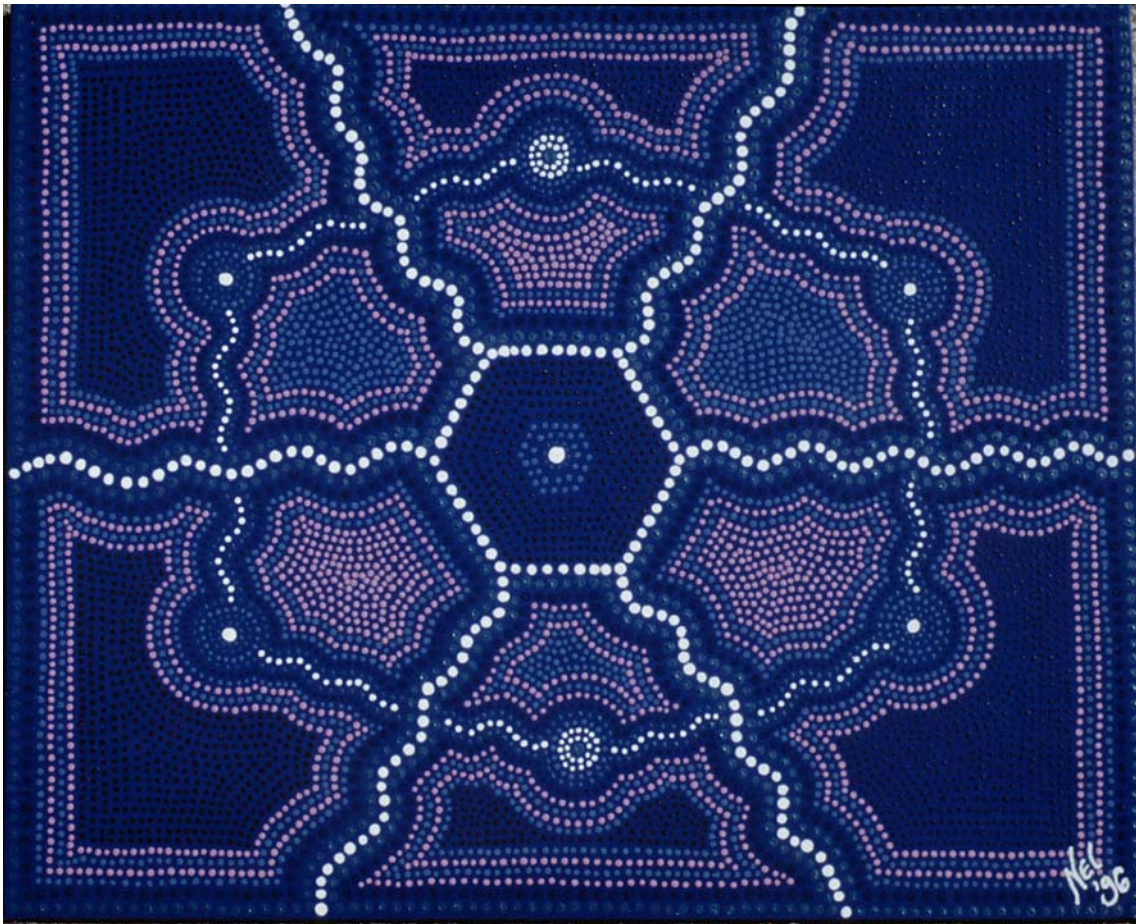


## Chapter Three: Aspects of Contemporary Aboriginal Australia



# Chapter Three: Aspects of Contemporary Aboriginal Australia

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Upon the recommendation of Western Australian Aboriginal advisers, the word “Aboriginal”, rather than “Indigenous” is used in this Benchbook

## **Summary of Chapter Three**

### **Aspects of Contemporary Aboriginal Australia**

#### **3.1 ABORIGINAL DEMOGRAPHY**

##### **3.1.1 Migration to Urban Areas**

- Aboriginal migration to populated centres increased greatly from the late 1940s

