squatters formed a "bottle brigade". They started to collect and sort beer and wine bottles for sale and used the proceeds to pay for food, beds, gas and electricity. The Emmaus movement was formed in Paris in 1959 by Abbe Pierre, a Catholic Priest, whom Father Kennedy knew personally and who also visited Redfern.²⁵

Members of the South Sydney City Council soon started to scrutinise the hostel for compliance with council bylaws.²⁶ They served a notice demanding that the hall be closed down, because it was not built for the purpose of accommodating people and thus was "unhealthy".²⁷ The health committee of the council also objected to the use of alcohol in the hall and found the residents' attitude threatening.²⁸ However, municipal Health Surveyor T. Hall reported after his visit that the bathroom, lavatory, kitchen and dormitory were "clean and well kept".²⁹ Bob Bellear noted that the Council was not interested in the health of the residents, but rather had reacted to the complaints it had received from the local residents.³⁰ Indeed, in November the Council evicted the homeless men from the Presbytery and alternative accommodation became an urgent matter.³¹

Bellear and the priests quickly realised the potential of the terraces that they had been squatting in, as a territorial base from which to launch the campaign for Aboriginal housing. Bellear planned to purchase the whole block bordered by Caroline, Eveleigh, Vine

²⁵ Anderson, 'Place narratives and the origins of inner Sydney's Aboriginal settlement', 322; Kennedy interviewed by Pat Ormesher.

²⁶ Anderson, 'Constructing geographies', 89; Anderson, 'Place narratives and the origins of inner Sydney's Aboriginal settlement', 321.

²⁷ Hector and Buckley, 'The unrest of black Redfern'; James and Jermyn, 'Developing Aboriginal Community at Redfern NSW', 74; Forbes, 'Heartland of underprivileged'; Wain, 'Redfern Aboriginal Housing Project', 4; Williams, 'When the dreaming has to stop'.

²⁸ Anderson, 'Place narratives and the origins of inner Sydney's Aboriginal settlement', 322.

²⁹ Hall quoted in Anderson, 'Place narratives and the origins of inner Sydney's Aboriginal settlement', 322.

³⁰ Bellear, 'Break Through', 4.

³¹ Anderson, 'Place narratives and the origins of inner Sydney's Aboriginal settlement', 322.

and Louis Streets, consisting of 65 houses or four acres of land, from the developers. He was supported in his plans by his wife Kaye, the priests, Bob Pringle from the BLF, and Colin James, an architect from Sydney University.³² The priests were aware of the political significance of the location in full view of all passing train passengers on their way to the Central Station, providing an opportunity to showcase the Aboriginal cause.³³ Bellear also emphasised the importance of the role that homeless Aboriginal men had in getting the housing project off the ground.³⁴

Bob Pringle, then the President of the BLF in New South Wales pressured Ian Kiernan, the owner-developer of the terraces, to offer his houses for temporary occupation for Aboriginal squatters. He went further and threatened a work ban on Kiernan's future terrace development and all other projects in Sydney, if he did not agree to release some of his terraces on Louis Street.³⁵ The BLF was at the time involved with the green bans aimed at protecting environmental sites or older buildings from new developments. It was the most significant union to assist the AHC, even though also other unions were involved.³⁶ According to Anderson, the BLF saw in the AHC an opportunity to support a communal project that offered a socialist alternative to capitalist development.³⁷ Furthermore, with Kevin Cook as part of the BLF leadership, Aboriginal issues were well represented in the Union, as I mentioned in Chapter 5.³⁸

With the permission of the developer, the group moved into two houses on Louis Street on Friday 29 December 1972. They called it Sydney's Aboriginal Embassy.³⁹ However, the houses assigned to the Aboriginal group were unfit to live in and they chose more suitable premises. The developer had also given specific rules and conditions that Bellear and the other men were expected to abide by if they wanted live in the premises. According to

³² Bob Bellear, 'Break Through', 4; Wain, 'Redfern Aboriginal Housing Project', 4; Butcher, 'South Sydney Community Aid – some memories'; James interviewed by Anael; Anderson, 'Constructing geographies', 88.

³³ Anderson, 'Constructing geographies', 88; Anderson, 'Place narratives and the origins of inner Sydney's Aboriginal settlement', 324.

³⁴ Bellear, 'Break Through', 4-5. See also Bellear interviewed by Maggie Roche; James interviewed by Anael.

³⁵ Anderson, 'Constructing geographies', 91.

³⁶ Bellear, 'Break Through', 4-5; James interviewed by Anael.

³⁷ Anderson, 'Constructing geographies', 91.

³⁸ Cook interviewed by Alexander and Hermann, 'From building sites to Aboriginal education', 45-46.

³⁹ Bellear, 'Break Through', 4-5; Wain, 'Redfern Aboriginal Housing Project', 4; Bellear interviewed by Maggie Roche.

Bellar, however, “as soon as we moved in those conditions were waived by us.”⁴⁰ They cleaned the houses and cleared the back yards. The Brown Nurses, a Catholic order, provided food, blankets and toiletries. Kaye Bellear continued to look after the men’s health. With assistance from the unions they had the water, gas and electricity connected. In order to cover expenses the men continued to collect empty bottles.⁴¹ The premises passed the Council’s health standards as, according to Bellear, their Health Department’s officer just happened to come around as they were finishing the clean-up.⁴² This officer was possibly the sympathetic T. Hall mentioned above, though the sources do not make this clear. As earlier at the Presbytery, the Health Department officer’s tick prevented immediate eviction by the Council on health grounds.

Government funding

The Aboriginal housing project hoped to get funding from the newly elected Labor government. Gordon Bryant, the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, visited the housing project in January 1973 and gave it his support.⁴³ Bryant saw the value of the housing project, not only in providing housing to Aboriginal people in Redfern and supporting their community, but also as a model for other inner-city communities.⁴⁴ For the Labor government this Aboriginal housing project offered a nationwide platform of reform of Aboriginal Affairs, one of the key issues of their election campaign. Furthermore renovating and utilising existing housing rather than “slum clearance” was gaining stronger currency in the rhetoric of the new Labor government.⁴⁵

Bob Bellear headed the newly established Aboriginal Housing Committee that made its first submission to the DAA in January 1973. Other members included Dick Blair, Lester

⁴⁰ Bellear, ‘Break Through’, 4-5.

⁴¹ Bellear, ‘Break Through’, 4-5; Wain, ‘Redfern Aboriginal Housing Project’, 4; Bellear interviewed by Maggie Roche. See also Hector and Buckley, ‘The unrest of black Redfern’; Williams, ‘When the dreaming has to stop’.

⁴² Bellear, ‘Break Through’, 4.

⁴³ Anderson, ‘Constructing geographies’, 92; Anderson, ‘Savagery and Urbanity’, 140.

⁴⁴ ‘Work started on Aborigines’ homes project’, *SMH*; ‘The Redfern Housing Project’, *New Dawn*, February 1974, 3; ‘Aboriginal Australia – the Redfern example’, *Aboriginal News*, Vol. 1, No. 9, October 1974.

⁴⁵ Anderson, ‘Constructing geographies’, 92; Anderson, ‘Place narratives and the origins of inner Sydney’s Aboriginal settlement’, 317, 326.

Bostock, Chicka Dixon, Shirley Smith, Cyril Boney, Claude Murray, Allen Kyle, Albert Kyle, George Villafloor, Ronald Jones, Gladys McVay and Patricia Kyle. Many of them came from the North Coast of NSW. The non-Indigenous supporters formed advisory council that included John Butcher, Bob Pringle, Peter Bradley, Ray Boucher, Peter Hidden, Ron Denham, Colin James and Jill Willmont.⁴⁶ Bryant had known Kaye Belleair's father, Alan 'Beau' Williams, at the Ballarat Trades Hall. His Secretary, Dick Hall, was Ted Kennedy's friend from his university days.⁴⁷

In their submission, apart from the desperate need for housing, the Aboriginal Housing Committee argued for the need for housing specifically in Redfern. Strictly speaking their project was located in Chippendale. However, this was part of Redfern according to the Indigenous definition. Aboriginal people had rented houses in Louis, Eveleigh, Caroline and Vine Streets for a number of years before the developer IBK purchased the properties, the Committee argued. The streets in question were also thought to be ideally located within walking distance of the already existing Aboriginal services: the Aboriginal Legal and Medical Services and Murawina.⁴⁸ Aboriginal activists perceived it as Aboriginal territory.

