

**‘We're the mob you should be listening to’:  
Aboriginal Elders talk about community-  
school relationships on Mornington Island**

**Thesis submitted by  
Hilary BOND, BA, GradDipTeach, PostGradDipArts, MEd  
in March 2004**

**for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
School of Education, James Cook University**

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The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted within the guidelines for research ethics outlined in the *National Statement on Ethics Conduct in Research Involving Human* (1999), the *Joint NHMRC/AVCC Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice* (1997), the *James Cook University Policy on Experimentation Ethics. Standard Practices and Guidelines* (2001), and the *James Cook University Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice* (2001). The proposed research methodology received clearance from the James Cook University Experimentation Ethics Review Committee (approval number H 1076).

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Hilary Bond

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Date

## Acknowledgements

My teacher, *Balyarini Kulthangar* died on 31 October, 2003. It is a tragedy that he will not see the finished document that we worked on together. He was my inspiration, my best friend, and my brother-in-law, a wise and knowledgeable Elder, a caring father to his people, Mayor of Mornington Island, my co-researcher and my major informant. Most of all, he wanted the children of Mornington Island to be educated about their own culture, *Kunhunhamandaa* Law, to respect and listen to their Elders and be educated in both worlds. He wanted a good relationship with ‘whitefellas’ so we could work together for the common good of the students. Last year he related to me a vision that really concerned him. He told me:

Old *Chuloo*, *Goomungee*, *Shirokee* and mefella were on our way to my country. We were walking blackfella style, you know, no clothes, just our spears and we were about to cross the Dugong River. These kids, blackfella kids stopped us. There were about fifty of themfellas. They had ghetto blasters on real loud. They were drunk, carrying cartons and shouting. They told us to turn back. We had no choice but to turn around and go back to town. You know, Hilary, that vision told me that very soon we would have no culture left. When our Elders die that knowledge turns to dust. When we are buried our knowledge is buried with us.

I promise you, *yugud Kulthangar*, that this ‘university book’, as you called my thesis, will carry your words, and people all over Australia, ‘black’ and ‘white’, will read what was in your heart.

I wish to thank the Elders, Lawmen and senior women of Mornington Island for your years of laughter, stories (both secular and sacred), your teaching, your untiring support, friendship, love and compassion. Thank you to Hilary, Hugh, *Kulthangar* and Kippy, Cecily, Clara, Ida and Granny Margaret for adopting me into your family and for always caring for me and sharing your lives with me.

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## **Abstract**

The thesis explores the relationships the Elders of Mornington Island, a ‘closed’, geographically-remote Aboriginal community, perceive as prevailing between the school and the community, and the relationships that they believe should exist between the community and the local school and its teachers. The Elders, or Lawmen, a body of Aboriginal senior men, see themselves as the repositories and teachers of tribal Aboriginal Law that has been handed down from their Creation Ancestors for thousands of years and is still being handed down. The thesis documents and explores their accounts of the relationships they have had with non-Aboriginal people in the past and, in particular, the relationships they prefer to have with the teachers and school respectively. This thesis does not explore the perspectives or cultural narratives of the schoolteachers or administrators.

The thesis draws on critical theory, seeing both the wider society and the local society of Mornington Island as dynamic structures in which some sectors of society, in this case Aboriginal people, are oppressed, with dire consequences in many aspects of their individual and collective lives. It also draws on critical theory in adopting an ethical position of solidarity with, and compassion for, those whose lives are thus impaired. It shares with the Elders this sense that Aboriginal people have been, and continue to be oppressed, and explores individual and institutional dimensions of race relations, manifested in ideology, physical coercion, personal attitude and interpersonal relations.

The main body of data comprises an extended series of open-ended conversational interviews with twenty-five Lawmen and eleven other senior Mornington Islanders. Initially conversations were tape-recorded, but at the request of participants, this practice was abandoned in favour of handwritten notes of interviews. All records of interviews were returned to the respective contributors (and read to them, where appropriate or necessary) for approval or amendment. In practice, these readings became the stimulus and occasion for further conversations. The thesis treats the material thus provided as reflecting and constructing a particular knowledge and understanding of the world; it makes no judgements about its ontological status or its epistemological foundations, but takes it at face value as an account of the world as the Elders encounter it. In analysing the material, the thesis identifies several key dimensions of their understandings of relations between community and school, and explores emergent themes within each of these

dimensions, with a view to recognising both the commonalities and multiplicities of views across interviews. In doing so, the thesis seeks to represent the Elders' views as fully as possible and to give pride of place to their understandings.

The Elders perceive that the secular past affects the present and that the sacred past is permanently present. In describing and accounting for the present and in constructing a proper future, they recurrently draw on the past. They construct the present and accounts of what should be, on the basis of both the eternal spiritual Law and the secular past. The secular past they recount is full of racism, inequality, loss and oppression. The normative present and future are fundamentally grounded in traditional Law: all relationships should be based on Law. The Elders are disappointed that the young people in the community do not know their relationship categories according traditional Law and that the community is characterised by disorder, collectively and individually. They attribute this disordered present to colonialism, past and present.

The Elders want better relations with school staff, but they see the teachers standing outside the structure of kin relations and as 'standoffish' and self-segregating. The Elders believe the teachers should be open, personally, and available to be incorporated by the community into its kin-based social structure. The Elders consider that the school gives them no voice in curriculum and pedagogy. They insist that they should be heard on such matters. They perceive the teachers as having a coercive pedagogy, and see their interest in the children as confined to the school. They insist that pedagogy ought to be caring and inclusive, that teachers should recognise, and extend their interest to, the wider context of students' lives, and that their pedagogy should reflect this. The Elders see the curriculum as a bastardised version of a mainstream, urban curriculum. The Elders insist that the curriculum should provide significant space for themselves to teach Law and culture and to be able to educate the young people in traditional ways. Equally, they insist that the Western component of the curriculum should be of the highest standard, by mainstream, urban criteria.

This study shows that the Elders have severe misgivings about both the prevailing relations and the contribution of the school to what they insistently refer to as their tribal community. It argues that the fact that the school appears this way to the Elders, as the senior figures of the community, is itself a problem, and that in so far as their views might be more widely shared, the problem is even more critical.

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## Introduction

### The purpose and aims of this study

The thesis explores the relationships the Mornington Island Elders perceive as prevailing between the school and the community and the relationships that they believe should exist between them. The Elders, or Lawmen, are a body of Aboriginal senior men who see themselves as the repositories and teachers of tribal Aboriginal Law that has been handed down from their Creation Ancestors for thousands of years and is still being handed down. The thesis documents and explores the Elders' accounts of the relationships that they have had with non-Aboriginal people in the past and the social and political relationships they have, and would prefer to have, with the teachers and school.

The idea of researching such a topic came, in part, from lengthy discussions I held weekly in 1998 with the head Aboriginal Lawman and Mayor of Mornington Island, *Balyarini Kulthangar*<sup>1</sup> and his wife, Juliana (*Bulthuku*) or Kippy. It also arose from conversations with senior Mornington Island women who were concerned, as ex-teachers, that they should have an improved relationship with the school and more participation at the school. Along with these conversations, I was also aware from my own observations and my knowledge of widespread concerns among some sections of the 'white' community, that there was what could be described as a state of crisis in the community of Mornington Island and in relation to the school in particular. Finally, I also had knowledge of 'public' discourse (such as in the mass communications media) on race relations and Aboriginal education, of current policies to address perceived problems in these areas, and of academic research and discussion in the field. An understanding of the academic literature, in particular, helped refine the topic.

The research involved consulting the Elders' and other members of the community, listening to their ideas, discussing their views of the school with them, and representing these views as fully as possible. This entailed extensive recursive, informal conversations. In both the research and the writing, I sought, and seek, to

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<sup>1</sup> I italicise Lardil words throughout following the practice of anthropologist McKnight who has been researching with the Mornington Island Aboriginal people since 1966.

embody explicitly the relationships of respect, equality and appreciation of their views that the Elders also expect in a school-community relationship.

The topic follows and reflects the widespread recognition that colonisation of Aboriginal Australian societies has resulted in serious disturbances to those people. The research makes visible the precise relationships the Aboriginal Lawmen of Mornington Island, the *Kunhanhaamendaa*<sup>2</sup> *Muyinda*<sup>3</sup>, prefer to have with the teachers and the school and the crucial conditions that the *Muyinda* believe would fulfil those relationships. This thesis specifically asks the Lawmen<sup>4</sup> of *Kunhanhaa*, “What relationships do the Elders believe exist with the school and the teachers, and what relationships would you prefer?”

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<sup>2</sup> Although the only township on Mornington Island is called Gununa on maps, I deferentially emulate the usage of the *Lardil Dictionary compiled by Ngakulumungan Kangka Leman* (1997) who refer to Mornington Island as “*Kunhanhaa*” (p. 167). *Kulthangar*, who was the the head ceremonial Elder throughout the period in which I was conducting research for this thesis, informed me that the Aboriginal inhabitants of Mornington Island should be known as *Kunhanaamendaa* and that *Lardil* is the language of the *Kunhanhaamendaa* people, rather than the name of the “tribe” (*Personal Communication*, 26 September, 2001). *Mendaa* is the *Lardil* name for people, so the *Kunhunaamendaa* are the people of *Kunhanhaa*. Before Mathew Flinders called the island Mornington Island the Aboriginal people called Timber Point *Kunhanhaa* (*Ngakulumungan Kangka Leman*, 1997, p. 167). Hence the main township or mission became known as Gununa. *Kunhanhaa* is pronounced Gun-nun-ar. In the *Lardil* language K is pronounced as G as in grand and *mendaa* is pronounced *man-dar*.

<sup>3</sup> The *Muyinda* are the *Lawmen* who are Elders. *Muyinda* is both singular and plural. A *Muyinda* is an Elder and the *Muyinda* are a collective group of Elders. In regard to the usage of the term Elders I respectfully follow the usage of *Kulthangar*, Paul Peters, Melville Escott, Bobby Thompson, Teddy Moon, Cyril Moon and Cecil Goodman who have agreed publicly that *Kunhanhaamendaa* Elders are and were only men, whereas the senior women on Mornington Island are known as “Grannies.” There are no longer any *Law-Women* or women who go through the ritual of initiation or as it is known, *Law* (*Personal Communications*, 16 May, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> *Lawmen* is another name for initiated men who are at least forty years of age, although *Kulthangar* says they should be over fifty years (*Personal Communication*, 16 May, 2002). *Lawmen* have gone through initiation or the circumcision rituals of Aboriginal Law. The initiates learn sacred and secular knowledge on an ongoing basis for the rest of their life. The *Muyinda* are also known as Big Country *Lawmen* (*Personal Communication*, *Kulthangar* 26 September, 2002). *Muyinda* is pronounced as Moy-inda. The *Muyinda* were the guardians of the Dreamtime or *Mirndiyan* Law and its accompanying sacred knowledge. *Kunhanhaa* women did not share in the sacred rituals, in *Mirdyan*, the sacred knowledge of the Law and therefore they did not have political equality with the men and were not eligible to become *Muyinda* (Mimmott and Horsman, 1991, p. 127). Those who are able to receive Dreamtime communications are called Big Country Men or *Lawmen* (*Personal Communications*, *Kulthangar* and *Milmajah*, 26 September, 2001). The *Muyinda* ensured the wellbeing of the tribe in their role of social caretakers and as such were respected for their power and abilities. Because of their special knowledge they were responsible to the tribe as a whole. As keepers of the sacred knowledge, the *Muyinda* traditionally had authority over other people acting as religious and political leaders and teachers of the community (*Personal Communications*, *Kulthangar*, *Birdibir*, Goodman, C., Watt, J., *Chuloo*, Peters, P., *Kurnungkur*, and *Milmajah*, 26 September, 2001). The *Muyinda* have a subcategory known as *kinenda* pronounced as ging-oon-da. According to Aboriginal Law on *Kunhanhaa* the *kinenda* are the judges, the peacemakers and the arbitrators in traditional tribal business. Cecil Goodman, *Kulthangar*, *Kurnungkur*, Wilfred Marmies and *Birdibir* are the *kinenda*.

There are a number of problems in Aboriginal education, which this thesis notes as part of the broader context for understanding Elders' views of school-community relations on Mornington Island, and which it addresses further in its exploration of those views. On the one hand, there is a widespread desire by many Aboriginal people for improved education. On the other, schooling is seen by many, including many 'remote' Aboriginal people, to be not meeting the needs of Aboriginal communities. For these Aboriginal people, schooling continues to be experienced as a vehicle of oppression, assimilation and intrusion (Morgan and Slade, 1998; Jude, 1998; Budby and Foley, 1998).

An important element in this is that school is essentially an outside institution imposed on communities (Kukathas, 1992). This is reflected and embodied in a rhetoric which positions 'white' society or government as active agents, while simultaneously constructing Aboriginal people as recipients of their benevolence. In South Australia, for example, Folds wrote in 1984 that his "school had a rhetoric of helping the Aboriginal people" (p. 101). More recently, in Queensland, the state government education department has used the language of 'delivery' of schooling. Such language, and the practices that accompany it disregard Aborigines as agents thus failing to respect them, treating them as dependents and victims. It constructs education as a welfare project. It puts the government in the position of power and disempowers those Indigenous people who are 'helped'. Commenting on the consequences of the dependency such an approach fosters, Noel Pearson argues that long standing dependency on government welfare "has corrupted Aboriginal values of responsibility and sharing" and "dependency has killed the will to live and the will to work" (2000, p. 20).

Another factor contributing to the failure of Western schooling in remote Aboriginal communities is not listening to the Elders of the community (Isaacs, 1995; Pryor, 1998; Gool and Patton, 1998; Bell, 1999; Australian Senate. Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, 2000; Blitner, 2000). As Elder Larry Lanley, a former Mornington Island mayor (and father of Lawman Hilary Lanley, a participant in the research for this thesis) stated in 1980, "Many changes have been pushed on us [by Europeans]. They do not understand our ways, but give us their laws and their schools and tell us what they think is best for Aboriginal people. We have no say. Europeans do not

listen” (Memmott and Horsman, 1991, p. 367). A non-Aboriginal teacher with wide experience of teaching in remote Aboriginal communities has claimed that, “there is often documentation of... a community from a non-Aboriginal perspective, but an Aboriginal perspective gained from talking to the [local] Elders will give you an understanding of why people feel a particular way about something” (Clarke, 2000, p. 3).

The concept of “community relationships with teachers and the school” is important because interrelatedness and interconnectedness is such an integral part of Indigenous experience. Maori scholar Smith (2001), Hawaiian scholar Meyer (1998), Cherokee scholar Walker (2000) and Australian Aboriginal scholars Moreton-Robinson (1998), White (2002), Foley (2003) and Martin (2000) all argue that anything that breaks with a sense of interconnectedness between people is harmful and is to be avoided.

Frequently, in political debate and the mass media (including what it represents as popular opinion), Aboriginal people are themselves deemed to have failed, in not responding to what are portrayed as the benefits of Western schooling; the responsibility for their low levels of education is firmly attributed to themselves (Howson, 2000, 2002; Geoffrey Partington, 2000, 2001; Etherington, 2000, 2001; Leary, 2000; Johns, 2000, 2001). Indigenous academics and activists, in contrast, have argued that Aboriginal educational ‘failure’ is the outcome of inadequate and inappropriate provision, the result of a history of non-Aboriginal intrusion and imposition, in which Westernised schooling functions as a vehicle of ‘white’ superiority. Education, they argue, needs to be decolonised (Hughes, 1984, 1988; Langton, 1994; Moreton-Robinson, 1998; White, 2002; Forrest, 1998; Foley, 2003; Martin, 2002; Rigney, 1995, 1997, 1998; Heitmeyer and Perry, 1998; Walker, 2000; L.T. Smith, 2002; G.H. Smith, 2002; Meyer, 1998; Smith and Ward, 2000; cf. Fanon, 1967, 1980, 1986).

### **Outline of the Approach**

My approach to the research was shaped by my sense that relations between ‘white’ society and Aboriginal societies, including those on Mornington Island, were intensely oppressive for Aboriginal people – a view shared by the Elders and other senior people I had spoken with on Mornington Island. An understanding of

the oppressiveness of social relations for subordinate social groups is well captured in critical theory. Critical social theory argues that society is a dynamic structure in which there are significant differences of interest between groups, and in which those groups have different capacities to secure their respective interests. As a result, some groups are oppressed (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1972; Friere, 1970, 1985; Held, 1980; Giroux and McLaren, 1991; Giroux, 1991; Habermas, 1980; Habermas, De Greiff and Cronin, 1998; Kellner, 1989). Critical theory informs my understanding of the structures constituted around racial difference, on Mornington Island in particular, and Australian society more generally, the differences of interest between non-Indigenous and Indigenous populations, and the power differentials which result. The literature on race relations in Australia shows such structures and differentials to be crucial in sustaining the impoverished, often dysfunctional, and oppressive conditions under which Aboriginal people live, especially in remote communities. I argue that the *Kunhanhaa* Elders perceive that because of their race, and also because of their geographical location far from the urban centres of non-Indigenous population, their people are exploited and oppressed by a group more powerful than themselves: the state government employed, 'educated', non-Aboriginal outsiders, who are the teachers. I argue, further, that they see this operating both at the individual, personal level and at the institutional level at which the teachers are functionaries of the system of government institutions that dominates their community politically.

One of the central concerns of social critical theory is to penetrate the veneer of objectified appearances in order to expose the underlying social relationships they conceal (Giroux, 1983). Giroux (1983) argues that the power of the dominant classes is reproduced through a form of ideological hegemony that is established through the family, schools, mass media and churches. Critical theory, in this respect, informs this thesis's analysis of role of the school, as an institution, as the Elders see it. It informs the understandings developed here of the school's capacity to install western knowledge and practices in the community in ways that fundamentally disrupt traditional knowledge, a range of traditional practices, and the social structures on which the wellbeing of the community was founded, but without offering access to the

benefits that western knowledge and society ostensibly have to offer. Critical theory, as it has been applied to education, is particularly useful here, not simply for the critical insights it facilitates, but for the understandings it has developed of what might constitute a more adequate educational approach – an approach which is caring and inclusive, and which recognises, and extends to embrace, the wider context of students' lives (Allen, 1998).

