

from the 'quiet revolution'  
to 'crisis' in **australian  
indigenous affairs**

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On 26 March 2005, the national Indigenous organisation, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), formally came to end, its abolition the capstone of a much longer process initiated by the Howard government when it first assumed power in 1996. The process began rhetorically, with government ministers and the prime minister, John Howard, incessantly questioning the legacy of self-determination, and of Indigenous corporate, communal and individual capacity. By 2004, this critique had been institutionalised. Indigenous policy development, program and service delivery organised around the goal of 'practical reconciliation' was 'mainstreamed' into Indigenous-specific units within federal agencies. Shared responsibility agreements (SRAs) between the federal government and individual Indigenous communities formed the new basis for the distribution of discretionary federal funding. This 'whole of government' approach, together with the idea that Indigenous citizens and communities would be co-responsible for their own welfare, linked philosophical commitment and an underlying moral critique of Indigenous agency to institutional change. In 2005, shortly before the abolition of ATSIC, Senator Amanda Vanstone termed these changes 'a quiet revolution'.

Within a year the 'quiet revolution' had turned into a 'crisis'. The then new minister for Family and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Mal Brough, toured 'town camps' on the outskirts of Alice Springs and the 'long grass' in Darwin in the first half of May 2006—returning a week later to take part in one of the night patrols of the town camps. He and senior ministers in the government delivered an ongoing commentary for the benefit of the media decrying the 'dysfunction', 'violence', 'substance abuse', 'alcoholism', 'poverty', 'unemployment' and critically poor health of these Indigenous communities. The public

scandal accompanying the communiqués regarding the plight of these and other rural and remote Aboriginal communities might have dissipated fairly quickly. Most ‘revelations’ of deprivation in Indigenous communities are short-lived media events that scandalise a public enough to want to read or listen to network coverage for a day or two, but which invariably get overtaken by the next round of current affairs. However, this was not what happened.

Following Brough’s two visits to the Northern Territory, the Crown Prosecutor in Alice Springs appeared in an interview on national television to voice her concerns about what she understood to be the widespread, long-term, violent abuse of Indigenous women and children by Indigenous men, and the failure of the law and other institutions to respond appropriately to this criminal behaviour. In the federal parliament, the then Treasurer, Peter Costello (at the time also the Acting Prime Minister), together with Brough, responded by decrying the use of ‘tribal’ law, and declared that the restoration of law and order in these communities was now the government’s priority in Indigenous affairs. Then, as if to demonstrate the correctness of this new focus in policy, long-running tensions within the Northern Territory community of Wadeye hit the press and airwaves. Stories of ‘gang violence’ and a community held hostage to these ‘gangs’ prompted claims by some (including some town residents) that an emergency evacuation of those hostaged residents was imperative.

There was never an evacuation of Wadeye, and there was no renewed federal commitment to respond to the multiple problems that Indigenous leaders and organisations have long argued are confronting Indigenous communities. Instead, Brough called for a ‘national summit’ to take place between state, territory and federal leaders to devise solutions to the particular problem of violence in Aboriginal communities, with a focus on child abuse and the safety of women and children. Media attention likewise focused on the ‘violence’, ‘dysfunction’, the ‘morass’, ‘emergency’, ‘social crisis’ and ‘depravity’ in remote Aboriginal communities. The idea that there was a crisis taking place in Indigenous communities across the Australian continent appeared to take hold of public discourse. The term frequently organises the coverage and commentary not just of tabloid journalists or shock jocks, but also the federal political leadership itself, as well as many other commentators with backgrounds that range from long-term experience in Indigenous affairs to those with more recent and superficial engagement.

In this essay, I want to look at the Howard government’s record in Indigenous affairs, as a background to the current policy landscape, to suggest that claims about ‘crisis’ in Indigenous communities should not be seen as a straightforward outcome of empirical circumstance, even though this appears in many ways to be verified by ‘objective’ statistical data and the ‘subjective’ testimony of many Indigenous people themselves. The *idea* of crisis does not derive *naturally* from such accounts of Indigenous circumstance. Rather, it is clear that the federal political leadership in fact *orchestrated* events, particularly throughout the month

of May 2006, by transforming the government's failure to change the fundamentals of Indigenous welfare—'its quiet revolution' and commitment to 'practical reconciliation'—into a widespread, general crisis. This 'crisis' became a turning point at which the discourse of government responsibility for citizens was overtaken and replaced by that of citizen responsibility to government, namely, that Indigenous people and communities themselves are now equally responsible for (governmental) failure in Indigenous affairs.

Crisis, within such an account, needs to be understood as a *process*. And while the idea of crisis has proliferated to the point that it seems to represent a key concept of modernity,<sup>1</sup> crisis situations do not naturally grow from objective conditions of threat. Instead, politicians and citizens *narrate* social problems or shifts of power in ways that project them as critical moments in history that signal disaster. Crises, then, as the political scientist Colin Hay has argued, are constituted in and through particular narratives, they are 'subjectively perceived and hence brought into existence through narrative and discourse ... Crises are representations and hence "constructions" of failure'.<sup>2</sup>

The capacity of the Australian government to render the present moment in terms of crisis, therefore, needs to be seen as one point along a narrative or, more accurately, discursive continuum. Along this continuum, clearly contradictory forms of thought and practices are made coherent. On the one hand, the social, economic and political issues entangled with Indigenous marginalisation are defined as requiring Indigenous people themselves to take responsibility for their structurally peripheral circumstance—citizen responsibility eclipses citizenship rights. On the other hand, this definition of crisis frames the circumstances of Indigenous experience in ways that provide the non-Indigenous political leadership with the key to defining the appropriate strategies for resolution of 'the crisis'—here, the restoration of law and order is defined as the fundamental solution. That this particular conjuncture has made possible the narrative construction of crisis is an outcome of the contingent coupling of these discursive positions.

In examining the development of this narrative of crisis, I would like to make two points. First, in the conception of crisis as deriving naturally from inherent features of Indigenous culture, community and individual behaviour, we fail to grasp the crucial, *active* and *material* role that the Commonwealth and other government and non-government agencies have played in the emergence of this crisis. 'Practical reconciliation' being in this regard only the most recent expression of federal economic and institutional agency and leadership. As I will show in relation to one community which I take as a case study—the Northern Territory community of Wadeye, Thamarrurr—federal government neglect of infrastructure, and program funding in housing, health, and education particularly, had produced significant and persistent shortfalls. Governmental fiscal neglect needs to be understood as one of the key factors producing the often critical conditions of daily life in communities such as

Wadeye. Critiques of Indigenous culture, and individual behaviour, are, it is true, not confined to the governments' thesis about the moral failure of Indigenous people to take responsibility for themselves and their communities—these have a much broader base, and come from Indigenous people themselves as well as, in principle, sympathetic and experienced analysts. However, these issues need to be seen in the context of the state's chronic fiscal neglect, and it remains unclear how those issues can be effectively addressed without also dealing with such structural neglect.