In April 1973 the Federal Government granted \$530,000 to the Committee. The government grant enabled the housing project to purchase and renovate between 25 and 29 terraces owned by IBK constructions, which agreed to sell the properties at a cost price.⁴⁹ *Arena* described the establishment of the Aboriginal Housing Company and its victory over land as the site of the first urban struggle for land rights.⁵⁰

The Committee representatives deposited the grant sum in a bank account at the Commonwealth Bank in Redfern. Considering how control and the demand for accountability became features of DAA operations, it is curious to think that the full sum

⁴⁶ 'Establishment grant application' in Robert W. Belleair (ed.), *Black Housing Book* (Broadway: Amber Press, 1976), 30; James and Jermyn, 'Developing Aboriginal Community at Redfern NSW', 74. Michael Mundine and Peter Valilis interviewed by the author, Redfern, 13 December 2000.

⁴⁷ Campion, *Ted Kennedy*, 102.

⁴⁸ 'Establishment grant application' in Belleair (ed.), *Black Housing Book*, 30.

⁴⁹ 'Redfern housing project', *Department of Aboriginal Affairs – Newsletter*, No. 4, 1973; '\$500,000 Sydney plan for Aboriginal houses', *The Canberra Times*, 16 April 1973; 'Work started on Aborigines' homes project', *SMH*; 'Home for and Aboriginal community', *SMH*, 17 April 1973; Forbes, 'Heartland of underprivileged'; James and Jermyn, 'Developing Aboriginal Community at Redfern NSW', 72; 'The Redfern Housing Project', *New Dawn*, February 1974, 1; 'Aboriginal Australia – the Redfern example', *Aboriginal News*; Clarke Gazzard Pty Ltd Architects, Report on Aboriginal Housing Project, Redfern, 22 February 1975, manuscript, AIATSIS, 1.

⁵⁰ 'The Louis street project and land rights', *Arena*, September 1973, Vol. 6, 7.

was given to the Committee rather than the DAA releasing it in stages upon request. At the time, however, there were no existing structures to deal with funding for Aboriginal organisations, as I have discussed in chapters 2 and 3. Nevertheless, according to Bellear the Commonwealth Bank, which was at the time government owned, subjected the funds to a condition that the Committee members had to make a submission every time they wished to withdraw money.⁵¹

The housing project also created opportunities for employment and training.⁵² The non-Indigenous supporters saw self-help as a crucial and valuable aspect of the project, as in the other Aboriginal organisations. For them it represented “a positive attempt by Aboriginal people to solve their self-acknowledged problems”.⁵³ Rent collected from the tenants was to be used for maintenance of the buildings and further development.⁵⁴ Members of the project envisioned that employment opportunities would extend from the initial building work to maintenance, gardening and positions as supervisors and assistants in the project.⁵⁵ Since there was a shortage of skilled Aboriginal workers at the time, it also hired Maori people.⁵⁶ However, with the skills acquired, the AHC was later involved, for example, in renovating 36 Turner Street for the use of the Aboriginal Medical Service in 1978.⁵⁷

Communal living

Building a community and strengthening Aboriginal identity were central to the AHC, as they were for the other organisations. In Dick Blair’s words:

⁵¹ Bellear, ‘Break Through’, 5.

⁵² ‘Establishment grant application’ in Bellear (ed.), *Black Housing Book*, 30; Bellear, ‘Break Through’, 7; ‘\$500,000 Sydney plan for Aboriginal houses’, *The Canberra Times*; ‘Work started on Aborigines’ homes project’, *SMH*; Williams, ‘When the dreaming has to stop’; ‘In six years ... houses, jobs and training’, *Aboriginal Quarterly*, March 1979, Vol. 1, No. 3, 2.

⁵³ Martin Mowbray, ‘Letter to editor’, *SMH*, 26 March 1973. See also ‘Redfern’s Aborigines’, *SMH*, 17 April 1973; Forbes, ‘Heartland of underprivileged’; James and Jermyn, ‘Developing Aboriginal Community at Redfern NSW’, 74; ‘The Redfern Housing Project’, *New Dawn*, February 1974, 4.

⁵⁴ Kenneth Joachim, ‘It’s white against black in Redfern’, *The Herald*, 14 April 1973; ‘\$500,000 Sydney plan for Aboriginal houses’, *The Canberra Times*; ‘Redfern housing project’, *Department of Aboriginal Affairs*; ‘The Redfern Housing Project’, *New Dawn*, February 1974, 1.

⁵⁵ Bellear, Submission to Senate Standing Committee on Social Environment.

⁵⁶ John Yeomans, ‘Their own village in the heart of the city’, *The Herald*, 25 June 1974; ‘Aboriginal Australia – the Redfern example’, *Aboriginal News*.

⁵⁷ ‘In six years ... houses, jobs and training’, *Aboriginal Quarterly*, 3; Meeting: DAA/AMS/AHC, 29 November 1978, C1696/10; Nolan, note for file, 12 April 1979, C1696/10.

The whole aim of the project is to bring Aboriginal people together so that we can live in the way we want to live and share what we have with one another... Our children will be able to grow up with more opportunities than we had and they too will be proud of their community and of themselves.⁵⁸

The best way to achieve this was thought to be by adding aspects of communal living in the design for the development of the Housing Company, despite the diverse regional and ethnic origins of Aboriginal people in Redfern.⁵⁹ One of the most frequently reported features of the project was the plan to knock down the back fences of the terraces on Eveleigh and Louis Streets and turn most of their back yards and a little lane way that ran in the middle into communal park land.⁶⁰ *New Dawn* reported on plans incorporating “traditional Aboriginal habits” and allowing for outside sleeping areas as well as indoor space that had no specific purpose.⁶¹

As with the other Aboriginal organisations, the AHC’s agenda extended beyond its main target – housing. In addition to the employment and training opportunities discussed above, it hoped to build a village-like environment with all Aboriginal services in close proximity. The AHC also planned to have space for communal facilities such as a clinic for people with alcohol problems and a cultural centre, before the Black Theatre Cultural Centre was established in 1974. It proposed to include a preschool centre, quite likely Murawina, as well as a recreation and study centre for school aged children and implement an adult education programme to improve the level of literacy, in particular, but also improve employability with workshops. It also envisioned locating the Legal and Medical Services on its site as part of the project. The Company hoped to purchase a warehouse and an old shoe factory that were located in the vicinity for these community purposes.⁶²

⁵⁸ Dick Blair quoted in James and Jermyn, ‘Developing Aboriginal Community at Redfern NSW’, 73; ‘The Redfern Housing Project’, *New Dawn*, February 1974, 4.

⁵⁹ Anderson, ‘Constructing geographies’, 92.

⁶⁰ ‘Housing at Redfern: Aborigines’ plans outlined’, *SMH*, 26 March 1973; Hector and Buckley, ‘The unrest of black Redfern’; Joachim, ‘It’s white against black in Redfern’; ‘\$500,000 Sydney plan for Aboriginal houses’, *The Canberra Times*; ‘Work started on Aborigines’ homes project’ *SMH*; Forbes, ‘Heartland of underprivileged’; James and Jermyn, ‘Developing Aboriginal Community at Redfern NSW’, 73; ‘Redfern housing project’, *Department of Aboriginal Affairs*; ‘The Redfern Housing Project’, *New Dawn*, February 1974, 3.

⁶¹ ‘The Redfern Housing Project’, *New Dawn*, February 1974, 4.