Critical theory not only maps broad relations and structures, but also argues that oppressive relations produce dire consequences in many aspects of the individual and collective lives of those who are oppressed. It points to individual as well as institutional dimensions of social relations, manifested in personal attitudes and interpersonal relations, and offers insights into the dire consequences such relations may have for those who are oppressed by them. In this light, I explore the Elders' arguments that Western schooling is confusing the *Kunhanhaa* students because the local school, as the principal agent of socialisation in non-Aboriginal society, has what Partington and McCudden describe as a "tendency to transmit the dominant culture" (1992, p. 16). Similarly, I explore the Elders' belief that the students are learning non-Aboriginal curriculum and are forgetting and becoming ashamed of their own culture, and their claims that this is fundamental to the disorder and dysfunctionality of both the community as a whole, and the lives of many of its members.

Finally, critical theory is important to this thesis because it offers a moral, ethical foundation and orientation for the research, analysis and writing. On the one hand, it maintains that thought and action – including the thought and action involved in a research project, such as this – should be grounded in compassion and in a sense of the sufferings of others (Habermas, 1980). Compassion, here, is not simply a gesture, but is linked to the formulation of strategies for addressing everyday problems and situations, and enabling those affected by them to resolve them, by working towards the development of knowledge and power through which they can gain control over their own lives (Cocklin, 1992). Such concerns, both in critical theory in general, and in this thesis in particular, point to the value of fine-grained qualitative research methods for exploring issues of institutional and personal power, historical context and subjectivity (Giroux, 1983, p. 15).

## **Methodology**

The thesis uses data from an extended series of open-ended conversational interviews with twenty-five Elders and eleven other senior Mornington Islanders. I have not sought the perspectives and cultural narratives of the schoolteachers and administrators; rather I have privileged the Elders' voices. Some of the Elders' contributions are examined a number of times within and in subsequent chapters and this approach is sympathetic with the mindset of my co-researchers. This approach reflects Indigenous concepts of plural identity where understanding is derived from the articulation of multiple perspectives and where it is the role of the Elders to synthesise these views to maintain social cohesion. The conversations were mainly conducted on Mornington Island, a closed geographically remote Aboriginal community. Initially conversations were tape-recorded, but at the request of participants, this practice was abandoned in favour of handwritten notes of interviews. All records of interviews were returned to the respective contributors (and read to them, where appropriate or necessary) for approval or amendment. In practice, these readings became the stimulus and occasion for further conversations, and, in the process, generation of further information.

The thesis treats the material thus provided as reflecting and constructing a particular knowledge and understanding of the world; it makes no judgements about its ontological status or its epistemological foundations, but takes it at face value as an account of the world as they encounter it. In doing so, it draws on the traditions of social constructivism (Kukla, 2000) and, beyond them, to symbolic interactionist theory (Mead, 1972; Blumer, 1969). These theoretical approaches recognise and, accordingly, accept people's accounts of the world in which they live, at face value, as constructions of their world as it is understood and experienced. This is particularly important in dealing with the Elders' discussions of what might be called 'spiritual' matters, which are not, by and large, accepted in 'white' society. More specifically, in the Elders' culture, the spirit world and the accompanying Law created by the spirit beings that inhabit and constitute that world, are an ever-present tangible – at times, even visible – reality. In Western culture it is considered that however real the spirit world may appear to certain

individuals it is nothing like as tangible as in the Elders' world. Interactionist theory argues that people create perceptions of each other and their social settings and they act largely upon these perceptions or meanings that they have given to these people or things (Neuman, 2000). The collective perspective of the social group and surrounding community gives us information about rules and attitudes of society, but social life and communication is only possible when we understand and use a common language and have common meanings and common understandings (Mead, 1972).

Within these constructivist and interactionist traditions, it is recognised that meanings and perspectives are shaped, modified and reshaped through interaction with people (Blumer, 1969). In part, this implies that the accounts of their world the Elders have shared with me will have been shaped, in part, by their various relationships with, and perceptions of, me. In part, they will have been shaped by the particular contexts in which the conversations took place, both the immediate contexts (in their homes, in the street, at the school) and the more general context of events and other conversations and interactions that might have preceded the interviews. Finally, they will have been shaped, in part over the longer term, by perceptible changes in the community; in the five years over which I conversed with *Kulthangar*, for instance, Elders died, Chief Executive Officers changed, new teachers and police and new principals came and went. Consequently, the interviews over this process did not reveal the same understandings, nor were they consistently clear. Such changes in views do not invalidate them; rather, interactionist and constructionist theories suggest, they indicate both the rich complexity and the contextual relatedness of individuals' constructions of their daily lives and surroundings. In this context, one of the roles of research is to 'capture' and reflect this rich, contextualised diversity and complexity, rather than seek to determine which represent the 'truth', or reduce the complexity to a singular, unified account.

In analysing the material, I identify several key dimensions of the Elders' understandings of relations between community and school, and explore key emergent themes within each of these dimensions, with a view to recognising both the commonalities and multiplicities of views across interviews. I understood, before I commenced work on this thesis, that it was likely that the Elders would

recount oppressive relationships, and an education system that was failing their people, and that they would speak of a racist structure and its workings on an interpersonal level. I anticipated exploring the dimensions of injustice, and disempowerment. The particulars, however, were unpredictable, and the specific concerns and themes, such as dehumanisation, emotions and feelings, spirituality, violent clashes, greed and generosity, good and bad people and good and bad relationships, emerged, more or less gradually and piecemeal, from the data. In identifying these dimensions in the Elders' views of relations between school and community, the thesis seeks to represent their views as fully as is possible, and gives pride of place to the understandings they generously shared with me.

### **The Thesis Structure**

Chapter One examines a range of literature on Aboriginal education in 'communities' and on the broader contexts within which it is situated, including ongoing colonialism, continued racism, Aboriginal educational failure, and school community relations. The little literature that exists on relationships with Elders suggests that Elders do not simply want to be listened to; they want to be consulted with, negotiated with, and deferred to in long-term, respectful and trusting relationships, or partnerships, with Westerners who understand them, know how they think and know and appreciate their culture, law and language.

Chapter Two discusses a range of methodological issues arising in the research and writing of this thesis. It outlines the research question, the theoretical framework and the research methods adopted. It examines the theory and methods of a qualitative case study and discusses technical issues of open-ended, qualitative interviews. It also argues the importance of listening to Aboriginal Elders as the basis of the research, how this goes beyond traditional unstructured in-depth interview techniques and how this relates to the way of life on a tribal Aboriginal community. It argues that on the one hand, listening to the Elders conforms to local protocols of respect and, on the other, that it is crucial to both the generation of rich and credible data, and to the credible interpretation of that data. Finally, the chapter outlines the way in which the transactions within which the data has been generated are understood, and the way that understanding shapes the analysis of the data.

Chapter Three explores the historical context of the Elders' views. It documents and analyses the Elders' understandings of past events, how the past survives in memory to shape practice and how the Elders account for it. It shows that the Elders perceive that the secular past affects the present and that the sacred past is permanently present. In describing and accounting for the present and in constructing a proper future they recurrently draw on the secular past, a past that they recount as filled with racism, inequality, loss and oppression. They construct their accounts of what should be on the basis of both the eternal spiritual Law and the secular past. Aspects of the secular past provide instances of what they see as good relationships, and which they see as demonstrating the possibility of further relationships in the future, but it is the traditional Law that provides the normative framework and grounds for the present and future they see as good for their community.

Chapter Four documents the Lawmen's views that all relationships should be based on traditional Law. The Elders are disappointed that the young people in the community do not know their correct 'skin' relationship categories according to Kunhanhaa traditional Law, and they also believe that the community is characterised by disorder, collectively and individually. They attribute this disordered present to colonialism, past and present.

Chapter Five narrows the focus and documents the Elders' views concerning their preferred relationships with non-Aboriginal teachers who come to the community. This chapter analyses the protocols governing 'proper' relationships among people, the Elders' preferred communication styles and the conditions that the Elders believe are necessary to build relationships between teachers and community which will lead to a better education for the students of the community. Chapter Five also examines the participants' understandings of power relationships and systems of educational power both in the community and outside the community. It applies Kincheloe's (1991) argument that those who hold accepted knowledge hold power. It explores the Elders' perception that the position of the school as an institution of government is such that it is unable to accord any significant or powerful voice to the Elders. The Elders, however, insist that they should be heard. At an individual personal level they want better relations with teachers, but they see the teachers as standing outside the structure of 'kin' relations

and as personally standoffish and self-segregating. The Elders believe the teachers should be open, personally, and available to be incorporated by community in the community's own kin based social structure.

Chapter Six analyses the Elders' ideas on culturally appropriate curriculum and pedagogy. This chapter extends the concept that Indigenous education is designed to recognise and support cosmic and secular interconnectedness. *Kunhanhaa* interconnectedness not only recognises mind, body, emotion and spirit as one in people, but also sees connections between people, knowledge and the natural world. This chapter explores the Elders' beliefs that teachers should learn respectful and appropriate pedagogy and curriculum based on local knowledge, through productive relationships with them. They see the teachers as having a coercive pedagogy, and see their interest in the children as confined to the school. They insist that pedagogy ought to be caring and inclusive, that teachers should recognise, and extend their interest to, the wider context of students' lives, and that their pedagogy should reflect this. They see the curriculum as a bastardised version of a mainstream, urban curriculum. They insist that the curriculum should provide significant space for themselves to teach Law and culture and to be able to educate the young people in traditional ways. Equally, they insist that the Western component of the curriculum should be of the highest standard, by mainstream, urban criteria.

The Conclusion summarises the main lines of argument and discussion, draws conclusions regarding, and suggests possible implications of, the Lawmen's constructions of what is, and what should be, in relation to the school and teachers on the basis of both the eternally present sacred past, and the temporal secular past. It also suggests possible implications of the thesis's findings for productive cross-cultural relationships between remote Aboriginal Elders and non-Aboriginal teachers. It concludes that the Lawmen have deep misgivings about both the prevailing relations between school and community and the contribution of the school to what they insistently refer to as their 'tribal community'<sup>5</sup>. The fact the

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<sup>5</sup> I respectfully follow the usage of the Mornington Island Elders who perceive themselves as "tribal Aboriginal people" (*Personal Communications, Kulthangar, Kurnungkur*, Goodman, C., *Milmajah*, Robinson, R., *Birdibir*, Moon, T., Peters, C., Williams, J., and Kelly, R., 15 May, 2002). *Kulthangar* stated, "We, the Big Country Lawmen of Mornington Island, the *Muyinda*, respect our Aboriginal Law and our people and as Elders, we are One Tribal Voice for Mornington Island" (Letter to author, *Kulthangar*, 24 June, 2002). Following their usage, I employ the term "tribal" throughout the thesis.

school appears this way to them, as the senior figures in the community, is in itself a problem; in-so-far as their views might be more widely shared, the problem is even more pressing.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Education and Aboriginal Communities:**

#### **A critical review of the literature**

This thesis explores the relationships between the community (and in particular the Elders) and the school on Mornington Island, as these are seen by the Elders of the community. The Elders see current community-school relations as a critical element in what they see as the failure of the school to meet the educational needs of the community, which they further understand in the context of an ongoing history of racism and oppression. This chapter sets the situation on Mornington Island, as the Elders see it, in the broader context of the widely-admitted failure of schooling for children in remote Aboriginal communities across northern and central Australia, the educational and administrative practices associated with that schooling, and the broader experience of government, and of racism, as these are encountered and understood by Aboriginal people in remote communities more generally. In doing so, it draws on a wider range of literature than that usually included in an academic literature review: biographical and autobiographical literature, popular journalism and policy texts, as well as academic research and argumentative or evaluative commentary. Biographical and autobiographical literature offers insights into the intensity and idiosyncrasies of individual experience and concerns about remote communities, including those of the people who make up those communities. Journalistic accounts indicate the concern about the chaotic state of affairs on Aboriginal communities that circulates beyond the confines of both the communities and those who live and work on them, and academia. Policy documents help situate the situation on Mornington Island in the context of current official responses to the issues that other literature highlights.

Seeing the situation on Mornington Island in this context suggests that although there are idiosyncrasies and details that are specific, perhaps even unique, to Mornington Island and that the community is not an isolated, exceptional or atypical case. It also provides a framework for developing a richer understanding of the situation on Mornington Island than might otherwise be the case, given the relatively small number and range of studies of that specific

community. Its purpose, in this respect, is to provide an understanding of the sorts of dynamics and issues that might be expected to surface there.

The chapter begins by noting the widespread recognition that schools for Aboriginal children in remote communities have failed. It then explores a variety of factors identified in existing research and other debate as contributing to this failure. In this context, it notes, on one hand, passing references mainly on the part of community members, to the failure of school providers to listen to Aboriginal people themselves, and on the other, the general inattention to this failure, and to Aboriginal views about existing and desirable provision. It discusses a broader range of contextual studies that locate schooling in remote Aboriginal communities within a long and continuing oppressive history of colonialism and racism. Finally, it notes a range of suggestions for addressing the problems facing schooling in these communities, in particular, the emphasis on the need to develop partnerships, and interconnections, in which school providers and others take the time to cultivate productive and respectful relationships with community members, specifically Elders, and to listen to them.

### **Educational Failure and School-Community Relationships**

#### *The Outcome of Western Education on Remote Communities*

There is abundant literature on the failure of Western education for remote Aboriginal students. Such general judgements are well summarised and further documented in key reviews over the past decade, including *The National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People 1996-2002* (Ministerial Council on Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, 1995), *Learning Lessons: An independent review of Indigenous education* (Collins, 1999), *The Review of Education and Employment Programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples* (Education Queensland, 1999), *Partners for Success: Strategy for continuous improvement of education and employment outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Education Queensland* (Education Queensland, 2000), *Katu Kalpa: Report on the Inquiry of Education and Training Programs for Indigenous Australians* (Australian Senate. Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, 2000), *“Emerging Themes”: National inquiry*

*into rural and remote education* (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2000) and “*Recommendations*”: *National inquiry into rural and remote education* (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2000). These reviews all maintain that current Western approaches to education in these contexts are far from successful. At the other end of the scale, a group of Aboriginal women from the Kimberley in Western Australia expressed the same sense of the inadequacy of education, as it was being provided, over a decade ago: “Gadiya never give blakbala chance before to talk up for what kinda education they want for their kids. They bin purum in dem-da gadyakin skulin an it’s not workin’ out too good. Yeah dat tru tu; it not working out too good, longtain” (cited in Theis, 1987, p. i).

Some judgements about the failure of education in remote Aboriginal communities are based on specific educational outcomes. A Multilevel Assessment Program found that “students in remote Aboriginal schools perform 3 to 7 years behind urban students of the same age in literacy and numeracy tests” (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, 1997, in Healey, 1998, p. 37), while Brace (2000) argues that, “It is a matter of national shame that Australia, a country which is known as a “go-getting nation with a can-do-attitude... [and which has] one of the most varied multi-cultural communities anywhere” has an Indigenous population with limited educational and employment” (p. 14). Such assessments seem consistent with the views of noted anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner (1979) almost twenty- five years ago, when he commented that, “if we can judge by the results, nothing seems to work – in [Aboriginal] education, in health, in economic development, in social progress... [we have] the presumption that there is something almost inexplicable in their failure or comparative failure (p. 342).

Others identify its failure in terms of broader social, cultural and political considerations. Hughes (1984), Groome and Hamilton (1994), Gary Partington (1998, 1999, 2000), Foley (1999) and Blitner (2000) argue that, generically, current approaches of Western education for Aboriginal people have widely disadvantaged Aboriginal people. Further, Eades (1985), Christie (1985), Smith (1986), Mulvaney (1989), Kukathas (1992), Groome (1994), Groome and Hamilton (1994), Dodson (1994), Coombes (1994), Morgan and Slade (1998),

Budby and Foley (1998), Foley (1999) and Folds (2001) all argue that for many remote Aboriginal people schooling, rather than providing valued knowledge and skills, continues to be expressed as a vehicle of oppression, assimilation, intrusion and alienation. However, as Clarke (2000), a teacher who has worked for many years on remote communities, suggests, this general assessment needs to be qualified by the recognition that “schools and communities vary greatly” (p. 1) and the recognition that there are notable examples of successful educational practices in the field of remote education (Sarra, 1999; Schelks-Indigenous Training Alliance, 1999).

### *Factors contributing to the failure of Western Education*

#### Racial Stereotypes and Deficit Thinking

Over two decades ago Green (1982) showed that many accounts of education in remote communities sought to understand and explain failure in terms of deficiencies in Aboriginal people themselves, and Dunn (2001) maintained that such deficit thinking still has currency. In some cases this approach suggests a general incomprehension or, as Stanner (1979) described it, “a presumption that there is something almost inexplicable in their failure or comparative failure” (p. 342). Historian Keith Windshuttle (2002), educationist Geoffrey Partington (2001), former conservative politician Peter Howson (1999, 2000, 2003), ministers of religion Steve Etherington (2000) and Paul Albrecht (1999) and writer Gary Johns (2001, 2003) are representative of the right-wing view. To Howson (2000), for example, the causes appear quite clear: they lie in the Aboriginal people’s “lack of drive” or the ‘fact’ that they remain “uncivilised and barbaric” (p. 20). Even anthropologist, David McKnight who has spent thirty years with the Mornington Islanders, argues that the “canteen has become the centre of [the Mornington Island] people’s lives... in every aspect of their social lives” (p. 212) and that many people in a previously stable society have become violent alcoholics. Others, while not subscribing to such view themselves, argue that many mainstream Australians believe that Aboriginal people are centuries behind Western culture (Bowden, 1990; Broome, 1994; Christie, 1995; Ryan, 1997; Evans, 1999). Evans (1999) suggest that Aboriginal people are popularly stereotyped as “irresponsible children or at worst utterly dispensable vermin” (p. 134).

These views are widely critiqued by academics and many of those with long-term involvement in and knowledge of Aboriginal communities, who see this as part of a long-standing practice whereby Aboriginal people are constantly mistreated, stereotyped and vilified. Evans (1999) argues, “hoary folk myths about blacks are continually passed on, down the generations, refurbished and constantly pedalled as facts” (p. 236). Likewise, Delgado and Stefanic (1995) maintain that “racism is woven into the warp and woof of the way we see and organise the world... [and] the dominant narrative changes very slowly and resists alteration” (p. 220). Critical political journalist Koch (2002) also argues that many Australians are insular and have a racially prejudiced “raw nerve” (p. 15). Anthropologist Colishaw (1998) takes a slightly less pessimistic view, maintaining that, “the popular conception among intellectuals that the cultural identity of Indigenous Australians is generally recognised as legitimate and that Aborigines are no longer burdened with a racial identity” and argues that the rise of Pauline Hanson’s One Nation Party has exposed “the whiteness of many Australian’s identities” (p. 147). Viviani. (1996), Koch. (2002), Munns, McFadden, Simpson and Faulkner. (1999) suggest that there is increased racial vilification and mistreatment in Australia. Koch (2002) maintains that this is the result of “the evil of downward envy [within the mentality of]... the victims of progress” (p. 15) and, further that Pauline Hanson and her One Nation Party have tapped into this Anglo-Australian “vein of discontent” (p. 15) since 1996. Koch (2002) considers that this racial discontent stems from “the shameful waste of billions of dollars thrown at ‘the Aboriginal problem’: the government’s response to a serious issue that it hoped buckets of money could solve, but has not” (p. 15).