Second, given this, the Howard government's declared solution to the crisis as lying with the restoration of law and order grossly underestimated the nature of the problem and scope of solutions and public resources required. It is certainly clear that national governments generally are unwilling to deal with increased inequality—in the sense that it is no longer possible to mount arguments that will have any purchase, along the lines that that the state has full responsibility for the welfare of disadvantaged citizens. However, in the case of remote Indigenous communities, the opportunity costs of maintaining the status quo have been calculated, and there is no argument, economic or political, that this situation is sustainable. There are, instead, alternative models as well as current practices organised broadly around notions of economic, cultural and social sustainability that make possible the long-term viability of communities such as Wadeye.

Seen in these terms, the 'crisis' in Indigenous communities has indeed been discursively constructed. That is, the 'crisis' has been constituted in and through policy understood as a field of discursive practice. Government at once both produces a narrative account of a 'crisis' unfolding across remote Indigenous communities as though this term describes what is 'really' taking place and, at the same time, through policy and programs actively reproduces the circumstances and conditions of daily life in remote communities that evidence this 'crisis'. Although policy and discourse are often thought of as separate spheres of activity, this separation is misleading. They are better understood as effectively one and the same thing, in that they are bound up with each other in constituting a particular field of discursive practice. This essay charts the contours of this field of discursive practice to, first, show how it was possible for the Howard government to develop this strategic narrative of crisis and, second, show how possible alternative fields of discursive practice might be constituted as the Rudd government finds its way through the process of dealing with Howard's legacy.

#### — NATURALISING CRISIS

When John Howard came to power in 1996, the new political leadership began—slowly at first, and then with increased vigour—to develop a narrative about the 'failure' of national policy and administration in Indigenous affairs over the previous two decades. As is well

known, that policy period, and the administrative and representative structures and processes it spawned, were organised around the principles of 'self-determination'/'self-management' and a bipartisan commitment to the elimination of racial discrimination and the protection of human rights. The former was institutionalised in the *Racial Discrimination Act*, and the latter in the creation of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC). During this twenty-year period, 'self-determination' was represented by both supporters and critics alike as signifying a clear 'break' from the era of administration which had preceded it, that of 'assimilation'.

When the first minister for Indigenous Affairs in the Howard government, John Herron, was appointed, he also maintained this idea of a break or rupture in policy and administration. However, he did so from a position in which he articulated a critical negative account of 'self-determination', suggesting that there was much merit in assimilationist ideas and the administrative regimes established during that era. Herron's apparent support for a 'return to assimilation' was coupled with an on-going critique which he, other government ministers, and Howard articulated concerning the 'failure' of 'separate' Indigenous institutions, programs and services to deliver improvements in the socioeconomic circumstances of Indigenous populations across the country. Remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory who had benefited from Commonwealth land rights legislation and community government, but who were now said to be 'land rich and dirt poor', were singled out for particular attention in this critical narrative. However, so as not to confine the critique to the Northern Territory—Indigenous socioeconomic indicators are appalling in all states—the federal government expanded its long-held criticism of ATSIC which had more or less been confined, while the coalition were in Opposition, to the argument that ATSIC created a 'separate, black parliament', for failing to 'deliver' services on the ground to Indigenous people in the states.

All these criticisms of the legacy of 'self-determination' developed in the first three years of the Howard government's term are well documented and analysed.<sup>3</sup> Many commentators (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) worried at the time that the government was indeed signalling a 'return to assimilation'—not least because government members liked to invoke the assimilationist vocabulary so succinctly developed during the 1950s and 1960s by that most vigorous of assimilation's proponents, Paul Hasluck. However, the government in fact framed its 'new' approach to policy and administration in terms of 'practical reconciliation'. This appeared at least in rhetorical terms to signal continuity as opposed to discontinuity with the previous policy era.<sup>4</sup>

'Practical reconciliation' built upon a direct critique of the Keating government's legacy of 'reconciliation' and, more indirectly, on a critique of the idea of 'self-determination'. Howard and other ministers argued that the Keating decade of 'reconciliation' had been too concerned

with 'symbolic' questions—Indigenous rights, the Stolen Generations, deaths in custody and the invalid alienation of land and resources.<sup>5</sup> Howard's focus would instead be on 'practical' outcomes in Indigenous health, education, welfare, income and employment. In this way, the idea of achieving statistical equality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians was seen by Howard to be the eventual goal of 'practical reconciliation'. Central to the effort required to achieve this goal was the commitment to 'mutual responsibility': government would better deliver on its responsibilities to Indigenous citizens by 'mainstreaming' programs and services, and Indigenous people themselves would be required to take greater responsibility for their own welfare and that of their families and communities.

Of course, all these developments in Indigenous Affairs under Howard need to be seen as coextensive with wider and longer-term national, international and global transformations, many of which began during the late 1970s and early 1980s.<sup>6</sup> In the national context, the reform of social welfare more broadly has been underscored by the McLure Report<sup>7</sup> and driven by the notion of 'mutual obligation' and the restructuring of the welfare sector. This has entailed a complex process of 'enterprising' both the state and its citizens, particularly those who are recipients of welfare.<sup>8</sup> Public sector agencies (formerly the primary providers of welfare programs and services), non-government organisations and the private sector now compete with one another to provide at the most competitive rates, programs and services to the recipients of welfare. At the same time, those citizens who are recipients of welfare are also required to conduct themselves in more 'enterprising' ways, actively undertaking designated work projects in exchange for unemployment and other welfare benefits.

Furthermore, all these efforts by policy makers to reconfigure the relationship between society, state, economy and citizen have, at the same time, also reconfigured geography and territory. Localities facing sustained economic hardship are now required to sort out their own problems, especially through the route of 'rebuilding local community', 'building community capacity', 'bridging social capital'—key terms in the contemporary vocabulary of 'welfare reform' in this geographic guise.<sup>9</sup>

At the international level, the transfer and exchange of these reforming ideas and practices in welfare and social policy has been productive and has cross-cut liberal, conservative and neo-conservative ideological commitments. For example, Blair Labour's 'Third Way' in the United Kingdom, the 'compassionate conservatism' of the Bush administration in the United States, and 'mutual obligation' and 'mutual responsibility' of the Howard government in Australia, while configured in nationally unique ways all stress the obligations of citizens to government as a critical element of welfare reform.<sup>10</sup>

The idea that Indigenous Australians needed to assume greater responsibility for themselves and their circumstances is clearly to be located within this wider and longer-term context. It was first made explicit in a policy statement by the minister who succeeded John Herron,

Philip Ruddock. In 2002, at the first ATSIC conference, Ruddock argued that 'to make better gains we need a far stronger focus on encouraging and supporting individuals to become self-reliant, take responsibility for themselves'. One year later, in 2003, the third minister to be appointed during the Howard government's on-going term of office, Amanda Vanstone, signalled a further reinvigoration of the government's commitment to the notion of citizen responsibility as an integral dimension of the relationship between citizens and the state. Arguing that the federal government wanted a more direct relationship with Indigenous citizens, Senator Vanstone declared that this would be achieved through agreements that would 'reflect a real partnership between [Indigenous] communities and government'.<sup>11</sup> Shared responsibility agreements now underscore this renewed relationship between the federal government and Indigenous citizens as mainstream government departments adopting a 'whole of government' approach work directly with Indigenous communities to negotiate individual agreements.