##### **3.1.2 Overview of Australia's Aboriginal Population**

- In 2006 Australia's estimated resident Aboriginal population was 517,000 persons, an increase of 13% increase from 2001
- In 2006 the Aboriginal population was characterised by a lower median age and larger families

##### **3.1.3 Health**

- The Aboriginal population has a relatively high prevalence of health problems and chronic diseases

##### **3.1.4 Education**

- Aboriginal education rates are improving in some sectors

##### **3.1.5 Employment**

- The Aboriginal labour force participation rate shows improving trends

##### **3.1.6 Stressors**

- Stressors may exist to a relatively large extent

#### **3.2 SOME FEATURES OF CONTEMPORARY ABORIGINAL CULTURE**

##### **3.2.1 Aboriginal Culture in Urban Areas**

- Traditional Aboriginal culture survives and practised in urban areas

##### **3.2.2 Survival of Aboriginal Languages**

- Only one third of the hundreds of original Aboriginal languages still survive
- In 2006, 12% of Aboriginal people in Western Australia said they spoke an Aboriginal language

##### **3.2.3 Use of Names**

- The use of names in Aboriginal culture remains complex, and the taboo on referring to deceased persons by name remains in some communities

### **3.3 ABORIGINAL AND ANGLO-AUSTRALIAN CULTURAL VALUES**

- 3.3.1** It appears that broad differences may exist between Aboriginal and Anglo-Australian values, including in relation to identity, life orientation, the concept of “family”, responsibility for children, social obligations, connection with land and styles of interaction



## CHAPTER THREE

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# Aspects of Contemporary Aboriginal Australia

### 3.1

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## ABORIGINAL DEMOGRAPHY

### 3.1.1 Migration to Urban Areas

- **Aboriginal migration to urban centres increased greatly from the late 1940s**

Although Aboriginal people traditionally inhabited what became the urban areas of Australia, post-colonisation migration by Aboriginal people to those populated areas increased greatly in the late 1940s. The factors giving rise to this migratory trend were both voluntary (responding to employment, sport and educational opportunities, and to health matters) and involuntary (involvement in the criminal justice system)<sup>1</sup>.

Accelerated Aboriginal migration to urban areas raised public awareness about many Aboriginal issues: in particular, health, education, housing, land rights, and employment. Those issues came to a head in the 1960s, and following the 1967 referendum, the constitutional prohibition upon the Commonwealth making laws for Aboriginal people was removed. In the early 1970s historians such as Henry Reynolds took a revisionist approach to the writing of Aboriginal history in the post-colonial era, raising public consciousness of Aboriginal dispossession and cultural dislocation to new heights<sup>2</sup>.

### 3.1.2 Overview of Australia's Aboriginal Population

- **In 2006 Australia's estimated resident Aboriginal population was 517,000 persons, an increase of 13% from 2001**

At 30 June 2006, when the most recent Census was taken, Australia's estimated resident Aboriginal population was 517,000 persons or 2.5% of the total population. Of that Aboriginal population, 90% of people were estimated as being of Aboriginal origin only; 6% were of Torres Strait Islander origin only; and 4% were of mixed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin<sup>3</sup>

In Western Australia, Aboriginal people comprised an estimated 77,900 persons (or 3.8% of the State's total population). Western Australia has the third highest estimated number of Aboriginal residents, after New South Wales (148,200 persons) and Queensland (146,400 persons). Western Australia had the highest Aboriginal growth rate (18%) in the country since the 2001 Census: the national growth rate was 13%<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> F Gale *Urban Aborigines* Australian National University, Canberra, 1972, p 79.

<sup>2</sup> See for example H Reynolds *Aborigines and Settlers: The Australian Experience 1788-1939*, Cassell, Melbourne, Australia, 1972; H Reynolds *The Other Side of the Frontier: Aboriginal Resistance to the European Invasion of Australia*, Ringwood, Victoria, 1981.

