

CHARLES UNIVERSITY IN PRAGUE
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

HEALING ABORIGINAL WOMEN

EMERGING AND CHANGING CULTURE OF INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given. I agree with possible exposure of my work in electronic or printed version.

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Date

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Signature

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I have indeed been fortunate.

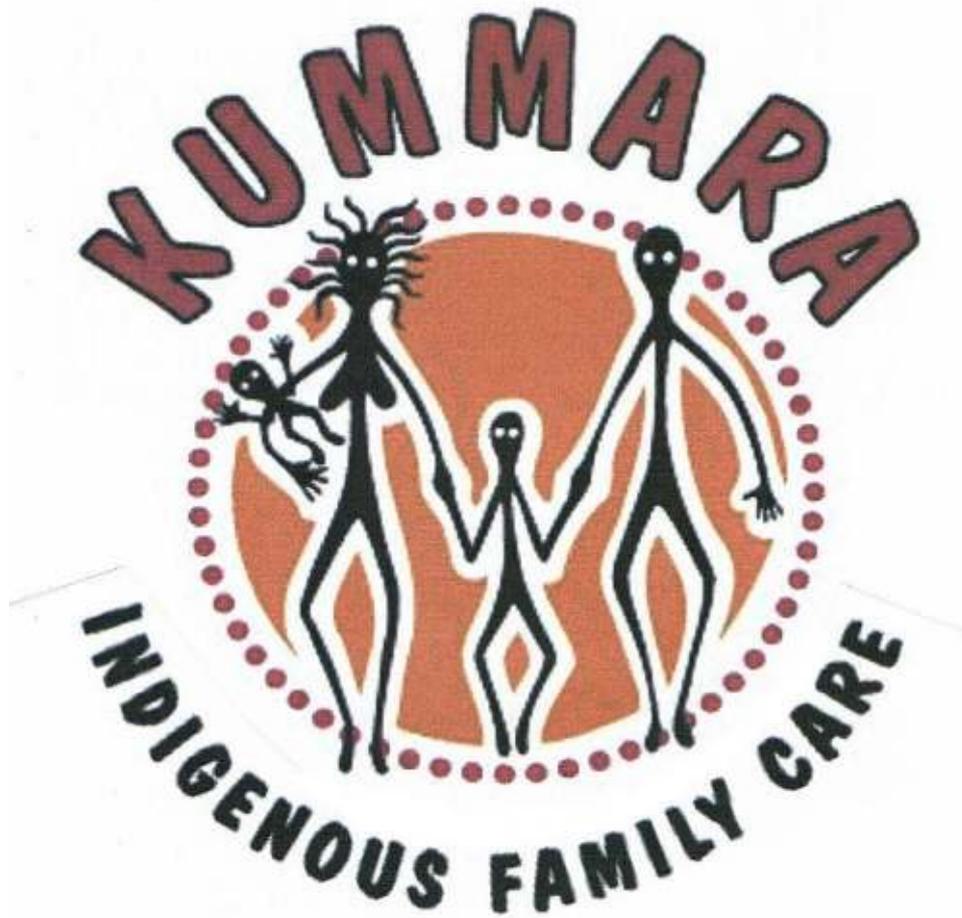
ABSTRACT:

This is a study of how an Aboriginal women's community organisation engages in revitalisation of traditional Australian Indigenous culture in urban context. I will address the principles of a women's Indigenous Family Care Centre, Kummara, in Brisbane (Queensland) where I volunteered, and conducted an ethnographic research. Kummara is based on family care, strengthening of women's business, and reconnecting Aboriginal women to their cultural role. The organisation addresses the consequences of the *Stolen generations* which was a forcible separation of Aboriginal children from their families, their re-education and Christianisation for the duration of 50 years (1910-1969) of Australian history. My thesis is that Aboriginal women practicing family care and women's spirituality in Kummara contribute to revitalisation of traditional Indigenous culture. This occurs mainly in education of children and young people (implementing rites of passage and parental programs), and in reconnecting to the traditional role of women in family, community and in spiritual life. In the Aboriginal context of health, the women in Kummara engage in a process of cultural, spiritual and emotional healing. They have adapted their ways of doing this to modern society and have been influenced by different Western and other cultural concepts while still trying to preserve elements of their traditional past. By nature, the women's perceptions of what is Aboriginal today differ, as their personalities differ. Therefore, the process of revitalising the women's culture seems to be inconsistent. Similarly to other Aboriginal institutions, it may also be driven by various political interests and aims as it is balancing in between the mainstream and the community demands. I argue that Kummara is a good example of how fruitful, though complicated, it is to find a common definition of Aboriginal culture that can be said to be shared. What I can bring into the debates on cultural revitalisation is an acknowledgement that the women in Kummara are aware of the innovative and adaptable nature of their own culture, communicate it, and understand it as a necessary process of cultural dynamism and change.

SOUHRN:

Předmětem této studie o současné městské kultuře Austrálců je, jak komunitní organizace sociální péče, Kummara, přispívá k revitalizaci tradiční kultury Austrálců.

Ve výzkumu jsem se zaměřila na centrum rodinné péče nativních žen – Kummara Family Care – v Brisbane, kde jsem po dobu pěti měsíců pracovala jako dobrovolník. Hlavním cílem Kummary je péče o rodinu a děti, ale současně posílení pozice Austrálek v moderní australské společnosti a znovuoobjevování jejich tradiční role. Tato organizace usiluje o řešení následků tzv. *Ukradených generací*, neboli šedesátileté etapy (1910-1969) kdy australští sociální pracovníci násilně odebírali děti z rodin Austrálců a podrobovali je západní převýchově a christianizaci. Hlavní tezí této práce je, že Kummara svou činností přispívá k revitalizaci tradiční kultury Austrálců, a to především v oblasti výchovy dětí a dospívajících (zavádění přechodových rituálů a rodičovských programů) a znovuoobjevování tradiční role ženy v rodině, komunitě a ženském spirituálním životě. Z pohledu nativních obyvatel a jejich holistického chápání zdraví se tak podílí na kulturním, spirituálním a emocionálním léčení. Přestože jsou způsoby “léčení” a rodinné péče pochopitelně modernizovány a nesou v sobě prvky z jiných kultur, které soudobou kulturu Austrálců ze všech stran ovlivňují a formují, přesto v sobě zachovávají jakýsi pravzor, neboli to, co se považuje za původní tradici. Představy žen o obnovování tradic a současně o způsobu jak je přizpůsobit modernímu životu, se přirozeně liší, stejně jako jejich osobnosti. Proto se jejich aktivity a příspěvky k revitalizaci tradiční ženské kultury, i způsob, jakým o ní přemýšlejí, mohou zdát poněkud nejednotné, nekonzistentní. Podobně jako je tomu u ostatních australských nativních organizací, i Kummara sleduje určité ideologické cíle a zájmy. Je ve složité pozici, neboť musí splňovat jak očekávání komunity, tak majoritní společnosti, která Kummaru prostřednictvím vlády finančně podporuje. Myslím si, že fungování této organizace je dobrým příkladem toho, jak plodné a současně komplikované je shodnout se na společné definici kultury, kterou dotyční lidé sdílejí. Mým přínosem k debatám o revitalizaci kultury je konstatování, že nativní ženy, s kterými jsem měla tu čest pracovat, si jsou plně vědomy proměnlivosti vlastní kultury, diskutují o této proměnlivosti a chápou ji jako nutný proces kulturního dynamismu a změny.



*Real 'traditions' can be invented, just as 'imagined communities' can be real communities
– assuming we recognise social reality as a social construct.*

(Alan Barnard 2006:7)

*The only way how to keep this country healthy is to practice cultural business here.
(Samuel Watson, Aboriginal elder, Yuggera community, Brisbane)*

*Aboriginal women just need to be women.
(Jackie Huggins)*

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I. Introduction

Both Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal social scientists have continuously paid a great deal of attention to the issue of Aboriginal identity and culture in new settings. They focus on urban Aboriginal culture, political issues, land rights, and on the whole idea of Aboriginal identity. One of the central problems is that a single, specific and widely applicable definition of Aboriginality has not been agreed upon (Schwab 1991). It is said that contemporary Australia is undergoing the process of decolonization¹ and reconciliation,² of cultural recovery. Consequently, Aboriginal culture and ideas of Aboriginality are in a continuous process of adaptation and change. Various authors (Sutton 1988, Creamer 1988, Reay 1988, Cowlshaw 1993, Morton 1998, Kolig 2005, Maddock 2002, Merlan 2005) present different theories of cultural revitalisation in rural and urban Australia today. Reay (1988), Maddock (2002) and Morton (1998) reject the idea of creating contemporary Aboriginal culture by transmission of culture elements derived from the pre-contact period. Others, however, such as Sutton, Cowlshaw, and Kolig, argue for ‘reflexivity’ and ‘inventiveness’ of the emerging culture. This includes revitalisation of certain elements of what is perceived as traditional culture as well as interaction with contemporary White society. While Sutton (1988) operates with the term “self-realization”, Kolig (2005) calls it the “revival of cultural tradition”, and Cowlshaw (1993) maintains the concept of self-creating “oppositional culture”.

How can revitalisation in Indigenous culture be applied to the wellbeing of women and families? In the present process of cultural recovery that Australia is undergoing, health and welfare services are being reshaped. Since the 1970s, there has been a shift in government health policy toward policies of Aboriginal self-determination and self-management. There has been funding of Indigenous community-based organisations in social care – institutions as community centres led mostly by Indigenous people. These community organisations connect Western and Indigenous health care models, forming a productive mix of both. Indigenous staff is trained in capacity and community building management that was designed in the USA in response to the economic crisis of 1970s. Kummara (‘Kummara’ meaning ‘watching over the children’) is one of the Indigenous self-governed community organisations, run by

¹ Decolonization is defined as “an attempt to reflect critically on the nature, scope, and process of colonialism, particularly its impact on colonized people and their environments” by Thaman (2003:1).

² Merlan understands this as “creating a new relationship between settler Australia and its Indigenous people” (Merlan 2005:485).

Indigenous women and funded to a large extent from the state and governmental resources. It is an Indigenous charitable organisation whose primary goal is to help families stay together, to strengthen relationships between men and women, and parents and their children and to help children and their mothers with all possible needs. The organisation is centred on the culturally significant input of women and reflects the proper place of Aboriginal women in the care and protection of all children. It comes from an understanding that a strong woman can be a good mother of her children and the ‘healer’ of her family as a societal unit. Therefore, Kummara is a women-led organisation dealing with all issues concerning women’s social, spiritual and emotional wellbeing. Although the target groups are Indigenous families, Kummara is accessible for non-Indigenous people too. Its doors are open to everyone since Kummara functions as a mediator between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and mainstream organisations. An issue women in Kummara intensively deal with is the fact that contemporary Australian and Indigenous society is very much male dominated. The role of women in contemporary Aboriginal society has been overlooked and has not been made public. This can cause a lack of recognition as well as interference in their sphere of business. The past experience of Aboriginal children being taken away from their families (known as *the Stolen generations*) perpetuates the persisting stereotypes of Aboriginal women as being neglectful of their children.³ There is also a growing problem of domestic violence in Aboriginal communities both urban and rural when women are the victims mostly. Indigenous writers, such as Jackie Huggins (1998) or Larissa Behrendt (2005) argue that Aborigines and women especially, still experience a lack of cultural safety and recognition. Women in Kummara emphasise that they need to be culturally recognised within the welfare system – as mothers and carers. They call for child care and family wellbeing as women’s business, traditionally ascribed to women (Reid 1982). After the considerable change family and kinship models have undergone as a result of two hundred years of colonization, they want to regain this responsibility. In this way, Aboriginal women are on the way to re-empower themselves and ‘heal’ their culture. The process of this cultural healing, as emphasised by women in Kummara, must necessarily be innovative.

I argue that the content and spirit of Kummara’s work is relevant to the context of cultural revitalisation in contemporary Australia. The topics I intend to explore are what the women in Kummara understand to be child care, family and women’s wellbeing; how they maintain

³ The image of Indigenous children in need of care and neglected goes hand in hand with a constant effort to uplift and civilise Indigenous Australians since the first contact with their colonizers (Eckermann 1992).

women's healing business in the present society, and how they define the contemporary role of women. For this end I am looking at their current projects and how successful they are. The thesis will draw upon theoretical approaches developed most fully by scholars involved in debates on cultural invention, and revitalisation in contemporary Australia and the Pacific, and in discussions on contemporary Indigeneity. Crucial to the analysis that follows are the works by Wagner (1975), Sutton (1988), Cowlishaw (1993), Kolig (2002), Maddock (2002), Merlan (2005), and Barnard (2006), which are presented in the following chapter. Generally, they operate with the case of contemporary Indigenous culture as well as with the meaning of 'tradition' for the present Indigenous people. Some authors claim that contemporary traditions are not real traditions any more since they are not drawing from their real origins; they are invented to create a suitable past. Others support the idea that traditions of all cultures are continually being invented just as culture is constantly being created, and that they are absolutely real in the present.

I discussed my research topic with Indigenous staff from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit at the University of Queensland. I was not sure about what subject could be sufficiently explored during my six month visit. Also, I was very keen to question issues that have not been discussed enough, and that would be beneficial for the Unit too. My only plan was to look towards Aboriginal women's issues as I presumed that the women's world would be more accessible for me, being a woman myself. Additionally, my research was restricted by the Brisbane area where I lived and studied. It was the Unit Deputy Director Jackie Huggins who encouraged me to focus on urban Aboriginal women's healing. She introduced me to Dulcie Bronsch from Kummara Association Incorporated, and to the Indigenous Family Care Centre in West End, Brisbane, where I enrolled as a volunteer.

1.1 Methodology

The empirical data was collected during my engagement in Kummara Family Care Centre in West End, Brisbane, where I volunteered for the period from August to December 2006. I used methods and techniques of ethnographic research defined by Spradley (1979, 1980), Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), and Silverman (1999) among others. I used a variety of field work methods in my research, including six semi-structured interviews (20-70 minutes in length), various ethnographic techniques, which involved participant observations, and informal discussions, all detailed and dated. I originally planned to use biographical interview

methods but decided not to as I was told by the University staff that Aboriginal people generally tend to incorporate the most common life stories of their people into their individual one. Therefore, biographical interviews would melt with the widely shared “myth”. Nevertheless, I attached everyone’s short life story in the beginning of each interview. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. All my respondents gave me the declaration that they do not mind having their full names made public. Therefore, I refer to their real names after every quotation. All of them were members of Kummara Family Care Centre, Indigenous women in their middle ages, except Jackie Huggins, the Deputy Director from the University of Queensland. Jackie supervised my work since my arrival, and since she is a well recognised female Indigenous activist in Queensland, and an associate member of Kummara, I felt compelled to include her in my list of interviewees. I engaged as a participant observer in women’s family care, regular women’s meetings, and as an attendant and organiser of a two-day women’s conference. In addition, I engaged in various activities in Indigenous communities, visiting lectures, conferences, ceremonies, art performances and exhibitions and the like.

1.2 Me in the field

As I said above, my entry to Kummara was mediated by Jackie Huggins. She introduced me to Dulcie Bronsch, Kummara’s cultural strengthening and community development worker. Jackie explained to her that one of the international students was keen to learn more about Aboriginal women’s issues and that she could volunteer for Kummara. As Dulcie admitted, she was a bit afraid of me being so young. She thought it would mean a long process of explaining everything to me. On the other hand, she was glad to have someone to give her a hand with the preparation of a forthcoming women’s conference. Contacting various women’s Indigenous organisations and individual women in Queensland, sending invitations, making power point slides and the conference’s program were my main activities in Kummara. I assisted at the conference itself and made the final evaluation of its outcomes and visitors’ feedbacks. I also visited the childcare centre and various Aboriginal community meetings that took place in Brisbane at that time - with my friends from Kummara or alone. In the end, Dulcie said: “I think you got a really good understanding of what Kummara is about, sister”. Particularly the term “sister” was of a special importance to me since that is how Aboriginal women call themselves in a familiar way. All the staff was very friendly and keen to talk to me, although they were usually quite busy. They had more or less flexible working hours so

they were rarely present all at the same time. Additionally, due to her health problems, the CEO of Kummara, Sue, was often absent. When she noticed I had new questions to ask, Dulcie would usually say “ok, let’s have a cuppa and a cigarette and you can ask me your questions” and stopped working for a while. The women in Kummara would often send me to talk to Mary, who is known to be a specialist for things concerning Aboriginal women’s issues. They usually said - “talk to Mary about those things. She is an expert on Aboriginal women’s business”. Needless to say, Mary was an icon even at the University, where they talked about her as the most educated and intellectual Aboriginal woman in the Brisbane area. Indeed, Mary was meant to be my key informant. In the beginning, I thought Kummara was a women’s healing centre as Jackie presented it. I did not know that family care can, in Indigenous eyes, be understood as healing. Slowly, step by step, I understood what Kummara is, what women’s business means, and that family care is just one crucial part of it.

Retrospectively, I see that I was really into Kummara’s work: I had not planned to write about anything but strong Aboriginal women and their call for a voice in the community. That markedly changed with the *See Change* Conference that occurred halfway through my fieldwork. Aboriginal women from all parts of Queensland there were discussing their cultural needs, terms with which they can refer to themselves and issues of their cultural healing and self-empowering as women. I can recall my confusion when I understood that, in the women’s eyes; the proclaimed reconnecting to the traditional women’s role includes diverse non-Indigenous cultural elements. Subsequently, I realised it is the way things are, and must be, as nothing is permanent. There cannot be any traditional culture anymore since the colonization of Australia. All have been changed and influenced by Western ways of thinking and what the ‘real’ culture used to be in the past can no longer be fully proclaimed. Understanding that culture is in a constant process of change, we cannot judge anyone by his or her so called ‘authenticity’. The conference was also about Aboriginal women’s claims of independence and recognition within the society. It is important to say, though, that Aboriginal women would reject any comparison to the White women’s movement since their interests differ. However, it sometimes seemed to me that they were quite feministic in their agenda. I have to say that I talked about Kummara and my research questions with many Indigenous professors, friends or colleagues. I was very open to all kinds of opinions but sometimes, I felt slightly discriminated in my viewpoint of an anthropologist. In contemporary Australia, there is a stigma on the work of former anthropologists and on anthropology in general. Indigenous people associate it with skulls measuring and racial

categorisation of people, with treating people as objects, and with White scientific viewpoint especially. That is why I always tried to be a helpful contributor to Kummara's work, not only the one who questions people. In practice, women in Kummara were really hardworking and passionate about their work. They were very friendly to all the clients and women coming from other community organisations. Kummara was a place of regular women's gatherings that are meant to be part of community building and strengthening project. Sometimes, Kummara functioned as a supervisor to all visiting female social workers facing issues of victims of domestic violence, neglected or lonely children, women without home and so forth. That is why it was a bit sad sometimes to listen to what was happening in Aboriginal families. As regards other parts of Kummara, I found the child care centre, Koolyangarra, with all its activities as a very pleasant place that definitely connects families and children.

1.3 Structuring the thesis

A few words about the structure of the thesis: The second chapter sets out a framework for studying issues of cultural invention in contemporary Australia and their relation to the agenda of Kummara. The third chapter discusses gender division in the past and present Aboriginal society, men's and women's roles, and men's and women's business. After introducing Kummara in the fourth chapter, I will present the data, interviews and field notes, collected during the research. The largest part is given to the voices of the Indigenous women I worked with. It illustrates their view on the principal issues of Kummara. I consciously use a lot of quotations here as I wanted to let the Indigenous women speak for themselves. I understand this to be the ethics of ethnography. When I refer to categories such as Indigenous, Western, Black, or White, I use capitals since I find it culturally sensitive. Sometimes, a focus on language can seem to be just academic verbosity but words can be very powerful, especially if they communicate subjects such as culture, identity, or race.

As I declare in the beginning, the thesis will discuss revitalisation of Indigenous culture in contemporary Australia. Under 'revitalisation', authors such as Anders Salomonson (1984) or Denis Chevallier (2005) refer to the voluntary act of adopting certain historical cultural practices and investing them with new meaning by staging an event. Since those cultural practices are widely referred to as something traditional, the concept of 'tradition' will be crucial for this study. It is important, then, to make clear how it is used by the authors I am referring to, as well as by Indigenous people in Australia, and my respondents. The most neutral meaning of 'tradition' is the action of transmitting or handing down a transmission of

statements, beliefs, rules, customs, or the like, esp. by word of mouth or by practice without writing. It can refer to the pre-contact period in Australian history. Nevertheless, in Indigenous Australia it often has a connotation of idyllic but uncertain past that Indigenous people claim to draw on. This is not an Australian issue only as the cases of forgery and ‘invented’ traditions are rather a common phenomenon. Eric Hobsbawm (1983:2) defines the ‘invented tradition’ as “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual of symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past.” Since the theory of invented traditions has political implications in the Pacific, the authors writing about cultural revitalisation in this area suggest using different terms, such as retraditionalisation, revival, or innovation.⁴ I sympathise with the word ‘innovation’ as it understands culture and tradition as something changeable, under process of adaptation or creation. “One is not born traditional: one chooses to be traditional by constant innovation”, according to Bruno Latour (1994:103). It is interesting that my Indigenous respondents and other people I talked to were really skilled in avoiding any usage of the words ‘invention’ or the verb ‘invent’. However, when they talked about contemporary Indigenous culture, some of them insisted on its traditional character, while some – as for example the women in Kummara, rejected the idea of its traditionalism, and emphasised its progressivism. Thus, the women in Kummara, as well as academics at the University, encouraged me to avoid the term ‘invention’ as inflammatory when talking about contemporary Indigenous culture. This discourse raises a question of accessibility of the term ‘tradition’ itself. From anthropological perspective, there is no single definition of tradition, and it is more efficient to focus on how individuals use this term, and what meaning they project in it.

⁴ Nevertheless, the original meaning of ‘invention’ and ‘innovation’ paralleled as follows: “Words like ‘invention’ and ‘innovation’ are often used to distinguish novel acts or ideas, or things created for the first time, from actions, thoughts, and arrangements that have become established, or habitual. Such a distinction conceals an assumption of the ‘automatic’ or ‘determined’ nature of ordinary action quite as much as deterministic notions do. By extending the usage of ‘invention’ and ‘innovation’ to the whole range of thought and action, I mean to counteract this assumption and to assert the spontaneous and creative realization of human culture” (Wagner 1975:37).

II. Theoretical issues

This chapter sets out a framework for relating issues of cultural invention in contemporary Australia to the agenda of the Indigenous women's organisation, Kummara. The first part of this chapter focuses on Australia in a wider cultural context by illustrating the debates on innovating culture in the South Pacific. Here, I am drawing mainly on the work of Maddock (2002), Sutton (1988), Guenther (2006), and Barnard (2006). The second part briefly reviews the historical context of contemporary Australia, government policies towards Indigenous people, and eventually their revitalisation movement. In the third part I will depict some of the issues arising in approaching contemporary Australian Aboriginality. This subject is especially contentious because there has been a strong tendency in the Western literature and anthropology especially, to base the description of the present Aboriginal societies on its comparison to the traditional one.⁵ It is clear that this model is never going to work since the colonization has led to a large transformation of Aboriginal culture. We have to concentrate on the "lived reality" and on the contemporary emerging culture. In the last, fifth chapter, I will compare the data with the theories of cultural revitalisation and invention and present the main findings and perspectives too.

2.1 Debate on Indigeneity and Invention of Tradition

Postmodernist debates on 'invention of tradition or invention of culture' began with various Pacific case studies in the 1980s. Anthropologists studying the Pacific began independently to view 'culture', 'tradition' or 'custom' as a symbolic construction, or a product of contemporary human activity rather than a passively inherited legacy. Hobsbawm's and Renger's iconic and provocative book *The Invention of Tradition* showed that new institutions of governance in Europe and its colonial dependencies were frequently imbued with status and legitimacy through the creation of traditional ceremonies and identities. The book stimulated overwhelming research activity on invented and imagined traditions in Europe and elsewhere.⁶ An independent field of research occurred in the Pacific. A special issue of the journal *Mankind* (Keesing and Tonkinson 1982) offered first studies of this emerging framework. Hobsbawm opposes the existence of 'genuine traditions' to invented ones. Those

⁵ One of the classical works on Australian Aborigines is the one by A.P. Elkin 1938. *Australian Aborigines: How to understand them?* with a 'typical' image of an Australian Aboriginal man on the front. He is situated in a bush, with a piece of cloth around his waist standing on one leg and carrying a spear.

⁶ Furthermore, Anderson's (1983) *Imagined Communities* and Wagner's (1975) *The Invention of Culture* hit the shelves about that time.

traditions do not constitute a direct continuity with past practices, and their claimed continuity with a certain historic past is “largely factitious” (1983:2). Hobsbawm distinguishes invariable traditions from flexible and changeable customs that, if routinely repeated, cannot have any larger ritual or symbolic function. He observes that new traditions are more likely to be invented in modern societies experiencing social changes, whereas customs dominate ‘traditional societies’. According to Kolig (2002), the emerging processes in 3rd and 4th world societies do not fundamentally differ from those in Western or 1st world societies. He writes that, in both cases, “the novelty may be dressed up as antiquity by a deliberate, calculated process which in extreme instances assumes the character of fraud” (2002:12). Thus, the inventive character of culture is not exclusive to Indigenous societies of Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the United States, South Africa, South America, Japan, South-east Asia and the Philippines but also to Britain and Ireland⁷ or France⁸. It occurs in modern societies that attempt to construct invented traditions of a novel type and for novel purposes by using ancient materials. Thus, “even the historic continuity had to be invented, for example by creating an ancient past beyond effective historical continuity either by semi-fiction...or by forgery (Ossian, Czech medieval manuscripts)” (Hobsbawm 1983:7).

Similarly for the Pacific context, ‘authentic’ cultures are always partly a cumulative product of the political myths of the ancestors that help to reinforce certain ideologies (see Keesing 1982). Thus, tradition is unavoidably political. Another point of this author is that Indigenous cultures experiencing cultural revival might, paradoxically, find an inspiration in ethnographic studies of much-hated anthropologists. This politicization of tradition provoked an attack by the Hawaiian scholar Trask (1991), who accused Keesing of colonial arrogance and racism because he questioned Indigenous representations of their tradition (see Keesing’s reply 1991). All following anthropological studies of the politics of tradition had to face similar Indigenous critique (Friedman 1993, Hanson 1989 and 1991, Linnekin 1992 etc.). Despite the fact that the term ‘cultural invention’ was clarified by Wagner (1975)⁹ this term still implies the political debates of anthropologists and Indigenous people in the contemporary Pacific.

⁷ E.g. Celtic cult or Welsh and Gaelic language revival or Scottish bagpipe and kilt revival (Trevor-Roper 1983).

⁸ Kolig (2002) particularly talks about the right-wing French nationalists and other right-wing Europeans, proclaiming their indigeneity vis-à-vis recent immigrants, mainly from the Islamic world and Saharan Africa.

⁹ The various contexts of a culture get their meaningful characteristics from one another, through the participation of symbolic elements in more than one context. They are invented out of each other, and the idea that some of the recognised contexts in a culture are ‘basic’ or ‘primary’, or represent the ‘innate’, or that their properties are somehow essentially objective or real, is a cultural illusion. Yet it is a necessary illusion, as much a part of living in and inventing a culture from the ‘inside’ as the anthropologist’s assumption of hard and fast rules is a prop for his invention of the culture from the ‘outside’ (Wagner 1975:41).

“Particularly the word ‘invention’ has caused a stir because it undermines exactly what it describes: the political use of ‘age-old’ traditions to defend or establish rights, status and privilege,” as stated by Otto and Pedersen (2005:17). In their recent collection of case studies, *Tradition and Agency. Tracing cultural continuity and invention* (2005), they slightly reverse previous concepts, claiming that “customs, as well as traditions, are central to all kinds of societies, even though differences can be found in the type of traditions that prevail” (2005:14). They deny Hobsbawm’s positioning of an invented tradition and argue that “all traditions are constructed or invented at some stage in history and this does not necessarily make them less genuine” (2005:31; see also Jolly 1992, Linnekin 1991).¹⁰

The debates of Kolig (2002, 2005), Merlan (2005), Barnard (2006), or Guenther (2006) examine the origins of the proclaimed Indigenous identity. Guenther acknowledges Barnard and others who support the idea of politically invented Indigeneity, however he challenges their point asking whether all this doubting is of any use for existing Indigenous people. Barnard sums up that a recent invention of community in itself does not play down its authenticity: “Real ‘traditions’ can be invented, just as ‘imagined communities’ can be real communities – assuming we recognise social reality as a social construct” (Barnard 2006:7). Thus, is it ever possible to debate their ‘authenticity’? The concept of ‘tradition’ led to a mutual misunderstanding (see Kolig 2005 and Jocelyn 1992). Indigenes understood the theory of an ‘invented’ culture as a denial of their past. As land claims of Australian Aborigines are based on the provability of land connections and maintenance of culture that has been practiced on that land for generations, as stated by Native Title by the Mabo decision of 1992¹¹, the ‘inventiveness’ of their traditions seems to counteract their claims. “To the motive to revive laws and customs is thus added a motive to deny they were ever lost, i.e. to deny the need for revival” (Maddock 2002:40). Furthermore, Indigeneity is mostly defined in cultural terms and in this sense is “a product of a global, post-modernist New Age, in which the ‘naturalistic’ forces of race (genes) and natural differences are de-emphasised vis-à-vis

¹⁰ Also, derived terms such as ‘invention’, ‘construction’, ‘objectification’ or ‘representation’ come from the understanding of culture as “creatively fashioned” (Linnekin 1992: 251) rather than passed down.

¹¹ In particular, it is a cruel irony for Aboriginal people to be asked to prove their ‘traditional connection’ with land, given the history of massacres, institutionalisation, and coercive assimilation, with which the state had sought to make them into good middle class (and preferably white) citizens of Queensland. Native Title legislation in the 1990s returned to an idea of ‘traditional’ Aboriginality. New kinds of bureaucracies, set up to address native title would represent Aboriginal people who could reveal they had the right kinds of cultural artefacts (tradition, connection, ‘tribe’), which under assimilation policies the bureaucracies had been trying to eradicate since the 1950s and before (Babidge 2000:178).

ethnicity and culture, and in which a shared humanity, basically, makes us all one” (Kolig 2002:9).

2.2 Origins of Indigenous movements in contemporary Australia

Australian policy of assimilation by absorption did not officially cease until the end of the 1960s. Until then, Aboriginal people were absent in mainstream Australian history. They would be associated with static, primitive and traditional past and thereby excluded from the changing story of Australian society. Only the pejoratively specified ‘full-blood’ people were recognised as ‘real’ Aborigines, part of a dying race, being swept aside by the march of civilisation. Australia had policies to draw Aborigines into the mainstream, both culturally and racially. “The word ‘assimilation’ was interpreted in various ways, but in practice it was always intended to mean absorption, loss of separate identity” (Berndts 1978:110). Aboriginal people were expected to take their place within the Australian system, ideally being equal with the same range of choices, the same freedom of action and movement and the same responsibilities. However, this actually meant rapid change, and inevitable disappearance of traditional lifestyle. There was an increase in removals to settlements and missions as well as forcible removal of so called ‘half-caste’ children (the *Stolen generations*) from their families. This was an official government policy in some Australian states from approximately the 1910s until 1969. But it was also a projection of a wider stereotypical notion of Aboriginal culture being dangerous and of Aboriginal parents being negligent (Goodall and Huggins 1992). Haebich (2000:13) describes the agenda of child removals as follows:

Aboriginal families have been viewed as sites of physical and moral danger and neglect and the rights of parents and children to remain together denied. Official interventions into these families have taken the form of direct action through the forced removal of children from their homes and official campaigns to carve family networks into isolated nuclear family units, as well as officially condoned practices of discrimination and neglect which threatened the very survival of many families and communities.

So entrenched were such beliefs that even when no policy was in force to secure the removal of Aboriginal children (as for example in Victoria during the twentieth century or in NSW after 1969), the effect of the institutionalised racism of the ‘normal’ child welfare system was such that Aboriginal children were still separated from their families (Goodall and Huggins 1992:413). This kind of institutionalisation did not cease until the late 1970s, when major

changes in policy and practice began - mainly through Aboriginal and welfare agency pressure. "The Aboriginal children placement principle which guided these changes stated that Aboriginal children should remain within their family and community environments, and that removal of any Aboriginal children should be a last resort" (Haebich 2000:45). It called for the recognition of Indigenous ways of child care, the review of existing welfare practices and services, and the development of Aboriginal family support programs – all for the keeping of children within their natural families. If removal was found as necessary, fostering and adoption should be within Aboriginal families. Aboriginal services for families and child placement agencies were set up in all states and the politics of adoption was formalised.

