

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE AND ABORIGINAL ORGANISATIONS IN RURAL-URBAN AUSTRALIA

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Since the colonisation of Australia in 1788, Australian Aboriginal people have been exposed to a barrage of socio-economic-political-cultural influences which have led to rapid and often traumatic socio-cultural change. Government policies, after an initial period of land alienation and conquest, aimed in successive periods at six goals: extermination, protection/segregation, assimilation, integration, self-determination and finally self-management (Rowley 1971). Australia's colonial history, then, followed patterns common to most colonial nations. Indigenes were subjugated and special legislation, directed to managing, controlling, protecting and 'uplifting' the minority, was set in place. As a result of such institutional racism, Aboriginal people became totally dependent on the majority.

Unlike other colonial nations, however, Australia never recognised Aboriginal peoples' prior occupation or ownership of this continent. Indeed, "The land itself was rendered subject to the legal fiction of being 'uninhabited'." (Gumbert 1984: 11) Consequently, no treaties have ever been signed to regulate relations between Aboriginal groups and non-Aboriginal governments. Today State and Federal Legislation continues to dominate Aboriginal Affairs and to define the parameters of Aboriginal policy, despite the fact that most forms of institutional racism have been abolished. The current policy of self-management, initiated in 1975,

... requires that Aboriginals, as individuals and communities, be in a position to make the same kinds of decisions about their future as other Australians customarily make, and to accept responsibility for the results flowing from such decisions. The Government sees this policy as offering Aboriginals a means of

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breaking out from the state of dependency which for so long enchained them (Ian Viner, 1978, the then Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, cited in Lippmann 1981: 81-82).

This article analyses the impact of current legislation, specifically the Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act (1976), which was enacted to facilitate self-management in Aboriginal affairs. It argues that, far from breaking the state of Aboriginal dependency, current policies inadvertently reinforce it because they fail to enshrine cultural difference in legal pluralism and thereby perpetuate structural violence.

Following Galtung (1970) we define structural violence as violence inherent in the social order. It may be expressed as physical violence, indicated in patterns of life expectancy across groups and time (Alcock and Kohler 1979); it may underlie psychological violence, indicated in patterns of alienation (Arosalo 1971); or it may be expressed as systemic frustration of aspirations (Khan 1978). Systemic frustration of aspirations means that the predominant social order denies one category of persons access to the prerequisites of effective participation in a system developed and controlled by powerful interest groups. These prerequisites, as outlined by Savitch's (1975) analysis of systemic bias, include organisational and communication skills, financial resources, and commitment of personnel and trained staff. Further, it is argued, legitimate pathways to effective participation are generally defined by the controlling groups in order to maintain their own power. This is an aspect of the fact that:

[p]ower derives from imbalances in the social exchange... In other words, one interactant achieves power through the inability of the other to reciprocate. The latter is in a position of dependence: satisfaction of need is contingent on compliance. (Russell 1981:67)

As a group, Aboriginal people in Australia are more dependent and less powerful than any other group in Australian society. Poverty is endemic (Gale and Brookman 1975); unemployment affects at least 40 to 50 per cent of Aboriginal adults and up to 90 per cent in some communities (Eckermann, Watts and Dixon 1984; Miller 1985). On average Aboriginal children are more likely to be streamed into 'special' classes, and they stay at school for shorter periods and attain fewer education qualifications, than other Australian children (Morgan 1987).

Indeed, it is clear that Aboriginal people in Australia are subject to all forms of structural violence. Thus physical violence is evident in the fact that adult Aboriginal life expectancy is on average 20 years less than that of non-Aborigines, while infant mortality continues to be at least two and sometimes three times higher than among non-Aborigines (NSW Task Force on Aboriginal Health 1983; Thompson 1986). Similarly, psychological violence is evident in the levels of alcohol used to alleviate stress and anxiety (Cawte 1972, 1974; Eckermann 1977; Eckermann, Watts and Dixon 1984). It is also demonstrated by the incidence of self-mutilation (Wilson 1982) and the number of deaths in custody currently under investigation by a Royal Commission.

In this paper, however, we wish to focus on systemic frustration as an expression of structural violence. While its causes and effects are more covert than those of other forms of structural violence, it may be argued that systemic frustration typifies more completely the position of Aboriginal people in Australian society today. It forms a major obstacle to Aboriginal people's aspirations for self-management, and so for "breaking out from the state of dependency which for so long enchained them" (Viner, quoted above).

We shall pursue this theme in three sections, in which we argue that:

- (i) social organisation and patterns of decision-making within rural/urban Aboriginal groups¹ have been oversimplified;
- (ii) such oversimplification has led to the development of pervasive stereotypes which have helped to shape culturally inappropriate legislation such as the Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act (1976) as well as the attitudes and actions of some bureaucrats who are supposed to assist Aboriginal organisations to achieve their aspirations;
- (iii) the resultant mismatch between Aboriginal expectations and legislative provision has heightened conflict within Aboriginal groups and perpetuated "a position of dependence" (Russell 1981: 67). This assertion will be supported by case-study material.