<sup>3</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics *Population Distribution, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2006*, 15 August 2007, 4705.0, p 4 ([www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au)). (Accessed 10 July 2008) The estimated resident population is calculated by adjusting the census count for instances in which Aboriginal status is unknown and for net undercount.

<sup>4</sup> ABS, *Population Distribution, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2006*, 15 August 2007, 4705.0, p 4, ([www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au)). (Accessed 10 July 2008)

Between 2001 and 2006, the Census count of Aboriginal people had doubled: the high level of growth reflects natural increase and non-demographic factors, such as people identifying their Aboriginal origin for the first time.

The experimental estimated and project resident total Aboriginal population for 2009 is 528,645 persons (low series<sup>5</sup>) or 600,201 persons (high series<sup>6</sup>).

*Note:* the 2002 *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey* indicated that more than half of the total Aboriginal population identified with a clan, tribal or language group and that almost 70% (and, in the case of Western Australia, 75.7%) of the total Aboriginal population had attended a cultural event during the past 12 months<sup>7</sup>.

- **In 2006 the Aboriginal population was characterised by a lower median age and larger families**

In 2006 the median age of the Aboriginal population was 20 years (compared with 37 years in the non- Aboriginal population). Older Aboriginal people (those aged 65 years or older) comprised just 6% of the Aboriginal population compared with 13% of the non- Aboriginal population<sup>8</sup>.

In 2006, Aboriginal households were more likely than other households to be family households (81% compared with 68%) and less likely to be one-person households (14% compared with 23%). Among Aboriginal households, 5% were likely to be multi-family households, compared with 1% for other households. Living arrangements varied with geographical remoteness, in very remote areas, 20% of families were multi-family<sup>9</sup>.

Aboriginal households tended to be larger than other households (average of 3.3 per household, compared with 2.5, respectively). In Aboriginal households, the average number of dependant children was 1.1, compared with 0.5 in other households. Over a third of Aboriginal people (39%) lived in private occupied dwellings<sup>10</sup>.

### 3.1.3 Health

- **The Aboriginal population has a relatively high prevalence of health problems and chronic diseases**

In April 2006 the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey* was published. The survey reported that in 2004-2005:

- 78% of Aboriginal people considered that their health to be “good to excellent”; however:
- 35% of Aboriginal people aged over 55 years reported having diabetes;
- 22% of Aboriginal people aged over 35 years reported having high blood pressure;

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<sup>5</sup> ABS, *Australian Demographic Statistics*, Dec 2007, 3101.0, p 39 ([www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au)). (Accessed 10 July 2008). The low projection series assumes changes in the Aboriginal population as a result of natural increase and interstate migration only.

<sup>6</sup> ABS, *Australian Demographic Statistics*, Dec 2007, 3101.0, p 39 ([www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au)). (Accessed 10 July 2008). The high projection series assumes a component of increase in the Aboriginal population observed between the 1996 and 2001 censuses which cannot be attributed to natural increase.

<sup>7</sup> ABS, *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey*, 2002 (4714.0) pp. 6, 22. ([www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au)) (Accessed 10 July 2008)

<sup>8</sup> ABS, *2006 Census of Population and Housing: Media Releases and Fact Sheets*, 2006, 2914.0.55.002 ([www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au)). (Accessed 10 July 2008)

<sup>9</sup> ABS, *Population Characteristics, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians*, 2006, 4710.0 ([www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au)). (Accessed 10 July 2008)

<sup>10</sup> ABS, *Population Characteristics, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians*, 2006, 4710.0 ([www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au)). (Accessed 10 July 2008)

- the most common health problems reported by Aboriginal people were eyesight (30%); asthma (15%); back problems (13%); heart and circulatory problems (12%) and ear or hearing problems (12%);
- 10% on Aboriginal children reported having ear or hearing problems (approximately 3 times the rate of non- Aboriginal children)<sup>11</sup>.