Senator Vanstone was the first minister in the Howard government to refer to this initiative in Indigenous Affairs as one more development in the 'quiet revolution' begun by the government nine years previously.<sup>12</sup> By mid 2006, however, Mal Brough—the fourth minister to assume the portfolio during the Howard government's term—quickly silenced the 'quiet revolution'. According to Brough's descriptions of conditions in town camps and remote communities which he visited in the Northern Territory, 'crisis' better described the situation in Indigenous Affairs, especially in remote Indigenous communities; a crisis brought about almost exclusively by Indigenous people themselves as they failed to fulfill their responsibilities as citizens.

To suggest that there is a social crisis unfolding across Indigenous communities is in many ways not an entirely new strategic intervention by government. For example, in the *Annual Report* for 2005, the secretaries' group responsible for the coordination of the federal government's 'whole of government' approach to the mainstream delivery of programs and services stated, 'In some communities the state of disorder is so great as to constitute a crisis'.<sup>13</sup> Nor was this analysis confined to government sources or those commentators who identified as supporters of the federal government. Indigenous community leaders and commentators as well as many non-Indigenous analysts have been frank about the critical social conditions in Indigenous communities, and about the relationship between these circumstances and individual and corporate/communal responsibility. Some of this commentary has indeed lent credibility to the governmental narrative of crisis. However, this does not appear to have been the intention of these analyses. Rather, these critiques have aimed to urge governments to take more seriously a range of cultural, ethnographic and historical factors in policy making, service delivery and institutional arrangements as they are configured for Indigenous

communities, *rather than* supporting a simple moral critique of Indigenous ‘failure’. I want to look in particular at two examples of this critique, not only for the ways in which they raise crucial issues associated with Indigenous corporate and individual agency, but also for the ways in which these raise crucial issues to do with the active role of government action itself, over many decades, in constructing and sustaining the current circumstances of daily life in many Indigenous communities.

— ‘BRINGING THE STATE BACK IN’<sup>14</sup>

The first example of this critique is that developed by the Indigenous activist and policy consultant, Noel Pearson, one of the most prominent critics of the active, historical role that governments have played in developing Indigenous disadvantage and marginalisation. In his monograph, *Our Right to Take Responsibility*, as well as in various articles and lectures, Pearson argued that the extension of welfare payments to Indigenous citizens over the past three decades has produced a debilitating dependency and widespread social dysfunction—specifically amongst the communities of Cape York.<sup>15</sup> The welfare economy that has developed in the region, Pearson observes, is inimical to traditional Aboriginal culture as much as it is to the economy of the market.<sup>16</sup> As Pearson puts it:

The problem with the welfare economy is that it is not a real economy. It is a completely artificial means of living. Our traditional economy was and is a real economy. Central to the traditional economy was the imperative for able-bodied people to work. If you did not hunt and gather, you starved ... Common to the real economy of traditional society and the real economy of the market is the demand for economic and social reciprocity. This reciprocity is expressed through work, initiative, struggle, enterprise, contribution, effort. The key problem with welfare is that it inherently does not demand reciprocity. I call it a gammon economy.<sup>17</sup>

According to Pearson, if the debilitating effects of the welfare economy are ever going to be overcome, the reinvigoration of reciprocity as the basis of social relations is crucial. For this to be possible, new institutional arrangements must be established. Pearson argues that service delivery to Aboriginal communities has proved extremely problematic on the ground, and that while government certainly has the resources to commit to services and programs, its *modus operandi* lacks coordination, encourages overlap, and duplication, and is not based on holistic approaches. Simply attempting to address the manifest problems in Cape York Aboriginal communities through better coordination of programs and other adjustments that generally take place under the rubric of ‘whole of government’ approaches to service delivery will be totally inadequate to deal with the scale of the problems and needs in those communities. From Pearson’s perspective, the idea of better coordination—a ‘whole



of government approach'—still assumes that welfare-induced problems can be solved through more effective program delivery under policies that are usually developed by bureaucrats far removed from these communities.

In other words, from Pearson's perspective, *government itself* continues to be an *active* source of the negative welfare mentality. What is required to fully tackle the problems that confront Cape York communities is, according to Pearson, a new interface with government, a statutory authority between Cape York peoples and government to coordinate holistic policy development, planning and the administration and delivery of welfare programs at regional, sub-regional and local levels. This new statutory interface will operate as a 'partnership interface', through which 'the state would negotiate with Aboriginal community representatives ... about the design of programs and the development of cooperative agreements on how the programs will be delivered on the ground'.<sup>18</sup>

Some commentators have seen Pearson's arguments as supporting the Howard government's commitment to welfare policy and payments premised upon the notion of citizen responsibility—mutual responsibility/mutual obligation.<sup>19</sup> However, such accounts are misleading; they ignore, first, Pearson's critique of the *on-going*, active role of the state in perpetuating welfare dependence—and this includes the Howard government's focus on mutual responsibility and mainstreamed, whole-of government approaches to policy and service delivery. Second, they overlook his arguments for the creation of new institutional arrangements through which the relationship between the state and Indigenous citizens should be configured. For Pearson, welfare has been debilitating because of the *way* in which it has been directed to Indigenous people. Pearson argues that systemic changes are essential in terms of the way in which welfare is distributed, but he does not see welfare *per se* as debilitating. Rather, welfare provides potentially valuable resources for the development of remote Aboriginal communities if genuine partnerships are established with government, developed under the new institutional arrangements he proposes replace the current arrangements which are wholly controlled by government. In 2006, six years on from the publication of *Our Right to Take Responsibility*, it was hardly surprising (although dreadfully depressing) to hear Pearson state that 'for all the negotiations that he has been involved in over the years with federal and state governments to bring about the changes he has argued for, almost no change has been the result'.<sup>20</sup>

Pearson's arguments point to the active, historical and contemporaneous role of the state in reproducing the critical circumstances of daily life in Cape York Aboriginal communities. Those who responded to Pearson's ideas with more care than just to point to the extent to which they supported the Howard government's position have highlighted a range of cultural and ethnographic issues that pose real difficulties for the practical implementation of his principle of reciprocity as well as the government's principle of mutual

responsibility. Like Pearson's critique of 'welfare dependency' this ethnographic and anthropological research also demonstrates the extent to which the state continues actively to reproduce the critical circumstances of daily life in many remote Indigenous communities.

