Respect and understanding versus arrogance

A study of how the approach of nineteenth-century British military commander in the Northern Territory, Collet Barker, offers a positive path towards intercultural interaction in Australia

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Michael Hartwig BIK
Student s226733

Supervisors
Mr Greg Williams
Dr Steven Farram

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We then gave 3 hearty cheers for the flag, the emblem of civil & religious liberty, and may it be a sign to the natives that the dawn of liberty, civilisation, and Christianity is about to break upon them. – Explorer John McDouall Stuart journal entry, 23 April 1860 (Stuart 1865).
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For uniformity, I have chosen to use the term Aboriginal people when referring to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of Australia unless in direct quotes or the context dictates otherwise. For similar reasons, I use the term Wik people to include the Wik Way people from the Aurukun area of north Queensland.
Abstract

A review of recent press reports on inter-cultural relations in Australia reveals a discrepancy between the interpretations of the meaning of racial equality and cultural recognition between the Aboriginal people and the non-Aboriginal policy makers. This study looks at the factors that have influenced dominant policy in Australia that, even after over two hundred years, has not only failed to achieve racial harmony based on mutual understanding and respect, but, in many cases, has created a greater divide between the cultures. In contrast to the traditional English attitude of arrogance and domination inherent in the policies of authorities since settlement in 1788, the approach of Captain Collet Barker of the 39th Regiment, commandant of the settlement at Raffles Bay on the Cobourg Peninsula, is described as an alternate approach to achieving inter-cultural harmony and respect. The conclusion reached from this study is that, instead of applying such a policy of arrogance and domination, an approach based on mutual respect and understanding, as practised by Barker, opens the way to meaningful recognition and reconciliation in Australia.
Chapter 1: Introduction

While studying for my Bachelor of Indigenous Knowledges degree I gained some understanding of the culture and traditions of Aboriginal people and how those ways of life have been sustained for tens of thousands of years. As a non-Indigenous person, I had cause to reflect upon what little knowledge non-Indigenous people of my generation and earlier have of the rich culture that existed on this continent before the arrival of the settlers in 1788 and continues to the present. An awareness of the impact of policies introduced by governments and politicians at all levels and all persuasions on the Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders of Australia followed, the effects of which were often to the detriment of those people. While the justification for many of those policies was claimed to be for the welfare of Aboriginal people, I was disappointed to come to understand how the eventual outcomes of many of these policies were the antitheses to the tone of their stated objectives. This research evolved as an attempt to reinterpret these policies from a newly established standpoint outside the confines of the dominant imported ideology.

In a twenty-first century climate where inter-racial reconciliation is prominent on the Australian political agenda, this thesis argues that the road to a meaningful and lasting reconciliation with the Aboriginal people lies not along the Western traditional avenue of dominance, arrogance and superiority, but by walking the path of mutual respect and cooperation based on education and understanding similar to that adopted by Captain Collet Barker and the leaders of the Aboriginal people he encountered at Raffles Bay in the Northern Territory and King George Sound in Western Australia. A succession of Australian governments and policy makers, belonging to a dominant, privileged culture of European heritage, have been, and continue to be, unable to recognise the patterns in their behaviour that marginalise and oppress the minority group, namely the Australian Aboriginal people. Recent events in Aurukun, a small community on the Cape York Peninsula in Queensland, have drawn attention to the consequences of the breakdown of intercultural relations and the destruction of the traditional culture and social structure of Aboriginal people (Armbruster 2016; Martin 2011). The belief in their
superiority inherent in that ideology continues to permeate the political and business leaders of Australia today, perpetuating the disruption to the social structure of Aboriginal people. In contrast to both historical and contemporary records of intercultural relations, the role of Captain Collet Barker as commandant of the settlement of Fort Wellington at Raffles Bay on the Cobourg Peninsula reveals an approach to intercultural relations quite different to that of his predecessors and offers an alternative philosophy to that adopted by the majority of British immigrants and the broader settler population (Fredericksen & De La Rue 2013, p. 3; Powell 2009, p. 51; Wilson 1835 ch.6 p. 12).

The aim of this study is to examine the political and racial ideology inherited by the European settlers from their British forebears that was, and continues to be, a major contributor to the damage caused to the culture, heritage, traditions and the well-being of Aboriginal people (Borland 2016), to document an example of its contemporary effects and to explore alternative responses to that ideology. In particular, the thesis provides an analysis of an alternative approach to implementing intercultural interaction that manifested itself in the leadership of Captain Collet Barker at Fort Wellington settlement in the Northern Territory. A critical analysis of the records of his work during his time at the settlement and those of the work he did prior to and after his Fort Wellington term of office provides an opportunity to understand what was different about his approach and why. The study provides some signposts for how intercultural relations in Australia could have been different if his approach had been more widespread and what we can learn from his approach today.

An exploration of the impact that government and business decisions can have on an Aboriginal community like Aurukun, demonstrates that the models of intercultural interaction inherited from the British ideological position in the 1800s are alive and well in contemporary society. This investigation will examine the history behind the development of the ideology that has influenced those decisions and special consideration will be made of the way the Queensland Government approached the granting of land rights to Aboriginal people and the
subsequent issuing and management of mining leases in the Aurukun area following the discovery of commercial quantities of bauxite in 1957.

To establish the background to the Aurukun experience, the investigation seeks to identify the political, religious, philosophical and economic influences developing the ideology of the British leading to the establishment of colonies in the continent we now call Australia. I examine how that ideology was applied towards the interaction between the European settlers and the traditional custodians of Australia, the Aboriginal people, in the first years of colonisation.
Chapter 2: Background provided by the literature

This chapter examines the ideology that influenced the British attitude towards intercultural relationships at the time of the arrival of European settlers with the First Fleet in 1788. This examination is then extended to the attitude of contemporary political and business leaders through the lens of events in Aurukun in 2016. The thread of this ideology cannot be understood without reference to the events and broad philosophical discussion that shaped and helped formulate British philosophy in the eighteenth century – a philosophy adopted by the British authorities and their Australian representatives from early European settlement that continues to be exercised in contemporary Australian society. Powell (2009, p. 84), commenting on the influence of the Enlightenment in the new colonies, wrote:

The humanitarian strain which [colonial authorities] saw as the great glory of British civilization made it their duty to offer Aborigines the benefits of that civilization – regular work for payment in food, tobacco and cast-off clothes, the charity of blanket issues, the suppression of pagan customs and the worship of the Christian God before they passed, holus-bolus, into His care.

Massive upheavals in European society from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century brought expansion in the competition for access to the supposed wealth of resources in foreign and previously unexplored lands. The literature reported that details of the encounters with the inhabitants of these distant lands became readily available through the newspapers and books following the invention of the printing press and contributed to the formation of inter-racial attitudes in Britain and Europe.

The French historian, Michèle Duchet, wrote:

[Explorers to distant lands] produced an impressive array of printed travel accounts and historical writings, through which the deeds of European adventurers, conquistadores and navigators entered
national historical narratives. Travel and voyage accounts such as the Jesuits’ multi-volume *Relations sur les découvertes et les autres événements arrivés en Canada, et au nord et à l’ouest des États-Unis* (1611–1672) and *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses* (1702 and ff.) provided fundamental information for historians and philosophers, as well as providing inspiration for literary works. Such publications brought the experience of new worlds into the purview of cultivated Europeans (Abbattista 1972, p. 8).

There is little evidence that the authorities, in developing and implementing the inter-racial policies, understood, or even cared about, what results they would have on the welfare, traditions and culture of the Australian Aboriginal people. An examination of the literature on these themes follows.

**The ‘Enlightenment’ and its influence on British colonial policy**

Research has suggested that the invention of the Gutenberg printing press was a major contributing factor towards three ‘historical transformations’ in western Europe that had repercussions globally – the Renaissance, the Reformation and the rise of the Enlightenment Movement and modern science (Marvin 1979, p. 795). The collection and availability of scientific data became much more widespread with the creation of the printing press – enabling the sharing of information gathered by many observers and to create a permanent accumulation of information no longer subject to the decay and fallibility of fading memories and hand-written scripts (Marvin 1979, p. 796). Such an advance facilitated the philosophical development that became the Enlightenment Movement, or the Age of Reason (Munck 2000, p. 1).

The invention of the printing press brought education through books, including the Bible, into the reach of much of the literate population of Europe. This focus on education, reinforced by the philosophy of the Enlightenment Movement, created an ideology in Britain that convinced political and business leaders that, as a means of exploiting the immense riches they believed were available in newly discovered countries, it was their duty to civilise and Christianise the native people of those countries (Ranajit Guha 1997, pp. 171-2). This philosophy extended to
inter-racial relations and was shared by Captain Arthur Phillip and his successors when colonising the new land later called Australia (Anderson & Perrin 2008, p. 157).

This school of thought evolved in the 1600s and 1700s from the theories of Francis Bacon, Isaac Newton, John Locke and Thomas Hobbes in England together with such thinkers as Voltaire and Rousseau in mainland Europe (Barnett 2003, p. 2; Munck 2000, p. 10; Venn 2006, p. 479). It advocated reason as a means for humans to obtain objective truth about the whole of reality. Fuelled by the advances in scientific knowledge, Enlightenment thinkers argued that reason, with an emphasis on rational logic, empirical science and education, further accelerated the transformation of thought from the mystical religious to the scientific logic of education, concepts contributing to the ideology of the period (Hampson 1976, p. 10; Mokyr 2009, p. 33). For example, the literature suggests that the aim of the first European settlers of South Australia in 1836 was to found a free colony encompassing the new Enlightenment principles (Hassell 1966).

Along with the evolution of the Enlightenment Movement, national rivalry and a race for territorial and military supremacy grew (Ferro 2005, p. 221). Settlement of immigrants and convicts outside Europe was a means to expand national agricultural, commercial and demographic resources (Greene & Morgan 2009, p. 17). Influenced by the philosophy of the Enlightenment Movement, British policy makers were of the belief that, as members of the superior race, it was their right and duty to educate the lesser inhabitants of the colonies (Broome 2010, p. 28; Ferro 2005, p. 221; Lim Shan-Loong 2000). Alan Powell wrote that the naval power of the British fuelled British arrogance, so much so that they believed God had chosen them and it was their duty to instruct the heathens in His worship ‘and in their duties as humble servants of the superior race’ (Powell 2009, p. 33).

This theme appears also in the work of Greene and Morgan (2009, p. 1) who suggested that the British held the intellectual desire to bring about Christian conversion and ‘civilisation’ among indigenous peoples. Rowley (1972) wrote that there was a European conviction of superiority over the inhabitants in new colonies and an assumption that the Christian settler was a ‘civilising force and
that economic exploitation was the basis for civilisation’ (Rowley 1972, p. 11). Ferro supported this view when he wrote that the English believed it was their duty to bring their superior know-how and science to the ‘inferior’ people of the world and to civilise them (Ferro 2005, p. 20). However, there was an underlying school of thought that, following the colonisation of Australia, this task was futile when applied to the education of the Australian Aboriginal people as their ‘inferiority’ was unchangeable, especially when Darwinian theory suggested that Aboriginal people as a race were doomed and destined for extinction (Darwin 1872, pp. 149-50). Charles Darwin decided that at some time in the near future ‘the civilized races of man will almost certainly exterminate and replace the savage man throughout the world’ (Reynolds 2005, p. 76). George Arthur, governor of Van Diemen’s Land and the representative of the British king (1823-1836) seemed to be of a similar opinion and considered Aboriginal people of his colony to be ‘a most treacherous race’ and commanded in 1828 that they ‘retire and depart from, and for no reason, and no pretence’ any cultivated or occupied land (Eyre 1964, p. 162). Richard Graham continued the theme of the British attitude towards the inhabitants of occupied lands writing

the force of the imperial power is to be measured not only or even primarily in the overt acts of political control but by the degree to which the values, attitudes and institutions of the expansionist nation infiltrate and overcome those of the recipient one (Graham 1969, p. 5).

This philosophy of superiority and authority travelled to Australia in 1788 with the First Fleet led by Captain Arthur Phillip (Thompson 2010, pp. 41-2) and found that same British approach to inter-racial relations continued through the twentieth century until today, as recent events in Aurukun (among many other places) demonstrate.
The Indigenous knowledge encountered by the settlers

Recent literature by Indigenous scholars has provided an insight into Aboriginal life that Europeans first encountered with the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788. They are the spiritual beliefs and knowledge of Aboriginal people, sometimes referred to as The Dreaming, or in the Central Australian Warlpiri language jukurrpa (as discussed below), their relationship with the land and the role of the Aboriginal community leaders – concepts that were so different to those of Christianity and the Enlightenment familiar to the European arrivals.