⁶² Bellear, Submission to Senate Standing Committee on Social Environment; James and Jermyn, ‘Developing Aboriginal Community at Redfern NSW’, 72-73; Gilbert, *Because White Man’ll Never Do It*, 2002, 89; Hector and Buckley, ‘The unrest of black Redfern’; Joachim, ‘It’s white against black in Redfern’; ‘Redfern’s Aborigines’, *SMH*; ‘Redfern housing project’, *Department of Aboriginal Affairs*; ‘The Redfern Housing Project’, *New Dawn*, February 1974, 3; *Nation Review*, 19 April – 27 April 1973; Yeomans, ‘Their own village in the heart of the city’.

Communitarian thinking influenced many intellectual critiques at the time. According to Anderson, non-Indigenous supporters, such as the priests, anticipated that a “Black commune” in the heart of the city would send a message to individualistic Australians. She argues that the proposal idealised Aboriginality and equated it with tradition, which in itself was a form of racialization based on European tradition.⁶³ However, the Aboriginal activists keenly subscribed to the idea of communality as traditional Aboriginality, which served as a building block for their growing national consciousness. Articulating their needs based on tradition further justified a development of a separate Aboriginal housing project.

Competing ideas

Soon after its establishment the Committee faced power struggles. By March 1973 Dick Blair had become the President and Bob Bellear the Vice-President.⁶⁴ Richard Blair with his wife moved into the house that was planned to be for the homeless people. Blair also set up an un-official black police force to patrol the area. Kaye Bellear argues that after Dick Blair became the leader of the project its focus changed from a community project looking after homeless Aboriginal people to providing accommodation to more ‘deserving’ Aboriginal people who did not come with such baggage. Kaye Bellear remembers Blair as being peripherally involved with the early stages of the AHC.⁶⁵

The challenge to leadership revealed competing ideas about Aboriginality and respectability. Kevin Gilbert criticised Blair’s leadership approach. In particular he did not approve of Blair’s support for what could be called assimilation, though Gilbert does not use this term. Gilbert, a Wiradjuri and Kamilaroi man born in 1933 in Condobolin, was an author, poet and political activist. He spent 14 years in prison, where he educated himself. He was central in the establishment of the Tent Embassy and edited *Alchuringa* and *Black Australian News*.⁶⁶ His book *Because a White Man’ll Never Do It* (1973) was the first major work written by an Aboriginal person in Australia, and it was influential among the Redfern

⁶³ Anderson, ‘Constructing geographies’, 92, 98.

⁶⁴ Wain, ‘Redfern Aboriginal Housing Project’, 5.

⁶⁵ Bellear interviewed by Maggie Roche. See also Wain, ‘Redfern Aboriginal Housing Project’, 5.

⁶⁶ Ian Howie-Willis, ‘Gilbert, K’ in David Horton (ed.), *The Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia*, (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1994), 413-414.

community. For example the *Aboriginal Medical Service Newsletter* listed Gilbert's work as recommended reading in January 1974. It was also on the reading list for the field officer course at the Aboriginal Legal Service.⁶⁷ Frank Doolan remembers how he read Gilbert's work when he came to school in Sydney in the 1970s and the powerful impact it had on him.⁶⁸ Although Gilbert was not, as far as I can tell, involved with every day running of the organisations, he was, for example, called in to chair a meeting when the Aboriginal housing project had difficulty making a decision about incorporation in June 1973.⁶⁹

Gilbert accused the whites of "white-anting" the project and undermining Aboriginal control in installing Blair as the President. According to him, media publicity drew the attention of local non-Indigenous residents as well as the representatives of the ALP hierarchy and the South Sydney Municipal Council, many of whom were opposed to the Aboriginal housing project. Furthermore, he argued that Dick Hall, representing Minister Bryant in Sydney, tried to steer the project away from Bob Bellear's plans to accommodate the Aboriginal alcoholics, while Blair supported the accommodation for 'decent' Aboriginal people who already had homes and jobs. Gilbert described them as "Blacks who want to show the gubbah that they are as good as he is". Gilbert supported Blair's attempt to create internal discipline, but accused his men of behaving like a "black Gestapo" towards their own people.⁷⁰

In his criticism Gilbert divided Aboriginal people into two groups: those who had integrated to white society and those who were underprivileged, homeless and destitute Aboriginal people. He argued that the latter were at the heart of what was described as the 'Aboriginal problem'. Yet, the homeless were not the people who got help, but "the 'decent' blacks who are willing to take the white man's orders." These Aboriginal people, according to Gilbert were trying to forget the horror of the mission and in the process had forgotten how to be black men and women.⁷¹

⁶⁷ *AMS Newsletter*, No. 10, 6; Field Officer Course, No. 2, Council meetings 1974-1975, Vivienne Abraham papers, ML MSS 6222/1.

⁶⁸ Cowlshaw, *The City's Outback*, 196-197.

⁶⁹ Gilbert, *Because White Man'll Never Do It*, 2002, 169.

⁷⁰ Gilbert, *Because White Man'll Never Do It*, 2002, 96, 164-167.

⁷¹ Gilbert, *Because White Man'll Never Do It*, 2002, 164, 178.

However, the intense white resistance towards the AHC, which I will discuss below, might explain why its leadership and focus shifted from providing community support to homeless people to accommodating for pensioners, invalids, widows and widowers with families.⁷² Dick Blair tried to steer clear of possible resentment of special treatment for Aboriginal people. "I'd like to see the whites get the same situation built for them," he said, "That's equality."⁷³

The AHC was incorporated in July 1973. Richard Pacey became its first director and Aub Phillips, Dick Blair's brother, was the first company Secretary. By October 1974 the AHC had received five grants totalling \$1,051,575 to buy and renovate IBK properties as well as additional sites on the same block.⁷⁴ By February 1975 an additional nine houses and two factory buildings on the same block were acquired.⁷⁵ It had developed from an emergency housing project into an established Housing Company that had a wide impact locally and served as a model nationally.

Non-Indigenous resistance

Territorial space in Redfern facilitated the advancement of Aboriginal affairs, but at the same time made the Aboriginal people vulnerable to racist currents.⁷⁶ Some of the non-Indigenous local residents were vocally against the plans of the Aboriginal housing project. They organised as the South Sydney Residents Protection Movement and objected to what they described as the Aboriginal "ghetto" and complained about local residents being subjected to "swearing, fighting and drunkenness."⁷⁷ Newspapers reported fears of racial violence. Father Ted Kennedy described the situation: "There is deep racism in here. It

⁷² 'The Redfern Housing project', *New Dawn*, February 1974, 2; Aboriginal Australia – the Redfern example', *Aboriginal News*.

⁷³ Forbes, 'Heartland of underprivileged'. See also 'Work started on Aborigines' homes project', *SMH*.

⁷⁴ James and Jermyn, 'Developing Aboriginal Community at Redfern NSW', 72; 'The Redfern Housing Project', *New Dawn*, February 1974, 4; 'Aboriginal Australia – the Redfern example', *Aboriginal News*; Belleair interviewed by Maggie Roche; James interviewed by Anael.

⁷⁵ Gazzard Architects, Report on Aboriginal Housing Project, 1.

⁷⁶ Anderson, 'Constructing geographies', 87.

