ABORIGINAL IDENTITY: THE MANAGEMENT OF A MINORITY GROUP BY THE MAINSTREAM SOCIETY

DEIRDRE E JORDAN,
Department of Education,
University of Adelaide,
G. P.O. Box 498,
Adelaide, South Australia,
Australia 5001.

ABSTRACT/RESUME

Until very recent years, the Aboriginal people of Australia were defined largely in negative terms by legislation and White perceptions. In recent decades, Australians have sought to recognize themselves as a multicultural society. This appears to have stimulated and allowed new efforts at self-management of Aboriginal Affairs, and the self-identification of Aboriginal people within Australian society as a whole.

Jusqu'à très récemment, le peuple aborigène d'australie était largement defini en termes negatifs par la législation et la sensibilité des Blancs. Ces dernières décennies, les australiens se sont efforcés de se considérer comme une sociéte multiculturelle. Ceci semble avoir stimulé et crée de nouveaux efforts pour l'auto-administration des Affaires Aborigines et l'auto-identification du peuple aborigène à l'intérieur de la sociéte australienne dans son ensemble.

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> The thing at issue is the ruin of a frame of reference, a culture, and the consequent devaluation of individuals. Yet we can see the start of some slight search for 'Aboriginality'. But what is Aboriginality? Is it being tribal? Who is an Aboriginal? Is he or she someone who feels that other Aboriginals are somehow dirty, lazy, drunken, Nudging? Is an Aboriginal anyone who has some degree of Aboriginal blood in his or her veins and who has been demonstrably disadvantaged by that? Or is an Aboriginal someone who has had the reserve experience? Is Aboriginality institutionalized gutlessness, an acceptance of the label 'the most powerless people on earth'? Or is Aboriginality when all the definitions have been exhausted a yearning for a different way of being, a wholeness that was presumed to have existed before 17767 (Watson, 1977:184).

The Aboriginal search for identity grows out of confusion and a need to come to grips not merely with the question of "identifying" as an Aboriginal person, but seeking to know, to understand, what can be the components of an Aboriginal identity, credible to individuals, which they can select out of the many Aboriginal identities offered them, and which they can build upon in order to attain a personal identity.

It is a problem which has not been addressed to any great extent in Australia by researchers from the White world. Current research literature in anthropology, if it touches at all on identity, is centred on changes taking place in the structures of tradition-oriented people.[1] Research literature in psychology, until very recently, sought either to provide data on concepts which parallel those of studies of mainstream society, or had a "mental health" approach to the problems of assimilation, examining "problems" of adjustment to White society.[2] Research literature, still the work of the White world, by its very nature is generated by and defined within a White framework of thought. It has focussed, by and large, on the assimilation of Aboriginal people into a White world of culture, of motivation, of learning, a world where Aboriginal identity is absorbed.[3]

The analysis by Aboriginal people themselves of the problem of loss of identity and anomie is taking a different point of departure; it is focussing on identity construction. Stewart (1976:26), for example, spoke of "embarking upon a long, difficult and in some cases a traumatic journey to establish our identities". Anderson (1975:19) projected a time when "Aboriginal people and Aboriginal teenagers would start grabbing hold of their identity themselves".[4]

THE THEORY

The Aboriginal people, in voicing the need to "grab" or "build" their identity, place themselves unconsciously within the theoretical framework provided by the sociology of knowledge. Within this framework, the society into which one is born is conceptualized as a social construct, and identity is

the result of social processes within that construct. The Australian Government's "working definition" of aboriginal identity may also be located within this context.

> An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander is a person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies as an Aboriginal or Tortes Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which he lives (Australian Department of Aboriginal Affairs, 1981). [5]

This basis for identification reflects the sociological dimension of the following definition of identity developed as part of a larger study on Aboriginal identity (Jordan, 198S), and proposed as a reference point for the rest of this article.

> Identity is defined as location of the self in a particular world of meaning both by the self and others. It is a product of interactions between individuals and social structures, and individuals and others. Through this location of the self, individuals recognize their self-sameness and continuity in time and perceive that others recognize their self-sameness and continuity.

The problems associated with assimilation grew out of a lack of success on the part of the White world in locating Aboriginal people in that world. White people "theorized" about assimilation, but they also predicted that Aboriginal people would always be resistant to civilizing influences: "it was not so much a matter of the colour of the skin as the colour of the mind" (Bleakley, 1961: $14). Aboriginal people who tried to locate themselves in the White world met with hostility and rejection:

> On the street there are the eyes, staring at black skin (Gilbert, 1973:41).

> I'd walk into a town. You walk down the street and you're black and the white man doesn't have to say a word to you. He steps around you, you're shit, you're nothing. And they cut you down with this sort of concept and you get that way, you feel it, you feel inferior (Dixon, 1975:49).

Aboriginal people in the past have been thwarted and frustrated in their efforts to respond to the (White) policy of assimilation. If they now wish to follow a different path and locate themselves in an Aboriginal world, then, in terms of the definition proposed above, they must locate themselves in a world of meaning that has characteristics that are specifically Aboriginal, a world which is legitimated, made credible to the self, at all levels of "theorizing". [6] It is not enough, for the construction of identity, for individuals to locate

themselves unilaterally within a particular "world". Identity is a social construct; its maintenance depends not only upon the individual, but upon the readiness of others to confirm the chosen identity of the individual.

The construction of an Aboriginal identity may lead to a conflict situation as the theorizing of Aboriginal people about an "Aboriginal" world of meaning within which an Aboriginal identity may be found may well be at variance with that of mainstream theorizing. The maintenance of the "world" of meaning of the mainstream group may then be threatened by a version of a deviant world, held by a visible group that is not assimilated into the mainstream. The Aboriginal "world", as a site for the location of identity, must therefore be studied not in isolation, but in relation to mainstream Australian society.

An understanding of this "objective reality" for Aboriginal people, that is, knowledge about an Aboriginal world which is objectivated and taken for granted, demands an understanding, therefore, at the conceptual level, of the machinery by which the world of Aboriginal society has been managed in the past, and is being managed in contemporary society by the dominant group. A discussion of various forms of conceptual machinery used to exercise control over a minority group by a dominant group may be found in Berger and Luckmann (1966:122-134). Two relevant forms of such "machinery" are those of therapy and nihilation. *Therapy* entails processes directed towards keeping deviants within the universe of meaning of the dominant group. Examples are available from those schools of psychiatric treatment and of classroom practice which are aimed at "adjusting" the individual to society. Therapy is employed to return the deviant individual to the norms of the mainstream group. Nihilation acts in the opposite way and is brought into play to protect a universe of meaning by liquidating conceptually all alternative systematizations of meaning. For example, the right-wing governments of South America set out, in the sixties and seventies, to silence the ideological stirrings of the oppressed groups in their countries. To attain this end, the world of meaning of the poor (who might seek justice) and of those religious who cast their lot with the poor, was nihilated by the dominant group by being categorized as "communist".[7] As the power base of the military governments was secure, the conceptual nihilation of the "world" of those critical of the government could be consummated in physical nihilation; the facts of the "dirty wars" of the sixties and seventies in Argentina, for example, are now widely known; the same processes continue still in Chile.

The situation in South America represents an extreme contemporary example of the way in which a dominant group has acted to control a minority group. I intend to argue a somewhat less extreme case, namely that the history of the Aboriginal people in Australia also shows evidence of the nihilation of the Aboriginal world (and therefore of /aboriginal identity) by mainstream society, a nihilation which tolerated - until the turn of the century the physical nihilation of the people.

The following propositions will be examined:

that the "world" of Aborigines was controlled by means of legislation and

policy which employed nihilation as the conceptual machinery to protect and maintain the "world" of the dominant group;

that such nihilation was supported by appropriate forms of legitimation;

that legislation and policy promoted negative typifications;

that the boundary constructed for Aboriginal society, within which Aboriginal people found identity, was a boundary from without, imposed not by Aborigines themselves, but by the dominant society.

LEGISLATION AND NIHILATION - AN HISTORICAL REVIEW FROM A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

One of the most important sources of mainstream theorizing with relation to the world of Aborigines is that found in legislation. A watershed in this "theorizing" is marked by a referendum held throughout the commonwealth of Australia in 1967. As a result of the referendum, the Commonwealth Government was given power, formerly held by the states, to legislate for the welfare of Aboriginal people.

I propose to examine the symbolic universe within which Aboriginal people were located by mainstream society as it can be found in Government legislation, policy and practice in two areas: in one particular state, South Australia, held to be one of the more enlightened states in its treatment of the Aboriginal people,[8] and at the Federal level, after the referendum, when the Commonwealth Government assumed responsibility for Aboriginal people.