Pilger (1996) a prominent critical journalist adds a further cautious note, reminding us that racism operates not only at an individual level, but at the level of government, and pointing out that, “Australia is the only developed country whose government has been condemned as racist by the United Nations” (p. 17).

Some writers argue that racist judgements reflect the ways that, “The social system and its structures in Australia are biased in favour of the power elite” (Dunn, 2001, p. 71) privileging such things as being white and middle-class, understanding particular rules, regulations and practices, and being aware of particular norms and values, possessing certain levels or kinds of education (such

as high literacy), using correct language or the language of power and access to high levels of income (Eckermann, 1994). Broome (1994) argues that the beliefs that depict Indigenous people in a deficit mode are based on the colonial and imperialistic European assumption that “materialism, so-called progress and change [are superior] to Aboriginal values of spirituality and continuity” (p. 24). In this light, and when such values are taken as normal and normative, Aborigines are readily made to appear deficient.

#### A widespread desire, among Indigenous people, for improvement in education

Many of the more recent academic research-based studies as well as commentaries by a range of people actively involved in education and other activities in remote Aboriginal communities show a range of factors associated with the system and nature of educational provision, rather than with the recipients, as more significant contributors. Indeed, a number of such studies note that rather than a lack of interest in education, substantial numbers of parents and others on such communities actively seek to secure what they see as the benefits of Western education. Thus, for example, both *Learning Lessons* (Collins, 1999) and *Katu Kalpa* (Australian Senate, Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, 2000) point out that this failure continues a widespread desire among Indigenous people for improvement in education for their children. Similarly Bartholomaeus (2000) states that “Within almost, if not every, rural community, there is a group of parents who want their children to receive an education that will enable those who do not wish to remain in the rural sector to be fitted for lives in metropolitan Australia and able to interact and compete with urban Australians on an equal basis” (p. 3). Similarly, Dennis Foley, a *Wirradjuri* activist and educator, believes that many Indigenous Australians want “a sound education to take a more active role in Australian society” (2000, p. 17).

Others note that alongside this interest in Western education, there is a resurgence of commitment to traditional education, to return to ancient knowledge and teachings, not just on the part of Australian Indigenous people but worldwide. The global nature of this trend is significant to the Mornington Island context, since, as I show, at least some of the Elders there express both their awareness of,

and affinity with, developments among other Indigenous peoples such as “American and Canadian Red Indians” (*Personal Communication, Kulthangar*, 21 April, 2003). On the one hand, this resurgence offers the prospect of restoring control over community development and capacity building to Indigenous people themselves (Dobson, Riley, McCormack and Hartman, 1997; Bourke and Bourke, 2000; Blitner, 2002; Martin, 2002; Smith, 2001; Foley, 2000; Walker, 2000; Cajette, 2000; Battiste, 2000, 2002). On the other hand, what Battiste (2002) calls “[the] rich treasure of neglected knowledge and teachings of the Elders” is seen to play a vital role in re-building the unity and dignity of communities (Battiste, 2002; Blitner, 2000; Dobson, Riley, McCormack and Hartman, 1997).

A number of writers maintain that education gives Indigenous people a source of self-empowerment and the possibility of living without the need for non-Aboriginal intermediaries or to continue as dependents of the welfare system which continues the paternalism and learned helplessness of the colonial era (Gary Partington, 1998; Pearson, 2000; Buti, 1996; Foley, 2000). Perhaps the strongest statement of this view is Aboriginal activist and lawyer, Pearson’s, claim (cited by journalist Koch) that, “in relation to the success of self-determination that education is the decisive resource that government can provide: when you empower people through education they solve the problems themselves” (Koch, 1999, p. 27).

#### Other problems in remote communities

The problems that community members, activists, scholars, journalistic commentators and governments identify in education on remote communities form part of a wider array of problems. Indeed, twenty-five years ago, Stanner (1979) referred more widely to problems in, “health... economic development... [and] social progress”, more generally, as well as to education (p. 342). More recently, the *Cape York Justice Study* (Fitzgerald, 2001) reported that the failure of education is only part of a wider destructive, but socially normalised problem on remote Indigenous communities: alcoholism, violence and hopelessness. Etherington (2000, 2001), Davis (2001), Martin (1998, 2002), Marshall (2003), Howson (2003) and Robertson (1999) all agree. Whatever the other factors involved, entrenched alcoholism is seen to be implicated in a range of other problems, including violence and health problems. Koch (1999, 2000, 2001, 2002,

2003) has written a number of front-page articles for *The Courier Mail* cataloguing these problems, as have journalists Whenham (2001, 2002) and Charlton (2001). Other researchers have documented high rates of personal problems such as diabetes, parasuicidal behaviour and sexually transmitted disease (Kim, Dixon and James, 1998; Reser, 1991; Department of Health, 1999). In addition to personal health problems, Pearson (2001, 2002) sees welfare abuse and welfare dependency as a major crippling problem on remote communities, in which alcohol is a contributing factor.

Health researchers have also documented a wide range of infrastructural problems that impact on everyday life in these communities, compounding the problems related to personal health and behaviour. Health researchers seem to give the widest coverage of the problems and dynamics one could expect on communities. Gruen, Weeramanthi and Baillie (2002), for example, report that on a broad range of health and social welfare indicators, Australia's Indigenous population is very poorly situated, and that their health has failed to improve comparably to that of Indigenous communities in other developed countries. Public health challenges, such as clean water, effective sanitation, adequate housing, and a healthy food supply, remain unmet (Gruen, Weeramanthi and Baillie, 2002, p. 517).

Martin (2002) argues that in addition to social problems associated with welfare dependence, and psychological and personal health problems associated with alcohol and other issues, problems on Indigenous communities are also fuelled by the collapse of the pastoral industry. Further, he claims, developments such as the introduction of alcohol, and the move from authoritarian regimes to a new emphasis on self-management have interacted with the principle of kinship and the relationship between Aboriginal society and the Western economy have produced a state of crisis in remote Aboriginal communities.

A quite different set of problems relates to the division and discord that are both effects and symptoms of crisis in the community life. *Courier Mail* reporters, commenting on the remote community of *Doomadgee*, sister community of Mornington Island (Memmott and Horsman, 1991), as being "a bubbling pot of politics" (Smith, 1999, p. 23) and a "political hotbed" (Franklin, 1999, p. 23). One consequence of this, according to former Queensland National Party leader Rob

Borbidge, is that while “community elders offer great wisdom [they] are often drowned out by the clamour of politics” (cited in Smith, 1999, p. 26). Franklin (1999) also reported that there are strong anti-government sentiments among the different rival factions, educated activists and traditional Elders within communities across the state. Even remote community Aboriginal educators (Dobson, Riley, McCormack and Hartman, 1997) remark on the factionalism within communities by saying, “there are an awful lot of family groups and we can’t do everything to please them all” (p. 25).

### *Explaining Problems*

#### (Mal) administration: imposition and dependency

Those who reject explanations of the failure of Aboriginal education built around presumed deficiencies in Aboriginal people themselves identify a wide range of alternative explanations. Some identify systemic political and bureaucratic factors. Reports such as Collins’ *Learning Lessons* (1999) and *Katu Kalpa* (Australian Senate. Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, 2000) identify administrative neglect and misallocation of government funds.

Equally important is the lack of, or failure of consultation. Schools and schooling as a whole is imposed on students without prior consultation with all sectors of the community. *The Partners of Success Review* (Education Queensland, 1999) admitted, “complex, distant and sometimes discordant relationships exist between schools and their Indigenous communities, inhibiting parents participation in decision making” (p. 13). Gary Partington, Richer, Godfrey, Harslett and Harrison (1999) also suggest that there may be inadequate communication between community and the school. Folds (1984), a long time remote Aboriginal community educator, argues that “In the case of *Pitjantjara* people, the *Anangu*, education is devised and packaged in head office [in Adelaide] then delivered in the community [where]... there has been little or no consultation to discover what the community learning needs are” (pp. 99-101). Others note that is not just at the level of particulars that there is a lack of communication and shared or consultative decision making, but that ‘the school’ itself is essentially an outside institution imposed on communities (Kukathas,

1992; Folds, 2001). Folds (1984) has commented that “Because of the imposition of schooling there is a long-standing dependency relationship, which contributes to the sapping of both local initiative and self-reliance... It is seen as a given where *Anangu* are the passive recipients and their relationship with the school is unproblematic” (p. 99). This, he argues, allows the school to maintain “a rhetoric of ‘helping the Aboriginal people’ and ‘protecting and preserving the Aboriginal culture’ with no regard for how the *Anangu* want to protect their own culture” (p. 101). The *Partners for Success Review* (Education Queensland, 1999) recognises this problem, noting that gaps in policy regarding communities’ choice on a range of educational matters of importance is a cause of a number of difficulties in education on communities. Without suggesting that policy makers are or have been intentionally racist Sackett (1991) points out that deficit thinking and other essentially racist views about the backwardness or incompetence or inability of Aboriginal people to manage their own lives, serves to legitimate such approaches.

A quite different line of administrative explanation for the failure of education in remote communities focuses on such particulars of administration as the systems for appointing and transferring teachers. *Partners for Success Review* (Education Queensland, 1999) case studies provide evidence that “lack of stability of staffing, particularly in remote areas” (p. 5) is one of the factors that influenced Indigenous students’ low educational outcomes. Blitner (2000) notes that the transfer systems allow most teachers to “leave after only a short stay in remote community schools” (p. 8).

Although the Indigenous Education and Training Alliance (Education Queensland, 2000) has commenced teaching cultural awareness, behaviour management and English as a second language programs to teachers who plan to work on remote communities, many studies argue that whatever the appointment and transfer arrangements, there is a shortage of adequately trained teachers, stemming from gaps in the teacher education system (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2000 and Education Queensland, 2000). *Emerging Themes* (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2000) argues that “only half the universities in Australia offer teaching courses that include Aboriginal or Indigenous studies as a core component” (p. 28) and Collins (1999)

maintains that there appears to be no formal arrangements between state governments and universities to provide appropriately trained graduates to teach in Indigenous schools (p. 83). The McRae, Ainsworth, Cumming, Hughes and McKay (2000) report, *What Works: Explorations in Improving Outcomes for Indigenous Students*, states that only “Fourteen percent of respondents... indicated that they had undertaken training in [Indigenous education] and two percent had pre-service and in-service training” (p. 17). Collins (1999) and experienced educator Christine Nicholls (1999) admit there is little cross-cultural, nor preparation for relationship building. Collins (1999) and *Recommendations* (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2000) also suggest that, “Most teacher training does not adequately prepare new recruits with the skills and knowledge needed for teaching in remote Australia and there is commonly a lack of knowledge among teaching staff” (p. 44) about remote Aboriginal culture. Finally, the shortage of Aboriginal teachers means a lack of Aboriginal teacher role models (Memmott and Horsman, 1991; Guilder, 1991).

The sense that in general, relations with government remain colonialist, and that teachers and other government workers are ill-prepared, and come and go, contribute to a lack of trust between community members and government and its agencies (Blitner, 2000; Fitzgerald, 2001). Further reports such as *Learning Lessons* (Collins, 1999) and *Katu Kalpa* (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2000) observe that in recent times both maladministration and what is seen as implicit, if not explicit racism, involved imposed rather than shared decision making have worsened, rather than improved the continuing lack of trust and confidence in government institutions.

#### *The significance of relationships*

The significance of these issues undermining Aboriginal education can be understood in light of studies that highlight the importance of relationships in Aboriginal culture and communities. A number of popular writers, researchers, Aboriginal educators, non-Aboriginal educators and biographies about famous Aboriginal people maintain that everything in the Aboriginal world is interrelated and interconnected and relationships, connectedness and belonging are at the basis of all Aboriginal peoples' well being (Arden, 1994; Gary Partington, 1998;

Forrest, 1998; Cataldi and Partington, 1998; Heslop, 1998; Corrie and Maloney, 1998; Isaacs, 1995; Dingo, 1998; Pryor, 1998; Blitner, 2000; Randall, 2003). Aboriginal academic Moreton-Robinson (2000) elaborates this point. On the one hand, she notes, Aboriginal life experience is underpinned by an “inter-generational relationship between Aboriginal women, extended families and communities” (p. 1) and on the other, they are based on “connections with one’s country and the spirit world... Indigenous people are related either by descent, country, place or shared experiences” (p. 2). Such relationships are not merely symbolic or emotional. Blitner (2000) maintains, “they guide the way we interact with one another” (p. 28). Smith (2001) argues, “A human person does not stand alone, but shares with other animate and, in the Western sense, ‘inanimate beings’, a ‘relationship’ based on a shared essence of life” (p. 74). Indigenous scholars emphasise that Indigenous education should consider the mind, body, emotion, and spirit to be integral aspects of human experience (Martin, 2002; Walker, 2000; Cajete, 2000; Ghostkeeper, 2001; Battiste, 2002; Hill, 2001; Randall, 2003). Battiste (2002) states that, “As diverse as Indigenous people are... [they see] knowledge as a sacred process with a sacred purpose, which is inherent in and connected to all of nature, to its creatures and to human existence” (p. 14). Martin’s (2002) research also embraces this idea.

Such relationships may also extend to embrace non-Aboriginal people. Willis (1998) in his account of Aboriginal people converting to Christianity in remote Australia argues, “Aborigines, equipped with their lifestyle heritage and essentially religious world-view were often interested in establishing relationships with whites” (p. 129). Earlier Willis (1980) had claimed that in order to pursue their own agendas many Aborigines had developed a “kind of strategic participation in white enterprises which [he] called kinship riding” (p. 134). Further, he suggested that “in the context of oppressive colonial regimes, ‘riding’ should be seen as an act of corporate leadership by which Aboriginal leaders attempted to negotiate the survival and interests of their group” (1988, p. 135). He has argued that pre-1968 that “the continuance of the authority of the traditional leaders maintained through this form of ‘riding’ was a key to the survival of the traditional cultural identity of small Aboriginal groups on cattle stations and other locations in remote Australia” (1988, p. 135). Willis’s (1988) argument about the

ways remote Aboriginal leaders used reciprocal relationships to maintain traditional culture is particularly pertinent to this thesis.

The centrality of relationships can be seen not only as an aspect of Aboriginal culture, but as a characteristic of small-scale communities. Martinez-Brawley (1990) suggests, “Small communities are characterised by common understandings, mutual interdependence and a nourishing sense of personal meaning and participation” (p. xxv).

A range of accounts from autobiography to scholarly research also attests to the importance of relationships, specifically on Mornington Island. Dick Roughsey (1971), Elsie Roughsey (1984), Binion (1985), Memmott and Horsman (1991) and McKnight (1999) all demonstrate that relationships are the foundation of the *Kunhanhaamendaa*'s wellbeing. Memmott and Horsman (1991), who spent a number of years at Mornington Island, argue, “The everyday life of the *Kunhanhaamendaa* was structured largely around kinship relationships. Through sharing and conversations... [the *Kunhanhaamendaa*] sensed a feeling of well being and harmony, [which] strengthened their relationships and friendships” (p. 89).

Many educators, linguists and anthropologists would have found their research impossible had they not formed kinship relationships with their co-researchers or research participants. On Mornington David McKnight (1999), Ken Hale (1997), Percy Tresize (1993), Amanda Ahern (2000), and Virginia Huffer (1980) all formed close personal relationships with the Indigenous inhabitants of Mornington Island. In Australia other anthropologists, linguists and educators such as Deborah Bird Rose (2001), Pat Lowe (2002), Hannah Rachel Bell (1998), Christine Watson (2003), Jeremy Beckett (2001), Bain Attwood (2001) and Peter McConochie (2003) have also formed close relationships with Indigenous peoples. Frequently Elders taught these adopted outsiders in their own cultural style, through story telling. Often the postcolonial stories these Indigenous peoples told, sometimes about the relationship between past and present, have become a form of cultural and political capital. Among Canadian scholars Julie Cruikshank (1990, 1992, 1998), Michael Marker (1999) and Wendy Wickwire (1993) stand out for their recording and appreciative analysis of these texts and for building deep empathic relationships with their Indigenous teachers and collaborators. In

her 1998 work, *The Social Life of Stories: Narrative and Knowledge in the Yukon Territory* Cruikshank indicates a relationship between the Elders and their stories and the land which reveals that knowledge resides in specific actual places in the landscape rather than in actual domains.

Linguistic evidence also points to the importance of relationships. Mornington Islanders' own explanation (in their *Lardil Dictionary*, 1998) suggests that the term *dubal yarran*, which means good friend or mate also indicates a close relationship. The word *dubal* is part of the word *dubalan* that means a road, path or track of the Ancestral Heroes. This indicates a sense of the interconnection or interrelationship between human and cosmic to which Smith (2001) and Moreton-Robinson (2000) are referring. This same sense of relationships was recognised over a century ago by Protector of Aborigines Roth (1901), who reported that an Aboriginal Lawman could have a face-to-face social relationship, or a non-kin relationship with a good friend or mate (*dubal yarran*) but that a relationship with a stranger (*banyanda*) was just not possible. As I discuss later in this chapter, Aboriginal people on small remote communities look for face-to-face relationships with familiar individuals rather than unfamiliar governmental institutions.

### *The teachers*

I have already noted that a number of reports and studies have highlighted the inadequate preparation provided by training programs for teachers coming to communities for the first time. Other studies focus on more personal attributes, and aspects of the general life-experience of such teachers. For the purposes of this thesis, central among these studies is one in which experienced Northern Territory educator Christine Nicholls (1999) observed that “many teachers who go to live and work in a community which was 99% Aboriginal [have] little or no preparation for relationship building” (p. 103). She also noted that many of these have never met an Aboriginal before in their life” (p. 103). Yet three years before Nicholl’s (1999) report, *The Desert Schools Language Project* (South Australian Teaching and Curriculum Centre, 1996) recognised that “intercultural relationships between teachers, students and community are vital in English language development as well as across the curriculum” (p. 1).