In *An Assessment of Noel Pearson's Proposals for Welfare Reform*, David Martin, an anthropologist with the Centre for Aboriginal and Economic Policy Research, has drawn on his own ethnographic work in the Cape York region as well as that of other anthropologists to suggest that there are certain widespread Aboriginal values and practices which may be inimical to the kinds of social and attitudinal changes that had been sought by Pearson and the Howard government in advocating an end to welfare dependency. First, as Martin shows, the notion of 'dependency', which lies at the core of both Pearson's and governmental assessments of the effects of welfare, is not necessarily one which would have much meaning for many Indigenous people living in remote communities. 'Dependency' here is understood in terms of a 'culturally established and validated capacity to demand and receive resources and services (symbolic and tangible) from others'.<sup>21</sup> Seen this way, not only is dependency *not* inimical to individual and group autonomy, it is 'a core principle through which Aboriginal agency is realized in the structuring of social relationships'.<sup>22</sup>

What appears as 'objective disparities in wealth and power', both within Aboriginal groups and between Aboriginal people and the wider society, can, as Martin states, 'be transformed by Aboriginal agency through a process of co-opting others, often outsiders (including non-Aboriginal people) to become patrons or "bosses" for Aboriginal people'.<sup>23</sup> This sets up a complex set of relations in which Aboriginal people clearly see that those with whom they enter into these relationships of so-called 'dependency' are from the perspective of those Aboriginal people involved entering into relationships of obligation and responsibility to those same Aboriginal agents. This ethnographically informed understanding of Aboriginal sociality has perplexed proponents of 'self-determination' no less than advocates of mutual and individual responsibility in the sense that both have sought to develop active Indigenous agents in terms that clearly have little resonance with Aboriginal peoples' expectations or experience.<sup>24</sup>

Martin is also concerned that Pearson's principle of reciprocity and the related notion of mutual responsibility as he uses it, while quite different from that used by the Howard government, will also founder against certain Aboriginal social values and practices. For Pearson, because the state is too remote from Indigenous experience, efforts to strengthen individual responsibility need to be organised around the idea of reciprocity and mutual responsibility between the individual and his or her 'family', local group and 'community'—and not between individuals or communities and the state. However, as Martin shows by drawing on a large body of anthropological and ethnographic research, neither 'families' nor 'communities' can be assumed to be units of sufficient moral and political authority capable

of instituting the kinds of reciprocity and responsibility for which Pearson argues. In the case of 'families', the value of individual autonomy means that 'it is rare even for a senior individual to be able to exercise authority across all members of a family, particularly in relation to the matters about which Pearson is most concerned—expenditure of individual incomes, care of children, consumption of alcohol, and so forth'.<sup>25</sup> In the case of 'communities', there are few if any Indigenous-wide community political institutions which exist apart from the quasi-local community government councils and regional councils (such as land councils). These bodies represent highly complex and internally differentiated populations in terms of factors that continue to inform Aboriginal political, economic and social relations such as affiliations with ancestral lands and language, personal and group histories, ethnicity and bearing on all of these, kin group and other local affiliations. Consequently, although community government councils have legislative responsibility for the general peace, welfare and health of community residents, they cannot be considered to have the necessary political or moral authority to demand responsibility and reciprocity from residents.

Finally, in relation to Pearson's conception of the relationship between the cash flows into communities through welfare payments and CDEP, and the manifestations of social pathology, Martin points out that there is a complex interplay between the social processes involved in increasing individuation on the one hand, and of enduring forms of collective action on the other. Where Pearson imagines that the source of the cash provides a moral force which is manifest in the way in which it is used by individuals—'you value the things you work for'<sup>26</sup>—ethnographic evidence suggests rather that there is 'a more complex interaction between individuals' values and practices, and those of their significant social networks as well as those of the community in which they live'.<sup>27</sup> Although cash has only become widely available to Aboriginal people living in remote communities in the last thirty to thirty-five years, it has nonetheless become 'deeply implicated in the production and reproduction of [the] distinctive Aboriginal values and practices' that lie at the heart of the issues that concern Pearson, and which are the subject of the highly moralising governmental discourse concerning citizen responsibility.<sup>28</sup> Money, Martin argues, 'has become central to a particular kind of Aboriginal "performative sociality", in which social relations (notably those of kinship) are constantly produced and reproduced through the flows of services and material items between individuals', while, at the same time, money has enabled individuals to abstract themselves from many of those same relationships of kin-relatedness and responsibility. What this means in terms of the uses to which money is put by recipients of welfare is complex. On the one hand, welfare payments enable the deepening of collective actions within Aboriginal groups (through collective saving for consumer items such as vehicles, for example, and the financing of large ceremonial gatherings as well as resourcing drinking and gambling groups). On the other hand, welfare and cash make possible more autonomous action by

individuals who want to assert their independence from others within their significant social networks. What all this implies for policy makers and governments, then, is that it is not possible to make clear-cut normative assessments about the effects of welfare payments and socially destructive behaviour. Rather, the availability of cash in the form of welfare payments can facilitate both constructive and destructive activity.

By drawing on a well-established body of grounded anthropological research, Martin shows how certain Aboriginal values and practices complicate not only Pearson's proposed policy solutions, but also those of government. Indigenous conceptions of, and practices associated with, 'dependency', the complex forms of relatedness and obligation forged by kin and other relationships, as well as the related issues concerning the availability of cash, make it clear that governmental attempts to devise 'solutions' to destructive behaviour such as alcohol abuse and violence will invariably founder when governments and policy makers fail to engage with these issues as they are understood and enacted by Aboriginal people. In this way, the 'responsible' Indigenous citizen as it had been constructed by the Howard government, like the 'self-determining' Indigenous citizen<sup>29</sup> of previous governments, is not only a problematically simplistic rendition of the cultural and social complexity described by anthropologists and ethnographers such as Martin. It is in fact actively contributing to the reproduction of those critical circumstances of daily life in remote Aboriginal communities, reproducing programs and policy that fail to engage with those Indigenous values and practices that can prove so problematic for the health, well-being, and development of individuals and communities.<sup>30</sup> The implication for the Rudd government today is that if it is to tackle Indigenous disadvantage successfully, it will need to do more than develop a more thoughtful characterisation of Indigenous citizens as the subjects of those policies. It will also need to generate a far more hands-on engagement with those relationships from which potentially authoritative Indigenous individuals and governance structures might emerge, and which are capable of responding to these very serious policy issues in meaningful ways.<sup>31</sup>

Of course, to speak here of the active role of 'government' in reproducing Indigenous disadvantage is to gloss into homogeneity what is in fact an altogether 'heterogeneous ensemble of institutions'.<sup>32</sup> This assemblage of organisations and agencies comprises not only federal, state and local government agencies—as well as non-government organisations—but also, most significantly, thousands of publicly funded Indigenous organisations or, as Tim Rowse refers to them collectively, the 'Indigenous sector'. This sector comprises a variety of organisational types, including statutory authorities such as land councils, incorporated 'councils' performing the functions of local governments in remote parts of the country, organisations that are employers and job placement agencies (such as the many Community Development Employment Program or CDEP schemes, arts centres and other corporations and associations created for the purpose of trading and other forms of economic

activity), as well as health services, legal services, housing associations, schools and sporting clubs. Furthermore, this very diverse governmental/organisational terrain means that there is no longer any sense (if there ever was) in which policy-making processes and practices can be understood to be coherent projects.