In order to appreciate the context within which theorizing about Aborigines took place, a brief historical outline is required. South Australia was established as a colonly in 1836; the first legislation relating to its foundation was the Foundation Act of 1854, enacted by the British Parliament. This Act categorized all land in the colony as public land, a decision legitimated by the fact that, in the preamble to the Act, the area to be settled was declared waste and unoccupied.[9]

Jenkin (1979:54ff) points out that in 1855, Lord Glenelg, the British Secretary of State for the Colonies, prevailed upon the founders of South Australia before they left England to insert a clause in the Letters Patent intended to protect the land rights of the indigenous people of Australia. The proviso, however, was worthless, as, vis-a-vis the 1854 Act of Parliament, it had no legal status. Glenelg's representations were heeded by only one colonist, a Quaker, who insisted on paying the Aborigines the interest on the amount of money used in purchasing his land from the government.[10]

Despite action taken by Gawler to protect some land for the use of Aborigines, Jenkin concludes that the 1842 Waste Lands Act,

> . . . by mentioning the two things that could be done for them [setting aside money for Aboriginal welfare, recovering land for

> the use of Aboriginal inhabitants of the country] without accepting that they had any *rights* at all to land or finance, effectively ossified the position of Aborigines as a mendicant, pauper class, completely at the mercy of a foreign authoritarian government which might or might not be benevolent in ensuing years,

Gale (1972:52) points out a further effect of the 1842 legislation. While the Act gave the *possibility* of land being put aside for the Aboriginal people, at the same time all land not already surveyed was declared waste and unoccupied. The Aborigines were thus, officially and legally, dispossessed of their land. In those cases where land *was* put aside for the use of Aborigines, the area was too small to be of any use for the production of food.

Apart from the injustices perpetrated by the Acts, they resulted in two outcomes leading to the destruction of the Aboriginal world. Being deprived of their land, the people were also deprived of the means of gaining food. The result was that they were made dependent in that regard on White society. More especially, through dispossession of their traditional lands to which their "Dreaming", their source of spiritual life is inextricably bound, they were prevented from maintaining a world of meaning encompassed by their Law which touched on every aspect of their life and provided a framework for their cultural identity.

What were the processes at work which permitted this situation to be legitimated?

In order to make the oppression of a minority group seem to be natural and justified, and in order to protect its own universe of meaning, a dominant group must build up a coherent body of theorizing which nihilates the world of the "deviant group" while supporting the actions of mainstream society. In Nazi Germany, for example, the conceptual nihilation of the "world" of Jewish people was based on a body of "theorizing" about the purity of race. In the case of the indigenous inhabitants of Australia, there were several strands of theorizing based upon a White world of meaning which countenanced the nihilation of the Aboriginal world, and indeed permitted the physical nihilation of Aborigines. The initial denial of existence of the people, found in the Land Acts, was legitimated in a different form at the turn of the century by a theorizing that claimed that Aborigines were not fully human.

Archbishop Polding, appearing in 1845 before a Parliamentary Committee on the *Condition of Aborigines,* gave, as his opinion concerning the reasons for the great decrease in the numbers of the Native people, "the aggressive manner of taking possession of their country."

> I myself have heard a man, educated and a large proprietor of sheep and cattle maintain that there was no more harm in shooting a native than in shooting a wild dog. I have heard it maintained by others that it was in the course of Providence that the blacks should disappear before the white, and the sooner the process was carried out the better for all parties. I fear such opinions

> prevail to great extent. Very recently, in the presence of two clergy-men, a man of education narrated as a good thing that he had been one of a party who had pursued the blacks in consequence of the cattle having been rushed by them and that he was sure they had shot upward of a hundred. When expostulated with he maintained there was nothing wrong with it, that it was preposterous to suppose that they had souls (Thorpe, 1950:262).

"Theorizing" by the general populace that Aborigines had no souls and were therefore less than human provided a pseudo-theological view which meshed well with widespread beliefs that primitive peoples in general were sub-human. These beliefs were transferred to Australian Aborigines and strengthened at the turn of the century, even in the face of contrary evidence, by a pseudo-scientific version of Darwin's theories which allowed the nihilation of the Aboriginal world at the cognitive level. Evolutionists conveniently found in Aborigines the missing link between apes and men.

Popular theorizing that Aborigines were less than human, that they had no "souls", permitted the massacre of Aboriginal people on a scale wide enough to see their extermination as being, at the very least, countenanced on the part of the policy makers, who remained passive in the face of wide-scale killings. The earlier conceptual nihilation of the existence of Aborigines was thus carried to an ultimate conclusion in their physical nihilation. This was brought about by such measures as giving people damper poisoned with corrosion sublimate. driving them from waterholes,[11] and murder by the police themselves.[12]

The "scientific" view that Aborigines were less than human was rejected by South Australia in an Adelaide newspaper through the publication of "scientific" findings which came to the conclusion that the Aboriginal people were human after all!

The *Register* of 17th June, 1914, made the following startling announcement:

> The native tribes of Australia are generally considered to be at the bottom of the scale of humanity . . . and probably to be inferior in mental development to many of the stone-age inhabitants of Europe in prehistoric ages. Yet they have every right to be considered man.
>
> HUMAN AFTER ALL
>
> Though infantile in intellectual development, the Australian natives are thoroughly human, as can readily be seen by the cubic measurement of their brains, 99.35 inches compared with that of a gorilla 30.51 inches (quoted in Jenkin, 1979:248).

The statement itself is absurd. Even more absurd is the arrogance of the

dominant group recognizing as "human after all", or "thoroughly human", the Aboriginal people of South Australia, people such as those from Port McLeay who, in 1914, were well educated in comparison with White people of those times. [13] They read the newspaper, [14] and would have been well aware of the "scientific" decisions being made about them; indeed, well aware that though now considered "human", they were still held to be at the "bottom of the scale of humanity".

Once the accepted knowledge of the time declared that Aborigines were human, one would have thought that it was no longer possible to legitimate their physical nihilation on the grounds of their supposed affinity with the animal world. Nevertheless, knowledge about the inherent inferiority of the Aboriginal people became accepted as "sedimented knowledge"[15] of mainstream society - that is as everyday knowledge, what everyone knows without having to examine it. This sedimented knowledge was a form of theorizing which legitimated the widespread incidents of extermination which continued well into this century. [16] Ted Docker documents the attitudes of the White population to Aborigines in connection with murders by police in what was at that time a territory administered, for certain purposes, by South Australia:

> In 1928 a trooper of the Northern Territory Mounted Police coldbloodedly shot down more than seventeen natives (his own admission) in what was supposed to be a round up of witnesses for criminal investigation. He was compared in an Adelaide newspaper to the Canadian mountie: "always rides alone, always gets his man" (Docker, 1964:9-10).

Sedimented "knowledge" about the inferiority of the Aboriginal world also permitted social legislation which, in its turn, was instrumental in destroying the social structures of the Aboriginal people and therefore the locus of identity. Such legislation was an unintended consequence of activities carried out by Church groups. These groups recognized that the Aboriginal people had "souls" to be saved. But they also believed that the Aboriginal people were infantile. The policies of missionaries, almost without exception, were of a paternalistic nature, denying the people autonomy. The symbolic world [17] which the churches had to protect differed from that of mainstream society. Nevertheless, the same conceptual mechanisms were used to nihilate the Aboriginal world of culture. The rites of initiation, the marriage customs, indeed, the total spiritual and social world of the Aborigines was categorized as pagan and hence eligible for nihilation.

While on the one hand the churches supported with all their power the "sanctity of the (White) family", at another level of theorizing they implemented practices designed to destroy the family and the authority structures of the Aboriginal people. For example, in many places, until a decade ago, the dormitory system for educating children continued, children were removed from parental control and traditional education, and the authority and autonomy of the people was over-ridden.

Structures set up by missions were progressively taken over by the government, and practices established by church groups, whereby all autonomy was removed from the people, were codified in law.[18] Under the South Australian Aborigines Act (1911), for example, Aborigines became minors, and their children could be taken from them. The Chief Protector appointed under the Act became the "Guardian of every Aboriginal and half-caste child", a not unexpected corollary of a situation where policy separated families.

On the reserves, in the personal sphere, codes of conduct were no longer subject to tribal authority. They were made the subject of White legislation which invented a deviancy and a delinquency for Aboriginal people. A "criminal class" was established by the definition of new "crimes" specific to Aboriginal people. The Protector was entitled to

> . . . inflict summary punishment by ways of imprisonment not exceeding fourteen days, upon Aborigines and half-castes living upon a reserve or within the district under his charge, who, in the judgement of such protector are guilty of any crime, serious misconduct, neglect of duty, gross insubordination or wilful breach of any regulation (Aborigines Act, 1911: Section 10).