A study of the incidence of chronic diseases among the Aboriginal population undertaken in 2004-005 revealed that, allowing for differences in the age structures of Aboriginal and non- Aboriginal populations, Aboriginal people were more than three times as likely as non- Aboriginal people to contract diabetes and more than 10 times more likely to have kidney disease. In 2004-2005, approximately 74,000 Aboriginal people reported having diabetes, cardiovascular disease or kidney disease. Aboriginal people living in remote areas had a higher incidence of those diseases than those living in non-remote areas<sup>12</sup>. Forty-seven per cent of Aboriginal people aged 35 years and older were daily smokers and 68% were overweight or obese. In non-remote areas, 82% of people in this age group had low exercise levels<sup>13</sup>.

### 3.1.4 Education

- **Aboriginal education rates are improving in some sectors**

The *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2007* report disclosed that 2006 21% of 15 year-old Aboriginal people were not participating in school education, compared with 5% of 15 year-old non-Aboriginal people. In 2006, Aboriginal students were half as likely to as non- Aboriginal students to continue to Year 12. In 2004-2005, 22% of Aboriginal students had completed Year 12, compared with 47% of non-Aboriginal people and the proportion of Aboriginal students who achieved a Year 12 certificate had changed little between 2001 and 2005.<sup>14</sup>

However, the proportion of Aboriginal people participating in post-secondary education increased from 5% in 1994 to 11% in 2004-2005, and the proportion of Aboriginal people who achieved a Certificate 3 or above increased from 8% to 21% in the same period. In that same period, non-Aboriginal people were more than twice as likely as Aboriginal people to have completed a post-secondary course.

### 3.1.5 Employment

- **The Aboriginal Labour force participation rate shows improving trends**

Aboriginal people generally experience high unemployment rates and lower workforce participation rates than non-Aboriginal people. Limited employment opportunities and low education levels in remote communities led to the development of the Community Development and Education Programs (CDEP) scheme, which was also intended to maximise the capacity of Aboriginal communities to determine the use of their workforce.

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<sup>11</sup> ABS, *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey, Australia, 2004-2005, Media Release, 4715.0* ([www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au)) (Accessed 10 July 2008)

<sup>12</sup> ABS, *Australian Social Trends, 2007: Selected Chronic Conditions among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, 4102.0* ([www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au)) (Accessed 10 July 2008)

<sup>13</sup> ABS, *Australian Social Trends, 2007: Selected Chronic Conditions among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, 4102.0* ([www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au)) (Accessed 10 July 2008)

<sup>14</sup> Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service *Provision Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2007* ([www.pc.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0005/69278/kevincators2007overview.pdf](http://www.pc.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0005/69278/kevincators2007overview.pdf)) pp 15-15. (Accessed 10 July 2008)

In 2006, an estimated 186,900 Aboriginal people were in the labour force (either employed or unemployed). This represents a labour force participation rate for all Aboriginal people aged 18 years and over of 59%. Of the Aboriginal people in the labour force, more lived in regional cities (78,000) than in major cities (62,700). Major cities had the highest rate of participation - 64%. Males accounted for 55% of the Aboriginal labour force in 2006<sup>15</sup>.

In 2006, an estimated 160,300 Aboriginal people were in employment. This represents half of the Aboriginal population aged 15 years and over. The employment to population ratio for Aboriginal males rose to 57% in 2006; the employment to population ratio for Aboriginal females rose to 44%<sup>16</sup>.

### 3.1.6 Stressors

- **Stressors may exist to a relatively large extent**

The 2002 *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey* revealed that Aboriginal people aged 18 years and over were 1.5 times more likely to experience at least one stressor in the previous 12 months than the non-Aboriginal community.