As the anthropologist Dianne Smith puts it, policy-making processes and practices are not only multisited, they are increasingly complex in their manifestations, values, principles, structure and agency, and do not necessarily cohere in the ways in which many commentators are prone to suggest.<sup>33</sup> Smith has argued that as Indigenous groups have asserted their own cultural values and priorities and inaugurated their own civil and legal structures, we need to understand that the state no longer monopolises policy-making power. Policy 'solutions' to the 'problem' of Indigenous disadvantage now pose difficult dilemmas not only for non-Indigenous bureaucrats and politicians, but for an expanding class of Indigenous policy makers as well.<sup>34</sup> By factoring these institutional transformations into our thinking about policy making, Smith argues that policy is no longer a matter of choosing between competing paradigms organised around the idea of cultural difference—how to eradicate it if you were/are an assimilationist, and how to preserve it if you were/are committed to 'self-determination'. Rather, as she puts it, 'the [current] dilemma for policy makers is not so much the need to recognize cultural values and diversity, but how to respond to these in the formulation of programs without degenerating into social engineering. This is a dilemma for Indigenous as well as non-Indigenous policy makers.'<sup>35</sup>

This far I have focused on several features of contemporary Indigenous social life and the contrasting understandings of the nature and effects of characteristics of Indigenous sociality that flow from these and produce key policy dilemmas and prescriptions. In this regard, the federal political leadership and its supporters have sought to draw attention to certain of these aspects of Indigenous 'culture' and individual behaviour in order to develop a moral critique of Indigenous 'welfare dependency' and the 'destructive' uses made of welfare payments by some recipients of social security benefits. However, others have focused on those same features and shown that a critical empirical (as opposed to a moralising or normative) understanding of these issues is crucial if any of those social practices deemed so destructive are to be dealt with effectively. In this regard, I have discussed David Martin's work at some length because it so clearly articulates key elements of and insights from a very large and rich corpus of anthropological research (including his own), research that demonstrates significant ethnographic and empirical complexity. The clear implications of this work in relation to federal policy and administration in Indigenous affairs, as I see it, is to show how, by ignoring this empirical and ethnographic complexity, the state actively contributes to the reproduction of much that it deems problematic in Indigenous social life and individual behaviour.<sup>36</sup>

While these issues of Indigenous ‘welfare dependency’ and the ‘destructive’ uses made of welfare payments by some recipients of those benefits form the basis of much of the public debate and political commentary about the ‘crisis’ in remote Aboriginal communities, there is, of course, a crucial element missing from this narrative. Government funding and the fiscal responsibility of the state is rarely the focus of attention in these debates, and to the extent that it is, it is usually in terms of government largesse in relation to Aboriginal communities, not governmental fiscal neglect. However, the data that are widely available reveal large and persistent shortfalls in government expenditure on infrastructure and services in Aboriginal communities. Although it is also the case that the federal government is failing to make adequate provision for infrastructure across the country more generally,<sup>37</sup> the research that demonstrates large shortfalls in expenditure on Indigenous communities receives little-to-no media attention. The sustaining fiction that government overspends on Indigenous programs and services is, it would seem, strengthened by public awareness of under-spending on infrastructure across the country more generally. Furthermore, this research also reveals a structural imbalance in funding in expenditure across Indigenous affairs, with proportionally much less being spent on positive aspects of public policy such as education and employment creation, and proportionally more being spent on negative areas such as criminal justice and unemployment benefits. One study that has focused on Wadeye, where ‘gang’ violence has been the focus of recent media attention, and its satellite homelands and outstations makes this explicit.<sup>38</sup>

Economists John Taylor and Owen Stanley were asked by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) to produce an account of the costs—both to governments and to the local community—of sustaining the status quo in the Wadeye region. Taylor had clearly identified the characteristics of the status quo at Wadeye in an earlier COAG study undertaken in 2004. This study examine a whole-of-government partnership approach to service delivery based on the concept of ‘shared responsibility’ between the Commonwealth and Territory governments and the Wadeye community. While issues to do with governance and shared responsibility, which can be assumed to have been seen by COAG as the cornerstone of governments’ commitment to improved social and economic outcomes in the region, formed the basis of this study, Taylor’s pilot revealed ‘substantial deficits in infrastructure and human capital’. It was clear that any potential for governance initiatives to deliver better outcomes was going to be seriously undermined in the absence of substantial improvements in each of these fields. COAG asked Taylor and a colleague, Owen Stanley, to calculate how much the current situation was costing government and the community. The ‘opportunity costs’ of maintaining the status quo—the costs arising from forgone production and from remedial actions necessary to compensate for critical socio-economic conditions—identified by Taylor and Stanley show just how unsustainable that

status quo is. Here are some of the key findings of their report, *The Opportunity Costs of the Status Quo in the Thamurrurr Region*:

The value of output forgone [is] \$43.8 million, while Indigenous employment incomes forgone amount to \$26.3million per annum. In addition one might add the estimated \$1.3million lost lifetime income due to premature mortality along with an estimated \$1.9 million in excess Centrelink payments ... [At] Thumurrurr the total remedial cost is substantially negative (instead of positive) to the tune of \$4million ... *This means that after accounting for all government dollars and transfer payments expended on residents in the region far less is spent on them per head than is spent on the average Territorian ... a key factor is the apparent gross underspending on education at Thamurrurr of some \$3.2million per annum ... for every education dollar spent by governments on the average child of compulsory school age in the Northern Territory, at present \$0.47 is spent on the Thamurrurr equivalent.*

With this conclusion in mind, one might expect that the remedial costs to government of servicing a growing Australian community that is relatively sick, poorly housed, illiterate, innumerate, disengaged from the education system, on low income, unemployed and with a sub-standard communications network would be substantially higher (not lower) than the Northern Territory average. What emerges instead is something akin to Hart's oft-cited inverse care law in relation to health care needs—*'to those most in need the least is provided'*. Furthermore, there is a structural imbalance in funding at Thamurrurr with proportionally less expenditure on positive aspects of public policy such as education and employment creation that are designed to build capacity and increase output, and proportionally more spending on negative areas such as criminal justice and unemployment benefit. *This begs the very important question as to whether this situation of fiscal imbalance actually serves to perpetuate the very socioeconomic conditions observed at Thamurrurr in the first place.*<sup>39</sup>