This ‘knowledge exists in life, in relationships, in our organisation and controls, in language, in sharing knowledge, in country and in the responsibilities required for individual action’ (Arbon 2008, p. 82).

The term jukurrpa may be applied to individual ancestral beings, or to any manifestation of their power and nature, i.e. knowledge of their travels and activities, rituals, designs, songs, places, ceremonies. This provides the model for human and non-human activity, social behaviour, natural development. Jukurrpa is not conceived as being in an historical past but as an eternal process which involves the maintenance of these lifeforces, symbolized as men and as other natural species (Wierzbicka & Goddard 2015, p. 44).

The land is an integral part of Aboriginal life where Aboriginal people have not only a spiritual connection to it but a social and cultural attachment as well (Korff 2016). For example, Aboriginal woman Melissa Lucashenko described what she sees when walking on country: ‘We see the world that white people see but we are also seeing a mythic landscape at the same time, and an historic landscape ... White people see Rotary parks and headlands; we see sacred sites. And we are looking for bush food’ (Chenery 2013). In the same vein, Aboriginal man, Tom Dystra, said: ‘We cultivated our land, but in a way different from the white man. We endeavoured to live with the land; they seemed to live off it’ (Korff 2016).

Literature detailing the importance of oral history to Aboriginal people of Australia in the absence of printed records highlights the ways in which laws, customs and
traditions governing day to day life, the relationship between the land, community and all other beings, history and responsibilities were passed from generation to generation through song, dance, art and oral stories. For example:

In traditional indigenous communities, be they Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or native North American communities, the most striking contrast with the dominant white culture is that decision-making takes place in an oral rather than a written tradition. The decision-making structures, like the legal, educational, health and economic structures, are generally invisible to Western eyes and ears (McIntyre 2001, p. 109).

For tens of thousands of years, Aboriginal people have looked to their leaders for guidance and governance. The leaders undertook responsibility for maintaining and protecting ancient laws, traditions, systems of knowledge and jurisdictional rights and interests. They are also the custodians of the land and the preservation of the ongoing relationship between the land and Aboriginal community. Leadership is shared among people with different areas of responsibility (Smith 2016). For Aboriginal people, chronological age is of a lesser importance than life stages and relative degrees of maturity. Leaders can be comparatively young in a biological sense (Morphy 2004) and are respected for the value of their cultural knowledge and leadership abilities and are responsible for making decisions on behalf of the community (McIntyre 2001, p. 109; Smith 2016). Leaders also play a particularly valued role in helping children to understand the practical aspects of life, society and culture. Walker (1993, p. 53) describes the importance of the leaders (in this case referred to as Elders) in Aboriginal life:

The role of Community Elders is difficult for outsiders to understand. We rely strongly on them as key decision makers within families. They are the people we hold the greatest respect for because many of them went through so much, so that now we do not have to suffer the injustices they experienced. Their guidance is often illustrated through everyday life and their teachings are often done subconsciously; we follow, we observe and we go on to teach our own families. It is
through our community leaders that the spirit of Aboriginal people is kept alive.

The literature reinforces the concept that respect for the leaders is essential to keep the community strong and the culture alive, for it is these leaders who have been charged with maintaining the knowledge, the spirit and the stories that are the backbone of Aboriginal society; if this respect is lost then there is no hope of gaining the necessary knowledge, nor the encouragement to keep striving (McIntyre 2001, p. 109; Walker 1993). It is this system of belief and community structure that the British settlers encountered when they arrived in 1788, a system that reflected very little of the philosophical understandings of the Enlightenment.

It was unsupported by any written rules and scientific research essential to the philosophy of the Enlightenment and impenetrable to rational logic. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the expansion of the use of the printing press in Europe, including Britain, made access to scientific and Christian teaching accessible to the literate public at large, having been translated into the vernacular (Moore 2015, p. 36). Books became the basis for education and were the basic tools for use in schools and universities. In Britain and Europe, reference material to confirm religious doctrine, support scientific or historical arguments or determine law became more readily available. Aboriginal Australians had no such books to support their beliefs and knowledge, reinforcing the opinion of the Europeans that they were a race uncivilised and godless (Hartley 1842).

In fact, evidence suggests that the British settlers considered it their duty to eliminate these oral traditions and beliefs and replace them with British education and Christianity, a philosophy that dominated inter-racial relations from the arrival of the First Fleet (Murray 1847, p. 2).

**British ideology transported to the Australian colonies**

Following ‘the greatest foreign policy fiasco of the British Empire’ (Mokyr 2009, p. 159), resulting in the loss of the thirteen American colonies, and with British prisons overflowing with inmates, alternate prison colonies were urgently needed to replace the facilities previously supplied by the American colonies (Broome 2010, p. 21; Powell 2009, p. 1). The new land visited by Captain James Cook in 1770
was considered an ideal site for a convict colony to replace the lost American facilities. The remoteness was considered a significant deterrent for convicts with escape in mind, preventing unwanted return to Britain, and the first shipment of convicts and guards landed on the shores of New South Wales in 1788 (Ferro 2005, p. 147). There are many instances in the literature describing contact between the Europeans and Aboriginal people following the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788. An example of the influence of the ideology upon the understanding of, or relations with, Aboriginal people appeared in the Governor Darling’s Commission in 1825 where Darling was granted the power of life and death over all people in the colony of New South Wales, but there was no mention whatsoever of Aboriginal people or inter-racial relations (Watson 1922b, pp. 99-107). His predecessor, Thomas Brisbane, governor from 1821 to 1825, was reported as being unsympathetic towards Aboriginal people, having some shot and imposing martial law in some areas to offset perceived aggression by Aboriginal people (Haydon 1966). In a similar vein, the literature exposes the disconnect between the humanitarian orders given to Governor Phillip and the belief in British supremacy stated in the same document (Broome 2010, p. 22). Early in his instructions Phillip was ordered ‘by every possible means to open an intercourse with the natives, and to conciliate their affections, enjoining all our subjects to live in amity and kindness with them’, while elsewhere he was ordered to ‘possess, dominate and to colonise’ (Governor Phillip’s Instructions 25 April 1787).

Rowley wrote that the assumption used in the formulation of policy towards Aboriginal people at that time was that it was the role of the government to provide the wherewithal to allow Aboriginal people to ‘advance’ into the white community (Rowley 1972, p. 2). He added that ‘... the colonial administrators, at best, tended to see themselves as extending the boundaries of the Kingdom of God as well as the nation state. This quite fundamental intolerance, by discounting the native systems of belief, paved the way for more debased ideologies of colonialism’. This ‘fundamental intolerance’ threatened the whole structure of Aboriginal beliefs, education and society (Rowley 1972, pp. 10-1).
Further examination of the literature reveals that for the emerging colonies to be economically self-sufficient there was heavy dependence on the creation and expansion of the pastoral and agricultural industries. In the view of the colonists, this was necessary to feed the rapidly increasing population of settlers in the new colonies and to generate trade income in the global market (Broome 2010, pp. 76-9; Powell 2009). Henry Reynolds wrote that after initial settlement the British claimed the right of sovereignty over the land on the Australian continent by right of discovery, thus allowing the confiscation of land from the traditional Aboriginal owners (Broome 2010, p. 18; Reynolds 1996, p. 133). Reynolds believed that such claim of sovereignty by the British was inconsistent with international law and was ‘an outrage, a violation of international usage, the assertion of a monstrous principle’ (Reynolds 2013, p. 176). The inference in the literature is that the imposition of British rights and law was at the expense of the traditional rights and laws of Aboriginal people, and such imposition created further breakdowns in intercultural relations rather than improving them.

Some legislation introduced purportedly to promote the welfare of Aboriginal people appears to have had as its underlying motivation the self-interest of the non-indigenous population. For example, Edward Eyre, nineteenth century explorer and government officer, offered as an argument for the increase in funding for the regular supply of food for Aboriginal people in designated reserves, the belief that such provision would extend the influence and authority over Aboriginal people and restrain their natural propensity for wandering (Eyre 1964, p. 460). In a similar vein, the various colonies established the role of ‘Protector of Aborigines’ ostensibly to ensure the welfare of Aboriginal people and to protect their land (Broome 2010, p. 52; Stevens & Petty 1981, p. 11), but the duties of Protector were those of controller, rather than protector, keeping Aboriginal people out of the towns and cities lest they upset the townspeople by their nakedness and un-Christian behaviour (AIATSIS 2014; Broome 2010, p. 53).

Unlike the British settlers, Aboriginal people, rather than living in one fixed settlement, moved throughout their land, following the seasons seeking food sources and shelter. They had a circuit of venues, moving from one to the next as
food sources were exhausted or as ceremonial responsibilities required (Gammage 2011, p. 3). However, such movement was not indiscriminate.

Each of the continent’s many Aboriginal nations have their own distinct borders. These are marked by mountains, rivers and other natural landmarks, in addition to stone arrangements, ‘ring trees’ and other artefacts. Crossing into a neighbouring nation’s lands without permission would incur a punishment, based on that nation’s own set of laws. Roaming the countryside by random whim with impunity was never a possibility, regardless of whether you were from the coast or the desert …

Different environments produced varied demands on the people who lived within them. Arid parts of the continent could sustain fewer people, thus a more delicate balance in managing resources was required, which meant that a semi-nomadic lifestyle was a reality for those living in such environments. However, in coastal and riverine country where the largest Aboriginal populations around the continent were based, people were not nomadic. They did not randomly roam within the borders of their own nations. Movements were based entirely on an understanding of the seasons and the environment, and such movements were limited (Patten 2016).

Amongst segments of the non-Aboriginal population this seemingly nomadic lifestyle needed to be stopped. There was support for the restriction of movement of Aboriginal people and for their education and conversion to Christianity as a means of destroying their traditional culture (Broome 2010, p. 158; Stanbury 1977, p. 34). A correspondent in the South Australian newspaper of 15 June 1847 acknowledged the situation and offered his advice, suggesting:

... in order to make the first step towards the permanent moral and religious improvement of the aborigines, they must be prevented from wandering about the country, their idle, vagrant, mendicant system must be absolutely prohibited, and settled habits of life enforced (Murray 1847, p. 2).
The tone of this offering suggests that these ‘nomadic’ ways of Aboriginal people were considered by the settlers to impede the ‘moral and religious improvement’ of the Aborigines and the only solution was to forcibly prevent them from ‘wandering about the country’. There is no mention that the cause of the ‘idle, vagrant, mendicant system’ was, to a very large degree, the colonisation of South Australia. But it was not only the influx of Aboriginal people that was stretching the infrastructure of Adelaide and the larger towns. The population of Europeans in the new colony of South Australia jumped from 7,600 in 1834 to 37,700 ten years later (ABS 2014).

Some concepts presented to public meetings called to consider the community approach to inter-racial relations were also designed to ‘effect the civilisation of the native population’ (Hartley 1842). The prime approach appeared to be the removal of children from the influence of their parents for the ‘benevolent purpose of instructing them in the arts of life and the doctrines of Christianity’ (ALRC 2014; Hartley 1842). To facilitate this proposal, parents of Aboriginal children were to be offered inducements in the form of food, clothing and tobacco to encourage them to consent to the removal of their children. The desire was to break the ties that bound the children to both their families and their culture, and so control the destiny of the children and the future generations of Aboriginal people (Hartley 1842).

However, the assembly of Aboriginal people in the major towns and centres was not ignored in these suggestions. One recommendation was that ‘the removal of natives from the vicinity of the town appears to be a matter of great importance – it can scarcely be questioned that they have suffered materially from their contact with Europeans … the further, therefore, they can be removed from town, or from populous districts, the better’ (Hartley 1842; Reynolds 2001, p. 158). Here the literature acknowledged the material damage caused by contact with Europeans, but this study found none to accept that the removal of Aboriginal people from the security of their own land and their traditional sources of food, health and shelter forced Aboriginal people to beg support from the settlers in their towns. Similarly, there was no evidence found of a system to address the
social, spiritual and psychological damage caused by the contact. Nor is there any consideration made of the consequences of breaking up families by removing the children. Other suggestions cited by Hartley included the purchase of land to be set aside as a reserve for Aboriginal people where food would be distributed and lessons in farming conducted (Hartley 1842).

These reserves would include buildings for schools, missionaries and teachers, and some for Aboriginal families. Orphaned Aboriginal children would be under the total control of Christian missionaries, away from parental influence, until the age of ten (Hartley 1842). These policies were formulated from the perspective of the Enlightenment belief that, as mentioned earlier, it was the duty of Europeans, particularly British, to educate, civilise and Christianise Aboriginal people and so assimilate them, removing them from their traditional land and culture and the influence of their community leaders and teachers, so destroying the continuity of their beliefs and ultimately identity.