Approximately 82% of Aboriginal people living in non-remote areas reported stressors in the form of death of a family member or close friend, serious illness or disability and unemployment. For Aboriginal people living in remote areas, the most frequently-reported stressors, after the death of a family member or close friend, were overcrowding at home (42%) and alcohol and drug-related problems. Only 57% of the non-Aboriginal community reported experiencing at least one stressor in 2002<sup>17</sup>.

In 2002, around 15% of Aboriginal people reported risky or high alcohol consumption during the previous year. The rate was higher for males than for females (17% compared with 13%) and it peaked for males aged 45-55 years (22%) and for females aged 35-44 years (19%). The level of risky/high alcohol consumption was similar for Aboriginal people in non-remote and remote areas<sup>18</sup>.

Note: it appears that there is little comparative analysis, however, on the incidence of dysfunction, domestic and child abuse in rural, regional and urban areas and information about whether in fact those environments are less stressful for Aboriginal people.

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<sup>15</sup> ABS, *Labour Force Characteristics of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians: Experimental Estimates from the Labour Force Survey, 2006* 6287.0, 2006, p 8. ([www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au)). (Accessed 10 July 2008)

<sup>16</sup> ABS, *Labour Force Characteristics of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians: Experimental Estimates from the Labour Force Survey, 2006* 6287.0, 2006, p 8. ([www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au)). (Accessed 10 July 2008)

<sup>17</sup> ABS, *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, 2002: Summary of Findings* 4714.0 ([www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au)) (Accessed 10 July 2008).

<sup>18</sup> ABS, *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, 2002: Summary of Findings* 4714.0 ([www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au)) (Accessed 10 July 2008).

## 3.2

### SOME FEATURES OF CONTEMPORARY ABORIGINAL CULTURE

The impact upon Aboriginal people of colonisation, dispossession and urbanisation has resulted in the breaking down of many cultural ties, traditional practices and beliefs. In particular, urbanisation has represented a significant change in the economic and social status of Aboriginal people: it has led to wider press coverage and representation of Aboriginal viewpoints; greater public awareness of issues relating to Aboriginal people, and the arousal of a public conscience about Aboriginal housing, employment, health and education<sup>19</sup>. The mounting campaign for Aboriginal land rights gave rise, in the 1970s, to land rights legislation and, in the 1990s, to the law of native title.

The struggle for land rights, better health, education, and living conditions and for self-determination has stimulated the emergence of Aboriginal spokespersons and leaders. Such leaders have emerged in politics, the public service and other local and national organisations. This, together with a growing interest in traditional Aboriginal culture and custom, has led to the development of Aboriginal social and political groupings not wholly based upon kin or culture groups:

“A wave of feeling for ‘Aboriginal’ identity, pointing toward pan-Aboriginality, seeks to establish a common socio-cultural heritage.”<sup>20</sup>

In cultural terms, Aboriginality may be understood as having as much to do with the socio-cultural environment, one’s values and one’s life experiences as much as it does with biological descent<sup>21</sup>.

#### 3.2.1 Aboriginal Culture in Urban Areas

- **Traditional Aboriginal culture survives and is practised in urban areas**

“We are often considered by outsiders to have lost our culture and to be completely integrated into non-aboriginal life. But we have a very unique culture in our city community that reflects traditional cultural values.” (Professor Larissa Behrendt)<sup>22</sup>

In 1998 the Australian and Torres Strait Islander Commission emphasised that “the cultures of Indigenous people in Blacktown, Redfern, Fitzroy and Musgrave Park are no less ‘Aboriginal’ than the cultures of their counterparts in Cape York, Arnhem Land or the Kimberley.”<sup>23</sup>

For some Aboriginal people, urbanisation takes the form of “fringe-dwelling”, almost wholly Aboriginal communities. For others, it may mean actual or apparent absorption into non-Aboriginal society. Some Aboriginal people are highly mobile within urban areas, often moving residences in order to be near family members.

<sup>19</sup> F Gale *Urban Aborigines* Australian National University, Canberra, 1972, p 5.

<sup>20</sup> RM Berndt and CH Berndt *The World of the First Australians* Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1988, p 528.