1. By 'rural-urban' Aboriginal groups we mean those which strongly identify themselves and are identified by others as Aboriginal but which do not pursue a traditional life style.

(i) Rural-urban aboriginal social organisation, value orientations, and patterns of decision-making

In the past anthropological research (e.g. Reay and Sittlington 1949; Bell 1956; Beckett 1958; Fink 1957/58; Calley 1959; Hausfeld 1960; Barwick 1962; Docker 1964; Reay 1964; Beckett 1965; Gale 1964) into rural-urban Aboriginal groups has concentrated on delineating levels of socio-economic deprivation, and the persistence, despite decades of colonial subjugation, of traditional belief systems. Investigations have aimed to ascertain the forms of social organisation, people's attitudes, and their sense of identity. Most frequently, it seems, analyses have been built on theoretical orientations based on concepts of assimilation and/or integration.

Almost invariably the same generalities appear: rural/urban Aboriginal organisation is 'still' based on close kinship bonds; sharing is common as are the squandering of money and heavy drinking; a high value is placed on generosity and community living and decision-making. Some 'tribal' vestiges remain, but much of the communities' ethos is derived from the poor or itinerant whites with whom they have had contact, or has arisen from cultural exclusion and social disintegration.

By searching out possible links with traditional orientations, by stressing steps along a culture continuum, and by attempting to analyse groups in terms of their actual or potential assimilation, researchers have characterised non-traditional Aboriginal groups as follows:

In the southern and south-eastern regions, in country towns and cities, and increasingly too in some of the northern towns, people of Aboriginal descent have become divorced from traditional Aboriginal life. Some are so far removed from it, both socially and conceptually, that they have only an idea of it and no first-hand knowledge.... Their difference from other Australians rests on acknowledgement of Aboriginal descent (that is, an Aboriginal identity), and low socio-economic status (restricted opportunities, limited choice) and on general socio-cultural deprivation (restricted mobility and restricted access to the acquisition of skills and education). In essence ... they are ... a disadvantaged people. (Berndt 1971: xv)

To some extent Berndt's analysis is apt - there is ample evidence of poverty, discrimination and continued restriction. However, such

analyses have helped to strengthen stereotypes about the poverty of culture among rural/urban Aboriginal people. Accounts of some features of their life as 'typically Aboriginal' have been based on ill-understood aspects believed to operate in traditionally oriented Aboriginal groups. In the process the concept of 'the Aboriginal community' has evolved. This supposedly embraces all Aboriginal people in a sharing, caring, supportive network where action is guided by preoccupation with the present and past rather than consideration for the future (Department of Education NSW 1982). However, because we have so little knowledge about "the bones of culture" (Sutton 1981:6) among rural-urban Aboriginal groups, it has been assumed that the 'real' cultural differences between such groups and mainstream society are minimal.

We believe that these notions have influenced the legislation and institutional structures developed to support the policy of self-management. Perhaps it is time to re-examine the values, norms and patterns of organisation prevalent among rural-urban Aboriginal people today and to ask whether these are sufficiently reflected in the policies for their self-management.

Among those Aboriginal groups with whom we have worked,² the following patterns appear to be common:

- * The basis of rural-urban Aboriginal social organisation is the family (Barwick 1962; Gale 1964; Beckett 1965). Families are most frequently compound and nuclear, rather than extended, in character (Eckermann, Watts and Dixon 1984; Dowd 1985); they are linked by intricate patterns of alliances, based on kinship and power, to form groups or factions (Eckermann 1977; Dowd 1985). Any 'community' is composed of a number of such factions. Each faction is part of a larger network which frequently extends

2. Eckermann has worked in a number of Aboriginal communities in South-east and South-west Queensland as well as North-west and Central New South Wales. Contacts in Queensland have been continuous since 1969; work in New South Wales began in 1977. At various times during these years research was supported by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, and the Armidale College of Advanced Education.

Dowd has worked in Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory since 1978 and in North-east and Central-Coast New South Wales since 1981. Research in 1984/1985 was supported by the Kellogg Foundation and the North-Coast Region Department of Health.

beyond a specific community, but which does not include other factions with whom it shares a geographic location.