Tom Petrie, prominent landholder in the Brisbane area of Queensland from the 1820s, recalled a conversation he had with Dalaipi, a head man among the Aborigines of North Pine area near Brisbane:

We were hunted from our ground, shot, poisoned, and had our daughters, sisters and wives taken from us ... what a number were poisoned at Kilcoy ... They stole our ground where we used to get food, and when we got hungry and took a bit of flour or killed a bullock to eat, they shot us or poisoned us. All they give us now for our land is a blanket once a year (Petrie & Petrie 1975, pp. 182-3).

Edward Micklethwaite Curr, squatter and author of a large work on the lore and language of Aboriginal people in Victoria, giving evidence to the 1878 Royal Commission on Aboriginal people, summarised a commonly held nineteenth century attitude to the plight of Aboriginal people:

That they must die out is, I think, a foregone conclusion. Were they as valuable commercially as short-horned cattle, or merino sheep, there would be no fear of their dying out. The fact is that we have protected
but never really wished to save them from extermination. The Anglo-Saxon in Australia, as elsewhere, does not foster weakly races. He wants their lands. He is thinking of riches. He tramples them under foot without noticing what he does (Janson & Macintyre 1990, p. 47).

Edward John Eyre, nineteenth century explorer, was appointed in 1841 Resident Magistrate and Protector of Aborigines at Moorundie, on the River Murray (Dutton 1966, p. 152). The experience gained in this role prompted him to include in the journal of his expeditions a section recording *Manners and Customs of the Aborigines of Australia*. Chapter IX of this section bore the heading ‘Suggestions for improvement of system adopted towards the natives’ (Eyre 1964, pp. 2046-7). These suggestions are listed below as an example of the superior attitude of the British of his time towards the welfare of Aboriginal people.

1st. It appears that the most important point, in fact almost the only essential one, in the first instance, is to gain such an influence or authority over the Aborigines as may be sufficient to enable us to induce them to adopt, or submit to any regulations that we make for their improvement, and that to effect this, the means must be suited to their circumstances and habits.

2ndly. It is desirable that the means employed should have a tendency to restrain their wandering habits, and thus gradually induce them to locate permanently in one place.

3rdly. It is important that the plan should be of such a nature as to become more binding in its influence in proportion to the length of time it is in operation.

4thly, It should hold out strong inducements to the parents willingly to allow their children to go to, and remain at the schools.

5thly. It should be such as would operate, in some degree, in weaning the natives from towns or populous districts.

6thly. It should offer some provision for the future career of the children upon their leaving school, and its tendency should be of such
a character as to diminish, as far as practicable, the attraction of a savage life.

7thly. It is highly important that the system adopted should be such as would add to the security and protection of the settlers, and thereby induce their assistance and co-operation, instead, as has too often been the case hitherto with past measures, of exciting a feeling of irritation and dislike between the two races.

I believe that all these objects might be accomplished, in a great degree, by distributing food regularly to all the natives, in their respective district.

When read together, these examples of the approach of the British and colonial authorities to the treatment of Aboriginal people produce one overwhelming theme. The white authorities, with the assistance of many Christian missionaries, approached inter-racial relations progressively through systematic attempts to either eradicate Aboriginal people or to Christianise and assimilate them. James Cowan described these actions as a ‘policy of cultural genocide that has in consequence all but wiped out traditional Aboriginal life in Australia’ (Cowan 2001, p. 16). Peter Sutton wrote: ‘When cultural changes were simply imposed on Indigenous people by others, the process and the policy were both called “assimilation”, which has become, rightly, a pejorative description. The arrogance of many manifestations of assimilationism in years gone by almost defies belief’ (Sutton 2011, p. 68).

The Enlightenment in the north of Australia
There is consistency in the literature as to the motivation to settle the north of Australia. The end of the Napoleonic wars in Europe heralded a realignment of European influence in Southeast Asia (Owen 2005, p. 76; Ricklefs 2010, p. 166). The French, Dutch, British and Portuguese all manoeuvred to gain secure access to trade and territory in the region (Barker, Mulvaney & Green 1992, p. 39; Hall 1981, p. 567) and in Britain, the government believed that a settlement in northern Australia was necessary to act as a deterrent to potential Dutch or French
annexation, to establish extensive trade in Southeast Asia to rival Singapore, and to create a northern base for survey vessels and a haven for shipwrecked sailors (Barker, Mulvaney & Green 1992, p. 39; Brookshaw 2013, p. 1; Hall 1981, p. 567; Powell 2009, pp. 38-9; 2016, pp. 27-8; Reid 1992, p. 42). Alan Powell more recently suggested a further reason - a northern settlement, along with settlements in Westernport in the south of the continent and King George’s Sound in the far southwest, would enable Britain to lay claim to ‘all that part of New Holland which is not included within the Territory of New South Wales’ (Powell 2016, p. ix). This is consistent with the British ideology of expansion of its empire for political and economic gain.

It can be deduced from the literature that the influence of the Enlightenment on the Europeans extended to the attitude towards Aboriginal people in the north of Australia. This is evidenced where the attitude towards original inhabitants adopted by the authorities in the new settlements is exposed. For example, Captain Bremer, in charge of establishing the settlement at Fort Dundas on Melville Island in 1824, revealed his feeling towards Aboriginal people overall when he reported on those he encountered there; ‘In their habits, these people seem to resemble the natives of New South Wales, but there are shades of difference which would lead me to think that they do not occupy quite so low a place on the graduated scale of the human species’ (Watson 1922a Bremer to Croker).

The literature reports that several attempts were made to establish a secure base in the north (Watson 1922c) but it was not until the tenure of Captain Collet Barker, of the 39th Regiment, as commandant of the settlement at Fort Wellington 1828-9 that inter-racial relations became amicable and trade with Macassan trepangers a possibility (Powell 2009, p. 43; Wilson 1835, p. 80). However, the approach taken by Barker was the exception, rather than the rule.

Mulvaney commented that Barker seemed to be one of the most efficient and compassionate administrators seen in Australia prior to the 1850s. His sensitive approach to inter-racial relations later extended beyond Fort Wellington to King
George Sound (Albany) in Western Australia (Mulvaney 1994, p. 1). Elsewhere Mulvaney wrote:

In an ambient culture of class consciousness, military hierarchy and racial superiority, Barker was tolerant of Aboriginal ways and groped towards an understanding of that society. He evidently treated soldiers and convicts fairly and with understanding; his firmness was linked with sympathy (Barker, Mulvaney & Green 1992, p. 33).

This passage notes both the ‘ambient culture of class consciousness, military hierarchy and racial superiority’ and the alternative approach taken by Barker, both of which are further examined later in this study. The approach taken by Barker towards inter-racial relations was the exception rather than the norm. The ideology inherited from the British described by Mulvaney above continued to dominate the policies of state and Federal Governments through the twentieth century.

The policies continued into the twenty-first century

One policy, extending from the 1890s to the 1970s, epitomised the attitude of governments towards the culture and traditions of Aboriginal people. Resulting in what is known today as the ‘Stolen Generations’ it was a government sponsored project designed to eliminate the influence of traditional culture, language and ceremonies from the lives of Aboriginal children. At various times between 1897 and 1935 all states in Australia introduced legislation authorising government officers to remove Aboriginal children from their families and, in many cases, making them wards of the state (Australian Human Rights Commission 2016). These children were forcefully taken away (stolen) from their families, many never to see their family again (Read 2015). The legislation allowing removal of children remained in force until 1969 when the last law was repealed (Australian Human Rights Commission 2016). In removing their children, the authorities also stole Aboriginal people’s future. Language, tradition, knowledge, dances and spirituality could only live if passed on to their children (Young 2009).
Another example of the continuity of this ideology is evident in the reporting of events in the north Queensland community of Aurukun, a town central to the members of the Wik people. Aurukun, a community of Wik and Wik Way people on the west coast of the Cape York Peninsula of north Queensland, was reported to be on the verge of a huge economic windfall in 1957. However, events have demonstrated that the beneficiaries of such a windfall established by the Queensland Government would not necessarily be Aboriginal people of Aurukun. The way the government conducted negotiations for the granting of exploration and mining leases over land traditionally owned by the Wik people created confusion about their rights and the protection of their culture, land and community. This uncertainty resulted in damage to the community structure.

‘The hopes of the Wik people have been cruelly dashed’ – said the Australian newspaper on 15 November 2014. The article by Langton (2014: 10) was commenting on the objection of the Wik people of Aurukun to the granting of a bauxite mining lease to the Swiss company, Glencore. This article was not the first reporting of the challenges and difficulties occurring in this town of Aurukun on the west coast of Cape York in Queensland, but it was just one of a series of reports that culminated in the shutdown of the local government school and the evacuation of teachers and other non-indigenous personnel in April 2016. It was reported that in May 2016 the Aurukun Aboriginal Community on Cape York Peninsula was torn apart by a campaign of delinquency waged by a group of local youths (Gregory 2016). Noel Pearson, co-chair of the Good to Great Schools Australia, wrote ‘The strife in Aurukun we are reaping today is the harvest sown by the Queensland Government over these past 35 years’ (Pearson 2016, p. 34).

On its website, it is stated by the Aurukun Shire Council: ‘The Aurukun shire is a very remote area of Queensland which is starkly different to most other Queensland shires. Its community is among the most disadvantaged in Australia but it has outstanding potentials for growth and prosperity’ (McCarthy 2013). The literature also suggests that factors contributing to Aurukun being classified as one of the most disadvantaged Aboriginal communities in Australia is the remoteness
of the community, together with mass unemployment, drugs and alcohol abuse (Armbruster 2016).

The disadvantage referred to above was the subject of further reports that state it has resulted in considerable unrest in the community, with violence against person and property and, more recently, threats to teachers resulting in the closure of the local school for a short time and the evacuation of teachers (Elks 2016, p. 1; McMah 2015; Walker 2016, p. 34). There are reports of other anti-social events such as the stealing of motor vehicles, a break-in at the local store and damage to homes and businesses that resulted in the despatch of riot police to the community to attempt to regain control (Uhr 2015, p. 1).

Various writers attempted to identify the causes of the disintegration of community spirit and function in Aurukun (Langton 2014a; Pearson 2016). Billy Gordon, an independent member of the Queensland Parliament, wrote that he believed Aurukun had reached this level of disadvantage ‘because knee-jerk reactions, finger-pointing, blame games, hidden agendas, political point-scoring and catchy headlines are the standard approach to the “Aboriginal problem”’. Gordon added that the frequent knee-jerk reactions are politically charged decisions made by government that set off a chain of events that result in further disadvantage to the community, without addressing the root of the problem (Gordon 2016, p. 8). It will be argued later in this thesis that such government decisions resulting in disadvantage to Aboriginal people reflect the ideology of superiority inherent in Australian leadership since the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788.

An example in the literature of the perceived approach to Aboriginal disadvantage taken by policy makers comes from former leader of the Australian Labor Party in Federal Parliament, Mark Latham, who said: ‘The events in Aurukun are another example of the truism in modern Australia that the damage being caused to Indigenous communities is much more by Indigenous people themselves than the question of historic wrong’ (King 2016). It is necessary to review the literature since the beginning of the twentieth century to reveal the events leading to the recent conflict in Aurukun and how there could be such divergent opinions as to
the cause of the damage to not only the Wik people, but all Australian Aboriginal people.

