

## *Section 2: Causes and Contributing Factors*

### *River Dreaming*

She sits by the river  
Looking at the trees  
She wonders if the morning  
Will bring a sweeter breeze.  
The bitter taste of blood  
Brings tears to her eyes.  
She wonders if the morning  
Will be the time she dies.  
As she wipes the tears from her eyes.

Her slim brown body is broken  
Ravished by the men  
Who brought their guns and weapons  
To this land to tame.  
They said the land was empty  
Not peopled by another race  
They raped and stole and slaughtered  
To establish a convict base.  
And she cries a tear for her race.

She sits by the river  
Looking at the trees  
She wonders if the morning  
Will bring a sweeter breeze.  
The bitter taste of blood  
Brings tears to her eyes  
She wonders if the morning  
Will be the time she dies.  
As she wipes the tears from her eyes.

Lies and deceit continue  
Even to this day  
Indigenous people of this land  
Hope the strangers will go away.  
But this will never happen  
We have to acknowledge the pain  
In order to reconcile this country  
Where all our people can gain  
And it's time for healing the pain.

She sits by the river looking at the trees  
She wonders if the morning will bring a sweeter breeze.  
The bitter taste of blood brings tears to her eyes.  
She wonders if the morning will be the time she dies.  
She wonders if the morning will be the time she dies.  
She wonders if the morning will be her time to die.  
And she wipes the tears from her eyes.

**Liz Connor 9/5/99**

**2.1. VIOLENCE – CAUSES AND CONTRIBUTING FACTORS**

Section 2 explores the causes and contributing factors of violence within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities. The problems in Communities have been defined in European terms for too long. Many programs implemented by Government, though well-intentioned, have not worked because they were developed and implemented from a Western paradigm. There has been little research or theory developed on the issue of violence within an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander framework, to consider how race intersects with gender and age within a colonial context. Without these considerations, poorly researched and prepared programs often create more problems than they solve. Such has been the Indigenous Australian experience.

**2.2. COLONISATION – AN INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVE**

*Figure 2      Impact of colonisation                      Indigenous experience*

<b>Political</b>	Invasion; colonisation
<b>Legal</b>	Erosion of traditional lore
<b>Cultural</b>	Acculturation
<b>Social</b>	Racism , discrimination
<b>Spiritual</b>	Imposed religion; erosion of spirituality
<b>Physical</b>	Massacres; Stolen Generations
<b>Gender-related</b>	Role breakdown
<b>Labour</b>	Welfare handouts; alcohol
<b>Families</b>	Trauma, turmoil, removal of children Family fragmentation.
<b>Economics</b>	Unemployment, welfare dependency.

Indigenous people are diverse and dynamic individuals and groups. This was the case before colonisation, and is even more so today. While there are diversities, there are also commonalities. This section will explore those common links to provide a better understanding of the effects of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Such an understanding is integral to the Report, and fundamental to developing processes and procedures to deal effectively with the violence documented throughout.

At the point of colonial invasion, Indigenous people lived in groups organised by complex kinship systems based on well-defined rules of marriage, behaviour and interaction. To maintain social cohesiveness and good order, Elders and traditional healers held positions of authority in the kin- and land- based groups, and fulfilled the functions of teachers, judges and spiritual leaders. The traditional healer played a major role in determining the type of behaviour that was correct and permissible.

Traditional Indigenous cultures had regulated forms of social control, and involved the administration of lore and education, in a firm structure of spirituality and well-being. The lives of Indigenous people were governed by principles and values that determined their cultural and social responsibilities through a process of socialisation. A breach of responsibilities was frowned upon and led to admonishment or more severe penalties.

Indigenous clans were linked to spirituality and land, and had a deep connection to their homelands and sacred sites, carrying out rituals and obligations to 'protect it'. It was in fact a system of rights and rules of reciprocity. Traditional Indigenous culture was founded on a highly sophisticated economy that embraced the value of family, as opposed to the accumulation of possessions and wealth. This economy was based on a system of environmental management, division of labour, resource exchange and trade. Men, women, families and extended family members provided support for one another, guided by the values and teachings of the Elders and the lore. Collectively, they socialised children into their place in the kinship system, and provided them with a holistic education about life, health, survival, child-rearing practices, maturational processes and responsibilities to family and kin.

Traditional Indigenous cultures provided a deep sense of both individual recognition and collective worth. Indigenous people were proud, and interdependent for survival and for a sense of spirituality and belonging.

The arrival of Europeans in 1788 and the subsequent declaration of *Terra Nullius* changed the lives of Aboriginal people forever, leaving in turn a recent history of discrimination and neglect. Through the policies and colonial practices established, Indigenous families were subjugated and dispossessed of traditional lands. The economic ramifications of such a process for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous sectors of the community have been much more profound than generally acknowledged or considered.

While colonisation affected both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to varying degrees, the impact has been borne more severely by Aboriginal people. Due to the geographical location of the Torres Strait, colonisation did not interfere with the traditional songs, dances, languages and cultures of the Torres Strait Islander people to the same extent as it did for Aboriginal people. For Aboriginal people, the consequences of colonisation have been severe.

Dispossessed of both land and kin, many Aboriginal people have been subjected to a lifetime of social isolation and discrimination. They have been sustained by a diet of welfare and suffered poor health and economic instability. They have been profoundly affected by the removal process and haunted by the loss of their children. The consequences have been so disempowering that it is difficult for many non-Aboriginal people to comprehend.

Aboriginal people have been marginalised and assigned to the outer edges of society. They have suffered from deep-seated and entrenched economic and social impoverishment, which has led to the multiple problems being experienced today. While the effects of colonisation varied from region to region, similar consequences of poverty and discrimination have seriously affected the whole of Aboriginal society.

Photo courtesy of the Queensland Museum.

Many Aboriginal people have been able to function productively, without disturbance to their self-esteem or cultural identity. However, for others this process has not been so easy.

Tormented by the traumas of the past 211 years, mourning for values eroded by time and cultural alienation, lost in a search for their families and themselves, many Aboriginal people are distressed and grieving for elements of their heritage that can never be found or retrieved. These people, their families and Communities, are in a state of grief as they attempt to deal with too much sorry business. For these people, their early removal from parental love and nurture, and prolonged separation from family and kin, have resulted in profound despair and depression.

The effects of these experiences are manifested in continuing stress and anxiety and in some cases, suicidal and violent behaviour. Escalating levels of family violence, increased alcohol consumption and high levels of suicide among younger members of the Communities, can all be directly related to the colonising process.

Many women consulted by the Task Force indicated that the men needed help to heal if progress is to be made in decreasing the level of violence. They also spoke of the need to revive the family unit and to help Communities to reunite in order to overcome the social illnesses that continue to be present. People are trying to hold on to and rely upon the extended family unit. However, the traditional family unit has been altered significantly through the colonising process. While the worth of family is still central to the experience of being 'Indigenous', the extended family has become fragmented and dispersed and in so doing has changed a major factor in the structure and functions of Indigenous lives.

These losses have started some people on a search to locate themselves in a family environment and to gain the security, assurance, nurturing and protection that a family and an extended family unit traditionally provided. As a result of policies of removal and subjugation, the traditional family unit often cannot provide the security it once offered. The report on the Stolen Generations spelled out the devastation and grief that this situation created.

There are people still trying to find their way home. Others are in a constant state of grief because their journey is not easy. Many have reunited with their families, and are trying to make up for the childhood they did not live. For others, their journey will be a lifetime quest, whereby they may never be able to find the sense of belonging and peace that they seek.

Torres Strait Islander families have fortunately been able to retain much of their family structures and therefore appear to be less affected than Aboriginal families in this regard. However, the effects of colonisation and discriminatory processes have been indelibly etched into the minds, the hearts and the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The residual damage of colonisation is obvious in family breakdowns, alcoholism, violence and abuse in Indigenous Communities. Almost every Aboriginal family has been affected in some way by separation from kin and the dislocation of traditional supports. An analysis of contemporary Communities would reveal a deep sense of loss and trauma in the hearts and minds of Aboriginal people, both individually and collectively.

As well as fragmenting families, colonisation left a legacy of social alienation and rejection that helped to create the culture of poverty in which Indigenous families are attempting to survive. From the time of invasion, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have endured both structural and institutional discrimination. In an attempt to deal with the historical ramifications, political forces of all persuasions have historically used punishment and detention to deal with Indigenous concerns. Although it is alleged that that attitude has changed in Indigenous Affairs in the past twenty years, the current numbers of Indigenous people in youth detention centres and adult correctional centres indicate that little progress has occurred.

Poor health, and social, moral, emotional and economical ill-health, are inherently linked to the history of cruelty in Australia. Australia is promoted as a country established on multiculturalism and democratic ideals, with Australians priding themselves on accepting all groups, regardless of race, creed or social background. History refutes this analysis and reveals, instead, a picture that is more sinister and insecure. For Aboriginal people, colonisation has meant the erosion and attempted annihilation of the world's oldest race.