- * Patterns of influence and prestige rarely extend beyond an individual's own faction and network. There are, of course, men and women who are respected generally. Their prestige, however, is based on their 'good reputation' and retained only as long as they do not interfere in the affairs of other factions.
- * A 'good reputation' is based on being a 'good person'; this is someone who is independent, kind, hard-working, empathetic and self-sufficient (Eckermann 1980 and 1979).
- * Factions acquire prestige within a geographic location primarily because their members live up to the standards of 'good people'. On another level factions acquire some prestige and a great deal of power by dominating 'community organisations' set up to further the policy of self-management (Dowd 1985).
- * Most consensual decision-making occurs within the family and outcomes are determined by elements of power and control as much as by affection and kinship. Consequently, when resources are shared within the family, patterns of reciprocity are strongly influenced by the levels of control which individuals wish to exert - the larger the contribution made by an individual on one occasion, the greater the demands which may be made subsequently by that person (Eckermann, Watts and Dixon 1984).
- * Patterns of decision-making within a faction, and beyond that within the wider network, are based on similar principles. Those who accept goods and services are indebted to those who provide them. Acceptance signals at least a tacit agreement that a favour is owed. Consequently kinship patterns are not always reliable indicators of group coherence because the deployment of power in the competition for scarce resources may have more significance.
- * 'Communal' decision-making, encompassing all factions sharing a geographic location, is not a common, nor indeed a culturally-desired practice.
- * Instead, decisions are made on the following basis:
 - (a) individual interest (Eckermann 1977) takes first priority, after which comes the interest of the family in the narrow sense. Family interest in its wider sense is then considered,

and finally, and perhaps rarely, the interest of the 'community' (Eckermann 1988);

- (b) complete trust and reliance is generally placed only in people who belong to the same alliance or faction (Dowd 1985);
- (c) individuals rarely give up their right of veto even when they have elected a person from 'the community' (or even their own faction) to represent their views (Dowd 1985).

It may, of course, be argued that in industrial society many groups are formed and operate on the basis of specific, vested interests; and that in all such groups the principles of 'consensus' and 'majority rule' are illusions fostered by those intent on gaining or maintaining internal control and external support for some particular factional interest. As Barker (1983: 25) points out, "Group power contests take place primarily within political and economic arenas...." Within these arenas a group's resources determine its access to political and economic power. In turn access enhances resources and consequently power. In this sense Aboriginal factions could be seen simply as another series of interest groups whose ability to manoeuvre within the power contest determines access to political and economic influence.

The position of Aboriginal people in Australian society is, however, unique. As we have noted, Aboriginal groups have been subject to almost 200 years of institutional racism, enshrined in the many and varied laws and acts specifically designed to control, 'uplift', assimilate and regulate them. No other Australian groups have been exposed to such laws. No other Australian groups have been reduced to such powerlessness in terms of access to political and economic resources.

The 1970s saw a change in government policy. Having long supported legislation designed to eliminate Aboriginal peoples as distinct cultural entities, governments now adopted "a policy of multiculturalism wherein society accepts the legitimacy of cultural diversity and leaves others, including racial and ethnic groups, with the right to their own cultural beliefs and practices." (Barker 1983:25)

Within this newly found climate of tolerance and, we would argue, because of a growing awareness at home and overseas of Aboriginal poverty, powerlessness and dependence, governments sought to enshrine Aboriginal cultural values in new legislation

intended to facilitate policies of self-development and self-management. This legislation included the Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act (1976), an initiative thought to cater for Aboriginal traditions and practices and so to provide Aboriginal people with some measure of control over their destiny.

The cultural traditions and practices considered 'typically' Aboriginal, however, were based on stereotypes of group-orientation, decision-making by consensus and 'community' affiliation. Not surprisingly, these stereotypes fitted well with existing non-Aboriginal systems. If Aboriginal groups operate on the basis of consensus in 'the community', then one could assume that they would be able to elect a committee to represent 'the community', select an executive from this committee and in general fit into the legally-established parameters of non-Aboriginal decision-making. Consequently, the cultural policy decision (Barker 1983) appeared innovative and sensitive, while requiring no changes in the existing structure of administration or the mechanisms of resource allocation.