Managers of reserves had immense power which could be used quite capriciously to categorize activities as criminal and to punish the offenders. Regulations under the Act, promulgated in 1917 and 1919, added further "crimes" specific to Aborigines. Under the regulations, Aborigines could be summarily fined for not closing a gate or for being untidily dressed; the time of rising in the morning was stipulated. For failing to obey an order an Aborigine could be fined ten pounds or gaoled, with or without hard labour, for two months. The Chief Protector could cause any Aboriginal to be moved to a reserve or Aboriginal institution (secs. 17-21) and he could assume control of the property of any Aboriginal (sec. 35). There were penalties to be imposed upon people who unlawfully entered a reserve (sec. 20) or who caused an Aboriginal to leave one (see. 21).[19] Section 34a made it an offence for a male, not of Aboriginal descent, to associate with a female who had any aboriginal ancestry. Successive Aborigines Acts gave power to segregate the "deviant" Aboriginal population from mainstream society.

SEGREGATION

The power to segregate Aborigines in South Australia was contained in the 1842 Act, the 1911 Act, and the 1933 Aborigines Act which remained in force until the more enlightened legislation of the 1962 Aborigines Act. Segregation, involving the removal of those deviating from mainstream norms from the sight of the dominant group, was a form of denial and nihilation. It may be seen as a form of physical nihilation which was less extreme than that of extermination.[20]

Under the 1911 Act, Aborigines could be subject to curfews and to re-

striction of movement in towns. These restrictions were confirmed in the 1939 Act. in South Australia, which

> . . . gave the Board power to remove Aborigines to reserves and keep them there, prevented entry by unauthorized persons and made it an offence to assist or entice them to escape. It enabled the Board to remove camps from the vicinity of towns and to remove individuals for 'loitering' or being improperly clothed. Towns could be proclaimed prohibited areas. (emphasis added).

Certainly, for later generations in South Australia the Aboriginal people were allowed to impinge very little on White society.[21] In South Australia before the 1950's and even into the 1960's, many, if not most urban people had never seen an Aboriginal person. They, like the Government officials, were, stoutly and with clear conscience, able to deny racism in Australia.

Perkins (1975:17) relates his own experience in Alice Springs:

> We had to stay there. We were not allowed in Alice Springs after dark, only for the pictures on Saturday night. That rule has relaxed a little over the years . . . But before the idea was simple: 'Keep the street clean of Aborigines.' That was the way we had to live - as scum, the unwanted.

Aborigines were separated spatially by the location of their housing; they were separated socially from those with whom they worked or played sport.

Perkins (Ibid :55-56) relates:

> I would go into a pub with the cricket team and the barman would say, "Listen darkie, you know you don't belong in here. If you don't get out, I'll get the copper on to you!"

The construction by mainstream society of a criminal identity creating 'crimes specific to Aborigines" is clear. Behaviour typified as "normal" for White citizens being within town precincts, drinking in a pub was typified as criminal for black people.[22]

Through policies of segregation, Aboriginal people were not only excluded from White society; they were located in a negative world by mainstream society. Hasluek (1970:160-161) commented that the system confined "the native within a legal status that has more in common with that of a born idiot than of any other class of British citizen." The Aborigine was stereotyped as "idiot". of low intelligence, as a child who must be protected, his movements restricted, his liberty curtailed, a person socially unacceptable. Jenkin (1979: 246) notes that the only other people who could be treated in this way were lunatics or criminals (and even they had to be proven to have committed an offence). As Perkins (1975:188) put it poignantly, "It is a crime to be an Aborigine in Australia". Having black skin was sufficient to draw down punish-

ment for anything "defined" as a crime, without any recourse to the courts.

The institutionalization of negative typifications for Aborigines is shown by the fact that one of the amendments to the 1959 Act in South Australia provided for exemption from the Act for some who could meet certain qualifications.

> In any case where the Board is of the opinion that any Aborigine by reason of his character and standard of intelligence and development should be exempted from the provisions of this Act, the Board may, by notice in writing, declare that the Aborigine may cease to be an Aborigine for the purpose of this act (Aborigines Act, 1934-1939:Section IIA).

Therefore, there was no possibility of a positive identity for Aboriginal people, as those who, in White terms, successfully appropriated an identity offered by White society, were no longer Aborigines. They were exempted from the penalites attached to Aboriginal identity. Clearly, legislation for Aborigines in general was intended to be seen as articulated for people who did not fulfil the requirements for exemption, that is, people of bad or indifferent character, of low standard of intelligence and development. By derivation, all Aborigines had these characteristics, as those who were considered not to possess these negative traits could be declared exempt from being Aborigines. The legislation thus located Aboriginal identity within a negative world of meaning.

Those Aborigines who wished to be part of White society after the Act of 1959 were forced to carry a certificate of exemption. Perhaps the most destructive aspect of the legislation was the requirement that if, "in order to be treated like a human being" (the phrase recurs again and again in conversation with Aboriginal people, and is interchangeable with "being treated like a White"), individuals applied for and were granted an "exemption", they had to cut themselves off from their family, their kin, their place of birth, their culture, and indeed, their Aboriginal identity.

All of the forces discussed produced a new conceptualization of the "Aboriginal problem" in the 1940's. The assumptions underlying the Land Acts legislation (namely that Aborigines did not exist), the active extermination of Aborigines, their removal from sight by the enforcement of segregation, the high death rate due to disease and malnutrition, all this led with ease to a promotion of theorizing that Aborigines were a dying race. This theorizing, in turn, was used as a basis for different forms of segregation: policies of *isolation* and *dispersal* were advocated, the former legitimated by prospects of economic advantage to the dominant group.

ISOLATION

Tindale (1941:68), summarizing his research (in part supported by the Government), talked of the full-blood Aborigines of South Australia as a dying remnant. He noted that

> The full bloods in the settled districts are a diminishing group and will soon be extinct. Isolation of the surviving desert tribes which have not yet completely lost their old ways of living would be an *economic* advantage to the State of South Australia. *It would enable the control of faunal pests and the effective occupation of a desert area which is a menace to the pastoral areas.* (emphasis added)

Tindale would have thought of himself as humanitarian. Yet his proposal for the tribal people did little to differentiate them from trained dogs, or some native animal promoting a balance in the wild - much as, in game parks, a mingling of animals preserves a balance. His solution of isolation was based on a widely held assumption (or wish) that Aborigines were dying out. He unashamedly posited the economic advantage of White people as a basis for the banishment, or, in effect, the physical nihilation of Aboriginal people.

DISPERSAL

A different solution, that of dispersal, was proposed for "half-castes". Tindale (1941:67) made the following observation:

> The problem of how to deal [with the half-castes who replace tribal people] is a difficult but not insoluble one. They are faced with the same problems as we are in nurturing their families, securing education and finding a place in the community. They should not be treated as if they were a highly developed species of animal, to be viewed only as though they were inhabitants of a zoological garden. They should not be shut away in segregated (almost caged) communities.

The last two sentences are most revealing of the perception and treatment of Aborigines in the early forties when Tindale was writing: categorization as animals, inhabitants of zoological gardens, echoes the stereotype of sub-human, a stereotype based on the "scientific" findings of the *"followers"* of Darwin, which had been sedimented into the thinking of a racist population.

Despite his desire to be humanitarian, Tindale was a man of his times in that he saw the "Aboriginal problem" not as one caused by White people, but one to be solved by White people, and solved by an act as inhuman as the treatment already accorded the Aboriginal people. He put forward (1941:119) a solution of dispersal:

> It would appear that the more ready means of bringing about a process of physical and social assimilation of the Australian mixed bloods into the community would be by the simple device of ensuring that a maximum dispersal or spread of the minority group will take place.

Assimilation as a policy in this particular formulation (one of dispersal) was also a form of nihilation of the Aboriginal world of meaning: the Aboriginal people, as a group, were to disappear from sight. This would occur because Aborigines would either become extinct or completely absorbed into the population by compulsory, "maximum" dispersal. Such dispersal would lead to total assimilation.

ASSIMILATION

By the 1950's, assimilation had become official policy for all of Australia. For the first time, the states gathered to discuss the "Aboriginal problem". In 1951 Hasluck (1953:13), then Minister for Territories, reported to Parliament that the Native Welfare Conference held in Canberra,

> . . . agreed that assimilation is the objective of native welfare measures. Assimilation means, in practical terms, that, in the course of time, it is expected that all persons of Aboriginal blood or mixed blood in Australia will live like White Australians do (emphasis added).

The policy of assimilation, spelled out by Hasluck in 1951, was confirmed in 1963 when a further conference of Commonwealth and State Ministers was held in Darwin and resulted in a more detailed statement on the meaning of the policy of assimilation.

> The policy of assimilation means that all Aborigines and part Aborigines will attain the same manner of living as other Australians and live as members of a single Australian community enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting the same responsbilities, observing the same customs and influenced by the same beliefs, hopes and loyalties as other Australians (Commonwealth of Australia Parliamentary Papers, 1963:651).

The statement went on to acknowledge the conflict between such a policy and the existing legislation referring to Aborigines. It adverted to the fact that there was specific (restrictive) legislation for Aborigines and noted the "rather loose use of the term 'citizenship' ", as Aboriginal people in most states were not permitted to vote at that time. This anomaly, however, was easily dismissed with a meaningless phrase:

> . . . such statutes can in no sense derogate from their citizenship in the sense of their status as Australian citizens.