⁷⁷ 'Council serves notices on 'ghetto'', *SMH*, 22 March 1973. See also e.g. Hector and Buckley, 'The unrest of black Redfern'; Joachim, 'It's white against black in Redfern'; Forbes, 'Heartland of underprivileged'; 'The Redfern housing project', *New Dawn*, June 1974, Vol. 5, No. 1, 8. For racial construction see Anderson, 'Constructing geographies', 87.

wouldn't take much to develop into violence.”⁷⁸ According to Kay Anderson, the organisers of the AHC were fully aware that they had “plunged in a micro-encounter with an adversarial colonial legacy.”⁷⁹

In March 1973 the South Sydney Residents Protection Movement organised a petition in which they likened the housing project to a disease:

We the undersigned [226] residents of South Sydney vociferously protest, object and condemn the establishment of ghetto in Louis and Caroline Streets by the Aboriginals who have squatted in these properties... We want the Aboriginal ghetto stopped now – for if allowed to continue it will spread like the plague throughout the entire South Sydney area.⁸⁰

South Sydney City Council, with an ALP majority, supported the South Sydney Residents Protection Movement against the Federal Labor government's views, and responded to the petition by serving notices on the Aboriginal residents who occupied the derelict houses. The notices demanded repair of the houses with the threat of legal action from the Council.⁸¹ South Sydney Council resented that the Federal Government did not consult them about the AHC.⁸²

Shortly after the AHC had got off the ground, South Sydney Council withdrew financial assistance to SSCA, which employed Dick Blair.⁸³ The SSCA was heavily involved in a campaign to “democratise the closed, secretive, monocultural, all-male, one-party South Sydney Council.”⁸⁴ According to John Butcher, a member of the SSCA, the withdrawal of the Council grant followed protests over the Council's poor approach to local Aboriginal issues such as police harassment, the problems the Council had caused to the AMS with their plans to renovate, and their response to homeless people who were accommodated at the St Vincent's Church and to the AHC. Kaye Bellea remembers how they would go as a group to the Council meetings and argue with the Council members about the housing

⁷⁸ Joachim, 'It's white against black in Redfern'. See also Forbes, 'Heartland of underprivileged'.

⁷⁹ Anderson, 'Constructing geographies', 90.

⁸⁰ 'South Sydney Residents' Protection Movement to Gough Whitlam', 10 March 1973, Bryant Papers, NAA quoted in Anderson, 'Constructing geographies', 94.

⁸¹ 'Council serves notices on 'ghetto'', *SMH*. See Colin James and Jermyn, 'Developing Aboriginal Community at Redfern NSW', 74.

⁸² 'Work started on Aborigines' homes project', *SMH*; *Nation Review*, 19 April 1973 – 27 April 1973; 'Row in A.L.P. over housing aid project' *Daily Mirror*, 3 May 1973.

⁸³ *Nation Review*, 19 April 1973 – 27 April 1973; 'Aiming High', *The Herald*, 14 April 1973; Forbes, 'Heartland of underprivileged'.

⁸⁴ Butcher, 'South Sydney Community Aid – some memories'.

project. She tells how one night she, together with John Butcher and two other people, was arrested during a meeting and ended up going to jail for four days.⁸⁵

The opponents of the AHC articulated their support for assimilation rather than segregation, as self-determination was perceived by them. One of the council representatives interviewed by the media was Alderman Keith Challenger, representing the ALP and also the Chairman of the council's planning and development committee. His objection was that the AHC would become an "urban mission" similar to ones in rural NSW. He articulated notions of equality and Australian nationalism in defence of his position: "I believe, brother, that the best place for us is to mix in together, live together and be Australian."⁸⁶ Challenger also argued that the area was not suitable for residential purposes. At the time there were plans for an expressway to be built that would cut the Aboriginal Housing Company area from that of the Aboriginal Legal and Medical Services.

Some local Aboriginal people also opposed the AHC, just as some had opposed the Black Theatre and its play *Basically Black* for embodying too radical views. For example, Mavis Dennis opposed the project and questioned the authenticity of the Aboriginal people involved and based on this saw them as undeserving of help.⁸⁷ She argued that the AHC was not run by Aboriginal people but by "kanakas, Torres Strait Islanders and communists, Black Powers." She later added, "Help the people out in the Northern Territory and Western Australia – they're the real aboriginal."⁸⁸ Dennis' family had lived in South Sydney since 1935. She recounted her family's struggle to be accepted by the whites, and felt that her position was now endangered. "But we were clean, we kept our houses properly, we worked hard. We had guitars and parties [...] these lot are just drunk fighting blacks."⁸⁹

The harassment from the police, though intense with other Aboriginal organisations in Redfern, seems to have peaked with the AHC. Police scrutiny of the area was extreme with many violent clashes from late 1972 into 1973. Between March and May 1973, around the time that Federal funding for the AHC was announced, 410 Aboriginal people were

⁸⁵ Belleair interviewed by Maggie Roche.

⁸⁶ Hector and Buckley, 'The unrest of black Redfern'. See also Forbes, 'Heartland of underprivileged'.

⁸⁷ See Cowlshaw, *The City's Outback*, 160, 185.

⁸⁸ Hector and Buckley, 'The unrest of black Redfern'. See also Forbes, 'Heartland of underprivileged'; 'Interview with Gary Williams', *Arena*, 8.

⁸⁹ Hector and Buckley, 'The unrest of black Redfern'.

arrested in the Louis Street area, mostly on minor charges of drunkenness and disorderly behaviour.⁹⁰ Kay Bellear relates that “constantly while the Housing Company was being developed, while people were squatting, and buying up the houses, there was just constant police harassment.”⁹¹ Roberta Sykes recalled that the police would come to the Housing Company in the early stages wanting to arrest people:

They arrested one man for sitting on the toilet and they said he was loitering with intent or something, a ridiculous, ludicrous charge. Another man was sleeping on a bit of blanket on the floor, and he was drunk and disorderly in his bed.⁹²

By the end of 1973 a number of Aboriginal people were charged with trespassing on properties that by then had become the possession of the AHC, so on their own property.

Increased police surveillance was prompted by the South Sydney City Council and supported by the then premier of New South Wales Robert Askin.⁹³ In October 1973 Justin Moloney accused the Police Special Branch, the 21st division, of persecuting Aboriginal people in Redfern in an open letter to Robert Askin in the *Identity* magazine. He wrote how on a recent Saturday night Sol Bellear, Bob Bellear’s brother, from the ALS “was beaten and kicked unconscious in the Redfern Police station” by the riot squad; Billie Craigie and Kay Bellear were also beaten up. The same night an Aboriginal mother with her 11 to 15 year old son were also physically abused. *Identity* also published a drawing of the AHC’s plans in which abusive comments were added and which had been pinned on the notice board in the Redfern detectives’ office. The area dedicated to elders was relabeled “elderly Aborigines too old to commit robberies” and the area for family housing as “Housing for notable criminals such as.”⁹⁴ (See Appendix 7.) Officially condoned police discrimination and violence was a telling sign of the exclusion of the Aboriginal people from the wider Australian society and undermined their rights as citizens as discussed in Chapter 2.

The establishment of an urban Aboriginal housing project challenged preconceived non-Indigenous ideas about settler cities as spaces of progress, commerce and modernity, which

⁹⁰ Anderson, ‘Constructing geographies’, 95.

⁹¹ Bellear interviewed by Maggie Roche.

⁹² Sykes interviewed by Pat Ormesher.

⁹³ Anderson, ‘Place narratives and the origins of inner Sydney’s Aboriginal settlement’, 332.

⁹⁴ Justin Moloney, ‘The Twenty-One Police Squad v Redfern Aborigines’, *Identity*, Vol. 1, No. 8, October 1973, 36.

operated discursively on the precondition of Indigenous absence. In this understanding Indigenous peoples were placed on the 'pre-historical' pre-modern side of the traditional/modern divide.⁹⁵ Thus, they did not belong in the inner city. Furthermore, the Redfern Aboriginal activists' claim for the ownership of urban land and Aboriginal self-determination, as sovereign people, challenged the legitimacy of the non-Indigenous occupation of the city as it did the Australian nation state, as discussed in Chapter 2.

Defending the territory

Aboriginal activists and their non-Indigenous supporters rallied to defend the Aboriginal Housing Company. Catholic brothers joined Aboriginal people in resisting the police. They came to the houses where Aboriginal people were staying and sat on the floor so that when the police came they had no option but to arrest the brothers as well as the Aboriginal people.⁹⁶ Shirley Smith also recalled a confrontation between Aboriginal people and the police on Louis Street in the early stages of the Aboriginal Housing Company, where Sister Ignatius Jenkins, from the Sisters of Charity who worked at the Medical Centre, started to record the numbers of the police:

Sister Ignatius, who was wearing her habit [...] pulled out her little notebook and began walking up and down the street, writing down all the numbers of the police cars, and also the numbers of the police uniforms: those of them who were wearing them. If you could have seen those policemen's faces! They looked like they had been struck by thunder.⁹⁷

Witnessing the behaviour of the police and recording the numbers of police officers was one of the key aspects of the ALS's fight against police harassment in Redfern and followed the example of Black Panthers Party in US.⁹⁸

Roberta Sykes observed that of the religious people who supported Aboriginal people, the women tended to be older, but the men were young. Sykes remembered one nun, possibly Sister Ignatius, to whom she gave a lift home. The nun would get into trouble for getting home at three o'clock in the morning, but was unwilling to tell where she had been,

⁹⁵ Banivanua Mar and Edmonds, 'Introduction', 11.