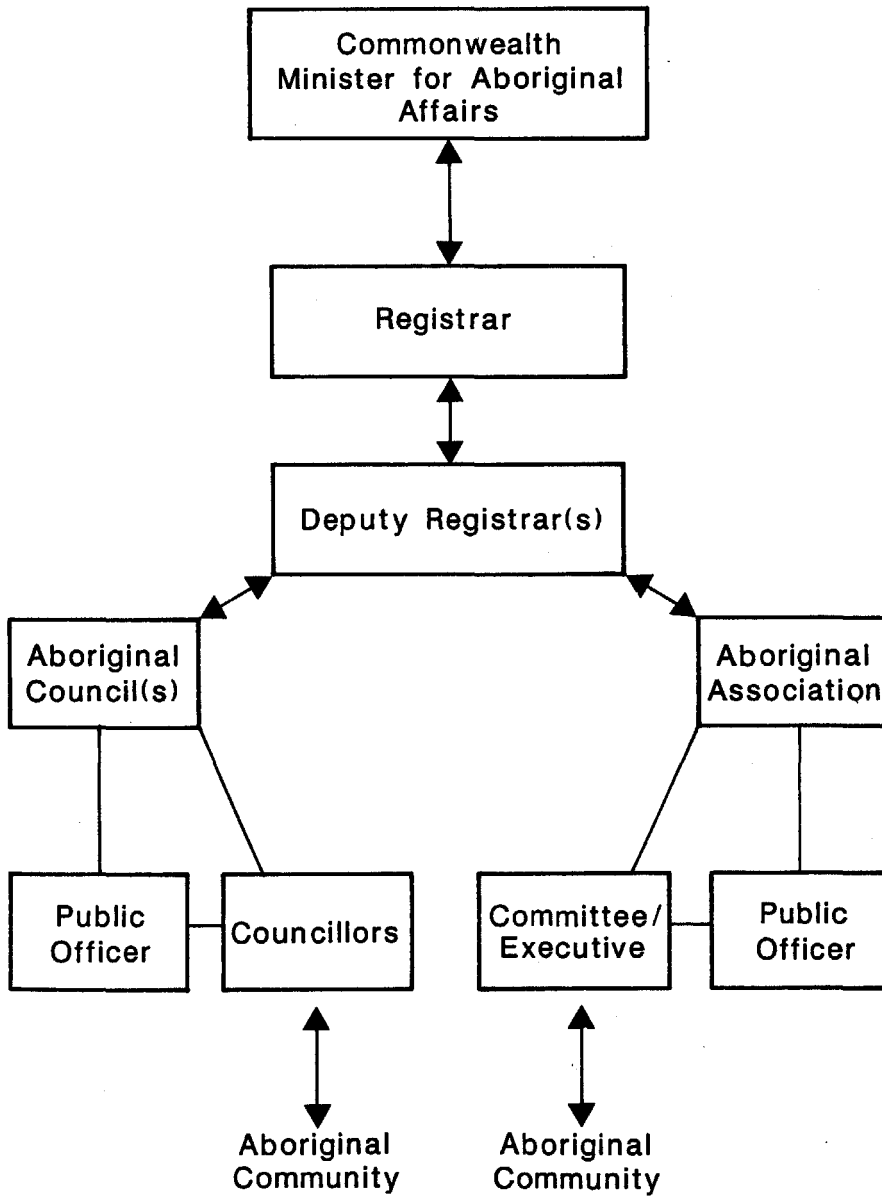
Unfortunately, the existence of 'the Aboriginal Community', like the characteristics of 'Aboriginality', may be only a figment of the white ethnocentric imagination (Von Sturmer 1973). Legislation which assumes the existence of such 'communities' may be culturally inappropriate. As such, it may exert enormous pressure on those Aboriginal groups which attempt to develop political and economic influence within the policy of self-management, and so engender systemic frustration.

Consideration of the Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act (1976) and its impact on one Aboriginal organisation will clarify the source and level of such frustration.

The Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act (1976)

The Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act (1976) was enacted to enable Aboriginal organisations to be incorporated, legitimised and funded to pursue such community endeavours as welfare, housing, education and training, and health. Aboriginal people have certainly not been slow to take advantage of such means to gain self-management. Indeed, as Rowley (1978) has shown, corporations have formed so rapidly that the process has outstripped effective classification. It may be argued, then, that Aboriginal groups have 'taken the carrot' offered by governments. They have expressed a real commitment to the philosophy underlying self-management.

Fig.1: Lines of authority, communication and responsibility as set out in the Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act (1976), sections 4-9, sections 10-26 and sections 43-46.



The structure of this Act, however, sets hierarchical lines of authority, communication and responsibility, as outlined in Figure 1, which place 'the Aboriginal community' within a typical non-Aboriginal bureaucratic framework.

Under the Act any group consisting of at least ten Aboriginal adults may apply to the Registrar for incorporation as an "Aboriginal Council". Similarly, a "committee" of an Aboriginal association may apply for incorporation as an "Aboriginal Association" (sections 11(1) and 43(1)).³ However, because of the expectation that 'Aboriginal communities' will be found to function on the basis of consensus or "mechanical solidarity" (Durkheim 1952), and because such expectations exclude any need to adapt existing bureaucratic systems, an application for incorporation as an Aboriginal Council is to be granted only if the Registrar is satisfied that the Council will be able to perform its functions effectively and that:

a substantial majority of adult Aboriginals living in the area to which the application relates is in favour of the establishment of an Aboriginal Council for the area with the functions set out in the application.... (section 16(1), our emphasis).

Further, the proposed Council generally must not encroach on territory already assigned to an incorporated Aboriginal Council.