Although de Hoog (1979) offers recipe book cultural rules and protocol for non-Aboriginal people who work on remote communities to follow, and the Internet has various commentaries on like areas (McCann, 2000; South Australian Teaching and Curriculum Centre, 1996) current reports indicate that teachers do not generally study this literature. Malin (1997), Groome and Hamilton (1995), Hunter and Schwab (1998), Gool and Patton (1998) and Gary Partington, Richer, Godfrey, Harslett and Harrison (1999) maintained that racial abuse and vilification from teachers, negative comments about families and prejudicial treatment still continue in schools in Australia. St Denis and Hampton (2002), writing *A Literature Review on Racism and The Effects on Aboriginal Education* in Canada, Alaska, Australia and New Zealand maintain that, “there is no doubt that Aboriginal people, students and teachers, must contend with racist practices and beliefs rooted in white supremacy and colonialism” (p. 5).

Green (1982) and Dunn (2001) maintain that educational discourses of the 1980s and 1990s included identifying child deficit, family deficit and environmental deficit as major problems in teaching Aboriginal children rather than considering deficits in the Western educational system. This view, that an Aboriginal student’s educational failure is a consequence of the deficits in that student, his family and environment, is still widely held today (Osborne and Tait, 1998; Larocque, 1991; Sixkiller Clarke, 1994; Gary Partington, 1998; Folds, 2001; St Denis and Hampton, 2002; Battiste, 2002; St. Denis, 2002). It is also still prevalent among teachers of Aboriginal students. Both Lippman (1992) and Eckermann (1994) found that many teachers were still influenced by deficit model thinking in relation to Aboriginal people. Deficit thinking on the part of teachers can include teacher estimation of Indigenous students (Brennan, 1998 and Harslett, 1998), poor, prejudiced, racist and discriminatory teacher relationships with students and Aboriginal families (Sarra, 1997; Gool and Patton, 1998) and a lack of understanding of Aboriginal culture (Harslett, Harrison, Godfrey, Partington and Richer, 1998; Gilbey, 1998; Munns, 1998; Memmott and Horsman, 1991; Guider, 1991; Harris and Malin, 1994; Lee, 1993; Trudgen, 2000; Purcell, 2002). Both Harslett (1998) and Munns (1998) warn that the outcomes of deficit logic can lower expectations of students, can create inadequate curriculum

and cause schools and teachers to have paternalistic attitudes about families and community.

Green (1983), Ingram (1981), Nicholls (1999) and Collins (1999) have raised this same argument of ignorance and subsequent culture shock over the years. Malin (1994) accentuates the fact that many teachers of Aboriginal children have not listened to the community: “even some who had experience in remote communities do not understand or cater to the needs of Aboriginal students” (p. 111). Nicholls (1999) reports that “culture shock for teachers... [who have never taught on an Aboriginal community before] is severe” (p. 103). Osborne (2001) suggested that familiarity with the local scene and its protocols as well as fluency in the local language are vital ingredients for the culturally congruent teacher of Aboriginal students.

The cumulative effect of many problems in schooling on Aboriginal communities leads many writers to see schools at best as irrelevant and at worst as destructive. Some of these problems are systemic and administrative issues, the irrelevancy and foreignness of Western schooling and the rejection of traditional Indigenous local knowledge and traditional teachers. Another major problem is the failure on the part of ‘outsider’ teachers to correctly engage with community members. These outsiders do not appear to understand the value of relationships in both the culture of Aboriginal communities and approaches to teaching and knowledge. Eades (1985), Christie (1985), Mulvaney (1989), Kukathas (1992), Bundarriyi, Yangarriny, Migalpa and Warlkunji (1991), Groome (1994), Groome and Hamilton (1994), Dodson (1994), Coombs (1994), Smith (1996), Morgan and Slade (1998), Wooltorton (1997), Jude (1998), Budby and Foley (1998), Foley (1999) and Folds (2001) all argue that for many remote Aboriginal people schooling continues to be experienced as a vehicle of oppression, assimilation, intrusion and alienation.

A number of studies evidence that such literature, alongside the institutional relations between teachers, schools (and government, more generally) and communities almost inevitably result in Aboriginal responses that are less than conducive to positive educational participation or outcomes. Attwood (1989), McConnochie (1982), *Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Report (1997)*, Beresford and Omaji (1998) and Harslett, Harrison, Godfrey, Partington

and Richer (1999) maintain that Aboriginal parents view teachers as hostile and schools as threatening environments. In fact, Kukathas (1992) and Folds (2001) argue that 'school' is essentially an outside institution imposed on communities. Gary Partington, Richer, Godfrey, Harslett and Harrison (1999) further argued that principals who were unwelcoming and intimidating to staff and community members and did not allow teachers to visit families often caused irreparable damage to individual teacher-student and teacher-community relationships.

In view of this research and with regard to what Reynolds (1999) calls, "forced subordination" (p. 37) it has been proposed that many Indigenous people passively resist the education system, by apparent silent tolerance of the status quo, while in fact steadfastly and impassively refusing to be a part (Ingram, 1981; Trigger, 1992 and Reynolds, 1999).

*(Western) schooling as a problem*

Other explanations of the failure of Aboriginal education focus not on government and structural relationships but on the nature of the education that is offered. *The Royal Commission of Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* (Wyvill, 1991) commented, "school based education systems in Australia have historically been unwilling or unable to accommodate many of the values, attitudes, codes and institutions of Aboriginal society" (p. 336). Within Indigenous communities, traditional knowledge regards the land, ceremonies, culture, language and spiritual wisdom as central.

There is a moderate amount of literature on the subject of Elders as educators, administrators, leaders and decision-makers who play crucial roles in decision-making and in teaching. Australian Aboriginal Elders such as The Brisbane Council of Elders Aboriginal Corporation (2003), Pryor (1998), *Wanjuk Marika* (1995), Dick Roughsey (1971), Elsie Roughsey (1984) and senior *Gumatj* leader *Galarrwuy Yunupingu* (1998) see Elders as teachers, custodians of the Law, keepers of the knowledge regarding land, ceremonies, culture, language and spiritual wisdom. Bell (1999), Blitner (2000) and Battiste (2002) argue that Elders teach for lifelong learning and use real life experiences. Northern Territory Aboriginal ethnobiologist Williams (2000) notes that this includes knowledge of "collect[ion] and prepar[ation of] plants for food and medicines or [plants] to use

as implements” (p. 1). Williams regards the Aboriginal Elders with this knowledge, as natural scientists who can read the country like a book. The literature by Aboriginal educators suggests that Elders involve and plan with families who are the owners of the land where they teach (Blitner, 2000).

Education in this respect, in both Australian Aboriginal and other colonialist contexts, is seen to be shaped by deficit thinking that sees Indigenous society and knowledge as inferior and Western knowledge as superior. Battiste (2002), writing from the Canadian context, but referring to relations between colonial regimes and Indigenous societies more generally, argues that:

For as long as Europeans have sought to colonise Indigenous peoples, Indigenous knowledge has been understood as being in binary opposition to ‘scientific’, ‘Western’, ‘Eurocentric’ or ‘modern’ knowledge. Eurocentric thinkers dismissed Indigenous knowledge in the same way they dismissed any socio-cultural-political life they did not understand: they found it to be unsystematic and incapable of meeting the productivity needs of the modern world (p. 5).

This dismissal of Indigenous knowledge and pedagogies, and the marginalisation of the custodians of this knowledge and the practitioners of those pedagogies increases the schools’ cultural gap from the community and contributes to the failure of education in remote communities. In this case the failure could be attributed to the loss of relevance and the confidence of the community in the education offered, and further, by undermining the cultural foundations of the community itself. *A National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, 1996-2002* (The Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs: Taskforce for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, 1995) also criticised the Western education system “because it lacks cultural relevance and could lead to the loss of Aboriginal languages, culture and unique identity” (p. 94).

*The historical legacy of race relations*

An extensive literature points to the fact that, whatever the present circumstances, Aboriginal perceptions of, and responses to, education, like government services more generally, and indeed the whole constellation of relations between Aboriginal communities and white Australian society, are shaped by the legacy of a long history of coercion, violence, ‘divide and conquer’ policies, herding Aboriginal people onto reserves and educating Aboriginal people to be servants (Evans, 1999; King and Vick, 1994; Reynolds, 2000; Pearson, 2000; Huggins, 1991b; Bird Rose, 1991). Indigenous academics such as Huggins (1991b), Foley (2000, 2003), Martin (2001) and Smith (1999) argue that Australia was colonised on a racially imperialistic base.

Mornington Island, as Memmott and Horsman (1991) show, was colonised in 1914, in the protectionist era instituted under *The Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act* of 1897, which King and Vick (1994) describe as the “first concerted effort by the Queensland Government at controlling and regulating Aborigines by legislation” (p. 2). Writing of Mornington Island, Memmott and Horsman (1991) describe the administration of Aboriginal affairs in this era as a “system of control and punishment” (p. 229). *The Act* isolated Aboriginal people away from the ‘white’ population by locating them on Aboriginal reserves “under the care and custody” of an administrative apparatus which recorded details of parentage, racial identity, geographical mobility, marriage, employment, character and behaviour (King and Vick, 1994, p. 2).

Kidd (1997) argues that in the old missions the slightest movement was supervised, all events were recorded and panopticism as a state of constant observation of inmates was the norm. Memmott and Horsman (1991) comment on the rigid social control that was practiced by missionaries Wilson and McCarthy from 1918 to 1948 on Mornington Island and Kidd (1997), while Rosser, in *Dreamtime Nightmares* (1985), and in particular, Mornington Islander Elsie Roughsey (1984) portray the missions and reserves that became ‘communities’, as near concentration camps. King and Vick (1994) argue that the power exercised

over Aborigines under *The Act* was comparable only to that which applied to convicted criminals.

In another study on Mornington Island and the Gulf of Carpentaria, Boer (2001), writing on pantopicism, suggests that “surveillance may be positioned as a colonial discourse” (p. 71). Said’s (1995) claim, that colonial administration treated subjected peoples as objects that “were rarely seen or looked at: they were seen through, analysed, analysed, not as citizens, or even people, but as problems to be solved, confined, [and] taken over” (p. 207) while clearly not specifically about Aboriginal people, applies to them, as they were subjected to *The Act*.

Windshuttle (2001) believes that “the greatest crime Australia ever committed was to incarcerate Aboriginal people under the system of protectorates and reserves that prevailed until the 1960s” (p. 17). Similarly, Smith (2001) maintains, ‘communities’ were created in Queensland as “missions or reserves that were regulated spaces” (2001, p. 22) where Aboriginal people were sent under *The Act*; she notes that the present remote Aboriginal communities are the remnants of those isolated reserves that were created in the 1890s.

Evans (1999) maintains that Archibald Meston, the principal architect of *The Act*, acted to segregate the Queensland Aboriginal people to the edges of the state. Evans (1999) argues that Meston’s mood was one of “impatient paternalism” (p. 131). Evans (1999) condemns Meston for his “arrogant disregard for the [Aborigine’s] most sacred cultural commitments” by removing the Aboriginal people from their own land and “segregating” them to geographically isolated reserves (p. 131). It is that ‘out of sight, out of mind’ isolation and mental and geographical marginalisation that one equates with physical remoteness. Remoteness is an obvious dynamic that exists on Mornington Island, as it is a geographically remote community that was created as a Presbyterian mission.

Windshuttle (2001) argues, “These policies [such as the *Protection Act*] were the work of missionaries and public servants who all claimed to be the Aborigine’s friends but who established a separatist system of dysfunctional communities whose sociological legacy survives to this day” (p. 17). Memmott and Horsman (1991), King and Vick (1994) and Trigger (1992) document the fear that was generated both by the dormitory systems on missions and reserves and the psychological emasculation of the men by the banning of initiations and the

learned helplessness this regime engendered. Studies by such writers as Broome (1994) and Elder (1988) and academics Kidd (1997), and Reynolds (1987, 1989, 1990, 1995, 1998, 1999, 2001) document the devastating effect European settlement had on Aboriginal people. Research by McKnight (1999), Memmott and Horsman (1991), Binion (1985), Huffer and Roughsey (1980) and biographies by indigenous Mornington Islanders, Roughsey (1971) and Roughsey (1984) relate more directly to the effect the mission had on the Mornington Island people and the other Aboriginal people who were sent there. Memmott and Horsman (1991) argue that the Aboriginal people of Mornington Island lost control of their lives, Lawful relationships and education in 1918 and the Elders lost their power as educators in 1918 and gradually lost their respect in the community as wise authority figures.

Rosser (1985), Memmott and Horsman (1991) and Kidd (1997) argue that historic silencing is part of an assimilationist and colonialist practice. Other authors suggest that the dominant culture still continues this silencing of Indigenous people, not only in Australia, but in a range of peoples who have been colonised by European nations (Foley, 2003; Martin, 2002; St Denis and Hampton, 2002; Smith, 2001; Bird Rose, 1991; Kidd, 1997; Marker, 1999). Roughsey (1984) and Rosser (1985) maintain that the generation of Aboriginal people bought up by the missionaries was cowed into silence by the missionaries who beat them with flagellums.

Alongside official policy and practice historians such as Rowley (1972), Reynolds (1981), Evans' (1975), Loos. (1982), Bird Rose. (1991) and Markus (1973, 1979) document a range of destructive physical violence inflicted on Aboriginal people. Evans (1975), Bird Rose (1991), Rosser (1985) and Huggins (1994, 1995) add substantial material to the beliefs that the dimensions of Australian frontier violence were enormous. Attwood (1994) reports that Aboriginal people were "routinely shot, poisoned or beaten to death, yet the silence was impenetrable" (p. 5). Evans (1999) argues that soldiers, sailors and convicts knowingly and wantonly broadcast syphilis, which was just as violent as poison and bullets. Writing about the North of Queensland and the Northern Territory, both Trigger (1992) and McKnight (1999) describe the atrocities of pre-1910 "Wild Times" in the Gulf of Carpentaria area, in which vicious killings of

Aboriginal men, women and children by 'white' people and Aboriginal mounted police were common. Roughsey (1984), in her autobiographical account of growing up on Mornington, claims that "White man with different hard life and government laws drove away all the good tribal ways of living [and made] us sad, quiet, frightened and shy; tribal life wrecked, [we were] worthless and unwanted and altogether forgotten" (pp. 1-2).

There were of course, exceptions, especially and increasingly in the later years of 'protection'. On Mornington Island, for example, Memmott and Horsman (1991) and Kidd (1997) note that in the 1970s the Presbyterian Church developed a new policy that advocated self-determination and cultural revival and with the advent of the Reverend Belcher as Minister they gradually regained their dignity. Yet, this and the "civil rights attitude" that developed with it, continued to be opposed by the government (Kidd, 1997, pp. 271-272).

However, Trigger (1992), writing about *Doomadgee*, claimed that social relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents were typically strained, "with little apparent intimacy and a great deal of social distance" (p. 7). Trigger's information is highly relevant to Mornington Island, as most *Doomadgee* Aboriginal people are related to Mornington island people and there is a great deal of social interaction between the two communities. Trigger (1992) also argues "*Doomadgee* Aboriginals exclude whites as part of a defence against constant administrative intrusiveness and attitudinal ethnocentrism on the part of white Australian society" (p. 101).

In this context of historic surveillance, fear, violence, enforced isolation and separation from their land, Australian Aborigines shared with other colonised Indigenous people a pervading sense that, as Canadian historian-educator Michael Marker (1999) expressed it regarding North American Indigenous people, that "the past is a living and resonant part of the present" (p. 17). Such legacies exist in the separation of peoples from the land that was central to their symbolic systems and the destruction of their languages and traditional socio-legal arrangements. They also live on in the memories of those who lived through that era and the stories of the violence and dispossession of the colonial era they told and continue to tell. Rosser's (1985) account of *Dreamtime Nightmares*, for instance, demonstrates not only in its own framing in the present, but in the tone of many

individual recollections he cites, the ongoing bitterness which accompanied white invasion and Aboriginal resistance in North Queensland. The protectionist era, from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century until the 1960s still figures in Aboriginal memories and can be seen to be a powerful shaping presence in Aboriginal people's lives (Jordan, 1982; Rosser, 1985; Buti, 1993; Sullivan, 1996; Huggins, 1998; Nundah Reconciliation Group, 1999; Education Queensland, 1999). *The Bringing Them Home Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children From Their Families* (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997), for instance, and some responses to it (Read, 1998; Dingo, 1998; Moriarty, 2000) indicate how acutely members of Aboriginal communities still feel about the weight of that era. Reynolds's interviews with Aboriginal people suggest, "The terrible past of violence and dispossession still haunts the living. Contact with *migloos* [non-Aboriginal people] is still fraught with tension and anxiety... White man wielded power. A white man meant trouble" (1999, pp. 38-39). Indigenous academic Martin Nakata's (2000) statement about his grandfather also reveals the legacy of lack of respect for Indigenous peoples and the indignity they had to suffer in the past: "When I'm struggling with my work I often think of my grandfather. I think of his bitterness and suppressed anger and confusion over the intrusions of white control into his community" (p. 222).

The fact that Australia has a Prime Minister who refuses to apologise for "past white mistakes" helps keep such historical memory alive (Pearson, 2000; Bird Rose, 1991). Pearson's *Light on the Hill* (2000) demonstrates the extent to which the legacy still continues to influence contemporary Aboriginal response to government policies. Yet, in 1992, Federal Race Commissioner, Irene Moss, commented specifically on the pervasive state of over-surveillance at Mornington Island. Indigenous academics such as Moreton-Robinson (2000) argue that this oppression is still visible as white superiority to Indigenous people, a group of people "whose marginality is not chosen, but is a consequence of their oppression" (Miller, 1995, p. 20). This state of colonialism still continues. Pearson (2000) and Buti (1996) identified long standing dependency, Moss (1992) maintained neo-colonialism and decision making by outsiders was still continuing at Mornington Island, and Folds (1984) recognised, twenty years ago, a sapping of

“local [Aboriginal] self-reliance and initiative” (p. 99) in the Northern Territory. So it is hardly surprising that Smith (1999) warned that “white public servants working in *Doomadgee* may [face] a sometimes hostile location and that is only part of the challenge” (p. 23).