The Queensland Government in 1903 declared the area around the Aboriginal mission at Aurukun an Aboriginal Reserve (Buchhorn 1976, p. 3). However, the rights of Aboriginal people attached to this reserve were overridden with the discovery of bauxite in the area and the granting of authorities to prospect and the first mining agreements over the region in 1957 and 1968 (Buchhorn 1976, p. 4; Martin 2011, p. 32; Tatz 1979, p. 34). Queensland mines minister Ernie Evans announced in parliament in 1957 that Comalco, the party to the mining agreement, had given an undertaking that Aboriginal people would be given the right to work in the mining development (Martin 2011, p. 32). The Queensland Mines Minister in 1975 (Ron Camm) assured the Queensland Parliament that the agreements guaranteed training of Aboriginal people, a sharing by Aboriginal people in the success of the industry, an equality of rights with the whites in the industry and a solution to the alcohol problem in the area (Martin 2011, p. 34). But, with hindsight, some believe that when the Queensland Government passed those special laws allowing the creation of a company called Comalco (Commonwealth Aluminium Company) to mine and process bauxite, and granting it the mining leases, the ‘curse of bauxite started’ (Pearson 2016, p. 34). The government, appointed trustee for Aboriginal people on reserves, carried out its duty as trustee by revoking their reserved lands to allow the mining to proceed (Pearson 2016, p. 34). The thread of government action hindering harmonious intercultural relations continues for it seems the agreements relating to Aboriginal people were not watertight for, once the bauxite mines came into operation, other rights for Aboriginal people in the leases were either ignored, diluted or appealed (Buchhorn 1976, pp. 4-7; Lacey & Hudson 1976, pp. 1-8). Colin Tatz headed his article on the way white institutions exploited and failed Aboriginal people ‘Aurukun: A lesson in power politics’ (Tatz 1979). In a similar vein, Marcia Langton wrote: ‘Despite the fact that the Wik have had their rights confirmed by the courts many times over, the Queensland Government has continued its contemptuous treatment of Aboriginal people’ (Langton 2014a).
There are reports of agreements being signed in 1957, 1965, 1968, and, in 1975, an agreement was reached with Pechiney Consolidated Australia Pty. Ltd. for the development and exploitation of bauxite in Aurukun, and employment and financial benefits for the Wik people (Martin 2011, p. 35). This agreement was cancelled in 2004 by legislation in the Queensland Parliament because ALCOA (formerly Pechiney) had failed to meet the terms of the agreement. The Queensland Government has on several more occasions invited interested parties to tender for the Aurukun bauxite reserves. In 2006, CHALCO was asked to submit a final tender, beating ten of the world’s leading aluminium processors for the right (Sharples 2006). Four years later and before mining had commenced, the Chinese-owned alumina company withdrew from the agreement following a decline in the demand for aluminium (Tapim, Timms, Mawer & Maddison 2010). News reports tell of a new agreement for the exploitation of the Aurukun bauxite that was signed with Glencore in 2014 (Branelly 2014; Swanepoel 2014). Continuing the confusion for the Aurukun people generated by the ongoing uncertainty of the destiny of their land, the ABC News reported that the Glencore involvement in the development was in doubt following the collapse of the shares in that company (Lewis 2015).

While the factors preventing the commencement of bauxite mining at Aurukun after nearly sixty years of negotiation are due more to economic and global market trends than political manoeuvring, the literature suggests that both the Queensland and the Federal Governments were prepared to ignore the rights of Aboriginal people in lease negotiations should the mining actually go ahead (Martin 2011, p. 35).

There is evidence in the literature examined in this chapter that, because of political, philosophical and religious events in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the British assumed an ideology of superiority towards the inhabitants of the lands they explored, exploited and settled. The contemporaneous military and naval successes enjoyed by Britain combined with these influences to create an ideology of British superiority over those races who they believed to be uneducated, non-Christian and uncivilised.
This ideology of superiority was incorporated in the conduct of the colonial authorities when establishing settlements in Australia and, when applied to interracial relations, had a detrimental and continuing impact on the culture, traditions and well-being of the Australian Aboriginal people. Literature in the twentieth and twenty-first century provided examples of how policies of the Queensland Government towards the Wik people of Aurukun lacked respect for the traditional community and led to the fracturing of their cohesive society.

The approach of Captain Collet Barker, commandant of the Fort Wellington settlement at Fort Wellington in the Northern Territory and, later, King George Sound at Albany in Western Australia, offers an alternative treatment of interracial relations that might fill this gap and is something that can be learned from his example and applied in a contemporary context. Barker adopted a policy of trust, respect and cooperation and was able to create a harmonious inter-racial environment where the culture and traditions of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people were respected and maintained. It is the example of Barker I want to explore to inform a more appropriate approach to government inter-racial policy that is respectful and fair, without the repercussions of the philosophy of superiority, dominance and intolerance.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Background to the study

So much of the literature in this field has been written from the perspective of the dominant, ruling British authorities and this perspective has presented a very one-sided viewpoint of inter-racial relations in Australia. Alternative approaches to the knowledge that critique the broad assumptions made by dominant authorities can offer a more culturally sensitive and discursively grounded analysis (Kokushkin 2014, p. 10). Standpoint Theory, often employed by Feminist theorists and Indigenous researchers suggests that those who are marginalised and oppressed by dominant discourses may, in fact, occupy a differently privileged position socially or politically, by virtue of their experience and how they understand their experience (Wylie 2003, p. 26). It allows a person or group suffering marginalisation or oppression within a dominant paradigm to provide an alternative critique from their standpoint that is impossible to be gained by researchers or policymakers operating from within the paradigm.

My upbringing and early education was dominated by strict, religious parents and the teachers in a Christian boarding school. From an early age, I was taught to do as I was told, accept the teachings of the Bible and that Australian history commenced in 1788 with the arrival of the First Fleet. My working life as an accountant reinforced the unquestioned belief that what was taught in the history and accounting text books was fact. In short, my formative years and professional life placed me firmly within the dominant paradigm operating within Australian society. However, in my later years I have realised that not everything we read can be understood in such unequivocal terms.

Understanding my position as a relatively privileged member of the dominant social group in Australia is an important aspect of the way in which an approach to this study is carried out. In contrast to my upbringing in the dominant social group, my education and professional experiences put me in a position where I can provide a valuable critique of my own culture.
Theoretical framework

A Critical Theory approach will be applied to the data that forms the basis of this research to identify an alternate reading behind its creation. The *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* defines Critical Theory as

A way of thinking about and examining culture and literature by considering the social, historical and ideological forces that affect it and make it the way it is (Hornsby 2005, p. 364).

Elsewhere another explanation describes Critical Theory:

It is the theorisation of how cultural, social, and status differences are created and developed to generate, reinforce, and maintain relations of dominance, inequality, or disenfranchisement (Bronner & Kellner 1989, p. 2; McGee & Warms 2013, p. 4).

The literature will be analysed to determine the influencing factors in the creation of policy and the eventual interpretation of that policy. It will use the methods implicit in Critical Theory as defined below.

**Critical Theory**

Critical Theory was developed in the 1920s and 1930s at the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, Germany (Bronner & Kellner 1989, p. 1). It developed out of the work of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels postulating the importance of capitalist society being

seen as structured by a dominant class’s exploitation of subordinate classes. A central feature of classical Marxist theory is the materialist stance that social being determines consciousness. According to this stance, ideological positions are a function of class positions, and the dominant ideology in society is that of its dominant class (Marx 1847, ch. 5).

Critical Theory was designed to extend Marxist critique so that it gave due emphasis to the influence of the culture and self-image of people in a historical period, as a factor in social change (Blackburn 2016). It is a form of rationalism, meaning it is based on the belief that all behaviour and opinions should be based
on reason rather than emotions or religious beliefs (Hornsby 2005, p. 1251). It is motivated by an interest in the emancipation of those who are oppressed and dominated (Kellner 2016, p. 1). The adoption of such a standard allows the researcher to be critical of a society that excludes groups or individuals, such as Aboriginal people, from social, economic and political participation, or which systematically renders groups powerless (Scott & Marshall 2005, p. 126). The bulk of the historical data gathered in this study was written from the position of those wielding power in the community. This basic data, such as historical records, journals and reports, is reviewed with a view to offering an alternative approach to the policies revealed (Phillips 2000, pp. 2-3). More specifically, in relation to this study, Critical Theory is

Typically a specification of the goals of [inter-racial] research ... means to address questions that are relevant to [Aboriginal people] or, more generally, to those oppressed by [racially]-structured systems of inequality, and that provide the kinds of understanding [Aboriginal people] need to bring about change in these oppressive conditions (Wylie 2007, p. 1).

The ideology of legislators and business leaders in Australia and the historical influences colouring the policies and business decisions affecting Aboriginal people will be identified and analysed. From that analysis, it can be determined whether such ideology and influences, irrespective of the publicly stated objectives, incorporated an understanding of Aboriginal society. Alternately, whether it excluded Aboriginal people from genuine economic and political participation and, in fact, accelerated the destruction of their traditional beliefs, customs, culture and well-being. It will also show that, even if an attempt were made to incorporate Aboriginal values into government policy, such considerations were often overridden by economic or political expedience.

Methods
This research aims to identify the events that influenced the colonial authorities in the early 1800s in the creation of the inter-racial ideology that was later
exported to the new colonies in Australia to the detriment of Aboriginal people and to examine the approach to intercultural relations exemplified by Barker.

Letters and reports between Governor Brisbane in Sydney and Earl Bathurst in London, and their successors were studied as are the newspapers and journals of the day to determine the contributing factors behind the establishment of a military presence in the north of Australia (Brookshaw 2013, p. 1; Hall 1981, p. 567; Powell 2009, p. 38).

The results of extensive analysis of government reports, the journals of Captain Collet Barker and Thomas Braidwood Wilson, letters and newspapers recounting attempts to establish bases on Melville Island and at Fort Wellington under Captains Smyth and Sleeman, together with the reasons these attempts were abandoned, are presented. Included in this analysis is a reflection on the attitude adopted by the military to Aboriginal people during the attempted settlements. A later focus of the thesis and research was in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries where a critical approach was applied to the literature reporting the discovery of enormous reserves of bauxite in 1957 in western Cape York Peninsula to determine whether the government policy created, refined and implemented to exploit these reserves were to the benefit of Aboriginal people of Aurukun.

An analysis of the legislation related to the welfare of Aboriginal people on Cape York Peninsula that was in place at the time of the bauxite discovery was followed by a review of the political, social and economic climate existing at the time of the introduction of the 1957 legislation. To determine the underlying motivation for the introduction of this legislation and its effect on inter-racial relations in the twenty-first century, Hansard, newspaper articles, journals, diaries and documentaries were analysed to reveal the factors that resulted in the introduction of the legislation and how the legislation has been implemented. This research revealed how the culture, lives and livelihood of the Aboriginal community around Aurukun were affected by the exploitation of the bauxite reserves and the government policies associated with it. Also analysed was the introduction of legislation to transfer vast tracts of the Aurukun Aboriginal Reserve to Comalco Aluminium Limited (now Rio Tinto Limited) and later to Pechiney.
Consolidated Australia Pty. Ltd., a subsidiary of a French aluminium company, to process the bauxite (Martin 2011, p. 32). A critique of the literature is applied to test whether or not government policy and ideology rendered it insensitive to the interests and culture of the Aboriginal people of Aurukun.

This thesis has relied entirely on historical data. Of necessity, the interpretation of the effect of policy on Aboriginal people and their culture and traditions is mainly from a non-Aboriginal viewpoint and such interpretation may not accurately reflect the impact of the government policies on Aboriginal people. Such an interpretation is clouded by the absence of the alternate viewpoint.

The underlying factors influencing the ideology of Captain Collet Barker reflected in the actions and approaches revealed in the above analysis were established through further research. A review was undertaken of Barker’s childhood, education and early career experiences. Further analysis was carried out on the data to find if Barker interpreted his job specification in a different manner to that of his predecessors and how his tenure affected the welfare of the local Aboriginal people.

Finally, the analysis of the results of the data collection and research are presented to explore ways of building more equitable, inclusive and respectful intercultural relations, based upon a different ideological paradigm.
Chapter 4: Aurukun and Queensland

It is well beyond the scope of this work to document all the examples of the influence of inherited government ideology on Aboriginal people. However, exploring the narrative of Queensland Government policy affecting the Wik people of Aurukun in north Queensland will demonstrate by example something of the way in which the underlying ideology of superiority over non-British inhabitants of the colonies has influenced this policy. It is a policy that has excluded Aboriginal people from genuine economic and political participation and, in fact, has become a major threat to the cohesion of their traditional society.

The early contact between Aboriginal people and British in the form of Royal Navy surveying expeditions in northern-eastern Australia prior to 1850 resulted in a number of clashes with some loss of life by both Aboriginal people and the sailors (Reynolds & Mabo 1993, p. 6). However, during several of these visits it was established that meaningful contact and mutually beneficial interrelations could be fostered, but only if Aboriginal people could retain their autonomy and the new arrivals acted with restraint. Sadly, the autonomy of Aboriginal people was rapidly weakened as the commitment to restraint by the British waned. From the time of their first contact with Aboriginal people in Queensland, the attitude of the British settlers was one of moral virtue, superiority and a divine right when claiming ownership of the land (Fitzgerald 1982, p. 204; Reynolds 1990, p. 86). While the interaction between races in the nineteenth century continued to be marked with numerous examples of discrimination, violence and abuse, the focus of this chapter is on intercultural relations around the town of Aurukun in north Queensland in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Aurukun is one of the largest communities on the far west coast of Cape York, Queensland. It is home to the Wik and Wik Way people, recognised as the traditional custodians of the area (Edwards & Heinrich 2006, pp. 572-3). Aurukun community life in the twenty-first century has been epitomised by violence and disruption in the school arena (Gregory 2016; Jose 2016). At the start of this century, the town had changed from being a peaceful and vibrant community to one resembling a disaster zone. The incidences of violence, rape, abuse of children
and community leaders alike, and neglect rose dramatically after 1985 (Sutton 2011, p. 1).