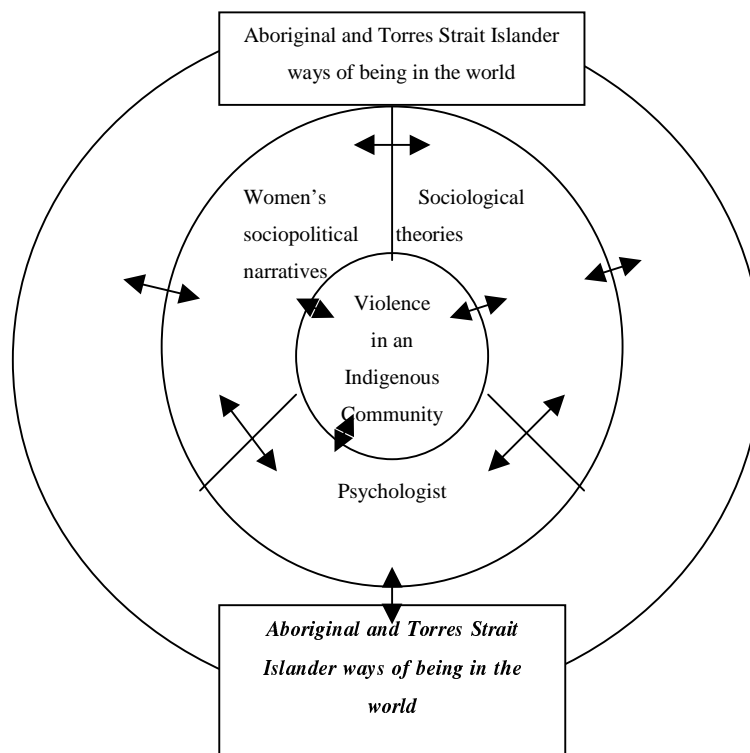
Dignified, proud, self-sustaining and healthy by tradition, Indigenous people today live a very different existence. Still proud and dignified in the face of great adversity, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are, however, profoundly wounded. Suffering poor health, affected by continuing discriminatory processes, haunted by a sense of loss that is both deep and profound, and dependent on welfare, the current plight of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander peoples is Australia's shame. Alcoholism, violence, abuse and poverty are the legacies of colonisation. An understanding of Indigenous circumstances today should be informed by knowledge of historical and contemporary processes.

### **2.3. DEVELOPING AN INDIGENOUS THEORY BASE**

According to Bolger, many Aboriginal women experience violence similar to abuse suffered by non-Aboriginal women and thus 'it is reasonable to assume that general theories will go at least some way to elucidating the causes of the violence they suffer'.<sup>1</sup> C. Atkinson has analysed the literature from a 'critical comparative perspective combined

with Aboriginal worldviews in which life is understood as an interactive process within physical, social and spiritual contexts.’<sup>2</sup> She provides a conceptual framework in a diagram that is crossdisciplinary, or holistic. She argues that a multilayered approach allows violence to be addressed within the historical, political, social and cultural environments in which it occurs. The contextual framework of Figure 3 will be used to explore violence and its causes and contributing factors within Indigenous contemporary situations.

*Figure 3 Conceptual framework for analysing violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities*<sup>3</sup>



This section explores Baker’s theories of colonising impacts, describing in particular how colonisation interrupts relationships between the men and women being colonised, to remould them into the shape of the colonisers. Women’s sociopolitical, sociological and psychological theories will be used to understand how colonisation creates complex and cumulative forms of traumatic stress that may be articulated in ill-health, misuse of alcohol and other drugs, and violence. Contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander forms of violence, as defined previously, placed into the context of inter- and transgenerational

trauma, should all be located within the theory base to acknowledge that the articulations of distress in violent experiences and behaviours can be seen in both their cause and effect.

One person or group can only behave violently towards another when they objectify them. During colonisation, Indigenous people were objectified, labelled as less than human.

*Degraded as to divine things, almost on a level with a brute...In a state of moral unfitness for heaven....And as incapable of enjoying its pleasures as darkness is incapable of dwelling with light.... Without God in the world entirely lost to all oral and spiritual perception.*<sup>4</sup>

Colonisation reproduces its own systems of control to the detriment of the people it colonises.

*The European society, which the Aborigines were supposed to emulate, produced poverty, crime and drunkenness in England, and a savage penal system in Australia.*<sup>5</sup>

There are underlying issues that cannot be ignored in any consideration of the causes and contributing factors of violence. Deeply embedded historical experiences and conditions from colonial and neo-colonial times are entrenched in Indigenous Communities. An Australian Prime Minister acknowledged this in the International Year of the World's Indigenous Peoples:

*It begins with an act of recognition.*

*Recognition that it was we who did the dispossessing.*

*We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life.*

*We brought the diseases. The alcohol.*

*We committed the murders.*

*We took the children from their mothers.*

*We practised discrimination and exclusion.*

*It was our ignorance and prejudice.*

*And our failure to imagine these things being done to us.*<sup>6</sup>

The outcomes of colonisation can be seen in the acts of violence under discussion. Once peoples or groups have been victimised, they may be re-victimised or re-victimise others.<sup>7</sup>

Public policy may contribute to this process. The welfare dependency in Indigenous Communities has in many ways been systematically and structurally created.

Power and violence are interrelated. In sociology, power is often used to describe the actions of nations and armies.<sup>8</sup> In psychology, however, power is used to mean the ability to affect, to influence and to change other persons.<sup>9</sup> May writes of power 'as the ability to cause or prevent change'.<sup>10</sup> Change can occur or be made to occur through constructive or destructive use of power.

Colonisation has been a powerful, destructive force for change in the lives of Australian Indigenous people. Baker<sup>11</sup> shows three distinct periods in coloniser/colonised relations. These periods are: invasion/frontier violence; intercession by often ethnocentric and paternalistic groups; and a re-assessment of responsibility to Indigenous needs around the 1960s by Government. Aboriginal people call these distinct periods the massacre times; the forced removals and separations; and the assimilation/child removal times. Within these three periods, principles of systemic power and control of the colonised prevailed, facilitated by three main types of power abuse or violence:

- overt physical violence;
- covert structural violence - subordination and enforced dependency;
- psychosocial dominance.<sup>12</sup>

These strategies, used successfully to colonise large groups, are similar to those used to brainwash prisoners of war<sup>13</sup> and are also successful in maintaining unequal power relationships in male / female associations.<sup>14</sup>

Overt physical violence is the quickest, most effective way to establish power over others.<sup>15</sup> The violence of the fist, the boot, a knife or gun terrifies or intimidates both victims and witnesses until they feel they must comply. Thereafter, threats are all that are

needed for control.

The Queensland Aboriginal reserves were established in response to the levels of frontier violence that left many groups traumatised and dispossessed.

*They hardly had any food in the camp...I asked them why they did not go into the bush and kill possums, and dig yams. They replied, 'Whitefellow along yarraman [horse] too much break him spear, burn yambo [humpies], cut him old man with whip; white man too much kill him kangaroo.'<sup>16</sup> ...They come into here like hunted wild beasts, having lived for years in a state of absolute terror. Their manifest joy at assurances of safety and protection is pathetic beyond expression.<sup>17</sup>*

Meston's proposed reserves became detainment camps and prisons. People were transferred to them at the direction of the Minister or his designated Aboriginal 'Protectors', often under brutal circumstances.

*Two women and two men were forced at gunpoint, chained together for 240 miles [380 kilometres] and forced-marched across the peninsula to Laura for transportation to Palm Island. A previous group, were beaten by the police, flogged en route several times, including one woman who was six months pregnant. She had been sexually assaulted.<sup>18</sup>*

Structural violence includes the systematic dispossession and (attempted) destruction of Indigenous power resources; relationship to and ownership of land; economic autonomy; law and political processes; cultural and spiritual beliefs and ceremonial practices, and social and family relationships. Legislation that removed people to reserves, took children from their mothers and fathers, and separated husbands and wives, also enforced a dependency on the economic, educational, legal, health, religious, welfare, political and social systems of the colonisers.

During this time, people were incarcerated both on what were called reserves through a legislative 'total control system', and within the prison system, for actions designated by the colonisers as criminal.

*White Australia has created historical and social conditions [for Aboriginal people] that are violence-provoking.<sup>19</sup>*

These established layers of inequality and dependency<sup>20</sup> continue today.

*No matter what their age at death they all had files – in many cases hundreds of pages of observations and moral and social judgments on them and their families; considerations of applications for basic rights, determinations about where they could live, where they could travel, who they could associate with, what possessions they could purchase, whether they could work and what, if any, wages they could receive or retain. Welfare officers, police, court officials and countless other white bureaucrats, most unknown and rarely seen by the persons concerned, judged and determined their lives. The officials saw all, recorded all, judged all, and yet, knew nothing about the people whose lives they controlled....Aboriginal people were removed at the whim of others, crowded into settlements and missions and in impoverished camps on cattle stations. Always there were non-Aboriginal people giving orders, making decisions in which the opinions of the Aboriginal people were not sought nor heeded. Aboriginal families could be separated, children removed if judged too light-skinned, placed in homes or boarded out as servants of non-Aboriginal families.<sup>21</sup>*

Psychosocial domination<sup>22</sup> or as it is sometimes referred to, cultural and spiritual genocide, is the greatest violence of all. Cultural genocide occurs when oppressors believe that the oppressed are non-persons and treat them as such.<sup>23</sup> When oppressors impose their own cultural and social values on the oppressed, the consequences are profound. 'The most terrible fear we can experience is the fear that our identity, our self, is about to be annihilated.'<sup>24</sup> Cultural and spiritual genocide attacks the essence of Aboriginality. People come to believe that they are valueless, and that their cultural and spiritual beliefs and practices are inferior.<sup>25</sup> They accept and adopt the identity, values, the beliefs and behaviours of their oppressors, or worse, are torn between the oppressors' world and their own.