#### The historical legacy of race relations: education in particular

According to Calgaret (1997), in the perceptions of Aboriginal people every individual non-Aboriginal teacher carries the burden of race relations of the past, while Osborne (2000) claims that “socio-historical-political realities beyond the school constrain much of what occurs in the classrooms” (p. 45). In addition, the limited Western education provided for Aboriginal children, and the prohibition against traditional education produced a legacy of minimal knowledge of skills in either culture. The *Bringing Them Home National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families* reflects that:

These children did not suffer from poor educational outcomes in the mainstream sense, but the education of their culture was severely affected, many of them removed from their parents did not develop the necessary life skills to adequately cope in a world outside the missions and institutions that became communities. Re-education of Aboriginal children in ‘white ways’ was a central thrust of the [Australian government] assimilation policy (Buti, 1996, p. 184).

Education, in these years, Huggins (1997) argues, became a tool to train Aboriginal people to become servants and “domestics and to take orders” (Bird Rose, 1999) and to “strip Aboriginal people of their culture” (*Bringing Them Home National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families*, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1997, p. 552).

## **Solutions and pointers to good practice**

### *Teachers*

Dunn (2001) suggests that teachers in isolated communities:

who are able to free themselves from the limitations imposed by past practices and attitudes, who are skilled in cross-cultural teaching, who understand the effects of historical/ social/ political background of oppression experienced by Aboriginal people and who are able to incorporate community concerns are sorely needed (p. 72).

However, the school and its community must support this approach. Gary Partington, Richer, Godfrey, Harslett and Harrison (1999) conclude that an individual teacher, however exemplar that teacher is, working in isolation from a cohesive school approach and with lack of support from a culturally informed principal, is unable to resolve issues which contribute to the better education of Aboriginal students.

### *Partnerships and relations*

Western and Indigenous research both points to educational success when teachers and schools form productive partnerships and connections with the Aboriginal community. Indigenous educators Hill (2001) and Battiste (2002) argue that as connected beings we human beings cannot be separated from each other and the processes of life. Shimpo (1978) and Clarke (2000), a teacher of remote Aboriginal community students, have deduced that Aboriginal people need meaningful personal relationships in order to work well with non-Aboriginal teachers and this thesis aims to further this understanding from an in-depth case study.

Fitzgerald (2001) argues that in remote Indigenous communities' partnerships are built on trust, which is generated in the context of relationships. Fitzgerald (2001) and the *Partners for Success Review* (Education Queensland, 1999) argue that relationships can only be built over time, allowing government workers the opportunities to learn that Aboriginal people on remote communities

place a greater importance on the outcomes sought by community members rather than by the procedures endorsed by their government departments. Fitzgerald's (2001) statement that "outsiders must prove to be reliable by following up over time on commitments made and by having the willingness to listen [to community members and Elders] and learn" is a stern warning to non-Aboriginal school staff who are not aware of correct community protocol. Fitzgerald (2001) and the *Partners for Success Review* (Education Queensland, 1999) maintain that a constant stream of new faces in the community erodes the trust between government workers and community. The position taken by Harris (1984), Harslett (1998) and Heslop (1998) is that a new teacher should take courage from the fact that the longer they stay in an Aboriginal community the more they will be accepted by the members of the community and the more effective their teaching will be.

*Partners For Success Review* (Education Queensland, 1999) maintains that the involvement and participation of Aboriginal people in decision making processes concerning the education of Aboriginal students is essential and for this to occur partnerships must be forged between schools and their local Aboriginal community. Research by teachers on remote communities, academics and authors of reports concerning remote communities all point out that Indigenous people value teachers who form positive relationships with parents and students (Australian Senate. Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, 2000; Munns, 1998; Harslett, 1998; Buckley, 1996; Gardiner, 1996; Puruntaye-meri, 1996; Jordan, 1992; Folds, 1987) and consult and negotiate with Aboriginal families regarding the education of their children (Bucknall, 1982; Theis, 1987; Harris, 1992; Malin, 1994; Routh, 1997; Buti, 1996; Collins, 1999; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2000).

Harris (1984), Harslett (1998) and Heslop (1998) maintain that the more a new teacher relates to people in the community outside the classroom the more effective their teaching efforts are likely to be. Munns (1998) also proposes that the "acceptance of teachers by the community is unquestionably a prerequisite for the development of close relationships with students" (p. 184). Heslop (1998) also maintains that the Elders and the Indigenous community members will only

befriend outsiders and trust them if they are prepared to join in with community life and they like them. In this regard both Heslop (1998) and the newly formed *Indigenous Education and Training Alliance* (Education Queensland, 2002) maintain that, “teachers must adopt ethical, courteous and self-reflective attitudes” (p. 1).

Blitner (2000) further argues that self-determination and control of schools is essential to remote Aboriginal people and this may be achieved through collaborative relationships with teachers. Blitner (2000) further contends that good relationships develop reciprocal respect, knowledge and skills for elders, teachers and children. *Mandawuy Yunupingu* (1999), lead singer of *Yothu Yindi* band and ex-principal of *Yirrkala* school, maintains that Aboriginal teachers who continue work with *Balanda* (non-Aboriginal) teachers, with equal pay have a “relationship of partnership” (p. 4) which makes school a positive place to be for students and families. *Partners for Success Review* (Education Queensland, 1999) admits that case studies provide evidence that “the quality of the relationship between the school and its community” is one factor which “influences [Aboriginal] student outcomes” (p. 5).

Education Queensland (2000) is presently using the concept of partnerships between schools and communities. There are a number of groups working on the *Partners for Success* (Education Queensland, 2000) strategy. They include the Indigenous Education and Training Alliance (2001), which supports the staff of schools with high levels of Indigenous children across the state. They also work with *The Cape York Partnership Plan* (Pearson and Ah Mat, 2000).

In Western Australia and the Northern Territory community run schools have existed for a number of decades (Aboriginal Independent Community Schools, 2004). By 1995 there were thirteen non-government community-run schools in Western Australia and twenty-three nationally (Mack, 1995). Routh (1997), who was the principal at Strelley Independent Aboriginal School in Western Australia in 1993 and 1994, states that Elders were employed at Strelley School as key educators who run culture camps and keep the language strong within the formal system of the school.

Blitner (2000) emphasises ethics in schooling through the protocol of respect and relationships when she argues that Elders involve and plan with families who

are the owners of the land where they teach. She maintains that Aboriginal educators should consult first with Elders “about their knowledge” before they teach children or take them “out bush” (p. 56).

Blitner (2000) also maintains that in the Northern Territory “Elders on remote community independent schools team-teach with university-trained teachers and on these communities” (p. 10). She holds that Elders “lead a team from each local community to ensure full Aboriginal control of their own schools right from grass roots level because that’s where the control of [the] Elders is strongest in their decision making” (p. 10).

Further, Blitner (2000) suggests that “Aboriginal teachers teach in certain ways that are similar to how they have been taught by their Elders” (p. 27). Bell (1999), Blitner (2000) and Battiste (2002) all argue that Elders teach for lifelong learning and use real life experiences. Battiste (2002) proposes that, “The first principle of Aboriginal learning is a preference for experience for experiential, real-life knowledge, [in which] they learn independently by observing, listening, and participating with a minimum of intervention or instruction” (p. 15). She maintains, “Aboriginal language is maintained when children go on bush trips with the Elders” (Blitner, 2000, p. 15). Indigenous societies, worldwide, traditionally have sought knowledge from “participation with the natural world” (Cajete, 2000, p. 71). They then use stories, dream, intuition, prayer and ritual to guide each person (Randall, 2003; Horton, 2001; Pryor, 1998; Dingo, 1998; Walker, 2000; Cajete, 2000; Battiste, 2002). Battiste (2002) suggests that Elders teach students, “Traditions, ceremonies, and daily observations as integral parts of the learning process, [which are] spirit-connecting processes that enable gifts, visions, and spirits to emerge in each person” (pp. 14-15). Kort and Reilly (no date), Hill (2001) and Battiste (2002) suggest that Elders teach knowledge that comes from introspection, meditation, prayer, and other types of self-directed learning.

Hill (2001) suggests that Elders use their knowledge and ceremonies to heal and educate Aboriginal students who have been oppressed by the “Ethnostress” of racism, powerlessness, anger, fear, history, education, education, religion, economics and early childhood stress. In an article on “Aboriginal Advancement: the Australian Challenge”, Pearson (2003) has proposed giving Elders legal power

over others in their communities to control “social dysfunctions such as alcohol abuse and conflict which would to some degree re-create the social and political environment of a tribal society” (p. 5). Beazley (1984) suggests community participation develops more positive student attitudes towards school and teachers, enhances curriculum relevance and makes schools more accountable and responsive. McMurray’s (2001) and Harslett’s (1998) research with Aboriginal communities both suggest that listening to local knowledge, openly sharing information, and passing on skills is not only part of an empowering community development model but it is also sound educational practice.

### *Curriculum and pedagogy*

The literature also extends the Indigenous need for relatedness and connectedness, collective and individual, to classroom pedagogy that emphasises warmth and belongingness. Such educators as Farnshawe (1976), Malin (1994) and Smith (1997) and the *Katu Kalpa* report (Australian Senate. Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, 2000) maintain that Aboriginal participants are more concerned with the human relationship and belongingness aspects of schooling as opposed to an emphasis on task efficiency and academic substance. Malin (1998) refers to a need to create a classroom atmosphere where Aboriginal students can feel a sense of belonging. Farnshawe (1976), Kuykendall (1992), Partington and McCuddin (1992) and Randall (2003) also maintain that Aboriginal children need to be valued and feel that their culture is valued.

Dobson, Riley, McCormack and Hartman (1997), Gool and Patton (1998), Bell (1999), Bourke and Bourke (2000), Williams (2000), Blitner (2000), Walker (2000), Hill (2001), Battiste (2002), Randall (2003) and Pearson (2003) all maintain that to restore Indigenous resilience and self reliance Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators, scholars and professionals have returned to seeking and must continue seeking the knowledge and teachings of the Elders of each community. School principals, Chris Sarra (2001) at *Cherbourg* and *Tarungka* Irene Jimbidie (2000) at Fitzroy Crossing have achieved considerable successes by working with the Elders of the local community. Craven (1998) also makes a

case that “Indigenous people’s input in Aboriginal Studies activities is the best resource available to teachers” (p. 200).

A current senate inquiry recommended that, “Teacher training curriculums should include Indigenous culture, English as a second language and basic training in paediatric illnesses” (Australian Senate. Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, 2000, pp. 103-4). The literature argues that teachers need to listen to local Aboriginal people and it also suggests that they could learn more appropriate pedagogy and curriculum from local community members (Harslett, 1998 and Collins, 1999). Speaking for the Alliance of Cape York Schools programme, Schelks (2000) stated that “vocational learning is working on Cape York because it moves away from a traditionally white, middle-class curriculum to a more localised and responsive educational experience” (p. 2).

### **Summary**

Within this critical survey of literature which bears on the topic of thesis I have discussed the research and scholarship relevant to that of listening to Elders from a remote Aboriginal community about respectful Elder – teacher and school relationships. The area of research encompasses issues and dynamics on remote Aboriginal communities, education on those communities, the issue of listening to Elders and personal and political relationships between Elders and non-Aboriginal people.

There are myriad and holistic causes for the general failure of Western education on remote communities. There is no one simple reason for the failure of Aboriginal education. Some literature reproaches the teachers. Lack of adequately trained teachers is often cited as a reason for educational failure. It is argued that only half of the universities in Australia teach Aboriginal studies and then it is not mandatory for students to study Aboriginal history, culture and world-views. Certain research literature proposes that teachers do not value the students’ culture and values, nor do they listen to them. A lack of familiarity with the child’s family, the issues of the local community, its social-historical-political background, its language(s) and its protocols, on the part of teachers, has also been argued as hindering successful student learning. The imposition of alien and

irrelevant curriculum and pedagogy is also cited as a reason for student failure. The literature suggests that Western education disadvantages Aboriginal students because many teachers lack adequate pre-service training and cross-cultural training. Some teachers, it is argued, may see students, their families and the community as having a deficit mentality, culture and environment. Thus, a great deal of literature argues that local Aboriginal community members may see schools as hostile environments and teachers as people who cannot be approached or trusted. It is implied by some research that the large turnover of unfriendly and unfamiliar staff and a history of bad community-school relationships may cause community members to be wary, resistant to and fearful of the teachers and school environment. A long-term lack of trust of the government system and its employees also adds to students and their families being resistant to the school and teachers.

Although much literature recognises that there is racism and prejudice among teachers and that Aboriginal people have been subjected to oppressive practices other writers argue that there is a widespread desire for education, both Western and in the local Aboriginal culture. The few educational successes have been mostly, Aboriginal principals who participate in informed negotiation with the local Elders and families, and have the support of the Elders. Those institutions that have achieved educational successes plan inside the framework of local Indigenous knowledges and steer away from 'white', middle-class values. Successful schools will not have teachers with negative attitudes about Aboriginal people on their staff; they want those teachers who refuse to fail and will develop positive strategies with Aboriginal students to wean them away from truancy. Successful teachers of Aboriginal children have emphasised that they must be part of a school that has positive attitudes about Aboriginal students, their families and the community. Such approaches emphasise the likelihood that those teachers will fail unless they have like-minded, positive collegial support and the support of community-minded principals.

The literature outlines many reasons why Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators, scholars, spokespeople and Elders themselves, would prefer the Elders to be agentic and self-determining in the field of Aboriginal education. In the past, it is argued, Elders have not been respected, listened to or agentic in any sense.

There has been a history of destruction of ancient knowledge, oppression and broken promises by Western individuals and Western institutions and as a result, Aboriginal people on communities that have been reserves or missions have a long-standing resistance to governementality, administrative intrusion and authoritarianism. There is also an acknowledgment in the literature written by academics that colonisation practices, however unconscious or unintentional, continue in education in remote communities. Although the most recent educational policies suggest that there must be involvement and participation of Aboriginal people and there must be partnerships forged between schools and the community, literature by Aboriginal educators and academic analysts maintain that the loudest voice in the community or the ruling faction drowns out all others. Other literature has suggested that Elders should be consulted and negotiated with as a matter of, not just respect, but ongoing trust, and it is this point of negotiation and ongoing reciprocal trust and respect that this thesis addresses.

The literature on the issue of social connectedness points to the conclusion that belongingness, personal relationships and connectedness are important to Aboriginal people, especially those on closed communities and that that belongingness within a classroom situation is an extension of this. Anthropological literature also suggests that kinship is an important concept to Aboriginal people and some literature suggests that ‘outsiders’ are often incorporated into Aboriginal society to fit into their system and engender reciprocal benefits. This process of adoption, as relatives or incorporation into the local community of sympathetic outsiders by Elders is important to this thesis.

The little literature that exists on relationships with Elders suggests that Elders do not just want to be listened to; they want to be consulted with, respectfully negotiated with, and deferred to in long-term, courteous and trusting relationships. They want to plan with and make decisions with European non-Aboriginal educators. One writer sympathetic to remote ‘Top-End’ Elders has argued that they want partnerships with Westerners who understand them, know how they think and know their culture, law and language.

While there is some literature world-wide on Elders as teachers, custodians of ancient Indigenous Law, keepers of knowledge regarding the land, ceremonies, culture, languages and spiritual wisdom, there is less in Australia and even less

that is generated in Queensland. A number of educators and scholars – some from Queensland, some from the Northern Territory and even more from Canada – maintain that Elders should lead a team of educators from each community to ensure that students learn experiential, balanced spiritual-physical-intellectual-creative, real-life, life-long knowledge. The ethics of respectfulness for Elders and respect by Elders is emphasised continually in the literature. Aboriginal educators emphasise the importance of planning with the families and owners of the land where Elders and educators teach. Research indicates that as connected beings we cannot be separated from each other and the processes of life and it has been suggested that before Elders begin educating students, they must heal the family and community stress that is created by historic and ongoing colonial oppression.

### **Conclusion**

Clearly, then, there are good reasons for exploring further, the problems facing and the possibilities open to schooling in remote Aboriginal communities. There are evident gaps in the literature, as well as pointers to both general problems to be explored, the importance of the peculiarities of local contexts, and possible principles to inform more productive positive practices. This thesis will address some gaps, specifically, that of non-Aboriginal teachers listening to, negotiating with and being educated by erudite Elders and by respectful Elder-teacher relationships, and informed by the understandings already established in the literature.

## Chapter 2

### Methodology

In this chapter I address the problems of obtaining and making sense of data that allows me to explore the relations between Elders and community, on the one hand, and the school and the teachers, on the other, on *Kunhanhaa* (Mornington Island), as outlined in the Introduction, in light of existing knowledge and understandings of education in Indigenous communities more generally, as explored in my critical review of the literature. I set out a general strategy of qualitative research and more particularly, interviews with remote community Aboriginal Elders that rapidly moved in the direction of recurrent, extended, open-ended conversations. In these conversations I sought to adopt the position of respectfulness towards the Elders rather than interrogator. For reasons foreshadowed already, the conversations were lengthy discussions, mostly held sitting in the dirt, in noisy environments with many people around.

Initially these interviews and conversations included a range of senior men and women; however, they quickly moved to focus, almost exclusively, on the male *Kunhanhaa* Elders. I made a decision to focus exclusively on the voices of the Elders and others in their circle and not to document and explore, in any way, the practices or policies of the school or the views of the non-Aboriginal teachers who staff the school. In participating in and subsequently interpreting the conversations of the *Kunhanhaamendaa*, I shared with my participants an understanding of the generally oppressive character of race relations in historical and contemporary Australian society.

To confirm the accuracy of my records of conversations and my interpretations of what they were saying I read successive notes of conversations and drafts of chapters to the Elders. This led to new waves of data generation and to successive revisions of drafts. At times they spoke of a spiritual and atemporal world whose reality would commonly be doubted among non-Aboriginal people. I have chosen to accept their account at face value.

## **A Qualitative Case Study**

As my account of the literature already suggests, the situation at *Kunhanhaa* can be seen as an example of a phenomenon that is much more widespread. I have not generalised from the findings at *Kunhanhaa*, but I have framed the study as something that makes sense, not as a purely local phenomenon, but as a local instance of a broader phenomenon. That makes it a case study.

Stake argues that the epistemological question that drives the case study is “what can be learned from the single case?” (1994, p. 236). While Yin (1994) suggests that the case study benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis Stake (1994) argues that, “A case study is not a mystical choice, but a choice of an object to be studied” (p. 236). Nevertheless, Creswell (1994) maintains that in a qualitative study, one does not commence with a theory to trial or confirm. Instead, consistent with the inductive model of thinking, a theory may become apparent during the data collection and analysis stage. However, my prior experience in the field of this study and background literature indicated that social critical theory would be an ideal theoretical proposition to frame both the data collection and analysis.