<sup>21</sup> Australian and Torres Strait Islander Commission *As a Matter of Fact: Answering the Myths and Misconceptions About Indigenous Australians*, Office of Public Affairs, ATSIC, Canberra, 1998, p 60.

<sup>22</sup> Behrendt L “Aboriginal Urban Identity: Preserving the Spirit, Protecting the Traditional in Non-Traditional Settings” *Australian Feminist Law Journal*, v. 4, March 1995: 55-61, p 56.

<sup>23</sup> ATSIC *As a Matter of Fact: Answering the Myths and Misconceptions About Indigenous Australians*, Office of Public Affairs, ATSIC, Canberra, 1998, p 61.

Cultural survival is manifest in cultural trends, such as the “snowballing” effect of Aboriginal urban migration (when one family member moves to the city, others tend to follow in a “chain migration” pattern<sup>24</sup>); and the continued strength of the extended family, which may include many non-linear family members<sup>25</sup>.

Aboriginal people may choose to form separate social groups within the broader community. The use of kinship terms and courtesy titles (such as aunty, uncle, brother and sister) may be common in such groups. It has been observed that such practices provide important psychological and emotional support to many Aboriginal people, and reflect the centrality of family and community in modern Aboriginal society<sup>26</sup>.

### 3.2.2 Survival of Aboriginal Languages

- **One third of the hundreds of original Aboriginal languages still survive**

In 1990, published research indicated that approximately two thirds of the estimated hundreds of original Aboriginal languages were extinct or nearly extinct. Of the surviving 90 languages, only 20 could be classified as “healthy”, in that each such language is spoken by and transmitted to children. The remaining 70 surviving languages are classified as “severely threatened”<sup>27</sup>.

- **In 2006 12% of Aboriginal people spoke an Aboriginal language at home**

In the 2006 Census, 52,000 people (one in eight, or 12% of Aboriginal Australians, aged 5 years and over) spoke an Aboriginal language at home. The majority of those people (372,000 or 86%) reported speaking only English at home. Fifty-six percent of Aboriginal people living in geographically remote areas reported that they spoke an Aboriginal language; only 4% of Aboriginal language speakers live in major cities. Fifty-six percent of Aboriginal language speakers live in the Northern Territory. The most-used Aboriginal languages were Torres Strait Creole (5,800 speakers) and Kriol (3,900 speakers); *Arrernte*, *Djambarrpuyngu*, *Pitjantjatjara* all had more than 2,500 speakers<sup>28</sup>.

### 3.2.3 Use of Names

- **The use of names in Aboriginal culture remains complex, and the taboo on referring to deceased persons by name remains in some communities**

The rules relating to the names by which an Aboriginal person may be called remain complex today. This applies particularly (but not exclusively) in traditional Aboriginal communities and in non-urban areas of Australia.

Where a more traditional culture is practised, an Aboriginal person may be known by several names including the relevant kinship term, a moiety name and a totem. An Aboriginal person may be referred to as “X’s son/daughter”, which may cause confusion where “X” has a number of sons or daughters, each of whom is referred to in that way. Sometimes a person is given a nickname as he or she grows older, which may derive from a physical characteristic or from a particular incident in that person’s life<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> F Gale *Urban Aborigines* Australian National University, Canberra, 1972, p 74.

<sup>25</sup> F Gale *Urban Aborigines* Australian National University, Canberra, 1972, p 165.

<sup>26</sup> C Bourke and B Edwards ‘Family and Kinship’ in C Bourke et al (eds) *Aboriginal Australia* Second Edition, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, Queensland, 1998, 100, pp 113-114.

<sup>27</sup> A Schmidt *The Loss of Australia’s Aboriginal Language Heritage* Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 1990, pp 1, 2. See also **Chapter Five**.