When people come to believe that their own culture is inferior 'they build their own prison and become simultaneously prisoner and warden'<sup>26</sup> and even executioner.

*All my life I never felt as though I fitted in. I was never treated the same as the white kids and they let me know it. All through school us black kids were never treated as equal to the white kids by the teacher nor by their parents. The only time I really fitted in was when I was at home or with our people in the park. They understood me there. We all shared a similar background and felt no good until we got together in the park. The drinking helped us all to forget. Some of us have moved on but others somehow got caught up in relying on it to dull their pain.<sup>27</sup>*

*Most of us girls were thinking white in the head, but were feeling black inside. We weren't black or white. We were a lonely, lost and sad displaced group... We were brainwashed to think like a white person but not accepted because [we] were black... a lost generation.<sup>28</sup>*

People throughout the consultation process consistently expressed similar feelings.

### 2.4. WOMEN'S SOCIOPOLITICAL THEORY

Some Aboriginal women are uncomfortable with feminism as an imposed construct.<sup>29</sup>

*I have done a lot of feminist subjects as I found to a certain extent feminism offers a theoretical framework that comes closer to analysing my oppression as an Aboriginal person than anything else. But even feminism falls quite short of the mark. While studying in a feminist law class, where I thought I'd feel more comfortable, I was confronted by these white women who said they wanted to hear 'different voices', they wanted to hear Aboriginal women speak up. But it was just lip service.<sup>30</sup>*

Nevertheless, feminist theories provide a general understanding for women. Since the mid-1980s, when State and Federal Government Task Forces prepared reports and made recommendations, the major legal and bureaucratic interventions in domestic violence have been largely derived from feminist theory and practice. Cameron, quoting Root (1992) argues: 'experiences of oppression, dehumanisation, horrors and atrocities in the struggles of millions of people can be approached using a feminist analysis. Such an

analysis broadens the scope of experiences, includes a sociopolitical context, and seeks a deeper understanding of trauma through “stories”, or narrative accounts of life experiences.<sup>31</sup> Whatever the interpretation of feminism, however, at its most fundamental level, it is based upon the notion of patriarchy.

*[Patriarchy is]...a familial-social ideological, political system in which men – by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs, etiquette, education and the division of labour, determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male.<sup>32</sup>*

However, there are some problems with a feminist analysis of violence from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective. The major focus has been on the socialisation of men and women into their respective roles, without acknowledging that race oppression is also relevant in the social construction of who Indigenous people are, as men and women. Brunnbauer, an Aboriginal woman, reflects that violence against Aboriginal women may be viewed as an outcome of patriarchal male domination and oppression of women generally, mediated through beliefs, practices and behaviours that serve the interests of men.<sup>33</sup> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men have adopted the behaviours, attitudes and beliefs of their male colonisers in the way they interact with their women. However, the issue is more complex than that. Bennett, another Aboriginal woman, points out that Aboriginal women do not have purely gendered experiences of violence, rendering them powerless under men. Like Aboriginal men, they have experienced the effects of colonisation and the consequences that followed.

To focus on socially constructed gender roles espoused by feminist theories only, is to ignore the colonial conditions that also create a sense of powerlessness for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men as well as women.<sup>34</sup> Bennett's summary of the main Aboriginal responses that contrast with feminist intervention was adapted<sup>35</sup> to show Aboriginal women's perspectives on family violence, and their relevance to understanding causal factors and consequences.

These points highlight the dilemmas in attempting to apply feminist theory to Aboriginal women's experiences of violence and expose essential differences that must be taken into consideration in solution-focused interventions into the escalating violence. Many

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Aboriginal people want to address violence from an Aboriginal perspective. This can only happen if they are included in this debate. To date this has not yet been the case.

**Figure 4 An Indigenous sociopolitical perspective on family violence**

CONCEPTS	ABORIGINAL PERSPECTIVE
Gender, patriarchy and family violence	Aboriginal women say patriarchy cannot fully explain violence as Aboriginal women do not have a purely gendered experience of violence. In traditional Aboriginal societies there were specific gender roles that were complementary and respectful and lores that protected the preservation of them.
Gender and power	Both Aboriginal men and women are relatively powerless in white society. Traditionally, men and women were relatively equal in Aboriginal Communities.
Family violence and empowerment	Empowerment of Communities is essential to address family violence. Aboriginal women may be unable or unwilling to fragment their identity by leaving the Community, kin, family or partners.
Commonality of women’s experience	There are differences of class, culture and status that affect understandings and experiences of family violence, of patriarchy and oppression. Oppression and inequality are not shared equally by Aboriginal and white women. Differences must be acknowledged and addressed.
The influence of the social context.	Capitalist conditions and colonial mentality create powerlessness and impact on the construction of gender roles and on family violence in Aboriginal Communities. Family violence can only be addressed by adopting Aboriginal world views of the problem and approaching it from a holistic perspective.
Attitudes to men	Domestic violence is a direct result of the breakdown of Aboriginal lore, and its replacement with white sexist/racist norms. ‘White society’ glorifies violence and tells our men this is what confirms them in their manhood (Lucashenko and Best, 1995).
Focus of intervention	Family violence is a Community issue involving men, women and children. Aboriginal men’s issues must also be addressed. Aboriginal women are also sometimes ‘perpetrators’ of violence against other Aboriginal women, men and children. The ‘collective personal’ is the ‘political’.
Legal responses	Although traditional violence in Aboriginal societies was a legitimate form of social control, unsanctioned violence against Aboriginal women was considered illegal and severely punished. However, ‘gamin’ traditional law, which is supported by misinformed people, is now being used as justification for indiscriminate bashings and sexual violence. Current legal responses are not appropriate. The legal system itself has functioned abusively on Aboriginal people.
Substance abuse and violence	The abuse of alcohol and drugs is one of the causes/contributing factors of violence in Aboriginal families and Communities and symptomatic of transgenerational trauma. In many cases both abuser and victim have been drinking.

Feminist theory does provide a perspective on power within the ‘socially structured and culturally maintained patterns of male/female relations’.<sup>36</sup> However, its usefulness is limited, both within the broader society and within Indigenous situations. Violence is often an aspect of patriarchy.<sup>37</sup>

*However...patriarchy is not natural and women haven’t always been oppressed...patriarchy is only 5000 to 7000 years old and that [sic.] pre-patriarchal cultures were based on strong bonds between women, women and men, and between adults and children....Life and power were shared equally between the sexes.<sup>38</sup>*

According to N. L. Jamieson, ‘In order for male dominance to get its initial grip on societies it had to turn whole cultures upside down.’<sup>39</sup> The British brought with them an entrenched patriarchal system that legitimised the acculturation and dispossession of a race they considered inferior. This cultural violence has contributed to the continuation of

patriarchy in Australia, where it is now firmly entrenched in society. In patriarchal societies young men may be socialised into using violence as a tool of domination and control,<sup>40</sup> and young women are socialised into subservience in both social and personal relationships.<sup>41</sup> Over time, these socialised positions become encased within the systems and structures of society and perpetuate themselves<sup>42</sup> and become the norm.

Patriarchal colonisation brought with it particular forms of violence that promoted, in turn, powerlessness in colonised groups. Patriarchal colonisation also restructured the gender relationships in colonised groups, to exemplify the structural relations of the colonisers.<sup>43</sup>

The unique dimensions of violence against Aboriginal women, and indeed violence generally within Aboriginal Communities, are a result of complex factors and sociohistorical consequences. While individual narratives are vital in understanding how violence is experienced, each story must also be located in the collective story, including accounts of how men, women and children experience violence.

### 2.5. SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES

Sociological theories focus on social factors implicated in the incidence and escalation of violence, both within families and within communities generally. While it is acknowledged that social problems and psychological problems are not isolated from each other, psychological factors are discussed in Subsection 2.6.

Violence in Indigenous Communities must be considered in its historical and sociostructural context, for ‘to construct [violence] as an “Aboriginal problem”, or to simply incriminate alcohol, denies a history of overt violence to Aborigines and the contemporary covert violence of cultural exclusion and institutional control’.<sup>44</sup>