Thus on the one hand, Aboriginal people in 1963, in most states, were not entitled to vote. On the other hand, this was not to be seen as derogating from their status as Australian citizens. Nevertheless, there was a difference in the

status accorded Aboriginal people. As late as 1964, Beazley, the member for Fremantle, was pleading for all Commonwealth instrumentalities, including the armed services, to pay Aborigines employed by them a wage at least equivalent to the award rate as fixed by the Arbitration Commission for a worker similarly employed who was covered by awards, and for the need for the extension of the protection of Australian Commission awards to Aborigines employed privately in the Northern Territory (Commonwealth of Australia Parliamentary Debates, 1964:821-822). Differences and differential treatment did exist even at the official level.

Other White voices supported Beazley's pleas for the injustices suffered by Aboriginal people to be redressed; there was also a growing insistence on the part of the Aboriginal people to have their voice heard. Once policies of assimilation of Aborigines were projected, and their status as citizens having some rights and some status was acknowledged (if only at the level of rhetoric), a change had to be made in the conceptual machinery seen as appropriate for their control by the dominant group. Aboriginal people became eligible for a form of control different from that of nihilation. A new conceptualization of Aboriginal identity by the White world was to be articulated at the Federal level, requiring a new form of control. Therapy, that is "treatment", of a deviant group designed to integrate their world within that of mainstream society, became more appropriate.

The crucial issue in the politics of assimilation became that of the necessity of devising machinery to absorb the hitherto rejected minority group. It required the glossing over of differences and the elimination of the more vital elements of the culture of the minority group.

Parliamentary debate henceforth addressed this problem. Whereas, until the mid-1960's, governments had created differences between White society and Aborigines, erecting boundaries to exclude the latter, now differences could not be tolerated. Formerly, the total world of meaning of Aboriginal people was nihilated; in changed circumstances, operating under a policy of assimilation, Aboriginal people were to be recognized as citizens. If, however, they attempted to assert their rights as "human beings", such activity called into question the theory and practice, the world of meaning of the dominant group, and could not be tolerated. "Political" activity of Aboriginal people (that is, activity to bring about change in their circumstances) had to be nihilated, while at the same time, as individuals, Aboriginal people were to be assimilated:

Instances of this particular focus for nihilation may be found, for example, in speeches made in Parliament. In 1967, a referendum addressed to the people of Australia relating to the transfer of responsibility concerning Aboriginal Affairs from the states to the Federal sphere was supported. The year following the referendum, W.C. Wentworth, at that time Minister for Social Services and Aboriginal Affairs, was posed a question in Parliament relating to the activities of Aborigines seeking their rights; these activities were categorized negatively as "black power". Wentworth repudiated the possibility of Aboriginal options different from those of White society:

> I am aware of the disruptive attempts of certain people to create differences of opinion and outlook between our Aboriginal people and the people of white descent. I deplore these efforts. I deplore entirely the efforts of certain people to create in Australia as they have succeeded in creating in the United States, differences that could lead to violence. I assure the Honourable Member and the House that the Government will do everything in its power to provide for the advancement of our Aboriginal people, and to ensure that they receive justice in every way and to prevent the emergence of conditions that could be used as an excuse for creating differences in the Australian community. The government regards the Aboriginals as Australians in the same sense as all other Australian citizens (Commonwealth of Australia Parliamentary Debates, 1968, 58:886).

The fact that Wentworth needed to make the statement - "The government regards the Aboriginals as Australians in the same sense as all other Australian citizens" - shows two things:

1. The Aborigines had previously NOT been regarded in this way.
2. The aborigines were now NOT to be different. They were to be assimilated. But they were to be assimilated on White terms. (It is revealing that Wentworth twice used the possessive "our" when referring to Aborigines).

From such an assimilationist perspective, it is not surprising that the assertion of Aboriginality, manifested in the setting up of a Black Embassy in Canberra in 1972, was seen as threatening the dominant group as it went counter to the mechanisms of therapy. The exercise of rights by the minority group had to be redefined in negative terms by the dominant group so that it could be rejected. This was achieved by categorizing the setting up of the Aboriginal embassy as evidence of black power, a concept which was raised as a spectre, and condemned; assimilation was proposed as an antidote. That is, Aboriginal stirrings would be contained within mainstream society. Those who continued to seek human rights would have their world of meaning nihilated, by being categorized negatively by the dominant group. Mackay, speaking on this issue in Parliament, made it clear that those Aborigines who demanded rights were no longer to be "Aborigines", but were given a new, negative redefinition. Their activity was deemed to originate from "apostles of class hatred" (i.e. communists).[23]

> . . . at our very doors the apostles of class and race hatred have stirred up many good people to support a cause which is aimed at the creation of apartheid and race friction.
>
> The government is not prepared to see a separate race within a race developed in Australia with an embassy from the Aborigines to the Government of Australia as though this were a foreign power.

> Like all other groups within our widening society, we welcome their participation and their political aspirations as part of a family, not as aliens holding the nation to ransom (Commonwealth Hansard, 1972).

Assimilation now meant the assimilation of political, as well as cultural, activity. The Aboriginal people were to be "part of a family". Any activity which questioned the values of the dominant society was "alien". To accomplish the therapeutic intent of incorporation into the White family, political activity had to be nihilated. In the instance quoted, the credibility of the Aborigines' grievances was further destroyed by aligning them, not only with Communist-inspired apostles of class and race hatred, but with Labor party politicians. Mackay continued his speech.

> But once again Labour stands, in most of its expressions, with the apostles of radical and even violent action to divide and denigrate this nation in our own eyes and in the esteem of the world (Ibid: 1973).

In sum, the notion of the exercising of human rights by Aborigines as a group was nihilated. Therapy was proposed as the appropriate conceptual machinery to control Aborigines. The form of therapy was to assimilate the Aboriginal people "into the same customs, beliefs, hopes and loyahies".[24] The beneficiaries were to be the majority group who would thus be freed of the criticism of an outgroup. It can be argued that physical assimilation and political assimilation are aimed at achieving the same ends.

The seeking of rights was offensive in that it called into question the policies and practices of mainstream society. Nevertheless, the very seeking of rights had led to a transformation of policy. Aborigines were no longer to be segregated, but were to be contained by becoming "part of a family". However, as a family has rights by ascription, not by achievement, the seeking of rights by Aboriginal people in the political arena demonstrated clearly that, over a period of two hundred years, such rights had been denied by mainstream society. It was an affront to White society for Aboriginal people to demonstrate this openly by claiming such rights.

The incorporation of Aborigines into mainstream society was predicated upon the nihilation of the world of meaning of Aborigines. The same strategy may be observed in ,the assimilation of Aboriginal activists into Government positions where activism can be contained.[25] Rowley (1971a:35) gave it as his view that assimilation in practice was an "effort to train the Aboriginal to make him less offensive to whites". He could have added that it was a mechanism for absorbing any criticism or opposition which might call into question the world of the dominant society.

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

> South Australia is the best state in Australia. Don Dunstan's the

> one that helped us up the ladder, our Premier. He's put us on the map, mate. We's Kangaroos and emus, before that. We got counted since them. They counted every Bullock and sheep in Australia but they never counted Aborigines. See? (Elphick, 1977:100).

The sixties Began in South Australia with a reversion to earlier policies of segregation. New reserves were established (Amata in 1961; Davenport in 1965); missions were transferred to government control (Gerard in 1961; Koonibba in 1963). Gale (1972:48) asserted that this development mirrored the policies of segregation developed in the first years of settlement. It may also be argued that the focus on reserves, seen as a return to the former policies of "apartheid", constituted an alarmed response on the part of mainstream society to the discernment of an emerging consciousness of Aboriginal identity on the part of the Aboriginal people.

We have seen that, at the Federal level, when the consciousness of Aboriginal identity began to crystallize and form a basis for action, the policies and practices of two centuries were re-examined, and new policies of assimilation projected, together with legitimating theorizing. In this developing situation, the government of South Australia opted initially for a policy of retrogression. It did not seek to defend the world of mainstream society by embracing the machinery of therapy with its corollary of assimilation, and the consequent need to de-emphasize differences. Instead, in order to protect the world of meaning of mainstream society, South Australia chose to establish further reserves and to continue the segregation of the Aboriginal people. This form of control was, however, to be abruptly terminated in the mid-1960's. A newly elected Labor Government set Aboriginal affairs on an entirely new path. Rowley (1971a:409) saw the policies of this government as the most daring and positive innovations of any Australian government.