⁹⁶ Sykes interviewed by Pat Ormesher.

⁹⁷ Smith, *Mum Shirl*, 83-84.

⁹⁸ Lothian, 'A Blackward Step Is a Forward Step', 95.

because she knew that her superior at the convent would not approve of her activities.⁹⁹ Perhaps many of the older men would have been in such positions in the Church hierarchy that they would have avoided joining a struggle that was not officially supported by the Church.

Aboriginal people welcomed the support of the religious orders. However, for some, such as Kevin Gilbert, people such as Father Ted represented the few who gave real substance to their profession of Christian love.¹⁰⁰ Sykes pointed out that though individual Christians took part in Aboriginal activism in Redfern, their actions were opposed by the official Churches. Sykes herself was educated by nuns, and apart from a particular nun who supported her academic aspirations, she felt “very bitter about them” and the racism that had defined the kind of education they were willing to offer to her that saw her only future in domestic service.¹⁰¹

The AHC was also able to turn to the BLF for help in its difficulties with the Council. After a request from the AHC, in a move to resist Council opposition, the Builders Labourers’ banned any further development on the site that was not approved by the AHC. This ban also limited the commercial possibilities of the site.¹⁰²

Representatives of the AHC were also able to use race to their advantage as they were buying further properties. Colin James remembers how together with Bob and Sol Bellear they used to go to auctions to bid for the houses and how the bidding would drop substantially once “these big black people walked in.”¹⁰³

The opposition to the Aboriginal housing project was reported to have diminished to some extent once the local residents had a better understanding of its nature. Some became very supportive of the concept and hoped that it would also open new possibilities for local

⁹⁹ Sykes interviewed by Pat Ormesher.

¹⁰⁰ Gilbert, *Because White Man'll Never Do It*, 2002, 88.

¹⁰¹ Sykes interviewed by Pat Ormesher.

¹⁰² Bob Pringle, ‘Union’s Role’ in Robert W. Bellear, *Black Housing Book* (Broadway: Amber Press, 1976, 23. See also Hector and Buckley, ‘The unrest of black Redfern’; ‘The Redfern Housing Project’, *New Dawn*, February 1974, 1; ‘Aboriginal Australia – the Redfern example’, *Aboriginal News*; Michael Dickinson, ‘Inner city plans and bans’, *Pol magazine*, July-August 1980, 92-93.

¹⁰³ James interviewed by Anael.

whites.¹⁰⁴ Keith Challenger and Mavis Dennis were also later reported to have changed their views in support the AHC.¹⁰⁵ Challenger's change of mind might have been assisted by a motion put forward by the BLF to the Federal Conference of the ALP which resulted in the Conference directing South Sydney City Council to assist with any project initiated by the Aboriginal community.¹⁰⁶

Company under government scrutiny

The renovations of the first four units at the AHC were completed in June 1975. Rita Smith, the first tenant to move in, was a single mother of four children.¹⁰⁷ However, though one more terrace was nearing completion, there had been little progress on the rest of the 29 houses. Building applications had been approved by the council on twelve houses. However, building applications had not been approved on a further six houses and not yet been lodged on eleven houses.¹⁰⁸

In early 1975 the Department of Aboriginal Affairs had ordered a report on the progress at the Aboriginal Housing Company after some criticism from the Commonwealth Department of Housing and Construction. The report concluded that the work was carried out in general according to the Council's conditions. It noted that lack of experience, vandalism, police raids, lack of tradesmen, strikes, material shortage and uncertain supply of funds from the DAA had led to delays in the completion of the work.¹⁰⁹

Bob Bellear underlined the difficulty of running a company that is a first of its kind. The directors of the company, who were honorary, did not have previous building experience, which reflected the low level of education and employment possibilities of Indigenous people at the time. Thus, the directors had to rely on advisors, which made the company

¹⁰⁴ Hector and Buckley, 'The unrest of black Redfern'.

¹⁰⁵ Yeomans, 'Their own village in the heart of the city'; 'Redfern blacks defend house plan' *SMH*, 18 November 1986.

¹⁰⁶ Pringle, 'Union's Role', 23.

¹⁰⁷ Minister's visit to Redfern, 12 June 1975, part 2, R76/2, C1696/10, NAA; Bellear interviewed by Maggie Roche.

¹⁰⁸ Gazzard Architects, Report on Aboriginal Housing Project, Redfern, 26-27.

¹⁰⁹ Gazzard Architects, Report on Aboriginal Housing Project, Redfern, 27, 40, 48.

more vulnerable to poor advice and abuse.¹¹⁰ The AHC directors in 1976 were: Sol Bellear, Bob Bellear, Billie Craigie, Alan Kyle, Naomi Mayers (AMS), Lyall Munro (ALS), Dick Blair, Sandra Phillips, Yvonne Phillips, Lyn Thompson and Henry Wallace. Only people of Aboriginal or Islander descent were eligible to be directors of the Aboriginal Housing Company, similarly to the ALS and Murawina.¹¹¹

The Aboriginal housing project had in its first submission, signed by Kay Bellear, seen the Government grant as a loan that would be paid back with the income received from the project.¹¹² However, by the mid-1970s the AHC had shifted to viewing the government grant more as Aboriginal money, like the other Aboriginal organisations. Bellear also pointed his finger at the DAA and criticised its bureaucrats for treating government money as if it was from their pockets.¹¹³ With a similar tone of criticism to other organisations discussed in this thesis, Bellear complained in *the Black Housing Book*:

The convenient loss of submissions; withholding cheques; not passing on information to Treasury to have cheques withdrawn up; opposing nearly everything put forward in the form of submissions; the passing of value judgements when absolutely in no position to do so; and many more incidents which happen in the department [sic.] to inhibit progress.¹¹⁴

The AHC had some financial independence from the DAA as it was able to borrow money against the title deeds of its properties when in financial difficulty. Otherwise, it would have needed to try to borrow from other equally financially strapped organisations or reduce staff. According to Bellear, the AHC was in a continuous battle with the DAA which tried to have the title deeds in its possession.¹¹⁵

The AHC also accused the Council of delaying development and building applications, and thus setting the project back by two years. For example, according to Doug Hill, the AHC's construction manager, the AHC was at one stage required to provide off-street parking for

¹¹⁰ Bellear, 'Break Through', 6. See also Sykes interviewed by Pat Ormesher.

¹¹¹ Neuman, 'Companies', 16.

¹¹² Bellear, Submission to Senate Standing Committee on Social Environment.

¹¹³ Bellear, 'Break Through', 6. See also Sykes interviewed by Pat Ormesher.

¹¹⁴ Bellear, 'Break Through', 5.

¹¹⁵ Bellear, 'Break Through', 6. See also Michael Mundine interviewed by Mary Trujillo, November 2006, Redfern Oral History, <http://redfernoralhistory.org/OralHistory/MickMundine/tabid/163/Default.aspx>, accessed 3 June 2011; Kennedy interviewed by Pat Ormesher.

three cars per house, when few Aboriginal people owned cars.¹¹⁶ Difficulties in getting Council approvals indicate a continuing non-Indigenous resistance to the Aboriginal presence in Redfern. Continuing Council resistance to an Aboriginal presence was also experienced by other Aboriginal organisations, in particular the AMS, Murawina and the Black Theatre as discussed in previous chapters.