Herein lies a massive obstacle to effective Aboriginal initiatives for self-management. The 'community' is defined by the Act on the basis of geographic locality, and majority agreement within this location is required before a Council may be supported. Only one Council may represent any one 'community'. Thus if one faction succeeds in establishing under the Act an institutional arrangement which will result in an allocation of specific resources, other factions are automatically excluded from gaining support for their ventures. In an economic climate where resources are scarce, this leads to bitter and destructive in-fighting between interest groups which frequently aborts all 'community' initiatives.

Indeed, given the form of rural-urban Aboriginal social organisation, people see only four alternative strategies when such a situation occurs. If family groups are opposed to some 'community' venture proposed by an opposing faction, they may protest to the Department

3. In short, essentially any Aboriginal interest group has the right to become incorporated and to apply for funding.

of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) and thus, by questioning the basis of 'community' involvement in the initiative, abort it. Alternatively, they may disrupt the activities of the Council and thus render it ineffective. They have the further option of 'stacking' meetings, and taking over elective positions so that the venture becomes 'theirs' and they can do with it what they want. Finally, family groups opposed to some 'community' program may stay away from the election process, totally dissociate themselves, and thus cripple the venture by withholding support and again calling into question the level of 'community' involvement.

Similar conditions apply to the formation of Aboriginal Associations, for which the Act requires a written application which is apparently to be judged on its merits by the Registrar (see section 43(2) and (3)). Again majority support is necessary, if not strictly according to the terms of the Act, then according to its interpretation and administration by the DAA. The Department officials forcefully support notions of community consensus and majority rule with threats to cut funding to corporations thought not to represent 'the community'. This theme will be explored further in the discussion of our case-study.

Bureaucratic control is also exerted by DAA's demands as to the mode of operation of Aboriginal organisations. Thus according to Section 23(1) of the Act, the term of office of councillors may not exceed three years and no specific time period is placed on the governing committee of an Aboriginal Association. Nevertheless, DAA advises Aboriginal organisations that all executive positions must become vacant and open for re-election annually. This practice ensures that executives are in constant flux and are rarely able to introduce, let alone implement or evaluate, new programs.

Further, according to sections 19(3), 29, 46(1) and 51 Councils and Associations have the right to hold and to dispose of property (other than an estate or interest in land) and may mortgage assets in order to raise funds. In theory, then, organisations ought to be able to become not only self-determining but also financially self-sufficient. Instead, however, Aboriginal organisations in North-west New South Wales, South-west Queensland and the Central coast of New South Wales are directed by DAA to incorporate as non-profit-making organisations, dependent on government funding for survival. This directive seriously impedes an organisation's ability to break away from bureaucratic control.

DAA is able to make such directives under Section 82, paras. (a)-(j) of the Act by which the Governor-General, through DAA, may determine the nature of the organisation's rules and regulations, prescribe the timing and form of an organisation's elections and exercise wide discretionary powers to inspect records or to strike an organisation from the register. Further, all Aboriginal organisations must sign an agreement with DAA which binds them to work within, not only the rules and regulations of the Act, but also those arising from DAA's administration and interpretation of the Act.

Consequently, although the Act clearly directs that the rules of an Association or Council "with respect to any matter may be based on Aboriginal custom" (sections 23(3) and 43(4)), there is little evidence that 'Aboriginal custom' is in fact in a position to influence the Act's implementation in any way.

Thus it may be argued that the Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act (1976) as applied effectively restricts and controls Aboriginal organisations' aspirations. The resultant systemic frustration is heightened by bureaucratic control which channels the efforts of some Aboriginal organisations into avenues which may be more easily administered, but which limit Aboriginal efforts at self-management. The following case study of one Aboriginal organisation highlights this pattern.

(iii) The mismatch between aboriginal expectations and legislative control - a case study of systemic frustration

Like any pressure or interest group (Archer and Goehner 1982), Aboriginal organisations must seek to secure support from their constituents, other sympathetic pressure groups, political elites, and the wider community, in order to gain positional and organisational legitimacy (Burke 1979) and access to necessary resources in the economic and political arenas. In turn, as Archer and Goehner point out, an organisation must within the framework of its own rules, interests and charters, process such resources as it gains access to, so as to meet the needs and demands of its constituents. This processing has consequences which in turn affect the organisation and its subsequent manoeuvring for support and resources.

Unlike other organisations, however, Aboriginal organisations become identified with just one interest group or faction, and moreover become dependent entirely on DAA. The latter, through the Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act (1976), confers positional legitimacy on

the organisations, but in such a way that these fail to meet their own goals and objectives as well as the needs and demands of their constituents.

This pattern is clearly reflected in the following case-study, recorded by Dowd (1985), of a small, locally based, independent Aboriginal Medical Service, the DMS.