Of interest to this study is the attitude of successive Queensland Governments towards the community and how that attitude has been a major influence in this eventual disruption. What makes the Aurukun community of particular interest in this study, and makes it a significant focus of government policy, is the fact that it sits on a deposit of bauxite estimated to be worth in excess of $20 billion in 2014 values (McKenna & Karvelas 2014). The influence that the discovery of the bauxite reserves has had on the Aurukun community is relevant to other Aboriginal communities in Australia who are custodians of land that conceals other unexploited reserves of marketable minerals.

Since Federation in 1901, the policy of the Queensland Government towards Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders has moved from the belief that left alone, Aboriginal people would die out (the ‘dying race’ theory), through the separation, exclusion and protection policies to that of eventual assimilation and integration (Fitzgerald 1984, p. 509). The ‘dying race’ theory was popular in the mid-nineteenth century and fueled by popular Darwinism. It held that Aboriginal people were dying out because of some providential law of nature (Rowley 1972, p. 103). But in the twentieth century, with a strong focus on the exploitation of land and mineral resources, the government has generally considered Aboriginal people to be obstacles in the path of state development (Fitzgerald 1984, p. 509).

In what has been described as an attitude of paternalism and discrimination, over the years legislation has been introduced controlling the lives of all Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders in Queensland. Such government controls included the relocation of Aboriginal people into special reserves, restriction of their movements, even from reserve to reserve, and the prohibition of marriage of Aboriginal people without the approval of a government appointed official. In many cases, management of these provisions was delegated to missions run by religious groups (Frankland 1994, p. 11). From 1904 until 1978 Aboriginal reserve at Aurukun was under the control of the Presbyterian (later Uniting) Church where the inmates were dominated by non-Aboriginal staff (Reynolds & Mabo 1993, p.
These actions exerted non-Aboriginal control over Aboriginal people and systematically rendered them powerless. The inference drawn from the literature is that the imposition of British rights and law was at the expense of the traditional rights and laws of Aboriginal people, and such imposition created further breakdowns in intercultural relations rather than improving them (Martin 2011, p. 31).

The drive of the Queensland Government for economic expansion reached a new level in the 1950s when mining company Comalco discovered massive deposits of bauxite under the Aboriginal reserves of Aurukun, Weipa and Mapoon in the Cape York area (Martin 2011, p. 31; Perkins & Langton 2008, p. 235). It soon became apparent that these deposits were among the largest and richest in the world. Queensland state politicians, the missions and church authorities quickly announced that the mining of bauxite in the area promised to be a source of profits for capital, jobs for labour, assimilation for Aboriginal people and progress for all (Martin 2011, p. 31). To facilitate the exploitation of the bauxite deposits, the Queensland Government converted large areas of Aboriginal reserves on Cape York, including the Aurukun reserve, to mining leases by passing the *Commonwealth Aluminium Corporation Pty Ltd Agreement Act 1957*, known as the Comalco Act. This action was initiated without proper consultation with the leaders of the Aboriginal people, undermining the authority of the community leaders and therefore disregarding and weakening the long established social structure of the Wik people. Community residents of the affected area were forcibly relocated to make way for the mining operations (Perkins & Langton 2008, p. 235). Rachel Peter, one resident rounded up by police in 1963 and relocated in this operation described the events:

> We’re the ones that were moved by police, by gunpoint, [on] that boat that they sent for us ... sneaked in on us in the night ... they came from Thursday Island. We were really sad, but we just had to go because they told us we were going for questioning. At the Bamaga wharf they told us there were seven houses waiting for us to walk in and light the stoves. And when we arrived there were no homes. We were just
standing out in the streets like a mob of cattle with nowhere to go (Perkins & Langton 2008, p. 236).

Another resident commented:

This is what they do, but the world doesn’t know. People don’t know how we were treated. They destroyed the homes, burnt them down, you know. And I seen all the burning down of the homes, the church ... it was destroying our culture, our lives (Roberts & McLean 1976, p. 10).

In 1974, John Koowarta, an Aboriginal man and a member of the Wik nation, together with a number of other stockmen planned to purchase the Archer River cattle station, which covered much of the Wik people’s traditional homeland, using funds provided by the Aboriginal Land Fund Commission. The holder of the pastoral lease agreed to sell the lease to them. In February 1976, the Aboriginal Land Fund Commission made a contract to purchase the property, but before the sale could be completed, it was blocked by the Queensland Government. The Premier of Queensland at the time, Joh Bjelke-Petersen, was not in favour of the sale, believing that Aboriginal people should not be able to acquire large areas of land and Aboriginal people ‘already had enough land for their benefit’ (Allam 2015).

Further examples of government condoned disregard and manipulation of Aboriginal people at Aurukun are abundant. For instance, the United States mining company Tipperary Land Corporation began prospecting and bulldozing in the Aurukun region in 1968. Soon, an agreement was reached between Tipperary, the Queensland Department of Aboriginal and Islander Affairs (DAIA) and the mission authorities allowing prospecting on the Aurukun land. The agreement contained provisions for Tipperary to negotiate terms to protect Aboriginal people should mining commence and that they would pay royalties to the DAIA three years after the start of mining. But the results of the discussions with the Wik people were inconsistent with the terms of the final agreement (Martin 2011, p. 33). In 1975, the Aurukun people made their position on mining quite clear, issuing a press release:
We Aurukun people will not allow any mining at all on our land. We will not accept any money for our land. Our land is sacred to us – We hunt on it and have our Sacred Places on it. We want Comalco, Billiton, Pechiney and Tipperary to leave our land alone. We must protect our culture (Fitzgerald 1984, p. 315)

There have been suggestions made by some historians that the Tipperary deal showed signs of trickery and manipulation on the part of corporate management and the state in their negotiations concerning the leases. Promises made to the Aurukun people were inconsistent with the details in letters from Tipperary to the churches and the DAIA (Fitzgerald 1984, p. 315). Martin gave details of a 1976 interview with Aurukun Chairman Frank Yunkaporta who recalled:

Then that bloke came in and had a meeting with us ... and said ‘Right, we’ll learn all you young fellows here to drive dozers and heavy equipment used for mining’. (But has anyone learnt to drive dozers and all them other things? No!) Right, then they tell us a bit later on, ‘Well, we’ll give you about 30%’. [But later] I went down to [the Director of Aboriginal Affairs] Killoran and had a meeting with him and the company – and they said that it wasn’t 30%. It was 3%. The whole community was there and witnessed that it had been 30%. We expected too that the royalty would come to the people – but now it goes to the government. I wasn’t too smart. They had everything in writing and I had nothing at all (Martin 2011, p. 33).

Yunkaporta’s comments illustrate the confusion suffered by the leaders of the Wik people of Aurukun caused by the approach of the Queensland Government during the negotiation phase. The ideology of superiority of the Queensland Government towards Aboriginal people was manifested in the lack of consideration of their wishes and the disrespect shown towards the Aboriginal leaders and community. Such an attitude contributed to the breakdown of traditional culture, social structure, and community cohesion.

On 22 May 1978, the Queensland Government enacted the Local Government (Aboriginal Lands) Act creating the Aurukun Shire Council (Frankland 1994, p. 11).
The Act granted a 50-year lease to the council over most of the land in the original reserve, a large part of the traditional lands of the Aurukun people. This imposition of state power is referred to by locals simply as The Takeover (Robinson 2016). In 1978 the Presbyterian Church was removed from its role as administrators of the missions at Aurukun and Mornington Islands, handing control to the DAIA (Pearson 2016, p. 2). The local community objected, and with the support of the Uniting Church (formed by the amalgamation of the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregational churches in 1977) sought relief from the Federal Government. This precipitated a confrontation between the Queensland and Federal Governments. After moves and counter moves by both governments, a compromise was reached in 1978 when both the Aurukun and Mornington Island communities were given ‘limited local government status’ (Frankland 1994, p. 11).

The on-going legislative changes and the conflict in the terms of the succession of leases relating to the exploitation of the bauxite deposits created further uncertainty for the people of Aurukun and raised doubt in the ability and authority of the community leaders. In a statement read to the Brisbane Supreme Court in 1982, the late Professor W.E.H. Stanner from the Australian National University said that there was evidence in the Aurukun Aboriginal people of disorganisation resulting from ‘their subjugation by whites … and their dependence in a power relationship from which the Aboriginal can find no tolerable exit’ (Fitzgerald 1984, pp. 530-1).

Nearly 60 years after the discovery of the bauxite deposits in Aurukun, the reserves have not been exploited. The Queensland Government has negotiated with a succession of leaseholders until, in 2004, control was returned to the government for failure by Pechiney, the then leaseholder, to observe its conditions. Since then there have been more than ten years of ‘bureaucratic incompetence within the Queensland Government trying to work out how to get the Aurukun field developed’ (Langton 2014b).

The new shire created by The Takeover of 1978 (see above p. 38) needed a source of revenue, but the only reliable funds coming in to the community was in the form of unemployment benefits received from the Federal Government. The only
viable way to obtain funding for the shire was to tap into those unemployment benefits and redirect them into the shire coffers (Smallbone, Rayment-McHugh & Smith 2013). In 1985, against the objection of the Wik leaders but on the insistence of the Queensland Government, the Aurukun Shire Council opened a wet canteen, selling alcohol, the profits from which acted as a source of shire finance. The impact on what was previously an alcohol-free community was devastating (Jose 2016; Pearson 2016, p. 2). Prior to The Takeover there was an environment of respectful kinship relationships. However, the social order and respect was shattered by the actions of the Queensland Government and the introduction of the wet canteen. Child neglect, homicides, suicides, violence and abuse – previously virtually unknown in this ordered society – became a plague (Jose 2016, p. 3). For nearly twenty years the ‘rivers of grog’ flowed. Family and clan relationships collapsed. There were nine homicides in the first five years of the operation of the canteen. Jose (2016) called the action of the government ministers in introducing the canteen ‘a form of state violence’. Jose continued: ‘The cycle of abuse and neglect that followed the grog chaos from 1985 was imprinted on the young children who were born in its wake’ (Jose 2016, p. 3).

Professor Stephen Smallbone was commissioned by the Queensland Government in 2011 to investigate youth sexual violence and abuse in Queensland (Smallbone, Rayment-McHugh & Smith 2013). The resulting report detailed much of the violence and abuse and the impact of alcohol on the community, detailed by Jose above. Smallbone and his team found that in Aurukun between 2001 and 2012 the reported sex abuse offences was 6.6 times higher than the Queensland average, with the mean age of the victims being 14. In the same period, the incidence of sexually transmitted diseases was 56 times the state average, 29 of the victims being children under 10 years old (Walker 2016). As damning as it was, the Queensland Government chose not to release the report until 2016 (Jose 2016).

By 2009 the Aurukun Shire Council had had enough. It closed the wet canteen and introduced an alcohol-management plan and welfare reforms (Koch 2011). The supply and use of alcohol was banned within the entire shire, but ‘sly-grogging’ –
sale of black market illegal alcohol - has flourished as have the detrimental effects of alcohol on the community (Koch 2011).

This chapter documents several examples of decisions taken by the Queensland Government that were formulated based on economic gain for business and the Queensland treasury but which appear to have been made with little consideration for the rights and opinions of the Wik people of Aurukun or their leaders. The ideology of superiority maintained by the Queensland Government and its agents, the Christian missions, towards the Wik people has resulted directly in the breakdown of the authority of Aboriginal community leaders and the social, cultural and economic fabric of those people. The disregard for the rights of the Aurukun community as citizens of Australia during the extended negotiations for bauxite mining leases has fractured the traditional stability of the Aboriginal community.

Writing in the Courier Mail, a reporter commented:

This tragedy is shameful. The response has been likewise shameful. The Queensland Government has done nothing effective though Aurukun continues to hit the headlines consistently. The usual response, where government announces more services to try to fix the problem for the people of Aurukun, will not work (Jose 2016, p. 3).

The unfulfilled promises of employment and financial benefit from the establishment of the mines has created a generation of unemployed members of the Aurukun community. The disregard of community wishes by the Queensland Government in relation to the establishment of a wet canteen resulted in levels of alcohol fuelled violence and neglect that have been compared unfavourably with notorious American cities (Jose 2016). These are clear examples of an ideology of superiority that has suppressed the rights and wellbeing of the Wik people of Aurukun. The application of this ideology, when examined critically, results in social and racial injustice and the immoral disregard for human rights.