Legislation in South Australia Before the 1960's had, in general, codified and legitimated practice. In the mid-1960's legislation was introduced not to legitimate, but to change practice. Laws were passed regarding land rights for Aborigines.[26] Anti-discrimination laws were aimed at changing the practices, if not the attitudes, of the White population towards Aborigines.[27] For the first time, there was a move away from policies aimed at the control and containment of the Aboriginal people towards policies requiring consultation and negotiation. Auntie Glad Elphick recounts how Don Dunstan, who later became Premier of the State, was instrumental in setting up a Legal Aid Service for the ABoriginal people. He was the first White person, in all her long life, who directed discussion about Aboriginal affairs By suggesting the need, and appropriateness, for consultation with Aboriginal people. "Why don't we ask the ABoriginal people themselves what they think?" At that time, to Aboriginal ears, this was the most incredible, extraordinary response.[28] A new era had begun wherein Aboriginal people were seen as adults who had opinions worth consulting, who had a right to autonomy over their lives. For the first time, theorizing about a positive ABoriginal identity was offered by government.

By the seventies, a new policy towards ABorigines had been established.

King, the South Australian Minister for Aboriginal Affairs in Dunstan's government, issued a statement in 1971 entitled The Shaping of a New Aboriginal Policy in South Australia. He repudiated the official policies of assimilation held by the previous Liberal governments and maintained that,

> The final wrong would be to attempt to destroy the Aborigine's racial and cultural identity and to turn him into a pseudo-white man. A most encouraging sign is the development among Aborigines of the desire to identify with their own people and to be proud of their race and its culture.
>
> This desire of educated Aborigines to be with their own people, rather than escape from their environment into the white community, is a most hopeful indication of the rapid recovery of self-respect of the Aboriginal people (King, 1971-1972:756-759).

To make it possible for the Aborigines to "identify with their own people"[29], but yet remain within White society, King proposed a policy radically different from that operating at the Federal level. Assimilation was to give way to integration. He defined the policy of integration as

> . . . the right of the Aboriginal people to live in our community on fully equal terms but retaining, if they so desire, a separate and identifiable 50 Aboriginal heritage and culture (King, 1971-1972: 756).

King's statement supported the politicization of Aborigines, a stance totally at variance with the policy of the Federal (Liberal) Government. He advocated that there should be active encouragement of a "sophisticated and articulate Aboriginal public opinion." He looked to the development of autonomous government on reserves, and to the participation of Aborigines in the political community.

The policy of integration put forward by King was a policy that, at the conceptual level, neither nihilated the Aboriginal world of meaning nor employed therapy to assimilate this world. Rather, such policy provided the possibility for the recognition of an alternative Aboriginal identity located within mainstream society.

The policy made a major impact on "official" theorizing about Aborigines; for the first time mainstream society projected a positive psychological world with which Aboriginal people could interact and which they could appropriate. They now had the possibility of locating themselves, and being located by the White world, within a positive Aboriginal identity.

INTO THE SEVENTIES - THE FEDERAL LEVEL

When the Labor Party came into power at the Federal level in 1973, policies

which had been developed in South Australia concerning Aboriginal affairs became official party policy. The platform statement of the Federal Labor Party proposed legislation against all forms of discrimination and the promotion of the rights of Aborigines with regard to social services, land rights and health - all new policies:

> . . . Aboriginal people were to receive the standard *rate of pay* for employment and the same industrial protection as other Australians, a dramatic departure from practice.
>
> . . . *Educational opportunities* were to be provided that were in no way inferior to those of the general community. Pre-school and adult education were to be provided as broadly as possible.
>
> . . . The philosophy underlying these programmes was that of *self-determination* for the Aboriginal people, and the exercise of a greater autonomy in all areas of their lives.

In one sense, such a policy was integrated into the overall thrust of Labor policy, which was one of providing equality of opportunity for all those in society who were disadvantaged in one form or another. However, the policy for Aborigines went beyond this. It recognized the need for positive discrimination. For example, special provision for employment was to be provided in regions where there was a concentration of Aboriginal people. Above all, the policy recognized in positive terms the right of Aboriginal people to find their identity within an Aboriginal world of meaning. Every Australian child was to be taught the history and culture of Aboriginal Australians, as an integral part of the history of Australia. The Labor Party, although in office only a short time, introduced massive legislation at the Commonwealth level. This legislation objectivated a world of meaning about Aboriginal identity, laying down guidelines which were inherited by the Liberal/National Country Party Coalition in 1975. The policy of self-determination initiated by the Labor Party was modified by the Liberal/National Country Party Coalition to one of self-management in its platform policy of 1975.[51] There was no emphasis in this policy, as there was in the South Australian policy, on the active encouragement of the politicization of Aboriginal groups. The possibility of structural differentiation was not entertained. Nevertheless there was a statement that recognized differences in the life-style of different groups of Aboriginal people.

The preamble noted that:

> . . . the life styles of Aborigines will, of necessity, vary between those living a more tribalized state in or near their traditional lands and those living in or near towns or cities. Policies must therefore reflect this fact (Guidelines, Liberal/National Party Policy, 1975).

As in the case of the Labor Government, there was positive support for the retention of Aboriginal values and Aboriginal culture.

> - Aboriginal values are an intrinsic part of Australia's culture and heritage. We are part of each other. Without mutual respect and support for each other's cultural integrity, we cannot secure our personal identities (ibid.)

The theorizing was positive in its tone. The identity offered to Aboriginal people, within the limitations of the conceptualization of the policies, was not one of socialization into negative identity. There was recognition, as in the case of the Labor Party, that Aborigines are not a monolithic group; there was recognition of the need to leave options open so that the people might choose an identity. Thus, the policy statements of both political parties in the 1970's represented a new era for Aboriginal people in so far as government policy and legislation was concerned.

The question must be asked whether the statement in the Liberal Party Platform "we are part of each other" was merely a sentiment, or whether it is possible to establish that it is integrated into overall theorizing. In particular, is the notion of differentiation of Aborigines into worlds where they "retain their racial identity and traditional life-style, or where desired adopt partially or wholly a European life-style" supported by other theorizing?

The possibility of testing whether such a policy may be seen as rhetoric rather than reality may be found in examining whether or not the assumptions made, and the policies projected, can be meshed into overall policy without losing credibility. The application of such a test is provided for by the fact that at the same time as positive "theorizing" was incorporated into party policies, a new emphasis was being projected relating to the conceptualization of Australian society; Australia was about to take on a new identity as a multicultural society.

By the early 1970's many different immigrant groups had attained their particular ethnic identity. This occurred for various reasons, some connected with language, some with religion, some with political affiliation, some with social mobility, giving higher status to individuals within the group which allowed them to set themselves up as definers of reality over and against mainstream society. The promotion of ethnic identities, added to a vigorous ethnic press, led politicians to believe that the "ethnic vote" would have considerable power at the ballot box. Politicians in certain "ethnic" areas decided that, in order to retain their seats, it was imperative to recognize ethnic groups and support their causes.[32] Thus a change in the conceptualization of Australian society to accomodate immigrants as an integral part of the "world" of Anglo-Saxon[33] society was forced upon politicians. Changes in government attitudes were attributed unashamedly

> . . . to growing awareness within all major political parties in recent years of the needs of migrant communities and of the

> importance of the migrant vote, particularly in marginal electorates (Commonwealth Education Portfolio, 1978).

Australian society was to be reconceptualized as a multicultural society where immigrants were not to be marginalized as the "strangers" outside mainstream society. New theorizing would integrate them within this society. But how were Aboriginal people to be located in this multicultural society?

CONTEMPORARY POLICY - AUSTRALIA AS A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

As was the case with Aborigines, policy towards immigrants was initially one of assimilation. By 1972, however, at the same time that King was announcing integration as policy for Aborigines in South Australia, Lynch, the then Minister for Immigration in the Federal Liberal Government, also announced integration as a new policy for immigrants:

> The earlier desire to make stereotype Australians of the newcomers has been set aside. The use of integration instead of assimilation is not mere semantics; it is the outward sign of a fundamental change in the attitude of the Australian Government and people (Lynch, 1972:10).

What Lynch did not state was that the fundamental change in the attitude of the Australian Government was due to a perception that political pressure could be brought to bear on the government by migrant groups. The policy was a legitimation, of a de facto situation brought about by immigrant groups constructing an ethnic identity. While policy, however, could be reformulated and restated at the government level, Lynch's proclamation that the policy of integration of immigrant groups also showed a change of attitude on the part of Australian people was utopian in the extreme. Changes in practice can be legislated for (e.g. practices of discrimination can be penalised). It is not possible to legislate for changes of attitude. It is even less realistic to speak of changes in the attitudes of people simply following government reconceptualization of particular issues. Nevertheless, from this date, policies regarding immigrant communities (redefined as ethnic groups) must be considered within the framework of a multicultural Australia, a notion that was stressed again by the Liberal Party when it returned to power in 1975.

In 1978, the Prime Minister (Malcolm Fraser), tabling in Parliament the Galbally Report on post arrival services for immigrants, made the following pronouncement:

> Australia is at a critical stage in developing a cohesive, united, multicultural nation. Further steps to encourage multi-culturalism are needed . . . [the government] will foster the retention of the cultural heritage of different ethnic groups and promote inter-

> cultural understanding (Fraser, 1978:2728).