DMS began catering for the health needs of Aboriginal people in a rural-urban district on the New South Wales Central Coast as a charitable organisation in 1977. In this district Aboriginal people constitute about 10 per cent of the total population. Organisations like DMS were formed to combat the appalling health situation among Aboriginal people and grew from the realisation that main-stream health services were failing to cater adequately for the health needs of Aboriginal clients. In 1979 it became an Aboriginal corporation funded by DAA. In 1981 the service's premises, located on the edge of town and near the Aboriginal reserves from which most of the service's clients came, were upgraded and extended. In 1984/85 DMS was staffed by four medical practitioners, one nurse and one dentist (all of non-Aboriginal descent), as well as one administrator, four field workers, three dental nurses three nurses' aides and one receptionist (all of Aboriginal descent). The organisation was under the control of an all-Aboriginal Board of Directors.

DMS's constitution defines its goals and objectives which include:

1. To administer and operate an Aboriginal Medical Service to cater for the health needs of Aboriginal people in the area.
2. To improve the health status of Aboriginal communities on the reserves, in the town and in surrounding areas through the implementation of appropriate medical care and disease prevention programs.
3. To involve Aboriginal people in the planning and provision of health care in their community.
4. To train Aboriginal people as field officers and health workers.
5. To teach Aboriginal people to make better use of existing health and social services.

These goals and objectives have far-reaching implications. They not only involve the agency in immediate health care provision but

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necessitate staff training, extensive health education, and Aboriginal community control of and involvement in the agency's planning and administration.

In order to meet these goals and objectives DMS prepares budgets and applies to DAA for funding. Such budgets must, however, be in terms of DAA's funding categories which are set down in a rigid framework and applied to all Aboriginal organisations. The funding categories, as summarised on the table below, are limited to salaries, equipment, building maintenance and vehicles. There are no categories for 'training', 'education', 'liaison' or 'staff development'. Given that all of the organisation's objectives necessitate education (either of staff or of people in the community), the very nature of the funding categories frustrates the purposes for which DMS was created.

Table: DMS Funding Priorities and Categories as a Percentage of Total Budget

priority level		% of total budget
1	wages and salaries	69
2	equipment and supplies	21
3	building maintenance and operating costs	5
4	vehicle replacement and maintenance	5

(Source: Analysis of 1985 DMS Budget)

Ironically, while imposing these rigid funding categories on Aboriginal organisations, DAA (1982) itself expects such organisations to:

1. Contribute toward the development of Aboriginals' ability to manage their own affairs, and to become self-sufficient in the provision of services.
2. Be the subjects of meaningful Aboriginal involvement in design and management, as well as delivery.
3. Operate in areas of activity which the Commonwealth has made particular policy commitments to support.

4. Provide, or lead to, permanent employment in State departments, institutions and agencies.

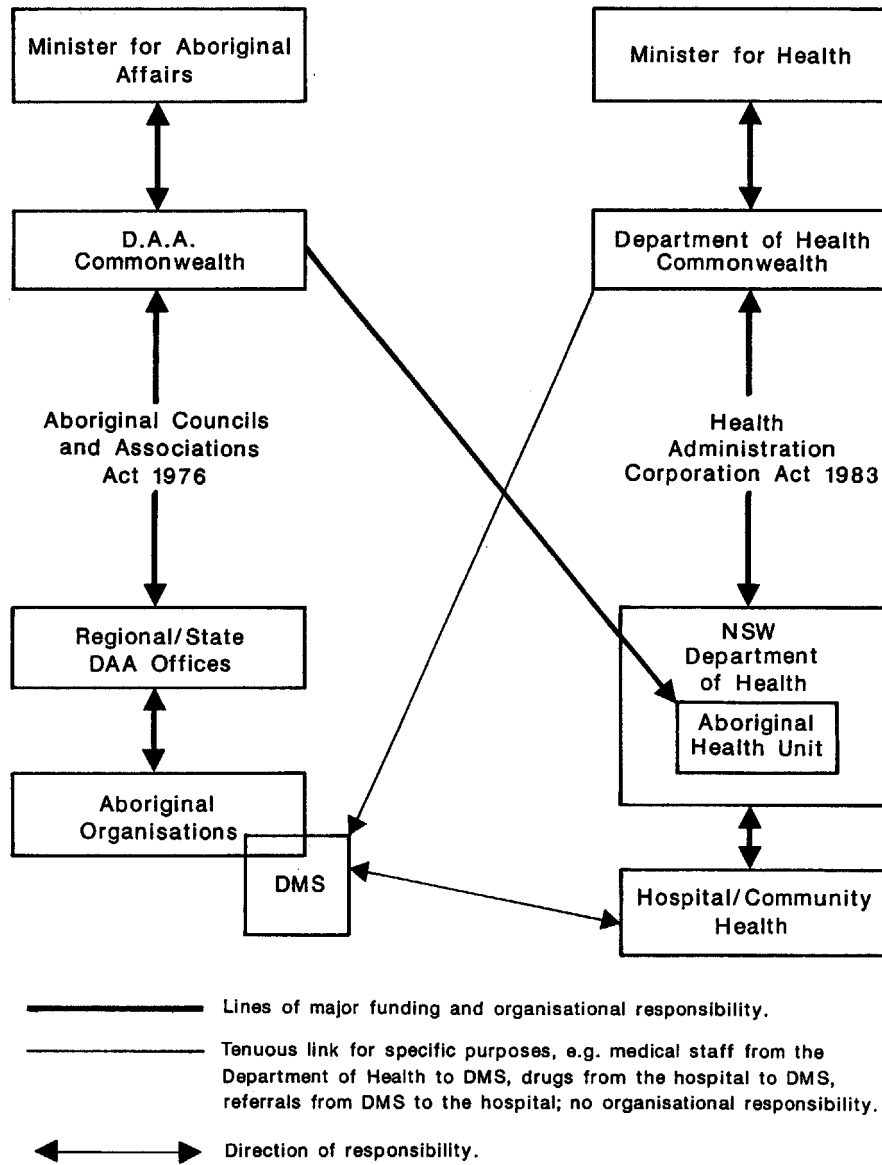
These DAA directives, discussed in October 1982 and to be effective from July 1983, were certainly not evident in DAA's allocation of resources to DMS in 1985.