This shift in government policy affected all the states. With the horrifying experience of the Second World War, the policy drew back from any taint of racist language. It was not until the referendum of 1967 that Aborigines were officially included in the national census. The Commonwealth government was empowered to make laws for Aborigines and to help in their advancement. They started to be viewed as potentially good, middle-class Australians. Policies focused on elevating the standards of housing, health, and education. But it was obvious that this kind of 'integration' without assimilation as an 'approved' socialisation process would eventually merge Aboriginal social habits in the majority social order. The late 60s and 70s showed a growing movement pressuring for Aboriginal self-determination (1972-1975), also encouraged by Europeans. This was followed by a growth of the Black Power movement, National Tribal Council and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services. Aboriginal people were encouraged to take charge of their own affairs, financially, technically, and socio-economically. As stated in the Self-management policy (1975 until now), Aboriginal people must be held accountable for their decisions and management of finance. There was a heavy push for land rights, separate health, and housing services but still without any significant outcomes. With the establishment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) in 1989, all consultative and decision-making functions were taken over by the community (see Eckermann 1992). In line with the policy of self-determination, there were various self-help programs and community organisations funded by the Australian government. Aboriginal Community-Controlled Health Services that are based on independence and community control, affordability, accessibility and appropriateness were introduced. The emphasis is on the communities' needs and communal decision-making. The problem with these services is that, despite their focus on Aborigines, they are often

“European inspired and European supervised endeavours” (Eckermann 1992:40). Thus, a large amount of money goes to European experts, supervisors and administrators.¹²

Sometimes such schemes fail and there’s a general outcry about the lack of Aboriginal responsibility and commitment, the waste of thousands of dollars of the tax payer’s money. This White ‘back-lash’, as it is often referred to, would be better directed towards the European superstructure which is manipulating the funds (Eckermann 1992:40).

Examples of this kind of failure were the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) and Aboriginal Islander Child Care Agency (AICCA). Both of these organisations were closed owing to financial mismanagement and conflicts of interests. Another problem with this White ‘back-lash’ is in its way of problem-solving. It seems that once we identify a problem, and we study those affected by the problem, we tend to identify the differences as the cause of the social problem itself. Finally, we “assign a government bureaucrat to invent a humanitarian action program to correct the differences” (Purpel and Ryan 1976:8-9). During the late 1990s Australians were forced to acknowledge the discriminatory treatment of Aboriginal children and families as members of the *Stolen generations*. The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Inquiry into the Forced Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families, Inquiry Report *Bringing Them Home*, had begun to expose the truth of what happened.

Since the 1980s, Aboriginal politics have continued to demand equal rights and recognition of separate rights, possession of land, and different culture. Huggins (1992) refers to this time as a decade of cultural revitalisation, when Aboriginal culture was reclaimed. A brief review of this form of ideological movement is necessary for the focus of this study. Sutton asserts that contemporary Australia experiences a search for real and authentic Aboriginal culture that involves looking back towards the past.

The last two decades of cultural reconstruction in rural and urban Australia have been characterised by a search for roots and history, attempts to revitalise certain elements of what is perceived as traditional culture, efforts by Aborigines to control Aboriginal studies and the

¹² In 1997, The Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal and Tropical Health (CRCATH) was established. Its goal is bringing together the users and providers of the research. One of the conditions is that the centre is under Aboriginal control (chairperson and majority of the board are Aborigines) (Matthews, 2001).

teaching of Aboriginal culture as domains of paid work and the emergence of a new form of Aboriginal intellectuality (Sutton 1988:257).

Sutton (1988) concludes that the practitioners of the new intellectuality are more involved in a construction of some kind of metaphysical identity, of inherited and inherent Aboriginal powers of perceptions and understanding, as well as of historically constituted contemporary identity. In the context of the general Aboriginal cultural revitalisation, this movement is essentially perceived as a process of cultural self-realisation that concerns all Australia. The knowledge of English, literacy, and contact with non-Indigenous researchers might have been facilitating, yet not crucial factors of Indigenous mobilization (see Sutton 1988). Merlan (2005) asserts that activists of Indigenous movements had formative relationships, not only within Indigenous families and social networks, but also with Whites as employers, interested activists, and representatives of supportive and sympathetic groups such as churches, unions, the Communist party, Freemasons, and feminists. Since any interaction provokes reevaluation of perspectives, and thus kinds of innovation and action both Indigenous and non-Indigenous actors can unite through ideological movement or mobilization.¹³

Prolonged interaction with settlers, bringing with it oppression and insistent demand that Indigenous people modify their behaviour and see their situation through the lens of understandings and templates for action pressed on them were stimuli to mobilization, often galvanized by non-Indigenous people (Merlan 2005:488).

But there is, from among the Indigenous activists, always an effort to reconstitute the Indigeneity. The terms of reference are on one hand universally understandable, but, on the other hand, still contribute to emphasise social inequalities. Merlan understands this categorical thinking of sameness and difference, emphasising the antinomy of Indigeneity versus the mainstream, as the biggest obstacle of contemporary Indigenous movements. Similarly, Maddock thinks that the effects of ‘mobilization’, ‘reinvention’, ‘renaissance’ or ‘revival’ can always be double sided. “Many Aborigines want to bolster their sense of themselves by reinstating what they have lost. Often the result is an ambiguous relation between emergent and earlier reality” (Maddock 2002:39). The renewed culture, if too rigid, can become nothing but an obstacle in the present world by restricting what they thought to be appropriate (customs, behaviour, dress, circumcision etc.).

¹³ ‘Mobilization’ or ‘movements’ are defined as focusing on “attention on social change and transformation as purportedly distinct from ordinary social reproduction” by Merlan (2005:474).

The cultural redefinition attempts might have their source in disbelief in the mainstream society's cultural values and lifestyle but can also work as a political means of promotion of the oppressed culture's interests. Anthropologists (e.g. Maddock 2002; Reay 1988; Keesing 1989) support either one or another of those theories. It raises a question, to what extent does the revitalised culture stay in the realm of tradition and to what extent it has been modified or innovated. Some authors, such as Rowley (1971) would say that the contemporary Aboriginal communities, in their way of living, conform to rejected racial minorities in other Western countries. It becomes clear especially if we are aware of the historical and political background of their present situation.

The tendency to migrate within well-established limits, the apparent indifference to immediate economic advantage and the high proportion of mother- and grandmother-dominated households could be better explained by such factors as availability of jobs, lack of opportunities and lack of economic security than by the transmission of culture elements derived from pre-contract tradition (Rowley 1971:163-4).

Similarly, Reay (1988) warns against attributing patterns of contemporary Aboriginal culture to tribal antecedents: "It may sometimes be difficult to determine whether a shared trait originated in pre-colonial Aboriginal society, colonial White society, or the shared experience and situation of itinerant rural workers" (1988:x). Contemporary Aborigines engage in a process of constructing their identity in opposition to the mainstream society, in racial differentiation, according to Cowlshaw (1993).¹⁴ Aboriginality is thus more complex interplay of construction of identities. She argues for this 'culture of resistance' as being a political effort (see Cowlshaw 1993). The critics of Cowlshaw (Keeffe 1988, Myers 1986, Pettman 1991, Lattas 1993) questioned the political content of this oppositional culture. The culture of resistance, often followed by poverty, alcohol abuse and violence has negative, self-destructive effects on its producer, and is not directed towards realizing change through formal political structures. They argue that one cannot derive his or her identity purely from a shared experience of oppression. They admit that contemporary Aboriginal culture may be a result of a more intense interaction with the mainstream rather than a suitably rewritten past. The local culture in Australia might be "a mixture of surviving Aboriginal traditions and new Aboriginal desires together with the perspectives of non-Aboriginal locals and elites" (Rowse

¹⁴ Similarly, Nicholas Thomas (1992) writes about 'inversion of tradition' which happens by creating cultural tradition in opposition to another one. The main impulse seems to be a rejection of another identity and inversion of the values attached to that identity, "that is, in a valorization of what is other and what is foreign rather than of what is associated with one's place" (1992:216).

1993:25). Cowlishow (1993) disagrees that we cannot be certain even about the memories of Aboriginal communities as they have been, “intruded by historians and anthropologists, museums, and medias. Aboriginality has emerged through reshaping old memories and forming of new ones” (Cowlishow 1993:17). Similarly, Merlan (2005:474) states the following: “Indigeneity (like all identity categories) does not designate a fixed entity but suggests processes of interaction and differentiation. Indigenous mobilization in Australia has involved not only Indigenous but also, in fundamental ways, non-Indigenous actors and form of action.” Nevertheless, the present goal is to compensate for the presumed ‘loss’ of traditional knowledge mainly. Authors such as Creamer (1988) support the idea that Aboriginal, as any other culture, might have always been innovating; therefore, it has never been lost.

My respondents strongly refused the idea of cultural loss. The same it is with Aboriginality – the women I talked with would warn me against calling anyone a partly Aborigine, since everyone can “be an Aborigine or not – there is nothing between.” They assert that knowledge or tradition is something still maintained but that they have to reconnect to it. I will discuss this point later. In the following chapter, I will focus on contemporary Aboriginal women’s issues, the beginnings of the Aboriginal women’s movement and the position of women in Aboriginal Community-Controlled Health Services.

III. Aboriginal women

The third chapter discusses gender division in the past and present Aboriginal society, men’s and women’s roles, and men’s and women’s business. All this is crucial for further understanding of the following chapters presenting particular Aboriginal women’s issues. I begin with an overview of Aboriginal gender’s representation in anthropology, and then I move to contemporary issues concerning Aboriginal women. I will demonstrate how Aboriginal women are in many ways involved in public domains. They are political in their effort to stay engaged in similar domains of work as they have always been – in looking after community, family and women’s wellbeing, child care and knowledge maintenance.

3.1 Anthropological representations

In this section I will present some contemporary Indigenous and non-Indigenous ethnographers' findings on gender relations among Aborigines. For understanding the women's role in family care and women's cultural healing today I look at how gender has determined both subsistence and ritual practices throughout time. Aboriginal gender-role constructs still remain a contested subject, an intensive discourse of feminist and Indigenous female writers¹⁵, and others. A major setback to these gender constructs is in the fact that they usually draw on interpretations of the traditional society, and therefore are slightly antiquated. These traditional male and female roles may or may not differ from what they are presently. Another point made by Merlan (1988) is that the gender discussion has arisen in research stimulated by European concerns about the nature of women's involvement in society. Therefore, this discussion does not tackle problems of contemporary Aboriginal communities and there lacks an ethnographic study on the present gender roles. This creates a large gulf between biographical and research accounts. In this thesis, I would like to avoid any static gender categorisation and to turn the attention to the "lived reality" in the present Australian society.

Authors dealing with gender in Aboriginal societies have certainly been influenced by their historical period and its scientific concepts as well as by their own ways of thinking. Diane Bell (1993) inspired by Kuhn's theory of social paradigm as a way of talking about and dealing with questions and problems in a specific time and historical context, presented different approaches as three separate paradigms. The first one, presented by Warner (1937), or Munn (1973), stated that women were considered as objects, not involved in religious life and marked as profane and the "other", "never decision making adults". It was influenced by Marxist class analysis, Levi-Straussian structuralism, Durkheimian dualism, and psychoanalysis. The leitmotif of the second paradigm was to study women from women's perspective. Authors such as Kaberry (1939) or Berndt (1973) went into the field with a clear idea of women's significance and dealt with important female issues concerning their role in both daily activities and ceremonial life (Bell 1993). The third paradigm belongs to feminist social scientists who question the former dogma of male dominance (Bell 1993). Authors like Juliette Michel, Shulamith Firestone or Eleanor Leacock want to reconsider and redefine "the

¹⁵ Indigenous (Larissa Behrendt, Jackie Huggins, Marcia Langton) and feminist (Diane Bell).

problem of women” (Bell 1993). Although researching important facts about gender, feminist authors perhaps tend to manipulate with an overly static model of male and female genders.

Since then, there has been a lot of gendered view of women’s significance in Aboriginal societies by both White (Hamilton 1987, Merlan 1988, Dussart 2000) and Indigenous female authors (Huggins 1988, Langton 1996, Haebich 2000, Behrendt 2005 etc.). While work of Indigenous authors deal with various issues as land claims, reconciliation, traditional Law, sacred sites affairs, and Indigenous art, most of it focuses on Aboriginal women and their present needs and the problem of the *Stolen generations* and violence, both inside and outside communities. There is a number of biographies written by Indigenous female authors. This corresponds to the fact that personal life stories and narratives gained special importance in Indigenous society. One of the most important conclusions anthropologists have made is that men and women engage in different activities but their roles are interdependent and complementary, not rigid and hierarchical, dominated by men. Specific subsistence and ritual practices differ in field, size, visibility, and social impact especially. They are widely referred to as ‘men’s and women’s business.

According to Lilla Watson, an Aboriginal elder from Brisbane, the women’s business includes the totality of all women’s knowledge, explicit and implicit, spiritual and physical, our ways of thinking and acting, and our understanding of human nature; women’s physical and mental health, the menstrual cycle, the sacredness of conception and childbirth, child-rearing methods; techniques for maintaining harmony and managing conflict; knowledge about the specific relationships between people; responsibilities with regard to women’s spiritual well-being and celebrations of life, of increase, of nurturance; and women’s knowledge and responsibilities with regard to land and the natural world (see *International Feminisms: Towards 2000*, Conference Melbourne, 1994). In her study of ritual life of the Warlpiri Aborigines in the Central Australian Desert, Françoise Dussart says that “function of business was not a declaration of the potency of their gender or of their kin group, but rather the maintenance of the Jukurrpa (Dreaming) in all its various guises” (Dussart 2000:15). By business, Dussart mostly means ritual. The starting points of the discourse on Aboriginal women’s business were two well-known cases of the Australian society interfering in Aboriginal women’s sacredness. Both of them were claims for protection of women’s sacred sites that have brought the issue of secrecy into the public sphere, where it was scrutinised and, in both cases, worried about and eventually dismissed as a lie: the Arrernte claims over

sites near Alice Springs (1980s), and the Ngarrindjeri claims over sites on Hindmarsh Island, Southern Australia (1994). Women's business as an aspect of Aboriginal women's life was not widely documented until 1970s with the influence of the so-called feminist anthropology. Until then, women's business was only assumed to be a less important counterpart to the more important male ritual life. Co-occurring with White women's movement, it was also pre-designated to be seen as an interest of a relatively new and marginally oriented group. In this study, I look at the phenomenon of women's business in the urban context, and mainly at issues concerning Aboriginal child care and women's health and healing, in terms of the wellbeing of families and of women especially.

The women's business and the men's business vary in their visible importance for the community and, arguably in their immediate value as well. All authors find a common ground in terms of child care. In Aboriginal societies, there was a shared responsibility for all the children, who were seen as particularly precious (Eckermann 1992). Position of child bearers, nurturers and socialisers has always been inherent to women, mothers and grandmothers especially (e.g. Berndt 1978, Bell 1993, Brandl 1983, Huggins 1998 etc.). Brandl (1983) writes about Aboriginal women as "bearers of culture." In his research on Pintupi-speaking Western Desert Aboriginal people, an American anthropologist Fred Myers (1993) describes some important connections between growing up children and shared responsibility and personal identity. He relates the matter of producing social persons to growing up children as well as to looking after the land. Pintupi use the term "holding" (*kanyininpa*) for having the knowledge of ritual and place and "passing it on" for others to hold and they talk about "holding" or "looking after" younger people and growing them up,¹⁶ giving them knowledge, food, objects and country – thus value constituting activities. Myers (1993:36) refers to these activities as "production of human beings" since they are forms of socially directed labour "with the intention of transforming the combination of spirit and body into agents, thus giving to such persons the capacity for acting in the world." Those activities, then, are the cornerstones of what Aboriginal persons are represented by - in contrast to White people. Also, the relationship of parents to their children is one of "holding". It is said to be mainly parents' obligation to hold or to look after them, though, more people can be responsible for a

¹⁶ Also, Chaloupka states that his Aboriginal friends "grew him up" in knowledge about the land, their society and traditions (1993:8).

child.¹⁷ The Pintupi believe that holding of child itself, and nurturing him or her, has transformative effects on the child's identity – thus, forms his or her social identity. In other words, one's identity is partly defined by the activity of being looked after by others among the Pintupi. Also, being an adult is defined by the capacity to look after the others. Myers (1993:52) recognises this as a “totemic organisation, for which the significant feature is that identities are not constructed principally in opposition to wholly external others, as is the case in nationalism and ethnic discourse...in totemic system, larger identities are relatively temporary objectifications, shared identities produced for the moment.” The teenage girls are under the control of older women, and it is not until they have their own children that they become adults and they can independently participate in religious life (see Myers 1993). Myers' findings concerning the meaning of child care within a community and of the relationship of the nurturer and the child for constituting collective identities are crucial to the understanding of the objectives of contemporary Indigenous family care organisations as Kummara which addresses the consequences of the *Stolen generations*.

The analysis of gender roles can be dual, materialist or economic, and ritual or symbolic. Firstly, we can compare male and female roles on a material level through their contribution to household subsistence. In terms of the daily food collection, most authors (Kaberry 1939, Berndts 1978, Bell 1993, Hamilton 1987 or Merlan 1988) see women in the past as independent and self-contained. However, if we think of men's and women's roles in terms of social interaction, men seem to dominate (Hamilton 1987). While women's food distribution was confined to their husbands and children, men shared meat with the wider community. Thus, the men's labour role was rather social and public, the women's domestic. Secondly, we can attempt to analyse women's and men's involvement in ritual practices. Hamilton, who conducted research among Pitjantjatjara women in Central Australia, points out that there were two sections in each myth – male and female parts of songs, myths, dances and so forth. One would be incomplete without the other. Both sexes had their secret sites and objects and both had their ancestral figures (Hamilton 1981). Kaberry, who went to the southern Kimberley region of Western Australia portrayed a ritual life in which women shared with men “the same supernatural sanction of the totemic ancestors and the Time Long Past” (Kaberry 1939:273). Women's ceremonial knowledge was imbedded in female society as it was passed down from mother to daughter. There were both female secret corroborees and

¹⁷ In Aboriginal kinship system, a child can have more parents than two and the parenthood is more defined by behaviour of attachment and care than by formal kin ties. For example, two men who consider themselves close brothers, for example, will refer to each other's children as “our dual children” (see Myers 1993 or Berndt 1983).

male rituals that empowered them to cast love spells on their partners and to have some kind of control over them. This again stresses the equality of roles in subsistence practices as well as in ritual. According to Myers (1991) who focused on male identity among Pintupi people, personhood was about shared identity, about the 'cultural subject'. Because ritual emphasises shared-ness, male ritual has more status as it is a more widely shared experience. None the less, Merlan depicted that the power of women's ritual is in its secrecy. I think that she makes a crucial point when she says that: "Subjective understandings of women about themselves reveal no gender based sense whatsoever of personal inferiority to men, but a sense of priority of certain male domains, especially ritual, and a strong sense of the propriety of adhering to norms of gender differentiated behaviour" (1988:59).

Additionally, in her recent research of Warlpiri Aborigines in Central Australia, Dussart (2000) finds that women have become the main performers of public rituals. These last arguments help us to turn our attention away from gender separatism and strict categories and focus on the present gendered reality. Most Indigenous female authors (e.g. Behrendt 2005, Lukashenko 2002, or Huggins 1998) assert that there has been a turnover in gender roles since colonization. The 1897s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Act in Queensland established control of movements of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders to enter employment contracts on their behalf, to hold any funds they might have, and control their spending. This Act assigned Aborigines inferior status and regarded them as slave labour. By this their fundamental human rights were denied. Australian Indigenous people became powerless partners, often hired for minimal wages in domestic services. Aboriginal women worked as Black servants and nurses of White landlords. Their entire day revolved around catering for those family needs and they were under almost total control of White men (see Huggins 1988).

Often a young Aboriginal woman lived almost simultaneously with her Aboriginal husband and a White man who, in practice, had more rights over her than her husband because of the great discrepancy between them in status. The patriarchal nature of contemporary society means that Aboriginal women were subject to further specific oppression by both Aboriginal and White men (Huggins 1998:14).

Having an example of White men dominating their women – and primarily Aboriginal women, Aboriginal men took on the behaviour and attitudes of their male colonizers.

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal men started to cooperate to establish the structures of patriarchy within the newly colonized societies (see Behrendt 2005). It seems that White women might have been Black women's allies. But truth is the opposite. Huggins (1993) asserts that despite the patriarchy in Australian society, Australia was not colonized on a sexually but on a racially imperialistic base. Consequently, even the oppressed White women took on the role of oppressors in relation to Black men and Black women.

Regarding the contemporary female position in subsistence practices, some authors presume that Aboriginal women in urban society moved from the position of breadwinners to welfare recipients - owing to a lower contribution to food production. According to materialistic Marxist theory, women's social status declined with the decline in their food production. Contrarily, other recent anthropologists (Collman 1988, Babidge 2002) argue that women are usually the main beneficiaries of government welfare, they are more economically active, and that they are the heads of the household. They explore the effects of the mission era on women's domestic stability in the present. Barwick notes that through a mission supported stability that was based in the status of childbearing (and rearing), women became the managers of the new domestic spheres, and hence the "agents of social change" (Barwick 1978:56). Moreover, patterns of bureaucratic support for women as the centre of family denigrated men's roles and excluded them, according to Collman (1988). At the same time, women's social networks and a women's community occur due to the gender divisions between the types of employment and opportunities provided by pastoralists, when Aboriginal women spent much more time in towns than men. "Not only were they used to life in town, they had built social networks among each other and spent time visiting each others homes, looking after each others' children and making the town home" (Babidge 2000:101). Babidge asserts that women also gained more experience in dealing with bureaucracies through their daily interaction with the welfare state. This also meant a certain level of their families lives (Babidge 2000).

3.2 Aboriginal women's empowerment

Bell's statement about women's subordination is contested by arguments made by Heather Goodall and Jackie Huggins (1992) in their article *Aboriginal women are everywhere*. These Indigenous authors assert women's strong continual involvement in all spheres of Aboriginal affairs. As it is documented they have been involved in land rights claims together with men.

They demanded the recognition of women's knowledge of the land, as well as their ceremonial obligations of sustaining their lands and communities.¹⁸ Aboriginal women have also played important roles in struggles for better employment conditions for Aboriginal people and are continually involved in the union movement "attempting to link and support the growing number of Aborigines in public sector jobs" (Goodall and Huggins 1992:407). They continually fight against an excessive social control over their families with the family social services the families often rely on due to the unemployment. This makes them more vulnerable to normative interventions by government officials.¹⁹ But the constant interaction of Aboriginal clients and welfare agents certainly causes a mutual influence. "The forms of Aboriginal family now evident are produced and reproduced through historical and continuing relation with the state "as stated by an Australian anthropologist Sally Babidge (2000:17). Likewise, Collmann writes that: "One cannot completely understand White welfare policies without reference to the actions Aborigines take in response to the welfare apparatus itself" (1988:6). It is understandable that Aboriginal clients and welfare agents interact with and affect each other. One of the objectives of Kummara is to ease this inevitable interaction.

One of the main field of Aboriginal women's activism concerns health. This topic is important for understanding the workings of Kummara, as its activities are often referred to as 'healing.' The Aboriginal women's movement is focused on redefinition of poor health as the effect of colonialism, racism and cultural intolerance, on enforcement of equal access to State services, and on its culturally appropriate delivery. Thus, Aboriginal women have been active in establishing the above discussed Aboriginal health services in both urban and rural regions. The statistics of low Aboriginal health and infant mortality as well as the rising death rate of young parents caused by poverty-linked stress, alcohol abuse and resulting violence, and consequent removal of children from families to 'mainstream' child care institutions were the main triggers of Aboriginal women taking responsibility into their own hands. Aboriginal women mobilized women from federal bureaucracy in consultation with women from Aboriginal communities across Australia which resulted in their greater involvement in Aboriginal affairs. Once involved in the policy making areas of public service, surrounded by White Australians and bureaucratic

¹⁸ For more about particular cases in New South Wales and Northern Territory see Huggins and Goodall 1992.

¹⁹ Goodall and Huggins (1992) stress that this perpetuates the same patterns which separated Aboriginal children from their families in the past. Even today, a significant number of Aboriginal children are outside the community, in foster homes, welfare or corrective institutions.

structures, these women have to face racial and gender prejudices (see Goodall and Huggins 1992). Moreover, those institutions, usually run by White men, discriminated them in terms of gender too.

Within the bureaucracies, Aboriginal women have found themselves confronting White male hierarchies of power: such structures seldom recognise any women's voices, much less voices belonging to Aboriginal women. Their peers are overwhelmingly Anglo-males, whose duty in Aboriginal affairs ceases each day at 5:06 p.m., whereas for an Aboriginal woman the shift is never ending (Goodall and Huggins 1992:412).

There is a pressure on Aboriginal women in this position from both the government and the Aboriginal community because of their position as mediators. Goodall and Huggins (1992) call this a 'meat in the sandwich' position, when women are judged by her work peers and by other Indigenous people, usually with little recognition from either of them. Similarly, Tarrago (1990) stresses the fact that these women can only operate under bureaucratic terms of reference that limit the actual benefits of their work. Berndt (1983) asserts that any reference to the main actors, people with power and authority, concerns males - might it be lawyers, politicians or government officials. This reinforces the existing view of men dominating public domain and might encourage even Aboriginal men to exclude women from any sphere of public responsibility. Not all of them would disparage women but, "they contend that women should play a secondary role in matters of land and sacred sites: a helping, cooperative role, but a subordinate one" (Berndt 1983:14). It seems that this attitude has strengthened recently, and it is presumed by some men that this is the way things 'used to be'. But it is actually a myth encouraged by Westerners, and our society's emphasis on male domination across all the aspects of life (see Berndt 1983). We can conclude that the problem is not in the women's activity itself but more in the way their work is underestimated and their voices publicly silenced. The power of men's political representation or *social capital* (see Bourdieu 1984) is much stronger. Despite all these obstacles, Aboriginal women operate in very significant public positions, today. In terms of child care, Aboriginal women initiated the reconnecting of *Stolen generations* children with their families. Projects such as 'Link-Up' or the 'Aboriginal Family History Project' accessed material of genealogies and photographs of several thousand Aboriginal people living in settlements across Australia for the purpose of reconnecting children with their families (Goodall and Huggins 1992). Aboriginal women have also been involved in designing programs for substance abuse by women and children such as Bennelong's Heaven in New South Wales or Angatja in

Pitjantjatjara Lands. They have to deal with warning cases of violence against women and children within their own communities, which is usually caused by alcohol abuse too. There are cultural obstacles preventing abused Aboriginal women and men from obtaining relevant help. Lack of trust to government agencies and law enforcement comes from the historical context of colonization, removal of children from their families, and from the deaths of Aboriginal people in custody. Also the fact that women do not want to leave their community and extended family stops them from seeking hospitalization or asylum. The Aboriginal institution, Wirraway Women's Housing Co-operative provides women in crisis with emergency shelter or more permanent accommodation in the town (Goodall and Huggins 1992). Last but not least, Aboriginal women have always been involved in maintaining knowledge by storytelling and narrating. There has been a boom of women's biographies since the 1970s, for instance Jackie Huggins' *Sister Girl* (1998), Shirley Smith's *Mum Shirl* (1981), Ruby Langford's *Don't Take Your Love to Town* (1988) or Sally Morgan's *My Place*. There are also a reasonable number of Aboriginal women's artists as Fiona Doyle or Tracy Muffet. In Indigenous context, art is also a way of communicating knowledge. While men have their ways and objects of painting, women have their own (see Langton 2000 or Chaloupka 1999).

3.3 Indigenous versus White women's movement

It is necessary to make some remarks on differences between the Aboriginal and White women's movements. A growing political engagement of Aboriginal people since the 1950s resulted in the 1967 referendum and land rights investigation and forming bodies like Federal Council of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI) and One People of Australia League (OPAL). There has been a kind of cooperation in between these two since the 1930s but feminists were reasonably influenced by their White standards, as well as by emerging anthropological work. It was under these circumstances that White feminists simply invited Aboriginal women to join them. One reason of its rejection was that they did not think about their inner racial attitudes towards their Aboriginal counterparts. More importantly, the White and Indigenous women's goals were often fundamentally different.

Aboriginal women insisted that the women's liberation movement recognise that the conditions they faced were different. For example, the White women's movement argued that compared to men, women in Australia were poorly educated and worked in poorly paid jobs. Yet Aboriginal women were better educated than Aboriginal men, and when they were able to be employed,

they worked in jobs with better status than Aboriginal men. The White women's movement was at that time concerned with sexuality and the right to say 'yes' – to be sexually active without condemnation. For Aboriginal women, fighting derogatory sexual stereotypes and exploitation by White men, the issue was more often the right to say 'no'. Where White women's demands to control their fertility were related to contraception and abortion, Aboriginal women were subject to unwanted sterilisation and continued to struggle against the loss of their children to interventionist welfare agencies. While Aboriginal women insisted on their rights to access of full medical services, including information about contraception, their demands to control their own fertility were related to the right to have as many children as they wanted (Goodall and Huggins 1992:402).

Indigenous authors as Huggins (1998) or Behrendt (1993) insist that, contrary to White women, Aboriginal women have to face two kinds of oppression – sexism and racism. They also put much bigger emphasis on family, community and child care. Furthermore, Aboriginal women do not have any reason to “like” White women more than men as they were colonized by both of them. Consequently, the notion of White female feminists speaking for Aboriginal women is disputable. There has been a quarrel in between Diane Bell, a White feminist and anthropologist, and Jackie Huggins (1991), Aboriginal activist and historian. The subject was Bell's article *Speaking about rape is everyone's business* (1989). Here, Bell is reacting to several cases of intra-racial rape that took place in the Northern Territory during and after the 1980s. Huggins et al. expresses doubts about Bell's representation of the Indigenous women's voice. They find Bell's view as of a White anthropologist interfering in Aboriginal women's affairs and taking control over them. According to them, Bell tends to interpret their issues in a Western way – either patriarchal or feminist. Their main questioning of Diane Bell's book is: who speaks for whom, and who has the right to speak for Aboriginal women? That has a historical explanation coming from racial and sexual imperialism. They are not looking for help in terms of gender or sex but in terms of race, drawing from prevailing White dominance in the country. They want Aboriginal women to solve their own problems, not for White feminists to interfere.

Mentioning another difference from White feminist claims, I can refer to what my respondents said. Mary depicted the fact that feminists have to call for equality as there has never been any between men and women in White society, whereas Aboriginal women used to be equal to men and thus can call for its re-establishment.

Men and women, of course they are separate but equal because there are such things like men's and women's law and women's spirituality. It does exist. If it was a real patriarchy then the women's law wouldn't even exist. It wouldn't even be there (Mary Graham, personal communication, 25/08/06).

It is interesting, though, that after expressing my interest in Aboriginal women's business, an Aboriginal elder, Lilla Watson, suggested to me reading Diane Bell's book *The Daughters of the Dreaming*, a study of Kaytej and Warlpiri people in Central Australia (1993). Was it because she found some parts interesting, or perhaps she thought that Bell's representation would be more understandable for me, being a White woman too? A few days later, Mary showed this book to me. She admitted that Diane Bell is a feminist and that she does not agree with everything that she says but that some of her points are interesting. Then, I asked Lilla about her reference again. She said that she would not reject anyone's work and that I should look at both Black and White perspectives (Lilla Watson, personal communication, 31/10/06). In one of her papers, Lilla Watson explicitly wrote:

There is an important role for dialogue and cooperation between feminisms intra-nationally, as well as inter-nationally, and that women of colonized societies have valuable insights to offer. I don't think feminism and decolonization can be separated. The development of an international feminist movement and the process of decolonization – cultural, religious, political, and economic – while pursuing their own agendas, need to go hand in hand (International Feminisms: Towards 2000, Conference Melbourne, 1994).

Nevertheless, the particular Indigenous woman, Jackie Huggins, who argued with Diane Bell, was very surprised with the fact that those women encouraged me, as a student from overseas, to read Diane Bell's books. She said she was going to see them about it and make them recommend Indigenous authors in the future.

This discourse on feminism and reading feminist literature on Aboriginal issues is very fragile to conceptualise as every single woman had a different notion of the discourse. All we can elicit here is that there has been at least some mutual influence and inspiration between White and Indigenous women movements' agenda and literature. After all, inspiration from the 'oppositional' intellectuality is inherent to the process of cultural revitalisation as discussed throughout the study.

3.4 Indigenous movement as a Black movement

In regards to the rise and support of Aboriginal culture and overt proclamation of Indigeneity since the 1970s, Sutton discusses a possible cultural influence by the American Black movement.

Much of the ideological push for this development, as well as much of its early rhetoric and techniques of public demonstrations, was transformed from the Black rights movement of the USA and received additional pushes from the general recognition of the Fourth World component in modern states, the multiculturalism phenomenon, and a heightened awareness of the minorities as well (Sutton 1988:258).

I have talked to several Indigenous Australians on this topic. The younger ones especially talked about the appropriation of the Afro-American hip-hop style of clothing or the shared protest against Western culture. Another important issue is certainly the movement for American Black women's rights. Their credo in the USA in the 1970s: "The hardest job in the USA is being a Black woman." Jackie Huggins, Aboriginal historian and activist, and one of my respondents, admitted that she might have been influenced by the Black women's movement as she made several visits to the USA at that time. Nevertheless, she rejected any wider influence in the Aboriginal women's community in general and said that if there were any, it was certainly mutual. She also pointed out that Aboriginal women are more ahead of certain issues as reconciliation (Jackie Huggins, personal communication, 04/10/06). However, there have certainly been similar voices for Aboriginal women's business in Canada. Searching for "Aboriginal women's business" on the Internet brings some Canadian websites²⁰ on the same topic. This would mean that notions of Indigeneity have both local and global influence, although certainly not in everyone's case. This influence is, as Huggins said, hard to specify as they are reciprocal.

²⁰ http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ps/ecd/js/journ_e.html, 15/08/06

IV. Kummara Family Care

This chapter focuses on Kummara, an Indigenous Family Care Centre in West End, Brisbane, where I conducted my fieldwork. After introducing the Kummara organisation and its objectives, I will present the data, interviews and field notes, gathered during the period from August to December 2006. During this time, I was engaged in Kummara as a volunteer.