Stake (1994) also maintains that one cannot understand a single case without knowing about other cases, and by firstly studying the literature on ongoing colonialism, continued racism and Aboriginal educational failure and, having taught in other Aboriginal communities, I had some relevant background.

This particular case study was what Stake (1994) calls an “intrinsic case study” (p. 237) and I undertook it because I had an interest in the Mornington Island community, in particular the senior members and children. This particularity of Mornington Island is typical of a case study. Stake (1994) argues that the uniqueness of a case study extends to the nature of the case; the historical background, the physical setting, and “other contexts and cases through which this case is recognisable and the participants through which the case can be known” (p. 238). Mornington Island and its people have already been written about by Roughsey (1971), Roughsey (1984), Cawte (1972), Binion (1984), Huffer (1988), Memmott and Horsman (1991), The Human Rights Commission (1992), Trezise (1993), Hale (1997), McKnight (1999, 2002) and Ahern (2000). However, this

case study particularly concerns the ideas of the Elders about relationships with transient non-Aboriginal government-employed teachers – a matter not discussed in the literature.

Stake (1994) argues that the researcher's themes or issues are matters for study, which may make the case an exemplar. In this regard, as Stake and Eisner (1985) also argue, this case study became a didactical and discovery learning tool. It is didactical, because I literally taught my audience and my participants what I have learned and my conversationalists taught me. I was privileged to be adopted by a number of families on *Kunhanhaa*, however, regardless of this, as a qualitative researcher I was a guest of the Elders sharing the private space of their world.

I made the choice of studying this case study through the qualitative methodology of interviewing. By using qualitative research I honoured the Elders' voices, visibility and sensitivity (Jansen and Davis, 1998). This research is built on a series of extended conversations. This positions it within the broad framework of qualitative research and, more specifically, qualitative research based on open-ended interview methods.

Bogdan and Biklen (1982) make a case that the data that is collected in qualitative research is deemed “ ‘soft’, that is, rich in description of people, places and conversations and not easily handled by statistical procedures” (p. 2). It is also concerned with understanding the participants' perspectives. In-depth interviewing is a well-known method of qualitative research.

### **“We're the mob you should be listening to”**

When the project began in 2000, there were twenty-one self-elected *Kunhanhaamendaa* participants. However, in 2002, when *Kulthangar* and *Kurnungkur* perceived the research as vital to their interests, the Elders assumed the major role in the research. The Elders suggested that other previous participants become minor figures in the research. There are now twenty-five active participants and eleven senior *Kunhanhaamendaa* and anonymous participants whom the Lawmen suggested that I listen to. I opted to follow their advice in recognition of protocol and I allowed myself to be strongly guided by

them. I made a decision to accept the Elders as my major participants, because they are the most senior traditional members of the community.

In regard to the formulation of the aims and objectives of the research I adopt the approach of Indigenous academic Yavu Kama (1988), who argues that the Indigenous people concerned should initiate research. In fact, this project was recommended by some of the Lawmen and senior *Kunhanhaa* women in 1998. I followed their suggestions to listen to the Elders' conversations about improving relationships between the community and the school when I began this research. One of these senior women, one of the Grannies, whom I will refer to as Anon. A as she has since passed away, told me in 1998:

We've always told the school they welcome to talk to us. We don't want the school to shut us out. We are always ready to help them. We just wanted a relationship with the school that's all! We wanted to be introduced to those new teachers when they come. We want them to trust us. We are so keen to help at the school. We have all the knowledge. We [Grannies] work together to help the kids to get through life. (*Personal Communication*, 2 September, 2000).

They believed that they should have closer social relationships with the teachers and be able to have a greater role at the school. These senior women had close personal relationships with the missionaries and many of them were teachers at the church-run school for years. One of the present Aboriginal teachers, a Lawman, *Jekarija*, showed me a newspaper clipping where his father, Lawman Larry Lanley, who had also taught at the school, spoke about this relationship. His father was the shire chairman when the State Government took over from the Uniting Church. Larry Lanley said:

Our people fear a Queensland Government takeover would hold us down real tight and we would never be given the chance of treated as real human beings. The people object to most of the Government

policies. The church has let us use self-determination. The Queensland Government would not. (Phillips, 1978, p. 3).

### **The participants and co-researchers**

In this section I explain why I call the Aboriginal people, who have informed me and worked with me on the research project, ‘participants’ and ‘co-researchers’ rather than ‘research subjects’. I also describe each participant and their background, as this is correct protocol according to Aboriginal world-views.

In establishing a research framework, when working with Aboriginal peoples, both Moreton-Robinson (2000) and Martin (2002) warn that research conduct with these people must be driven by the multiple perspectives of their worldviews, their beliefs about relationships, reciprocity, obligation and shared experiences and their “Ways of Doing” (Martin, 2002, pp. 5-6). These Aboriginal researchers recommend “equalising power differentials where Aboriginal people [especially Elders] are subjects and... knowledgeable experts” (Martin, 2002, p. 6). I have chosen to follow their advice.

Therefore, I have specifically called my Elder-informants ‘participants’, ‘conversationalists’ and ‘co-researchers’ rather than ‘research subjects’ because these terms suggest a more personal, respectful, reciprocal, meaningful, long-term relationship rather than an informal short term affiliation that one would have with a researcher who is a stranger. Many of the *Kunhanhaamendaa* I talked with would not converse with a stranger. It is not culturally correct. Granny Margaret Hills said that she would be “too shy and frightened to talk to a stranger.” (*Personal Communication*, 21 April, 2002). She told me, “We frightened of whitefellas if we don’t know who they are” (*Personal Communication*, 21 April, 2002). Likewise senior women *Bulthuku* and Ursula Roughsey argued that, “We would not talk with someone we had no relationship with, especially a whitefella. If we don’t know them we can’t talk” (*Personal Communications*, 31 August 2001). Only by knowing the participants, being adopted by them and knowing the correct protocols have I been able to converse with them at depth. Aboriginal Lawmen *Jekarija*, *Chuloo*, and *Kulthangar* formally placed me in their social system by giving me the *nimarama* skin group, saltwater totem and language

name *Ngarajin*. In this regard, Maori educators and researchers Graham Smith (1992) and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) have suggested that culturally pertinent research can be undertaken by non-Indigenous researchers where ‘adopted’ researchers are incorporated into the daily life of Maori people, and uphold a life-long relationship which continues far beyond the sphere of research.

There are a number of reasons why I have called my informants ‘participants’ in the research and more particularly why I call the Elders, ‘co-researchers’. I use these terms, first, because, according to the “properties of conduct” (Bell, 1999, pp. 362-363) or correct protocol on *Kunhanhaa* the Elders are the owners of their stories and the words of their culture. In this case, *Kulthangar* and the Elders “own the words” of all *Kunhanhaamendaa*. Bell (1999) also argues that “an Elder who has been nominated to speak for others is accountatable to that community [so they are] cited and consulted” as authority figures (1999, p. 409). *Kulthangar* and *Birdibirr* told me that they had informed Binion (1987), McKnight (1999), Hale (1997), Memmott and Horsman (1991) and Ahern (2000) in the past. Therefore, they reasoned that they understood the research process and I promised, at their request, that they would be seen as ‘co-researchers’ (*Personal Communications*, 17 May, 2002). Again, according to Bell (1998), amongst the *Ngarrindjeri*, “Once one has given one’s word, it is binding” (p. 407). This was also so with the *Kunhanhaa* Elders (*Personal Communications*, *Kulthangar*, *Birdibirr*, Moon, T., Robinson, R., *Kurnungkur*, *Milmajah*, Goodman, C., 17 May, 2002; Wilson, E., 15 May, 2002; Kelly, K., *Wuhnun*, 15 May, 2002; Peters, C., 27 September, 2001). Bell (1998) also mentions, “Many times I noticed that a *Ngarrindjeri* elder was asking me the same questions a rigorous historian would ask about documents” (1998, p. 397). Again, I observed that *Kurnungkur*, Teddy, Cecil, *Milmahjah* and *Kulthangar* spoke in a similar fashion (*Personal Communications*, 17 May, 2002). I saw the Elders as highly intelligent men whose experience and knowledge had been disregarded in the past and I chose to see them as equals and change the power imbalance, which had existed for them before the missionaries removed the Elders’ political power. In doing so I adhered to the research practices and ideas of Smith (1992), Osborne (1995), Harslet (1998), Smith (1999), Moreton-Robinson (2000), Martin (2002) and Foley (2002).

The participants live on Mornington Island, an island in the Gulf of Carpentaria in North-West Queensland. Of the nine hundred Aboriginal people living on the island, twenty-six are Elders. A few of these very old men are beyond speaking. Approximately sixty percent of the Aboriginal population is indigenous to *Kunhanhaa*, Denham (*Bathungan*) and Forsythe (*Mayanba*) Islands. These three islands are in close geographical proximity to each other and are known as the Northern Wellesley Islands. The Denham and Forsythe Island (*Yankgal* people) have intermarried for so long with the original *Kunhanhaamendaa* that I refer to them in the thesis as *Kunhanhaamendaa*.

Approximately fifteen percent of *Kunhanhaa*'s population are *Kaidilt* people from nearby Bentinck Island. Another twenty percent of the population is *Waanyi-Garawa* and *Kangalida* people from the mainland. The *Kangalida* people are from the Westmoreland-Escott Station-*Doomadgee* area. The *Waanyi-Garawa* people are from the Lawn Hill area. Five percent of the population is made up of the Wik (*Aurukun*), *Koko-bera* (Kowanyama) and *Yanyula* (*Borrooloola*) people.

Participant and co-researcher, *Kulthangar* of *Dunkuru*, the former mayor of *Kunhanhaa*, the 'Big Country Lawman' for all four corners of the Big Country of *Kunhanhaa*, could legally speak 'for' the community, because he had knowledge of every sacred place on the island. He was also a *kinenda* or peacemaker, judge and arbiter. He was the ceremonial leader at all sacred ceremonies and the "doctor" at initiations. He retained the genealogical-historical knowledge of the community inhabitants. Because his mother, Lettie Sam, was a *Kangalida-Garawa* woman he also inherited much sacred knowledge from the *Borrooloola* region and Robinson River region, from the *Garawa*, *Kangalida* and *Yanyula* Elders and through these links he had connections to these people. *Kulthangar*'s grandmother *Budawangin* of *Dunkuru* and *Wurrkurjin*, was a full sister to participant Ida Brookedale's grandfather *Lelkandu Yilimingalin* of *Wurrkurjin*. *Lelkandu* was the father of Ida's mother Maudie.

Bobby Thompson (*Kurnungkur*) is also a co-researcher and participant. He is related to *Kulthangar* through his mother, Lily, as *Kulthangar*'s mother Lettie and Lily were cousin-sisters who came together to the mission in the 1920s. *Kurnungkur* heads the local council road works and building team.

Participants Teddy and Cyril (*Birdibir*) Moon are *dulmadas* or owners of *Langunganji* (Sydney Island). Teddy is a shire councillor. Both brothers were the cousin-brothers of participant, *Ngerrawurn*, another Lawman who died in 2002. They are also cousins of co-researcher Ida Brookedale. Ida's grandfather Terry (*Berdengalin*) of *Ganba* was *Birdibir's* grandfather's brother. *Birdibir's* grandfather was *Jaurth* of Sydney Island.

*Ngerrawurn's* mother Margaret Hills is a *Kangalida* woman who was sent to *Kunhanhaa* in 1930. Margaret was a major participant. Her mother Nora was an older cousin-sister of *Kulthangar's* mother Lettie. Participant Billy *Koorabuba* (*Milmajah-Lemburren*) and participant *Kangala* were Margaret's brothers. *Kangala* was a *warama* or Elder with two major initiations in Aboriginal Law, therefore an Aboriginal man of "high degree" (Elkin, 1994). *Kangala* died in 2000, so I will only be using his skin name. Melville Escott (*Milmajah*) is a *dulmada* of *Mirrigudt* and *Birri*. His father, Prince Escott, was the son of Margaret Hill's father, King Jimmy, a *kinenda* of the *Kangalida* people. On his mother's side *Milmajah's* great-grandmother was Kitty Bell and his grandfather was Charlie Bell, a *Yanyula-Garawa* man. *Milmajah* was a major participant.

Participant Hugh Ben (*Chuloo*) is *dulmada* of *Thundalin* (commonly known as Market Garden). His son-in-law, participant Hilary Lanley (*Jekarija*), is the son of Larry Lanley, who with his wife Fanny and Henry Peters taught language and culture at the school in the 1970s. Hilary's grandfather Sprinter George and Mellville's great-grandfather Charlie Bell were brothers. Larry, along with Pompey Wilson and Douglas Burke, began the Mornington Island Dancing Troupe (*Woomera*), which tours the world promoting *Kunhanhaa* song and dance.

Participant Cecil Goodman is also a shire councillor and *dulmada* of *Birri* and *Gurrielgun*. His mother, who died in 2002, was also a participant. She came to the island in 1928 and her mother, Kitty Bell, married John *Dimirurr*, an uncle of Dick Roughsey and *Kulthangar*. Through their common grandfather, Charlie Bell, Hilary, *Milmajah* and Cecil are cousins.

Edgar Wilson, Pompey's son, *Kulthangar's* brother-in-law and a shire councillor was a participant too. *Bulthuku* and Edgar share a common grandfather, Billy Bamboo of *Ganba*. *Bulthuku's* mother Julie is the full sister of Edgar's

father, Pompey. Billy Bamboo was a cousin brother to Ida Brookedale's father Shilling. Both participants share a common grandfather, *Berdengalin* (Terry).

Participants Joseph Watt (*Banbaji*) and his brother *Banjabi* Gordon (*Goomungee*) are *dulmadas* of *Barrarrkiya*.

Angus Roughsey (*Yarakara*) is *dulmada* of *Langunganji*. Digger Adams (*Ngurrumu*) is *dulmada* of *Kanba*. His cousin is Ida Brookedale of *Kanba*. Angus' cousin-brother, Timothy Roughsey (*Dilmurrur*) is a *dulmada* of *Kenthawu* and *Langunganji*. His wife Ursula belongs to the *Banjabi* family of *Barrarrkiya*. *Yarakara*, Ida, *Ngurrumu*, *Dilmurrur* and Ursula were all research participants.

Calder, Paul and Matthew Peters and their sister Lillian Bush are *dulmadas* of *Lemutha* and *Birri*. Wayne Williams (*Wunhun*) and his brother Johnny are also *dulmadas* of *Birri*. Their mother was *Birdibir*'s sister. Calder, Paul, Mathew, Lillian, *Wunhun* and Johnny were all co-researchers.

Reggie Robinson (*Gurrbudgee*), another participant, is a *Kunhanhaa* policeman. He is the cousin- brother of *Kulthangar*. His father, Don Robinson, was *Kulthangar*'s mother's brother.

Co-researcher, Wilfred Marmies (*Lemenburren*) is a *dulmada* of *Belaliya*. His sisters, Clara Reid and Cecily Farrell were both participants in the research. The Marmies sibling's grandmother *Bidmaraja* was Cecil Goodman's great-grandmother. Clara's husband Pat Reid was *Kulthangar*'s adopted brother.

Roger Kelly is a Bentick Island Elder whom the other *Kunhanhaamendaa* Elders asked to participate. Tonky Logan is a cousin-brother to *Milmajah* through his great-grandmother Kitty Bell. Roger and Tonky were both participants in the project.

I chose many of the informants as participants and co-researchers because they are such knowledgeable people. The participants speak from not only deep inside the heartland of traditional Aboriginal culture but with a knowledge of political issues in the field of race relations and understanding gained in Western educational institutions. What they say should not be dismissed as the utterances of people who might know traditional culture but have no idea about the Western world. Their experience and knowledge includes highly articulated Western learning which includes extensive participation in academic conferences, watching the news, reading political literature and Western tertiary education and

many years of participation in research with Western academics. Many of these participants and co-researchers are not only well educated in traditional Aboriginal Law and speak up to five Aboriginal languages, but they have travelled worldwide.

*Kurnungkur* has completed years of external study and holds a senior administrative position with the Mornington Shire Council. He is also the adopted 'skin' brother of anthropologist Professor David McKnight, with whom he has spent considerable time discussing academic issues. *Kulthangar*, *Milmajah*, *Wuhnun*, *Birdibir*, *Ngurrumu*, *Yarakara*, Teddy, Roger, Cecil, Ida, Clara and *Bulthuku* have spent many years working with McKnight, anthropologist Paul Memmott and anthropologist Ken Hale. *Wuhun* has also studied at tertiary level in Sydney. Reggie's father Don was a 'black tracker' with the Brisbane police and bequeathed to Reggie his love of reading about politics. Wilfred, Cecily and Clara were much influenced by their older brother, Andrew, who was an active participant in the Australian Land Rights movement. Lillian has knowledge of contemporary land rights and politics and has trained to become a teacher under the Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Program. All watch the news daily on television. All the Elders and senior women watched the Pauline Hanson (Leader of the One Nation Party) phenomenon<sup>6</sup> in great detail and have discussed this at great length with me. Roger has also had much experience with the Aboriginal Land Rights movement and is very much a political activist within the movement to restore Aboriginal languages to communities. Roger was trained as a councillor by *Jekarija's* father Larry Lanley. *Jekarija* has kept his father's newspaper clippings from the 1978 State Government takeover of Mornington Island and he is politically well versed. Cecil and Lillian Bush also were political activists against the 1978 State Government takeover of the island and along with *Jajeridgea* and Margaret they watch the news every day on television. Ex-school-

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<sup>6</sup> Pauline Hanson has been a controversial figure ever since she founded the One Nation Party . Mr Phillip Ruddock MP stated about her, "She could go down in history as an inspirational battler for the rights of ordinary the Australian or a symbol of the worst in reactionary white conservatism. " (2003, p. 1). The height of her influence was in the late 1990s. She denounced the inequality of giving welfare money to Aboriginal people while that money was not available to non-Aboriginal Australian people. Pauline Hanson caused outrage among Aboriginal people by writing a *Pauline Hanson The Truth*, a book in which her supporters claim that even Daisy Bates, a prominent turn of the century social worker, spoke of baby cannibalism being rife among some Aboriginal peoples.

teacher Margaret also reads prolifically. She owns books by Trigger (1992), McKnight (1999), Dingo (1998), Pryor (1998), Hume (2002), Keen (1997), Bell (1998, 2002), Memmott and Horsman (1991), Binion (1987), Moriarty (2000) and Harris (1990) and often speaks to me about the information in them. *Kulthangar*, Joseph, *Goomungee*, Cecil, Teddy, *Jekarija*, *Dilmirrur* and *Wunhnun* have all travelled worldwide with the *Woomera* dance team. *Kulthangar*, Cecil, Roger and Teddy attend and have attended numerous local government conferences and, as mayor, *Kulthangar* was invited to China and America on numerous occasions on official state visits. *Kulthangar*, the other Shire councillors and Margaret were and are presently friends with Tony McGrady, the long-time local member of state parliament for the district, and often talk about their friend, North Queensland politician Bob Katter, with enthusiasm. These men and women are well versed in the ways and values of the wider world outside Mornington Island.