By 1976 under the Fraser government, press reports of overspending on the housing project in Redfern had started to appear. Senator J. Keefe, opposition spokesman for Aboriginal Affairs, described these accusations as distortions that were designed to create a white backlash against Aboriginal projects.¹¹⁷ In 1977 the Federal Government threatened to wind down the project, because the cost of housing in the area had become too high.¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, Aboriginal people continued to live in inner Sydney, where they had services and employment, and where there was a community that they could relate to.

Despite the criticism, Federal funding to the AHC continued and by 1979 it had received nearly \$5 million. Compared to the other Aboriginal organisations studied in this thesis this was a high level of funding, comparable to the ALS. In the case of the AHC though this was due to the way it needed to be able to make purchases on the property market. The AHC owned 66 houses out of which 55 were tenanted. *Aboriginal Quarterly* complemented the renovated houses: “Trendy Paddington residents would feel at home in them.”¹¹⁹ The end of the 1970s and early 1980s are often remembered as the good times at the AHC. For example, Michael Mundine remembers how in the 1970s the place “was so beautiful, it was the caring and sharing”, until the drug scene changed it in the 1990s.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Williams, ‘When the dreaming has to stop’. See also Graham Williams, ‘Aborigines at eye of poverty cyclone’, *SMH*, 12 May 1976.

¹¹⁷ ‘Housing reports distorted – Senator’, *SMH*, 22 May 1976.

¹¹⁸ Williams, ‘When the dreaming has to stop’; Dickinson, ‘Inner city plans and bans’, 92-93; ‘Inner-city boom beats homes plan’, *The Sun*, 25 September 1980.

¹¹⁹ ‘In six years...houses, jobs and training’, *Aboriginal Quarterly*, 2.

¹²⁰ Mundine and Valilis interviewed by the author. See also Ali Golding interviewed by Kaylene Simon, 29 May 2006, Redfern Oral History, <http://redfernoralthistory.org/OralHistory/AuntieAliGolding/tabid/140/Default.aspx>, accessed 3 June 2011.

Conclusion

The Aboriginal Housing Company further canvases the ways in which Aboriginal organisations were in effect building a self-determining community in Redfern, while providing a model for Aboriginal people nationally. The AHC created space for appropriate Aboriginal housing. Furthermore, it aimed to strengthen urban Aboriginal identity by building facilities that would cater for the Aboriginal community's needs in Redfern and create the basis for its self-sufficiency. Like the other Aboriginal organisations, the AHC aimed to expand its operations beyond a housing project in providing employment and training opportunities as well as community facilities. In its aspirations it was supported by sympathetic non-Indigenous people, such as the priests of the St Vincent's presbytery and the BLF.

It was important for the AHC to be located in Redfern, which had become the centre of the Aboriginal community in Sydney and was where the other Aboriginal services had been established. Its claim to urban land radically increased the Indigenous presence in inner Sydney and, more forcefully than any of the other organisations, argued for their right to belong in the city. The establishment of the AHC highlighted the way the Aboriginal organisations in Redfern challenged non-Indigenous notions of Sydney as void of Aboriginality. Whereas previous land claims were predominantly rural and remote, in its claim to urban land the AHC questioned the legitimacy of the non-Indigenous occupation of the city.

Though the Federal Labor government gave extensive support to the AHC, the local Council, with a Labor majority, resisted the Aboriginal demand for self-determination in the form of what it perceived to be a 'separatist', housing project. In its struggle against the AHC to maintain the European dominance and ownership of the urban space, the Council evicted Aboriginal people from properties owned by the AHC and together with the police utilised the existing culture of police harassment in Redfern that targeted all the Aboriginal organisations, but was particularly aggressive towards the AHC.

Non-Indigenous resistance brought out competing ideas of Aboriginality among the Aboriginal activists and their supporters. Though the AHC had started as a project to

accommodate homeless Aboriginal people, after a change in its leadership it moved towards supporting pensioners and widowers who were perceived to be more 'deserving' of accommodation than the homeless Aboriginal men and were also seen to be more acceptable to the non-Indigenous community.

The AHC, similarly to other Aboriginal organisations, treated its government funding as Aboriginal money and criticised the DAA for hindering the project. Yet the AHC, compared to the other organisations studied in this thesis, received substantial financial support from the government, at a similar level to that granted to the ALS. In part this was due to fact that in order for the Aboriginal housing project to materialise, the AHC had to be able to purchase property in inner Sydney. Nevertheless, the AHC had greater independence from the DAA than the other organisations, as it possessed the title deeds of the properties it had purchased and was thus able to borrow money against them. Throughout the 1970s the AHC managed to increase its hold on property in the inner city and double in size.

Conclusion: “Making the community to go ahead as one”¹

The Tent Embassy demonstration on the lawns of the Old Parliament House in 1972 no doubt represents the iconic image of Aboriginal protest as a symbol of Aboriginal activism in the 1970s. However, it was in the inner-Sydney suburb of Redfern that many radical changes in Aboriginal politics occurred at the time. These developments followed a rapid increase in its Aboriginal population during the post-war period, as many, mainly young Aboriginal people migrated to the city in the hope of a better life. Redfern, and its surrounding suburbs, became a meeting point where Indigenous people from different areas with diverse backgrounds came together and realised their commonalities as Aboriginal people. They carried with them experiences of discrimination and memories of the second wave of dispossession of their people, which formed part of the basis of their shared identity and fed into their growing sense of Aboriginal nationalism.

While cultural traditions that gave form to Indigenous activism centred on rural spaces, urban space was essential to the development of the Aboriginal movement.² In the inner city Aboriginal migrants found themselves living in an impoverished area with poor and crowded housing conditions, dealing with health issues, facing limited opportunities and intense police surveillance and brutality – a situation not dissimilar to that in the rural areas they came from. They turned for support to the local welfare organisations, established in response to the increasing number of Aboriginal people. Many also joined the existing Aboriginal rights organisations in Sydney. In these organisations, young Aboriginal people forged new friendships and many started their learning curve in the operations and politics of community organisations.

Importantly, in the city Aboriginal people also found the shelter of anonymity and met with an increasingly radical environment of the 1960s. They came in touch with New Left and student groups, who also had marginal relations with the state and protested against the Vietnam War and apartheid as well as for women’s rights. Among these groups Aboriginal activists found new allies, who came together with their existing supporters:

¹ Gary Foley in Alessandro Cavadini, *Ningla A’Na*, Australian Film Institute, 1972.

² Cf. D’Arcus, ‘The Urban Geography of Red Power’, 1246.

members of the unions and the Churches. Influenced by the Black Power ideologies and the wider worldwide Liberation movement, and boosted by their strengthening sense of nationalism, Aboriginal activists started to look for their own solutions to the problems facing them. They established Aboriginal controlled service organisations that for the first time in Australia provided welfare services by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people. With their initiatives they continued a long history of Aboriginal activism that had sought justice for Aboriginal people under colonisation in Sydney.

Every Aboriginal organisation empowered urban Aboriginal people in their specific field – law, health, culture, education and housing – and challenged existing power relations in the city. However, they all thought a holistic approach was vital to their operations. As well as providing legal services, the ALS looked after its clients' welfare and supported an Aboriginal adoption agency. The AMS saw poor health as a consequence of colonialism and saw land rights, as well as combating racism and poverty, as an essential step towards better health. Murawina assisted with housing, educational and nutritional problems and acted as a referral centre. Furthermore, it advocated Aboriginal women's rights and framed Indigenous feminism around issues important to Aboriginal women, such as their right to a family. The Black Theatre trained Indigenous people in the entertainment industry and actively took part in street politics. The AHC provided not only housing, but a form of communal living that connected with the activists of the other organisations and created opportunities for training and employment in the building industry.

The establishment of Aboriginal controlled organisations that delivered welfare services to Aboriginal people was in itself a radically different development. However, as I have shown, none of the organisations studied in this thesis limited themselves to service delivery. Rather, their overarching aim was political, the struggle for self-determination. As part of their aspiration for self-determination Aboriginal organisations in Redfern assumed a central role in strengthening urban Indigenous identity. They took part in building an urban Aboriginal community in a settler colonial city which, in non-Indigenous minds, had been discursively emptied of the Indigenous presence. In their activism the Aboriginal organisations challenged the notion of urban space as void of Aboriginality and in their struggle for self-determination claimed Indigenous ownership of social and geographic spaces in the city.