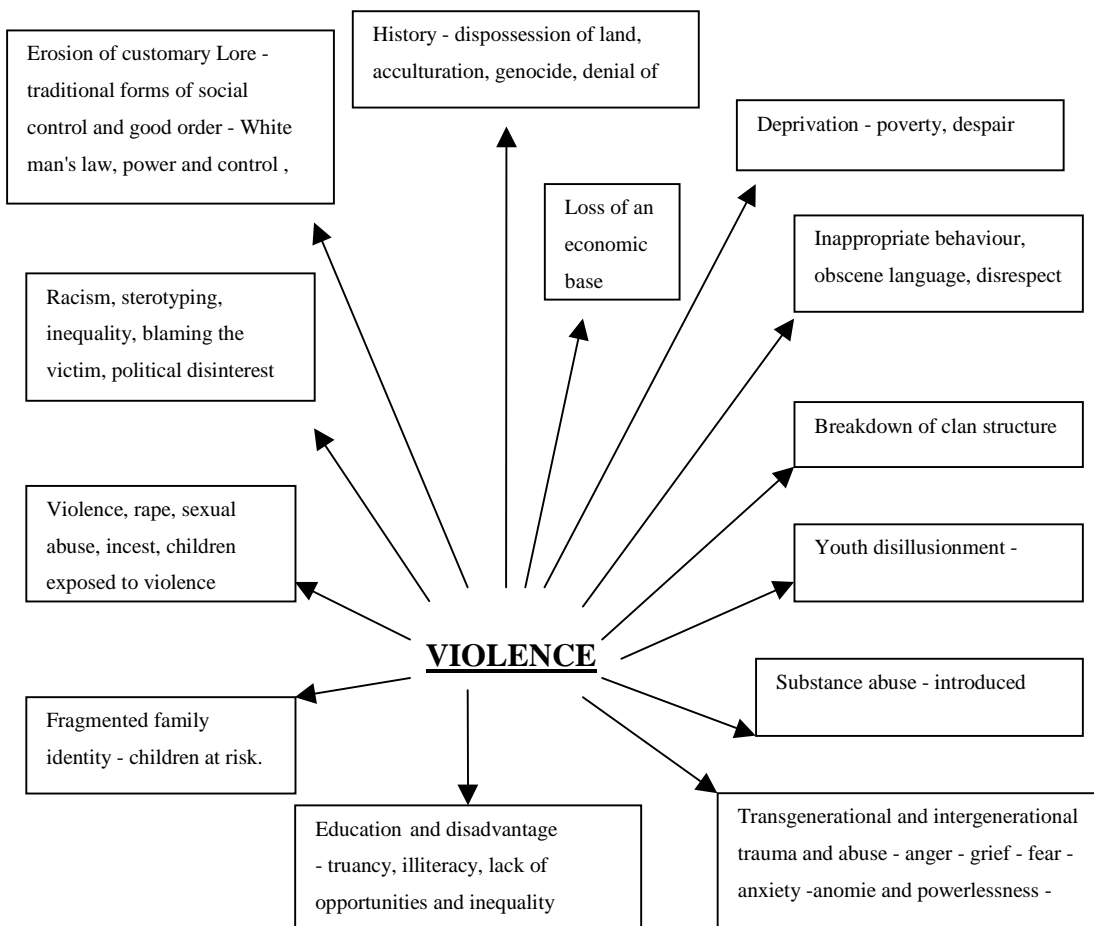
The National Aboriginal Health Strategy Working Party has written:

*Domestic Violence, which is frequently associated with alcohol consumption, cannot be attributed to any one cause. Domestic violence has its roots in institutionalisation, incarceration, loss of role, loss of parental and role models,*

*low self-esteem and alienation.*<sup>45</sup>

Brunnbauer listed what has been ‘identified by Aboriginal women and their Communities as contributing to family violence ... arising out of their experiences of oppression, racism, dispossession, dislocation and disenfranchisement within Australian society’.<sup>46</sup> The combined list by Brunnbauer shown in Figure 5 is a complex and cumulative set of interactive social and structural factors.

*Figure 5 A sociological overview of factors contributing to Indigenous oppression and violence*



**2.6. PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES**

Psychological theories are also important to consider when conceptualising violence. The theories provide a framework for analysing the complexities of the historical impacts on Indigenous peoples, in traumatic distress and its transgenerational effects on individuals,

on families, and collectively.<sup>47</sup> However, Western psychology has generally focused on individuals and pathologised individual behaviour without placing the individual into a whole environment or community.<sup>48</sup>

*Psychology has continued to decontextualise the individual, examining the patient as an isolated entity without considering the larger sociohistorical causes of personal distress. As a result, cultural absences and political wounds are 'interiorised' (i.e., located in the self) and thus blamed on the victim. While psychologists have been treating the empty self, they have, of necessity, also been constructing it, profiting from it, and not challenging the social arrangements that created it.*<sup>49</sup>

On the other hand, Eastern psychology and Indigenous psychology understand self as part of something much larger, providing a transpersonal perspective.<sup>50</sup> Psychological theory must begin to relate the predicament of the individual to his or her environment without losing sight of the individual. While some psychological theory is in danger of blaming the victim, or detracting from the responsibility of the offender, there is a substantial body of evidence in support of both inter and transgenerational transmission of trauma in relation to violent behaviour. In the Western psychological context, violence is perceived as learned behaviour passed down from parent to child. It is also seen as related to psychological disorders, the manifestation of physiological problems such as trauma or those associated with the influence of alcohol and drugs.<sup>51</sup> The transpersonal experiences that many Indigenous people have suffered cannot be explained within the confines of Western psychology.

This Report has referred to the results of interactive psychological factors across generations. Many Indigenous children have been profoundly hurt and emotionally and socially abused by the process. Because of the compounding circumstances of dysfunction in Indigenous Communities, people cannot express the pain of the hurt they have experienced and as a result, they have become oppressed. Expressing feelings have resulted too often in misuse of alcohol and other drugs, and alienation from their own families and Communities. Non-Indigenous Australians generally have not understood the pain that Indigenous Australians have suffered, nor that abuses occurred.

Restricted access to education about the processes, and the inability of educational institutions to teach what is needed has limited people's ability to understand both the cause and effect of past violence against Indigenous peoples and the effect that this can have on the behaviour of their children.

Photo courtesy of the Queensland Museum.

### **2.7. THE ABUSE OF ALCOHOL AND OTHER ADDICTIVE SUBSTANCES**

*I have read literally hundreds of Sentencing Remarks where judges of the District and Supreme Courts throughout Queensland have said time and again that something must happen about the alcohol problem in remote Communities and indeed over the past two decades<sup>52</sup> have commented repeatedly that still nothing has been done. I could literally chronicle the Judicial remarks made over the past twenty years alone which portray the most damning indictments against successive administrations during the past two decades and indeed throughout the century. It is so graphic that I doubt that any defence could properly be mounted to an action against the Government for failing in its duty to people in these Communities, particularly against the background of the repeated comment and entreaty judicially that the authorities act to do something. They have utterly failed,*

*neglected or refused to do so....While people continue to promulgate the view that it's 'just the way they live and they do it to themselves' and similar non-cerebral utterings, the case against the various administrations continues to grow. The fact of the matter is that the governments have involved themselves in what is in truth a pernicious trade....What is the difference between knowingly selling alcohol to people whom you know are grossly damaged physically and mentally by such sale and who become or continue to be addicted to it on the one hand and on the other hand selling heroin or amphetamines or any other illicit drugs or opiate. If you conclude that there is in reality no difference, then you would conclude that the present administration and past administrations are arguably just plain drug dealers. That is to say – dealers in death.<sup>53</sup>*

The consultative process advanced alcohol as the most pressing concern of Indigenous people. Of the 43 submissions received from individuals and various agencies, 91% of the overall submissions, and 100% of those from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including Community Councils and organisations, cited alcohol and other drugs as major factors for attention if the issue of violence is to be successfully addressed. This subsection reflects the voices and submissions that should be heard, in order to understand how people experiencing violence relate it to alcohol. The fact that they took the time to make submissions and attend consultations reinforces their call for immediate intervention.

It is widely accepted that people drink alcohol for a variety of reasons, including as a way of coping with deep-seated, unresolved problems. While alcohol is regarded as a mitigating factor in violent circumstances, it should not be used as an excuse for the violence occurring. It is vital to recognise the role of alcohol in deaths and injuries through violence, in general ill-health, and also in family and Community breakdown. It is also important to acknowledge that many people do enjoy alcohol in moderation:

*We have a lot of social drinkers who are responsible in the way they drink. The impression that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are violent and are drunks must be changed.<sup>54</sup>*

However, both the consultations and the submissions generally focused on alcohol as featuring prominently in violence and its use therefore must be addressed as a priority.

### 2.7.1. Alcohol and other drugs – an historical overview

While alcohol was identified as the major trigger of violence, there were also concerns about people mixing it with *yarndi* (marijuana).

*Alcohol is not the only problem here.... My ex, he was real violent. When I was eight months with my last, he kicked me in the stomach to try to get rid of the baby because he said it wasn't his. It was but he wouldn't believe me.*

*He would be worse when he ran out of yarndi. That's when he would get into the kids too, really belt into them before he started on me. I left him, got away, and with this new one I keep feeling something is wrong with him because he doesn't argue or hit me. I keep wondering what's wrong.<sup>55</sup>*

*Yarndi* used alone, however, was seen as preferable to alcohol.

*He's all right when he is on yarndi. He's not the same person. When he is drinking he drinks straight rum and you can't look at him sideways or you would get a backhand.<sup>56</sup>*

In fact, *yarndi* is seen as a pacifier and some women actually buy it for their husbands to avoid being bashed: 'When he's on the *yarndi* he sits in front of the TV like a little lamb.'<sup>57</sup>

Indigenous people can sometimes be easy targets for pushers peddling alcohol and illegal substances, especially when they live in areas where there are other marginalised people and high rates of unemployment.

*When people are forced into living conditions that they do not benefit from and do not want - the anger can be for a number of reasons and it simmers away at an alarming degree and on occasions is barely hidden. When judgment is clouded with alcohol dependence there is little in the way of reasoning to prevail. Anger and frustration manifests itself in more drinking, more alcohol abuse and more violence. It doesn't matter whether someone is angry about feelings of dispossession or lack of self-respect or lack of respect for others or lack of a future or lack of money, lack of services, lack of facilities, lack of health when there are so many 'lacks' to choose from.<sup>58</sup>*

*The drugs help to take away the pain, they make people feel better. Lots of people are traumatised by violence experienced during their childhood.<sup>59</sup>*

With the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788, the invaders brought convicts, settlers, policies of colonisation, new diseases, and the Westminster system of justice. They also brought alcohol, in the form of rum. The consequences of the introduction of colonial policies, Western 'justice' and alcohol are still being dealt with today.