It was Fraser's view (Ibid:2731) that schools were "the key element in achieving such a goal".

Recognition of an emerging Aboriginal identity did not have its origins (as did that of immigrant identity) in a response to the political realities of the time. At the Federal level, Aborigines had no vote in most states until the referendum. It had been advantageous to a mainstream society to exclude them from a common framework; Aboriginal people were a group without power in every sense - unlike the immigrant groups many of which were coherent and highly politicized.

In order to investigate how theorizing on the part of government about multicultural attitudes found issue in practice, it is proposed to examine the particular "world" in which the effect of the policy of multiculturalism can be clearly discerned, namely the "world" of education which Fraser saw as the key element in achieving policies of multiculturalism, and to put into context theorizing about Aboriginal identity within the development of this world.

GOVERNMENT POLICY ON MULTICULTURALISM IN EDUCATION

The urgency of promoting multiculturalism in education is shown by the number and status of the committees appointed and the speed with which they presented reports and with which their recommendations were implemented. These general issues will not be surveyed here. Rather, the focus will be on whether or not the policy of integration for Aborigines was itself subsumed, in its initial formulations, into overall policy for a "new" Australia.

One source of government theorizing, against which policy towards Aborigines may be tested, is found in the Commonwealth Education Portfolio discussion paper of 1978. This paper set out to adumbrate the means of establishing formal machinery to implement the recommendations of the Galbally Report (Gabally, 1978), particularly with regard to its recommendations for education. The paper devoted one page (p. 4) to a description of the Aboriginal situation, but then was able to ignore the participation of the Aboriginal people in a multicultural society as "the Government has acknowledged the unique position of the Aboriginals by the establishment of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs".

On page 8, the statement was made:

> The conceptual framework for education for a multicultural society must include *a11 groups* in Australian society. There is a popular tendency to think of multicultural education as relating only to immigrants (emphasis added).

Mention of "all groups" in society did not refer to Aborigines but to established Anglo-Saxon groups who were to be encouraged to appreciate the culture and customs of the immigrants, as is made clear by the footnote:

> The Government has accepted that special educational provisions are necessary for the Aboriginal group.

Aborigines were to be given special help, placed in a unique position; at the same time they were placed outside the conceptual framework of a multicultural society in a footnote. They were prevented from locating themselves within mainstream society by a boundary-from-without.[34] Furthermore, they were excluded as a single, monolithic group in contra-distinction to the official government policy, which, at the level of theorizing, offered various possibilities for the location of Aboriginal identity within the total framework of Australian society. There is no doubt that some tradition-oriented Aboriginal people did reject the values of White society, and by their own volition excluded themselves from a multicultural society. There is also no doubt that some Aboriginal people wished to include themselves in mainstream White society, but were prevented from doing this by the way in which this new society was conceptualized.[35] Watts (56-57), in a study of 900 students receiving Aboriginal Study Grants, found that 54 per cent preferred to identify themselves as Aboriginal and Australian (despite the fact that grants are given only to those who identify themselves as Aborigines). Aboriginal leaders in the 1970's opted for a nomenclature which would integrate Aboriginal people within the wider group. In 1975, when a Central Australian Aborigines Congress was established, Neville Perkins outlined the reasons for adopting the term "Aboriginal Australian", which he saw both as promoting the notion of uniqueness, and of allowing "for people of Aboriginal descent to identify broadly as both Aboriginal and Australians within the context of modern Australian society".

In the same year as the publication of the Commonwealth Education Portfolio discussion paper (1978), a ministerial committee was appointed to make recommendations on the distribution of funds for multicultural education. This committee, in presenting its report, stated:

> Australia has always been a multicultural society. Even before the European settlement the continent was inhabited by the Aboriginal groups each with their own distinct and different languages and cultures (Committee on Multicultural Education, 1979:5).

With these few words, which can only be seen as pure rhetoric (the use of the word multicultural in the quote bears no resemblance to the use of the word throughout the rest of the text), Aborigines were dismissed from inclusion in the "new"multicultural society.[36]

Manifestly, the situation of the Aboriginal people, their loss of culture and their loss of identity, places them in a category quite different from that of immigrants to Australia. Aborigines recognize this; they see their case on all counts as different from that of immigrants. (They are not "New Australians"; they are the *original* Australians). In a paradoxical way, the report of the ministerial committee pointed to the unique position of the Aboriginal people but recognized it by excluding Aborigines from further mention!

Nevertheless, if Aborigines are to be seen as part of a multicultural society, if policies of integration for Aborigines advanced by the government in power are not to be mere rhetoric ("we are part of each other"), then efforts must be made to conceptualize Australian society in a way that does not exclude Aborigines.

In sum, Aboriginal people were excluded from the conceptualization of mainstream society at the same time that they were presented with an ideology of self-identification/self-management; it must be judged that the Party Platform of the Liberal Governments concerning multiculturalism in the 1970's, in seeking to integrate *immigrant* groups in the newly emerging multicultural Australia, at the same time had the consequences of working against the integration of *Aboriginal* people.

A further reflection of contemporary theorizing may be found in the influential report of the Ethnic Affairs Commission of New South Wales, also published in 1978. The Ethnic Affairs Commission related the promotion of multiculturalism to the maintenance of a secure identity:

> The long search for an Australian identity is taking a new turn. A new identity is now emerging through huge shifts in community values, taste, style, norms. (Ethnic Affairs Commission of New Wouth Wales, 1978:1).

The Commission, too, did not see Aboriginal people as part of this newly emerging Australian identity.

> Regarding the Australian Aborigines the Commission felt during its first year of operation, that it had neither the competence nor the resources even to start tackling the first issue; - that is, whether the Aborigines would like to be included in the work of the Commission (Ibid: 5).

In this document, once again Aborigines were not seen as part of a multicultural Australia. The Commissioners, like so many before them, felt they were faced with an intractable problem. Their reaction reflected so many other stances towards Aborigines; Aborigines are Aborigines, not really Australians.

A further institution which has the potential to be a powerful "reality definer" for immigrants and for Aborigines alike is found in the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs, established in 1979. The Institute addressed education as its first major issue. It came to the conclusion that the maintenance of aspects of ethnic culture was not incompatible with identification as an Australian. The stated aims of its document were to promote a cohesive Australian society by developing among Australian people an awareness and understanding of the diverse cultures resulting from the immigration of various ethnic groups. By using a conceptualization of society which focussed on ethnic groups as immigrants it was not possible for the Institute to include Aborigines in its concern. It declared itself ready to co-operate with Aboriginal groups. It is

not surprising however, that the latter, as they were NOT immigrants, and because the conceptualization of the 1970's separated them out of the newly developing cohesive society, Aborigines were forced into a separate identity.

As, by general consensus of policy makers in multicultural Australia in the 1970's, Aborigines were not part of the new multicultural "Australian" identity, the logical deduction was that they had to find a separate Aboriginal identity. Policies which act to exclude, either by omission or commission, must be seen to erect a boundary-from-without. The conclusion must be reached that, except for the brief period when a Labor Government was in power, despite the granting of citizenship to Aborigines. they were nevertheless not seen in the theorizing of government or of official organizations as eligible for therapy and appropriate subjects for full integration into a multicultural society.

The exclusion of Aborigines from the newly emerging multicultural identity was cemented by the decisions about the locus of administration for Aboriginal affairs. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs was initially set up to further Aboriginal interests. Bureaucracies, however, once established, take on a life of their own. It can be argued that Aborigines were separated from mainstream multicultural Australia not only because of their "uniqueness", but because their conceptual exclusion was necessary to the maintenance of the operations of a government department.

> Separate administrative arrangements apply to those areas and as the Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs made clear in November 1979, in his second reading speech on the Bill to establish the Institute (of Multicultural Affairs) it would not overlap the functions of the Department of Aboriginal Affairs or the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs, 1980:v).

The basis for the exclusion of Aboriginal people may very well be traced to the (unintended) consequences of policies concerning other ethnic groups and to the consequences of the reification of the activities of government departments.[37] All three contributing factors discussed lead to the conclusion that, in the early theorizing of those involved in multicultural education, the Aboriginal people were not located within the conceptualization of a multicultural Australia.

The exclusion of Aboriginal people in the 1970's through a "boundary-from-without," nevertheless paradoxically worked to the advantage of Aboriginal people in the construction of Aboriginal identity, as the possibility of disparate groups of Aboriginal people becoming more cohesive and constructing a framework for building positive identity was facilitated by policies which acted to exclude Aborigines, while "theorizing" about them positively. Indeed, the very fact that mainstream theorizing about Aborigines since the 1970's has been positive, has further acted to separate Aboriginal people. This consequence is inherent in the conceptualization of policies of self-management/ self-determination projected by government because, if the "uniqueness" of

Aborigines is accepted, and the framework of a multicultural society excluding Aborigines is also accepted, then Aborigines are forced into exercising their autonomy outside this framework. As a consequence, the grounds for declaring Aboriginal activities aimed at promoting their autonomy (formerly designated as creating a "race within a race") are removed.