All of the Aboriginal organisations created Indigenous spaces and worked to strengthen Aboriginal pride in their culture. However, the most central organisations in the cultural mission were Murawina and the Black Theatre. Murawina provided an Aboriginal educational space and a meeting place for Aboriginal women. In its everyday practices it strengthened Aboriginal children's sense of identity as a distinct people, taught them Aboriginal versions of Australia's past and created links to traditional Aboriginal cultures. The Black Theatre played a central cultural role in legitimising the struggle for self-determination via its plays, dance performances and activities as a cultural centre. Its dance, theatre and art workshops and its art exhibitions offered Aboriginal people and children, and youth in particular, an opportunity to learn about their identity. Its building became a meeting place for Indigenous people in inner Sydney and it acted as a community centre with multiple functions. The Black Theatre's plays represented an Aboriginal view of the past and opposed non-Indigenous historical narratives about the colonisation of Australia. Its plays reflected the contemporary concerns of Aboriginal activism and the way past was intertwined with the present.

The geographic location of Aboriginal organisations in the heart of Redfern was significant for the developing sense of the local Aboriginal community in Redfern. The organisations' presence in the streetscape of the inner city and in the everyday lives of inner-city Aboriginal people underlined their belonging in the city. The importance of Redfern as an Aboriginal territory and a centre of political struggle was highlighted, and challenged, by the resentment of many in the local Aboriginal community of the Black Theatre dance group's decision to break away from the Black Theatre Arts and Culture Centre.

Many local non-Indigenous people resisted the increasing Aboriginal presence. Though at the time ideas about equality were shifting in Australian public discourse, the concept of separate services for Aboriginal people was difficult to accept for those supporting equal treatment rather than equal outcomes. Thus, the Aboriginal services were seen as segregationist by their opposers, such as the representatives of the South Sydney City Council. The AHC's claim for a block of urban land, in particular, caused vocal and violent resistance, though all the other organisations also faced opposition. While the AHC distinctly disturbed the notion of the non-Indigenous occupation of the city as legitimate, its opponents questioned the Aboriginal right to belong in the city. The ALS, on the other

hand was resisted because it put forward a legal challenge to the discrimination against Aboriginal people and their mistreatment at the hands of the police, as well as arguing for Aboriginal sovereignty. Furthermore, though cultural endeavours such as the Black Theatre were seemingly less threatening than other aspects of Aboriginal activism, culture played a crucial role in articulating a strong and assertive Aboriginal identity. Local non-Indigenous resistance to Aboriginal organisations, and the intense police harassment and brutality that it coincided with, further reinforced the shared identity of Aboriginal people in Redfern. Aboriginal activists from different organisations and their non-Indigenous supporters rallied together and defended their position against the opposition.

The impact of the Aboriginal organisations was not only felt at the local level. Their models, in particular the ALS and the AMS, were soon followed elsewhere in Australia. Redfern Aboriginal activists consciously tried to reach from local to the state-wide and national level. Supported by their national sentiment, they were eager to travel to different parts of New South Wales and Australia to share their knowledge with local Aboriginal communities. However, because of the many family connections, they were particularly keen to strengthen the links between urban and rural areas in New South Wales, for though now living in the city, they had maintained connections to their places of origin, family and kin in rural areas.

Once Whitlam was elected to power, the associations in Redfern were among the first Aboriginal organisations to experience self-determination as a government policy. However, in order to receive funding they were expected to negotiate the scope and the limits of their self-determination with the representatives of the newly established Department of Aboriginal Affairs at a time when the non-Indigenous state was most committed to universalist welfare. All of the Aboriginal organisations studied in this thesis benefited from increased funding under the policy of self-determination. Government funding allowed them to develop into community organisations that operated as centres of community governance, provided professional and material resources to the community and represented the Aboriginal community. For example, led by Paul Coe, the ALS argued for Aboriginal sovereignty and challenged Australia's basis as settled rather than conquered country in High Court in 1979.

However, the introduction of the government's self-determination policy did not occur without problems. The government and Aboriginal activists had not agreed on the principles of self-determination and what these meant in practice. The DAA officials were limited by the available funding and were ultimately accountable to their Minister and the Australian public, rather than to the Aboriginal people, for the use of government funds. They tended to see self-determination as limited to Aboriginal control in service delivery. They largely opposed the political activism that the Aboriginal organisations engaged with and the holistic way with which they approached their specific fields. Furthermore, in their dealings with the Aboriginal organisations, the DAA officials, many of them influenced by the ideals of assimilation, ultimately viewed self-determination policy as a short term solution and as a way to equal treatment of Aboriginal populations. Thus, they constrained, as well as facilitated, self-determination as it was defined by the Aboriginal activists. The Aboriginal activists, on the other hand, argued for full Aboriginal control of their organisations' agenda and operations. They treated government funding as Aboriginal money and saw it as compensation for their colonisation as peoples.

The Aboriginal organisations' responses to the opportunities and challenges of self-determination policy differed depending, for example, on the individual people involved or the priority with which they received support from the government. A comparison of the ALS with the AMS highlights particularly well the different approaches the organisations and the government could take under the self-determination policy. The ALS was in a special position as, together with other Aboriginal legal services, it was given the responsibility of providing free legal representation for Aboriginal people as pledged by the Whitlam government. The ALS seized the opportunity and soon expanded its operations to other parts of New South Wales. When establishing offices and increasing its expenses, its leadership refused to seek government permission and in general to submit to government conditions or negotiate the limits of its self-determination with the government. Extensive government funding made the ALS less reliant on its non-Indigenous supporters and staff. At the time the ALS was mainly run by young Aboriginal men, who were members of the Black Panther party that was heavily influenced by Black Power ideologies and anti-colonial thinking. They pushed for full Aboriginal control and assigned the ALS's non-Indigenous supporters to the margins as they were excluded from the ALS council from 1974 onwards.

The AMS, on the other hand, had to argue strongly for the need for a dedicated Aboriginal medical service in an urban area. Once funded it was able to expand its operations locally under the Whitlam government's self-determination policy. However, the DAA preferred to fund separate medical services in different areas and limited the AMS's operations locally to the inner-Sydney area, possibly because of the difficulties it had in controlling the ALS. Thus it prevented the AMS's plans to operate on a state-wide basis like the ALS. The government also expected the AMS, unlike the ALS, to do voluntary fundraising in order to avoid dependency associated with its welfare oriented profile. The AMS used the independent funding to its advantage and became very efficient at it. Despite government resistance, it was able to, not only assist in advisory roles, but financially support setting up medical services and facilitate Aboriginal self-determination elsewhere in Australia. The AMS, which had had Aboriginal professionals, namely nurses, among its staff from the beginning, was mainly run by Aboriginal women. However, it was not black women-only organisation like Murawina.

Though the AMS had experienced Aboriginal members, it also benefited from the expertise, connections and resources that its' non-Indigenous supporters brought to its fundraising and operations. This was very different to the ALS, which had excluded non-Indigenous participation as mentioned above. Particularly important was the input of the representatives of the Catholic Church and their donation of the building on Turner Street. The AMS's fundraising fitted smoothly with the pre-existing culture of seeing health work as charity among the religious institutions and in the Western world in general. Non-Indigenous people would have also donated willingly to the AMS, as they would have tended to see Aboriginal health work, and an organisation run by women, as non-threatening. Reliance on independent funding and other non-Indigenous resources, however, made the AMS dependent on its non-Indigenous supporters. Thus, AMS members needed to define Aboriginal control in such a way that it allowed co-operation with non-Indigenous people. Individual non-Indigenous supporters, for their part, were required to respect the principles of Aboriginal control and the AMS's desire for self-determination, in order for the co-operation to be successful.