<sup>28</sup> ABS, *Population Characteristics, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2006*, 4713.0 ([www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au)). (Accessed 10 July 2008)

<sup>29</sup> A Glass *Into Another World: A Glimpse of the Culture of the Ngaanyatjarra People* Institute for Aboriginal Development, Alice Springs, Northern Territory, 1990, p 31.

For non-Aboriginal people, difficulties may arise where a person is referred to by a combination of names e.g. an English name, a surname and a subsection name.

“For example, [a man] might be called *Kumaranyga* (his personal name) by some people, or *Tjampu* (‘left handed’), his nick name. He may be called *Tjakamarra* (his subsection name) by others. He might be referred to as X’s uncle or Y’s father. These are all appropriate labels...”<sup>30</sup>

Accordingly, it may be difficult for a non-Aboriginal person to be certain that he or she is speaking or referring to an Aboriginal person by the correct or culturally appropriate name. Moreover, many traditional Aboriginal names (as well as other Aboriginal words) are difficult for non-Aboriginal people to spell and to pronounce. Such difficulties may be exacerbated by the fact that the sound of an Aboriginal name may be hard for non-Aboriginal people to understand.

As discussed in **Chapter Two**, in many traditional Aboriginal communities the name of a deceased person may not be mentioned for a long period after that person’s death. Today, the use of a deceased person’s name remains in some communities. To speak or use the name of a deceased person indicates lack of respect for the deceased and for the bereaved, and inflicts great hurt and sorrow upon the latter. Even words which sound similar to the name of the deceased person may become taboo.

Accordingly, a deceased person may be mentioned only indirectly or by reference: for example, as “X’s brother” (X being the surviving person). In the case of the predictable death of a very old person or a baby, the taboo may last for as long as a year. However, if the deceased dies in the prime of life, or if his or her relatives are especially sensitive about the death, the name of the deceased may not be spoken for 15 to 20 years<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> J de Hoog and J Sherwood *Working With Aborigines in Remote Areas* Mount Lawley College, Mount Lawley, 1979, p 78.

<sup>31</sup> A Glass *Into Another World: A Glimpse of the Culture of the Ngaanyatjarra People* Institute for Aboriginal Development, Alice Springs, Northern Territory, 1990, p 39.

### 3.3

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## ABORIGINAL AND ANGLO-AUSTRALIAN CULTURAL VALUES

Broad differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal (or mainstream) values have been identified by a Jill Byrne, a non-Aboriginal community development consultant, who worked for a number of years in the Kimberley. Some of Ms Byrne's observations of sharp distinctions between Aboriginal and Anglo-Australian values are re-produced below<sup>32</sup>.

Ms Bryne suggests that the principle "take only what you need today" is a central and enduring traditional Aboriginal value. In contrast, Anglo-Australian culture often operates under the capitalist value of "accumulate for tomorrow". Further, traditional Aboriginal society tends to be collectivist (value: "we all look after one another") whereas Anglo-Australian culture is individualist (value: "look after yourself").

Other points of comparison are briefly noted below. Note that the comments are very broadly stated and are not intended to be prescriptive in any way.

### 3.3.1. Apparent Differences between Aboriginal and Anglo-Australian Cultural Values:

- **Identity:**
  - *Aboriginal society:* a person's identity may be influenced by family and social factors. The nurturing of relationships is highly valued, as is the existence of a strong social network.
  - *Anglo-Australian society:* personal identity is typically individualistic and measured by a person's occupation, level of education and socio-economic status.
- **Life Orientation:**
  - *Aboriginal society:* the focus is often group-centred. In traditional groups, the past and the present are of great importance: the future may be less so. Immediate economic matters may take precedence over future ones. Often cooperation, rather than competition, is important.
  - *Anglo-Australian society:* the emphasis tends to be on individual achievement and individual rights. There is often a strong focus on the future, and perhaps the pursuit of personal happiness. Career, family and the accumulation of wealth are priorities. People are often highly competitive. Society is often diverse, stratified and status-conscious.
- **The Concept of Family:**
  - *Aboriginal society:* "family" consists of the extended family, often including quite distant family members. Family concerns are of primary importance, and the greater part of a person's life and his or her social activities may be conducted closely within the family group. Death or illness in the family generally takes priority over everything else.