Aboriginal woman, Yolanda Walker, presenting a paper in the journal *Family Matters* produced by the Australian Institute of Family Studies, wrote:
Most of the problems facing Aboriginal people today stem from
generations of oppression and have resulted in a lack of trust of white
society. First, the land was taken from us; for a race that shares a
unique bonding with the land, this in itself is extremely damaging. The
white man introduced alcohol and poisoned Aboriginal people with
diseases for which we had no immunity. Our women were raped, our
children removed, our men hunted and murdered. Why? Our people
did not speak English, we had dark skin and we practiced different
ways. The white man could not relate and so reacted brutally.

Colonisation meant oppression and genocide. Aboriginal people were
denied the right to live by their own rules, to decide on their own
policies. They were denied the freedom to run their own economic and
family life. They could not necessarily marry the person they chose,
mix with people of their choice, speak to people of a certain skin
colour, live in a particular street or on a reserve (Walker 1993, p. 52).

McIntyre commented:

The breakdown of traditional indigenous [sic] culture and the
imposition of Western decision making values leave Aboriginal
communities in Australia in a difficult place. Western schools have
taught the young to devalue the traditional ways. Ill health, confusion,
frustration and powerlessness have marginalised many of the Elders.
Their ability to teach younger generations by example is greatly
diminished (McIntyre 2001, pp. 109-10).

Another description of the change in the community cohesion aggravated by the
policy of the Queensland Government in approaching inter-racial relations was
provided by Wik Elder Silas Wolomby. Wolomby had his jaw being broken in two
places by two youths armed with an iron bar during a fight between rival youth
gangs. He believed the anti-social behaviour of the young people in Aurukun was
the result of the erosion of the authority of the community leaders and traditional
community standards:
The loss of traditional culture has opened the way to a form of social anarchy and madness. Several decades ago troublesome kids would be taken out bush by the senior law men and sorted out. Child sex was taboo and offenders were punished. But these days, he says, young mothers and fathers go to the tavern, leaving children to the mercy of whoever may come along. The lucky ones are left with their grandmothers or elder sisters (Skelton 2007).

Reverend Graham Paulson, an Aboriginal Ministry Elder from Brisbane describes the effect of the ideology of superiority and lack of respect has been for him:

What gets passed down is the enormous hurt and disorientation that comes from losing one’s land, losing one’s identity, losing one’s goal and purpose in life. And this is passed down from my grand-parents to my parents and from my parents to me. And so I had to deal with this disquiet and dysfunction that I couldn’t explain (Starrenburg 2014, episode 2).

Tatz (1979, p. 66) summarised the relations between the Queensland Government and the Aurukun community, describing it as a complex of racism, ambiguity, alienation, coercion, double talk, diminution of rights – of profound pessimism when politics, law and white men fail fragile black communities.

This description clearly indicated that the Queensland Government considered itself superior to Aboriginal people of Aurukun, showing little respect for the rights and tradition of the Aurukun community. Tatz added ‘Aurukun is the fable which demonstrates how the strong do what they can and how the weak suffer what they must’ (Tatz 1979, p. 67).
Chapter 5: Collet Barker

In September 1824, James John Gordon Bremer, captain of His Majesty’s ship Tamar, took possession of Port Essington on the Cobourg Peninsula in what is now the Northern Territory, and three days later took possession of Melville and Bathurst Islands in the name of the king of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. So the occupation of northern Australia by Europeans began (Headon 1991, p. xvii).

The motivation for the establishment of European settlements in the north was rooted in the determination of the British to maintain superiority over its European rivals, especially in the wake of the Napoleonic wars, when competition spread to Southeast Asia (Owen 2005, p. 77; Powell 2009, p. 37). Commercial rivalry and the struggle for influence created an atmosphere of distrust that extended to the emerging British colony of New South Wales (Powell 2016, p. 15).

In 1824, Earl Bathurst, the British Secretary of State for the Colonies ordered Governor Brisbane of New South Wales to set up a new settlement in northern Australia as a military outpost for defence, the expansion of trade and to establish relations with the Aboriginal people of the area (Barker, Mulvaney & Green 1992, p. 39; Powell 2016, p. 45).

In 1826, after receiving disturbing reports of the failure of an earlier attempt at settlement at Fort Dundas on Melville Island, the Colonial Office in London decided to set up a second military outpost on the northern coast of mainland Australia. On 19 May 1827, Captain James Stirling was despatched from Sydney to establish an outpost at Raffles Bay. The outpost was named Fort Wellington. The crew consisted of convicts and members of the 39th Regiment. They arrived at Fort Wellington the next month and established the settlement on the eastern side of the bay. Stirling soon left for Swan River, in Western Australia, passing command of Fort Wellington to Captain Henry Smyth (Barker, Mulvaney & Green 1992, p. 43; Powell 2009, p. 43). Under Smyth the settlement succumbed to similar setbacks as caused the downfall of the Fort Dundas experiment. Malaria, scurvy and afflictions associated with poor diet and hygiene, the tropical climate leading to lethargy, the mosquitoes and sand-flies and the ever-present haunting fear of
Aboriginal people together with the isolation threatened the new settlement from the onset (Historical Society of the Northern Territory 1971, p. 15; Powell 2009, p. 42).

However, with the arrival on 13 September 1828 of new commandant Captain Collet Barker, the management strategies of the settlement altered significantly. Barker quickly established good relations with Aboriginal people and sought out the trepangers from Macassar (Macassans) in the East Indies to negotiate agreements for the formalising of the trade in trepang. But Barker had arrived too late. The adverse reports from previous commandants and the expense of maintaining the settlements caused the authorities in London and Sydney in 1829 to close the settlement and transfer Barker to King George Sound in Western Australia, to the surprise of the fishermen from Macassar and the great sorrow of his Aboriginal friends (Harris 1985, p. 159; Mulvaney 1994, p. 11; Mulvaney 1989a, p. 69; Powell 2016, p. 152).

There were five original objectives for the British in wanting a base in northern Australia. They were the need to protect British trade with China; provide a springboard for naval operations in the Indian Ocean; offer a haven for sailors shipwrecked in Torres Strait; establish trade with the sailors of Southeast Asia and to foster cordial relations with the local Indigenous inhabitants. These were similar to the instructions given in 1788 to Governor Arthur Phillip, who was ordered to open dialogue with Aboriginal people and to live in a conciliatory manner. Barker’s approach to achieving these objectives, especially in the area of inter-racial relations, differed from his predecessors. This chapter will explore how Barker’s management of inter-racial relations at Fort Wellington was different. Later the study will analyse what can be learned from Barker’s approach to inter-racial relations that may be relevant to twenty-first century Australia.

Although Captain Collet Barker’s term as commandant of Fort Wellington, Raffles Bay, lasted only fifty weeks, his influence on inter-racial relations on the Cobourg Peninsula extended well beyond this term. His policy was adopted at the later settlement of Victoria on Port Essington and contributed to peaceful racial co-existence there between 1838 and 1849 (Mulvaney 1994, p. 1). Nine years after
Barker’s departure and the abandonment of Fort Wellington a tiny British fleet sailed in to the settlement of Port Essington. The local Aboriginal people initially believed that Barker had returned. Mulvaney comments that ‘[B]ecause of his influence, and probably also because people were accustomed to the annual arrival of Macassan fleets, the British arrival created no traumas and friendly relations resumed. Port Essington proved a remarkable frontier of peaceful co-existence’ (Mulvaney 1989b, p. 69).

A captain in the 39th Regiment of Foot, Barker was a guard on vessels transporting convicts to New South Wales. In July 1828, he disembarked in Sydney and within a month was posted to Fort Wellington as commandant. The settlement he inherited was dispirited and very pessimistic as a result of the leadership of Barker’s two predecessors, Captain Smyth and Lieutenant Sleeman (Mulvaney 1994, p. 5).

Smyth demonstrated that he was unsuited to the task of creating a sustainable settlement in previously unsettled territory, first at Fort Dundas then Fort Wellington. Described as having ‘energy without understanding’ (Powell 2016, p. 98) and apparently uncomfortable in the vicinity of Aboriginal people, Smyth offered financial incentives to some of his men to kidnap a hostage for ‘pacification’ in response to some pilfering. In capturing a young girl, the men killed a man, woman and child, an action later described by Governor Darling as an ‘atrocities’ (Mulvaney 1994, p. 3; Powell 2016, p. 99).

1. In the tradition of the British ideology of superiority referred to earlier, Smyth and Sleeman, like all previous commandants at both Fort Wellington and Fort Dundas, considered Aboriginal people to be a perpetual menace who must be dominated. One form of this domination was to erect social barriers between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, these divisions being mutually exclusive (Barker, Mulvaney & Green 1992, p. 42).

Fort Wellington under Barker
With the arrival of Barker as commandant at Fort Wellington the atmosphere was quickly transformed (Barker, Mulvaney & Green 1992, p. 33). Aware of the Fort
Dundas lessons on the impact of poor diet on the incidence of disease, especially scurvy and malaria, Barker quickly experimented with local plant foods, seeking advice of the local Aboriginal people (Mulvaney 1994, p. 7; Powell 2016, p. 103). The treatment and prevention of malaria appeared to have been beneficial as there was only one confirmed death of a person who contracted malaria at the settlement under Barker’s leadership (Reid 1992, p. 46).

From the outset, Captain Barker showed great tact, compassion and adaptability in dealing with the Aboriginal people of Fort Wellington. Friendly relations prevailed during his term of power, not only with Aboriginal people but also the Macassan fishermen, who annually visited the area in search of the seafood delicacy, trepang. Under the influence of Barker, they were delighted to be able to land and cure their trepang without molestation from the local people. The trade and interaction flourished for the short period that the settlement was occupied, and visits by Macassans began to increase to the extent that soon restraint had to be put upon it (Favenc 1896).

The most notable of Barker’s achievements was in the sphere of relations with Aboriginal people. His chief interest and hobby was the study of Aboriginal society (Mulvaney 1994, p. 9). Instead of following the traditional path of domination adopted by his peers, Barker went out of his way to study the culture, traditions and law of those people. T.B. Wilson, surgeon and member of the Royal Geographical Society, spent time at Fort Wellington after being shipwrecked in the Timor Sea. He noted that ‘Captain Barker had a great deal of difficulty to contend with, in his method of treating the natives; as no other individual in the settlement could be brought to consider these poor beings in any other light than wild beasts’ (Wilson 1835, Ch. V).

Instead of erecting barriers to prevent Aboriginal people from entering the European compound, Barker welcomed and encouraged them to mingle with both troops and convicts and to observe and participate in many of the European operations and festivities (Wilson 1835, Ch. V). This trust and welcome was reciprocated, as evidenced by a dance party organised by Aboriginal people around a fire outside the settlement. Europeans, including sailors from a ship in
port joined the local people dancing to the music, followed by a supper of rice provided by Barker. Aboriginal people then camped the night within the settlement compound (Wilson 1835, Ch. VI). This event illustrates a completely different approach to that mentioned earlier adopted by Eyre in his *Suggestions for improvement of system adopted towards the natives*, suggestion 5: ‘[The system] should be such as would operate, in some degree, in weaning the natives from towns or populous districts’ (Eyre 1964, p. 2046).

**Respect**

There are several definitions of the word ‘respect’, but for this study of Barker it is defined as ‘due regard for the feelings, wishes, or rights of others’ (Oxford Living Dictionaries 2016).

Barker quickly learnt the importance and respect given by Aboriginal people to their leaders. By communicating directly to Wellington (Aboriginal name Merriak) and exchanging gifts, he established a level of trust and respect - that was accepted by most of the Aboriginal community, although occasional individuals tested this trust, only to be reprimanded by their leaders (Barker, Mulvaney & Green 1992, pp. 82-3). The importance of the role of the community leaders in inter-racial interaction was emphasised when Wellington spent most of the night of the dance reminding Barker and his men that Washington (Aboriginal name Miago) was subordinate to Wellington and, as such, not entitled to receive much attention from the Europeans (Wilson 1835, Ch. VI).

Other examples of mutual respect shown by both Aboriginal people and Barker were noted by surgeon T.B. Wilson and included in the narrative of his travels (Wilson 1835) and Mulvaney included similar observations in his biography of Barker (Barker, Mulvaney & Green 1992, Chs. 1-3).

Wilson reported:

> A short time before I arrived, Captain Barker had paid a visit to the natives, placing himself under Wellington's care, who seemed not a little flattered by such a mark of distinction. ... Captain Barker was treated with the greatest attention and kindness. Wellington would
neither accept of any present himself, nor would he permit any of his followers to do so … In the evening, they prepared a mess of fish, which they had speared, and were highly delighted to perceive Captain Barker partake of it. In travelling, whenever they came to a stream, or marsh, one of the natives, named Marambal, insisted on carrying him over … In the evening, the Captain retired to rest, as the natives did, on the sand. Next day, he returned to the settlement in safety, to the great joy of all our people, who, thenceforth, began to consider the natives in a more favourable light than they had hitherto done (Wilson 1835, Ch V).