Compared to mainstream organisations, Kummara operates with both Indigenous and Western models of social care since it has been formed by both of them. These two models come from culturally different approaches to health and wellbeing - from holistic approach and curative approach. While the Western curative approach focuses on physical symptoms, Indigenous holistic approach sees complex issues of wellbeing on physical, social, emotional, and spiritual level. Thus, Western, or mainstream services provide care to individuals and focus on the sick person, whereas according to the Indigenous care providers, all community must be cured as it affects the individual. Lynn et al. (1998) outlined the principles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander helping styles. It is a holistic help that is highly systemic and organic that does not put an emphasis on any particular method. Conversely, much of the Western social welfare is 'instrumental', consisting of a task-centred and problem solving theory, and a crisis intervention. The clash of the 'curative' and 'holistic' approach is apparent in the inability of the mainstream services to meet Indigenous needs. Health in an Indigenous context is the outcome of a complex interplay between the individual, his territory of conception and his spiritual integrity: body, land and spirit (Reid 1982). Assuring of this interplay is referred to as Aboriginal "cultural safety" by Eckermann (1992). As understood by Kummara, only physical, emotional, social and spiritual wellbeing of a mother can assure the wellbeing of her family which is her responsibility. Thus, Kummara focuses especially on child care and on women's emotional, social and spiritual health. It is one of the organisations that were funded due to inefficiency of the mainstream organisations. Before presenting Kummara, I will make a brief introduction to the Indigenous way of looking after human wellbeing. The National Aboriginal and Islander Health Organisation (NAIHO) states that:

Health to Aboriginal people is a multi-dimensional concept that embraces all aspects of living and stresses the importance of survival in harmony with the environment. It is not just the physical wellbeing of the individual but the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of the whole community. It is a whole-of-life view and it also includes the cyclical concept of life (Eckermann 1992:174).

It is undoubted that colonization brought many stressors such as land disposal, introducing of diseases, bad food, alcohol, subordination, and slavery that contributed to the poor Aboriginal wellbeing.²¹ These things have affected not only the physical, but also the spiritual, emotional and social wellbeing of Aborigines. Aboriginal cultural and spiritual practices were repressed. Taking children away from their families resulted in generational effects including loss of parenting skills and social cohesion. A young Indigenous anthropologist Gregory Phillips, notes in his book *Addictions and healing in Aboriginal country*: “Thus, not only did colonization produce situational traumatising, such as seeing relatives shot or taken away, but it also produced cumulative trauma as a result of shame and self-hate, and intergenerational trauma as a result of unresolved and unaddressed grief and loss” (2003:23).

Thus, the factors contributing to the poor health status of Indigenous people should be seen within the broad context of the ‘social determinants of health’. These include income, education, employment, stress, social networks and support, social exclusion, working and living conditions, gender and behavioural aspects. Cultural factors, such as traditions, attitudes, beliefs, and customs have some influence too. Together, these social and cultural factors make the major impact on person’s behaviour. The rural communities face serious problems of alcohol and drug abuse, and of increasing violence towards children such as child sexual abuse. None the less, the urban communities have similar problems, supported by delinquency, and the rising aggressiveness within the family. Regarding family, domestic violence is one of the most calling issues today. But it is not only men who are the perpetrators, women are too. Another health area to consider is pregnancy and childbearing. Babies with an Indigenous mother were twice as likely (13% of births) to be low birthweight babies as babies with a non-Indigenous mother (6%). Indigenous mothers are more likely to have their babies at younger ages than other mothers. The average age of Indigenous mothers who gave birth in 2003 was 25 years which is six years earlier compared to the average age of all mothers (<http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/>, 02/10/06).

The health care provided by mainstream institutions is, unfortunately, not always fitting Aboriginal people’s needs. The welfare system today is highly institutionalised; therefore,

²¹ Aboriginal people today experience the lowest social and economic standard in Australia. Their health is three times worse and their life expectancy is 17 years shorter than of an average White Australian. The leading cause of death of both men and women in 2001 was cardiovascular disease, followed by injuries, cancer and nutritional and metabolic problems (<http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/>, 02/10/06).

medical and social care is separated from issues related to personal, family and community care. Moreover, there are particular reasons why Indigenous people would not seek the care as often as they need it which I refer to in chapter 3.2. It is confusing for Aboriginal people that they have to wait and make an appointment to be able to see a doctor or a social worker. Of course, the women I worked with were used to Western institutions and took all this for granted. Being educated, they are much more aware of the welfare system's benefits than the people in remote communities or on the streets. That is why education is considered the key factor in improving the health and wellbeing of Indigenous Australians, and there is a strong need to educate Indigenous children and families.²² Unfortunately, parents do not encourage their children to go to school since they would not go there themselves. Indigenous children are not prepared to sit at school and concentrate.

Then there are the calls for blackfellows to get up and start doing things but it's easy to say that when you don't have a lot of history hanging over you, when you come from a stable home, be it middle class, lower class or upper class. If you come from stability and consistency, you're fine. But a lot of our mob has inherent problems with alcohol, drugs, violence. Our identity is displaced too - not knowing a space, not having a place where you belong, where you feel you belong (Theresa Mace, personal communication, 13/09/06).

4.1 Origins of Kummara

The 1970s' program of building Indigenous community-based organisations in family and child wellbeing followed three crucial principles: affordability, accessibility and appropriateness (Eckermann 1992). The similarities are that the services are not focused on providers but on the needs of communities, their approach seems to be more flexible and supposedly less bureaucratic, their basis lies in family and community, and they come from the importance of communal decision-making (Eckermann 1992). Kummara has grown in response to a major need for an Indigenous community-focused, professionally coordinated, integrated childcare family service (Chapman & Munro 2001). Kummara Association Inc. was established in 1999 by its current CEO (Chief Executive Officer), Sue Featherstone, and the chairperson, Lesley-Ann Clements (both Indigenous women). According to their words,

²² In 2002, Indigenous people aged 18 years or over who had completed higher levels of schooling, were more likely to report better health and less likely to have a disability or long-term health condition than those who had completed lower levels of schooling. Between 1996 and 2004, Indigenous primary and secondary school enrolments and retention rates steadily increased. This trend was particularly evident for the retention rate to Year 11 from Year 7/8 (up from 47% to 61%) (<http://www.healthinonet.ecu.edu.au/>, 02/10/06).

they started Kummara in the spirit of exclusively women-led family care. They took over Koolyangarra Child Care Centre that used to function under Aboriginal Islander Child Care Agency in Brisbane (AICCA). The development of the first Aboriginal Child Care Agencies, AICCAs, was a response to calls from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities for the establishment of national legislation to protect the rights of their children; for recognition and funding of Indigenous community controlled child welfare organisations to assume responsibility for the child welfare; and for the establishment of a national body focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. In 1981, the Secretariat of National Aboriginal Islander Child Care (SNAICC), the national peak body for AICCAs was formally established, although without the level of resources required to drive the development of Indigenous child welfare agencies across all states and territories. All jurisdictions have adopted the principle of Aboriginal Child Placement either in legislation or policy. The Principle has the following order of preference for placing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children outside their family:

1. with the child's extended family
2. within the child's Indigenous community
3. with other Indigenous people

All stakeholders, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, stressed the importance of Indigenous services playing a key role in working with children and families which are involved in the child protection system. All AICCAs, however, also expressed a desire to have a greater capacity to do work which keeps children and families out of the welfare system. From the program's inception, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been calling for the focus of child welfare interventions to move from child removal to family support. However, while early intervention and prevention work with families at risk of entering the child protection system was included in AICCAs' program, it did not reflect what the Australian government considered its role in supporting AICCAs.

The main objectives of AICCAs program, later overtaken by Kummara, were that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young: 1) receive quality care in a safe and supportive environment in which their needs are met; 2) are placed in culturally appropriate environment; 3) maintain and strengthen their relationship with their family, community and significant others; 4) experience continuity of care in their placement, health, education, recreation, cultural and spiritual identity, family and community contact; 5) are supported to return home

or to move to alternative placements; 6) and are assisted in their transition to independence, in accordance with the case plan.

AICCAs were Indigenous non-governmental organisations under Commonwealth initiative that is primarily the responsibility of the States (i.e. child protection). This may be in part why they have received little or no support from the Australian Government beyond their historical funding allocation. At the same time, underfunding by nearly all States and Territories until recently, has equally contributed to the lack of capacity within the AICCA program. This has contributed to overstretched organisations which have struggled to remain viable facing ever-increasing demands for their services from Indigenous communities with burgeoning young populations. It has also led to workforce issues such as a shortage of appropriately trained and skilled Indigenous staff across the service delivery spectrum, problems competing with the higher salary levels available to highly skilled Indigenous staff for working in government departments, a high staff turnover due to stress from the lack of support, high case loads, and extreme disadvantage of communities they work with. AICCAs were eventually closed down. However, it must be noted that a number of larger AICCAs within the program have been very successful. They demonstrate that Indigenous organisations can expand and grow in response to the needs of communities but they require additional resources to develop the appropriate systems to manage them effectively.

I would like to say a few words about the current leader and one of the principal founders of Kummara, Sue Featherstone. All the following data come from an interview carried out on September 8, 2007.

*

Sue's story

I think it might be desirable to introduce a short biography of an Indigenous woman who has had a very interesting life. The experience of being a *Stolen generations* child has shaped Sue's life journey and certainly contributed to her present activism in Indigenous family care. Sue came from a remote community Mulinjali (Bundjabeng) from Lagan River in Rathdowney in Southern Queensland but her family did not have any evidence of her date of birth. According to her words, she was born during the Second World War. Her father was a Scotsman (this area was not settled by White settlers until 1952) and her mother Indigenous. While father was a Christian, mother was mainstreamed (in between Christianity and Indigenous religion) in her faith. Lots of dairy farm barns were built here and run by Scots.

Family moved further up to Northern Queensland to Maalan to settle their farm. Sue was removed from her family with her brother at age twelve because they were too pale. They were placed in several families and their father would come and get them back. Then she lived at a mission further up in Central Queensland. She started to work at the station. She says that it was actually fun but that she recalls innutritious food they were fed with. It was mostly bread and honey which she became used to since then. They did not have any fruit and vegetable and children's health was poor. She also lived in a foster home for some time. She escaped from the station when she was fourteen and went to Melbourne. She had had a vision Melbourne was the place she had to go to. Not having anything, she stayed on the streets. Eventually, communist party found her, took care of her, and educated her. Therefore, she says, she cannot say anything against communists. With their support, she started to work in the Commonwealth Bank. Eventually, her communist attendants found her parents. They had been removed from the coast as their land was used as a building estate. She points out that after meeting her parents; relationship with her mother was never the same again. "I felt really disconnected. I said all the words of love but didn't care." When she started studying and working she had a constant feeling that she must be perfect. She wanted to show that she was Indigenous, educated and the best of all. Now, she realises that she missed closer contact with people and the separation from her mother made her emotionally "shallow". She admits that she never had really deep feelings for any man and that her emotional ties with men were problematic. She was very independent. Sue graduated in social work at the University of Queensland when she retired. She has three children.

*

It is clear that Sue was separated from her Indigenous relatives, grew up in Western society, and got Western education and an experience of working in a completely mainstream Western financial institution. When she came back, she, as any other *Stolen generations* child, was not able to fully restore the relationship with her family. But she felt the need to help others and to do something for the community, especially for the mothers and children. Thus, she started to work in Aboriginal Islander Child Care Agency. Before the closure of AICCAs, Sue Featherstone and Lesley-Ann Clements started Kummara. Their motto was clear – women are the ones responsible for their children. Conversely, there used to be something as a "boys club" in AICCAs as noted by Sue (personal communication, 08/09/06). All this reveals around the Aboriginal perception of women's health and child care as an exclusively women's business as emphasised within Kummara.

Kummara is currently one of three Indigenous organisations in Brisbane that focus on child care. It has taken over the AICCAs' objectives and principles (such as Aboriginal Child Placement Principle)²³ and continues to secure the wellbeing of Indigenous children and families. Moreover, Kummara's activities do not concern Indigenous people only since it provides help to anyone in need, and acts as a mediator with the mainstream services. There are non-Indigenous children in Kummara's Child Care Centre such as White Australians or the Sudanese. This corresponds with all the Kummara's concept of relating Indigenous and non-Indigenous models of care and healing, and redressing the relationships among people. For instance, Kummara organises family meetings that help in breaking down barriers, such as common myths of Indigenous child rearing, through the sharing of information and knowledge between parents and the different cultures. Maintaining family connections in care and working towards family restoration is a core component of the work of Kummara. The organisation focuses on providing prevention and early intervention programs to strengthen families and build their resilience and support networks. This includes: 1) a cultural centre where children and parents learn to do things together and relearn about their culture; 2) parenting skills development programs, early childhood learning programs such as supported playgroups, childcare, and preschool, practical assistance and advocacy to access specialist services (employment, drug and alcohol treatment, family violence); 3) building links to mainstream services to build positive development (preschools, child and maternal health); 4) supporting education of children and young people, encouraging families to get their children to study, planning traditional way of learning (rites of passage for youth). Kummara intervenes in family breakdown issues and safeguards the children before the state intervention which usually removes them to White institutions. The staff cooperates with clients that come from the street, seek for the best solution of their problems and directs them to the relevant institutions of a social care – mainstream or Indigenous. Importantly, Kummara offers help to all clients in need and is not confined to Indigenous clients and organisations. It contributes to building relations between White agencies and the Indigenous community in the inner-city area and to bridging the chasm between Indigenous people and welfare services resulting from the history. Since it functions as an agent of change, Kummara has to engage in negotiations on changing the policies of child safety under the Department of Child Safety. Staffs are called upon by the relevant departments to provide cultural advice in their case management processes. They play a strong advocacy role in court cases, ensuring

²³ [http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/vIA/indigenous/\\$File/AICCA_Report.pdf](http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/vIA/indigenous/$File/AICCA_Report.pdf), 15/08/06

that kinship placements are adequately assessed as a first option wherever possible. It still includes the range of culturally appropriate placement options (in line with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle) for those children who are unable to stay safely with their birth parents, along with a good case planning and a strong emphasis on maintaining family connections and family reunification. Kummara is involved in recruiting, training, and supporting Indigenous foster carers. This role is crucial to states/territories' capacity to implement the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle to which all are committed. Last but not least, Kummara's commitment is in research, documenting and advocating for an integrated approach to services. The prime objective is to develop an approach to management of Indigenous organisations and programs which are tailored to the specific needs, aspirations and circumstances of Indigenous children, women and families who are associated with other Kummara services and other organisations with which Kummara Association will endeavour to establish formal links for the integration of services.

Recently, Kummara's been researching a common definition of Aboriginal terms of reference and on parenting programs. The local communities intend to examine women's issues and participate in Kummara's research since there persist injustice and domestic violence against Aboriginal women and their children and women experience male's dominance in many ways. Kummara puts a strong emphasis on women as protectors of their children and families; therefore, on healthy women as healers of a community. Gradually, Kummara has started to deal with everything concerning women's health. Apart from helping children and families, Kummara organises regular women's meetings and conferences. The 'BRIMS' (meaning 'Building Resilience in Murri Sisters') women's meetings were designed to consult and collaborate on program content for the upcoming *See Change* Conference and the development of the Indigenous Parenting Program. The goal of women's conferences organised by Kummara is to build a discourse on Aboriginal women's wellbeing. The Jirun Conference was the first women's conference that took part in May 2006. The main part of my volunteering in Kummara (August-November 2006) was the preparation of the *See Change* Conference (coming from 'Murri women want 'sea change') that took place in October 2006. Murri women²⁴ from Brisbane and its surroundings engaged in a debate concerning empowerment of women, obtaining their original Law, ceremonies, responsibility for their families and mainly for recognition of their voices. This women's forum was the first step to forthcoming regular meetings of Murri women that will intend to redefine Aboriginal

²⁴ Aboriginal people from Queensland and Northern New South Wales call themselves Murri.

and Torres Strait Islanders terms of reference. I will discuss the outcomes of the conference further in this chapter. As I was able to observe, most of the time I spent in Kummara was dedicated to planning and organising the women's conferences. It also concerned most of the phone calls and emails. I did not see many clients physically while working in Kummara. This is partly due to the counselling provided via phone calls. Furthermore, the organisation's recent focus on women's issues and community research was in the air.

Since the women in Kummara relate their work to community's and women's spiritual or cultural healing, they practice the holistic model of healing, based on the strengthening of an individual within a community and, through this, the strengthening of the community as a whole (referred to as community building). The actual service might be sitting and talking and having a cup of tea, yarning (talking in a circle), or counselling but it is always about supporting the individual in finding his or her own way – referred to as “walking together” in Kummara. As Sue said, capacity building is about lifting up and “saying you can do that” (Sue Featherstone, personal communication, 12/10/06). According to Theresa “healing is a journey that individuals need to go through before they find themselves - it is a process” (Theresa Mace, personal communication, 05/10/06). Sue emphasised that Kummara is no longer providing a community service that it is more about mediation and, primarily, about an effort to change the system. She admits that this process can be a long run but the results are worth it:

Last year we actually got five families together again. Their children were out at foster care and they are back home with mum and dad. That's the achievement just to get them back of the department. It might not sound as huge numbers but those five families are back together and we still support them. If they want us to we don't go and turn up. We write them a letter you know “How are you going? Do you need anything? Do you need children get back to school? Do you need uniforms? And we put a lot of children back into school with uniforms. It's a pretty pragmatic stuff. They actually built their relationships with those families and then they are more likely to come back if they need some support. So it's not about huge amount of people coming and going because we have done all that. So it's not as much about business, it is more about dropping in and having a cup of tea and a bit of change (Sue Featherstone, personal communication, 12/10/06).

4.2 Organisational structure

The personnel of Kummara Association Incorporated currently consist of ten members that comprise the committee (a chairperson, treasurer, secretary, and two community members) and the staff (Chief Executive Officer, receptionist, consultant, early intervention and family support worker, and cultural strengthening and community development worker). Kummara falls under the community-based social work discourse that emphasises welfare as a social activity, and participation in a community context. One of Kummara's mission statements is to include family members and citizens of its services in program development, implementation and evaluation. Collaboration particularly with Aboriginal women in the West End district is the cornerstone of Kummara's organisational mission statement.

Kummara runs two separate centres. These are the Indigenous Family Care Centre and Child Care Centre in Brisbane. In my thesis, I usually refer to the Family Care Centre where I volunteered. Another programs currently run by Koolyangarra are Indigenous Children's Program, Tjapita Training, and Badjigal Youth.

Koolyangarra Child Care Centre serves to families and is inclusive of all client groups that seek support and advocacy. The problems faced by families and children at Koolyangarra Childcare Centre are multiple and complex – some are autistic or with learning disabilities. The children and their families have long-term needs for support, advice and assistance. **Indigenous Children's Program (ICP)** implements research of Indigenous parenting, crime prevention, parenting strategies and developing parental reflection skills. **Tjapita Training** involves various methods of staff training. **Badjigal Youth** involves specific programs for teenagers but is currently inactive due to a lack of funding.

The main pillar of Kummara is a multi-functional, strengths-based and family-centred approach that is consistent with the values of Queensland Childcare Strategic Plan 2000-2005. Being **multifunctional**, Kummara investigates issues from all possible sides, starting with the situation in the family, social, cultural and medical circumstances. Members are provided with alternatives and not simply made to 'fit in' with what is available. In this way, members can be linked with services that are both culturally appropriate and self-determining. I had a chance to see a case of the multifunctional approach when a child had learning difficulties. While, according to women in Kummara, mainstream organisations would send the child to a special school, Kummara investigated the details. Due to a medical check, it was found that

the child had hearing problems and therefore was not able to follow the classwork. It is part of Kummara's family support to coordinate with a speech and hearing program that identifies problems that need to be addressed before getting into the education system. Also, the Child Care Centre is open to all children, and various needs. Some of them may be autistic or traumatised. The Indigenous **strengths-based model** has been designed for Kummara by cooperation of Kummara members and psychologists. It was partly inspired by similar models used in the United States and Canada, but it mainly responds to Australian Indigenous cultural needs. It involves services that focus on the strengths and knowledge of the individual and also work on identifying the strengths and resources held within the family, community or culture with which the individual is situated. This approach acknowledges the individual as part of a greater whole and moves the focus to the family, its subsystems and its interaction with the whole community. The strengths-based model is culturally driven which means that each member of the organisation brings their own unique culture to each situation and the comprehensiveness of that culture actually drives the process. In this way the process becomes much more than just acknowledging difference, or being sensitive to race or ethnicity. The fundamental principle behind empowerment and strengths-based practice is to foster client self-determination (Chapman and Munro 2001). **Family-centred model** is based on that relevant services have identified family and community connections of fundamental importance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders people. Families provide the greatest source of support and strength for them (Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia 1995). Through this service, they are supported in discovering and identifying their strengths, knowledge and resources from their own cultural background and traditional history.

According to the Aboriginal Health Council (1995 in Chapman and Munro 2001), strengths, knowledge and resources identified by Aborigines as holding families and community together were:

- Pride in Aboriginal identity – pride in belonging to Aboriginal culture
- Family connections – families provide the greatest source of support and strength
- Self-pride – pride to be an Aborigine
- Humour – humour is a strength
- Spirituality – spirituality and religion as a source of strength within the community
- Caring and Sharing – importance of family and community connections
- Sharing stories – sharing stories of strength and resistance to injustices

- The elder people – respecting their strength (particularly of the old women)
- Aboriginal organisations – the importance of Aboriginal organisations, workers and services as a source of strength
- Being strong for family – strength derived from the desire to be there for the family
- Naming injustices – dealing with grief and loss by identifying and naming injustices
- Remembering – remembering is an important healing experience
- Aboriginal ways and knowledge – recognising Aboriginal ways of healing

The CEO of Kummara, Sue Featherstone, told me that thanks to corresponding well to this social work model, Kummara actually fits in the mainstream system – despite being an Indigenous organisation. Sue proved this by comparing the Health Council’s findings with the findings of the Indigenous people.²⁵ These two did not differ to a big extent but it was important to show this fact by presenting a model that has been approved by the mainstream system first and then implemented in an Indigenous way (personal communication, 12/10/06). By emphasising this, I would like to address the cultural obstacles faced by Indigenous organisations. While their main goal is to address the Aboriginal community’s issues and help Indigenous people, being sponsored mainly by the government, they still have to meet the mainstream, government expectations. Thus, their fruitfulness usually reflects the extent they manage to fit in between those two categories of expectations. In this way, Kummara has been reasonably successful so far.

4.3 Funding as Kummara’s obstacle

Kummara currently receives funding from the Department of Family and Community Services and Indigenous affairs (FACSI) with Commonwealth support and additional money through grants from the Brisbane City Council. Both these institutions belong to the establishment. They allow Kummara to be flexible and, most of the times, recognise the cultural differences among Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Kummara has also been responsible for persuading the Brisbane City Council that cultural difference should be seen as an asset rather than an exception to the norm, or a problem. To a big extent, Kummara is

²⁵ Some of the key features of culturally sensitive approaches highlighted by Indigenous people (Lyn et al, 1998) include: making connections with family and place, two way sharing and story-telling, sharing spirituality, informality, focussing on the whole person in their context, non-direct circular time-rich process, talking plain, listening, non-sharing, humour, tapping into the family source, walking through the system together, following the person’s direction of the process, using modified ‘White ways’ such as clarification, checking understanding, and using a problem-solving process.

funded, and therefore controlled by the Australian government, the Department of Child Care. Due to the origin of funding Kummara is very dependent on the political climate and on how much funding is allocated to the Aboriginal services by the current political party in power. As I could see, Kummara has not had larger difficulties in receiving funding to implement child care programs. However, it seems to be much harder to receive sufficient funding to support the women's conferences and meetings that aimed to find a common ground in Aboriginal women's community in terms of defining status and cultural identity of Aboriginal women in contemporary Australian society. I gained an impression that because the main goal of Kummara is supposed to provide a family care, sufficient funding for its other activities was easily attained – e.g. the realisation of the two main women's conferences and the women's gathering series. In one of our debates, Theresa Mace mentioned that the government has to realise that Kummara works in the field of family and child care to support it (personal communication, 16/11/06). According to the annual reports the Kummara's annual budget is approximately AU\$50,000 a year.

Kummara faces the same problem as any other non-governmental organisation. As I said before, it is bound to meet the needs of the community but conform to governmental demands at the same time. In that way, it is constantly being pushed from both sides. Kummara has a very good reputation partly because of the so-called non-qualified order that implies an organisational functioning and financial management must be legitimate and transparent. There is only a few non-governmental organisations (Indigenous or non-Indigenous) with a policy of non-qualified order in Brisbane area. In general, there are prejudices towards Indigenous organisations because it is alleged by various people that “Indigenous communities cannot manage money” (Gerald Featherstone, personal communication, 26/10/06). One day, I noticed a big surprise in Kummara, when they got an email from Senator Andrew Bartlett from Democratic Party, who wanted to visit the organisation. He is well known for his programs of social support for Indigenous people. His visit could promote Kummara in public domain and bring it some new funding too. The most needed thing, though, is to be recognised by mainstream society and mainstream organisations. When I asked people within the West End district whether they knew Kummara, the answer was usually no. The only ones who were aware of it was a man from a bookshop in about a hundred meters' distance from Kummara, and a woman from a charity just across the road. They would say just something like: “Oh yes, it is an organisation for all the Indigenous people...” Nevertheless, a source of Kummara's critique might be other Indigenous people.

The success in cooperation with the government or the working with non-Indigenous clients can imply that Kummara might not correspond to all community demands. It “might be criticised for not doing enough for the community” (Stephen Corporal, Student Support Service, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit at the University of Queensland, personal communication, 25/10/06). Also, different Indigenous organisations do sometimes criticise one another. An Aboriginal elder from Yuggera community in Brisbane told me that Kummara is a bit different from Indigenous organisations since the women, and Sue especially, have not been into the local Indigenous community much as they do not all come from Brisbane area. This comes from an understanding of traditional owners as the historical owners. Therefore, he identified Kummara as “a little bit made-up.” However, another comment on this topic was: “Those are just general gossip. Most Indigenous people wouldn’t let others down because of how many bad things have been written about Indigenous organisations. It would support their bad name” (Stephen Corporal, personal communication, 25/10/06). Blaming someone who has been separated from his or her family and brought up by Western people for not being enough into the Indigenous community, can be identified as “blaming the victim” rather than an adequate critique. But there is also a pressure against the concept of separate Indigenous services itself. As Theresa said (personal communication, 13/09/06), there is still a tendency to mainstream Indigenous services. But the mainstream organisations are confined in their structures and any unpunctuality is counted as a complete failure when it comes to Indigenous people. Kummara’s family support and early intervention worker, Theresa, emphasised how different the Indigenous and mainstream approaches can be: “The mainstream has to deal with everybody so it is the “one size fits all model”, whereas Indigenous and all the other cultures have their own ways and protocols of working with the community” (Theresa Mace, personal communication, 13/09/06).

Although they try to put Indigenous workers into positions and try to make it Indigenous friendly, it never will be if it’s incorporated into a mainstream service. It can’t be because mainstream services have targets to meet, you know, timeframes to work within and all those sorts of things. They will never be able to effectively assist the families that really need it. That would be fine with the families that have the strengths and motivation to access and go through all the hoops but there are a lot out there that don’t and they are the ones that end up in child protection or the justice system. When it comes down to supporting families, protecting children and all those sorts of things, the services cannot be mainstreamed, they have to stay separate (Theresa Mace, personal communication, 13/09/06).

4.4 View of the women in Kummara

Aboriginal people around Australia differ locally in a physical, social and cultural way. Therefore, we have to identify them with their origin. This study concerns Aboriginal women from Queensland, with an emphasis on women from Brisbane area. Brisbane seems to be more egalitarian in the way that even among Aboriginal people, differences in gender and social status are not so apparent. Therefore, young women can gain the same social status, income or professional level which, in other places, would not be conceivable.²⁶ Indigenous people form about 1.2 % of Brisbane population while it is 2.2 % throughout Australia. The prevailing communities in Brisbane are Yuggera and Turrbal. I should say that the women involved in Kummara do not belong to them since they come from different clan groups throughout Australia. Brisbane has several women's organisations but only Kummara is currently involved in women's business that concerns women's cultural healing. There is a women's community in Musgrave Park that has recently started women's gatherings and wants to bring women together to do ceremonies, traditional cooking, weaving et cetera. The head of Kummara, Sue, complained about this:

See, there is Kummara that has been doing women's business for ten years. Now they start a new women's group there and we will end up with ten different women's groups around Brisbane that will not know about each other. Why don't those women connect together? They are still repeating the same thing again and again (Sue Featherstone, personal communication, 16/11/06).

Women involved in reconnecting to their cultural role may have different views and ideas about it. Sometimes, they stay within their own community, and do not seek other women's projects that would make things easier for both communities, and - from an Aboriginal perspective - would be very natural way of women's cooperation and sharing responsibilities for a child as described by theorists of the traditional community life (see Berndts 1983 or Reid 1982). Therefore, it is necessary to see Kummara as only one way of understanding women's position and the discourse around it.

²⁶ In traditional societies, the status of young women was far behind young men. Kolig (1981) discusses contemporary Aboriginal societies as being much more egalitarian, e.g. in terms of religious participation.

4.4.1 Women and men and Aboriginal terms of reference

Aboriginal terms of reference are ways in which Aboriginal people refer to and reconstitute their culture within the mainstream society. It concerns issues important for and articulated by Aboriginal people. It involves using their ways of understanding that might be different to White people's terms of reference. An example is Aboriginal Law. Its meaning and understanding by Aboriginal people differs from the Western understanding of law. Aboriginal Law is translated as 'Dreaming,' which does not correspond to Aboriginal word 'Jukurrpa', expressing 'pattern', 'law', 'place', and 'relation'. Similarly, Aboriginal Law does not concern law in our terms of understanding only. It involves all aspects of living, clan law, personal law, ritual law, and the ways of treating the nature and other people, and so forth. Myers (1993:36) defines it as a "mythologically constituted knowledge and ritual." It is manifested in the complex of myth, ritual, observance of the kinship code, rules of reciprocity, and religious obligations (Kolig 1981). The difference in translation of the word is caused by the insufficiency of English vocabulary to interpret Aboriginal languages and ways of thinking.²⁷ Mary and Lilla emphasised that colonization caused confusion in Aboriginal among White terms of reference and the Aboriginal ones were affected.

Aboriginal terms of reference are based on everything coming out of this land and out of our experience of living on it for thousands of years. They are based on: our spirituality, our child rearing practices, men's business, women's business, Aboriginal Law, all coming from this land. Aboriginal terms of reference are in everything. How you talk to people, how you conduct yourself in the land, how you conduct yourself towards other people. But through the colonial process it has created a lot of confusion. Our people have not been able to really consolidate within themselves what Aboriginal terms of reference are. And that's why White people were able to impose their White terms of reference on us (Lilla Watson, personal communication, 31/10/06).

To Jackie Huggins, Aboriginal terms of reference are: "being strong and proud and having your identity as a woman, mother, and aunt - generally being a good person" (personal communication, 8/11/06). In Kummara, women used Aboriginal terms of reference when talking about women's issues and maintaining women's role. They agreed that the time has come to redefine those terms, to actually express what Aboriginal women are supposed to refer to today. When addressing the issues of finding a new common ground, they would

²⁷ As we know from Saussure's (1916) theory, languages are determined by ways of thinking.

commonly use expressions such as ‘reconstructing’, ‘rediscovering’, ‘reclaiming’, ‘rebuilding’, ‘re-enforcing’, ‘rejuvenating’, ‘regenerating’ or ‘revisiting’ and ‘taking back control’. All these expressions correspond to what the process of cultural revitalisation or innovation is about – about re-establishing traditions. Kummara has a regular women’s meeting (‘BRIMS’ – meaning Building Resilience In Murri Sisters) for its members and women from other community organisations around Brisbane. They call it “chat and chew” as it usually consists of chatting on what is happening in the community over a collective lunch. I went to two of these meetings. The atmosphere was usually very relaxed and friendly. There were always some comments on the current issues at work or on the forthcoming conference but if there was a discussion on women’s issues, it was very rich. At one of these meetings, Lilla Watson, a very educated Murri woman, made a very important remark on defining the women’s position today: “It is not about reinventing but about reconstructing how Aboriginal culture was constructed” (women’s meeting, 25/08/06). Mary Graham perfected her words by saying that: “It must be done not just in an intellectual but in a spiritual way as well” (women’s meeting, 25/08/06). At that moment, I was trying to engage in a discussion on how this ‘new’ women’s role is relevant to its past paradigm and how it would be influenced by the present. They commonly refused a ‘comeback’ of past and preferred ‘regeneration’ of women’s roles. One of the two founders of Kummara, Lesley-Ann Clements, said: “It’s just to reinforce what we’ve had and what we’ve practised. And it’s just bringing it back to the course so that it is being noticed. Just as fashion goes around in a circle so our culture is part of us, it comes with us. We just have to rejuvenate it” (women’s meeting, 25/08/06). When interviewing Mary, I posed her the same question. She openly agreed that the present women’s position and present traditions must be modernised. I did not hesitate to introduce the discussion about cultural invention to her and she did not seem to refuse it completely.

Most of the people would say that we want to go back to the past, to bring some old traditions. But it cannot be completely like that. If we could identify with the old tradition and fully Western culture, neither of them would be true today. But what is this authenticity everyone talks about? Is it living in the bush, throwing a boomerang? (Mary Graham, 12/10/06)

But women’s definitions of terms of reference differed as can be seen from the discussion below which I recorded at a women’s meeting on 25/08/06. Here, I do not name two of the speakers as I have not officially asked for their approval.