This incongruence between bureaucratic and agency goals and objectives on the one hand, and resource allocation on the other, creates an almost insurmountable dilemma for DMS. Its Aboriginal Board of Directors, administrator and field staff are 'untrained' in the sense that their educational experiences have been either limited or bad or both (Dowd 1985: 151). Thus in principle much of the daily running and all of the planning and administration is in the hands of individuals who are not 'system-wise'. Resource allocation precludes the in-servicing, training, and education necessary to ensure that these individuals will indeed become self-managing. Consequently, unable to control the agency for which they are responsible, or to take decision-making positions within its operations, Aboriginal staff and directors are forced to depend on non-Aboriginal health professionals and DAA bureaucrats for the required planning, administrative and professional skills.

Thus the DAA Area Manager's comment that DMS "doesn't know how to do a submission [for funding] ... we usually do it for them ... they have no idea," manifests the expectations, attitudes and practices in the Department which encourage continued dependence. Similarly one of the non-Aboriginal medical officers says: "While I like the idea of community control and being an employee I get frustrated in the decision-making process...." (Dowd 1985: 185).

DMS does not in practice provide or enhance access to political or economic power - it is the recipient of that which the Department hands out. The resultant frustration is clearly reflected in the administrator's comments about the budget: "from what I can make out ... they just cut the budget by 10 per cent every time" (personal communication, October 1984).

Fig.2 Government lines of funding responsibility



Coombs (1978: 242) maintains that agencies such as DMS

have in effect been accepted by the government (with reservations and doubts) as an independent Aboriginal controlled element in the administration of government programs.

This comment seems to us unduly optimistic. Governments have not really accepted an independent Aboriginal-controlled element. They have ensured that while policy pays lip-service to self-management, administration maintains control. Thus, although all Aboriginal organisations, including DMS, apply for annual budgets, DAA distributes these budgets in quarterly allotments and only if and when its quarterly reviews of finances demonstrate that funds are not 'mismanaged' or spent outside the Department's funding categories. Not surprisingly, half of the staff at DMS report low job satisfaction. The administrator, who attempts to provide "whatever the doctors want", spends most of his time worrying about "funding ... and workers not turning up," while Aboriginal staff report that most of the day they sit and wait for the phone to ring (Dowd 1985: 177).

DAA's stranglehold on the organisation is also evident when its position on lines of responsibility in relation to government health funding is considered. Figure 2 illustrates that Aboriginal Corporations like DMS are closely linked with, and responsible to, the Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs and, ultimately, to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs. As mentioned this structure confers *positional legitimacy* (Burke 1979) by providing a legal framework and an opportunity to be registered, sponsored and financed by the government. However it does not break down the cycle of dependence on white control and decision-making.

Indeed, the annual threat of funding cuts, the fear that criticism from other factions may lead to DAA intervention, and the annual scramble by factions to gain or maintain power and control, have the result that Aboriginal management groups appear to spend all their energies in maintaining what they have acquired. At DMS they do this by manipulating election times (which are usually arranged to be when most people are out of town); by providing employment for members of their own faction (in the firm belief that these are the only people who may be relied upon); by minimising communication with the rest of 'the community' about their plans and aspirations (to stave off criticism from other factions); and by relying on non-Aboriginal expertise to draft funding proposals and rationales. Consequently they become locked into a vicious circle of scrambling

to maintain power and funding and depending on non-Aboriginal agents for these purposes.