Taylor and Stanley's research provides the data upon which irrefutable arguments for increased public spending on positive aspects of public policy in Indigenous Affairs can be made. They argue that this spending must be primarily directed at positive public policy initiatives, namely, job creation and human capital formation. As they put it:

Job creation will require governments to fund major infrastructure and housing works, to adopt preferential tendering and employment policy, and to develop businesses that export goods and services outside the Thamurrurr community. Human capital formation will require efforts to enhance appropriate education and training facilities and services, as well as improvements in health and housing. At the same time the pressing need is to stimulate labour intensive economic activity given the size and growth of working age numbers against the limited scope for mainstream work. Opportunities exist here via a much expanded CDEP

scheme via the proper resourcing and development of a marketable arts and crafts industry, and via enhanced support caring for country, land and sea management activities.<sup>40</sup>

#### — LAW, ORDER, AUTHORITY AND SUSTAINABILITY

Yet for all the persuasive detail of this COAG report, the Howard government continued to insist that 'the crisis' in remote Aboriginal communities is not about money. Howard's health minister, Tony Abbott, for example, claimed that 'the basic problem of Aboriginal disadvantage was not a lack of spending but the directionless culture in which Aboriginal people lived'.<sup>41</sup> This view was reinforced almost daily by editorials in the print media throughout May and June 2006. As well, something of a slanging match ensued during this time between members of the Howard government and the Northern Territory Chief Minister, Clare Martin. For example, in a letter to Howard, Martin highlighted 'overcrowded housing as a key contributing factor to family violence and community concerns'. She received no reply from Howard, but Brough responded in the media by claiming that 'the problems with housing lay with Aboriginal community groups'. He proposed that these councils and associations 'should be stripped of responsibility and that funding should be tied to residents' behaviour'. He then declared that housing was not at issue and only served to 'distract attention from law and order'.<sup>42</sup> In this he was joined by Peter Costello. During question time in the federal parliament, Costello was asked why no family relationships centres were being established in areas of greatest need such as Alice Springs. In response he declared that, 'when you are dealing with crime of the levels that you are in Aboriginal communities, family relationship centres are not the frontline services you need. The services you need are a police force that is capable of apprehending those who are engaged in crime, a court system that will try them and a jail system that will punish them.'<sup>43</sup>

These quotes are necessarily selective, but they do not misrepresent the Howard government's position, and as such they are suggestive of the broader contours of the account of crisis that was being narrated. That is, that the solution to the crisis lies with Aboriginal people themselves, and in the restoration of law, order and security. Aboriginal people, in these terms, must sort out their disorganised lives and take greater responsibility for their circumstances. The problem of violence in communities—and here there is tacit acknowledgement that increased spending is required, albeit negative spending—is to be solved through an increased police presence in those communities.<sup>44</sup>

If this narrative of crisis has been an easy political fiction to sustain, operating effectively to deflect from public attention the very active role of government in perpetuating the critical conditions of life in remote Aboriginal communities, it has also had the effect of making it difficult to conceive how those critical conditions might be transformed into a situation where lives and communities can be made sustainable beyond, of course, the proposals about



improving individual and communal responsibility and increased policing. However, once again, there is research which, taken together with consideration of those factors that I have discussed so far—tough-minded, empirically grounded understandings of the specific cultural bases of individual and corporate life in many remote communities, of the heterogeneity of governance and policy-making institutions and practices, and of the critical supporting fiscal and institutional role of the state—that is very suggestive of ways in which those communities and their residents can live socially and economically sustainable lives.

Setting aside those factors that currently operate as institutional and cultural barriers to development in remote Aboriginal communities, John Altman has argued that we need to extend our conception of what constitutes economic activity in these communities beyond orthodox conceptions of the economy as the market economy, to include the full range of economic activity carried out in remote Aboriginal areas. When we do this, we see that there is a great deal of economic activity currently being carried out in remote areas populated by Aboriginal people that is not recognised as such, and which produces very significant economic, environmental and social benefits. What is more, these economic, environmental and social benefits do not only devolve to Aboriginal communities but to the public and private sectors more generally.<sup>45</sup> In other words, a broader conception of the economy reveals very broad national benefits generated by Aboriginal people.

Altman's argument, then, is based on the premise that the narrow conception of economic activity contained in the notion of the market economy should be extended to encompass the full range of economic practices and institutions in remote areas. This then includes: (1) the market, conceptualised as productive private sector activity; (2) the state, which is a provider of services and benefits; and (3) all customary economic activities. This last category, the customary, is based on traditional economic activity such as hunting, gathering and fishing, but also includes more recent innovations in these fields of practice, such as land and habitat management, species management and the maintenance of biodiversity as well as artistic production. While Aboriginal people carry out all these activities as a matter of custom and tradition, they have also become involved in recent times in commercial and public sector applications of these practices. In doing so, however, the value of their labour is seldom recognised, nor is the productive benefit of this labour recognised or valued. If, however, the value of Indigenous labour and productive activity in the customary sector were recognised and accounted for, we would have a more accurate understanding not only of current levels of economic activity in remote communities, but also of the development potential of these communities. In addition to this, we would have an accurate account of the value that these communities add both to the market economy, the public sector and the national estate. Such a model of economic activity utterly contradicts the idea that remote Aboriginal communities are too costly and that some should be shut down.<sup>46</sup>

Some examples of the ways that the customary contributes value to both the public and private sectors to which Altman points include the contribution that Indigenous artistic production and natural resource management makes to both private and public economies. Artistic production has generated the development of highly valuable (albeit under-valued) international markets in fine art and tourist arts and crafts. The contribution of this activity to the public estate has also been significant in terms of the development of valuable public collections of Indigenous art housed in national, state and territory institutions. The value of natural resource management is also extensively distributed. For example, wildlife harvesting has health benefits for Aboriginal people, it contributes to the maintenance of optimal populations of species, and is therefore environmentally sustainable. It also contributes significantly to the management of the enormous problems that feral animals and weeds pose for the pastoral and agricultural industries as well as other forms of land-based development. As well, the contribution of customary resource management to coastal development and security, marine environment and species protection is similarly significant in coastal areas.

Taken together, the links between the customary, market and state economies comprise what Altman calls 'the hybrid economy' of remote Aboriginal communities. By extending our concept of what constitutes economic activity in those remote regions to include all three spheres of economic activity at work in those places—the market, state and customary—Altman argues that we have the (conceptual) framework around which it is possible to build institutions and practices of sustainable development.

#### — CONCLUSION: CRISIS, WHAT CRISIS?

At one level, this has been an essay about the changes in Indigenous Affairs brought about by the Howard government during its decade in power, and about how these changes can be understood as being inextricably linked with a broader project of welfare reform—one which is not unique to Australia. This reforming project has conjured up anew ideas about the responsibility of citizens to the state, their communities and themselves. As a result, in place of the former welfarist conviction that the state was responsible for its disadvantaged citizens, the idea of citizen responsibility to the state now seems secure. In Australian Indigenous Affairs, this conviction has been translated more harshly into the idea that citizens can indeed fail their governments. Those who point to disorganisation, poverty, violence, unemployment, critically poor health conditions and lack of schooling, literacy, skills and viable economic activity in remote Aboriginal communities, are attempting to demonstrate the rightness of this conviction, but can only do so by ignoring the evidence to the contrary.