Many of the participants did not speak alone. Their husband or wife and various family members joined them and often a number of people who belonged to the household, the work gang, the neighbours, or part of the card party. Many people, who were interested in the topic, added their voices. When I spoke to *Dilmurrur* and Ursula, Joseph, *Milmajah*, Lindsey Roughsey, the head of the Roughsey family, and one of the teachers, Ken Steele, were also present. When I spoke to *Milmajah*, his wife, her sisters, their sons and his daughters-in-law were usually there, although *Milmajah* preferred that they did not speak.

### **Listening as a protocol and method**

Listening to people is a standard technique in qualitative research, but my research methodology was also in line with standard and culturally appropriate protocol in a 'traditionally oriented' Aboriginal community. Aboriginal people, leaders and Indigenous academics insist that non-Aboriginal educators and researchers listen to the local Aboriginal people of the community where they are teaching or researching (Smith, 1992; Foley, 1998; Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Smith, 1999; Cajete, 2000; Hill, 2002; Martin, 2002). I conducted in-depth interviews in 2000, 2001 and 2002 with an emphasis on making sure that the Elders were heard (*Personal Communication, Kulthangar*, 20 April, 2002).

Unstructured interviewing is an ideal method because the researcher must spend a greater amount of time with the conversationalist/s. Unstructured interviewing also allows the participants to regulate the flow of information and the conversationalist/s can use language that is natural to them. This methodology also means that the conversationalists perspective/s are vital. Unstructured interviewing suggests that the conversationalists have equal status to the researcher in the dialogue (Burns, 2000).

“Interviewing is one of the most common and powerful methods of trying to understand our fellow human beings” (Fontana and Frey, 1994, p. 361). Taylor and Bogdan state that “repeated [and recursive] face to face encounters between researcher and [participants] are directed to understanding the [participants’] perspectives on their lives, experiences or situations as expressed in their own words” (1984, p. 77). These researchers rely on listening in an unstructured situation.

Rice and Ezzy state, “The good interviewer is working hard at listening to what is being said. [As a result] that person will feel like they have been heard” (1999, p. 52). Qualitative researcher Seidman maintains, “I interview because I am interested in other people’s stories” (1991, p. 1). The Elders conveyed stories to me rather than converse or be interviewed. Stories were, for the Elders, a traditional educational tool. Telling stories and being listened to restored their power. Being interviewed reduced their status.

My ideas regarding equalising the unbalanced power roles of participants and researcher parallel those of Fontana and Frey (1994). They maintain, “Because the goal of unstructured interviewing is understanding it becomes paramount for the researcher to establish rapport and he or she must be able to put himself in the role of the respondents and attempt to see the situation from their perspective, rather than impose the world of academia on them” (p. 367).

Clandinin and Connelly (1994) also maintain that:

Conversations are marked by a flexibility to allow participants to establish the form and topics important to the inquiry. Indeed there is probing in conversations, but it is done in a situation of mutual trust, listening and caring for the experience

described by the other [person]. We see the centrality of the relationship among researcher and participant. (p. 422).

This emphasis on conversations rather than interviewing, mutual trust, listening and compassion for the experience described by the participants were vital in my research. My relationship with the participants was built around time, respect, and reciprocity. The quality of the relationships grew, over time and these relationships became central to the thesis. In this respect, interviews or conversations with such important figures as Aboriginal Elders would have been impossible unless we had an established ongoing relationship before the research officially began. After the first interview my conversations increasingly emphasised ‘respectful listening from the heart’.

### **The protocol of listening from heart**

There is a protocol of deferential listening for working with Aboriginal research participants. This protocol reflects and respects their understandings of the respect due to them. This protocol involves listening as an expectation, in fact listening where one is positioned as passive. Listening is more than just a technique – it is a disposition or attitude of ‘listening from the heart’. Privileging the Elders’ point of view is appropriate because they are at the wrong end of a significant imbalance of power and therefore it is widely recognised that researchers should listen for humanitarian and ethical reasons, but also for reasons of ensuring good data.

*Kulthangar* told me every time I came back, “Whitefellas throw their weight around but wefella Elders have knowledge. Knowledge is power. If you’re not initiated you have the knowledge of a child. The only way to learn is to listen to the Elders” (*Personal Communications*, 15 January, 2001; 17 April, 2002; 15 May, 2002). Other Indigenous people and experts agree. Smith (2000) insists, “Indigenous methodologies tend to approach cultural protocols, values and behaviours as an integral part of methodology” (p. 7). She maintains that in Indigenous communities “the adage knowledge is power, is taken seriously” (p. 16). *Boori Pryor*, a *Birri Gubba* Aboriginal man, also states, “Listening to the old people is the true way of respect. I tell the kids, if you don’t listen you don’t learn” (1998, p. 10). Bell (1998) also argues, “Knowledge within *Ngarrindjeri*

society is restricted on the basis of age, gender, and family in ways that mystify a print-oriented society which, nonetheless, has its own rules, albeit not always made explicit” (p. 38).

When *Kulthangar* visited Townsville on 6 September, 2001 I took him to meet my academic supervisor. *Kulthangar* asked my supervisor what his role was in relation to me. My supervisor answered that he was my teacher. *Kulthangar* recalled the next day that he folded his arms and stated, “Well, when Hilary is at Mornington Island I am her teacher. She listens to me. She listens from the heart.” (*Personal Communication*, 7 September, 2001). There is a similarity, here, to an incident Pryor relates where he tells a small child in his audience, “Look little girl, I can’t make you into an Aboriginal [person], but you’re asking questions about us and you’re listening and learning. It’s sort of making you into an Aboriginal person in your heart” (1998, p. 34). Later in the month *Kulthangar* told me, “We adopted you because you respect us. We know you respect us, because you listen to us. We tell you the truth” (*Personal Communication*, 28 September, 2001).

Don McLeod (1987), one of the organisers of the 1946 Pilbara Aboriginal pastoral strike, a man who has lived with tribal Lawmen most of his life, argues that “blackfellas have profound respect for truth, particularly when dealing with serious matters, absolute honesty is required and becomes established as the only acceptable mode of behaviour” (p. 19). McLeod (1987) continued, “When the old people talk about [any aspect of the Law] being threatened they may be talking about a case when a young man or woman fails to display what is regarded by the elders as appropriate humility, the desired level of respect for truth and knowledge” (p. 18).

Protocol demands that senior Aboriginal people be taken seriously, attentively listened to, and treated with deference. In the situation where there is an imbalance of power and the researcher is identified as part of the dominant racial-cultural group, which has the preponderance of power in relation to the social group with which the research participants are identified, it is even more important to observe the major protocols of listening to Elders, respectfully and humbly. Indigenous scholars agree (Cajete, 2000; Martin, 2002; Linda Tuhiwai Smith, 2002; Graham Smith, 2002; Randall, 2003). Senior Aboriginal figure Mick Dodson cites senior white bureaucrat and adopted *Yolgnu*, Nugget Coombs, as

saying “Elders have a right to be consulted and listened to with respect” (1996, p. 2). Smith (2001) declares, “The term ‘respect’ is consistently used by Indigenous peoples to underscore the significance of our relationships and humanity. Respect is a reciprocal, shared, constantly interchanging principle, which is expressed through all aspects of social conduct” (p. 5). Haig-Brown and Archibald (1996) write that, “to be in harmony with oneself, other members of the animal kingdom, and other elements of nature requires that First Nations people respect the gift of each entity and establish and maintain respectful and reciprocal relations with each” (p. 116).

Being heard is important to the Elders’ sense of power and agency because of their long experience of being denied a voice under colonialism. Since early mission days in 1914, the *Kunhanhaamendaa* were “expected to be obedient and ‘seen and not heard’ and, like children, we expected never be ‘cheeky’. We want to be heard and not forgotten” (*Personal Communication, Kulthangar, 24 June, 2002*). This speaking up, speaking out is very important to the Elders. The Elders indicated a need to speak their “truths”, and because few other non-Aboriginal people listened to them it became a political act on my part to listen to them.

Since I began the research in 2000, major reports such as *Learning Lessons* (Collins, 1999), *Bush Talks* (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2000), *Katu Kalpa* (Australian Senate, Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, 2000), *Partners For Success* (Education Queensland, 2001) and the *Cape York Justice Study* (Fitzgerald, 2001) have highlighted the need to listen to local community members and local Elders. *Kurnungkur* spoke for all the Elders, when he told me that he had warned the local principal, “You should have listened to us years ago” (*Personal Communication, 15 May, 2002*).

### **“Listen now, dear sister-in-law” – methods of obtaining quality data**

According to Yin (1994), the quality of data can be enhanced by using “multiple sources of evidence, establishing a chain of evidence and having key participants review the draft case study report” (Yin, 1994, p. 33). The data that I gained from the Elders has a general consistency that accords with the work of other case studies, such as Theis’ (1984) study of Kimberley Aboriginal people, Blitner’s

(2000) reflections of Northern Territory community schools and Routh's (1996) study of the Strelley Independent Aboriginal School. Further, I checked on the relationship between my experience with my Mornington Island co-researchers and that of other communities by reading accounts, such as those I have cited above, to the participants and they agreed.

There are also specific methodological issues in relation to Indigenous research, which reflected *Kunhanhaa* protocols. Each conversation informed the other conversations and sometimes reflected what the others had said, and it was and is vital, in terms of protocol, that I gained information from the Elders and *dulmadas* (owners) of most of the countries of *Kunhanhaa*. I canvassed widely: of the nineteen countries of *Kunhanhaa* I gained an accurate historical, genealogical and cultural picture of *Kunhunaa* and ideas on the research project from *dulmadas* of seventeen of those countries (*Personal Communications, Kulthangar, 5 September, 2000, 26 November, 2000, 2 April, 2002; Kurnungkur, 24 September, 2000; Chuloo, 17 September, 2000, 10 May, 2002; Milmajah, 2 September, 2000, 3 November, 2000, Ngerrawurn, 17 September, 2000, 20 November, 2000, Marmies, W., 10 April, 2001; Goomungee, 1 December, 2000; Williams, J., 20 September, 2000; Goodman, C., 20 September, 2001; Peters, C., 20 November, 2000; Jekarija 10 April, 2001; Dilmurrur, 6 September, 2000, 2 November, 2000; Yarakara, 12 November, 2001, Ngurrumu, 12 November, 2001*). *Kulthangar* frequently referred me to Clara on matters of history and Leeward geography and to Wilfred and Clara when referring to the *Balalyia* country; to *Chuloo* and his sister Flora Nero when talking about *Thundalin*; to Matthew and Lillian when talking about *Birri* and *Lemutha* country; to *Birdibir* and *Ngerrawurn* when referring to *Langunganji* and to Joseph when discussing the history of *Barrakya*. Bell (1998) suggests that in this regard that one must only gain knowledge from those who are allowed to pass it on.

There were a total of 35 senior residents of *Kunhanhaa*, 25 of them were Lawmen. Along with the number and spread of *dulmadas* this contributed to the range and depth of evidence. When I checked the information from the thesis with Elders in family groupings the rest of the family has chorused agreement (*Personal Communications, Chuloo, Goomungee and Jekarija, 15 November, 2002*). And relationships with the teachers were very much a topic of conversation

when I sat at the front of the only shop, the centre of community talk (*Personal Communications*, Reid, C., Farrell, C., Ngerrawurn, Williams, J., Peters, C., Hills, M., 20 November, 2000; *Milmajah*, 3 November, 2000; *Dilmirrur*, Roughsey, U., 20 September, 2000). I established a chain of evidence by gaining information from family groupings, the *dulmadas* of most of the countries and checking information regularly and recursively.

*Kulthangar* stated, “If something really serious happens we Elders are the leaders and we are the ones responsible for our people” (*Personal Communication*, 25 June, 2002), but although the *Kunhanhaa* Elders construct themselves according to *Mirndiyan* Law as “one tribal Voice” (*Personal Communication*, *Kulthangar* and *Kurnungkur*, 25 June, 2002), politically “communities are not homogenous groups of people” (Environment Protection Agency, 1995, p. 8). There are many divisions, factions, family hostilities and different tribes. Folds (2001) states, “Aboriginal society is one in which no one can speak for anyone else. Popular consensus [is] unobtainable” (p. 145). Bearing in mind that there have only been a few times that I have conversed with the Elders when most of them were physically present they have constantly reminded me that they are one “united tribal voice” (*Personal Communications*, *Kulthangar*, *Kurnungkur*, Goodman, C., *Milmajah*, Robinson, R., *Birdibir*, Moon, T., Peters, C., Williams, J. and Kelly, R., 15 May, 2002). It is rare to find them physically together except at ceremony time, so non-Aboriginal people may assume they are a divided group, but traditionally each family group or people from one country lived separately (McKnight, 1999; Memott and Horsman, 1991) and this is still the case at *Kunhanhaa*. Specific Elders are often geographically located with their own family group. Like Trudgen (2000) I have had to walk or drive from family group to family group to hear their stories.

Over the three years I have been researching with them there has been much ambiguity and ambivalence in what they have told me and because of readjustment to changing non-Aboriginal community workers the Elders have, in some respects, and some matters, over time, have had to search for new solutions to their powerlessness. Hence they have voiced different ways of seeing things, and this changing may be seen as lack of focus (*Personal Communications*,

*Kurnungkur, Milmajah, Robinson, R., Kulthangar and Birdibir, 16 May, 2002).*

This complexity is one of the lenses through which I analyse the data.

Until the Elders, as a unified body, took over as chief participants *Bulthuku* told me that “most people really don’t want to talk about the teachers and the school” (*Personal Communication, 6 September, 2001*) and McKnight’s comments seem appropriate to *Bulthuku*’s statement. He stated, “In response to pestering questions, one should be on guard. People say the first thing that come into their head” (p. 180) and they may later contradict what they have said, however, as I seek to show below, I consider that there are good reasons to believe that the Elders gave me credible data.

### **Obtaining credible data**

There are a number of things I did which might be expected to increase the likelihood of these mighty, knowledgeable Lawmen giving me information of value. I was asked by the Grannies and Elders to conduct this research. In this regard Bell maintains that her *Ngarrindjeri* participants’ “preparedness to engage with me and my analysis and the structure of the book” (1998, p. 368) gives both validity and quality of data. Also, following the protocol of *Kunhanhaa* Law I assumed respectful body language, listened with respect and performed respectful and correct actions.

I performed numerous recursive interviews where I read back previous data. I returned eight times over three years, stayed often for two months at a time, and spent much time with the Elders and my *Kunhanhaa* relatives in Mt Isa and Townsville when they were away from home. In this time I did not dictate conversations but waited and let the Elders talk at their own rate and let the process evolve at the rate that was acceptable and comfortable for the Elders’ lifestyles.

I checked and re-checked information and interpretation of data with my co-researchers. Bell (1998) and Martin (2002) maintain that these recursive interviews are part of correct protocol for obtaining quality data with Aboriginal elders. Bell (1998) argues:

This sort of dialogical research is always an interesting strategy. The feedback one receives from

having one's participants read their own words is invaluable. I'd read a story back, ask about certain details and find myself being told another story by way of illustrating the answer. There was hardly a session when I was not told something new. They were genuinely interested in what I thought and how I figured it out. If I was taking their stories seriously they respected mine. (pp. 366-368).

Similarly, Aboriginal educator and researcher, Martin (2002) suggests that data interpretation is "an issue of according respect to the people and country involved to allow them to tell their own stories in their own ways [and in] checking and rechecking interpretations with participants" (p. 6). Aboriginal educator Cadet-James (2001), Smith (1996) and researchers Vallance and Tchacos (2001) believe that spiral approaches or concentric encounters where the participants and researchers explore new facets of old ground create comfort, mutual respect and trust for all parties. Cadet-James (2001) maintains this process "crystallises cultural sensitivity and respect, in the sense that respect becomes 'noun, verb, metaphor and relationship' " (Vallance and Tchacos, 2001, p. 4).

So the way their conversations went indicated to me that the Elders developed trust in me. I knew the Elders for some time before I began the research. I taught at the Mornington Island State School in 1998 and 1999 and was the librarian at the Mornington Island Shire Council library in 1998 and 1999 and in this way I met many *Kunhanhaa* residents as the canteen was next to the library. The canteen is essentially the social hub of the community and in those days most people used to sit on the lawn in front of the library, or come into the library and chat. Many of the relationships on which this thesis came to rest were formed at this stage.

Some relationships began in my childhood in the bush. Because I came from a pastoral property in the Richmond (North-West Queensland) district I established friendships with *Milmajah*, and Wilfred's brother, Andrew, who had all worked on properties in the area. Because of my interest in family history and the fact that I was a 'bush woman' and an academic *Kulthangar* and his wife,

*Bulthuku*, and I developed a close relationship. Because of my interest in art I became friendly with artists Lindsay Roughsey and *Milmajah*. Since July 1998 *Jekarija*, *Chuloo*, *Kulthangar*, *Bulthuku* and Margaret have adopted me into the kinship system.

From almost the beginning of my time on Mornington Island, I had been learning *Lardil* language. I was interested in local culture and genealogy, and I was accustomed to using plain English, and did so both in my conversations and in my writing. *Kulthangar* told me, “Hilary you are learning the culture and the family tree, you must also learn our language because now you are *Kunhanhaamendaa*” (*Personal Communication*, 29 September, 2001).

*Kulthangar* and I talked about many intimate details of the Law, excluding sacred men’s business. It is unethical and spiritually dangerous to discuss this material. As *Kulthangar* says, “Can’t tell white fella sacred things” (*Personal Communication*, 12 June, 2001). *Yolgnu* Lawman, *Wanjuk Marika* also argues, “Anthropologists show us no respect.” He maintains that they write, “deep, dangerous, special words” that should not be written in books (1995, p. 40). My credibility with the Lawmen also includes the respect and mutual trust of not voicing and writing certain things that I have heard and seen.