Speaker One: If you look at the sexual abuse in our community...I mean we had a rain ceremony where women would use body paintings and knew what a comfortable touch was and they knew what was appropriate and what wasn't. There was a whole knowledge based on that, in terms of reference to sexual abuse. And they used to be very superstitious so they would do basket weaving and that kind of stuff when they would drive away the evil spirits."

Lila: It's not superstitious. Superstitious is a convenient word that White people would introduce into our vocabulary. And I think that we have to be careful about using words like this because sometimes it can be in regards to the Law. And that's the sort of thing we are talking about when we are talking about what Aboriginal terms of reference are. And we have to realise that we can't expect too much of ourselves because it is a process. And this is a very small beginning of it. We can also be completely off track.

Speaker One: ...it has to be representative, agreed by different women.

Mary: Yes, because Aboriginal people are very different.

Lilla: We have to be aware of what we are trying to...not reinvent but...

Mary: Reclaim.

Lilla: Reclaim what Aboriginal terms of reference are.

Mary: Because it can't be stuck in the past.

Speaker Two: So we have to keep the past in the mind but to move forward.

Lilla: Because we never locate it in the history, we never locate it in individuals such as White people but we locate it in the land. Whenever we walk on land all our history is present. It is with us.

Speaker One: And it's still accessible.

Lilla: Absolutely.

Speaker Two: That's why we have to make people conscious of how it can be accessible for them. Bring it to their consciousness.

Mary: I believe that it has to be done not only intellectually but it also has to be expressed and demonstrated in a way of ritual ceremony. Because, to me, that is not only a sacralising of a notion, a quality, and of an action, you know. It actually has something to do with our people, with the way we behave and conduct. Everything is kind of slow, it involves careful thinking.

Sue: That's what we missed in Kummara although it was a prescriptive work. We sort of missed the opportunity to educate them in the way of slowing down, to do the ceremonies and to get to know each other as a community. And it was actually quite exhausting.

As we can see, the women had very inconsistent notions of terms of reference. The process of discussion is, however, the cornerstone of finding a common ground according to Aboriginal ethics of community decision making. At the women's conference, women from Kummara engaged in discussion with the other women attending, they encouraged them to define what

they understood by Aboriginal terms of reference. In this context, other Aboriginal women addressed issues as necessity of maintaining creativity, strength and resilience, respect to elders' knowledge, living in harmony with the nature, environmental and family nurturing, cultural healing and reconnecting, leadership in the family and in the community, living in the present but comparing it with the past too, sharing with everybody, honour, belief in a better future, healing from their past, having a healthy life style, respecting themselves, looking at feminism from a distance, and so forth (*See Change* conference, 18/10/06). Women were excited about the idea of making an Aboriginal women's website and possibly a forum that would be accessible for everyone around the world. Some of them brought in ideas coming from completely different cultural backgrounds. One woman was suggesting a Mother's day festival and a celebration of the Earth as mother. She referred to this as a kind of cultural inspiration coming from 'New Age'. In relation to this and other suggested women's activities and ceremonies, she explicitly said: "Why do they call it New Age when it is actually the old age?" Two women started suggesting establishing of a celebration of the Mother Earth's day. Another woman started talking about her Irish friend who proclaims her Celtic origin. She said she found big similarities in Celtic and Aboriginal traditions. When I asked her what she meant, she gave an example of Celtic body painting, which is very similar to the Aboriginal one (*See Change* conference, 18/10/06).

I think this discourse on Aboriginal culture, as it is understood today, intensively addresses the necessity of change, and of inspiration by surrounding mainstream culture. There are many perspectives of understanding Aboriginal culture as its content is fragile and still emerging. However, as seen from the data here, there are efforts to define and grasp it nowadays.

4.4.2 Men's and women's business

When asked about men's and women's business, Kummara women talked about two separate kinds of gender roles. Their understanding corresponds to the traditional Aboriginal conception of the different male and female involvement in daily activities from subsistence practices to ritual. That is exactly what women in Kummara demand, the reconnection to their domain of women's business, taking their traditional roles on again. As is clear from the interviews, they would agree that men should respect women's business, not intervene in their affairs, and vice versa – as it used to be until colonization. This often mentioned respect to the

separate business is illustrated by my talk with Dulcie (personal communication, 05/10/06). We had the following discussion of initiation rites organized by Musgrave Park Community in Brisbane:

Dulcie: I know, they take them somewhere out to a camp for a month. That's different from what we want. We want a long process... of becoming an adult and getting the knowledge - as Mary describes it (my remark: mentioned in chapter 5.4.5).

Me: And do you know what do these boys do at that camp?

Dulcie: I don't know, that's not my business; that's male business. We shouldn't even care about it, you know?

This is a typical example of how roles and knowledge or 'business' are divided between the sexes in Aboriginal community. Women know what they 'should not care about and talk about'. Another day, I was showing Dulcie some pictures from Moreton Island where I spent my weekend. She started talking about Stradbroke Island and about two lakes there – Blue and Brown Lake - each permitted only for one of the sexes that is, in Indigenous context, natural as there are male and female domains in work and rituals strictly observed.

In terms of women's strengthening, women in Kummara usually emphasised the fact that they do not want to disempower men or to deal without them. The women would often say: "We run the country – both men and women!" As will be clear from the quotation below, what they call for is their own voice in the community, their roles and their own business as it used to be in the traditional society where everything. They think that their roles and business are clearly defined and recognised as it was before colonization. Arrival of White people brought in the concept of patriarchy and male dominance over women. The women assert that males are often the spokesmen in the present Aboriginal society which relates to gender inequality. All of this corresponds to the anthropological findings presented in chapter three.

While men are often the spokesmen and speak on behalf of women, we want women to speak for themselves. The majority of the Australian government is male dominated, there are not enough women in politics, there are not enough women making decisions that form policy support. We need to take back our place in society. We want to get women in the position of making decisions on behalf of Aboriginal families and children. You know, I've been talking to a lot of women and they all say the same thing, "it's the women's time to have a go" (Dulcie Bronsch, personal communication, 10/08/06).

The mentioned wish to 'see a change' or that it is 'time for change' was often expressed by other women in Kummara. Regarding the recent cases of infant rape in Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory, Dulcie mentioned the fact that, sometimes, instead of solving the problem by taking the perpetrators away, the children are taken away by social workers. Additionally, these are often male policemen. This is a reminder of the constant intervention of the state officers into Aboriginal families. Sue mentioned that the women's call is about taking back power without disempowering others: "It is not about shutting others out but about making sure that we are included in the decision-making process" (Sue Featherstone, 08/09/06).

When women in Kummara talked about rights for separate women's business, especially in terms of ceremonial life and situations requiring separation of the sexes, it was referred to as women's law. According to Mary, "It is anything to do with women's business, women's sexuality, physicality, your beliefs, and your feelings – only women can deal with those things" (personal communication, 25/08/06). In the present, it would include separate institutions like hospitals, schools or churches. It would also include one's intimacy. For example, a woman's body is exclusively the woman's thing, and only she can look after it. Therefore, gynaecologists could have been only female. Mary admitted that defining women's law today is very problematic as it is supposed to be something inherent and self-evident, something without a need of explanation. Mary even used the example of the self-evidence of the Christian Ten Commandments. It would have to be something people know they have to do and something they cannot be punished for. Therefore, the term 'law' is slightly disputable as Mary mentioned. Again, this is a problem of the completely different cultures and ways of thinking that formed the vocabulary of the different languages – English and Aboriginal ones. Being inherent and self-evident, Aboriginal Law is something present in people's demeanour, in ways of social interaction. Mary says: "We believe that our Law is inside us, that all the emotions we have are a kind of inner natural force" (personal communication, 12/10/06). However, the present disorder and violence in Aboriginal communities is a very result of the interference of sexes into the separate spheres of business. A rather sceptical view is, again, represented by Theresa. When asked about women's business she said, "It's all gone" (13/09/06).

The ways in which it is problematic to make this ‘Law’ visible and clear to young people, to make Aboriginal people’s values of ethics and generosity inherent to them, automatic and lived out, were discussed at the women’s conference. These examples show us again that defining women’s issues like contemporary women’s roles and the cultural wellbeing of women are being discussed intensively within the community. In some ways, they correspond to the aims expressed by the feminist movement, in others not. It is a question whether or not we can make any clear distinction between the two.

4.4.3 Women and family care

The Kummara women claim that the main responsibility in child care belongs to mothers and that after the considerable change family and kinship models have undergone as a result of two hundred years of colonization, they want to regain this responsibility. Regarding this claim, Kummara women would often talk about the ‘unhealthy’ model in the present society with cases of violence, sexual abuse, alcoholism, suicide, family disintegration, community disruption, intergenerational dislocation, loss of language, and erosion of culture. The consequences of the colonial history were breakdowns of traditional parental child rearing and educational practices, and social instability leading to high rates of suicide. Another aspect of this problem is a lack of so called ‘role models’ (meaning the example found in adults which can be elders, leaders or just their parents) in Aboriginal society. This is not only caused by a lack of elderly people in the present Aboriginal society but also by the wrong example passed on by parents.

Our kids are feral; they’re sniffing petrol, and drinking alcohol because they’ve got no role models either. They lack that male and female teachers, and that’s the stuff we want to bring back and even practice (Dulcie Bronsch, personal communication, 10/08/06).

Here, Dulcie is referring to a project on the Rites of Passage described in the following chapter. Also, taking Aboriginal children out of their families from the 1900s to 1950s (the *Stolen generations* children) strongly contributed to the deconstruction of the family ties and functioning. Sue, being a *Stolen generations* child, described to me her personal experience on an emotional level:

You just don’t have the actions which make real relationships because you don’t have real attachment. And you don’t realise it. You become a singular unit. You know if you love

somebody you give off yourself. None of my siblings had real emotional depth. And you can observe it as you get older. You don't trust a living soul. And it is intergenerational trauma. My children are great, they are wonderful but they also don't let anybody get too close (Sue Featherstone, personal communication, 08/09/06).

The main goal of Kummara family care is to rebalance the equality between men and women within the family and to hand over the responsibility for children on to their mothers (or women in general) again. And we already know that is the reason why Kummara was founded – after the separation from AICCA in Brisbane which was male and female child care organisation. An important step for Kummara is to present healthy parental models and to pass them on their clients. A final remark on the Aboriginal notion of child care is that it is a source of women's pride, honour, and, perhaps, of their own wellbeing. It is a woman's obligation to stay within a family, to nurture and educate her children. On the contrary, the image of a woman staying at home and watching over her children has gained some negative connotations within the Western society. Lilla Watson said that it was the White women's movement that brought in this idea of a subordinate women's position in a household. Jackie Huggins added: "It is the Protestant work ethic, you go out and you work. And caring for children is secondary to that. And it's not. You have to give children the first part. I mean, if you can combine that, it's great" (Jackie Huggins, personal communication, 08/11/06).

4.4.4 Rites of Passage

In remote parts of Australia, there are still communities practicing initiation of young boys into independent adults. The initiation includes ceremonies, ritual circumcision, and a time of separation of young boys from their community. As Myers (1993:41) states, "it is after the initiation that a young man can begin to learn and practice the knowledge that comes to him from senior men, who also establish their senior identity through having "held" a junior." Again, he remarks on how person's identity is continually socially constructed. When Myers writes about "processes of social reproduction," he means long periods of individual transition. From his view then, a full male adult identity is not established at initiation but during the process of learning and receiving the knowledge of older men. This again emphasises the importance of having a family and a community – something that has been uprooted in Aboriginal societies.

However, it has been noted that the effects of initiation can be ambiguous. It occurs that initiated boys feel far too proud of themselves, which sometimes make them act violently. As noted by an Aboriginal man (personal communication, 05/10/06), a traditional owner from Stradbroke Island, they sometimes act as machos, and even start abusing women. A negative factor is that boys do not have the traditional example in elders. Therefore, there is a need in both urban and rural communities to find proper ways of initiating young people – boys and girls. Kummara’s member Mary Graham has designed a *Rites of Passage Program for Urban Youth* that provides types of ‘resilience’ activities for Aboriginal young people. The main body of it consists of youth’s initiation from childhood to adulthood. According to my interviews, women in Kummara believed that this educational activity would contribute to the moral healing of Aboriginal youth. There is also another community in Brisbane that has started a program of initiating young boys, but boys only. I refer to this in chapter 4.4.2. As mentioned earlier, children and young people have a place of special importance in Aboriginal society. Therefore, the cultural healing concerns them (and their mothers) primarily since “they are the future and we have to try to bring about a better future for them” (Mary Graham, 25/08/06).

According to Mary, this was meant to be only a preliminary model of the program, since the main ideas were expected to appear at *See Change* conference. “That’s the proper Aboriginal way of consensus. I would never say this is what people could or should do. That’s a very White thing to do” (Mary Graham, personal communication, 25/08/06). Mary’s draft draws her own experience of working with families, children and young people in Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agency (AICCA) in Brisbane during the 1980s. Mary was inspired by work of collective of authors *Crossroads, the Quest for Contemporary Rites of Passage* (1996) which is a collection of fifty writings on aspects of rites of passage in different cultures around the world, examining myth, history, and contemporary rites of passage. It also presents new programs in education designed by devoted elders to instruct and help to bridge the “cultural lag.”²⁸ Another book she drew from was *Rites of Passage. Aboriginal Youth, Crime and Justice* (1996), written by Australian sociologists and community workers. This book stresses the importance of primary and secondary intervention. The primary intervention strategy must address the underlying causes of social disadvantage experienced in the daily lives of Aboriginal youth and the secondary one must focus on those Aboriginal youth on the

²⁸ “Cultural lag” is a term introduced by William F. Ogburn (1964). The term refers to the notion that society is unable to keep up with the rapid pace of technological change, and that social problems and conflicts are caused by this lag.

treadmill of the criminal justice system. The Rites of Passage Program is directed to them. It involves mainly elements of physical and mental education as well.

Mary's program is discussed below, along with concepts of traditional Indigenous knowledge and education. Using Aboriginal Cultural Reconstruction and Resilience (ACRR) as a model, rites of passage are put forward as an educational process for Aboriginal youth from various backgrounds. This holistic concept of education is supposed to provide a learning environment that supports people's development as of whole individuals: mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. It is a reaction to growing numbers of youth suicide, substance abuse and teenage violence. It also relates to the fact that Aboriginal youth are the most rapidly growing sector of the Aboriginal population. Half of the Aboriginal population in Australia is under 25 years of age, which expresses the obvious need for culturally relevant educational and youth programs, and more innovative crime prevention strategies. With the legacy of colonialism discussed in the chapter above, parenting and education of children and youth have been disintegrated. Another important fact is that the present educational practices are still drawing from a European model of cultural dominance. The re-establishment and reconstruction of Aboriginal traditions and the establishment of appropriate programs and activities would enable young people to rediscover the wisdom of the traditional ways of life.

The program *Rites of Passage Program for Urban Youth* would include cultural foundations and spiritual teachings, elders, community-based initiatives, and the direct experience of caring for special sites and natural ecosystems. Suggested courses and activities would go in the following order: **Community gathering** – A formal celebratory gathering of the families, relatives and friends of the participants of the Program followed with feasting, dancing, ceremonies and speeches to youth. **Learning about the Land** – Activities and learning about looking after special sites, understanding the relationship with flora and fauna via story telling and excursions with elders - learning their wisdom. Learning the obligations of looking after the land and its sacred dimensions. Related activities are learning about environmental studies, land rights, native titles and ecological sustainability. **Understanding of the Creative Spirit** – Process of understanding the life of the mind and heart and of managing the ego in appropriate and creative ways. Learning the Aboriginal worldview through understanding Aboriginal logic and the Aboriginal sense of time and space that will help young people to retain mental health by relieving stress, promoting a positive attitude to life and improving relationships. Related activities and learning are story telling, writing stories and poetry,

painting and drawing, dance, drama and music. **Physical Life Education** – Learning physical skills, self-respect, respect for others, for their bodies, and also a sense of the beauty and complexity of the physical world. Besides learning healthy habits, they will learn positive competitiveness without the egotism, the position of an individual in the collective and what it means to win or lose. Related activities and learning are health education (physical and mental), sexuality, physical challenges, sport, bush-craft and wilderness skills, food preparation and nutrition and games. **Ceremony protocols (rules)** – Learning the importance of conducting oneself with a sense of honour and treating the people one interacts with in an honourable way. Ceremony and protocols imbue activities with a sense of the sacred and therefore they are not to be treated in a shallow way. They are a reminder of life as a spiritual place. Related activities and learning are feasting, presentations, the teaching of manners, self-regard, and self-respect. The large changes in life (birth, naming, adulthood, marriage, creating life, becoming an Elder, death) presented in the context of ceremonies and protocols. **Relationships** – Learning of the meaning of positive relationships, of the appropriate and positive social interaction relating to others, family, friends and colleagues. Related activities and learning are learning appropriate behaviours for men and women, intergenerational relationships, a sense of shame, managing anger, fear, passion, shyness, et cetera. Observing oneself in public situations and understanding large changes in life and their impact. **Formal Educational Courses** – Engagement in formal education. Learning conventional coursework – not necessarily in a formal setting – will help the participants to feel secure about their acquisition of formal qualifications which will help them in employment choices they make at a later stage. Related activities and learning are English, Maths, History, Aboriginal Language, Politics, and International Affairs, and possibly discussion evenings and workshops. **Completion Community Celebration** – Another gathering of the community to celebrate the transition of the youth into adults and more importantly of their full integration into the community - followed by dances, music, songs and ceremonies. Further activities such as assisting the participants to find a job, to continue their education or help their community would follow after the formal completion of the Program.

According to Mary, “involvement in these activities will help young people to develop well adjusted personalities, positive attitudes and grounded characters and be an asset and a source of pride to the Aboriginal community as well” (Mary Graham – *Rites of Passage Program for Urban Youth* 2006:7). Regarding ritual circumcision of boys, Mary acknowledged that it is an important religious think that still take place, though, only in form of average circumcision,

not including linear cutting of penis as it was traditionally. She also said that today, boys go to their local clinics to be circumcised. On girls' initiation that used to be followed by ritual defloration in some communities, Mary explained that it would not be usual in her community by saying that: "These things might still take place in some communities but not in ours. I wouldn't approach it, for sure, neither ideologically. We are looking at it more in terms of strengthening of character, moral favour. You gotta be realistic." People carrying out this Program will be "key individuals such as mentors, trainers, role models, elders and other wisdom holders, and extended family and peers" (Mary Graham – *Rites of Passage Program for Urban Youth* 2006:7). The Program is envisaged to take twelve months to complete. Two or three months to prepare, six or seven months to carry out the modules and the remaining two months to debrief with the participants and their families and to write the final report on outcomes for funding bodies. There will also be a follow up visit to participants and their family to record their impressions and impact of the Program on their development six months to one year later.

Mary presented her project at *See Change* conference in October 2006. The women showed a big interest in the Program and became a "hit" of the conference. One of them even promised to get a funding for it. Also, evaluation sheets that the women had to fill out at the end showed how outstanding Mary's speech was.

4.4.5 Reflections on Aboriginal women's health and healing

Women in Kummara, except Theresa²⁹, referred to Kummara's work as healing. In Aboriginal holistic approach, healing covers a very large area, and things like community meetings, yarning (that means talking in a circle) circles, art making, singing or spending your time in nature, can be referred to as healing too. Lilla Watson says that Aboriginal people have been influenced by Western health concepts but their understanding of health still includes spiritual, emotional and psychological wellbeing, and also relations with the land. Lilla says: "It must involve the land because it seems to me that if the land is unwell, then we will be unwell. And that affects our emotional, our spiritual, and psychological wellbeing" (Lilla Watson, personal communication, 31/10/06). Although women in Kummara do not

²⁹ Theresa would not refer to Kummara's work as healing. She perceived Kummara's focus as purely family oriented but with a recent focus on women's spirituality. She admitted that a particular part can be referred to as healing.

practice any traditional cures in terms of the physical healing, they practice women's spiritual healing, as they call it, reconnecting to women's roles, women's values and traditions - the way contemporary Aboriginal women may define their culture. Jackie Huggins referred to Kummara as a healing place since "they apply the very essence of Aboriginal women's cultural healing practices as we know it today and do it in honest and dignified manner" (personal communication, 8/11/06).

The content of the *See Change* conference was very much focused on women's spiritual and cultural healing. The attending women had a chance to articulate their personal strengths and weaknesses, and all this was evaluated and brought into a forum. Most frequently named weaknesses were: attitudes to being Black, shame, guilt, isolation, fear, silence, pain, loss of knowledge, stereotyping/judgement, cultural awareness at school, a lack of agility to claim our rights. Conversely, the women identified with these strengths: self-understanding and wisdom, finding roots and family connections, spending time with family, connecting with the land, connecting with the ancestors spiritually, contact with nature, going to sacred places, valuing who we are, the true women's role, releasing pain from past experiences, and finding harmony and balance. Not as much the women as some of the presenters have emphasised the importance of putting the efforts and energy only in community things, of not talking to White people so much. I would like to introduce what was presented by another two Indigenous female speakers.

One of them presented a program under an organisation called 'Landmark Education', an American education forum advertising new methods of learning. Their motto is following: "Standard educational methods enhance what you know and explore what you don't know. Landmark Education gives you an access to what you don't even know that you don't know" (<http://www.landmarkeducation.com/>, 18/10/06). According to what was said and what I investigated, this consists of workshops on self-empowerment and self-esteem. It embraces the individual process of recovering from one's past by identifying the troublesome interpretation of a moment in one's past – the 'landmark' – that perpetuates the way one understands the world around him or her and often contributes to his or her low self-esteem. By identifying this misinterpretation one can usually understand his or her hidden expectations of the future that are immediately creating unconscious stereotypes in his or her mind. By undergoing this process one can slowly heal his or her mind and avoid all preconceived ideas about his or her future. Participation at this workshop is AU\$500. After

further investigation and discussion, I found that this organisation has some traits comparable to the Scientologist Church, and other cult-like organisations. The specially-trained agents use methods of persuasion, repeating forcing phrases (such as “Do you get it?”), and create moments of individual wellbeing and high self-confidence. Another factor is the price of the training. It might be affordable; nevertheless, I was very sceptical about the benefits of the training. But the most burning question it raised was whether the Indigenous women accept this form of healing. In general, women at the conference seemed to be quite interested in this agent’s presentation and followed her instructions. When I discussed my suspicions about it with Sue and Jenny, who had attended the workshop, they agreed that it was inadequate. Sue said that she did not feel comfortable about things like this and that she does not believe in it. According to Jenny:

It is good as long as you know exactly what you are going to do with the result. The first part is okay, your mind is clean, and you are ready to start again. But you must know what to put in this image of your ‘blank’ future because they are trying to influence you in the second part. The problem is that it is not always given by the right people (Jenny Fraser, personal communication, 19/10/06).

The work of another female healer, Pam White, was based on classical Eastern knowledge of body chakras and meditation techniques. She opened her speech with a welcoming spirits ceremony using a smouldering incense stick, continued with meditation and then presented the chakra theory. Occasionally, she related particular chakras to Aboriginal subjects such as land, contact with spirits and so on.

Both those healing concepts included Aboriginal cultural ‘patterns’ and formulations in a way, but they mostly seemed to be based on the New Age ideologies and concepts of understanding the world. I must admit that I was very surprised, and I talked to the women in Kummara about my feelings. Dulcie explained to me that by inviting the woman from Landmark Education, she reacted to a call from the community. “Many women told me that they needed to build their self-esteem in particular. That’s why I invited Wendy” (personal communication, 26/10/06). Generally, she presented this workshop as one of the possible forms of healing which does not have to be considered good or bad necessarily. She explicitly recognised the influence in the traditional healing from ‘outside’ as something natural with the potential to be more or less useful. “You might think it’s good or bad but it’s just another option. We can combine these two systems in order to get a nice mix” (Dulcie Bronsch,

personal communication, 26/10/06). Dulcie also mentioned that Kummara was planning to start a healing centre that would include different curative systems – physical and spiritual healing - and different kinds of medicine and cures. One might be the traditional ‘bush medicine’ consisting mainly of Aboriginal herbs and foods, another could be the spiritual healing that is similar to the ‘Eastern way’ of spiritual healing, and there would probably be massages, baths and other things of similar nature. “We might have a month of bush medicine and a month of something else” (personal communication, 26/10/06). Later that day, I talked to Mary about the conference. She seemed to be slightly more surprised than Dulcie at the ways of healing that were presented. Nevertheless, she noted that similar concepts might be successful within Indigenous community since it lacks the definition of the proper Indigenous way of healing, and Law. None the less, Mary admitted that she personally finds some alternative ways of healing, such as Reiki, useful. She sounded almost guilty saying that. She also mentioned the fact that it is impossible to stay away from any outside cultural influences. “We cannot be chauvinistic. But our Aboriginal ways have to be explored the natural force inside us, our Law” (personal communication, 26/10/06). Other women, Lilla Watson, and Jackie Huggins talked about the usefulness of other cultural models as they are always somehow transformed into an Aboriginal way. In Jackie’s words “just take what you want and throw out the rest” (personal communication, 08/11/06). Lilla made a good comment on this matter when she compared what is valuable for Indigenous and what for White people. She also mentioned the ability of Indigenous people to choose only what they need:

There are lots of things like cars that have been imported to this country and Murriss use them now but we use them according to our values. Houses are mainly for prestige and material possession and ownership, whereas Murriss are more inclined not to put that sort of value on them. When that big cyclone happened up in Darwin, White people were absolutely devastated because they lost their houses; they lost their cars, their boats, their possessions, whereabouts Murriss, they handled all that much better. They sort of went around and said “oh, this was a big blow, wasn’t it?” So what I am saying is... Even this Landmark Education or whatever it is... I don’t see it as a danger if Aboriginal people participate in it or decide to do it, and then maybe it will help them in some way. I think that anything that helps people is good (strongly)! (Lilla Watson, personal communication, 31/10/06).

I think these comments support the idea that for women in Kummara, the Aboriginal culture today is in a process of re-creation. It is being influenced from the outside and there is certainly nothing wrong about it. It is a natural process of cultural adaptation to the present in

order to make this culture as 'effective' as possible. On the other hand, it also responds to the fact that present Aboriginal societies lack an exact definition of their common ground - a clear expression of their terms of reference.

V. Discourse on invention of Aboriginal women: Theory in practice

In this chapter I will shift the focus from Aboriginal women's healing as practiced by women in Kummara to the theory of revitalisation of the Aboriginal notion of culture. First, as a background to my analysis, I will examine key theories on cultural revitalisation and invention in contemporary Australia and the Pacific. Next, I will focus on the interplay of creating an image of Aboriginal women throughout Australian history by anthropologists, historians, White feminists, and by Indigenous women themselves, and then begin the analysis of the discourse on 'revitalising' culture of Aboriginal women in Kummara.

After presenting various works on invention and revitalisation of culture or tradition in the Pacific, I hope I made comprehensible that Australian Indigenous culture, as well as any other culture, is fluid, dynamic and adaptable. Accordingly, the creative force has enabled traditional culture to persist. Since it transformed through adaptation, the culture is different from what it used to be before the European settlement. The revival of Indigenous knowledge, practices and traditional ceremonies might have seemed suspicious due to the common perception of culture and tradition as rigid, a set of unchangeable practices and rites with an inherent power to persist anything. It brought in political disputes over the authenticity of the proclaimed Indigenous traditions in the whole Pacific. "The fluidity of culture, and the creativity and innovation, if not outright invention involved in the revitalisation of tradition, have led many within the dominant society in New Zealand and Australia to be sceptical of Indigenous claims and to stress the need for them to be thoroughly and objectively checked by anthropologists", as elicited by Kolig (2005:308). I believe the readers of this text understood it as an example of how the revitalisation, revival or invention of cultural practices can happen and there is nothing bad or bizarre about it. The fundamental story behind these lines is that culture is in a process of constant change. It cannot be absolutely consistent in two different times, in the present and in a particular moment in the past. A strong stimulus to rethink traditions "comes from both the attempt to redress the imbalance of power poignantly experienced by the indigenes for so long, and from their deeply felt need to be successful in a modern world" (Kolig 2005:296-297). This happens in ways more homogenous to their own

culture than in those dictated by the dominant society. It seems that the dominant society now allows this to happen more than before. In both Australia and New Zealand, recent legislation and policies have strongly supported the revival of Indigenous traditions. This, on the other hand, creates envy among the rest of the population. More populist groups and political parties are particularly hostile to the gains and government support obtained by Indigenous people – for example to the government funding of Maori tribes in Waitangi treaty settlements in New Zealand. The large restrictions of Aboriginal land claims that would endanger the mining and farm-based economy set by Australian Wik legislation (1988)³⁰ reflected the widespread envy among the Australian population of Aboriginal favour (Kolig 2005). As intended by Merlan (2005), Aboriginal demands may be constrained by official policies today, to reduce the revival of its cultural content, and to exclude politics of it. Especially in the case of Aboriginal land claims, traditions and proclaimed privacy of sacred sites could be the only tools of legislative success, if no other land rights were officially recognised. It is the anthropologists involved in these affairs who have a crucial role in examining Indigenous culture and its validity in terms of identity and continuity of tradition.³¹ As the revival of tradition is in many cases responding to the dominant society and follows particular rational aims, it is usually greatly influenced by mainstream values. Kolig (2005:301) points out that this ‘ideological transfer’ is inherently selective:

³⁰ The Wik Decision is a decision of the High Court of Australia in *Wik Peoples v. the State of Queensland* in December 1996, regarding the right of access by the Wik peoples of Cape York Peninsula in North Queensland to Crown land held under pastoral leases for cattle grazing. The court decided (4 judges to 3) that the rights of Indigenous people who can prove a connection to the land can coexist with the rights of the leaseholders (or pastoralists), but where there is any inconsistency between the two, the rights of the pastoralist will prevail. In other words, pastoral leases do not automatically give exclusive possession to the pastoralist, and therefore do not necessarily extinguish native title. This had been a major assumption upon which the Commonwealth Native Title Act had first been drafted ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wik Peoples v Queensland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wik_Peoples_v_Queensland), 08/05/07).

³¹ The anthropological dilemma is apparent in the example of the Hindmarsh Island dispute of 1989. In this case, anthropologists were called upon to play the role of judge of Ngarrindjeri women’s claims of sacred sites and their relevance to secret women’s business. A private developer made plans to build a bridge linking the island with the mainland, together with a harbour and housing estates. The state government supported this high-priced project in order to lift the local economy. Two years after the plans had been announced in 1994; a group of Ngarrindjeri women declared the island to be of a strong spiritual importance for them and protested against the building plans. They did not provide any details, asserting secrecy of their religious life and women’s business. However, another group of women from the same tribe challenged this claim by refuting the existence of any sacred sites in that area. State and federal governments, the Minister of Aboriginal affairs, Aboriginal groups, consultant anthropologists and the land developer himself – were all involved in a protracted discussion. The anthropologists divided into two categories. Both of them had to consider the fact that no women’s spiritual life had been recorded in Hindmarsh Island by previous anthropologists. The opponents dismissed the women’s claims as inspired by questionable motives, whereas the defenders inclined to believe that Aboriginal culture is changeable and the women’s claims plausible. Nevertheless, the claims were eventually scrutinised and dismissed as a lie. This dispute has highlighted the question of how bounded anthropological knowledge is. Whether it extends a provable ‘truth’ to public interests or whether it is compelled to steer clear from partisan commitment and emotionality (Kolig 2005).

Although, in some cases, Aborigines are re-learning traditional culture from fairly comprehensive anthropological and historical representations, by no means is all of this cultural repertory accepted into the 'traditional' canon and made a candidate for revival. For instance, the Moko tattoo (on the face or on the buttocks) is compatible with Western aesthetics: cannibalism, on the other hand, cannot be made to fit within Western morality. The practice generates such revulsion in the dominant society that any attempt to revive it would be counterproductive.

While some traditional customs such as ritual circumcision of Aboriginal boys, or separate institutions for boys and girls, men and women, might be grounded in the traditional Aboriginal Law, they can be hardly re-established in the present society. As women in Kummara emphasised, it is not only about going back to the past - contemporary Indigenous culture and traditions are modernised. Indigenous people are strongly influenced by the demands of living with, and in, a wider society, according to its values and views. On the other hand, there is a growing scene of Indigenous knowledge as a counterpart of the Western intellectuality. Both Maori and Aboriginal intellectuals give lectures on Indigenous traditional knowledge, languages and so on. The assertion of its equality to science at schools and tertiary institutions is, according to Kolig, an evidence of the epistemological insecurity inherent in postmodernism. Indigenous rewriting of history and the promotion of their traditional knowledge as environmentally wise is widely accepted as truth.

According to my findings, women in Kummara consciously attempt to revitalise or rejuvenate their past culture. They, and Aboriginal women from other Queensland communities, focus on similar tenets like women's empowerment, spiritual healing and involvement in the community decision-making processes. However, as seen within the small scale of Kummara, their notions and acceptations of cultural transfer generally vary. Thus, the process of cultural transition seems to be incoherent and random, a question of individual taste, rather than of an interactive planning. It is important to say that even in traditional Aboriginal societies, people thought and acted as individuals, even though the strongest emphasis was on community. Due to different amounts of knowledge, people understood different things differently. But everyone had a certain 'framework', social status and adequate self-determination. Today, social roles are far more questionable and contested as shown in this study. Nevertheless, Kummara represents only one women's discourse, not exclusive definitions of culture that is to be adopted. "Aborigines are not a homogenous mass and distinctions need to be made

among them. The experience of some is more relevant than of others to the question of a renaissance” (Maddock 2002:25). Therefore, the outcomes of the discourse in Kummara may be viewed as a small part of a ‘cultural framework’.