Rum was used as an insidious form of social control over the convicts, and as currency or for barter in the development of this country. From the outset, alcohol was part of the colony's economic base and a political tool. Alcohol made life easier for stressed, oppressed, and traumatised people in the eighteenth century and continues to be used in this manner today.

The image of the drunken Aboriginal is a colonial construction, predating the ready availability of alcohol to Indigenous people. Alcohol was used to engage Indigenous Australians in discourse, to pay for labour, to attract people into settlements and to lure people into assimilation. Indigenous Australian women were encouraged to consume alcohol, which was used by white men to barter for sex.<sup>60</sup> Young girls and boys, well under the age of puberty, were fed alcohol and used for sexual gratification. This abhorrent type of behaviour was unheard of among Aboriginal people prior to invasion.<sup>61</sup>

Alcohol is therefore part of Australian history, and both alcohol and opium are part of Queensland's history.<sup>62</sup> The legacy of alcohol lives on to create abject misery. As recently as three years ago, Aboriginal artists reported being paid in cartons of beer by an art gallery proprietor in Alice Springs.

During the consultative process in Indigenous Communities, informants indicated the extent of the damage being caused through the abuse of alcohol:

*One of the harshest realities for us as Aboriginal people is that we are letting the grog and drugs kill us. I don't think we know how to stop and we will mourn the many loved ones we have lost through grog and drugs. Some have been perpetrators. Some have been victims. Many have been both.*<sup>63</sup>

*One of the difficulties is dealing with the alcohol. The problem is that it is now so firmly entrenched. I worked for the Aboriginal Legal Service, and saw many examples of children as young as eight being alcohol-dependent and in some cases sniffing petrol and glue. The spiral of violence actually commences with children beginning to access alcohol and then becoming dependent upon it. In other words if something isn't done to save the children from alcohol by the time they're eight, then it's too late.*<sup>64</sup>

*Alcohol is not the most important ingredient in the violence. The ingredients are complex – boredom – anxiety – insecurity. Who do our young people look up to? Alcohol is just a symptom.*<sup>65</sup>

*In my opinion if you placed 1,200 or so European people on Mornington Island, housed within the same way in such proximity to the hotel on the hill, you would quickly have an identical situation of dependence upon alcohol, despair and violence. The people in the Communities are all poor. It is very difficult to be sophisticated when you have no money and little to look forward to in life. Motivation is a hard commodity to come by when you are dependent upon alcohol. Respect is hard to come by when young people in the Community see the older members of the Community behaving in a way that is guaranteed to engender disrespect. Once again, it is the alcohol.*<sup>66</sup>

*The biggest problem in this town is there are no services for men. Aboriginal men need a crisis service – not just an alcohol service but a crisis service – often the violence occurs at a time of crisis – when the person has increased his alcohol intake.<sup>67</sup>*

*Many of the women using the shelter have multiple problems – they are experiencing domestic violence – have alcohol and other drug problems – have mental illness – they have been sexually abused as a child, which is a contributing factor to domestic violence - alcohol abuse and mental illness.<sup>68</sup>*

*I drink because I feel better. I feel good when I drink because I don’t hurt so much and I am not frightened so much.<sup>69</sup>*

The last quote contains the words of a young mother from Mornington Island who was a regular victim of family violence but also stated that she felt ‘no good’. She said her feelings came from her experiences as a child witness to violence. Indigenous informants stated clearly that alcohol and drugs helped people to cope with feelings of powerlessness, despair and helplessness. Informants also stated that few services were available to encourage users to free themselves of addiction. They needed worthwhile programs, rehabilitation and counselling services run by appropriately trained workers.

### **2.7.2. Alcohol and violence**

*Many of those people that drink grog, drown their feelings in grog and drugs. The only thing is then they forget that everyone else has feelings and they can do a lot of damage when they start punishing in a fit of rage as they do, have you seen them when that happens, it’s a sad sight.<sup>70</sup>*

Submissions in the consultations forcibly stated that if the issue of alcohol were addressed, violence would decrease. Many people with severe alcohol addiction indicated they would like stop to drinking, but there are no services available to help them.

*Alcohol and substance abuse are proven contributing factors in violence, suicide, murder and rape. The underlying issues which exacerbate the drinking of alcohol are controls external to the means of our people, dispossession, poor housing, poor health, education.<sup>71</sup>*

*The men say – ‘We got nothing - can’t get a job - so I’m fighting with my wife’. DV here is a lot to do with boredom. Nothing to do except go together all day, sleep together all night. A lot of DV happens where the person is sober, but it is easier to just talk about the alcohol.<sup>72</sup>*

*Men are largely in an alcohol spiral and have lost the self-respect that they ought to have....If the problem with alcohol abuse is tackled and beaten, then the incidents of violence and abuse against women and children will drop to a staggering extent. Offenders have indicated they wish to go to prison to get away from alcohol.<sup>73</sup>*

*Indigenous people say alcohol is a huge problem, but its use must be studied in the context of their situations. Alcohol consumption ‘cannot be understood or given a meaning except in relation to the dependent situation of Aboriginal people within the Australian state’.<sup>74</sup> Alcohol is used in a structured manner, to mitigate needs that have both positive and negative consequences. Alcohol enables anger and despair to be expressed without responsibility for the consequences.<sup>75</sup> Alcohol provides a sense of belonging to a group, although it may be a social group of drinkers. When alcohol use increases with greater availability, children are at risk of being abused and neglected,<sup>76</sup> and of witnessing of violence between adults, thus learning behaviour which may lead them to violence in turn.*

Alcohol is associated with getting drunk, feeling powerless, aggressively articulating feelings of anger and distress, and engaging in interpersonal violence.<sup>77</sup> Because Indigenous people have a different cultural construction for alcohol use than other Australians, responsibility for violent behaviour can be easily attributed to alcohol. The excuse given is that ‘it was the grog’. A clear message throughout the consultations was that blaming alcohol for violence is no longer acceptable. Alcohol-related deaths and

injuries, and in particular violence against small children, must be condemned in the harshest terms, and those responsible must stand accountable.

However, it was also believed that the design of programs to reduce the consumption of alcohol and other addictive substances must take cultural aspects into account. The therapeutic properties of alcohol must be replaced by programs with real meaning that have long-term benefits for health and well-being. Suitable strategies should be devised in collaboration with expert alcohol and drug workers.

When groups of Indigenous people live in cities, strategies to reduce alcohol consumption and illicit drugs are hard to monitor. In contrast, the isolation of some regional Aboriginal Communities could be used in their favour to contain the use of alcohol and illicit drugs and to outlaw their ready access through more stringent surveillance. It is important to give priority to strategies to help Communities to utilise their isolation. One strategy is to conduct road checks of vehicles and people entering Communities, and another would be to set up an easily accessible notification hotline, with guaranteed anonymity. Apparently reporting of information from isolated regions to drug hotlines has been less effective than expected, because of confidentiality concerns.

### **2.7.3. Costs of the abuse of alcohol and other drugs**

The Alcohol and Other Drugs Council of Australia (ADCA), in a report commissioned by the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, summarises the impact of alcohol in the following terms:

- *Aboriginal alcohol misuse has a devastating effect on family life by precipitating domestic violence and sexual abuse;*
- *Widespread alcohol misuse by parents and other Aboriginal adults provides strong negative role models of drinking and parenting behaviour for children;*
- *The misuse of alcohol has damaging effects on Aboriginal life in the social and cultural spheres. For example, heavy drinking has been linked to the neglect of important ceremonies in traditional Communities;*

- *Although alcohol is not the only cause of family and community disruption, it is seen as a primary cause by many Aboriginal people.*<sup>78</sup>

The summary of the report on alcohol-related violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities<sup>79</sup> found:

- violence is pervasive;
- women are more likely to be victims and men perpetrators;
- violent episodes are often associated with drinking.

The relationship between drinking and violence is not directly causal, but alcohol may facilitate or incite violence by providing a socially acceptable excuse for the negative behaviour. Indigenous women associate violence with alcohol, often seeing it as a contributing factor or a cause, or listing it as one of the reasons for increased violence. The Task Force found that contemporary patterns of family violence do not accord with traditional practices of resolving disputes. Traditionally, forms of confrontational aggression and structured violence were used in disputes, but family disputes today are often unstructured when alcohol is involved. The relationship of alcohol and violence is not yet fully understood.<sup>80</sup>

Noel Pearson has written that 'Ours is one of the most dysfunctional societies on the planet today; surely the fact that the per capita consumption of alcohol in Cape York is the highest in the world says something about our dysfunction'.<sup>81</sup> In every document or study on violence within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander situations, the issue of alcohol and its effects are raised. In fact, most of the women in Cape York say alcohol causes violence. Canteens on Communities are a continuing source of contention. There are calls to 'close the canteens'. While this opinion was expressed throughout the consultations, a more powerful call was for the canteens to be properly run. It is important to recognise that not all canteens were put into place by the will of the Community.