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<sup>32</sup> J Byrnes 'A Comparison of Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Values' *Dissent* (3) Spring 2000 p 6 et seq.

- *Anglo-Australian society*: the basic family unit consists (perhaps) of one set of parents and children. Frequently, feelings of obligation towards those in lineal family relationships are stronger than those in collateral family relationships. Family and social relationships are not necessarily co-extensive.
- **Responsibility for Children:**
  - *Aboriginal society*: children may be perceived as the responsibility of the extended family, or even the wider social group. Older people are often referred to as “Aunty”, “Aunt”, “Uncle” or “Unc” as a mark of respect, even if they are not blood relatives<sup>33</sup>. However, children are also expected to make their own decisions from an early age.
  - *Anglo-Australian society*: parents are held responsible (or hold themselves responsible) for a child’s behaviour, advancement and well being into that child’s mid-to-late teenage years, and perhaps even beyond that time.
- **Social Obligation:**
  - *Aboriginal society*: people may conform to others’ expectations, particularly those of the immediate and extended family. No-one should be left in need. Family members are often expected to “look out” for one another.
  - *Anglo-Australian society*: is characterised by more limited relationships. There may be a sharp decline in a sense of responsibility from immediate family to other persons and to the wider community. However, charitable traits may be apparent.
- **Connection with Land:**
  - *Aboriginal society*: often a strong sense of relationship to ancestral land exists, even where people have not lived in that place. Spiritual strength is gained from being in one’s own country. Traditional people may wish to live in their own country if possible, or at least to visit it, and even to die there.
  - *Anglo-Australian society*: usually “land” has a secular and economic connotation. Although a person’s birthplace may have sentimental value, it is not necessarily of great importance otherwise. Travelling widely is valued, and living far from your birthplace is common.
- **Styles of Interaction - Direct or Indirect:**
  - *Aboriginal society*: since the greater part of a person’s life may be lived within the family group, respect is accorded to “inner” privacy, such as personal thoughts and feelings. Only certain people may be entitled to ask or to know certain matters of a personal nature. Consequently, the use of hints and invitations to volunteer information are preferred to direct questioning.
  - *Anglo-Australian society*: directness and forthrightness in conversations is valued, as is the free exchange of ideas and public discussion of issues. The asking of direct questions is quite acceptable, except in relation to personal matters.

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<sup>33</sup> Judicial Commission of NSW *Equality Before the Law: Bench Book*, 2006 ([www.jc.nsw.gov.au/benchbks/equality](http://www.jc.nsw.gov.au/benchbks/equality)) Sec 2.3.0.4. (Accessed 5 July 2008)

- **Material Possessions:**
  - *Aboriginal society:* in traditional society material goods are not highly prized, because family and spiritual matters are of the most importance. In a more contemporary context, material possessions of all kinds may be highly valued.
  - *Anglo-Australian society:* material possessions are highly prized: the acquisition and accumulation of material goods is socially sanctioned.
- **Education:**
  - *Aboriginal society:* the word “education” may refer to learning cultural and possibly spiritual ways, as well as to formal education in mainstream institutions.
  - *Anglo-Australian society:* institutional, multidisciplinary education is highly valued. Often the focus of education is to maximise career and employment prospects.
- **Public Behaviour:**
  - *Aboriginal society:* social behaviour is often public. In some traditional communities, drinking in public with friends and family is accepted. In such groups, public displays of affection between men and women may be disapproved.
  - *Anglo-Australian society:* generally speaking, there is disapproval of public drinking. However, public displays of affection between men and women are usually acceptable<sup>34</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup> J Byrnes ‘A Comparison of Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Values’ *Dissent* (3) Spring 2000 p 6, pp 6-1.

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