Clearly this process creates only the illusion of 'power'. Aboriginal people in DMS exercise no real control, but the illusion of power generates the aspiration to control. Systemic bias (Savitch, 1975) ensures that DMS equates control, i.e., self-management, with the separation of the 'physical' organisation from overt non-Aboriginal influence. Thus the Chairman of the DMS Board firmly believes that the agency is independent and expresses the conviction by saying that "[white people] just got to realise this place has nothing to do with 'm'" (personal communication, 1984). Consequently DMS does nothing to develop *organisational legitimacy* (Burke 1979) by seeking support for the agency's activities within and beyond the Aboriginal 'community'. As a result, DAA, the funding authority, remains the main pin legitimising the system, maintaining and perpetuating it.

Aboriginal people, then, are misled in a number of ways:

- (a) The government promises them some control over their lives through the policy of self-management and through development of their own organisations.
- (b) Separate agencies support the illusion that self-management is being achieved but are in fact structurally, financially and administratively controlled by the government bureaucracy.
- (c) Aspirations for self-management are consequently frustrated, and people take refuge in the illusion of 'power' which becomes more important than control over the planning and development of services.

Consequently, in Russell's (1981) terms, a dependent client relationship is maintained, reinforcing Aboriginal people's powerlessness and systemic frustration.

What are the benefits generated by DMS? Aboriginal people in the area gain free, comfortable and accessible medical care if they choose to take advantage of it. The local hospital, which originally resisted DMS's incorporation, also benefits, particularly from the agency's work in child health care, because, as Copeman (1980) reports, DMS's activities have markedly reduced the number of Aboriginal children admitted to hospital and reduced their duration of stay. The faction which dominates DMS gains 'power', employment for its members and access to some resources, e.g. clinic cars. DAA

gains in that, while conforming to government policies of self-management, it maintains control over the agency's resources, administration and planning.

Who loses? Ultimately, the community does because it does not really become responsible for its own health nor involved in its own health care provisions. The dominant faction loses by being placed in a constant state of tension and anxiety trying to maintain 'power'. Aboriginal staff lose because, although they are employed, they do not gain the opportunity to become self-sufficient and proficient in their positions. The hospital loses: the fact that it has minimal contact and interaction with DMS means that the mainstream health system (which is not adequately meeting the needs of the Aboriginal community) misses an opportunity to learn what makes DMS acceptable to Aboriginal people, and so loses a chance to develop insight and strategies to improve its own services.

What is the probable balance of benefit or loss over time? There are two viewpoints. One, the pessimistic view portrayed by Thiele (1982), suggests that Aboriginal organisations are caught in a chasm between their community and mainstream bureaucracy. Government policy maintains the status quo by sanctioning the practices, rules and regulations of the bureaucracy without regard for the norms and values underlying Aboriginal community organisation and communication. Another view is that particular constraints, in terms of government control and community response, characterise a stage in community development which will eventually evolve into a more favourable situation as Aboriginal groups gain greater skills in management.

However, a more pressing issue than the difference between these theoretical viewpoints has emerged to confront DMS. DAA indicated (Area Manager, personal communication, October 1984) that unless DMS streamlined its services it would be aborted, leaving both the faction supporting DMS and the community as a whole without either the long-term benefits of developing self-determining strategies or the immediate benefits of accessible health intervention. This threat became a reality in 1986 when the Board of Directors of DMS was removed by DAA and a non-Aboriginal Administrator appointed to investigate allegations of misappropriation of funds and to manage the organisation until the election of a new Board of Directors. The Medical Centre was closed completely when it became obvious that the 'community' could not or would not select a new Board because of severe in-fighting between factions. The incident was reported in

the press as yet another example of government monies being 'wasted'.

DMS remained closed until October 1987 when new premises were opened in the centre of town by Mr. C. Perkins, permanent head of DAA. Interestingly these new premises are some distance from those which operated previously and away from the physical location of the faction which formerly dominated the service. The bureaucracy, unable to deal with the in-fighting and manoeuvring for control generated by the Act, has attempted to 'solve' the problem by relocating the services to more neutral territory. We believe that little will change. Another faction will come to dominate the organisation without gaining any real control while the bureaucracy will continue to apply rules and regulations which will suit its own structure and maintain its power.

Thus Thiele's (1982) view may in fact be the most realistic appraisal. It seems almost inevitable to us that the chasm between Aboriginal community and mainstream bureaucracy will persist and deepen as long as such bureaucracies pay lip service to cultural differences while perpetuating monocultural structures. Majority control will continue to frustrate self-management and thus perpetuate structural violence while the legislation and its administration continue to be at variance with Aboriginal social structures, values and norms.

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