*For years the people of Aurukun said no to a canteen at public meetings and in a referendum. However, after Aurukun received Local Government status, the then Local Government Minister, Mr Russ Hinze decided it was discriminatory for the Aurukun Community not to have a canteen like other Queenslanders. A canteen*

*was built in the middle of Centenary Park, in the midst of the children's playground equipment! Great role modelling for the children as they play around the canteen at night.*<sup>82</sup>

*I've seen children in school holidays hanging around outside the canteen...in the middle of the day drinking glasses of beer. Some children roam around until the early hours of the morning. Neglect is the real problem...and this lack of supervision leaves opportunities for children to be sexually abused.*<sup>83</sup>

As children use their playground in which the canteen is now located, they see their elders drinking, and they witness the violence that results from the grog. This influences social learning. The messages given to the adults and children of the Aurukun Community were clear. The State had power, and they were powerless. Their opinions and concerns were of no consequence. Both Hunter and Miller<sup>84</sup> pointed out 'today's parents are the offspring of the first "legal Aboriginal drinkers", many of whom have grown up in settings dominated by violence and alcohol. Role models for peaceful settlements of disputes are few'.<sup>85</sup> Drinking and violence are both 'socially learned responses, maintained by a system of reinforcements or lack of intervention'<sup>86</sup> and the direct intervention of the State into Indigenous lives.

It is also important to recognise the women who have worked relentlessly over the years to limit the damage of alcohol. At the present time, Doomadgee does not have a canteen, by the grace and tenacity of the lone woman on the Council, Clara Foster, who has successfully blocked all endeavours by other Councillors and the State and Federal bureaucrats to fund a canteen for Doomadgee. In the early nineties, the Mt Isa ATSIC regional office funded a consulting architect to travel to Doomadgee, to begin the process of drawing up plans for a canteen. Around that same time, two children drowned in an open sewerage drain.<sup>87</sup> Both the State and Federal Governments were engaged in discussion about whose responsibility it was to put in place proper sanitation at Doomadgee, and at the same time, discussion continued about whether Doomadgee should have a hotel, to keep the money spent on grog in the Community.

**Who cared about the open sewerage drain and the dangers it posed for children?**

### 2.8. Cultural and spiritual violence

The most profound form of violence violates the spirit and soul, tearing at individual and collective identity. Colonisation and postcolonial interactions have made many Indigenous people feel disempowered and dispirited, as they face an isolating and brutalising life.

*Traditional values have been eroded and the other men in the Communities simply do not have the same respect from others...that they once had.*<sup>88</sup>

The attempted genocide of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through colonisation has subjected Indigenous people to a continuing process of destruction evidenced in the confusion, desolation and despair in the minds of the young and in the eyes of the Elders, who are only too aware of how much such experience has cost.

The roots of contemporary Aboriginal spirituality lie in traditions based on 40,000 years of ceremonies and rituals enmeshed in cyclical reverence of life, death and creation.

While the effects of colonisation of the lives of Aboriginal people varied from area to area, many clans resisted the intrusion of the colonisers and suffered the consequences of family dispersal, dispossession of land and in many cases, death. Diseases and malnutrition caused many Aboriginal people to accept the shelter and food offered by the colonisers, often to their own peril. The provision of water and food laced with poison was not an unusual occurrence in early interactions between Aboriginal people and the invaders.

The lives of many Aboriginal people altered forever as they were rounded up and placed on communal missions and reserves. The increasing dominance of Western civilisation eroded many aspects of the traditional way of life and fragmented both the cultural and spiritual bases.

Aboriginal people fought hard to retain their cultural identity and continued to practise their culture, even in the face of the most devastating consequences. Hidden by Elders from the managers of missions and other authoritative figures who inflicted severe

punishment if cultural practices were witnessed, many of the traditional beliefs and rituals were handed down through generations as secret business.

The National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families, the *Bringing Them Home* report, detailed in both implicit and explicit terms the tragic circumstances and effects of genocide on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Photo courtesy of Queensland Museum.

Indigenous children have been forcibly separated from their families and Communities since the first days of European occupation of Australia. Violent battles over rights to land, food and water sources characterised race relations in the nineteenth century. Indigenous children were kidnapped and exploited for their labour.<sup>89</sup> In Queensland and Western Australia, the Chief Protector used his removal powers and guardianship powers to force all Indigenous people onto large and highly regulated government settlements and missions, to remove children from their mothers at about the age of four years and place

them in dormitories away from their families and to send them off the mission at about the age of fourteen to work.<sup>90</sup>

The practice of giving young Aboriginal men and women to establishments or households to use for labour exposed them to both sexual and physical violence without any form of recourse from authorities who were often aware of the abuse and ill treatment inflicted.

The Task Force was provided with numerous accounts of people who had been taken away from their parents as children; some had since found their way back home and others were still searching. They had all suffered physical violence and emotional and psychological abuse. The victims who came forward spoke of cruelty inflicted upon them that defies any sense of humanitarianism. One forty-year-old woman provided the following account:

*They took me from my parents when I was only five and they also took my brothers who were four and nine. I remember being in the back yard playing with my brothers and a man came walking up the side of the house, he had with him two other men, all of who wore uniforms. I remember my mother screaming for my dad and begging the men to leave us alone and that she would do anything if they did not take us away from her. I remember being so scared, so terrified that I hurt so much inside I thought I was going to drop dead from fright. They threw us into the back of the car and drove away before we could give mum a hug; we never even got time to see our dad because he was at work. I kept looking out of the back window of the car, hoping with all my might that my mum would somehow catch up to us and make everything alright.*

*But she never did, we didn't have a car and there was no one that she could turn to for help. I remember my baby brother trembling really hard and he wet himself. My older brother just kept looking out of the window. I knew he was crying but he wouldn't say anything 'cause mum and dad would always tell him how he must act when with white people.*

*My brothers and I were taken to a home and each day we would sit and hold each other as if we were frightened that even that was going to be taken away. My older brother used to say he would look after us and he wouldn't let anyone touch us or*

*hurt us, not if he could help it. One day when I went to find my brothers they had sent them to another place and I cannot tell anyone, even today the terrible pain I felt inside and the deep sense of fear that I had as to what was going to happen to us. I prayed that mum and dad would come and get me but I found out many years later that they could not find out where they put us. Even to the day she died, our mother kept searching, I found her too late.*

*When I was fourteen they put me out to work for a local land owner and his wife. When I arrived, he told me that I was to be one of his best livestock and that is the way he treated me. I was kept chained up under the house with the dogs at night, I had chains on my legs and after I had all my meals I had chains put on my wrists. The only time I was let off the chain was when they wanted me to work or when he took me upstairs once a month when the wife was unable to do it. I would lie there screaming for him to stop and begging the women to help me but somehow they just didn't listen. I prayed to God for me to die and when that didn't happen I tried to run away. He caught up with me and told me that he had to teach me a lesson for my own sake and what happened next I still feel even though I am now forty. He ripped my blouse off and tied me to a post under the house and whipped me with the stockwhip until something happened, I must have passed out because after what seemed like eternity, I couldn't feel it anymore. I thanked God because I thought he had let me die.*

*I was made to live with the man and his wife for another five years, and whenever he thought I did something wrong he would give me a hard backhand across the face or pull me into the shed and tell me he was doing what he was doing as a way of punishment and that I should never forget it. If you cried he would hit you some more. I begged the missus for help but she never seemed to worry about what was going on. I never saved any wages from the time there and it was only after he died that I was made to go back to the mission only not to the same one, to another far away from my family so that I would not be able to see them. I have spent my whole life trying to understand why these things happened. I just don't understand. I was a young child for God's sake, I had done nothing, we were always fed and clothed*

*really well and we had lots of love from mum and dad, I just don't know why they did what they did to us, I don't think we will ever know.*<sup>91</sup>

The woman showed the Task Force members the wounds on her back from the whippings she suffered and it was reported that the scars were so deeply furrowed that it was hard to believe that a young girl of fourteen could have survived such an ordeal.

Many accounts were given to the Task Force of ordeals experienced by Aboriginal men and women when they were taken away as children and placed in missions, in institutions and fostered out. Even those who eventually went to a home where they were not physically or sexually violated reported experiencing a deep sense of loss and a lifetime of grieving as a result of being taken away from the family as part of the government practice.

*All of my brothers and sisters and I were taken by authorities. I remember being so scared; none of us knew where they were taking us, all we knew was that it was a long way away. The youngest of us was three and the oldest was nearly eleven and they made him work like a man when he was just a boy who was just as frightened as the rest of us, but he would never show it. That used to make them angry because he would never react. I remember finding him crying once and he said not to tell anyone because that would only make them push him to do even more harder work than what he was already doing. They were really cruel to him and he was only a young boy of eleven.*<sup>92</sup>

Generational responses to the forced removal of children have contributed to dysfunctionality in many families and inability to cope with the associated stresses.

*When I was young my father was a warrior and I grew up thinking that I was going to be a warrior and when I got to be older all I saw was the grog, men sitting looking into space with no jobs and no future.*<sup>93</sup>

The younger generation are often rebellious and antagonistic against authority figures and in some cases institutionalised, having spent many of their formative years in missions or

in youth detention centres. This has been the case for a number of young men taken away from their family at an early age.

For the parents and families of those people taken away, the process and its consequences were equally damaging. Made to question their abilities as parents, both culturally and on a gender basis, many parents suffered immense grief and guilt because they could not stop the authorities from taking their children.