At another level, however, I have been concerned with the way in which government fails its citizens, specifically Indigenous citizens, not in the 'symbolic' terms that Howard rejected

anyway, but precisely in the 'practical' terms developed by Howard and his leadership team. The failure of the Howard government to make any difference during this time to Indigenous socioeconomic indicators—the 'practical' goal identified by the government itself—is an assessment of that government's legacy that receives little media coverage. The failure of Howard's 'quiet revolution' has been very quiet indeed. The critical circumstances of daily life in many remote Aboriginal communities, instead of providing testimony to this failure, have instead been turned into something of an alibi, making the idea of a 'crisis' in those communities seem utterly feasible. This idea of crisis, as narrated by the Howard government, naturalised a people and their circumstances as the product of moral deficit, deviance, and even degeneracy. We have reached the point where 'the crisis has begun to be lived in its terms', not in the sense that we have all been duped, but in the way which this narrative of crisis does in fact 'express real problems, real and lived experiences, real contradictions'.<sup>47</sup> The rub is that, in narrating crisis, the current Rudd government is compelled primarily to respond to this narrative construction of crisis, and only secondarily to the conditions of governmental failure and contradiction that underlie it.

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1. C. Lomnitz, 'Times of Crisis: Historicity, Sacrifice and the Spectacle of Debacle', *Public Culture*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2003, pp. 127–47; A. Mbembe and J. Roitman, 'Figures of the Subject in Times of Crisis', *Public Culture*, vol. 7, no. 2, 1995, pp. 324–46.
2. C. Hay, 'Narrating Crisis: The Discursive Construction of the "Winter of Discontent"', *Sociology*, vol. 30, no. 2, 1996, pp. 253–72.
3. For example: L. Behrendt, 'ATSIC: Regional Mythologies', *Arena Magazine*, April–May 2004; Northern and Central Land Councils, *Submission to the Review of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission*, 2003; M. Ivanitz & K. McPhail, 'ATSIC: Autonomy or Accountability' in I. Holland and J. Flemming, *Government Reformed: Values and Institutions*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2003, pp. 185–201; A. Pratt, 'Make or Break? A Background to the ATSIC Changes and the ATSIC Review', *Current Issues Brief*, no. 29, Department of the Parliamentary Library, Canberra, 2002–03.
4. Tim Rowse has argued very persuasively that it is a mistake to see the Howard government's record in Indigenous Affairs as a 'return to assimilation'. As he argues, a crucial and enduring legacy of self-determination is the 'Indigenous sector'—some 4000 or more Aboriginal councils and associations charged with a very wide range of administrative and representative functions. As Rowse puts it: 'The Indigenous sector is a huge fact that that both government and its critics cannot fail to account. The [Howard government's] reforms cannot be characterised as a return to assimilation because in those days there was no equivalent of the Indigenous sector. It is a relatively new feature of policy that separates us from assimilation.' Tim Rowse, 'The Politics of being Practical: Howard and His Quiet Revolution in Indigenous Affairs', speech to the Brisbane Institute, 13 July 2005, p. 2, available at [http://www.brisinst.org.au/resources/rowse\\_tim\\_indigenous.html](http://www.brisinst.org.au/resources/rowse_tim_indigenous.html). See also Tim Rowse,

- Indigenous Futures: Choice and Development for Aboriginal and Islander Australia*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2002.
5. J. C. Altman and B. H. Hunter, *Monitoring 'Practical' Reconciliation: Evidence from the Reconciliation Decade, 1991–2001*, CAEPR Discussion Paper, no. 254, CAEPR, ANU Canberra, 2003, p. 1.
  6. D. Held, A. McGrew, D. Goldblatt and J. Perraton, *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2001.
  7. P. McLure, Participation Support for a More Equitable Society, Final Report of the Group on Welfare Reform, unpublished report to the federal minister for family and community services, 2000.
  8. M. Considine, *Enterprising States: The Public Management of Welfare to Work*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 2001.
  9. By contrast, those prosperous localities where capital and labour markets, investment and jobs are located are never required to demonstrate their funds of 'social capital' or 'community capacity'. A. Amin, 'Local Community on Trial', *Economy and Society*, vol. 34, no. 4, 2005, pp. 612–13.
  10. Transformations in the global economy are seen by governments in each of these countries to be the inevitable drivers of these reforms. This has often been glossed, usually incorrectly, by many commentators as neoliberalism. The effect of this gloss is two fold: first, it erases the distinctively national configuration of ideological commitment and institutions in each case; second, it elides the distinctive, and in many ways contradictory, intellectual traditions that inform these ideas associated with contemporary economic, political and cultural transformations—particularly as these concern changes to 'the welfare state'. See W. Brown, *Edgework: Critical Essays in Knowledge and Politics*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2005.
  11. Amanda Vanstone, *Address to the National Press Club*, Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Indigenous Affairs, 2005, p. 4.
  12. Vanstone, p. 2.
  13. Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination, *Secretaries Group Annual Report 2005*. from [http://www.oipc.gov.au/performance\\_reporting/sec\\_group/ar2005/section/section2\\_6.asp](http://www.oipc.gov.au/performance_reporting/sec_group/ar2005/section/section2_6.asp).
  14. I have lifted the title of a now seminal work published in 1985 by the historical sociologist, Theda Skocpol and colleagues P. B. Evans, D. Rueschemeyer and T. Skocpol (eds), *Bringing the State Back In*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985. Their work demonstrated the importance of institutional analysis in history, sociology, politics and so forth at a time when many scholars tended to focus on the actions of individuals and groups of individuals in producing social and historical change.
  15. Noel Pearson, *Our Right to Take Responsibility*, Noel Pearson and Associates, Cairns, 2000.
  16. Pearson uses the term 'welfare economy' to refer to the full range of welfare benefits payable to Indigenous individuals and communities. This includes the form of 'unemployment' benefit unique to Indigenous communities in which Indigenous people work for the equivalent of welfare payments through the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP). CDEP was developed more than twenty years ago and to this extent was probably a world first as a mutual obligation welfare program. J. C. Altman, M. C. Gray and R. Levitus, *Policy Issues for the Community Development Employment Projects Scheme in Rural and Remote Australia*, CAEPR Discussion Paper, no. 271, CAEPR, ANU, Canberra, 2005.
  17. N. Pearson, 'Positive and Negative Welfare and Australia's Indigenous Communities', *Family Matters*, vol. 54, 1999, p. 32.
  18. N. Pearson, 'Positive and Negative Welfare', p. 33.
  19. H. Hughes, 'New deal for Communities', *Executive Highlights*, no. 261, <http://www.cis.org.au>, 2005; C. Pearson, 'Beware of a Relapse, Noel', *The Australian*, 1 July 2006, p. 16.
  20. *The 7.30 Report*, ABC Television, 29 June 2006.
  21. D. Martin, *Is Welfare Dependency 'Welfare Poison'? An Assessment of Noel Pearson's Proposals for Aboriginal Welfare Reform*, CAEPR Discussion Paper, no. 213, CAEPR, ANU Canberra, 2001, p. 6.
  22. Martin, p. 6.
  23. Martin, p. 7.
  24. Richard Sennett has made a similar point in relation to arguments developed in the USA about 'welfare dependency': that the conceptions of dependency that inform these debates derive from liberal political philosophy and Christian theology and are therefore culturally specific. Richard Sennett, *Respect: The Formation of Character in Age of Inequality*, Allen Lane, New York, 2002.
  25. Martin, p. 15.
  26. N. Pearson, *Our Right to Take Responsibility*.
  27. Martin, p. 9.
  28. Martin, p. 8.
  29. Here I am not mounting a critique of self-determination so much as pointing out—as many others have done previously—that is that it was never clearly defined.
  30. Peter Sutton has developed a compelling account of the way in which these factors interlink with