The women in Kummara talked about the necessary changes that must come soon. Most of them explicitly said that they do not claim back their past, some rigid and frozen moments of traditional Aboriginal culture. Some of them questioned the word ‘traditional,’ which has negative political connotations in the Australian context as it implies romantic anthropological concepts of ‘authentic’ and ‘real’ Aborigines in the ‘Golden Age’ before colonization, and of their present counterparts as being ‘unreal’ and culturally ‘lost’ (Cowlshaw 1993; Keefe 1988; Maddock 2002). They also avoided using the word ‘invention’ in regards to the changing role of Aboriginal women today and to their conception of change. They agreed that they needn’t create or invent something new as they are calling for things they have already had. Therefore, they communicate this change as ‘rejuvenation’, ‘revisiting’, or ‘reclaiming’. As I understand it, they perceive this as a process of re-establishing their present authenticity as Aboriginal women, by acknowledging and drawing from the past, as well as by accepting cultural modernisation in the present. This cultural influence happens in various ways and in different areas.³²

Regarding the Australian Indigenous culture’s transformation, one has to start with examining the pre-contact past. There has been scientific evidence of Aboriginal adaptation to massive climate changes. In his article *It’s the life, Jim, but not as we know it*, Ian Lilley (2006) draws attention to archaeological findings from the end of Pleistocene. This geological epoch known as Ice Age was - until recently - portrayed as simple and static in terms of people’s behaviour in comparison with the dynamic postglacial times, known as Holocene. In fact, the stone artefacts, their quality, quantity and innovation in different times and different places show clearly the ability of Pleistocene desert people to “reconfigure their economies, mobility patterns, territorial ranges, information exchange-systems and technological organisations to cope with continuous climate change” (Lilley 2006:218). According to Lilley, the very clear message from archaeology is that “the capacity to make what can be radical changes shows how adaptable and resilient people can be” (2006:220). Furthermore, Aboriginal societies have been culturally influenced from the outside world in the millennia before the Europeans

³² There are innovations in the traditional Aboriginal ways of painting and art making. As regards the traditional beliefs, there is a growing amount of cases of conversion to Islam among prisoners especially, referred to as revision.

arrived already. This occurred mainly in the northern coast area where Aborigines would be visited by Macassans, Indonesians, and Melanesians for centuries. Nevertheless, this cultural exchange did not certainly result in any bigger changes; the influences have been either rejected or integrated (see Kolig 1981). For example, Chaloupka (1993) notices this cultural influence in Aboriginal rock art. I asked my respondents for evidence of cultural changes in the pre-contact or traditional past. I was looking for a proof of this cultural dynamism. Lilla brought up the fact that, in Aboriginal communities, people never mentioned the names of their dead (personal communication, 31/10/06). That involved exclusion of the name of the dead person from the vocabulary and a consequent adaptation of the daily speech.³³ She added that while the Western society tends to talk about its dead “heroes” such as Elvis Presley and similar ones, in Aboriginal society, everyone can be a hero in his life.

The shifting point in Australian Aborigines’ history was colonization. Aboriginal culture since 1788 is necessarily different from how it was before. People have been constantly adjusting their ways of living and their categories of thinking to the radically new socioeconomic conditions enforced by Western society. This has been most visible in subsistence practices - the way they started to make a living. More recently, they have been actively revising and reshaping their religion into a new structure. Kolig (1981:1) states that not only has the religion survived in our modern world but “its importance remains unimpaired.” Due to the formative influence of religion on people’s consciousness, “Dreaming” remains “the reservoir of the autochthonous Aboriginal heritage, the symbol of unchanging continuity” that has slowly become “a vehicle of ethnic awareness in the wider Australia” (1981:1).

The process of cultural reconciliation in present Australia is known as decolonization. The family and community healing practiced by women in Kummara certainly involves this decolonization aspect. But what the Aboriginal community represents today? It is certainly more of a new form of sociality than a continuation of its old form. A ‘traditional’ ethnographer, Radcliffe-Brown (1930:35), asserts the following: “the local organisation is the first part of the social system to be destroyed by the advent of the European and the expropriation of the native owners of the land”. With the breakdown of their social

³³ Patrick Williams (2003) writes about the same phenomenon in the community of the Kalderash Roma in France.

organisation, such as family and community, Aboriginal people have lost another significant cultural pattern. Coming from Myers's (1993) concept of "holding" cultural values within the kin through nurturing, care for, and teaching of children and young people, their social construction of "shared identity" has been disrupted. Thus, the new communities attempted to protect themselves. According to J.H. Bell (1965:402), they were characterised by "extensive kinship ties...a strong sense of belonging to a group" and "this ethnocentrism has done much to preserve the homogeneity of their birthplace". Belonging to a particular place is, among other things, stressed in Kummara's framework.

Another significant factor of cultural change is education. Most of the Kummara's personnel graduated from Australian universities with degrees in social work, social politics or psychology. Kummara's conceptual framework has been designed to see Indigenous research methods combined with Western research methods. The Kummara staff has been trained in a community-based approach drawn from Western social work conceptual models. In this way, Kummara is being fabricated using both Western and Indigenous models in a functional and effective way. One of the objectives of Kummara is the re-establishing of rites of passage.

The call for rites of passage and initiation of adults especially, is remarkable in the present Aboriginal society as it is commonly emphasised that young people lack the right role models and norms. The call for rites of passage does not only occur in Australia since it is common to many new political regimes and innovatory movements that look for their own equivalents of the traditional rites associated with religion (civil marriage, funerals), according to Hobsbawm (1983). But while the old practices were "strongly binding", the invented ones tend to be "quite unspecific and vague as to the nature of the values, rights and obligations of the group membership they inculcate: 'patriotism', 'loyalty', 'duty', 'playing the game', 'the school spirit' and the like" (1983:10). Mary from Kummara has made a very thoughtful concept of rites of passage for young people becoming adults that is, conversely to the one presented by Yuggera community in Brisbane, designed for a period of twelve months and is attended by both boys and girls. However, this program operates with other concepts that are still in progress. Thus, it can be put in practice when proper Aboriginal terms of reference will be agreed on. Women in Kummara are still trying to define what exactly they mean for them.

Coming back to Aboriginal women's appropriation of spiritual healing (chapter four) that explicitly draws from Eastern religion and mainstream ideologies, we can examine the idea of

Mother Earth's Day as a product of cultural adaptation. As Kolig (2005:307) observes about the same event recorded in a different Aboriginal community,

While the image of the ground as the source of animal and human life, indeed of everything that exists, concrete or abstract, is certainly traditional (in the sense of pre-dating contact with the White settlers), the ascription of femininity to it is certainly new, and would have sat rather uneasily with the values of many traditionally androcentric Aboriginal societies.

Thus, this particular example is not only an appropriation of a new gender role, it is also an appropriation of dominant society's taste for celebrating Mother's and Father's Days and environmentalism.

Cultural inspiration is apparent in my discussion with Lilla and Mary when they recommended a work of a White feminist and anthropologist and ethnographic studies of some Western and Indigenous writers to me as representative sources of information on Aboriginal women's business. In other discussions and interviews, they repeatedly expressed their abhorrence of anthropologists. They would reject their work as being conducted under Western science's principles, models of thinking and categorising. They expressed the same refusal of White feminists. When I asked them whether they thought they had been inspired by the White women's movement, they said no or made ambiguous statements. On the other hand, they recommended those ethnographic studies and White feminist's books to me. They might not have been conscious of the current Indigenous literature. Another possible interpretation is that they wanted to provide me with a kind of 'understandable' literature. However, I think that the reason is much simpler. Mary and Lilla might find those books interesting and informative since – despite being White or feminist – the authors made some important findings. The rejection of anthropologists seems to be a 'mantra' of all Indigenous people but it can be just an automatic reflex action. Anthropologists have been very important mediators with the wider Australian society, as discussed later, in many situations demanding an objective judgement about cultural issues. Thus, they may be seen with suspicion but always with some amount of trust that can also be a sign of resignation.

I had a chance to observe different women's perceptions of Diane Bell's books as described in chapter three. Based on this it can be concluded that Aboriginal women might be partly inspired or influenced by White feminism and vice versa. The problem is not whether there

has been any influence but rather in the symbolic power one group of women had over the latter. Thus, Aboriginal women were simply invited to join White feminists without any sign of an apology or humility, without the abandonment of the White racist approach. But Aboriginal women did not run after the help of White women. This can be related to who speaks for whom, who has a power to interpret whom. It raises the question of existence of the symbolic power or *symbolic capital* as introduced by Bourdieu (1979). In simple words, it is understood as the amount of honour and prestige possessed by a person with regards to acting structures. It occurred in my research in another way. Through evaluating the attendance of the conference, run by Kummara that focused on women's empowerment and spiritual healing, I realised that all the attending women had a reasonably good social status – seen from the view of mainstream society. All of them were employed or self-employed; some of them worked for the Australian government. They were mostly from the late twenties to early fifties. Furthermore, the Kummara personnel comprise educated and intellectually strong women. It raises the question whether this kind of discourse might be limited to Aboriginal women in leadership positions. I conclude that it is a common and understandable phenomenon that contemporary notions of culture, and primarily discourse on that culture, are the domain of people in higher positions or with greater social capital. The important thing is whether the positive outcomes of it concern others as well. Surprisingly, one of the respondents mentioned the same – that the women at the conference were women in leadership positions, not the average, the common ones.

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“Exception proves the rule”

This woman, Theresa (Early intervention and family support worker), became more and more sceptical of Kummara's activities towards the end of my placement. She decided to leave, as the organisation had not corresponded to her expectations. She said that Kummara focused on women and research completely at the expense of parenting programs and family support. “Everyone talks about childcare but they are actually just doing research” (personal communication, 02/11/06). She said that she had remarked a lack of facilities, such as missing means of transport. Sometimes, she was not able to travel to see the families. She also complained about missing supervision in Kummara. Another thing she mentioned was that Kummara presents itself exclusively as a women's organisation but there is actually a man on the board (It was Sue's son, Gerald, who is in charge of the Tjapita staff training program.). She obviously did not feel comfortable about the women's issues as she said: “The conference focused on women in leadership positions instead of on common ones. I don't believe in it,

and I didn't want to be involved in it. It blew up into a big thing." She summed up her feelings by implying that there is more talk than action in child care in Kummara and assured me: "I love the place, I love the people, but it is not actually working." I presume that Theresa was staying slightly in between the Indigenous and the mainstream models, to which she admitted. She said that if she needed help, she would hesitate whether to go to an Indigenous or to a mainstream organisation.

I am sort of in between, one of those people who say "it's time to stop crying and go up there and do something" but at the same time, we need to take baby steps. Unless you have that identity crisis you cannot understand why it's needed. The body identity crisis is "I just found that I am a blackfellow but I don't know where my country is, I don't know any totems." In my case, I've known I am a blackfellow for all of my life but I still don't know my totem and land.

Theresa has been brought up in a mostly Western environment. Unfortunately, she still does not know the origin of the group her father partly belonged to. She has worked in both Indigenous and mainstream organisations, so she experienced both systems. From my point of view, she was really dedicated to early intervention, and just not as interested in the rather 'intellectual' work of Kummara. To close this story - as I said above, women's perceptions of culture differ as their individualities differ.

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When I asked women in Kummara what they thought about being influenced by mainstream and other cultures, they all independently agreed that acceptance of other cultures' concepts and ideas can be beneficial. The reason for that is that Aboriginal culture and Aborigines themselves are still evolving. Notions of other cultures' healing and spirituality named in chapter four can be good examples of that. Especially the presentation of the Landmark organisation and of the Eastern way of healing and the comments on that:

All things are valid. We don't reject anything. If they decide to take it on, it will be used in their way. They might look at it and say 'oh, this is interesting' but reject it and never ever use it. That's the dynamism (Lilla Watson, personal communication, 31/10/06).

Again, we can assume those things arose through the constant reshaping and rebuilding of Indigenous practices that necessarily involved outside influences. Kolig (1981) assumes that "religious brokers," as he refers to modern spiritual leaders, are skilled managers at the same time. They acquire property rights to various traditions and actively introduce them to the

public. They have to be flexible in maintaining community demands, in abstracting from various religious sources, and in making use of technology, such as the information technology, promotion, use of money, transport and so forth. However, the necessity to have these abilities and technological skills excludes many prestigious Aboriginal elders from their religious competence. They are not enough flexible and agile. “To some extent, being a leader today depends on personal finances, since a leader must actively set an example in the purchase of new esoteric secrets, and he must be able to travel widely, and so forth. A poor man would hardly be able to afford a leading role” (Kolig 1981:157).

As theoretical and stagnant as it might seem, it is common to talk about the process of cultural recreation, innovation and revitalisation. Yet applied in practice by women in Kummara, this process is actually very vivid and interesting. It is a confirmation of the dynamism and progressiveness of Aboriginal culture, of its continual emergence.

We haven't lost it. We just need to reconnect with that culture, with that Old Age culture of thousands of years because it's there. It might seem stagnant, it might seem suppressed, and it might seem invisible but we need to reconnect to that in various ways (Jackie Huggins, personal communication, 08/11/06).

As we can see, the above mentioned ‘denial of the need for revival’ has been a key theme throughout this study. I conclude that it is not adequate to talk about a loss of Aboriginal culture, nor is it adequate to assert its complete artificial construction. Aboriginal people engage in a process of necessary self-identification with the world they live in, which includes significant moments of “retraditionalisation” (Kolig 2002) as an opposite to the mainstream society's rationalisation trend proclaimed by Max Weber (1924). Rationalisation is a process that is inherent to capitalism. The expansion of science, technology and modern bureaucracy followed the ideal of the most effective functioning of social and economic life based on technical skills. Retraditionalisation itself is “supported by the globalisation through the freedom of choice...and rebellion against the state-hegemony (Kolig 2002:8).” In this way, Aboriginal culture is being revitalised and innovated and is reasserting cultural autonomy on a political level. As implemented by the women in Kummara, it is undoubtedly an opposition against Australian mainstream society's assimilative push towards the Aboriginal population. It corresponds to the theory of contemporary Indigenous culture as constantly being “formed and reformed by individual creativity, inventiveness and self-interested enterprise” (Kolig

2002:13). But who is behind this enterprise, and whose interests are being portrayed? Who is the enterprise designed for? It is always necessary to look for the actors of this culture and their agenda. Nevertheless, it seems that Aboriginal people today cannot turn against the history and restore their traditional past. “Even if Aborigines could consolidate themselves in the bush, remove themselves from intensive contact with Western civilisation, and perhaps revert to the old skills of subsistence, they cannot regain a precontact consciousness” (Kolig 1981:4).

So far, I have been questioning the process of cultural influence, its forms and patterns. I cannot avoid asking the following question - do the cultural influences always happen consciously and purposefully, coming from various interests and needs of Aboriginal communities? I assume they do not since Aboriginal traditions have been “suspended” with their forced assimilation, Christianisation and collective re-education. The little amount of traditional knowledge has been kept by Aboriginal elders or clandestinely handed down within the families. Whether Aborigines draw some of the notions of their traditional past from the work of anthropologists or not, they are not fully aware of all the changes that have occurred and to which extent they have altered the essence of their tradition. We can consider the following Kolig’s (1981:5) remark: “Many a new feature is believed to be completely traditional, perhaps as ancient as the Dreamtime, while in actual fact it may be no older than a few decades. Perhaps, this is a deliberate self-deception.” There might also be a difference in Western understanding of tradition as something pre-European, and in Aboriginal perceptions of tradition as the lived present, the proclaimed “Law”. “In many respects, the Law may only be a clouded mirror of past glory, but for the Aborigines it is the sanctuary of their autochthonous cultural heritage” (Kolig 1981:5). This comment presents a scientific point of view.

To make the final notes balanced, I would like to close it with a statement by Mary Graham: “While the external manifestations of our culture might look very different or modified, the internal structures remain. They are difficult to lose since people still think in that particular way. But there are new ways how to describe ourselves. It jells with what you know” (personal communication, 09/11/06).

CONCLUSION

Let me state what I take to be the significances of this study, and to present some new perspectives. Regarding what I have written about Kummara so far, one can understand their version of social care and healing, of rebuilding the families that are looking for a source of help and support aside from available mainstream options as a form of cultural revitalisation. Revitalisation through the Aboriginal concept of cultural healing essentially leads to revealing a cultural lag that is present in modern society's notion of culture. Supposing that the workings of Kummara and of similar organisations can complete this lag, one might ask whether this can improve the quality of life of Aboriginal people within the main society and their co-existence within it or vice versa. Considering Kummara's work with non-Indigenous clients and institutions, it should. However, the women in Kummara concede that their cultural concepts can be very confronting in some ways - not only for the mainstream society but for some Aboriginal people too. While Kummara attempts to connect with the mainstream, it still deals with revitalisation of traditional women's culture as well as with a systematic change in social care for Indigenous people – it still keeps its cultural exclusivity. Can this imply that it would be politically impossible for Kummara to operate only for Indigenous clients? That would be another question to ponder... I conclude that, as long as it is working for Kummara's clients, it is efficient. They are helped in social care issues by their 'people' and in their 'ways' – be it their way of communication, emphasising the land connections and authorities, rites of passage and parenting programs, child care, women's gatherings or spiritual healing. They are included in a network of Indigenous but also non-Indigenous families and friends. They are in a daily contact with Indigenous ways of thinking and acting, and still reminded of how 'their ancestors would do similar things'. Since Kummara's work is fundamentally ideological, its real benefits for all the Aboriginal people in Brisbane – even those on the streets - might be seen in time. Nevertheless, I believe that the way Kummara approaches Indigenous culture is much more sophisticated and complex than the way culture is defined by some theorists of multiculturalism.³⁴ Culture, which is a problematic term itself, can hardly be identified with one specific society and vice versa. Thus, people who might call themselves Indigenous can refer to parts of their traditional

³⁴ Some social scientists tend to restrict Romany culture to folk, such as music, ceremonies, tales, and traditional skills or, which is even worse, to genetically inherent characteristics as noted by Jakoubek (2005). This can contribute to misunderstandings of the whole cultural concept and to creating institutions of 'high culture' such as publishing of songs, tales and music recordings, organising Romany festivals, folk and music ensembles, museums of Romany culture and so forth. Those things, according to Jakoubek, do not contribute to preserve the remaining cultural patterns in Romany settlements outside the city but focus on the 'high culture institutions'.

customs but, at the same time, share the mainstream ways of living and thinking. But we have to distinguish the interpretation of contemporary Aboriginal culture by Kummara from other communities' interpretations. Kummara's clients and members become a part of Kummara's notion of Indigenous culture. It raises the question where this all leads. Will Aboriginal people continue in their cultural recovering and create various communities with various versions of Aboriginal culture? It would not be strange at all as Aboriginal people used to live in separate clan groups, share different cultural patterns, and speak different languages. Therefore, different conceptions of culture would be a natural thing.

The apparent focus on women's issues was claimed to be a calling need of the community. I often heard Indigenous women saying that "it is time for a change now". According to my findings, while Kummara used to operate in child care, addressing the consequences of the *Stolen generations* essentially, the recent focus on women's spirituality and healing is a result of it being emphasised by other Indigenous women communities within the Brisbane area, the spiritual leaders and so forth. Those are the needs of the community women talked about, the "time for a change". A woman's healing and spirituality, reconnecting to the secret women's business seems to be on the top of the list nowadays and the linking of communities by communication networks enables its unification. But it is not only expanding patterns of social interaction that contributes to Aboriginal self-determination and self-identification. It is also their new openness to the surrounding world, and to the Western culture. Hopefully, this will contribute to a better form of coexistence within Australia. Another important issue is to redefine and reassure contemporary role of Aboriginal men.

I understand the contemporary process of recreation and reestablishment of Indigenous culture, presented by Kummara, as one culture's manifestation of free will and right for self-determinacy. No scientific theory of invention or revitalisation of traditional Aboriginal culture can proclaim this to be good or bad, valid or invalid. Contemporary Indigenous culture is, primarily, an Indigenous thing. No matter to what extent it is influenced by other cultures or cultural movements, it is still Indigenous. From my point of view, we can see the process of a new emerging Indigenous culture, as presented by Kummara, as a contribution to the rising cultural awareness among Indigenous people of Australia. Among other things, Kummara represents a "bridge" in between two worlds, and two or more cultures. This thesis then is not the end of the women's stories; it might be the beginning of the change.

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APPENDIXES

A. KUMMARA'S REPORTS

Indigenous Children Programme 2006 – Evaluation, July-September 2006

As regards clients, the numbers in Kummara's annual report for July-September 2006 say that there were 213 participants, 144 children, and 73 families operating with Kummara. These figures are inclusive of family and children's figures only and include various kinds of activities such as:

-
- Advocacy, Case Management and Family Supporters
- Emergency Assessment and Family Counselling
- Linking to Auxiliary Support Services
- Community and Cultural Strengthening
- Evaluation Process and Action Research Methodology
- Parent/Child Groups, Family Activities and Cultural Strengthening
- Drop in time for Individuals, Families and Children
- Integrated Support for Individuals, Families and Children
- Information and Referrals

Kummara also realised several bigger projects with the number of participants over 200. Those were:

- The Jirun Conference in May 2006
- The *See Change* Conference in October 2006
- Regular women's meetings

B. INTERVIEWS

- I. **Dulcie Bronsch** (10/08/06), Kummara Family Care, Cultural strengthening and community development worker
- II. **Mary Graham** (25/08/06) Kummara Family Care Centre, Consultant
- III. **Sue Featherstone** (08/09/06), Kummara Family Care Centre, Chief Executive Officer
- IV. **Theresa Mace** (13/09/06), Kummara Family Care, Family Support and early intervention worker
- V. **Lilla Watson** (31/10/06), Kummara Family Care, Consultant
- VI. **Jackie Huggins** (08/11/06), Deputy director at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies unit at the University of Queensland

Speakers in the interviews: J – Me, D – Dulcie, M – Mary, S – Sue, T – Theresa, L – Lilla,
H – Jackie

I. DULCIE BRONSCH

10/08/2006, Kummara Family Care - Cultural strengthening and community development worker

Position and qualification: Dulcie works in Kummara Indigenous Family Care Centre as a Cultural strengthening and community development worker. She graduated in community management (Advanced Diploma) in Sydney.

Personal history: Dulcie was born in 1956 and grew up in Cullumulla in South West v Queensland. Her parents were from Gungari and she belongs to Kommai tribe. Her mother was a house wife, and her father was a solicitor. But he died and her mother married a German immigrant. Dulcie went to primary and high school in Brisbane. Then worked in a medical centre, in Aboriginal art industry, in Musgrave park community, and started to work for Kummara Association in 2004. In 2004, she accomplished her further education in community management in Sydney. She is married and has two boys, 33 and 32 of age. One is a commercial pilot and the second a land surveyor.

We were mainly talking about Kummara Indigenous family care centre's goals and principles. This organisation has recently come with a new activity involved in Aboriginal women's business. Dulcie is in charge of the *See Change* conference on Aboriginal women's issues that takes place in October. I am currently helping Dulcie with its preparation.

Keywords: Kummara's objectives, women's issues, traditional role, gender roles, women's law, rites of passage

J: Dulcie, can you tell me the **basic facts about your organisation and its activities?**

D: Of course. So the primary activity is a change agent. It means we are mediating all change in policies of child safe. We cooperate with the department of child safety, we do counselling for families, and we make an effort to encourage people to get their children to study. Important is that we build the relations between White offices and Indigenous community (it means inner city community, but they can also go outside the scope) and make corporate projects. The projects you know look like getting together at fire, playing the guitar and stuff like that...

J: And why did you incorporate **the women's issues?**

D: We just want more time for women. You know there are too many men everywhere, in politics. They seem to be the more powerful. Women are responsible for their kids. There are two roles of men today but the Western society's model has been overwhelming the traditional one now. And all this is causing problems. *See Change* conference wants to make women to make decisions. While men are often the spokesmen and speak on behalf of women, we want women to speak for themselves. We need to take back our place in society. We've had all these problems in Northern Territory just recently about children assaults and... I mean women should have taken up that discussion because there shouldn't be the man coming in there and wanting to have the children away. They have already taken us away years and years ago. They cannot take us away again. Don't take the children away take away the perpetrators. Men's thinking is far different to women's thinking. We have different values different understanding... There are lots and lots of good staff that I could tell you about women. And that's why we are doing the *See Change* conference. It's not just one thing. It's just a start of where we wanna go. We wanna get women in position of making decisions on behalf of Aboriginal families and children. So that's where we are going at the moment. And you know, I've been talking to a lot of women (pause) in the last year I would say and they all say, the same thing, "it's a women's time to have a go". And we are not begging men at all. We just think that we can do a better job. Actually we know that we can do a better job, hey (smile).

J: Does it mean that you want to get your **traditional role back**, to establish men's and women's business again?

D: Yes, there is something we want to bring again. Now we've come to this society where our men are the spokesmen and they are taking on the Western society's roles as they see the world, you know. That's not for us. We don't want that business. We want to get back to there where we had the control of the women's business and they have their own business. We don't want men to talk on behalf of us any more. And that's what the conference is about. And we will have series of forums after that conference because we wanna reconstruct

Aboriginal women's law. I have already booked a centre for these forums where the Law reconstruction will continue. They will be taking place every six weeks to keep the talk to keep the energy...

J: Why the name "*See Change*"?

D: That's interesting how we came up with this name and the logo. Because we've had lots of women around talking about "we want to sea change", so *See Change* comes from women wanting sea change. And "sea change" is kind of you know when people want to go to the bush and see their change. See the "base value". They call it "sea change" because you want to change yourself.

J: So everything that appears in your program is the results of your communication with Murri women.

D: Yes, that's right.

J: By the way, what does it mean **Murri women** and where does it come from?

D: It just means Aboriginal. It came from nowhere. I think it came from North Queensland way perhaps...around 1970's. We used to be Goories cause down in the New South Wales they used to call themselves Koories. But I don't know where we picked up or how we picked up to be called Goories you know. I'd like to be called Goorie, but anyway (smile).

J: So what do Murri women think about their position in today's society?

J: The general thing is that the majority as the government is male dominated, there are not enough women in politics, there are not enough women making decisions that form the policy support. So we say look, you know, it is our turn now to gain the staff that men currently have hold of. It's not just in Brisbane, but everywhere in Queensland up to the north that all feel it same. Women have different set of values; different compassion and understanding and I tell you that we would be a better society if we had women in those positions.

J: So what is the main **change in the Law you want to make**? Will it be the same as your Law in the past?

D: Well, there were some principles that we are calling "Law". The main problem is that our Law is not being recognised. Some people might call it folk law. But we want to reconstruct it and make it genuine.

J: So all this containing this organisation is being paid by government?

D: Yes, it's under Federal Commonwealth government founding – the department FACSIA (Family and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs). (The organisation is non-governmental.)

J: When you talk about **helping families** it contains mainly counselling?

D: If they have any problems concerning housing, education, social support we help them. If kids are in danger we try to get them off their families or to intervene not let things happen. But it's not just children, we do other services, you know. We get lots of women who want for example leave their men so we help them to get away. What other support we do? It depends on who locks in the door, who needs a help. And we refer them to other services depending on what their problem is. There are quite a few homeless services in South Brisbane here. One of the main is West End Community House. Hmm, they do absolutely wonderful work. It's a mainstream organisation and they take care of all the tenants, you know. We have a very big population of homeless people here. Now the government has just bought in these move-on-powers that can just move them from public parks when they become a menace. And all the development which is happening here in West End is taking off all the land so there is less spaces for homeless people there is less space for Aboriginal people to kind of meet together safely. So they made these strange laws which really don't fit with us. The government policy which they brought in and which they still bring in today directly averts the connections that Aboriginal people had with land and plants which are their identity. They are still doing it today and I have seen how our people have been displaced all the time as I have been a development worker so I have also got all the feedback from the community you know. So it still continues all the time...

J: One of your preferred activities for the future is also **initiation**. Can you tell me more about how do you imagine come back of this ritual?

D: Initiation as bringing from childhood to manhood was practiced for ever in our society. Then it has stopped for last hundred years and we wanna bring that back. We want to develop programs for our families on Indigenous way of parenting and bring it back. And we will bring it to *See Change* forum as well. We want to move these cases as critical development. Cause our kids are all...you know are feral, they're sniffing petrol (chroming), drinking alcohol...you know what our kids are doing these days... Because they've got no role models (my remark: leaders, acknowledged persons) either, you know. If they had a hard time with their family or whatever reason...they lack that male teacher you know and that's the stuff we wanna call back and even practice and... We have actually put an application the National Community Crime Prevention Program in Canberra that could help us to develop an Indigenous way of parenting. And we wanna train up our community into delivering it to other communities because we wanna take it to other communities around the state. We wanna make it for everybody so that they have the same training of adult prevention. We are developing this program with Queensland University Social Work department.

J: Would this initiation concern both young boys and girls?

D: Oh, yes. The rites of passage will have both groups. We have already talked to our organisation that deals with young kids and young girls shall do it. We've got a boys kind of support on the north side so they gonna be our partners in the relationship. So we will get them close. And it's not just closed within the organisation. If a young girl with her mum was to come through that's fine too, you know. But it will be young men and young women, you know. The men will have the men and the women will have the women.

J: That's fine that so many people are concerned about it.

D: Yeah, but to get funding for this you know it's a big business.

J: I believe so.

D: So we need these partnerships to get the department give us funding. They want us to make those partnerships. So we work with UQ because all the stuff here are from UQ, except me. All are social workers here (laughter).

J: And what did bring you to do this?

D: I've done advanced home and community management you know that's about... So that's just exactly what I do here, what I have skilled up at university. It was for three years and I went down four times a year for two week blocks. I was staying at campus. It was wonderful there in Sydney. Yeah so we have a family support and early prevention worker but you really need to have also a community development worker. You have to build relationships to get families in so it's about building these relationships.

J: And did you have any **personal reason for women's issues support?**

D: Oh...it's a call; it's a call from women. And that's a part of what we do here, you know. If a certain part of community wants to establish something I just help them... Have you been to West End before?

J: No, I must have a look now. And I know that there are some family nights in Musgrave Park (traditional meeting spot of Aborigines). There will be a didgeridoo playing and various ceremonies such as coroborees. Do you use it for singing and dancing?

D: Yes, corroboree or they usually call themselves dancers. We don't use the word corroboree unless we have a big corroboree. But we do the welcome ceremonies... and we also have an elder to do this welcome. There are many things going on all the time.

J: I am very interested in all this. I would love to see a ceremony.

D: Yeah, we will do something at the conference. We want to get some women dancers... I don't know where we are gonna get them from yet but I will find it. And we might get an Auntie Alice, she is one of our elders and she is ninety years of age. She does smoking ceremonies so she might do that for us at *See Change* conference. She is our special elder and we would like her to be there. Because all elders do smoking ceremony when you have to be taught or given permission or... You have smoking ceremony for different things for different cultural events. In some parts of the country only men are allowed to do smoking ceremonies. So that's fine that's there in their country you know that's "there" (smile). It's like a, a didgeridoo. I was always told that women are not supposed

to play it but there are other women in other communities and they have smaller ones and they are allowed to play those you know? It's different you know? Every clan groups have their own rules as their terms of reference. And that's also what we will talk about at *See Change* conference.

J: Yes, that's good to know because I read these anthropological books that are telling you about **the roles of women and roles of men**, different rules and things...

D: Yes we are very strict about our rules and that's the way it is. And it's good you know because we were equal to men and that is what we wanna bring it back the way it was. They had their men's business and were in charge of hunting and we had our business and were in charge of children and gathering food and stuff like that. We all had our roles to play.

J: And there was **no dominance**.

D: No dominance at all. We were equal partners.

J: I think even in religion – in ceremonies that women were involved in initiation, gift exchange or mourning ceremonies and so on...

D: Yes, we call mourning ceremonies "sorry business". And that's when you're mourning or when (pause) all the community is in deep emotional stress, usually in case of death or something like that. That community may be mourning for months or weeks or whatever you know. It can be a long period

II. MARY GRAHAM

25/08/06, Kummara Family Care Centre, Consultant

Position and qualification: Mary is currently doing counselling and research at Kummara Family Care Centre. Graduated (BA) in social politics at University of Queensland.

Personal history: Mary was born in Brisbane in 1948. Both her parents were Aborigines. Her father was from Kombu-merri and her mother was from Waka Waka community (North of Brisbane). She grew up in Southport and went working to Brisbane. She worked mainly as a cook and then started to work in social work department of Aboriginal affairs. She depicted her way to Mosmen (Northern Queensland) in 1969 as a turning point in her life. She was shocked seeing the terrible poverty that Aboriginal people up there lived in. She stamped this event as a real eye opener. "It was exactly like seeing third-world poverty. Another crucial experience was all her engagement in social work and community work where she saw the "bad politics" of these institutions. After these two personal experiences she decided to finish her high school and go to the University and get her degree. She studied politics at the University of Queensland (BA). Then, she went into community work in child care and became a big friend of Elizabeth Watson (Aboriginal artist and writer) who was already a lecturer in the Social Work department at UQ. Then Lilla Watson asked her to work as a tutor at the department. Then she came out of the community and did various jobs like child care again, engagement in Native Title claims, own business as a counsellor in community development and cross-cultural awareness (working with White Australians). She has one son.