In many cases, both parents and the children exposed to the barbaric process turned to alcohol and or substance abuse as a means of blotting out bad memories.

*I was in the kitchen when I heard my sons scream and without even looking, I knew what was happening because that was always my biggest fear. I ran outside and they were just putting them in the car. I ran at the one in uniform and I grabbed at one of my children to pull him away. But they just knocked me to the ground. I begged them not to take them from me and but they said they would be better off with someone else rather than the likes of me. I watched and screamed while they drove away and the look on my sons' faces I never forgot, I still see it in my mind today. I thought I was going to go mad. No one will ever be able to remove the deep feelings of hurt and anger that you have inside when something like that occurs. I grew angrier every day. I searched for my boys for two years; every time I saw someone who looked like them I would call out their names but it wasn't them. I realised after searching for two years that they were not coming back. I just couldn't cope with life anymore and so I tried to do away with myself. It didn't work and so I spent the next twenty years looking down the neck of a bottle because that was the only way I could block out the pain that I felt from losing my boys and the grief that I suffered when I knew that they would not be coming back. I always prayed that they knew I loved them and that I was looking for them.<sup>94</sup>*

In a gross act of negligence, few records were kept of the names of the children taken away, where they were taken from or where they were taken to. While there have been many speculations about exactly how many Aboriginal children were removed by the Government, the actual figures will never be known.

*Family violence is affecting us all and it has got to stop but we have got to get them to understand that we were once placid people but now you wouldn't think that would you. Where do we go from here I am not sure. I don't think we really understand how many of us have been affected and how many of us will never be found. The alcohol, the breaking of culture and the hurt that many of our people carry with them, does not excuse the violence that we witness, but must be acknowledged and addressed if there is to ever be a break in the cycle of violence and abuse that we are seeing.<sup>95</sup>*

*Where we go from here I am not sure. I don't think we really understand how many of us have been effected by the abduction of our children, how many of us were taken away nor if they will ever be found. The whole practice is one of deceit and callousness.<sup>96</sup>*

The effects of alcoholism, stress and traumatisation lie dormant in the minds of many Aboriginal people who are now parents and grandparents of the next generation. For many of these people, the ramifications are evident in their dysfunctional and dispirited state. A number of them have been further violated or have become the perpetrators of violence themselves.

Spiritual and cultural violence was cited by many informants as one of the significant factors in the current turmoil being witnessed in Aboriginal Communities. It will continue to rise unless Governments work with Indigenous people to help heal the injuries.

Informants saw violence as an expression of suppressed inner pain. While this observation is not meant to excuse offending behaviour, it should provide a basis for introducing interventions into violence by providing counselling services and other initiatives.

*If they want to help us heal and to stop the violence that we are seeing, then we must all go back to the beginning and help some of our people start again for it is those people who are stuck in a vacuum where they are now adults, but there is a small and vulnerable child, confused and abused in all manners, that is lurking*

*deep within. The trouble is this situation may describe too many of us. Everyone I have spoken to has been affected by the process of being taken away, being brought up on a mission or having suffered some form of discrimination or abuse at the hands of authoritative figures either in the schools, when you go to get a job or just by watching what has happened to your family. You can't experience these sorts of pain and not expect some of it to be retained in the young mind. I think that is where much of this violence is coming from, unresolved conflict which has been allowed to fester within and with no counselling available for many years, the individual has often resorted to other means for release i.e. alcohol which encourages other difficulties to surface which in some cases is abusive and aggressive behaviour which can act as an agent for unresolved and pent-up feelings that have no other form of release.<sup>97</sup>*

*When a child's development is arrested, when their feelings are repressed, especially hurt and anger, they grow up to be an adult with an angry, hurt child inside them which has never recovered from the original pain. This angry young child will contaminate that person's adult behaviour until they are given the right type of support to help them recover. For many young people their behaviour is the result of previous abuse, which has contaminated them, forcing the hurt child to do the only thing they can to deal with the pain - rage at authority<sup>98</sup> or strike out at those who are equally as vulnerable such as their loved ones or those in the Community.<sup>99</sup>*

Although it is not wise to use this analysis as a generic explanation of the violence in Aboriginal Communities, it provides one explanation.

Many people in Indigenous Communities have been forced to adapt to Western culture, while non-Indigenous people have not shown a matching acceptance of Indigenous culture. To survive this conflict, Indigenous people have gone through a process of acculturation whereby they have had to adapt to survive, with many trying to live between two worlds. This has been their dilemma for generations; acculturation has been forced upon them, resulting, in many cases, in generations of dysfunctional people. Acculturation can produce a sense of low self-esteem, powerlessness, confusion, cultural disorientation, and alienation

from the strength of cultural values. Many Aboriginal people feel lost, unable to live in the Western world but unable to go back to the old culture neither.

Indigenous people can feel isolated from themselves and from society:

*Many of our people feel isolated and alone...can we build a life with anyone when we can't even build life for ourselves?<sup>100</sup>*

*It does not matter what you do to get a better life, you will always be struggling because we just cannot fit into the white man's world and our Communities are changing so quickly. I think many of us are lost. We really look after each other here [in prison] and we make sure we protect each other and we help set each other on a straight path. It's when you get out that it all falls apart. There is nothing there for us no matter how hard we try, you cannot get a job. You find it hard to be able to rent a place and you always feel as though white people don't trust you. We used to be able to rely on our families and our Communities, but they forget us when we are in here and then we get out we get angry.<sup>101</sup>*

*The high levels of institutionalisation of Aboriginal children and adults is the result of systemic racism - unchecked, forced acculturation and continued shaming in order to institute a different and more subtle form of genocide - where the power and resources to self-determine and heal is not available.<sup>102</sup>*

*Historical events have produced, for today's Aboriginal people and governments, a set of complexities and concerns that must be dealt with if we are to set the path straight for our future generations. The unhealed wounds of being taken away, the unresolved conflict that is individually or collectively being aroused, must all be dealt with in a way that helps the disempowered to feel empowered and the alienated and isolated, to feel in control and in charge of their lives.*

*A large percentage of Indigenous youth, currently working through the cultural conflict that they are experiencing, are potentially being placed on a path for future conflict which will fester into something much more serious unless action is taken*

*now to help them deal with the crisis that has evolved. The adults already bound by the inner turmoil they have experienced must be helped to feel a sense of belonging, of productivity and of positivism in the eyes of others and more importantly, within themselves. We must work with governments and agencies to help bring our people out of the dark so that we can deal with the ramifications of past actions and work toward an environment that nurtures what is required for the collective good.<sup>103</sup> While economic sustainability is essential, of equal importance is the social and cultural sustainability of our people which makes up the very essence of who we are. It is through the revival of our spirituality, our connectedness to land and through the respect for self and others that we may be able to turn the situation around and instil in the minds of our people a renewed sense of optimism and strength that is urgently required. This will be a significant step toward addressing the violence and alcoholism, both of which have resulted from the cultural and spiritual fragmentation that our people have suffered as a result of past actions and political and social practices that have been imposed.<sup>104</sup>*

Part of the restorative process will need to focus on the land, because the healing, spiritual aspects of land have largely been unacknowledged until recently:

*Our land also has an important role to play in healing. The land is a powerful healer, as is the sea. When your ancestors have walked these places for millennia, they hold an energy of timelessness that invokes serenity and the feeling that one is not alone, but in the presence of these ancestors, who are able to communicate via the senses and convey the feelings and thoughts that are most conducive to healing. When we are able to sit on our land in contemplation and hear, feel or see the spirits of our old people, then we have been to a place within ourselves of great depth and connectedness. It is this place that we need to go to in order to truly heal ourselves; and once we have learnt how to do that, then we move forward.<sup>105</sup>*

*I find my peace here now – it is something you can't explain – just to lie under the trees and look up at the sky, with a fish line in the water. It doesn't matter if you don't catch a fish. It's just so relaxing.<sup>106</sup>*

## Endnotes

### Section 2 – Causes and contributing factors

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<sup>1</sup> A. Bolger, *Aboriginal Women and Violence: Report for the Criminal Research Council and the Northern Territory Police* (Darwin: Australian National University, North Australian Research Unit, 1991), 39.

<sup>2</sup> C. Atkinson, 'Violence Against Aboriginal Women: Alternative Dimensions and Proposed Ways Forward', Social Work Thesis, University of South Australia (1998), 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>4</sup> J. Harper, 'Report Investigating the Establishment of a Mission Station at Bateman's Bay', *Jean Woolmington, Aboriginals in Colonial Society: 1788 –1850* (Melbourne: Cassell Australia), 18 quoted by Mick Dodson, *Social Justice: The End in the Beginning*.

<sup>5</sup> R. Broome, *Aboriginal Australians: Black Response to White Dominance 1788-1980* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1982), 31.

<sup>6</sup> The Honourable the Prime Minister, P. J. Keating, MP, Redfern Park, 10 December 1992.

<sup>7</sup> F. M. Ochberg, *Post-Traumatic Therapy and Victims of Violence* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1988).

<sup>8</sup> R. May, *Power and Innocence: A Search for the Sources of Violence*. (New York: Norton, 1976), 100.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>11</sup> D.R. Baker, *Race, Ethnicity and Power* (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1983).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 30-41.

<sup>13</sup> M. Romero, 'A Comparison Between Strategies Used on Prisoners of War and Battered Wives', *Sex Roles* 13, nos 9/10 (1985).