Certainly, Aboriginal people seized the concept of self-determination and interacted with it to build a new, positive world of meaning for themselves. The tradition-oriented people express this by saying "The marrngu are the boss! " This is used both as a rallying cry, and as a firm basis for building a world of meaning in which Aboriginal people exert autonomy (Jordan, 1985: 181ff).

On all sides, Aboriginal people at every level in society and in every sphere of action, such as health care, legal rights, and educational policy-making, are asserting "We will do it ourselves". It is no longer accepted without question that White people will work for Aboriginal people as before. Rather, today the meaning of working for Aboriginal people has changed. Aboriginal people employ White staff to "work for" them - in Aboriginal independent schools, in legal services, in health care. The role of the non-Aboriginal is to implement the policy of the Aboriginal people; White people work for Aboriginal people, or with Aboriginal people to further the aims of the latter.

In sum, while Aboriginal people are physically located within a multicultural society, more and more they are entering into situations which are structurally alternative, and within which they have greater control of their futures. While this was not by choice originally, social interactions have produced a situation where the Aboriginal voice, expressing political, cultural, physical and educational needs, is heard.

The legislation noted in South Australia in 1834 has turned full circle. The Federal Government Land Rights Act was proclaimed in 1977; instead of Land Acts dispossessing the people, legislation returning territory to the Aboriginal people is currently, in the mid-1980's, under consideration: in most states this is favourable to Aboriginal wishes. Aboriginal people are in positions of leadership in Aboriginal organizations;[38] positions within government, within the Public Service, have been identified as appropriately filled by Aboriginal people.

The positive theorizing of the governments in the 1970's has borne fruit in the 1980's as the Aboriginal people have been given, and have taken, responsibility for their own development, and incipient, rudimentary theorizing has become fact - "We will do it ourselves".

One example, appropriate to the present discussion, is the role played in education.

NATIONAL ABORIGINAL EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The Minister for Education, Senator Carrick, in announcing the establishment of the NAEC in 1977, outlined the role of the committee as giving advice to the Department of Education on Aboriginal needs, and ways of meeting these

needs, and advising the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and indeed all instrumentalities concerned with education. The Committee was to assist the Department in monitoring existing programmes and researching and proposing new programmes.

The Committee has more than fulfilled these expectations; it has carried out a series of evaluations on existing projects (e.g. the Black community school in Townsville, the Aboriginal Community College in Adelaide etc.). In 1979, it researched the need for Aboriginal teachers and the opportunity for teacher training for Aboriginal people in response to the National Inquiry into Education; it articulated and disseminated.NAEC policy in the area.[39] It has clearly stated its Aims and Objectives for Aboriginal Education in a widely disseminated policy statement. It researched the involvement and needs of Aboriginal people in Higher Education, and produced a comprehensive document to guide the government in the allocation of funds for the 1985-1987 triennium (Aborigines and Tertiary Education - A framework for the 1985-87 triennium). Together with the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission it mounted a review of support systems for Aboriginal students in higher Education (Jordan, 1984).

Government Departments have heeded and implemented NAEC policy. It is undeniable that great steps, indeed leaps, have been made in self-management for Aboriginal people since the 1970's in the area of education.

Nevertheless, one issue still remains: the Schools Commission (1982) advocated that Aboriginal people take full responsibility not only for policy making in education but also for funding. This has not yet happened. Clearly the "golden rule" applies - "He who has the gold, makes the rules". This is true of most situations in the White world; research is carried out in those areas which are funded, and therefore which, by definition, meet the needs of the funding group. Aboriginal progress towards self-management, self-determination, will always be controlled, in the final analysis, by those who control the funds.

Hence, while lauding the progress made, from a sociological viewpoint we must return to the notion of how minority groups are managed by mainstream groups. In education, the consultation of Governments with Aboriginal people is real; the Aboriginal voice is clear and coherent and it is heard. Alternative structures exist for policy making, alternative schools to meet the needs of Aboriginal people are encouraged and are flourishing. There is, then, evidence of structural differentiation. Until, however, funding is controlled by Aboriginal people, the issues discussed above relating the mechanism of therapy as a form of control of minority groups by the dominant groups in society must be addressed.

It will be recalled that Rowley saw assimilation as a means of controlling Aboriginal people and making them more acceptable to Whites. The question must be asked whether the assimilation of Aboriginal leaders into government instrumentalities without the power of funding to implement their policies is not also acting as a form of therapy, a means of controlling[40] a minority group, so that, while they are given (limited) powers of self-management, their radicalism[41] is at the same time absorbed, and, paradoxically, Aboriginal people

and their alternative structures are integrated into Australian multicultural identity.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Elkin, 1932a, 19S2b, 1953, 1959a, 1959b, 1960; C.H. Berndt, 1961; R.M. Berndt, 1959, 1961, 1972, 1981; Chase, 1980; Fink, 1955; Tonkinson, 1974, Berndt and Phillips, 1973.

2. See, for example, Dawson, 1969; de Lacey, 1971;de Lemos, 1969; Douglas, 1968; Duncan, 1969; Gault, 1969; Kearney, 1966; McElwain, 1969; Milliken, 1969; Nurcombe and Moffitt, 1970; Seagrim, 1971; Teasdale and Katz, 1968.

3. See, for example, Berry, 1970; Cawte, Bianchi and Kiloh, 1968; Nurcombe and Cawte, 1967.

4. See, for example, Elphick, 1971" Gilbert, 1973, 1977; Perkins, 1975; personal communications during field work, 1980/81.

5. The census has never operated to reflect the second part of this definition (namely that a persons's self-identification must be legitimated by others).

6. "Theorizing", as the concept is used here, occurs at various levels. Berger and Luckmann (1966:110ff.) discuss the process of legitimation as a form of theorizing.

> Legitimation is best described as a "second order" objectivation of meaning. Legitimation produces new meanings that serve to integrate the meanings already attached to disparate institutional processes. The function of legitimation is to make objectively available and *subjectively* plausible the first order objectivations that have been institutionalized. The lowest form of legitimation is contained in, and transmitted through, language.

Berger and Luckmann (1966:122) call this incipient theorizing. C. Wright Mills (1963:441) refers to vocabularies of motives that canalize thought.

Rudimentary forms of theorizing, according to Berger and Luckmann (1966:122), "are highly pragmatic explanatory schemes relating to concrete actions."

Such rudimentary forms of theorizing may be found in every day statements of belief, of "recipe" knowledge (Schutz, 1971:72ff).

Explicit theories characterize a third level of theorizing. The highest level of theorizing is found in the construction of a symbolic universe, the latter defined by Berger and Luckmann (1966: i13)as

> . . . bodies of theoretical tradition that integrate different provinces of meaning and encompass the institutional order in a symbolic totality.

The identity of individuals is dependent upon their ability to locate themselves within a world of meaning wherein they recognize their self-sameness and continuity and perceive that others affirm this recognition. If the Aboriginal person wishes to locate himself in an Aboriginal world, then the legitimation of this world, at all the levels of theorizing, must make this world plausible to him, so that it offers a real possibility of identity, that is, location in a world of meaning that has characteristics that are specifically Aboriginal.

7. Parallel examples may be found in Australia. For example, in the early eighties, the unemployed were categorized as dole bludgers. The world of meaning of the employed was threatened by the world of the unemployed; the latter was then given negative connotations by the dominant (employed) group.

8. See Gale, 1972:42; Rowley, 1971a:409.

9. See Jenkin, 1979:25.

10. Contrary to popular mythology, the Aboriginal people were not passive; they resisted the usurpation of their land. A correspondent to the South Australian of June 16, 1838, observed that:

> . . . the whole of the districts surveyed under the Act of Parliament and allotted without any reserve to the colonists were occupied by the natives; indeed, the more intelligent part of the natives themselves have often asserted, that the land, for instance, on which Adelaide is situated, belongs to the "blackfellow" (Jenkin, Ibid:5).

11. Report of the Commissioner of Police, 5 June, 1885, (Jenkin, 1979:63).

12. See J. Homer (in F.S. Stevens, ed., 1972:211-227).

13. The Advertiser, Adelaide 13 December 1909 commented on the speech of David Ngunaitponi, one of the Port McLeay Aborigines in Adelaide, in the following way:

> But it was when the "adult" David took the platform and spoke of

> the tradition of his people, of their knowledge of astronomy, their intimacy with the science of botany, their bushcraft and folklore that the audience gave most attention . . . this civilized native spoke of the similarity of Greek mythology and the Aboriginal fiction (quoted in Jenkin, 1979:226).
>
> David has astonished the professors of Sydney and Melbourne by the breadth of his intelligence and his capacity for absorbing knowledge, and he has been a recognized authority on that branch of knowledge known as ballistics... He has always been interested in mechanics. He made an improvement on ordinary sheep shears which proved very promising (quoted in Jenkin, 1979:234-5).