Currently, Mary is preparing a paper on rites of passage for *See Change* conference concerning Aboriginal women's issues which will be held in October 2006.

Her strong background is in philosophy.

Keywords: **Aboriginal women's business, Law, Aboriginal social structure, impact of colonization, rites of passage, terms of reference, cultural influence, White and Black movement, equality, family, male's dominance, continuity of culture**

J: Mary, I am quite interested in anything concerning **Aboriginal women's business**. Where does it come from and what are the basic ideas?

M: This thing is something similar all around the world. You probably have heard about it. Because there is a lot of similarities with our lot here. We often get together with American or Canadian Indians because some of the things are very similar, you know similar problems, similar things that happened here. Even though in colonial days our lot didn't have so big tribal wars with White fellows, you know it wasn't that kind of war, battles like

Indian wars. It was sort of more like guerrilla warfare here like small bands of people who attacked the mission stations and like that. But everything else, like all the social problems were roughly the same. Like the terrible poverty, domination by Western stuff, Western ways, enslavement of course, terrible violence, an inability to handle alcohol, you know alcohol have been used to dominate the people here. There were policies of impoverishment, you know stolen wages and generations and over decades that happened. They deliberately made them poor.

J: Do you mean economical poverty or even cultural?

M: Yes, even cultural poverty, the loss of identity. There are thousands of people living in terrible poverty in this country. You wouldn't know it if you talk to most Australians – “this is a wonderful country”, you know, “this is ethical and...”

J: Yes. That's also what European people think. That Australia is such an open and multicultural country. But sometimes I have some doubts about it.

M: Yes, it's the other way around. Yeah. There were different White fellows who came here. Not all of them were convicts. A lot of them were but a lot of them were the lower class White fellows, you know like the class system in England... They were the low class who went here. The ones who went to Canada and the ones who went to India were all different. The ones who went to Africa were different again. They were all different classes. But the ones who came here were the most uneducated, the lowest class - whether they were convicts or not. So that had a lot of impact on the way this society operated so it was the, when they came here it was the first time that they had someone who they perceived to be underneath them, someone to rule over. And that's when the terrible cruel happened you know, the terrible cruel. So the ones who went to South America – how were they called? – The Puritans. They went there because of religious persecution, you know, in the 1600 or whatever it was 1500. So that's why religion is so important for Americans. Whereas for the mob that came here, religion was absolutely nothing. They were people who weren't wanted basically by their own people, they were dumped in. That historian, what's his name, Hughes, Robert Hughes, an Australian historian. He calls Australia “a gulag”. He said that's how our people were displaced here. And I think it's pretty right as prisoners used to be sent far away. So they could do whatever they liked with Aboriginal people. And they actually did. So there are a lot of similar things. I remember seeing a documentary on an Indian community in Canada I think. All the problems they went through were almost absolutely the same, a real image of some of the problems of communities here - terrible corruption, domestic family violence, child abuse, terrible alcoholism and drug taking. The place was just absolutely trash at the time, fights spreading in among young people, young men especially hanging around and frightening everybody and murders at really high rate. And that was an Indian community but exactly the same image as of one of ours here – in the north or in the west. It's like systemic, you know what I mean? A break down of systems, the social and legal system – there's no legal system, there's no law, nor Western, nor Aboriginal. There's just no law at all. So it's a wild place, you know, it's really like feral.

J: I have heard about **three kinds of law – black one, White one and bullshit law**. What does the bullshit law mean?

M: Yes, that's right. It means that when traditional Law is not working properly there will be all kinds of opportunists. Like Cook... So they would come to the forum, to the “woodwork,” you know, and they would say what the law is. It's a corruption. There is the real traditional Law and then there is a corruption of the traditional Law. That's the bullshit law. That's the law where men say “oh yes, we run everything, you know, and women sort of follow behind. It's absolutely rubbish.

J: Is it about people running the system for their own benefit?

M: For their benefits, that's right. They are people with their agenda, whereas in proper Aboriginal Law you couldn't take power. It has been called politics of checkmate in Aboriginal traditional society.

J: When do you think did the agenda of Aboriginal women's business approximately start?

M: Oh, I think you probably cannot pinpoint it anywhere because I think it started as soon as European came to the country. When colonialism came here they already started to oppress people. The whole colonial adventure just sort of came crushing down everybody. So people, Aboriginal men and their law have been emasculated. Do you know what it means? Their legitimacy and their validity were taken away. So they had no power any more, so White men simply imposed their own. (She starts to paint picture of a net and a picture of pyramid.) This is in that paper (my remark: the paper she is supposed to read at *See Change* conference), a bit philosophical.

J: I like philosophy.

M: Oh, do you?

J: Oh, definitely. I studied humanities. Anthropology and humanities, it's all quite related.

M: Oh, I like philosophy. I have my suspicions about anthropology. Because, you know, Indigenous people all around the world come off badly. When I went to Uni, I studied political science. Actually, I became a very good friend lecturer there – Kubalkova, Vendulka Kubalkova. Do you know her? She is brilliant; she is more brilliant than all of those academics. She has written about ten books on Marxism. And she talked about various things. About the Prague Spring and like that. (Then she is asking me for Vaclav Havel). Anyway, this is the Aboriginal kinship system (showing me the net picture).

J: Here we go. It's quite complex isn't it?

M: Yes, it's an unbelievable system. I still don't get it and it's different from place to place. This is a lateral system (pointing on pyramid picture). Do you know what I mean by lateral? Sideways system. Whereas in this system here – no God, no king, no president, all the upper class and the middle class and the lower class. But that (pyramid) has been imposed on this. It's completely dominative. And from the beginning everything was dominated. It caused breakdowns, cultural breakdowns. Because men, Aboriginal men, you can see that men are on the top. Men are up here (pointing at the picture) and women are down here. Even if there have been a king or queen or so, it is still a hierarchy of some sort. And the individual is extremely important; it makes his way up, his ambitions and things. Whereas here (pointing on the net picture), you can't be like that. There's no democracy. You know it's not a democratic system. (Then she puts "elders" in the top layer and men and women in the bottom one.) That's the nearest thing to a hierarchy here. They are not true hierarchy; they are not kings and queens. They can tell you what to do only because they are old and have got grey hair. You have to be differ to them, you know, differ. But they can't actually tell you what to... they can't order you like a policeman. You are your own person; you are your own boss. And men and women are their own boss. That's why it is so awful now, that what is now is not Aboriginal, you know, what you see on the TV news, is not Aboriginal. The whole point was not to have a hierarchy. It's not a good idea. Because in spiritual world there are Dreaming ancestors and there is a whole lot of them.

J: So should they be on the top?

M: They are sort of on the top but there is no one of them more important than the other. It's not like a hierarchy of Dreaming ancestors where the more important ones are up here (showing the top of the pyramid). It's almost like a panel of Dreaming ancestors. There are a number of them. What they actually are is the original template of the flora and fauna. So big red kangaroos, koalas, snakes, green ants, fish...all the flora and fauna. It's the original land. And land has invented all that. And when you really listen to these Dreaming stories you just imagine that somebody has taken the story of evolution and made it sacred. It's just like that. Because all those beings are from the earth and they come from including people. So people are, obviously, from the earth too. And do you know that saying "As in heaven so on Earth." It means that if you have a spiritual idea then your social and political kind of system is gonna match that. So that's what that spiritual ground is like. There's no God, there's no heaven and hell, it doesn't exist and there is no paradise. So when you die you are with your ancestors, you don't go to heaven or anything like that. There is no emotional perfectibility of human beings. And what you have to do, and nobody will tell you because you have to learn staff, to learn and grow in yourself and your wisdom. And all people – not all of us are - but they are supposed to be like a template, exempla. And men and women, of course they are separate but equal. Because there are such things like men's and women's law and women's spirituality. It does exist. If it was a real patriarchy then the women's law wouldn't even exist. It wouldn't even be there. Of course, if it was a matriarchy then there wouldn't be men's law...

J: So you mean it was something in between these categories?

M: Yes. They are really just categories.

J: Yes, I have just realised that every time I have read about **structure of traditional Aboriginal society it was presented as a hierarchy model with elders on the top, then adult men, adult women etc.**

M: Yes, that's right because Western anthropologists cannot get out of it. Those are their values you know? And all you have to do is look at their belief systems. Aboriginal belief system has nothing to do with one God. If it

was then you would have a father as a head of a household. You know what I mean? So it's not the same. It's very different. And all of this is based in a particular part of land. So the Kakadu people or the Waka Waka people are in our place, you know. The land embeds you. That's why our land is so important.

J: Am I right in saying that in **today's hierarchy** there will be elder men on the top having an overwhelming power, then, there would be other men, and the women on the bottom?

M: Oh yes, that's how it works now. Everything is up side down because White man run this system (strongly), basically. They are here (showing the pyramid). And if this is imposed on that, these fellows here (showing Aboriginal men in the net picture), Aboriginal men, get the idea – “well, this is pretty good, we like that, you know”. Do you know what I mean? They are influenced by them, very influenced. And it's not to say that they are all bad or wrong or anything like that, but... White man will talk to a bloke, you know, he's not gonna talk to a women, he's gonna talk to another Aboriginal man. And that's where they get the idea that their system must be imposed all over here too. It was just a complete mistake. When women anthropologists started to come in to this country, they started to talk to Aboriginal women, and they got a completely different view, completely different. They realised that they were quite wrong in all previously. That's because all the previous anthropology stuff had been made by men, by White men talking to men, obviously. Now, there was a total misunderstanding between these anthropologists here and these men here quite often. It is recorded that they'd say to these male anthropologists – “well, if you wanna talk about anything to do with women you have to go to talk to women about it”. Now, the White male anthropologists saw that there is a kind of dismissing thing, dismissing women like – “well, that's not really important”. But that's not what the Aboriginal men meant at all. They meant that about anything concerning women or female nature of the society, you must talk to women because they know, they know about it. Total misunderstanding (repeatedly). But nevertheless, Aboriginal men have been socially and politically influenced a lot by White men because that's who get to speak all the time. Young men have to speak all the time. There are women spiritual figures; they can be healers, warriors, there are corroborees, dance, songs, stories, women sacred sites – they are all over the country. And if it was a patriarchy or if it was a hierarchy, that wouldn't be so. In the ancient world, I think, in the ancient European world – Romans, Greeks, Germanic and Slavic – there must have been some women's sites and women must have had some power. There must have been Slavic “Dreaming stories” too, their legends and so...

J: Yes, it is said that they used to be pagans. (And I continue with telling her our brief history. Then I talk about Czech Catholicism.)

M: A lot of Aboriginal people are Christians now. And of course it's a culture – different culture and religion.

J: And how strong in their belief do you think they are?

M: It's apparently historical, you know, missionaries coming in, missionaries were going out all over the world, converted Indians...and the same thing happened here. So people thought, well, they became Christians, you know, to survive. But quite often it didn't help.

J: Is it possible that it also helped them in a way, perhaps in their own beliefs or hopes?

M: Oh yes, sometimes it helped them, purely, life-survivingly; the missionaries would protect them from White people who would like to kill them. They can be grateful.

J: That's an unbelievable thought that the fact that they become Christians would save them from being killed... And if we go back to the point – you said at the beginning that **Aboriginal women's business** must have started with **White colonization**. Is that right?

M: I think, I am not sure what Jackie (my remark: Jackie Huggins) would say. But I think that as soon as you start to oppress someone they start to fight back. So I think they probably started to try to do that straight away, to get people to understand that they do have their own law. Even though there are some anthropologists today who say “no there is no women's law”. But the evidence they say... they might say “well, look, in the old days and not just in the old days, but still today in some places around the country, there are arranged marriages. Like my parents marriage. Both my parents were Aborigines. It was always said it was a correct marriage, a proper one. That's one thing - how can two people be together. Another thing is that man can have more than wife. And they would say “that's an obvious evidence of patriarchy isn't it?” But if you really look at it...especially on that they had more than one wife, it's really an economic arrangement. It's to do with that older man have power; younger men don't in their traditional field. So older men can actually choose who they want to marry. But it also it's to do with what clan you belong to. They use these bloody terms like “moieties.” Somebody from one

group must marry somebody from that group, not from that group. So it's something like a rule or moral or something like that. But in the end, what proves equality to me is the very fact that if it was a patriarchy then there wouldn't be such a thing such as women's law. So to me it is really equal. And women's law really exists. It is that anything to do with women's business, women's sexuality, physicality, your beliefs, and your feelings – only women can pronounce those things. You know like all the business about abortion now. From an Aboriginal women's law perspective we would say that only woman can make the decision about things like that. Not men not scientists, not anybody else. Say that we wanna hypothetically start rearranging things here in the Western society. According to Aboriginal women's law there would be two different churches – there would one for men, one for women, boys and girls – not children but after adolescence – they would go to different schools. When they were little they could be together but after puberty they have to be separated. In terms of health, boys and men would go to male doctors, and girls and women would go to women's doctors. Gynaecologists, you know, there is a lot of male gynaecologists. That would be completely against the Law. Only women would be allowed to become gynaecologists. That's all to do with women's business. So it means that you are your own person.

J: Why do you call it **business**?

M: I think they are using that word business in Murri way – in Aboriginal way. Business just means everything, all the women's issues.

J: It quite makes sense for me but someone may think of some kind of enterprise.

M: Yes, free enterprises, capitalism (laughter).

J: Can you tell me what do you think is **important to change now**, in this society?

M: Well, I think it's exactly what's happening now. Reconstituting, trying to reclaim all the principles, the ethics and the ways in which to empower Aboriginal women. Especially the belief in your own sort of power. And that means something to do with spirituality, not just how to start a business and win a million dollars – or anything like that. And it's not just about having an Aboriginal woman voted into the Australian parliament and stuff like that. It's all that too but it's especially about that Aboriginal women claim their proper role in running the country. And that's what this is about – it's about men and women running the country, not just men but men and women equally running the country, looking after all the ethics which go with Aboriginal Law in general. See Aboriginal Law in general is to do with looking after the land, you know. And that has been interrupted so much. It's taken for granted, it's not respected. It's about looking after the environment – you know what I mean – making sure that it's not too damaged too much. Well men and women have different roles to play. And they have to keep teaching younger people to know all that. So right at the moment it seems at the moment that Aboriginal men have made too many compromises with the dominant social system. And that's why there is a vacuum, a vacuum in power now, in autonomy for Aboriginal people, independence. There is a vacuum. Nobody is doing anything nobody is fighting for our...for our life really, our way of living, our principles or anything like that. White fellows actually think that Aboriginal people don't have any ethics. We don't have a moral world but we do Aboriginal people exist in a moral world. And the point is to try to bring that to the forum, to understand ourselves and articulate it for younger people and for the wider community. That's what Aboriginal women are concerned about. Because Murri men haven't done it well so far. They have made too many compromises.

J: Would it mean a **revival of tradition**? Or how would you call it?

M: I think a little bit of that is a revival of tradition but the thing is you can't go back hundred years, nobody can't go back to the old days. So some compromise must to happen. But nevertheless there has to be that understanding. So that's what they see as important now.

J: **How do you imagine the comeback of initiation?** (My remark: She usually calls initiation "rites of passage".)

M: Yes, definitely. The rites of passage...it cannot be a current copy of the old one because things have changed so much...

J: What about the **circumcision**?

M: Oh, that still takes place. That's a very important religious thing. What they do now out in those remote places on the traditional area is that they go to the local clinic. So it's not done in a rough way out in the bush but it's done with a nurse and a doctor.

J: I also have heard about the ritual defloration of girls.

M: Not cutting, nothing like a mutilation that...

J: No, I mean a ritual loss of virginity. That's probably something you would not like to bring back.

M: No. I don't think so. These things might still be in place in some communities. But it does not concern our community. We wouldn't or I wouldn't approach it, for sure, neither ideologically...so Murrin don't have tenet ideology of this. We are looking at it more in terms of strengthening of character, moral favour, that kind of stuff. You gotta be realistic. If some women come from certain communities and they wanted us investigate it, well, that would be up to them, that's their business. We wouldn't say "this is how it should be done".

J: That's what for example **Kaberry** wrote about in her book *Aboriginal women – sacred and profane*.

M: (The name does not sound familiar to her.) I don't know. All I know is that I would be very careful about reading anything what any anthropologist says about anything like that. Because there is a tradition – not in this country - in Polynesia or Melanesia...I don't know about American Indians but... I mean Indigenous people would quite often tell anthropologists anything. They are not necessarily lying but they are actually literal. It's found that this was quite actually true with Margaret Mead who was an anthropologist of 1940s.

J: Yes, I know that case about her research of the Samoan culture.

M: She was asking them very personal things about sexuality. I am not pretty sure but I have heard reports talking about Indian group and other people saying that they did the same thing. They just told anthropologists whatever they wanted. So you have to wonder how much truth is there. And also there is the whole thing of men and women relations, you know? I mean, of course that women wouldn't have been accepted hundred years ago but the idea of a man talking to a woman about matters like that would be very improper. Everywhere, in all these old Indigenous cultures it is very improper. You would have a woman talking to a woman, you know, if you wanna to get a real true about something, you know. And you would have men talking to men. But of course Western men at that time didn't understand any of those sorts of stuff.

J: And what should the reestablishment of **the rites** improve? Should there be any rules?

M: Yes, definitely, rules and ethics.

J: And what other things should be brought back? Things like ceremonies, corroborees, healing?

M: Yeah, healing, eating certain things. Because you were allowed to eat only certain things.

J: That's what should be brought back again?

M: Yes, they still do that. Stuff to do with especially women's menstruation. Only women would talk to girls. And it's a celebratory thing.

J: And how would this work from **the perspective of bi-cultural coexistence**? Would it help in living next to the major population or would it make bigger difference between White Australians and Aborigines?

M: I think it would be a certain amount of separation. But it would be a strengthening for us. It's like deconstructing stuff. That's what we have got to do. White fellows have to go through decolonization process which is deconstruction. And the Indigenous have to go through decolonization too. To deconstruct what we have been influenced by. So there has to be a separation in that sense, of examination, of reflection and so on. And that is strengthening. So they would be truly strengthened in the moral, not as in purely dominating economic sense. So them both would be strengthened and especially Indigenous, and then you can have truly equal relationship. And then you come together. So people have to reclaim things, reconstitute, reclaim. Deconstruct, strengthen, restrengthen, explore... And explore things as in to fit the urban situation – it's not good learning about culture again by going far out in the bush. I mean you might go to the bush but the real things gonna happen right here where the people actually live, you know. Because it's not treating the land in a proper

way if you say “oh well...”, its only in its pristine state that it really matters. The land should mean something right here when the river isn’t far away. Have a look at the state of the river – is it healthy is it sick, is it polluted? And so on. But those rites of passage are so important because nobody is teaching young people about ethics. The old system, that’s what it was about. It was about an Aboriginal moral world. And nobody is passing it on. That’s why they are... that’s why there is domestic violence and abuse. Because nobody knows what that is anymore. Because this has been imposed for so long, for several generations and every time they wanna do something according to our old laws, proper old laws, they get knocked on the head. There is no treaty, you know. At least in those other countries they have treaties. And all this gets into really murky area. The, all the social indices – health, education, employment, housing – all these have improved. You can see it apparently on graphs and statistics. They have improved across the border – America, Canada and New Zealand. There are still pockets of terrible poverty over the two. Overall things have improved. Here (stresses), things are going backwards, actually, getting worse and worse. And I put it down to the fact that those places have treaties with its Indigenous people and this place doesn’t have treaty. A treaty says that the Indigenous are running their affairs. They run their own choice. They make all the mistakes but hey have the opportunity to put the right people into the right governance system. And that’s what’s going wrong here. Democracy is thrown up the wrong people. It’s just no good. And the whole democratic thing – as I can see it – you have to be very rich, very powerful, to stay up the other people, to make the vote the way you want. And it’s not supposed to happen in the democracy but it does. In little experiments with democracy among the Indigenous here, that’s what’s happened. So the wrong people come to the forum with their own agenda. All the Cooks and other opportunists – they are the ones who run many organisations and communities.

J: It’s quite tricky with democratic system isn’t it? But there is no way of the only right democracy.

M: It gonna be a different kind of democracy. I don’t know but it doesn’t fit most of the world population actually. Cause most of the world is not Western (laughter). They just believe in their way of doing.

J: And if you consider **the rites of passage** how do you think they would help in improving the **current moral background**? Would they bring in some kind of rules or order in young people’s lives?

M: Rules and order and especially ethics, learning the rules and ethics. That would be one part of it.

J: And what would be another part?

M: Another part would be looking after land. That’s the principle actually. The custodial ethic comes from the Dreaming, from whole notion of Dreaming or Dreamings. It’s an ethic of looking after, not of controlling it. And you may disagree, but to me this is a controlling ethic – this is a God up here (pointing at the top of the pyramid) and this is a king or president o whatever and they lay down rules for everyone else. And if there are ethics in it, it might either come from either a religion or a book or reading a philosopher or something like that. Here (pointing at the net picture), we don’t actually; we don’t know inherently how to look after others or ourselves. We have to put in practice the idea of looking after land that then becomes a big template for looking after one another, for having a custodial ethic of looking after one another. Learn ourselves from the example of looking after the land. That’s why our land is so important. If you exploit land if you treat it cruelly, if you damage it in any way, or corrupt or contaminate it then that’s the perfect template or example of doing it with everyone else. And partly that’s what at the basis the meaning of the Dreaming is. So you have to keep looking after your land. You can’t be ethical in your ideas only; you have got to be ethical in your action. But with people being people, that’s not gonna be ethical autonomy because of jealousy, murderousness, and because of somebody has to run for someone else’s woman you know, girlfriend, wife or whatever. But the overall meaning of the social...principles, if you like, would be about or are about actually about looking after land. You can’t enslave people. Nobody had a foot back against this system because nobody enslaved anybody or treated people cruelly. And the land wasn’t seen as something to be conquered, ever. Land was seen as something to be looked after.

J: Ok. And may I just ask you about the term **“rites of passage”**? Do you mean just initiation by that or all other “life changes from one stadium to another”? One author called Arthur van Gennep wrote a book about all these things. It won’t be just initiation but wedding, funeral, or even birth and death as well. What does it mean for you then?

M: Oh well. You see, that paper (the one she will read at *See Change* conference) it’s like a discussion paper for people to work it out. If you wanna put something in which you think is important for young people becoming teenager. That’s the major period. We can’t go back to the... But also, you see, a circumcision goes on anyway. The real Aboriginal men or boys must be circumcised. It’s a religious thing.

J: And even some White Australians are circumcised aren't they?

M: Oh yeah. Sometimes they are too. But I think their medical science people say "oh well, it's your choice, you don't have to, it's not necessary". Actually they are just coming around with the other way of thinking that perhaps it is for medical reasons like preventing cancer and all kinds of things. That it is really good. I thought it was really funny, very strange.

J: And do you think its right that it's healthy?

M: Oh I think it is. The circumcision is right, is proper.

J: Back to the rites of passage – if I understand it well, you don't have any clear idea yet. Will that appear in discussion with other women?

M: Oh yes, that's what all gonna be discussed. I don't have any ideas about those things myself but I think that all those things will come out of discussion. And that's proper Aboriginal way of consensus. I would never write down – "I think that this is what people could or should do" or "we mustn't do that". That's very White thing to do.

J: So that all will be part of the **forum at the conference**.

M: That all will be part of that, hopefully. I am not here to talk about what should happened with rites of passage, I am here talking about what people would like to consider. And I would love to get people's agreements about that it is necessary to revisit us, to examine...because it's terrible the problems we have here. Terrible violence, young people culturally lost, you know. Something concrete has to start to be done. That's how you would do it. That consensus of decision is what takes place in democracies. So you hold a discussion about what would suit. Another community might say "yes, we do wanna get back that to that circumcision for young fellows; girls should do that and that. But another community might say something quite different. So it depends. Do you know that map, Australian Aboriginal map?

J: The coloured one with clan tribes and languages? {My remark: The map is on the wall in the house.}

M: Yes, well languages. They are not actual...of course that's What White linguist scientists' thing. But roughly it is based on where tribes live, actually. They are all equal. They are all autonomous regions. And all makes me interested in the whole thing of the break up of the Soviet Union too. But there are other places like Ireland, England, Wells and all of that - everybody wants to be with his own tribal group. Everybody wants to be with his own small lot, whether it numbers a hundred or thousand or millions. At the tribes Australian natives want to be with themselves and so on. This seems like its natural to me. And that is exactly like Aboriginal...like they developed for a long time. Because if it had developed into big tribes, it wouldn't end up being private with chiefs running everything, you know. I always come back to the social and political because that's my background of studies, you know its political staff. (She studied political science at UQ. I think it is a good Uni, quite conservative, though. But anyway, with these rites of passage it has always been seen that with the interference of Western culture Aboriginal people have been controlled over so long that people's obligations or responsibilities for bringing children up in this moral world have gone, have dropped away, you know what I mean? They have been ignored too long. And it's not a fault of people because you can't...you've been dominated for so long, you simply had to learn to survive, to get jobs, look after your family, live without being given a hard time too much. So something has gotta go. And that's what social upheaval is, you know.

J: Do you read any books on this or are these just your ideas?

M: I have read a lot, have read a lot. A lot of it comes from my background, of reading philosophy of societies. I have read a few things about rites of passage stuff. Roughly that what gave me the idea is it's the same model over the world wherever colonialism went – it's social upheaval. Enslavement of course, interference, continual interference, people always under surveillance. The natives were always under surveillance. Whether they were Africans or Arabs, you know, whenever the English, French, Spanish or Portuguese went, they just did the same thing. So everybody had got to try to claw their way back to some kind of normality. And you can't just go straight away to save your people; you've got to deconstruct things. And that's the first instance of the rites of passage. It is to help communities to start discussing these things and to really think about what kind of things can be bring back some kind of normality to our land and communities.

J: And as I understand the rites of passage mainly concern **young people**. Is it because they are the most important ones to somehow culturally recover?

M: It is the future. They are the future. You want them to be deliberate reasonably normal. We want to try to help them in stability. It's no good thinking and hoping that things will be better. We gotta try to bring about the better future for our people.

Continuation: Mary Graham , 22/09/2006

J: What do you think about **anthropological representations of urban Aborigines**? I have not found much literature on it.

M: No, there is not much research done with urban Aboriginals. That would be great if you wanted to. I think that White fellows, academic kind of research people. I think that they think that urban Aboriginals wouldn't be too different from the White fellows. That's a wrong assumption. So they would go to the "real" Aboriginal people, to the remote places.

J: It is said that they perceive Aboriginal urban culture as much weaker; they even talk about **cultural loss**. What do you think about that?

M: Yes, I think they have made wrong and very narrow assumptions about what culture actually is. They are very old-fashioned, almost colonial in their view what culture actually is. It's almost like for example...say Czech – if you were in a costume, wearing a traditional hat and shoes, something like that – then that's real. You know what I mean? It's just a wrong assumption and misunderstanding of what culture actually is. You know, it's not the external things – that's only a small part of it of what the real people think and feel. And the researchers don't seem to understand it. Aboriginal people like football, they all like football, they like country and Western music – they might like traditional music too but they like country and Western and rock - and it doesn't make them Western. Like Japanese people, they are highly technological but you couldn't say they are Western. No, they have different way of thinking and philosophy all together.

J: If this community work is based on social work, there must have been some **influence by the Western society** or not?

M: Yes, there are a whole lot of methods to do with community development. It's social work. They would have run courses all the time on community development so lot of social workers they have done the notions of coming in and helping communities. How they deal with their clients, run their organisations.

J: So there was actually a big support from Australian part. Is it still so small that it does not make any more apparent changes?

M: Still too small and very poor. All the Murri organisations are very poor and cannot do all the things they want to.

J: Because of lack of support?

M: Lack of support, lack of resources. So social workers are coming and trying to work out find ways and methods how to get around that or to get funding, to get more money to do things. Mostly organisations simply deliver service. They don't usually look at training themselves or others; they help them to deliver the service. So there is usually delivering a service or building, training or professional developing. There is usually not enough money to do both. Kummara also concentrates on that rather than on actual straight welfare.

J: And I have noticed that there is also plenty of research around it focused on the actual outcomes of Indigenous organisations.

M: Yes.

J: What exactly was the **ATSIC**?

M: It was done away by our government. It used to be a Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA), and because Aboriginal people were looking for a system of representation – like democracy – they decided to change DAA to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Community (ATSIC). And ATSIC was a government department with

women's programs sort of under unelected representative bodies - councils. It was led by Aboriginal representatives in every capital city around our country. It was an experiment in democracy. You know, it's not our traditional thing, democracy, its more consensus decision making. Like most Indigenous people everywhere, they don't go with democracy. They talk. They have a general agreement about things. The government blamed certain people like Sugar Robinson – they were seen as very corrupted. But it was a blame put on them. But ATSIC was very badly led anyway from internally, from the government. So they were never given enough of power, Aboriginal people, so their decisions still could be overturned. So it was not democratic at all. Plus they under funded ATSIC by - it seemed to be like a big money – about a billion a year – but see there is half a million of Aboriginal people in the country, were tens of thousand Aboriginal people in the country living in the third world poverty – as you can see in Africa or Latin America or India. It needed more funds to get people out of that third world poverty. But the government never did it. This is a very rich industrial country and the Indigenous population is very small. They could be easily helped. They could have but they weren't and they didn't allow ATSIC to do that. So ATSIC was only for a short time because it was unsuccessful. But they tried to say that it was unsuccessful because of the bad Indigenous people. But it's far more complex than that. They for example expected ATSIC to say – fix road on Aboriginal communities. I mean roads are under the state. So people would go to ask government for roads for access to communities but the government would say “sorry, we don't have the money, you have to go and ask ATSIC”. But that was not their responsibility to fix roads. So ATSIC was expected to do all these things around but it couldn't and it was criticised by White fellows.

- Showing me a picture in her article on ways of strengthening community organisations.-

M: It's strengthening cultural integrity, women's law and empowerment, strengthening themselves. Healing would be the first step.

J: And would you call it **tradition**?

M: Oh yeah. It's like reclaiming or cultural rejuvenation, or rediscovering. So it was happening and that got destroyed and now there is an effort to identify that sort of thing and strengthen it, and to do that for women because women are the backbone of all the society. Strengthening them means strengthening the whole community.

J: It s also a phenomenon in anthropology. They would call it **innovation** for example. It addresses the cultural transformation in time.

M: Ok. That's right. It can never be real returning to the old one. It can only be a kind of innovating development, based on some old principles, our old ways of doing things, you know? It's like what all modernisation is about.

J: Is it too rigid to return back to the old things?

M: Absolutely, and especially for urban people. You cannot return to the way things were done.

J: How do you think are urban **Aborigines influenced by the mainstream**?

M: Yes. Well I mean things like employment; you have got to be fully stable and functional to be able get a job. It is one thing to get job but another to keep them.

J: If **women** were supposed to have an **equal position to their men in the past**, how would it be in the present urban context?

M: Today, I think, people often talk about this, that a lot of Aboriginal men have taken on them values of White fellows, White men who traditionally have run things – everything in the society and politics and like that. So some see it is a good thing because in the old system everything was quite equal. And now they can dominate. And I don't thing it works on people in a conscious way, it's an unconscious thing. I don't think that Aboriginal men say “well, ok, now we are the bosses”. I think it's very inner, inside their minds.

J: And how it works in reality? As you can for example see in **families coming to Kummara**?

M: I think, what Kummara sometimes sees, especially through Murri sisters, is domestic violence. So they see some of the worst examples of men dominating women but that's not our tradition that is different attitude. Some anthropologists would say that men did dominate. But if there was a patriarchy there would not be things

like women's law. But today, most of the institutions are led by men. That was not so in ancient times. There were men's and women's sites. That's how we know that there was equality.

J: And now?

M: They are still there. But in urban communities it has been made up side down. It's kind of blown apart. So men want to dominate things. Women are on the receiving end of it. It is unbalanced at the moment. So there is the attempt to rebalance it again.

J: Is it also because of the lack of community life? That people are separated in their families, women spends most of the time at home and man can feel stronger and so?

M: That's right. Do you know the word atomise, people have been separated out. Before there was a community, you know relatives. Now in big urban areas, there is a family – there might be relatives but they are kind of far away, they are not close – so it's isolated. They are not together. It is atomised. So it is a big imposal on Aboriginal people because of economics, jobs, all these things, cost of living.

J: And violence?

M: As well. So when people are isolated, you quite often see violence in urban areas. In remote communities, there are no jobs, no privacy, terrible poverty, terrible housing, people are just there, they are bored, drinking, you know what I mean, and then there's that kind of violence. But that's different to urban areas where people are scattered out and then violence happens because of isolation.

J: And I have also heard that they often don't see the help in their family but outside it.

M: I don't know... Help or well fare used to be built in the community but now they might go outside, to a counsellor or something. But there is another place in West End called Gallen Place. They might tell you more about it. They are an Aboriginal organisation that counsel Aboriginal clients. I don't see people coming here asking for internal help. They would be asking "where can I go to get some housing?" and that sort of things. Or a family might come, a mother or a grandmother, who need some resources for their children. They might need money for education, for their books and so. So Kummara refers them on to other places for help with housing or legal manners or travel, anything like that. But not straight counselling, you know – "I have a problem, help me what to do".

J: Have you heard about any **other organisations around Brisbane who would do similar things like Kummara, like women's business or particularly rites of passage?**

M: No, I haven't. There are many Indigenous organisations and it would be good if you could contact them and ask. But again they are mostly kind of "well-farish" which is good, helping with housing, living. But this is the only one I know that helps with this kind of strengthening...you know beyond the line.