On another occasion:

Captain Barker informed me he had lent Wellington a canoe for a fortnight, and that no person in the settlement believed it would ever be returned. Dr. Davis, who still viewed the natives (and particularly Wellington), with a prejudiced eye, was quite confident that he would never again visit the settlement; or if he did so, that he would make some excuse for not returning the canoe … In the evening of the 30th, Wellington, the native chief, with a number of his tribe, visited the settlement, and brought back the canoe. I was much pleased at this occurrence, as it established the position that Captain Barker and myself firmly maintained, viz. that the natives were not such rogues as they were reported to be; and that they were "more sinned against than sinning" (Wilson 1835, Chs. V & VI).

A reference by Mulvaney relates to Barker’s rejection of ideological superiority with its lack of respect towards Aboriginal people: ‘In an ambient culture of class consciousness, military hierarchy and racial superiority, Barker was tolerant of Aboriginal ways and groped towards an understanding of that society’ (Barker, Mulvaney & Green 1992, p. 33). He also acknowledged the rights of Aboriginal people as custodians of the land, a factor that is significant in the light of the issue of Land Rights raised in the next chapter of this study (Barker, Mulvaney & Green 1992, p. 295).
Barker went out of his way to foster a culture of mutual respect between the British settlers in the community and the Aboriginal custodians of the land incorporating Fort Wellington. The reports of Wilson (1835) above illustrate the lengths to which Barker was prepared to go to learn the customs of the local people and to demonstrate that preparedness to them. On another occasion, Barker and Wilson met two Elders, including Wellington, while taking an evening stroll along the beach. ‘They joined us like old acquaintances meeting in a town’, Barker reported, ‘after a few minutes conversation we each passed on. Barker was prepared to share with Aboriginal people some of the skills brought from Britain. Prior to his leaving the settlement, he familiarised his Aboriginal friends with the various vegetable and fruit plants in the settlement garden and the benefit offered by that produce (Mulvaney 1994, p. 11).

Probably the most telling illustration of the importance of Barker and his approach to inter-racial relations was that, under his administration at Raffles Bay and later at Albany in Western Australia, no Aboriginal deaths, or even injuries, resulted from aggression by his troops or the convicts in his care (Barker, Mulvaney & Green 1992, p. 33). How different this statistic is when compared to the many violent conflicts reported in the literature occurring in other regions of the new colonies from the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788 (Broome 2010, p. 37; Reynolds 1996, p. 53).

For reasons determined in Sydney and Britain before Barker arrived at Raffles Bay, the settlement at Fort Wellington was abandoned in August 1829 (Barker, Mulvaney & Green 1992, p. 43). Barker was transferred to King George Sound at Albany in Western Australia to once again replace Lieutenant George Sleeman as commandant of the settlement where his experience in developing positive inter-racial relations continued. Historian Garden (1977) noted that the level of energy Barker devoted to the well-being of the settlement at King George Sound and that of its Aboriginal neighbours was similar to his efforts at Fort Wellington (Barker, Mulvaney & Green 1992, p. 244; Garden 1977, p. 23). Barker took great interest in the lives of Aboriginal people of the Sound, making the effort to understand their culture and customs. In so doing he won the respect and affection of the
Aborigines who, on hearing of his later death at the mouth of the Murray River, wanted to be taken to the place so they could avenge him (Garden 1977, p. 33).

Mulvaney wrote of Barker:

[He] must be rated as one of the most efficient and compassionate administrators in pre-1850 Australia, not only for his command at Fort Wellington, but also subsequently at King George Sound (Albany). His stature is even greater on the roll of those who sought to improve racial relations and to attempt the comprehension of Aboriginal society (Mulvaney 1994, p. 1).

Elsewhere, Mulvaney wrote:

[Barker’s] is a record of peaceful interaction between two cultures. This constituted the critical difference between the commercially motivated Swan River settlement ... Those colonists were land-takers, so their spread was characterised by bloodshed, culminating in 1834, only five years after the first European arrival, in Aboriginal massacre at Pinjarra (Barker, Mulvaney & Green 1992, p. 245),

and ‘What Barker achieved was trust from Aborigines at both settlements’ (Barker, Mulvaney & Green 1992, p. 35).

**Macassans**

Barker’s ability to communicate with and relate to a different culture was not confined to Aboriginal people. One of the instructions he received when appointed to Fort Wellington was to foster trade with Southeast Asia. For some hundreds of years before the establishment of the Fort Wellington settlement, Macassan sailors from South Sulawesi, Indonesia, made annual excursions to the north of Australia to collect and process trepang, or bêche-de-mer, highly regarded as a delicacy in China and Japan (Powell 2016, p. 41).

Realising the potential trade benefits to be gained from harvesting trepang, Barker kept copious records of the movement and activities of the Macassans during their
visits to Fort Wellington (Mulvaney 1994, p. 9). The British also believed that trade with the Macassans could open up markets for British goods in the Indies, even though such a venture would not be tolerated by the Dutch. Barker realised that it would be uneconomical for the British to establish their own trepang harvesting operation, instead, he began nurturing relations with the Macassans with the intention of contracting to purchase part of their catch for trade purposes (Powell 2016, p. 105). These negotiations were progressing well until, to the great surprise and disappointment of the Macassans, Barker was transferred (Barker, Mulvaney & Green 1992; Favenc 1896).

Barker was cast in a different mould to that of most of his peers. He was able to establish an environment of trust, respect and peaceful inter-racial cohabitation at both Fort Wellington and King George Sound where others had brought antagonism, doubt, distrust and violence. The esteem that he attracted was demonstrated to Captain (Sir) George Bremer when he sailed into Port Essington on the Cobourg Peninsula nine years later. Aboriginal Elder, Langari, approached Bremer’s vessel in a canoe and climbed aboard and addressed Bremer:

*Shedding tears, and frequently touching his shoulders with both hands in a sort of half embrace. From this repeatedly pointing to Fort Wellington, and making use of the term Commandant in a tone of endearment, it appeared that Langari … had mistaken … Bremer for Captain Barker … to whom the natives had been very much attached (Earl 1846, pp. 34-5).*

**Barker’s background**

To understand why Captain Collet Barker approached inter-racial relations in a manner so different to those of his peers it would be normal to delve into the various archives containing details of personnel in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. However, uncovering details of the life of Barker before Fort Wellington yielded little fruit. The most extensive research into the early life of Barker is that conducted by D.J. Mulvaney in the first chapter of *Commandant of solitude: The Journals of Captain Collet Barker 1828-1831* (Barker, Mulvaney &

One factor uncovered by Mulvaney that may have helped shape Barker’s approach to tolerance and respect towards Aboriginal people was the influence of Unitarian doctrine adopted by the Presbyterian, Independent and Baptists congregations of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Barker, Mulvaney & Green 1992, p. 9). Unitarians often engaged in community work, promoted diversity and believed that human differences were creative, not destructive (Brown 2015). David James, a prominent Presbyterian clergyman, published his sermon preached at the funeral of Barker’s great-uncle, emphasising that ‘piety was rational and affectionate, equally remote from bigotry [sic] as enthusiasm’. Perhaps Barker inherited these tenets of tolerance and quiet piety. It could be argued that Barker was influenced by these religious teachings for at Fort Wellington he regularly read the sermons of Scottish preacher, Hugh Blair, to the soldiers and convicts on the Sabbath (Barker, Mulvaney & Green 1992, p. 9).

Collet Barker had many opportunities to test his tenets of tolerance and quiet piety. After enlisting in the 39th Regiment of Foot in 1806, three months after the English victory at Trafalgar he served in several theatres of battle including Spain, Canada, and France, then Ireland (Barker, Mulvaney & Green 1992, pp. 13-20). Barker sailed with the 39th Regiment acting as guards transporting convicts from Britain to Australia from 1826 until his appointment as commandant at Fort Wellington in July 1828 (Mulvaney 1994, p. 5).

The approach taken by Barker to inter-racial relations was in stark contrast to that of others in position of authority in the new colonies of Australia. His approach demonstrated a commitment to the prevention of oppression and domination of Aboriginal people and sits at odds with the ideology of superiority. By adopting a policy of equality, trust and respect Barker could demonstrate to Aboriginal people of Raffles Bay that cooperative coexistence was of benefit to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people alike. Powell wrote that ‘The power of Barker’s personality lived after him, and ensured … that black/white relations at the new settlement [at Port Essington] would be off to a good start’ (Powell 2016, p. 169). He could continue
this policy when transferred to King George Sound in Western Australia. His work did not go unnoticed by the authorities in Sydney. Governor Ralph Darling, recognising Barker’s ‘energetic and humane administration’ (Barker, Mulvaney & Green 1992, p. 23), appointed him as New Zealand Resident where it was hoped Barker would restore ‘Confidence between the Natives of New Zealand and the European settlers’ (Powell 2016, p. 155).

Barker’s death
En route from Fremantle to Sydney, after a brief landing to explore the eastern shore of St Vincent Gulf, Barker and a small party set off on foot to the mouth of the Murray River. While at the mouth, Barker crossed the river and wandered over the sand dunes alone. While out of sight he was attacked and killed by three Aboriginal men. Some reports claim the attackers thought Barker was one of several lawless sealers who had captured women and killed on occasions. Mulvaney wrote that ‘... the Aborigines got it terribly wrong. They chose as a payback victim one of the most humane friends that Aboriginal people had encountered in a responsible post since 1788’ (Barker, Mulvaney & Green 1992, pp. 25-6).

The Barker approach
The available literature suggests that the spiritual and family influences on the young Collet Barker helped formulate his approach to interpersonal relations. His preparedness to treat all people as equals, whether they be European and non-European, and to respect diversity of culture and heritage produced a level of intercultural harmony in Fort Wellington and King George Sound that contrasted dramatically with the conflict and aggression experienced in many other military and civilian settlements at the time. By making the effort to learn about and attempt to understand the different culture of Aboriginal people he encountered, he was able to accept that the laws, culture and heritage of Aboriginal people, while so different to those of the Europeans, were entitled to the same level of respect as those of his own culture.

By acknowledging the divergence of cultures, Barker and Aboriginal leaders he encountered were able to communicate, debate and negotiate common ground
that allowed for harmonious interaction free of the violence, disrespect and domination experienced elsewhere.

Later in this work examples are given of attempts by Australian governments to legislate for the benefit of Aboriginal people. These examples demonstrate that, with all good will, these attempts failed because the overriding ideology of non-Aboriginal superiority prevented mutual respect, understanding, communication and negotiation from influencing the design of these policies. If the approach taken by Barker towards intercultural negotiations had been applied by the governments in these examples the results would have been much different as will be seen in the following chapters.
Chapter 6: Respectful recognition

This chapter postulates that the approach of respect and cooperation exemplified by Captain Collet Barker at Fort Wellington and King George Sound nearly two hundred years ago, if adopted by those in power today, may be more successful in achieving a more equitable result for all Australians – Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike.

Chapter 5 noted that Barker enjoyed successful intercultural relations at Fort Wellington and later at King George Sound by developing an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding with Aboriginal people he encountered. The protocols for inter-group behaviour were established through consultation based on mutual understanding of the related cultures. This concept was acknowledged by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, but could not be translated into policy formulation.

Successful consultation requires mutual respect and understanding, recognising local protocols, and preparedness to adapt to different customs and cultures (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation 2000, Part 9 Section 31).

This sentiment was repeated in 2015 and applied directly to the attempts to formulate a meaningful format for an amendment to the Constitution to recognise Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders:

Reconciliation is about unity and respect between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and non-Indigenous Australians. It is about respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage and valuing justice and equity for all Australians (Reconciliation 2015).

History has shown us that reconciliation is more than acknowledging the mistakes of the past and apologising for wrongs committed since settlement. Having acknowledged the past it is vital for reconciliation that a plan be implemented to prevent further abuses and oppression in the future. Adopting the Barker approach to intercultural relations would provide a sound basis upon which a mutually respectful and positive future could be built. To achieve this goal would
require a commitment to respect, equality and tolerance on the part of all parties involved, Aborigines and non-Aborigines. It would require all parties to be aware of the cultural and spiritual heritage of the other parties enabling a mutually agreed starting position to be established.

It would be grossly optimistic to assume such changes in attitude to intercultural relations could be achieved without overcoming many traditional and ingrained obstacles. However, in the interests of equality, social justice and mutual respect, it is essential that all Australians accept these challenges and strive for success as Collet Barker and Merriak (Wellington) demonstrated in Fort Wellington.