<sup>14</sup> S. Schechter, *Women and Male Violence: Visions and Struggles of the Battered Women's Movement* (Boston: South End Press, 1982).

<sup>15</sup> S. Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Man, Women and Rape* (New York: Bantam, 1975) states that physical violence and rape have been powerful tools of domination and colonisation throughout the ages, and specifically articulates the hierarchy of power and reaffirms male dominance in relationships

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in R. Evans, *Expulsion, Exploitation and Extermination: Race Relations in Colonial Queensland* (Sydney: ANZ Books, 1975), 88.

<sup>17</sup> A. Meston. *Queensland Aboriginals: Proposed System for Their Improvement and Preservation* (1896).

<sup>18</sup> R. Kidd, *The Way We Civilise* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1997), 121.

<sup>19</sup> P. Wilson, *Black Death White Hands* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1982), 3.

<sup>20</sup> Baker, *Race, Ethnicity and Power*; E. Hunter, *Aboriginal Health and History: Power and Prejudice in Remote Australia* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

<sup>21</sup> Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, *National Report*, vol. 2 (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1991), 502-503.

<sup>22</sup> Baker, *Race, Ethnicity and Power*, 35.

<sup>23</sup> Harr'e, *Social Beings* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1993), 106.

<sup>24</sup> D. Rowe, *Beyond Fear* (London: Fontana, 1982).

<sup>25</sup> Baker, *Race, Ethnicity and Power*.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>27</sup> Consultations, Brisbane, 1999.

<sup>28</sup> Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families* (Canberra: HREOC, 1997)

<sup>29</sup> A critique of the problems in feminist theory as it is applied to the needs of Aboriginal women and domestic violence can be found in C. Atkinson, Thesis, 60 – 66.

<sup>30</sup> C. Felton, in G. Maddigan (1993).

<sup>31</sup> S. Cameron, 'Aboriginal Experiences of Psychological Trauma: Personal, Intergenerational and Transgenerational', Master's Thesis, Victoria University (1998).

- <sup>32</sup> Rich quoted in C. Atkinson, Thesis.
- <sup>33</sup> P. Brunnbauer, 'Aboriginal Women and Family Violence: A Community Development Response', unpublished Thesis, University of South Australia (1996), 55.
- <sup>34</sup> B. Bennett, 'Domestic Violence'. *Aboriginal and Islander Health Worker Journal* 21, no. 4 (1997), 11-14.
- <sup>35</sup> C. Atkinson, Thesis, 60 – 66.
- <sup>36</sup> K. Yllo and M. Bograd. *Feminist Perspectives on Wife Abuse* (California: Sage, 1988), 17.
- <sup>37</sup> R.E. Dobash and R. Dobash, *Violence Against Wives: A Case Against the Patriarchy* (New York: The Free Press, 1979).
- <sup>38</sup> N.L. Jamieson, <http://www.connsacs.org/patriarchy.htm>, Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>40</sup> H. Blagg, 'Intervention with Adolescents to Prevent Domestic Violence', Preface to *Report: The Derby or Aboriginal Community Model* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology, 1998).
- <sup>41</sup> S. Butler, *Conspiracy of Silence: The Trauma of Incest* (California: Volcano Press, 1978).
- <sup>42</sup> Wilson, *Black Death White Hands*.
- <sup>43</sup> Bennett, 'Domestic Violence'; M. Lucashenko, 'Violence Against Indigenous Women: Public and Private Dimensions', ed. S. Cook and J. Bessant, *Women's Encounters With Violence: Australian Experiences* (California: Sage Publications, 1996), 378-90.
- <sup>44</sup> E. Hunter, *The Intercultural and Sociohistorical Context of Aboriginal Personal Violence in Remote Australia* (1990), 14.
- <sup>45</sup> National Aboriginal Health Strategy Working Party (1989), 8.
- <sup>46</sup> Brunnbauer, 'Aboriginal Women and Family Violence'.
- <sup>47</sup> C. Atkinson, Thesis.
- <sup>48</sup> A. Mindell, *Sitting in the Fire* (Oregon: Lao Tse Press, 1995).
- <sup>49</sup> Cushman (1990), 609, quoted in B. Miller, *A Sociohistorical and Psychological Perspective on Aboriginal Intracultural Aggression* (1991), 21.
- <sup>50</sup> E. Smith, 'Addressing the Psychological Distress of Death as Reality: A Transpersonal Approach', *Social Work* 40 (1995).
- <sup>51</sup> K. Mow, *Tjunparni: Family Violence in Indigenous Australia: A Report and Literature Review for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission* (Canberra: ATSIC, 1992), 31.
- <sup>52</sup> The approximate timespan of the judicial remarks in question.
- <sup>53</sup> Submission 40.
- <sup>54</sup> Consultations, Kowanyama.
- <sup>55</sup> Consultations, Brisbane, July 1999.
- <sup>56</sup> Consultations, Boggo Road Women's Prison, July 1999.
- <sup>57</sup> Consultation, Toowoomba.
- <sup>58</sup> Submission 40.
- <sup>59</sup> Consultations, Inala.
- <sup>60</sup> B. Elder, *Blood on the Wattle: Massacres and Maltreatment of the Australian Aborigines since 1788* (Sydney: National Book Distributors and Publishers, 1996); H. Reynolds, *This Whispering in our Hearts* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1998).
- <sup>61</sup> W.E. Roth, *The Queensland Aborigines vol. 11: Bulletins 1-8 North Queensland Ethnology from the Home Secretary's Department - Brisbane 1901-1908* (Perth: Hesperian Press, 1988).
- <sup>62</sup> The *Aboriginals Protection and Prevention of the Sale of Opium Act* acknowledged the use of opium and alcohol as payment for Aboriginal labour. This Act was in force from 1897 until 1971 and it gave power to the Director of Native Welfare, as the legal guardian of all Aboriginal people, to determine where they should live, whom they should marry, how and when they could work, and to receive on their behalf all monies received as wages for work performed.
- <sup>63</sup> Submission 25.
- <sup>64</sup> Submission 40.
- <sup>65</sup> Consultations, Mornington Island, doctor at the hospital.
- <sup>66</sup> Submission 40.
- <sup>67</sup> Consultations, Mt Isa.

- <sup>68</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>69</sup> Community Consultations, 1999.
- <sup>70</sup> Submission 24.
- <sup>71</sup> Submission 23.
- <sup>72</sup> Consultations, Mt Isa.
- <sup>73</sup> Submission 40.
- <sup>74</sup> R. Homel et al., *Risk and Resilience: Crime and Violence Prevention in Aboriginal Communities*, work in progress, 1999.
- <sup>75</sup> J. P. Reser, 'A Perspective on the Causes and Cultural Context of Violence in Aboriginal Communities in North Queensland', a report to the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (Mimeo 1990).
- <sup>76</sup> Aboriginal Coordinating Council Submission to the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (unpublished report).
- <sup>77</sup> J.P. Reser, 'The Sociohistorical Argument and Constructions of "Aboriginal Violence": A Critical Review of Hunter' (1991).
- <sup>78</sup> Royal Commission Into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, *National Report*, E. Johnston, vol. 2, (Canberra: Australian Government Printing Service, 1991), 313.
- <sup>79</sup> P. d'Abbs et al., *Alcohol Misuse and Violence: Alcohol-related Violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities: A Literature Review* (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1993).
- <sup>80</sup> Ibid, 62-63.
- <sup>81</sup> N. Pearson, 'Our Right to be Responsible', unpublished Discussion Paper (1999).
- <sup>82</sup> Aboriginal Coordinating Council, *Submission to the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* (Cairns: ACC, 1991), 36
- <sup>83</sup> Ibid., 36 -37.
- <sup>84</sup> Hunter, *The Intercultural and Sociohistorical Context*.
- <sup>85</sup> Miller, *A Sociohistorical and Psychological Perspective*.
- <sup>86</sup> D. Indermaur et al., *Working with Adolescents to Prevent Domestic Violence* (Canberra: National Campaign Against Violence and Crime, 1998).
- <sup>87</sup> Aboriginal Coordinating Council, *Community Justice in Northern Queensland: Problems of Implementation and Development* (Cairns: ACC, 1988) 22.
- <sup>88</sup> Consultations , Sir David Longlands Correctional Centre, 1999.
- <sup>89</sup> National Inquiry Into the Separation of Aboriginal Children from their Families (Sterling Press :1996).
- <sup>90</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>91</sup> Consultation, Brisbane, 1999
- <sup>92</sup> Consultations, Central Queensland, 1999.
- <sup>93</sup> Consultations, Sir David Longlands Correctional Centre.
- <sup>94</sup> Consultations, Elder, Brisbane, 1999.
- <sup>95</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>96</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>97</sup> Consultations, North Queensland, 1999.
- <sup>98</sup> Ibid., 20
- <sup>99</sup> Submission, Brisbane, 1999.
- <sup>100</sup> Consultations, Sir David Longlands Correctional Centre, 1999.
- <sup>101</sup> Submission, Brisbane, 1999.
- <sup>102</sup> Submission, Goreng Goreng, 1999.
- <sup>103</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>104</sup> Consultation, Elder, 1999.
- <sup>105</sup> C. Clarke and D Fewquandie, *Indigenous Therapies: Old Ways of Healing—New Ways of Being*, (conference report, 1998).
- <sup>106</sup> Consultations, Mornington Island, 1999.