J: I tried to put "Aboriginal women's business" on Google the other day and there were so many things from Canada. And I also noticed that many Australian studies on community building have been inspired by **Canadian models.**

M: Oh yes, they are way ahead of a lot of things that Aboriginal people do. Also, they have been colonized longer (500) than Aboriginal people (200). They are a way ahead of developing decolonization programs to try to help with poverty and rejuvenating staff, reclamation, reclaiming culture besides land rights and land title and treaties etc.

J: Do you observe any influence from their side?

M: Oh yeah, definitely. Indian groups – Native Americans and Canadian Indians sometimes get together with Aboriginal people. Next month, there is an American woman coming and talking about getting compensation for something to do with children. So it is quite important for the mob here as it is to do with stealing children and stealing wages. So she will have a speech for Black women. And the Americans, they are very rich, their compensation is something like several billion dollars for half a million people, you know.

J: Do you think they are more progressive in a way?

M: They are much more progressive. With treaties here it is absolutely nothing...

J: I have also read that they are much more progressive in things like community building and Indigenous self-led organisations in Canada.

M: They are so far ahead. And you can talk to Australians here and they have no problem with the idea of treaties for American Indians, it is perfectly all right. But you can talk to them about treaties here and they will blow up. They don't like the idea. It's fucking racist. Bloody racist. It is something psychological in Australia; it is a real problem here.

J: Michael has told us that Australian society behaves like a person with depression which avoids things.

M: That's correct. They are great in avoiding and denying things.

J: And do you think there has been any **influence by American Black movement**?

M: It is actually a bit different. We are more in common with the Indian mob because it's Indigenous and Black Americans are not indigenous. There is a terrible racism and real hatred among Black Americans towards Whites, deadly hate. But I don't think it's the same with Indigenous people here. It's not real hatred. They are at the mercy of hatred actually, Indigenous people, so they don't think of attacking Whites or anything like that.

J: **American movement** was more aggressive from what I have heard.

M: More aggressive, they would put up with anything, whereas Indigenous people might have put up with fights in the beginning but later. People had fights here, but smaller guerrilla wars. But as time went down there was, shooting, poisoning Indigenous people and so... So it's a different situation.

J: And what do you think about **White feminist movement**? Do you think they might have had any influence on you?

M: It has influenced me against them actually (laughter). They want to be equal to men. And Murri women...it's not about being equal, it's about rebalancing back to equality, to empower Murri women again. They have got nothing against Aboriginal men we don't want to stop them from doing things, take them over or...it's just different.

J: Why wouldn't you call it **equality** then?

M: Well, see that they...you may disagree but White women have historically been at the mercy of very powerful male institutions. Men run the church; they ran the parliament, all of these institutions. There might have been one or two powerful women but not to the extent of whole lot of women doing things. Maybe in monasteries like nuns...or they might have been a queen but it has nothing to do with women running things. So I think feminism arose as a protest against it. Be allowed to have a vote... whereas Aboriginal women already have had the equality. The old institutions in their society already were equal. So they want rebalancing now, not equality as feminists. We have our own world. So it's about rebalancing of those worlds. Because it's out of balance and now it's rebalancing again. Whereas White women have always been down here and men have been up here and women wanna climb up. That's very difficult.

J: We talked about rites of passage last week and you mentioned the importance of circumcision in boys' lives. Would you still involve circumcision in the rites of passage you are calling for?

M: I would. For many mothers it is unthinkable to avoid circumcision. You have to do it. Occasionally, there is a young family that doesn't bother, but for most of the families I have come across it is a normal thing, proper thing to do.

J: What do you think about me using the term "**innovation**" in Indigenous culture in my thesis?

M: I think innovation is good because we don't wanna copy some inherent structures. We need to adapt them, to innovate them. I think innovation sounds good.

I asked Jackie the same thing as I will ask you now. How would you say can we prove the continuity of unwritten Indigenous culture and the fact that it has never been lost? In other words, how do you think has been **the knowledge passed down throughout the Australian history**, from generation to generation?

M: What I usually say to this question is that culture is a double-sided thing. There are external manifestations of it that can change, whereas internal structures remain. It is difficult to lose them as people still think in that particular way. And that's what Jackie said that they pass it on with stories, it's a prompt. You know what I mean? It keeps you thinking in those ways despite all the change.

J: You probably know that the typical phrases anthropologists would say are that Indigenous people refuse anthropology, but on the other hand use ethnographies and draw on them all the time because they have partly lost their culture.

M: I think that people accept some things. But the typical discussion revolves around where we came from. Anthropological theories claim that we came from somewhere else, whereas we say that we were made human here, on this place. And there are no dreaming stories talking about anything else. But it is also still a new thing for us to describe ourselves. It jells with what you know, you know what I mean?

III. SUE FEATHERSTONE

8/9/2006, Kummara Family Care Centre, Chief Executive Officer

Position and qualification: Sue was one of three founders of Kummara Family Care Centre and is currently its CEO (Chief Executive Officer). She graduated in social work (MA) at Queensland University in Brisbane.

Personal history: Coming from a remote community Mulinjali (Bundjabeng) from Lagan River in Rathdowney in Southern Queensland, Sue's family did not have any evidence of her date of birth. She says that she was born sometime during the Second World War. Her father was a Scot man (This area was not settled by White settlers till 1952. Then lots of dairy farm ballots were built here and run by Scots. Her mother was Indigenous. She was removed to a station because she was very gold, not black. Her father was a Christian, not strong, and mother was mainstream in her belief. Family moved further up Northern Queensland to Maalan to settle their farm. Sue was removed from her family with her brother in the age of twelve because they were too pale as their mother. They were placed in several families and their father would come and get them back. Then she lived at a mission further in Central Queensland. Then she went working at a station. She says that it was actually fun but she recalls innutritious food they were fed with. It was mostly bread and honey which she became addicted to since then. They did not have any fruit and vegetable and children's health was poor. She also lived in a foster home for a time. She escaped from the station when she was fourteen and went to Melbourne. She had a vision that that was the place she had to go to. Not having anything, she stayed in the streets. Eventually, communist party found her, took care after her, and educated her. Therefore, she says that she cannot say anything against communists. With their support, she started to work in a Commonwealth Bank. Eventually, her communist attendants found her parents. They had been removed from the coast as their land was used for building. She stresses that after meeting her parents; relationship with her mother was never the same again. "I was actually really disconnected. I said all the words of love but didn't care." Since she started to study and work she had a constant feeling that she must be perfect. She wanted to show that she was Indigenous, educated and the best. But she realises now, that she missed closer contact with people and the separation from her mother made her emotionally "shallow". She admits that she has never had really deep feelings to any man and that her emotional ties with men were problematic. She was very independent. "Once they got into my way, I got off." She has three children, two boys and a girl. When she stopped telling me her life story she said: "I don't have an idea why am I telling you this boring story." Sue graduated in social work at UQ when she retired. She has three children. She said that she has been reading mostly social work literature recently but she also likes reading family histories. You can always find connections thanks to that.

Keywords: beginnings of Kummara and its objectives, Kummara's programs, racial tolerance, men vs women, cultural influence, *Stolen generations*

J: Sue, can you please tell me something about the beginnings of this centre?

S: I had worked for different Indigenous organisation called Koolyangarra, also based on family care. Then, I left and started Kummara Family care centre with another Indigenous woman Leslie Clements and one of Dulcie's very good friends who is now very seriously ill, Paddy Davidson. What happened was...there was an

organisation that was the legislative agency for child protection and we ended up closing because of a serious financial mismanagement. So a bunch of Aboriginal women got together to take over the child protection. And we didn't win that bit but we kept the same organisation as Kummara, and then we put in for to do a family support, and that's how it started.

J: And the primary organisation was non-governmental?

S: Non-governmental. But it was a legislated agency. In Queensland you have agencies that were legislated under the department of child safety to look after child notifications.

J: And were **the participants of those organisations** all-Indigenous?

S: Yes, just Indigenous workers. But you do have non-Indigenous within the department of child safety. And you have the AICCA's who are part of the legislation. You have the mainstream child protection agencies and you have the AICCA who are supposed to undertake the child placement principle for Aboriginal children. So they sort of stand outside the department of child safety but they are legislated to work with child safety. So that's how Kummara came about, that Aboriginal woman wanted to take control culturally over growing up children as we not saw it as a male's place. Men were not involved in bringing up children until children reached puberty. And then boys went to live with men and girls went to live with women. And the AICCA's have had a lot of men into it and we saw it must have been failing the children in that area. So then we got very political and tried to take them over.

J: So do you think that in this society **men became more involved in bringing up children?**

S: Yes, because they were better negotiators than us better talkers with the government and the government liked the men. You know the men were more inclined to go along with the flow so as long as they have their business done and they have got the money... Whereas the women can be very... you know. And they really didn't see us as being important because women were not important in their society so they sort of didn't see us as being important. So then we started to get very political which is what about the Jirun meetings are about, they are about politics, and about women taking this place, culturally. But still within the mainstream, I mean we have got to live with them in this environment so... But there is a place for women and that needs to be recognised.

J: I am a bit surprised that the main voice in child care belonged to men.

S: Mostly men were running them. They were employing women. And then women wanted the decision making roles.

J: So is the Aboriginal **women's business** a part of it all?

S: It's actually; it is about revisiting, about taking back control. It's not about shutting others out but it is about making sure that we are included in decision making process so that we are not excluded from it because both the government and the men made a hell of a mess of it. There is a calling thing happening in communities and not just in Aboriginal communities. It's about rebuilding...because we are a part of the mainstream society and whole world is too busy, you know. And you don't actually have time. It's about reflecting what is working for our community, what isn't working, how can we change it and how does it fit with our ways of doing things. Do we have to compromise ourselves to get the business done and we got to the stage where we are not compliant to compromise any more. You do have to compromise in your life but compromise is in a win-win situation really. Somebody always loses in a compromise. It's about taking women rebuilding and revisiting their strengths and recognising how strong they are and building their sense of self again. Because if you have been told enough that you are not capable you start to believe that you are not capable and everybody believes that Aboriginal people are hopeless, they can't help themselves, and they are just pouring our money... What they want us to be is more like them.

J: They want you to assimilate?

S: Yeah, and if we were more like them then we did ok. That's like a Catholic coming to say "if you become a Catholic you'll be all right". That is not the answer, you know. It is not the answer. And it's actually trying to educate people that difference is ok. We might do things differently. But we still...we can still achieve a reasonably happy life. I mean to recognise happiness you must be unhappy. That's normal. You have ups and downs in life. You don't know you are happy until you have been unhappy. And it's the same that you don't know you're doing a good job until you've mugged up something.

J: Do you believe in destiny?

S: Yes, I do, I really do. I have retired years ago and I just decided to do something different with my life and this just happened. I don't come from Brisbane and it was a big thing to get the elders from Brisbane to come to ask me to do something well because I am a stranger to this place. This is not my land. I don't come from here.

J: How important are **land ties** for you?

S: It is really important. When I get really ill, it's like you're driven to get back home. Just to have a walk around and visit again. It's like a pain, it's probably like a religion, cause you're connected. And it sounds artificially but it's not. And it's the same with other Indigenous cultures because it's like the Japanese animism, you know. While they worship animals and things like that and we worship the land. When you go back home you always have no shoes on and so...

J: Is it also that you are looking for signs when you are travelling? That you recognise signs relating to your country?

S: And you always recognise the birds from your place. And you sort of think "oh, that's a storm bird, we can have a storm". You know what your place is. When you don't hear them anymore, you know you are outside your place. That's not your place anymore, that's somebody else's place. It sounds a bit airy-fairy doesn't it, but it's not really, it's about how you belong.

J: I find it quite natural. I like it.

S: It's actually really easy. If you're living in a fast environment, in a city it's just about survival. Cities are about survival. You have to get on train, go to work, get on train, cook the meal, have a bath, watch TV, and go to bed. Oh man, it's really about survival. It's not really a quality of life. It's actually pretty poor. We have been sucked into it.

J: So you think that people are suffering in a city?

S: They are. You know, it's a governmental social engineering. To keep you busy. That you don't make any waves, you know, just keep you busy because people don't have the energy. Thirty, forty years ago, Australians were very passionate people, and they would be marching and they would be protesting and they would be up in thousands. You know as French still are. French get up and march. Australians don't do that any more. They are just exhausted, plainly exhausted from living. And it's a shame because we were all passionate. And that grief that is coming out for Steve Ervin, you know we all liked him; we were all out there but Australians aren't any more. They have become very apathetic. I think we have too good life. Sometimes you need to stand and be counted. I was just reading in today's paper about the number of sexual...and it wasn't just about Indigenous kids. It was about a number of sexual attacks on children, and it was outrageous. That is sick. So where is the information where do they see that as normal? There's something going on. It never...it did happen. It has always happened. Maybe not to that extent. Maybe we are hearing about it more. So that is the sort of things that interests me. Has it always happened?

J: And what about **attitudes of people here towards Aborigines**? What I hear is just so frustrating sometimes. My friend is harassed by police while walking to school during the day. They just stop and check him without any reason. Or is it a privilege of Queensland?

S: Well it is also more in Queensland because it is very conservative state, even the Murri people are conservative. And that's why I only have that small thing on the back of my car (pointing at a label of Indigenous organisation on her car). I used to have a big metal magnetic thing saying "Kummara Family Care Centre" there and I would be pulled up by the police all the time. One night, I was coming back from Toowoomba early in the morning and I was pulled up by the police in Ipswich and asked where I had been and what I had been doing there. I mean, this is a free country, you can travel where you want or not? And then we couldn't go ahead because we kept being pulled up. It is just still a part of Australian culture. It's actually sad. One of the fellows had a sports car and he would always be pulled up cause they would think it would be stolen. Because that black man should not be in that car.

J: So do you face these prejudices every day? Is it more in a city or in the country?

S: Cairns is interesting. It is what we call rednecks, you know - very racist.

J: Some people say, Brisbane is rednecks.

S: Oh, Brisbane is. Racism is still very much alive in Queensland. It is better, don't get me wrong. It is better than it was. But...just read some of these North Queensland papers, Cairns-made. It's just pulling, absolutely dreadful. But it is not as bad as it used to be. Now we get paid the same wages, we get the same money. Usually the lower paid jobs but we still get paid according to our work conditions, whereas before they used to pay us nothing or paid very rarely.

J: Ok, if I go back to Kummara now, how do you think **would the changes you want to bring in influence the coexistence of your and White-Australian culture?** Would it make bigger or smaller gap between you?

S: It would actually be very confronting. Not just for the mainstream workers but also for Aboriginal workers as sometimes they have been subsumed into the system of wages and doing things. And sometimes that can be very confronting because it doesn't fit with their work pace because we are much slower in taking decisions and talk about a lot. And we discuss it in very informal ways, you know. But there is actually lot that comes out of it. It might be a lunch but there is a lot that comes out of it. As we sit and have a conversation (e.g. Brims women's meeting) and it might even be just five or ten minutes in that hour but it is really strong. So we do things slowly. We don't sit down like the most genuine and say "all right we have to make a decision about this now". It's also about self-esteeming and valuing each other. Everyone has something to say which is valuable. It might be different. You can always just say, "well, this is my way, and this is how I was brought up", and hopefully you will get a sense of taking the best from everybody and hopefully that will make a change. Because in fact what we are trying to do is to affect changes in children's lives, so that they have a chance to access life's opportunities. You know, if they are traumatised in such a young age, they don't even get a chance to value themselves, and to access education, and you can't get by this world without it, times have changed. You've got to have an education to get a job and a lot of them are failing at schools because of trauma. So that's why are we trying to work at the early level. You know, if you touch one child's life in a better way, that's a change. We don't have great visions of changing the world; we just have visions of changing one child's life.

J: So what does it exactly mean for you?

S: Supporting each family in their needs which are individual needs. You know you can't just say one side fits all. So each family has different values and we are trying to support them in identifying their needs – not as saying them "you need this and this" but its about spending a time with them, letting them identify what they need to help with if want any help. Some people don't, and that's ok. You can't force people to do things even if you see that it's gonna be a disaster, you can't force them.

J: And do you have many **clients?**

S: We don't do much service provision at all. We have got our fifty families down in Koolyangarra and that's where we do our family support. If they want they just drop in and we usually follow them up in any help they need. But we don't do service provision, it's not like a medical centre.

J: So it is more based on **mediation?**

S: Yes, you give them the skills to do what they want to do with their life. There is a plenty of organisations that are funded for service. We are about changing the system so it sounds more political. It is a systemic change so we have been always working on research and things like all cultural strengthening. Like the conference it's about building cultural strength. Women getting together and it's very political in a way but it's about changing system. What we need more is to change the system and we have been able to affect a lot of change, like more support for children and child care. There are a lot of them who come to child care and have very high needs. They might be autistic or being abused. There is a lot of trauma. So we do advocating with the parents, with the families, with the departments, changing the system, making them meet their legislative requirements. We have to know the legislation. We for example arrange meeting of siblings who aren't in touch with each other. If for example one of them is in foster care. And we want them to see each other; it's a part of our role. We advocate at this level so that the connection still stays.

J: So do you see some **progress in general?**

S: Last year we actually got five families together again. Their children were out at foster care and they're back home with mum and dad. That's the achievement just to get them back of the department. It might not sound as huge numbers but those five families are back together and we still support them. If they want us to we don't go and turn up. We write them a letter you know "How are you going? Do you need anything? Do you need children get back to school? Do you need uniforms? That sort of stuff. And we put a lot of children back into school with uniforms. It's a pretty pragmatic stuff. They actually built their relationships with those families and then they are more likely to come back if they need some support. So it's not about huge amount of people coming and going because we have done all that. So it's not as much about business, it is more about dropping in and having a cup of tea and a bit of change.

J: So as far as I understand it, all the women business is seen in relation to kids to a big extent?

S: Yes, it's all seen in relation to kids and growing them up.

J: So do you think your personal story have contributed to your involvement in all this?

S: Yes. I see it from my story that even if you make that relationship with parents again, you don't form an attachment. You actually do have a loving relationship with your parents if you have been reconnected but it's not the same. And that impacts on your life and that's what we are trying to eliminate. So under my personal history are the years of trying to get children to their families and form attachments. Because once they have been to a foster system they might go to six foster placements a year. That is so unhealthy. I find it cruel. Sometimes their parents just don't cope with their behaviour. And they are really traumatised kids. So we want children to go back to their families, and always to a safe environment.

J: And returns are also difficult. As you said, your **relationship to your mother** was never the same after reencounter.

S: Yes. I mean I loved them. But deep love...you need actions to support your feelings, to care in an active way. I was amazed looking back how selfish I was. I didn't actually care in an active way. I said all the words but was really disconnected. I would go and visit mum but...I didn't care. It's just a metaphor for lack of attachment. And my mother was very beautiful and very vain. You just don't have the actions which make the real relationship because you don't have the real attachment. And you don't realise it. You become a singular unit. You get through life but you never make real emotional attachments. You know if you love somebody you give of yourself. But the lack of emotions is passed on your children. None of my siblings had real emotional depth. And you can observe it as you get older. You don't trust living soul. And it is intergenerational trauma. My children are great, they are wonderful but they also don't let anybody too close. My daughter married the greatest man I have seen but there was no emotional connection between them. I was sad because she deserves much more selling herself short because of her emotional district. It's maybe the society we are living in. It might not be my entire fault. And the other children are like that. But those are not just Aboriginal children. That's my area of knowledge you know. But I think that children got a pretty rough time, really.

J: I used to work with mentally handicapped children. They were often left by their parents...

S: But it is hard to make judgements because of the style of living. And also relationships usually break down under the children who need that deep care and life is going and how can you stay at home with the child that needs that depth. But on the other hand, there is a hip of wonderful parents doing a lovely job. You can't just focus on the sad stuff. And that's what keeps me going if I look at the numbers. I see there is sixty five thousand of Aborigines in Queensland. Of those sixty five thousand is probably three thousand notifications. So you have to focus on the strength, otherwise you would just fall apart. I had to prove myself and everyone else that Aboriginal women are capable. The White people always feel a bit surprised that you can actually do something. I remember my teacher who was looking at my results and saying "you couldn't have possibly done that". Our strength is working on a ground. Financial management is very important now. Financial management at Kummara did actually make more for our reputation than all the work. As long as you are financially clean they don't care and you can have a great organisation.

IV. THERESA MACE

13/09/2006, Kummara Family Care Centre, Family Support and Early Intervention Worker

Position and qualification: Theresa is a Family Support and Early Intervention Worker in Kummara. She has a degree in Social work (BA).

Personal history: Theresa was born in 1967 in Cherbourg. Her father is European and Indigenous but he did not know his real identity for a long time. Her mother is fully European. She was the eldest among other siblings and they were all in a children's home. She had no contact with her family. After leaving the children's home, they all split. Her mother met her father when she was young. It was in New South Wales at the time when Aboriginal people were still not allowed to stay in the town area. She was not aware that he was Aboriginal as he was fair. They moved to Brisbane to his family. Theresa and her brother and sister were born in Brisbane. They moved to Canberra and then to Darwin. Then they came back to Brisbane and Theresa finished her high school there. She started to work, had a daughter (20) and experienced domestic violence. She got away of the wrong relationship and was trying to reconnect with her family as she did not know them at all. Theresa later finished a degree in social work (BA).

Keywords: Indigenous vs. mainstream organisations, Indigenous way, terms of reference, welfare system, Kummara and others

J: Theresa, what do you think is the main **difference between your, Indigenous organisation, and any mainstream (White) welfare organisation?**

T: It's basically different in all the way of working with people. It is nearly impossible to get some immediate help if you go to any mainstream one. You have to make an appointment to be able to come. You have to pass so many things to actually talk to someone.

J: So what would be **the Indigenous way?**

T: The whole principle of working with Indigenous people and their terms of reference, that type of thing is taking into account that things like connection between a family is sometimes much stronger than it is recognised in non-Indigenous cultures.

J: What do you mean here by **Indigenous terms of reference?**

T: Is accepting the protocols (for Aboriginal people means customs or Law) and all the other issues that go along when you work with the families. For instance my sister died a couple of years ago and my mother is caring for her children. But when she has an urgent appointment then we are there for her, whereas in other families, they have to find someone to look after kids. But I suppose that our organisation is about researching and advocating for those gaps that are there. The mainstream has to deal with everybody so it is the "one side fits all model", whereas Indigenous and all the other cultures have their own ways and protocols of working with their community people. It's difficult to move from colonization where you just dumped in to everything. Then in early 60s they said "these black fellows are really human beings", let's acknowledge them. So then we had the Department of Aboriginal affairs and all the other departments that focused on these issues to overcome them. But that's done a big full turn now and it is going back to the colonization where the "one side fits all". And basically if you are not fitting into that little box, you're in trouble, you know? If your parenting skills seem outside of what we've got, we're going to be in child protection, right? This sort of things. It depends which area you are looking at. Like child care. A lot of Indigenous families are...not sceptical so much but not aware of the benefits of being in the system. They are more scared of what if department finds out that something is going on and - all that sorts of things.

J: So you think that it is difficult for them to understand the **welfare system** and know about all the benefits?

T: The benefits they are all fine with because definitely my generation and the one after me are all basically the welfare babies. But there hasn't been a transfer of strong parental skills and knowledge to the parents that are coming up which is reinforcing this all welfare system within the community. We say it's children having children because Indigenous community splits with the domestic service and then stolen generation started to bring the families together or started to build the awareness that there were big chunks in people's lives missing. And parenting is a learned behaviour it is a learned stuff. You don't get it from a book, you don't get it from a lecture, and you get it by doing it. I suppose that this is the big problem that all these parents that are coming through now are getting those skills passed onto them and even the cultural side is sometimes being missed and

that's why are we having these troubles and when the kids go to school then it's again perpetuating this cycle because the parents are scared of going to school because of their experience and their parents not going to school and then we have dropout rates and attachment to the justice systems and those sorts of things... And then there are the calls for blackfellows to get up and start doing things but it's easy to say that when you don't have a lot of history hanging over you, when you come from stable being it middle class, lower class or upper class. If you come from stability and consistency, you're fine. But a lot of our mob has inherent problems with alcohol, drugs, violence. Identity is a lot of the cause too - not knowing a space, not having a place where you belong, where you feel you belong. Children are treated more like objects or prices rather than actual children. It's unfortunate. Cause I was to a Murri school and I was working a lot with the grade one and what it came a lot was when the children came to the school they were not prepared for the hole "sit down, stay still, be quiet", this sort of stuff. It's all learned behaviour and that's what we are trying to identify and breach those gaps. We have different programs to try to engage with parents. They are not happening for whatever reason it is.

J: They are not happening because they are not interested?

T: Well, I am not sure what's happening. They say yes, yes, there is an interest but when it comes to the day there's no action.

J: Does Kummara do a lot of research?

T: Yes, Mary does the research to develop Indigenous terms of reference. It's just...it's a messy thing. It's a messy area. So I was no help to them, I was better in the kitchen, when I wasn't thinking.

J: How **Kummara coexist within the community system.** You said that people say it is time to Indigenous people to do their things but on the other hand, people don't acknowledge your work?

T: We are community capacity building organisation which is fairly unique and we are multifunctional service. That means that we have a community development stuff going on. We also run a childcare centre to assist families that want to get back to the work force. That's part of that moralist family support intervention which is coordinating a speech and hearing program. So we are identifying early whether there are issues that need to be addressed before getting into that education system. That's the intervention's side, being multifunctional. We don't... ok, we say family support and the general consensus in community about family support is about being able to access emergency relief and all those sorts of immediate, short term responses, whereas we are not part of that practice. We are more, ok, let's get your issue out on the table and identify where the issue is actually coming from and then linking them and walking beside them. It's like a... one of the family members needs to organise transport for his children or something. Instead of them ringing us, we give them a phone. All those sorts of empowerment rather than disempowering people by doing it for them so that they always have this crutch to lean on. So we just walk beside them and support them as they go along.

J: So that's the main difference from the mainstream organisation?

T: Yes, we are more advocacy than the actual process support.

J: So is there anyone standing **against you?**

T: Is not necessarily against this organisation. It's against this concept of the separate Indigenous services. For some reason there is still this belief that Indigenous services should be mainstreamed. For what reason, I am not sure. All it really does is put people out of work. It's shutting down services, it's disrespecting people who are unable to access, whether it being a mental issue or physical or psychological. I am sort of in between. I am one of those people who say "it's time to stop crying and go up there and do something" but at the same time, we do need to do baby steps. Unless you have that identity crisis you cannot understand why it's needed. And the body identity crisis is "I just found that I am a blackfellow. But I don't know where my country is, I don't know any totems". Or, in my case, I've known I am a blackfellow for all of my life but I still don't know my totem. I still don't know my land. Ok? My family was taken to a mission. And it's a lot of things that happened within the person that impacts on their ability to do anything. I met one family this morning and didn't show up for a family meeting that is pretty important. I could just immediately think of six or seven reasons why that would have happened. Whereas departmental thinking is, ok, she missed the meeting, bad mark. Even the more they try to put Indigenous workers into positions and try to make it Indigenous friendly, it never will be if it's incorporated into a mainstream service. It can't be because that mainstream service has targets to meet, you know, timeframes to work within and all those sorts of things. And six months seems to be the societal framework for working with a family or a client. Six months, three months and then you say goodbye. I've been working with this family all

year and we are in October and we are still just making edgeways of where we wanna go. And that's not a fault of the family all the time; it's also the fault of the department, my fault as well. A gap's happening in the contact. It's a very sensitive area. But mainstream services will never be able to effectively assist the families that really need it. That would be fine with the families that have the strengths and motivation to access and go through all the hoops. But there are a lot out there that don't. And they are the ones that, unfortunately, end up in child protection or justice system because of that.

J: So why did you say that you are in between?

T: I am speaking from my position. If I needed a support, I'd be hesitating to be going to the mainstream. So, while I understand that some general services can be mainstream, yeah, yeah, when it comes down to supporting families, protecting children and all those sorts of things, they cannot be mainstream, they have to stay separate. It's like the multicultural side of Australia, they have their own separate services. They have their own interpreters, their own housing support people, and their own departments. We used to have a lot but every year, they cut something off.

V. LILLA WATSON

31/10/2006, Kummara Family Care, Consultant

Position and qualification: Lilla works as a consultant for Kummara Family Care Centre. She is also an artist. She graduated at the University of Queensland in Psychology (BA).

Personal history: Lilla Watson is a Gangulu woman who grew up in what is now Central Queensland. Since her family moved to Brisbane in the late 1960's, she and other members of her family have become well known through their involvement in the Indigenous community. She was Inaugural President of the Brisbane Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agency (1981-85), and has served on the Boards of the Aboriginal and Islander Independent School and the Brisbane Indigenous Media Association.

She worked as a Research Assistant (1980-83) and Lecturer in Aboriginal Welfare Studies (1983-90) with the Department of Social Work at the University of Queensland, where she developed and taught two subjects within the interdisciplinary area within the Faculty of Arts. More recently, she has successfully developed an innovative artistic medium to portray and project aspects of her spiritual and cultural identity, and exhibited here and overseas.

She has also served on many Government and Agency committees and selection panels, including the Ford Inquiry Implementation Committee, and is currently a Member of the Senate of the University of Queensland, its Standing Committee on the Status of Women; and the Board of the State Library of Queensland, where she also chairs the Indigenous Advisory Committee.

Keywords: Aboriginal terms of reference, healing, women's business vs. men's business, women's law, role of mother, cultural influence, dynamism

J: Lilla, I am still a little bit unsure about what exactly **Aboriginal terms of reference** are. I understand it as a way of referring to all authentic Aboriginal issues. Or do you see any better definition?

L: I guess that when I talk about Aboriginal terms of reference, I am talking about our experience that has come about out of this land for the thousands of years that we have lived here, right? Now, as you know we have run this country before anyone arrived here. We developed our own ways and our own understanding of what it means to be human. And that experience has come directly from this land, right? And that's what Aboriginal terms of reference are based on. It is everything coming out of this land, out of our experience of living in this land for the thousands of years that we have. That's what Aboriginal terms of reference are based on: our spirituality, our child rearing practices, men's business, women's business, Aboriginal Law, all comes from this land. It doesn't come from anywhere else.

J: Does it mean that it **always has to be part of your culture**?

L: Always part of our consciousness, always part of our culture, what our culture is. That has come from this land here. What has happened through the colonial process is an imposed system. Their terms of reference belong to England and to Europe and through the colonization; they have imposed their terms of reference on the land. And you see the majority of the people that live in this country; they locate their race history over there,

somewhere. Their race history is in England, in Europe, in another country. Not locate here. Aboriginal people race's history begins here. And that's where Aboriginal terms of reference come from.

J: So what do you use the terms of reference to refer to today?

L: Well, in referring to our spirituality. The imposed spirituality comes from some fellow called Jesus that was born over in Europe or somewhere else. He wasn't born here.... Our child rearing practices are very different. Our ways of making decisions as based on consensus, not on conflict approach. The imposed system is all about conflict. Who can get the most votes. Voting system is very foreign to this country, it doesn't belong here.

J: It is probably difficult to define the terms of reference because they concern so many things. We did a yarnning circle at *See Change* conference on terms of reference, and women put in things like creativity, healing, spirituality, honour, respecting elders and so.

L: Yes, because it covers everything. Education, everything...Oh, it's just so... I mean, where do you start, it's hard, where do you start say this. I can remember my little nieces going to school and they come home and they do something that was very culturally inappropriate. And my brother and my older sister said, "you don't do that at home". And she says "but we do that at school". And I say "well you might do that in school but you don't do that here because that's not part of our culture." You know what I mean? So it's in everything. How you talk to people, how you conduct yourself in the land, how you conduct yourself to other people, it's all part of that. But through the colonial process it has created a lot of confusion because colonialism, I think, is the best way for anyone, to understand their own culture. For Australians, would be the best way for them to understand themselves. And that's a very hard to do for White Australians. They find it very difficult to own their history in this country. Cause it's not a very good history. It's absolutely horrific history, really! What they were able to do to Aboriginal people in this country because colonialism dehumanises people. And it's only by dehumanising other people that the colonizers can do what they do and what they did to Aboriginal people. It's only by dehumanising the people they are colonizing, that they can actually do these dreadful things. And see, that's the problem with White Australia today – they still colonize us. They still got the colonial mentality. They cannot see to rid themselves of this colonial mentality.

J: It's quite serious.

L: (ironical laughter) It's very serious! Because in their eyes, Aboriginal people are still not human beings as they are.

J: It is actually very depressing.

L: (laughter again) It is depressing but you don't let it beat ya!

J: Let's move to another question now. What does **healing mean to you?**

L: Healing... Now, this is difficult because we have been influenced by things that have come into our lives. But, for me, when we talk about healing, we are not just talking about the physical illnesses. For me, healing is much more. It involves the spiritual, and emotional, and psychological, and it involves the land. It must involve the land. Because it seems to me that if the land is unwell, then we will be unwell. And that affects our emotional and our spiritual well being, and psychological too. And it's when we try to work with those...well, what happens when it is all being interfered with...then quite often, I believe, it is those things that dictate our illnesses we are interfered with. And our emotional and spiritual well being comes out of balance. Once out of balance, then you end up with illnesses. And that's when you try to get them back in balance, that's when the healing occurs, I think. And that happens in various ways. It can be through family...

J: Like Kummara, maybe?

L: Yes. It can be through your community. So it's a very holistic thing, I think.