I am not in a position to lay out a road map for successful, respectful intercultural relations, however, it is within the scope of this thesis to identify some of the barriers that need to be overcome to change the thinking of the parties concerned towards intercultural negotiations.

**Some challenges facing Aboriginal people**

Australia is a vast land where travel and communications battle the challenge of distance. For Aboriginal people the challenge of communication is compounded by the multiplicity of nations (over 500) with the associated variety of languages, cultures and spiritual traditions (Australian Government 2016). Such a diversity of languages and social structures would make the development of a united Aboriginal position towards reconciliation a real challenge. But without one united voice, the frustration of the past, where the concerns of Aborigines were ignored, would be exacerbated.

Establishing the mechanism for canvassing the requirements of the Aborigines would be time consuming and expensive. However, this mechanism must be created by Aboriginal people themselves, free from the bias and pre-conceived expectations of the dominant powers. The consultative forum of Aboriginal people must be free of outside (non-Aboriginal) influence so that its deliberations reflect the opinions of Aboriginal people. The tools for this consultative process must be made available to Aboriginal people from federal resources.
Some challenges facing non-Aboriginal people

History suggests that the biggest challenge facing the dominant power group when addressing the way forward for intercultural relations will be to ignore the influences of the inherited ideology of superiority and approach the challenge in the spirit of mutual respect and fairness. Previous legislation and policies to improve the welfare of Aboriginal people have been coloured by an assumption that policy makers know what is best for Aboriginal people based on their belief in their own superiority and knowledge, rather than as a result of consultation with the affected people.

Another hurdle will be the time necessary to negotiate a mutually agreed position and the effect such a delay would have on the opinions of the voting public of Australia. There is a danger that an extended time frame would dim the desired for change in the minds of the general public.

Similarly, the expenditure necessary to effect the above may create a negative attitude in the eyes of an uninformed public. However, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that there exists an opportunity to correct the failings of the past by creating a fairer society where all are treated with the same respect and dignity.

These suggestions are by no means exhaustive but are listed to demonstrate some of the hurdles that would need to be cleared before proper recognition of Aboriginal people could occur and real reconciliation be achieved.
Chapter 7: Reconciliation into the twenty-first century

The evidence suggests that the policy makers in the Federal Government of Australia have not been able to translate their words of reconciliation and recognition relating to intercultural relations with action to promote the emancipation from all forms of oppression and domination of Aboriginal people. As mentioned in earlier chapters, Critical Theory states that ‘...ideological positions are a function of class positions, and the dominant ideology in society is that of its dominant class’ (Marx 1847) and ‘It maintains a commitment to freedom, happiness, and a rational ordering of society and emancipation from all forms of oppression (Bronner & Kellner 1989, p. 2). It is motivated by an interest in the emancipation of those who are oppressed and dominated’ (Kellner 2016, p. 1). By applying Critical Theory to the ideology of superiority as practised by those in power in Australia since 1788 and from my own standpoint of privilege, it is evident to me that those in power in Australia, those developing and implementing ideology, appear to have not maintained a commitment to the freedom, happiness and rational ordering of society to promote the emancipation from all forms of oppression, especially the oppression and domination of Aboriginal people. A review of three events that have occurred in the last fifty years illustrate how those in positions of power have continued to implement policies that fail to relieve the oppression and domination of Aboriginal people.

Over the last fifty years there have been several well publicised policy statements made by Federal Governments of the time, purporting to promote the advancement of the welfare of the Aborigines, but in each case the policy was designed from the position of superiority, where the perception of action in the eyes of the non-Aboriginal population took precedence over the actual implementation of meaningful benefits to Aboriginal people. It is worth looking at three of those events to illustrate the point. Those three events are: the establishment in 1991 of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, the ‘Sorry’ statement of 2007 and the movement to recognise Aboriginal people in the Australian Constitution.
Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation

In 1991, the Federal Government established the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation under the *Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act 1991* and was charged with this mission:

Object 5. The object of the establishment of the Council is to promote a process of reconciliation between Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders and the wider Australian community, based on an appreciation by the Australian community as a whole of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and achievements and of the unique position of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders as the indigenous peoples of Australia, and by means that include the fostering of an ongoing national commitment to co-operate to address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage (*Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act 1991*, Part 2 Section 5).

The last section of the Act included the regulation ‘This Act ceases to be in force on 1 January 2001’ (*Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act 1991*, Part 5 Section 32). There is an amazing level of optimism on the part of the Federal Government emanating from this final section. The desire that the Federal Government, through its agency the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, would be able to achieve in less than ten years a task which its predecessors had failed to complete in more than two hundred years, appears optimistic at least. That the finalisation of the Act was set to coincide with the celebrations of the centenary of federation further suggests that perhaps the whole Act was designed to influence non-Aborigines rather than achieve positive benefits for the Aborigines of Australia.

Further evidence of the non-Aboriginal domination of this Act appears in Part 4 of the Act where the appointment and termination of members of the Council rests ultimately with the Federal Minister responsible for administering the Act. For example, Section 25 states ‘A member holds office on such terms and conditions (if any) in respect of matters not provided for by this Act as are determined by the Minister’ (*Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act 1991*, Part 4 Section 25). In other words, the government minister of the day has control over the structure of
the Council. From my standpoint, such a policy does not promote a commitment to the freedom, happiness and rational ordering of society to promote the emancipation from all forms of oppression and domination of Aboriginal people. The fact that, in 2017, there is little, if any, tangible improvement in ‘the appreciation by the Australian community as a whole of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and achievements and of the unique position of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders as the indigenous peoples of Australia’ (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act 1991, Part 2 Section 5), suggests that the promotional activity of the government of the day was more important than achieving the publicised commitment to co-operate to address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage.

The ‘Sorry’ Statement
Following his success in the federal election of November 2007, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd honoured a pre-election promise to Australia to apologise ...

to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for the laws and policies of successive parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these ‘our fellow Australians ...

For the future we take heart; resolving that this new page in the history of our great continent can now be written. A future based on mutual respect, mutual resolve and mutual responsibility.

A future where all Australians, whatever their origins, are truly equal partners, with equal opportunities and with an equal stake in shaping the next chapter in the history of this great country, Australia.

... I therefore propose a joint policy commission, to be led by the Leader of the Opposition and me, with a mandate to develop and implement—to begin with—an effective housing strategy for remote communities over the next five years. It will be consistent with the government’s policy framework, a new partnership for closing the gap (Rudd 2008, p. 171).
The speech was greeted with ‘cheers and tears’ (ABC News 2008). But these fine words of apology have not been translated into the action required to ‘close the gap’. In fact, several news articles comment that the gap between the health, employment and educational levels of Aborigines and non-Aborigines has widened since the 2008 speech (Carter 2017; Hunter & Gordon 2017; Morgan 2017). An independent observer could be justified in feeling that, while the ‘Sorry’ speech acknowledged a lot of the errors and discrimination of the past, the promises for the future have not been converted into positive action for the benefit of Aboriginal people. The five-year plan to develop and implement an effective housing strategy for remote communities quickly became a ten-year plan and in 2008 the planned completion date was extended to 2018 (Department of Social Services 2013, p. 8). While large amounts of money were poured into the scheme to build new houses and repair existing accommodation for Aboriginal communities in remote areas, the level of severe overcrowding has been reduced only marginally in the first eight years of the plan.

This week, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull delivered his Close the Gap report to Parliament. Meanwhile housing shortages in remote NT Aboriginal communities have reached critical levels – homelessness in the Territory is 15 times the national average. For Aboriginal people on the ground, this means children living in houses with 20 other people, elderly men and women sleeping on kitchen floors, tents pitched on verandahs during monsoon rains, and women who are experiencing violence with nowhere safe to go (Ross & Walters 2017).

The words of the apology received enthusiastic acclaim in the non-Aboriginal press. The translation of those words into a real improvement in the welfare and culture of Aboriginal people has not yet been achieved. The oppression and dominance of Aboriginal people continues.

**Recognition and the Australian Constitution.**

There have been debates about recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia’s founding document – the Constitution – since the 1990s (Recognise 2017). As it currently exists, the Constitution makes no reference to
Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people. The path towards meaningful recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Constitution has been very twisted. Sir Anthony Mason, former Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia, believed that there is widespread acknowledgement that the Constitution has failed to protect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights as the first peoples of this country. He went so far as to add ‘... it was ineffective in protecting our peoples from the most fundamental of all freedoms, the freedom from discrimination’ (Mason 2001).

Leading up to the August, 2010 Federal Election, bipartisan support was reaffirmed by both major parties as election commitments (Brown, Milne, Brandt, Gillard & Swan 2010; Loughnane 2010). Since the winding up of the Council for Aboriginal Recognition in 2000 there have been several advisory bodies established by successive Federal Governments to formalise the wording and the mechanics of a referendum to alter the Constitution. In 2011 an Expert Panel was established, with its work being completed by a Parliamentary Joint Select Committee in 2015. In December 2015 the prime minister, together with the leader of the opposition, appointed a Referendum Council to consult widely throughout Australia and move towards achieving constitutional recognition of First Australians (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet 2016). In a speech to Parliament in February 2016 Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull expressed optimism that the proposed referendum to alter the Constitution would still be held in 2017. He noted that the debate had focused on options including the insertion of a racial discrimination prohibition in the constitution or the recognition of a body to advise the parliament on legislation affecting Indigenous people, adding ‘I think the more elaborate the changes, the less likely they are to ever get passed, so there is a lot of judgment that is called for there’ (p. 1). He also made a comment very relevant to this discussion when he said that he understood the frustration of Indigenous leaders who had expressed anger that their voices were not being heard (Gordon & Hunter 2016, p. 1).

This thesis recognises that the ideology of superiority that the British settlers brought from Europe and applied to the political and commercial administration
of Australia excluded the Australian Aboriginal people from genuine economic and political participation and, in fact, accelerated the destruction of their traditional beliefs, customs, culture and well-being. The events at Aurukun in northern Queensland illustrate the adverse influence this ideology has had on a small Aboriginal community. On the other hand, Captain Collet Barker, by taking it upon himself to study and understand the traditions and culture of Aboriginal people in Raffles Bay and King George Sound, was able to establish communities where the application of mutual respect, trust and cooperation acknowledged the cultural differences but embraced and celebrated the common values.

Barker took it upon himself to study the customs and law of the Aborigines. This enabled him to formulate an approach to inter-cultural interaction that was sensitive to the traditions of those people and respectful to the laws and structure of their society. This demonstration of respect attracted a reciprocal response from the Aboriginal leadership that resulted in a relationship far more harmonious than those often encountered in the Australia of the early 1800s. In twenty-first century Australia attempts by political authorities to establish a reconciliation with the Aboriginal people reflects more the traditions and approach of European heritage while failing to grasp the critical importance of land, culture and heritage to the Aboriginal people. In so doing, by concentrating on satisfying European values, understanding of, and respect for, Aboriginal values alienates the Aboriginal people and prevents a resolution. The Barker approach necessitates a serious attempt to understand the culture and needs of the Aboriginal people, then listening to and negotiating with them to achieve a solution that meets the hopes and aspirations of all parties.

If the Barker approach had been adopted in the three examples earlier in this chapter, the outcomes would be much different. A positive interchange of cultural and political sensitivities and aspirations prior to the implementation of policy would have produced results that demonstrated mutual respect and created positive benefits for all parties. A Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation that included and respected members appointed by and representing the voice of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, free of non-Aboriginal influence, and the
removal of artificially imposed deadlines, may have achieved the reconciliation of its purpose. A ‘Sorry’ statement, that established promises formulated in consultation with the Aboriginal subjects of the apology, and with the will to fulfil such promises, would have provided substance to the Aboriginal people rather than a hollow gesture. Token recognition of the Aboriginal people in the Australian Constitution, if created without proper consultation with the Aboriginal people, and supported by positive actions to entrench their rights and welfare in a reconciled Australia, would be just another hollow gesture. The Barker approach of mutual trust, understanding and consultation, if adopted, would create an environment where the rights, welfare, culture and beliefs of all citizens would be enshrined in the Constitution to the benefit of all Australians.

If today’s politicians could reject their traits of superiority, dominance and arrogance inherited from their British predecessors, and adopt the Barker approach to intercultural relations emphasising mutual trust, respect, communication, consultation and co-operation, Australia in the twenty-first century has the opportunity to celebrate the heritage and culture of the original inhabitants of this land, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Not just by acknowledging the mistakes in intercultural relations since the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788, but, more importantly, by establishing a pathway towards future relations where the culture and heritage of all is acknowledged and celebrated and all Australians are treated with mutual respect, trust, dignity and cooperation.
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