Ngunaitponi was not alone in his achievements.

14. Jenkin, 1979:240; photographs, South Australian Archives.

15. Berger and Luckmann (1966:85-89) discuss the process of "sedimentation" of knowledge, whereby particular experiences become "part of the common stock of knowledge. Language becomes the depository of a large aggregate of collective sedimentations, which can be acquired monothetically, that is, as cohesive wholes and without reconstructing their original process of formation."

    The lack of blame attached to killing Aboriginal people thus continued into this century as exemplified by public statements which treated Aborigines as less than human. A certain Miss Cantle (1978:1) a missionary working at Port Augusta, relates how, at a town council meeting in Port Augusta in 1937, "one councillor stood up and gave his opinion that the best thing to do was to turn a machine gun on the whole camp and wipe it right out, people and all". The contemporary sedimentation of theorizing about Aborigines as less than human may be seen also as late as the seventies in an anecdote related by Turnbull, (1972: 233):

> People selling buttons in Melbourne streets for an Aborigine cause not long ago were astounded by the savagery of the answers given by some of those asked to buy - "I'd rub the lot out", "Give 'em bait" and so on, and these people who had probably never seen an Aborigine.

    The very use of the word "bait" categorizes Aborigines as animals. The comments reveal that extermination, as a permitted activity, and the typification of Aborigines as less than human, has been sedimented into the common stock of knowledge of people far removed from those who actually did give Aboriginal people "bait". The force of racist policies of extermination and the stereotypes which supported them may be shown in

their persistence throughout Australia, and may be found even in the deliberations of the Federal Parliament. As late as 1969, W.C. Wentworth, then Minister for Social Services and Aboriginal Affairs, replying in Parliament to a question concerning statements made by a member of the Government, the member for Capricornia, was forced to admit that, while he believed the Government would not support the statement, the member had in fact stated that Aborigines were second-class citizens, and that therefore they should submit to sterilization, and that moral compulsion should be applied to make the people submit (Wentworth, 1969). It is not extravagant to categorize sterilization as a latter day form of extermination.

16. Aboriginal people interviewed at Strelley as part of a research project on the construction of Aboriginal identity (Jordan, 1983)remember graphically being present at incidents of mass Mllings. The people there believe that the giving of grog was also part of a government policy of extermination (see also Rowley, 1971a, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society).*

17. Berger defines a symbolic universe as "the matrix of all socially objectivated and subjectively real meanings". He goes on to say "The entire historic society and the entire biography of the individual are seen as events taking place *within* this universe... The symbolic universe provides order for the subjective apprehension of biographical experience (Berger and Luckmann, 1966: ll4ff).

18. Gale (1972:61)states: The contemporary situation whereby Aborigines were isolated in the precincts of Christian missions appeared at the time to be workable and useful. It was therefore natural that it should have become codified and perpetuated by the 1911 Aborigines Act. Indeed, the idea of the maintenance of Aborigines on reserves lay at the very core of this Act, the effect of which was to set Aborigines apart as a separate group in the community and, in contrast to the earlier attitudes of laissez-faire, to legislate for them in a rigid and paternalistic way.

19. An Aborigine who had been declared "exempt" could not visit a reserve without permission. Mrs. Elphick, an "important woman", states that she had to obtain permission to attend her mother's funeral; another family negotiated for three days to take their mother to a reserve for burial.

20. Nihilation by banishment has been used consistently to manage the problems of those having some form of stigma. Usually this stigma is allied to physical attributes. However, in Western Australia in the 1950's, the unemployed were seen as being stigmatized and were removed from sight into camps outside the city boundaries.

21. See Rowley, 1971a:passim; 1971b:22.

22. See Jenkin, 1979:246.

23. Similarly, in the forties, marches in the streets by Aborigines seeking recognition of their rights were categorized as Nazi inspired.

24. See p. 25, Aboriginal Welfare Conference, Darwin, 1963 (Commonwealth of Australia Parliamentary Papers, 1963).

25. Tradition-oriented people make this very point. They claim that marta-marta (Part-European people) cannot make a treaty on their behalf with the government. Marta-marta working in Government agencies are part of the government.

26. Aboriginal Lands Trust Act, 1965.

27. Prohibition of Discrimination Act, 1966.

28. Personal communication from Mrs. Elphick.

29. It is interesting (and revealing, as an example of sedimentation of knowledge) to note that, despite King's enlightened attitude, he still thought of Aborigines as identifying with "their own people". The Aborigines to whom he referred were part-Aborigines, and therefore also part-European. It is a commentary on the perceptions of White society that contemporary theorizers, even the most enlightened, assume that Aborigines should identify with the race of their black parent rather than their White parent.

30. It should be noted that King made the assumption that the urban Aboriginal people possessed a "separate and identifiable Aboriginal heritage and culture" that they could maintain. This assumption must be questioned. Rather it is an identity that must be *reconstructed.*

31. In the major guidelines of the Liberal/National Party policy 1975, self-managernent was outlined in the following way:

    The Liberal and National Country Parties recognize that if a policy of self-management is to be effective, Aborigines must play a leading role in their affairs. This will include Aborigines playing a significant role:

    (a) in setting long term goals and objectives which the government should pursue and the programmes it should adopt in such areas as Aboriginal education, housing, health, employment and legal aid;

    (b) in setting the priorities for expenditure on Aboriginal affairs within the context of overall budget allocations, and

(c) in evaluating existing programmes and formulating new ones.

The following statements detailed the assumptions and aims in recognizing and promoting an Aboriginal identity:

- We recognize the fundamental fight of Aborigines to retain their racial identity and traditional life-style or where desired to adopt partially or wholly a European life-style;

- We will, within the limits of available finances fund programmes which develop Aboriginal self-sufficiency and which represent initiatives that Aborigines themselves believe will enhance their dignity, self-respect and self-reliance;

- We will promote cross-cultural understanding and co-operation by a continuing process of community education for all age groups to ensure a higher level of mutual toleration, trust and enterprise than has so far marked our history.

- A special obligation is also imposed upon us all to provide opportunities for Aborigines to preserve their traditions, languages and customs from further encroachment and destruction.

32. It is not asserted here that ethnic groups either had the power, or exerted the power to elect particular individuals or groups to parliament: it is merely recorded that politicians believed this way a factor at the time.

33. It must be noted that the dominant group in society has, in the 1980's, reconceptualized its own composition. The categorization of White/Anglo/Saxon/Protestant has given way to Anglo/Saxon/Celtic, to include the once despised Irish group. Clearly the ingroup has redefined itself over and against the minority group.

34. Isajiw (1974:122) highlights the importance of the notion of a boundary which excludes certain ethnic groups.

> Ethnicity is the result of a double boundary, a boundary from within, maintained by the socialization process, and a boundary from-without established by the process of intergroup relations . . . the basic difference lies in the external boundaries. It is not so much a matter of faster or slower assimilation or non-assimilation. More significantly, it is a matter of how the various ethnic groups are perceived and identified by the power-holding, policy-making and influence-exerting bodies of the two societies.

Barth (1969) saw the very existence of ethnic groups dependent upon

boundaries, rather than cultural features,

> The cultural features that signal the boundary may change and the cultural characteristics of the members may likewise be transformed, indeed even the organizational form of the group may change. Yet the continuing dichotomization between members and outsiders allows us to specify the nature of continuity and investigate the changing cultural form and context (Barth, 1969: 14).

35. It must be noted that, with regard to *funding,* a different source already existed for Aborigines. The question here is that of inclusion of Aboriginal people in *theorizing* about a multicultural society. The problem posed by separate funding is taken up later in this paper.

36. "The commitment of Australia's ethnic groups to maintaining aspects of their cultural heritage is clear, and this is not only compatible with, but supportive of identification with Australia . . . To fully realize Australia's potential, meet the responsibilities and reap the benefits inherent in the composition of our population, it is necessary that all Australians be afforded equality of opportunity to participate in the life of the nation and maintain their ethnic and cultural heritage within the law and accepted political framework... Education in Australia should embrace the teaching of English as a second language, the teaching of community languages and studies of ethnic and cultural diversity in Australia" (Australian Institute of Multi-Cultural Affairs, 1980:vii,7).

37. The term reification is used here to describe social constructs which, once established, take on a life of their own and act back upon society to constrain action.

38. See Watts (1981:58ff) for a full list of Aboriginal bodies, the date of establishment, their roles and functions, and the work carried out by them.

39. The acceptance of this policy was reaffirmed by the Minister for Education, Senator S. Ryan, in allocating funding in 1984.

40. It is not suggested that government instrumentalities *formulate* a policy intended to control but rather that, as discussed earlier, when the world of the dominant group is threatened by another "world of meaning" it must take steps to preserve its own world - usually either by nihilation or therapy.

41. Radicalism here is used in the same sense of "returning to the roots"; in this case returning to the root causes of Aboriginal disadvantage in society.

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