J: Do you know Michael Williams? He runs the course Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Approaches to Knowledge. It is all based on discussion of Aboriginal, domestic and international students sitting together. It is very challenging thing. Michael told me the other day that it is also a kind of healing.

L: Absolutely, that's all part of the healing process. And I think it does a lot of good for White Australian students to be involved in that course, especially White Australian students. And Aboriginal students too!

Because when we started the course, Aboriginal students saw it as a chance how to get stuck into the White students. And the White students were hearing things that they had not heard before. And that made them very vulnerable and emotional. Not all of them, of course because some of them thought it was a lot of nonsense and so...but anyway, so quite often there was a lot of tension in the room and we used to always teach sitting in a circle, you know, and before they were allowed to go at the end of the session, someone had to tell a joke.

J: Hey, we didn't do this!

L: They always had to tell a joke. And if it didn't make everybody laughing, someone else would have to tell a joke. Everyone had to be really happy. But we said to them "can't tell racist jokes, can't tell sexist jokes, can't tell blond jokes, can't tell handicapped jokes, can't tell Irish jokes..."

J: So what is left? Nothing!

L: And they said so how we can find any joke like that? And we would say "well, it's up to you to find that" (laughter). So we had real strict principles about what sort of jokes it could be.

J: So, would you say that work of Kummara that supports **family and women's emotional well being is a kind of healing too?**

L: Absolutely.

J: I am currently writing a paper about Kummara and I called it "Healing Aboriginal woman" as I think it reflects two healing: healing of the society through healing of women and also healing practiced by Kummara women.

L: Ok, very good.

J: So, what do you think Kummara calls for in terms of **Aboriginal women's business?**

L: One of the major things about - I will talk more generally about Aboriginal women's business and then, I guess, you can see how Kummara fits into that - Aboriginal women have always had the responsibility for the growing up small children. And it is a very important cultural aspect. Because, as you probably know, it's in the first five or six or seven years of our life when we learn the most we ever learn. So that's where that responsibility was with women to grow up very strong cultural children into very independent thinking. And that's where the process starts - at a very early age. And women have that responsibility and that's a very strong responsibility. And there is a saying - I don't know if you have heard it - but "a chain is only as strong as its weakest link". You understand what that means? You understand what that means? You have got this strong chain but it is only as strong as its weakest link. It can be pooled apart easily, if there is a weak link. So, Aboriginal women have that responsibility of ensuring very strong cultural beings, from their early age. And that's a very important responsibility for women. Now, let me say that in the liberation movement in the 60s women...Western women, I guess, saw that as a negative because they have been forced into opposition. There is a book by an Australian author, Ann Summers. And she wrote that book in the 60s or the 70s. She said that Western men have colonized women. Colonized them into what they wanted them to be, more or less into being slaves. And I think, being a mother and mothering your children became viewed in a negative way. And understandably, I think, most Western women felt trapped in that role of motherhood. And I think the women's liberation movement or feminist movement reacted against that. They wanted to share the responsibility with men - which is, you know, there's nothing wrong about that, it's quite right - but it became a negative mothering, you know what I mean?

J: That the **image of mother staying at home with her children...**

L: Was seen in a negative light. I think, by the feminists. But you see, in Aboriginal terms, that's a very positive thing to do.

J: So how would be that **mother seen in your terms of reference?**

L: She is not a negative. That's her responsibility and a very important responsibility. I think it's wonderful... And I think more men are coming to appreciate their bond with children at an early age because that's when that bond happens. For the mother, especially, and for the father it should happen, that bonding. And it becomes very strong. And it is a wonderful love between the child and the parents, the mother and the father. And you know, I have been thinking, and I cannot understand...but I think, you can understand, there are children who killed their

parents. There are some awful cases of children killing their parents in the States and here too (desperately). And I just wonder if these children have been put in the nurseries in their early age because the mother has to work, you know? And the wonderful bonding happens more with the carer than with the mother. So if the child gets to an age when...maybe it's easy to kill people, I don't know. But it seems to me that there is something wrong if the child can kill a parent.

J: I have read in many books that the responsibility for children was originally in all the community. That **everyone was responsible for growing up children.**

L: Oh, yes. It's run throughout the country. The responsibility is shared out through their grandmothers, their aunts and also their fathers, their grandfathers, and their uncles. It's shared out. So that the whole weight of being responsible for this child doesn't fall on you. You know what I mean?

J: Does it mean that you are the main carer but you can rely on others?

L: You can rely on your mother and your father and your sisters and your brothers and other relatives. It's like... Quite often you see a Murri family with three or four children and they might go to visit relatives and they take their children with them and when they come home they might not have any children. Because along the way the child said, "I'm gonna stay here with auntie, I'm gonna stay in this house, I'm gonna stay in that house". So the child has many homes, many mothers, many fathers, and the responsibility for child rearing is shared with other relatives and with the community. The community also plays part of that. I know when I...if I am down the street - I don't have any children, I have got some nephews and nieces and they are my children - but if I am down the street and I see any of our young people in trouble then I don't have any hesitation - even if I don't know that child and I have never seen him before - I have no hesitation going up to that child and saying "do you need some help?", "have you got a problem, hey?" you know, especially if the police is questioning him. I will go up and say "what's the problem here, what's wrong with this child?". And if the police says, "what's the business of yours?," I will say, "well, I am his auntie". Even if he might have not seen me for all his life, he just calls me auntie and says, "well, auntie, this problem's here". You know what I mean? So, it's very much a shared responsibility.

J: You said that a community is also part of it. Would then **Kummara represent this community?**

L: Yes, they are just part of it too. Because there are just Murri kids that walk up to the Aboriginal hostel down the road. Dulcie knows those kids and she calls them "my love" and they are saying "hello auntie" and very much part of it.

J: Ok. This question is maybe a little bit political but Mary and Sue told me something about **AICCA**. That it was more **men's business** too. So Kummara was based to be uniquely women's business of growing up children. And those women in Kummara are facing some kinds of stereotypes from the side of the former AICCA because they do strictly women's business. Can you explore on that?

L: Well, what has happened was that confusion between Aboriginal terms of reference and White terms of reference. Some people out in the community are operating on White terms of reference and others work on Aboriginal terms of reference. So there can be this crossing over and this confusion. Whereabouts, traditionally, people wouldn't question women's business. And that's what women have decided to do, and that's women's business. And, you know, Aboriginal terms of reference wouldn't question that. If there is a problem there, other Aboriginal women will address it. And then they will talk to other Aboriginal women. And then they will talk to Kummara. And then they will just talk it out. But if it's men who are doing it, then there are no Aboriginal terms of reference they are operating on.

J: So what do you think happened in between Kummara and AICCA?

L: In AICCA? I think they just got confused. I think they took over the White terms of reference. And it collapsed; you know that, don't ya? I think they took on White terms of reference in there. (Lilla's husband offers us a coffee and Lilla commenting on what a nice husband he is.)

J: Do you think that Kummara has any **enemies in between mainstream or Indigenous organisations?**

L: Well, I don't see them as enemies. I just see people who think as individuals that maybe they can do a better job or something. And that's with all the organisations. That's when (Lilla notices her sister in law coming and leaves to welcome her shortly) people start acting as individuals, on the White terms of reference. It gets

confused, you know what I mean? And I think that a lot of the White terms of reference people are confused by and sometimes slip over the line and start operate on the White terms of reference and not on Aboriginal terms of reference. And that creates problems. And I don't see that as bad tensions or anything like that, there's just an amount of confusion, you know.

J: I will switch to a different subject concerning women now. Talking about **women's law**, I understand it as consisting of rules, ceremonies, looking after land, kinship system, and even relationships between men and women. Can you all call it women's law?

L: Yes, there's women's law and everything just about... And that excludes men from the women's law...even. Have you seen the paper I wrote once? There's a paper I wrote... (She gives me the paper and we move to another question.) This is what I tried to do. This is Western society - the out of circle is men's business and everything inside of is men's business. Women's business is encompassed within that. And this is public business, all is encamp used within men's terms of reference, within men's business. And this is what I think happened with the feminist movement. The women's business is pushing out and men would have to start to rethink their terms of reference because women are coming more out. In Murri society, these spheres sometimes overlap.

J: You recommended to me a **book of Diane Bell, "Daughters of the Dreaming, once**. She is a White feminist anthropologist. Does it mean that you don't refuse her work even she has this political background?

L: No, I think that she has done a good job on what women's business about. And there are things like protocols. Some people call them protocols, I call them Law.

J: And I have the last question. What do you think about **influence in your culture from outside?** (Then I tell Lilla about the presentation of Landmark education at *See Change* conference.)

L: Well, I haven't heard her talk about it. But you see, with things like that. There are lots of things that have been imported to this country and Murri use them now but we use them according to our values - like lots of things, like houses, cars. They don't have the same value for Murris as for White people, like houses are mainly for prestige and possessions and ownership, and all those sorts of things. Whereas I guess Murris are more inclined not to put that sort of value on them. You know what I mean? When that big cyclone happened up in Darwin, White people were absolutely devastated because they lost their houses; they lost their cars, their boats, possessions. And the psychological trauma was devastating for White people. Whereabouts Murris, they handed all that much better. They sort of went around and said "oh, this was a big blow, wasn't it?" Whereas people would traumatise and say "oh, my house, my boat, my car, everything's gone!" And Murris would say "oh Jesus, it was a real big wind!" You know what I mean? They lost the same thing! They lost their houses but the trauma wasn't the same as it was for Murris. You know what I mean?

J: I think so.

L: So what I am saying is... Even this Landmark or whatever it is... I don't see it as a danger if Aboriginal people participate in it or decide to do it, and then maybe it will help them in some way. Anything that helps people I think is good (strongly)! And hopefully they will take out of it what they need. Aboriginal people have done a lot with what have been imposed on us.

J: But would it be **still in Aboriginal terms of reference?**

L: Well see, that's where the problem is. If people are not grounded in Aboriginal terms of reference, then it can create quite a lot of confusion. People need to be really grounded in what the Aboriginal terms of reference are.

J: But as long as it helps them... There was another healer talking about chakras, meditation and this eastern kind of medicine. I must say that I was a bit surprised at the beginning because it is not Aboriginal. I expected some kind of bush medicine.

L: But people will come hopefully to Aboriginal terms of reference and will keep it in text. So they can say, "oh, that's good, I can use that in a Murri way, in Aboriginal way and it will help me". Because there has been a lot of problems created for Aboriginal people, lot of ceremonies have been chopped off from us and lot of languages have been taken away from us. So now, we are in a stage of sort of saying this is what Aboriginal terms of reference are, and this is what we are in control of. And, perhaps, you see, Aboriginal culture has always been a very dynamic culture. But the groundwork, the terms of reference don't change like the Law doesn't change. But have you heard Mary saying that all things are valid and reasonable? Aboriginal people don't reject, they say "oh

this is interesting". If they decide to take it on, it will be used in their way. But they will look at it and say "oh yes" but might reject it and never ever use it. That's the dynamism.

J: That's quite interesting. Where the **dynamism** comes from?

L: Well, I think that one of the things it comes from is that when someone died, traditionally, you didn't speak that person's name again. And if that person's name was like something, sounded like something else, then they invented new words. You see? They would invent a new word or they would change it. And that meant that there was a constant change. Even the language changed. You see? And when you didn't speak someone's name again what did that mean? Of course it meant that people were released to go to where ever they were supposed to go when they died. And, every time you mention the name it's like calling the person back from the dead. It's not releasing. Every time you mention the name it's like you are holding onto them. I mean Western society does that which is what Western society does. There is no condemnation on that. It's just what Western society and many other societies do. Whereabouts Aboriginal people have different way. You have to release that person and you don't mention the name because every time you mention the name you are holding onto them.

J: Yes, I have heard the same about Romany people in our country.

L: And I was going to say. With not mentioning the name - I see Western society as carrying a lot of their dead people on their backs, and I think that of people like Elvis Presley. They have made a great industry of Elvis Presley, haven't they? He is the multi million dollar industry but he is dead. And what I think of - here is this dead guy - there might be dozens of others out there that are much better than Elvis Presley ever was, but we will never hear them because this dead guy is taking the sound of our air way, this dead guy keeps singing and we will never hear these people that are probably whole of better than him (laughter)!

J: So in your culture, there wouldn't be any songs of Elvis Presley because he is already dead?

L: We wouldn't even know who it was. We would have never heard his name. And what does that do? That allows you to become a hero in your own life time. You know what I mean? You can be a hero in your own life time. What's the good about being a hero after your death? You wouldn't have heard about it!

VI. JACKIE HUGGINS

08/11/2006, Deputy director at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies unit at the University of Queensland

Qualifications: Enrolling at the University of Queensland (UQ), she graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in History and Anthropology and an Honours degree in History and Women's Studies. She also has a Diploma of Education from Flinders University in South Australia. In December 2006, Jackie is receiving a Honour Doctorate for her community service work.

Personal history: Born in Ayr in Central Queensland on 19 August 1956 she is of the Bidjara (central Queensland) and Birri-Gubba Juru (north Queensland) peoples. She attended Inala State High School before leaving at fifteen to work for the ABC and then spending two years with the Department of Aboriginal Affairs in Canberra. Over the years Jackie has been a influential and effective member of numerous organisations. Currently she is co-chair of Reconciliation Australia; a director of the Telstra Foundation; director of the Australian Centre for Indigenous History, Australian National University; council member of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies; member of the Indigenous Advisory Board of the Queensland Centre of Domestic and Family Violence Research, Central Queensland University; co-chair of the Independent Inquiry into Release Policy and Practice in the Queensland Prison System (2004); and member of the Indigenous Advisory Board for the State Library of Queensland. Jackie is the Deputy Director of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit at UQ. She mentors and encourages many Indigenous students including Indigenous women law students, to whom she imparts her optimism, wisdom, hope and vision.

Prior to these appointments, she was an executive member of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (1994-2000); chair of the Queensland Domestic Violence Council (2001); commissioner for Queensland for the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families (1997); and a member of the ATSIC Review Panel (2003).

Jackie is one of UQ's leading academics and an Australian icon. Her heritage, her intellect, her own experiences, and her love of history have all contributed to her deep understanding of life and people and have

made her a force behind important Indigenous initiatives in Queensland and Australia. Jackie's vision as an Indigenous Australian "is for people to understand and know their history... then they can better understand issues about native title, Wik, and the *Stolen generations*, but they first have to know and understand the 60,000 years plus of Aboriginal history in the country before we can move on" But, she adds: "I'm still hopeful. I remain forever optimistic".

In 2001 Jackie Huggins was awarded an Order of Australia for her services to the Indigenous community, particularly for her work with reconciliation, literacy, women's issues and social justice. In 2000, she had been honoured with the Queensland Premier's Millennium Award for Excellence in Indigenous Affairs.

She has several publications to her name, including *Auntie Rita* (with her mother Rita Huggins, 1994) and *Sister Girl* (1999).

Keywords: women's business, healing, origins of Kummara, continuity of culture, tradition, cultural influence, equality, feminism, role of mother, decolonization

J: We were talking about **Aboriginal women's business of Kummara** and I have heard about women's business meetings organised by Musgrave Park community recently. Do you think it is **time for women now?**

H: Oh yeah. You know as Dulcie said, it's the *See Change*; it's the timing of all the stuff. And it is very important. We are on a *See Change*, we are on a change. I can see it coming.

J: Do you recall the **origins of Kummara?**

H: I have heard it through Sue and she told me that she was so passionate about little babies, children, which she loves, and the women that would provide the parenting, whether they would be single women or married women, whatever. But she was very passionate about getting some programs in place. And I know, initially, she had a friend that lived not far from me, and we had lunch around her place, and that's when Sue was thinking and wanting to start it all up. And there were some young single women down at the Valley, some girls on drugs and sniffing, in the early days, and she wanted to do something with them too. And she said that she'd got on board Mary and Lilla and Lesley. Dulcie wasn't there, she came later. And I knew that if Sue put a hand to anything, it would be honest, it would be reliable, it would be transparent, and that would operate from a very good governance arrangement. And they have been very successful. I just hope that people realise them, that they will be given some more assistance, and resources to grow bigger and bigger. And I see my role now as supporting those women as much as I can because I do come off to national comities next year and I will have some time for our local people in the Brisbane area. And I know that I will always be travelling and always doing the international and the national stuff but it's all that obligation of giving back yourself to your community. And people know I've been around and now I am just too busy to even do stuff here but that's my decade plan to give it back more increasingly. But as I said I don't wanna be on the boards as there is too many politics on the boards. I just wanna be around and speak for them or facilitate workshops if they want me to, and to have a presence there in their lives. In that way I can help. Now I can't do any hands on, coal face issues but I can certainly be a spokesperson if they want me to. But look at them, they have plenty spokeswomen who can talk about anything, about any subject. So I think that's my contribution back to them and back to the Brisbane community too, where I grew up. And I think we are all doing the basis of it. I am just trying to seek some avenues to alleviate the gram statistics we have and to improve the social justice conditions for our people. That's always in the back of my mind, that's why I do it.

J: How you see **Kummara in among other Indigenous organizations?**

H: I travelled this country extensively. I would say because probably I know Kummara better than most of the other organisations, that they made me feel very proud to see how successful they are, and how they are able to gain rich partnerships in their work. But also, to do that with a really strong Aboriginal women's foundation and philosophy. I think it is so important the way they see themselves, and other people see themselves, and certainly the way that they are able to draw the future directions. I think they do a great job and in comparison, I would say, that they are probably one of the best in the country. You know I've had a lot of experience in knowing and visiting Aboriginal organisations... But I hope they will put in for a reconciliation governance award soon, I hope they will, and they should. I will be speaking about it with Sue next Thursday if she is up to it. Good on them! I watched them from when they started and when they were growing... The presentation that they did recently was really indicative of how they've progressed.

J: What did you think about my interview with Lilla Watson? Was there anything you would like to comment on?

H: There was absolutely nothing I would disagree with. Because I know how Lilla talk about the stuff and I know Mary's feelings and I have learnt a lot from those two women, they were my peers and they still are. In many aspects they are. They are older than me, they are wiser, I think, and I still look up to them. They ran the first Indigenous program here in the 80s and taught me so much there.

J: Before I first went to Kummara, you told me it was a healing centre. Do you think we can understand Kummara's work as a cultural healing?

H: Oh yes. It's a place of cultural healing because they apply the very essence of Aboriginal women's cultural healing practices as we know it today. And while we adapted these modifications over the years... really, it's a place that...is all about healing. I think healing is pivotal to the way that it does its business, to the way that it sees itself, in a way that it shares information with other people. It certainly is a healing place, through all the politics that might surround it, presents itself from outside and possibly inside too. But, you know, people get healed and they feel good about places and people who do the right things but more importantly, they do it in such an honest and dignified manner. And that's what I like about Kummara. Because I know those women who work there are so dedicated. You know, if I had a business, I would employ them tomorrow, but they would need Kummara (laughter). And they are all family. Like the unit here, at UQ (meaning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies unit at Queensland University), we consider ourselves as a family. We have our little fights; we have our little disagreements but... And with that, when you're comfortable with yourself, you can embrace other people; you can embrace them and let them into your field and let them into your space. And I know that Kummara has done that for you. And we have done that for you too. I know you've had a great experience and I can't wait to see it all written up! And this will be a very valuable document for Kummara too.

J: Jackie, how would you say can we prove the continuity of unwritten Indigenous culture and the fact that it has never been lost? In other words, how do you think has been the knowledge passed down throughout the Australian history, from generation to generation?

H: Ok, even though, there are still elements of people speaking language... for instance, my grandmother, she was sent to Cherbourg Aboriginal mission. They said to her family, "you will be punished if you speak your language; you practice your traditional costumes and so forth". But they subverted this and they spoke their language at home - and my mother and aunties and uncles have told me that - but they tried to speak English most of the time. So the result of that is that I know maybe a hundred Aboriginal words from my mothers' local language which we still use in our text to each other. And you would have heard that in Kummara, 'gammon' and the Aboriginal English, or 'deadly' or Murri. I think Dulcie is a deadly queen. She says 'deadly' all the time! So we have used it as a means by surviving this world. But if people say to me we have lost our culture, I don't believe that for one moment. We haven't lost our culture. And it was best described to me at a conference in Hawaii where I went two years ago. And there this beautiful classical looking Native American woman, she just looked like if she stepped out this Pocahontas movie, she was just so classically beautiful and she said that "people who say that any Indigenous people in the world have lost their culture are so untrue. It's untrue because we haven't lost it; we just need to reconnect with it. We need to reconnect we that culture, with that Old Aged culture of thousands and thousands years because it's there. It might seem stagnant, it might seem suppressed, it might seem that it's not there or invisible but we need to reconnect in various way to that." And that made a lot of sense. And then she drew this diagram of a circle. And she said, "Imagine that you have come from Indigenous women's world. Therefore you are blessed with many traits. You have come out of the body of an Indigenous woman who has had her culture. Surely that does affect the baby. So when you come out every person has a culture. So the way you reconnect and how you define that culture that will make you an Indian or make you a Czech, or make you a Greek or Jew or an Asian. It's about finding that reconnection. And I have used that in answer to a lot of my people that got up there and said "we've lost our culture, we've lost our culture" - I say "you haven't lost it, you can find it, and you just need to reconnect to it". Even though colonization was so horrible that it dismantled our people, it's about getting that reconnection going.

J: So did for example your mother tell you about old traditions and costumes?

H: She told me as much as she could. And I know that you know the history when they were put onto missions and reserves, denied their language, and culture, and all the rest of it, and they were punished for doing so, that in very small ways could they pass that on. But my mother told me stories, and she passed it onto my son John, when he was very young, and on her other grandchildren. So she had stories and she had knowledge of stories that were passed down by her mother and father. So it's there in a sense. That's why I think we've never lost our culture at all.

J: Might it be useful for Aboriginal people to be **influenced from other cultures**, and to, kind of transform their culture?

H: It can be ok. Just take out what you want and throw out the rest. I have to tell you this story. I have been involved in the history summit and I worked in a working party of five people to look at the way history is taught in this country and also to do up questions and milestones about inseting Aboriginal history and Aboriginal people. And the first one was how many years we have been here? I say seventy thousand, Sam Watson says a hundred thousand, and forty to sixty is the anthropological number but there are debates within that as well. It was a long time. And then they have a theory called 'land bridge' theory that we came from Asia. And Mary Graham's answer to that – no matter how long they've tried to prove that we come from anywhere else – just the longer we keep getting into this country. Because, you know, there has been some radio carbon dating in the Kimberley that puts us back up to hundred thousand years. But it was much, you see, and they couldn't define that. But definitely there has been scientific archaeological evidence up to at least sixty thousand years. And those debates go on all the time between us and African people and even Chinese people. So when I say we our one of the oldest living surviving cultures on the planet, whereas some of our people say "we are the" but I don't know whether you can be so prescriptive and so definite about that. But anyway, look, it's a long time. They say the 'arrival' of the first peoples. And I say to them you have to take out 'arrivals' because our worldview is that we evolve from this land. And you could see them "oh, here she goes again", and I got a few nods. I said so we put the time loan "first peoples occupied Australia for forty to sixty thousand years" and then there was even a bit iffy with "occupied" and I said "well, inhabited, there's scientific evidence that says we were here, we were the first people" so thank goodness I got that change. This is where my terms of reference that Lilla speaks about in her paper come through because we know that but it can be dated with scientific evidence as well. So this dynamism is very important in terms of person's name, where they come from, there's a whole range of that I guess.

J: What do **the terms of reference mean for you?** Lilla and Mary want women to talk about it, and to find a common ground.

H: I think I am very much in that league too. Because I think I know what terms of reference is to me and it is being strong and proud and having your identity as a woman, as a mother, as an aunt...generally being a good person. And you know these Aboriginal terms of reference too... I think that people who do cultural awareness training courses, they should be doing Whiteness training courses about themselves. Let's put the shoe on the other foot now. Because you know it's about people fixing themselves up before they come and wanna do stuff with us. But Aboriginal terms of reference are about how people get that back and feel very proud about it. But I think it is very difficult to explain that in the mainstream. If you try to explain Whiteness, I think it's much easier. But with Aboriginal terms of reference people would say, "well that's only exclusively Aboriginal, only Aboriginal people can do that". And what does that mean? Whereas if you say to White fellows "well what do you mean? If you explain your stuff to me... It's just an oppositional idea. And even the rites of passage which are a new idea... I think that is fantastic and we are learning heaps. See the *See Change* – as Dulcie calls it - the sea change is coming.

J: Is that like **White people are asking you what your terms of reference are but that they even wouldn't know how to express their own?**

H: Exactly, that's exactly what you mean. It's like "you show me yours, I show you mine". It's like in the Sister girl book, there's a passage on it. Actually, bell hooks says this in our interview we did together (Huggins, J., *Sister Girl*, 1998, p.61). She says: "And that means I don't want a White woman to want to be my friend when she hasn't yet thought about unlearning her racism. Otherwise, then I feel like I am being put once again in, you know, "I want you to be my friend so I can have someone who will help me unlearn my racism". Once again, this puts Black women in the kind of maid service position, as "help me to do something that will benefit me" rather than the kind of approach of mutuality of sharing that would say "we could be bonded together because we are both committed to the anti-racist struggle and the anti-sexist struggle and that those two things, those two commitments converge and under gird and strengthen each other." And then I said how really drained I am when I go to a feminist conference and I am the only Black woman there speaking out about Indigenous women's rights. And I must say that 'thank goodness' you know there is a lot more now out there... not so many but our Black women are going to conferences and are talking about Indigenous women's position which is really good and that stuff that bell hooks said... I said "well look, forty thousand years is the answer, you work out the equation to racism, and you tell me why you get that answer all the time. So it's about putting stuff back on students to work it out themselves because we get tired of doing the educating. But we still do it, you know? And that's the graciousness of, particularly Aboriginal women, I think. But that's our role, that's what we should do.

J: How would you **compare the feminist call for equality with Indigenous women's agenda?**

H: See, we were always an egalitarian society; it was not until a patriarchal arrangements and colonialism came to our country that it fragmented that. And see, a lot of our men try to be like White men and try to be chauvinistic and violet women and children because, you know, before there were very strong rules etcetera. So we've always – and I think it has been an intrinsic part of Aboriginal women's business that we've never lost that independence that autonomy and strength of being Aboriginal women, whereas men have. Their roles have been incredibly eroded, emasculated, and they are trying now to get back and to find that. Through the men's groups that have been running around the country they are trying to redefine what their role is, and whether they have lost out, whether they have gone off the rails. Women have always been with children so we follow that path down there, and stay on it, you know, despite all the obstacles.

J: If the position of women with children is still there, do **Indigenous women need to strengthen this position?**

H: Yeah, see, it's there. It's a bit like...culture. We need to reconnect to those models; we need to reconnect as women. Because we have it, innately, still health within our beings, that is far easier for us to do that. Far easier than men, I think.

J: Would you say that the path it is still in there but not strong enough?

H: Well, I don't think it has ever been loud publicly to really resurface or to be a part of the living vibrant culture that we have. And that's why the media will go to men as spokesmen. That's why we see all the men talking about it. Whereas those men too, they know that women are ones that do all that work. You know, they have mothers and sisters and aunts and cousins who have never lost it and who will always be the backbone of the society. And that's what women are essentially. Aboriginal women are the backbones of the society. And you get very few arguments from Aboriginal men. In fact, when I've said that very publicly in lectures and in Aboriginal meetings, you know, I see all the men nod. Because it's true. I've not seen one man come up to me and say, "that's not true at all". I haven't had it when men have not accepted that.

J: But that's what exactly women in Kummara told me that there was too many **men everywhere**, in public domain, speaking on behalf of women, and even in child care.

H: Yes. I mean, who does the Australian newspaper go to? Noel Pearson. Who does a lot of the media go to here? It's a brother Sam Watson. And whilst that's fine and good, I would love to hear Mary Graham or Lilla Watson speaking out. I have an opportunity to do that all the time but it's about women who are around, doing the coal face and working in the local communities all the time. And that's the same for all over Australia. I get the newspaper clips everyday that are Indigenous. And I would say eighty percent are men speaking. So I agree with Kummara, we have to create a shift in that dynamic. Women now get to be the main spokes people, whereas before they've never had. And I blame on anthropologists historically because when they came into our country, they only spoke to the men. And left the women on one side ignored us completely.

J: Some White authors have said that **the position of women has reasonably weakened** as they are no longer maintaining their former roles, and that they are much more settled, staying at home, and more dependent on their husbands. How would you contradict this?

H: A lot of White women say that but if you read my stuff in gender relation to Australia called 'Aboriginal women are everywhere' and 'Sister girl', you will see that we are not sitting at home and doing nothing at all. We are raising families and raising communities. And we are also involved in community activities so I think what you've read has obviously come from a non-Indigenous woman who has not had the insight or hasn't had that experience of Aboriginal women, of knowing us. I don't know any Aboriginal woman who is just sitting at home. She is doing something very vital for her children and for her communities. And I think that's what Kummara is about, about promoting those women. And the job they do is the most precious in the world of raising kids. I can't think of any more important job than being a mother.

J: In terms of the importance of this mother's role, Lilla was talking about that feminist movement created a **negative image of mothering**. Running the house and raising children might be observed as a sign of women's inequality to men. Do you agree?

H: Because their first thing is work, isn't it? The protestant work ethic is that you go out and you work. And carrying about children is secondary to that. And it's not. You have to give children the first part. I mean, if you can combine that, it's great. Many people combine that, even I, being a mother and a working person.

J: And how does it come that there has been many Indigenous organisations, even in child care, that were run by men? How it does come that Mary Graham cannot be sitting here?

H: I think there is a lot of institutional racism and sexism but that's attached to this. See, I know in the early days of childcare, all the spokesmen were men. They hardly ever saw the women speaker, although you know there were people like Mary Graham that were doing the hard yards but you would never hear them when there were TV cruise or radio cruise around. So it's about doing that public stuff. But I don't think the mass communication in this country gets it even now. There are some very capable, eloquent, and beautifully spoken women in our communities. They just go to the men, and you know when Patrick Dotson was the chair of the council for reconciliation, he did great job, but they went to him all the time. They went to Evelyn Scott too when she became a chair but I don't think not as much as Patrick. Because there was a male voice there, a male stand, you know?

J: It might be everywhere the same.

H: It's everywhere throughout the world, isn't it? And it's about men, trying to regain their place as well. And we gonna help them with that. We are all part of this... ideology we call Aboriginality - women and men together for sure. And the racism stuff, it doesn't play favourites between men and women for sure.

J: See, I haven't read much on **decolonization** but would you say that this reconnecting is part of it?

H: Yes, because we have been stripped off a lot of our cultural practices and... Yeah we do need to reconnect because we were stripped with colonization. We need to get back to where we were. Now I was thinking, when you wanna claim Native title in this country, how you get land claims, where you have to prove traditional and continuant occupation. And, for many of us, we can't do that. A lot of us have been pushed into missions and reserves and disconnected from our country. We don't know that story, those are not our places. But we do need to somehow find a way of reconnecting. People at Stradbroke Island defined. It's a clear case. They haven't moved from there. They still practice their traditional culture. They go out and hunt and fish and look for oysters, hunt kangaroo on the island and stuff... And you can see that all, it's a very clear case. But they are still trying to get their claims up and the Law of this country doesn't wanna see us. And you have been here to a very important time when the Nunga people in Perth got Native Title. You see the fears ness of the opposition to that? The government just said, "we'll take them to court", the liberal and the labour government have joined their forces to say it's not on and it shouldn't be given. So the government comes against us no matter what political persuasion they are. Still a long way to go!

J: Ok. The last question Jackie - what do you read?

H: I love reading. I am always reading three books at a time. Ok. One is always a self-help book because, I think I am on a journey now of...I just turned fifty this year and I wanna read a bit more about other people. I get very tired of reading Indigenous texts, so I need to escape a bit (laughter)! I love reading autobiographies and life stories of anyone. Sue gives me some of the romance books. They are sort of a women meets a man later in life and they fall in love, you know it's a nice fantasy. The book I am reading now was given to me for my birthday and it's about 60s civil rights movements and it's very heavy, so I read different books to escape from that a little bit, and then come back. I usually read the self-book, it's healing book and I take bits what I can from it.

J: Did you say it is mostly Indigenous?

H: I would say it used to be very much Indigenous until last two years. All of it was Indigenous. In fact I have never read much outside. But I found now I am reading more outside Indigenous books. I have to read it because of my work. And you know what? No one has ever written a good healing book for Aboriginal women. And I've been told that in the next seven years, I am going to write a book that would be bigger and better than anything ever I've written. And I kind of have a hunch that it could be this book. Cause all the stuff that I am doing on national Aboriginal women's leadership and way we talk about it, every time I think I should be putting this into a book. So I think that's where I am heading in the way of my next book. That will be out in seven years time. Always when I've written things, my women love it. Aboriginal women tell to me "oh Jackie that was just the best thing you wrote on leadership, the best thing you wrote on feminism, you know, because you really spoke to me". Well, I wanna find a book that will speak to them about having success, being positive...So it will be this book on healing, or self-help, or on being an Aboriginal woman, all those things. It will be in that vain I think.

C. PHOTODOCUMENTATION



Kummara Family Care Centre, West End, Brisbane



A rainbow serpent – mythical Aboriginal creature, made by Kummara centre, West End, Brisbane



Lilla, me, Lesley, Mary, and Nicole behind, Kummara Family Care Centre



Children playing at Child Care Centre Koolyangarra, West End, Brisbane



Sue, Jackie, Lesley, Dulcie at See Change Conference



Women painting on canvas at See Change Conference