Under the Fraser government, Aboriginal affairs policy shifted from self-determination to self-management. The DAA officials started to impose on Aboriginal organisations stricter

financial controls that emphasised accountability. They also increasingly objected to the political activism that the organisations took part in as part of their operations. All the Aboriginal organisations opposed strongly these changes in government policies. However, as before, they responded differently to the challenges the changes represented. The ALS systematically refused to provide the DAA with financial reports or report on its activities. Nor did it follow its budget or the DAA guidelines and incorporate. The DAA was also made aware that the ALS was dealing with internal difficulties as its leadership had lost the trust of many of its members locally and in the regional areas. The ALS was, nevertheless, in a strong position to argue for its continuity for two more years, as there were no alternative legal services available for Aboriginal people. Finally in 1977 the government agreed to fund breakaway legal services in different parts of New South Wales, thus limiting the power of the ALS based in Redfern. The initial successes of the the ALS depended, in part, on its indispensability as a deliverer of Whitlam's pledge. Under the Fraser government, the commitment to the promise to provide free legal service to Aboriginal people became diluted and alternatives to the ALS in Redfern now existed.

The AMS, unlike the ALS, provided the DAA with the necessary, though minimum, information to fulfill government requirements of accountability and assure continued funding. The AMS managed to expand its operations locally with government funding that now consisted of combination of grants from the DAA and the Commonwealth Department of Health, as well as independent fundraising. In their negotiations with the government the AMS, like the other Aboriginal organisations, ultimately tried to maximise their level of funding and the level of Aboriginal control of their organisation under the changing government policies.

The process of planning and constructing the Murawina building further highlights the difficulties of Aboriginal self-determination within the framework of government control. Under the Whitlam government Murawina was granted a block of land and promised funding for new premises on this block. In the understanding that they had full control over the decisions regarding the building project, Murawina members proceeded to organise it with the help of their supporters, the Builders Labourers Federation and the progressive architects. However, changing government objectives, even under the same Minister, subjected Murawina's building project to increased levels of supervision.

Furthermore, delays in having the building plans approved and funding guaranteed postponed the building project. It took Murawina members and their non-Indigenous supporters five years of lobbying before the Murawina building was officially opened in 1979.

In the 1970s the Aboriginal organisations in Redfern became political power bases that extended their influence beyond the local to the state and national levels. In their daily practices and in their negotiations with the governments, they struggled for Aboriginal control and *their* definition of Aboriginal self-determination, which was fuelled by their sense of nationalism and the concept of Aboriginal sovereignty. In this process the Aboriginal organisations did not only seek to revitalize Aboriginal culture. Rather, with the means available and in their multiple ways, they together strove to create a self-determining Aboriginal community and struggled to create a level of community governance, secure ownership of land and provide material resources for the Aboriginal community in Redfern and elsewhere in Australia.³

In the current debates on the successes and failures of Aboriginal self-determination, it would be important to remember that at the time when self-determination was practised as a government policy it held different meaning to Aboriginal activists and government officials, as I have discussed in this thesis. Importantly, the Indigenous idea of self-determination was fuelled by a sense of nationalism rather than policy practice. Furthermore, despite their shared struggle and ideologies, the responses to the government policy of self-determination varied between different Aboriginal organisations even in the same area, as I have shown. In order to better understand the history of Aboriginal self-determination in Australia and its nuances, it would be important to also study Aboriginal activism for self-determination in other parts of Australia, both rural and urban, and the national networks that developed between Aboriginal organisations. Furthermore, in order to appreciate different sensitivities of the current debates on self-determination, it would be essential to research the history of the concept of self-determination in Australia and to map how the meaning of it has changed in Aboriginal politics under local and international influences throughout the time.

³ Cf. W. Sanders, 'Towards an Indigenous order of Australian government', 16.

Afterword

Four out of the five organisations studied in this thesis still operate in Redfern. The ALS now operates as the Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) and provides a wide range of legal and paralegal services as well as lobbying for Aboriginal rights at the local, State, Federal and international level. It has 23 offices and 185 Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff.¹ The AMS forms part of the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council. It offers a variety of health programs, including chronic disease and mental health programs. It continues to advocate a holistic idea of Aboriginal health and commits to promoting Aboriginal culture, sovereignty and self-determination. It has 12 membership regions in New South Wales.² The AHC has demolished housing on its original location, ‘the Block’, and is planning a redevelopment of the area that would restore the “health” of the local Aboriginal community and provide employment for its members. Unlike the ALS and the AMS, it does not receive government funding, but operates on the rental income it receives from the 41 properties it has in Sydney and rural New South Wales.³ Murawina now operates as the Murawina Aboriginal Education Centre from the former Redfern Public School to which it moved in 2003.⁴ Many of the younger generation of Aboriginal people, such as Chicka Dixon’s granddaughter Nadeena Dixon, remember the Aboriginal men and women who first set up Aboriginal service organisations in Redfern as Freedom fighters.⁵

¹ ‘About us’, Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT), <http://www.alsnswact.org.au/pages/about-us>, accessed 26 June 2013.

² ‘About us’, Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of New South Wales, http://www.ahmrc.org.au/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2&Itemid=2, accessed 26 June 2013.

³ ‘About Aboriginal housing Company’, Aboriginal Housing Company, <http://www.ahc.org.au/about-us.html>, accessed 26 June 2013.

⁴ Zoe Pollock, ‘Murawina’, Dictionary of Sydney, <http://www.dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/murawina>, accessed 25 November 2013; ‘Fact Sheet. Murawina Child Care Centre’, Indigenous Land Corporation, Australian Government, <http://www.ilc.gov.au/webdata/resources/files/MurawinaFactSheet.PDF>, accessed 25 June 2013.

⁵ Nadeena Dixon, ‘The Fox and the Freedom Fighters’, Something in Common, Australian Human Rights Commission, <http://somethingincommon.gov.au/get-inspired/fox-and-freedom-fighters>, accessed 24 June 2013.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Redfern map

[Map has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.]

1) The ALS, 142 Regent St; 2) The ALS, 7 Botany St; 3) The AMS, 171 Regent St; 4) The AMS, 36 Turner St; 5) The Black Theatre, 181 Regent St; 6) The Black Theatre, 31-33 Botany St; 7) Murawina, 72 Shepherd Street; 8) Murawina, 77-85 Eveleigh St; 9) The AHC; 10) Empress Hotel; 11) Clifton Hotel. (Source: *Gregory's Street Directory: Sydney* (Ultimo, Gregory's Street Directories, Guides and Maps, 1979))

Appendix 2: AMS appeal for donations

[Image has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.]

(Source: *Identity*, Vol. 1, No. 3, Janaury 1972, 41.)

Appendix 3: Aileen Corpus wearing a white mask in *Basically Black*

[Image has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.]

(Source: Images from Australian Indigenous History, 1970s, The Koori History Website, <http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/images/history/1970s/blacktheatre/bb72/tv1.html>, accessed 30 July 2013.)

Appendix 4: Bennelong's cage

[Image has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.]

(Source: Nimrod Theatre Collection, Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales in Casey, *Creating Frames*.)

Appendix 5: Murawina flyer

[Image has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.]

(Source: Murawina-Construction of Preschool and Hostel Accomodation, part 4, R76/15, C1696/10, NAA.)

Appendix 6: “Return all Aboriginal children home. Not your home.”

[Image has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.]

(Source: *Identity*, Vol. 1, No. 9, January 1974, 35.)

Appendix 7: “The meaning of the Terms used in the Aboriginal Housing Scheme”

[Image has been removed due to Copyright restrictions.]

(Source: *Identity*, Vol. 1, No. 8, October 1973, 36)

Bibliography

Abbreviations

AIATSIS	Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Studies
ARRC	Aboriginal Research and Resource Centre
ASIO	Australian Security Intelligence Organization
DAA	Department of Aboriginal Affairs
OAA	Office of Aboriginal Affairs
ML	Mitchell Library
NAA	National Archives of Australia
NLA	National Library of Australia
UNSW	University of New South Wales

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