- longer-term historical processes or, as he puts it, 'the after-effects of colonization'. These include: sedentarisation, missionisation and the forcible relocation of people to government settlements; the 1968 equal wages decision for stock-workers which resulted in the widespread although undesired departure of people from small communities; the collapse of pastoral employment resulting in the concentration of large numbers of people who had been employed in this industry, together with their families, onto Aboriginal reserves, missions and settlements and fringe settlements at other towns; dramatically increased access to alcohol in remote and rural areas from the early 1970s, and the rise in incomes as a result of the extension of social security benefits previously denied most Aboriginal people. P. Sutton, 'The Politics of Suffering: Indigenous Policy in Australia since the 1970s', *Anthropological Forum*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2001, pp. 125–73.
31. Martin, p. 19; J. Hunt and D. Smith, *Building Indigenous Community Governance in Australia: Preliminary Research Findings*, CAEPR Working Paper, no. 31, CAEPR, ANU, Canberra, 2005, p. 8.
  32. T. Rowse, *Indigenous Futures: Choice and Development for Aboriginal and Islander Australia*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2002.
  33. D. Smith, 'When Starship Pintupi Meets the Klingons of Policy', *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2003, p. 262.
  34. Over the last decade a great deal of bureaucratic and political attention has focused on 'governance', and what makes for 'good governance' in particular, in Aboriginal communities. Yet, as Austin-Broos points out, 'If in fact government transfers are not enough, if life-long welfare is inherently disabling even on the margins of the nation-state, improving governance can only have minimal impact'. D. Austin-Broos, 'Introduction', in D. Austin-Broos and G. Macdonald (eds), *Culture, Economy and Governance in Aboriginal Australia*, University of Sydney Press, Sydney, 2006, p. 2. Notwithstanding this, there does not appear to be a limit to the continuing enthusiasm for 'governance' as a solution to the 'problem' of remote Aboriginal communities. Yet, as one Indigenous community leader remarked in a recent seminar held in Darwin on Indigenous governance, 'Our communities are littered with models of government which have made no difference to our health, educational outcomes and employment opportunities', North Australia Research Unit, Australian National University, Indigenous Governance Seminar, June 2005.
  35. Smith, p. 262.
  36. As Peter Sutton puts it, 'A careless and historically inaccurate habit is blame the victim syndrome ... but this does not justify turning away from the partially cultural underpinnings of disadvantage, and from looking clear-eyed at successful interventions that actually diminish disadvantage', Sutton, p. 149.
  37. CEDA, *Infrastructure: Getting On With The Job*, CEDA, Melbourne, 2005.
  38. John Taylor and Owen Stanley, *The Opportunity Costs of the Status Quo in the Thamurrurr Region*, CAEPR Working Paper, no. 28, CAEPR, ANU, Canberra, 2005.
  39. Taylor and Stanley, pp. 63–4 (emphasis added).
  40. Taylor and Stanley, p. 64.
  41. *Guardian Weekly*, 30 June – 6 July 2006, p. 7.
  42. *Australian*, 22 May 2006, p. 1.
  43. House of Representatives Hansard, 23 May 2006, pp. 6–7.
  44. There is an underlying assumption in these arguments that much of the violence in Aboriginal communities is incomprehensible to the wider community, that this violence is senseless, wanton and utterly destructive. Without in any way apologising for this violence or trying to downplay the extent of the suffering caused by violence, it is crucial, however, to recognise as Anton Blok argues, that we cannot understand violence (and therefore can do little to inhibit its unauthorised and unacceptable uses) unless we understand that far from being 'senseless' all acts of violence are meaningful (A. Blok, *Honour and Violence*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2001, pp. 103–4). That is, violent acts are forms of meaningful action in that they all 'say' or express something—for example, 'I can humiliate you/am humiliated, subject you/am subjected, vindicate you/vindicate myself, and so forth'. At Wadeye, Bill Ivory has explained how the symbolism of heavy metal as a transgressive genre of music organises 'gang' formation and activity (B. Ivory, *Nemarluk to Heavy Metal: Cultural Change and the Development of Contemporary Youth Sub-Culture at Port Keats, Northern Territory*, BA Honours thesis, Charles Darwin University, Darwin, 2003). Other anthropologists have similarly provided really 'thick' descriptions of the meanings and uses of violence elsewhere, on how violence is learned and how and why it is practiced. (A. Hamilton, *Nature and Nurture: Aboriginal Child-Rearing in Northern Arnhem Land*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1981; D. Martin, 'Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Homicide: "Same but Different"', in H. Strang and S. Gerull (eds), *Homicide: Patterns, Prevention and Control*, Australian

- Institute of Criminology, Canberra, 1993, pp. 167–76; C. Tatz, 'Aboriginal Violence: A Return to Pessimism', *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 25, 1990, pp. 245–60). It is to this data that non-Indigenous policy makers must turn, and not to simplistic, moralising claims about the need for victims and perpetrators of violence to simply reform their ways or face jail.
45. J. C. Altman, *Sustainable Development Options on Aboriginal Land: The Hybrid Economy in the C21st*, CAEPR Discussion Paper, no. 226, CAEPR, ANU, Canberra, 2001; J. C. Altman, C. Linkhorn, J. Clark, *Land Rights and Development Reform in Remote Australia*, CAEPR Discussion Paper, no. 276, CAEPR, ANU, Canberra, 2005.
46. N. Rothwell, 'Frontier too Far', *Australian*, 4–5 February 2006, p. 17.
47. S. Hall, 'Encoding/Decoding' in S. Hall et al. (eds), *Culture, Media, Language*, Unwin Hyman, London, 1989, p. 83.