### **The Elders tell their stories: the nature of the data collected**

Although I often began conversations with the topic question, “What can you do to improve relationships with the school”, the Elders had no intention of answering questions. Instead, they told me a story. It may be academically correct to call the Elders’ stories ‘narratives’ or ‘accounts’, but the Lawmen call them ‘stories’. They call their sacred sites ‘story places’, so for the Elders the term ‘story’ is constituted from religious and spiritual understandings. The stories have sacredness about them, because the Elders construct themselves as the embodiment and custodians of *Mirndiyan* Law.

Polkinghorne (1988) argues that human beings make their lives meaningful by telling a story. Bruner (1990), Mishler (1986) and Ezzy (1996) all maintain that interviewers often expect categorical answers that fit with the scientific model of the person but get narratives instead. Rice and Ezzy (1999) found that when an interviewer expected an interviewee to give a response that measured a set of

dimensions or characteristics or bundles of variables he told a story about how he saw himself more as a person who asks questions than one who answers them. The Elders were typical of the well-documented (Dingo, 1998) resistance or non-responsiveness to pointless questions: questions to which the questioner already knows the answer. In the same way Rice and Ezzy (1999) comment on their documentation of their interviewing experiences by stating, “Chris refused to discuss himself as an abstract entity or self concept, or to place his experience on a scale” (p. 121), the Lawmen told me stories rather than answer in “a scientific, logical, rational manner in response to Western expectations that attempt to conceptualise people and experiences as objects that can be measured on variables” (Rice and Ezzy, 1999, p. 122). The Elders leant towards this rich, subjective telling that has room for elasticity, and for multiple understandings.

If *Kulthangar* told a story he expected it to be believed. He told me firmly, “We Elders never tell lies. We would not be Elders if we did” (*Personal Communication*, 17 April, 2003). *Kulthangar* had been a participant in the Mornington Island land claim cases, and he told me, “The judge is not going to give us back our land because he don’t believe us. We don’t have proof in the whitefella way” (*Personal Communication*, 15 January, 2001). *Kulthangar* had also heard of the Hindmarsh Bridge case where “the general attitude was one of contempt for Aboriginal women’s restricted knowledge” (Bell, 1998, p. 8), but he had also given evidence for *Murrandoo Yanner*’s 1999 High Court ‘Bush Tucker’ case, which *Murrandoo* won. *Kulthangar* often prefaced his stories by saying, “We Elders never lie.” All the stories passed down to him by his father are his to tell. He told me that no one would respect the Elders if they did not always tell the truth (*Personal Communication*, 8 August, 2002). *Kulthangar* told the same stories for the last four years. He told them almost word for word when he repeated them.

Early in the research all the participants made it clear that they needed to tell their stories. Some stories were about oppression and resistance and family histories of resistance or compliance. Some were stories of good relationships with ‘white teachers’. Some were Lawful discourses on what should be happening and the concept of connections and relationships as a cosmology within Aboriginal Law. Mostly the stories were about lived experiences. *Kulthangar* and

*Milmajah's* stories are also what *Kulthangar* calls "visions: we see it all beforehand: what Red Indian call dreams. Telling stories, seeing visions give us time to think, to plan carefully, slowly" (*Personal Communication*, 17 April, 2003).

### **What the Elders said. What I did. Being positioned: the conduct of research**

When I completed my first set of conversational interviews in September 2000 the participants all asked when I would be coming back to listen to more of their stories. I returned in November and December, 2000 and stayed for six weeks, then again in January 2001, April 2001, September 2001, December 2001, and January 2002, April and May 2002 and November 2002. I spoke to *Kulthangar*, *Milmajah* and *Kurnungur* on the telephone numerous times. When I read them back their previous accounts they generally agreed, corrected some areas, and told me another story. This was the Elders' and Grannies' method of conveying their information. Bell suggests that, "In an oral society which relies on face to face situations these 'properties of conduct' [etiquette] are the law and the sanctions for violators are known. That is the power of the cautions contained in the stories. That is the power of the word" (p. 362). For the *Muyinda* this etiquette about stories included rules about conduct on sacred places, conduct as a relative and the conduct of respect for Elders.

My methodology was the type of 'dialogical research' where one recursively takes notes, analyses them and returns for more comments. This dialogical approach ensured my integrity as a researcher, personal and professional, because it was the approach that the Lawmen expected and respected. Such recursive interviews accord with requirements of protocol, first, for gaining information and, second, for a reciprocal relationship with one's skin family. As the Elders spoke, I read their reflected ideas back to them for validation, they gained more insights: social, political, and cultural, remembered more stories, remembered more Law and they filled more gaps in my (written) thesis as we used this recursive speaking, listening and writing process.

Thus far, I have sought to show how I consistently attempted to follow local protocols as a means of increasing the likelihood of gaining information of value. In my judgement, the Elders' words and actions also suggest that they responded

positively to the way I approached the research. First, *Kulthangar* told me that the research process prompted him to think, clarify and talk about Aboriginal Law, his culture and the past. Second, he said he saw participation in the research as part of a process of “pulling themselves [the Elders] together”, individually and collectively, to recover their roles at the school and in the community, as teachers and leaders (*Personal Communication*, 17 May, 2002). Third, his role in the research process inspired *Kulthangar* to write a book about Aboriginal leadership, the Law and his land. He insisted that I act as his scribe and editor for his book and to eventually have it published (*Personal Communication*, 15 January, 2001). In return, he told me I could use the information he gave me, for the thesis. Indeed, at times, I felt as though my thesis was a secondary outcome for *Kulthangar*. This shifted the balance of power to him as primary researcher and author and positioned me as humble scribe, but, as he saw it, these roles were normal. Fourth, at significant moments in the process, the Elders demonstrated that their active support for the thesis by taking initiative to ensure that it took the form they wanted. Crucially, they sent a letter to the university ethics committee to assert their position in relation to the research project. *Kulthangar*, *Kurnungkur* and *Milmajah* all telephoned me separately to tell me what the letter contained and to discuss their decision to take the project over. *Kulthangar* sent me a copy of the letter. On 17 May, 2002, when the Elders, as a ‘united body’, made the decision to take over the research project, they had quite a number of photographs of themselves and me taken at their [sacred] ceremony grounds, to frame and send to the head of my department. The letter they wrote said:

We really feel that we have been left out of a lot of things and we come in now and have our say. We respect the Law and our people and as Elders we are one tribal voice for Mornington Island. If something serious happens we are the ones responsible for our people and we will fight for our rights. We want the name of the Elders to be printed in Hilary’s university work and be heard. We want people to know who we are and where we are from. We do not want to be forgotten. We Elders are proud of

who we are and what we are trying to get together from the past to make the future better for younger ones. (*Personal Communication*, 24 June, 2002).

Their role in the project is also indicated in the way they shaped its content. Prior to and outside the context of the research, I had been, and continued to be involved with them in various attempts to enlarge their input into the school. They also assumed I knew the finer details of what they wanted in the area of pedagogy and curriculum, because I had previously taught at two Aboriginal community schools and because they also had approved, had contributed to, and were familiar with the project that I completed for my Master's degree in education, about bush foods and *Murrandoo* Yanner. Consequently, except for a few comments by *Kurnungkur* and a younger anonymous Lawman, the Elders made broad general statements in reply to my 'research' questions about what they wanted in the area of pedagogy and curriculum at the school and their role at the school. Rather than fill in the finer details on these matters, their frequent comment was, "You know!" They could do this not only because we had worked together on school matters, but because they had spent years training me about Aboriginal history in the Gulf regions, *Lardil* language, *Kunhunaamendaa*, *Waanyi*, *Gangalida*, Bentinck Island and *Garawa* genealogy, tribal kinship rules, boundaries of countries, sacred stories, bush foods, cooking, the seasons and cultural beliefs.

Rather than being interviewed they regarded themselves as teaching me. *Kulthangar* told me, "Wefella go slowly. We learn l'il bit by l'il bit. We tell you a bit. You go way think a bit, dream a bit, learn a bit; come back, learn li'l bit more. We teach you this way" (*Personal Communication*, 17 April, 2003). The Elders have regarded the research as being for them, for books they wanted to have published about their ideas, rather than the "whiteman's university" (*Personal Communication*, *Kulthangar*, 16 May, 2002). *Birdibir*, *Kulthangar* and *Milmajah* all told me, "These stories [are] part of your education in Aboriginal Law" (*Personal Communications*, 15 May, 2002).

Throughout their conversations their most frequent statements were "Listen now!" or "Are you listening?" followed by "Write this down!" *Kulthangar*, *Birdibir* and *Milmajah* said at the time, without fail, "Repeat back what I've said"

or “Read it back when you’ve finished a page.” They insisted I wrote down word for word what they had said. I had a night to type it up on my computer. The next day I would distribute what the Elders had said back to them in size twenty-font type.

I had typed the transcripts of the conversations out for each participant and posted them to the participants in January, 2001. In April, 2001 I started weaving the conversations into the chapters of the thesis. I returned in September and October, 2001 to check the contents of these chapters and extend them.

In July 2001 *Bulthuku*, Ursula and I spent a week in Mt Isa carefully checking the chapters and they made comments, which I wrote in the margins. In August, 2001 *Kulthangar* came to Townsville for a week and we checked my research. As *Bulthuku* was not in Townsville it was my duty as his *yugurr* or sister-in-law to look after him. *Bulthuku* was still in Mt Isa when I returned to Mornington Island, so it was again my duty care for *Kulthangar*, which entailed cooking for him, and going out fencing with him and his men.

I took my laptop computer out with me every day and at lunch I read out the chapters and the Lawmen stood around listening as *Kulthangar* made comments on the chapters. It was a good public relations exercise and enhanced *Kulthangar’s* local reputation as a researcher and writer and it enriched and confirmed the data. Each afternoon *Kulthangar* allowed me a little spare time to check the chapters with other participants. In this time *Kulthangar* and I constructed the context chapters. I rang *Kulthangar* frequently on the telephone, to check through information, but he always asked me “When are you coming up again.” He preferred face-to-face interaction.

In my conduct and communication style I imitated local protocol as much as possible. Although listening is a traditional method in academic qualitative research the scope of listening on this particular Aboriginal community went far and beyond unstructured interviewing because of complex historical and cultural reasons.

### **Acting with deference, humility and respect: Being positioned as researcher**

Respect in conducting interviews is not only ethical protocol for Aboriginal people but Kale (1995) and Bogdan and Biklen (1982) discuss respect and

reciprocity as a mainstream method in conducting interviews. Not only did reciprocity extend to using ‘Small English’ but also it meant being a good friend and caring relative. Bringing gifts, cooking for Margaret Hills and making special treats for *Kulthangar*, going to church with *Kulthangar*, *Bulthuku*, Johnny, *Wunhun*, and the Grannies, cooking for *Kulthangar* for weeks while *Bulthuku* was away, spending time with my adopted family, going camping; sitting for long hours at the canteen, painting with *Milmajah* and going out fencing with *Kulthangar* and ‘his men’ was part of this process.

When interacting with the Elders I assumed a humble and deferential posture. For example, if they sat on the concrete veranda I sat in the dirt to be physically lower than them or, when I sat with *Kulthangar* I took my folding canvas chair, which I knew was lower than his chair. I always bought a thermos of tea, milk, sugar, a large metal mug and a quart pot, pikelets, oranges and meat, as he liked to have his favourite food when he talked.

I was also expected to act with deference to the Elders because of my youth and status as a woman. As *Kulthangar*’s *yugurr* or sister-in-law I was expected to be passive and obedient. He talked and I listened and took notes. If there were people around when he was talking they listened too and if they talked he told them to, “Go away because I am talking about a very big thing” (*Personal Communication*, May 18, 2002). As I am still only in my forties the Elders considered me to be still a “baby” (*Personal Communication*, *Birdibir*, 19 May, 2002) compared to the men in terms of age and experience, and senior people in an Aboriginal community expect to be listened to and their ideas respected (Smith, 1996; Buckley, 1996). There were striking parallels in my experience to Bell’s (1998) when talking with *Ngarrindgerri* people. Bell states that the respect system is:

not some set of vague rules that one learns through observation. There are clear instructions given to those who are learning. We weren’t allowed to answer back. If they said don’t go somewhere you didn’t question it and they weren’t always specific. It meant to have patience and wait for the answers to come. (p. 62).

*Kulthangar, Birdibir, and Milmajah* all told me, “We respect you because you never talk crooked and are learning about the family tree, language and our culture” (*Personal Communications*, 15 November, 2002). Johnny told me, “You never talk down to people, Hilary. Everyone feels comfortable with you” (*Personal Communication*, 1 May, 2002). *Kulthangar* and *Milmajah* have told me, “You are respected and trusted you come from the bush” (*Personal Communications*, 16 January, 2001)). *Wuhnun* and Johnny have told me they trust me because “You have taught on other Aboriginal communities” (*Personal Communications*, 20 September, 2000). Margaret, Cecily, *Bulthuku, Jekarija* and Clara have all told me, “We love you because you always come back, write to us and visit us” (*Personal Communications*, 14 May, 2002).

I modified my speech and writing because the Elders told me that they found ‘Big English’ insulting and distressing. *Kulthangar* argued, “Only mongrel fellas use Big English to make us tired, angry and confused. Why can’t they use Small English?” (*Personal Communication*, 9 September, 2001). Excessive academic jargon and vocabulary that is difficult to understand confused and insulted these people, so that they were no longer are interested in what is being said. The Lawmen constantly wished to hear the progressing chapters so I had to convert each chapter into ‘Small English’. One of the greatest ethical challenges for this thesis concerned the use of formal academic language. My attempt to speak and write in ways that are more, rather than less, accessible to the Elders not only reflects their expressed concerns, but the position taken by Indigenous academics such as Huggins (1998), who states that “formalised academic language is most often dispassionate, highly coded insider language, indecipherable to many of the Indigenous people whose daily lives are greatly affected by formal research” (pp. 71-77).

### **Data gathering techniques**

Most of the Elders were suspicious of a tape recorder because they thought it was a camera but generally they told me that they felt comfortable seeing me write and then being able to hear me read their words back. They perceived themselves as having more agency in the research process as a result. That way they could think of other information and add it to the original text or have a good laugh.

Humour was a large part of this data gathering process. Although I have not included any of the jokes, humorous stories and situations that the senior women, Lawmen and Elders turned into a joke, many of the situations were humorous. And many of our encounters were turned into a humorous story and recounted many times to many people.

Many of the Elders disliked being taped. Likewise, writing on her work with *Ngarrindjeri* Bell (1998) states “Although everyone loves to hear the ‘old people’ on tape, most resist being recorded” (p. 61). There was also little use using a tape recorder because the background noise was too great, whether it was talking, loud country and western music and videos, heavy rain, the sound of cars and the water truck, planes flying past, people shouting, dogs barking or babies crying. Further, sand could damage the tape recorder and recordings, indeed, I lost an interview with Cecil because sand had blown into the tape recorder and I had not taken any notes. He never repeated that conversation. After that, I wrote what the Elders said down onto notepads that I took in my bag everywhere. I transcribed these notes into my laptop computer and kept the notes locked away. My ethics approval included safe storage in locked filing cabinets in my office at James Cook University and after that period all data is in the possession of the author in a safe at my home.

### **Contexts and occasions for data gathering**

There were many occasions for listening to the Elders’ stories and, except for a few formal meetings at the Festival Grounds with all the Elders, these were casual meetings. Wherever I went I took my bag with my text, extra pages and pens. Places such as the canteen, the Elders’ homes, my home at Mornington Island, camping at the beach, parties, hotels where the Elders were staying in Townsville, the Pamela Street Hostel in Mt Isa, the Townsville and Mt Isa airports and hospitals and out fencing with *Kulthangar* and his men were all contexts to hear new stories, check and re-check work.

Often the Lawmen ‘dropped in’ at my home for a cup of tea, dinner, lunch, breakfast at all hours of the day and night and we checked the chapters as I had my research notes and typed chapters on the dining table. Most conversations

were conducted while they drank mugs of tea and ate. *Birdibir* preferred me to go out to his 'country' to sit, watch the sunset and record what he said.

As *Kurnungkur* said, "It is absolutely useless to see people on drunken days when people are playing cards or socialising at the canteen" (*Personal Communication*, 21 May, 2002) so Wednesday afternoon; Thursday, Friday and Saturday were days where I could not conduct research. If I did visit a house where a big card game was being played in a front yard or veranda I had to sit away from the game and conduct a conversation with someone who was not involved in the game or who was not drinking alcohol. If my participants had been drinking, they usually told me, "Come back tomorrow, when I'm not drunk" (*Personal Communications*, Reid, C., 20 November, 2000; Watt, J., 20 September, 2001). Because *Kulthangar*, *Kurnungkur* and *Milmajah* did not drink or play cards they were available on "drunken days." At night *Kulthangar*, *Milmajah* and I often went to a party and here the Lawmen told me titbits of information that they wanted to be recorded. I sat at *Kulthangar's* feet. These were obligatory social occasions. Hence I had to be patient and put aside long periods of time to conduct my research.

The participants preferred to converse with me as a visiting relation rather than a researcher. Each time I visited *Kunhanhaa* I sent letters, telling all the participants that I would be coming. *Kulthangar* had been dictating his book to me for two years and many of the participants were interested in his book rather than talking about relationships with the school, as the book was about family history and historical events and the Elders continually told me stories to construct an historical context chapter for the thesis (*Personal Communications*, *Milmajah* 16 May, 2002; 8 June, 2002; 9 June 2002; *Kulthangar*, 20 September, 2001; 21 September, 2001; 22 September, 2001; 25 September, 2001; 27 September, 2001; 1 October, 2001). Some of them were more interested in my connections with Aboriginal people who had lived and worked near my grandfather's pastoral property when I was a child (*Personal Communications*, Anon. B and Anon. C, 28 April, 2002). So in this regard, as researchers and social workers Lynn, Thorpe, Miles, Cutts, Butcher and Ford (1998) suggest, "the participants ensured the content, direction, pace of the interaction, while I went with the flow" (p. 27). Nothing was rushed; it was a totally informal process.

### **Being positioned: the researcher and social relationships**

In its particularity, this thesis arose from my life and work at Mornington Island and my awareness of the problems there. My close personal ‘skin’ relationships with many families on Mornington Island provided me with a vivid awareness of the reality rather than the rhetoric of a neo-colonial education system.

In 2000, when I initially posed the question “What are the relationships that senior *Kunhanhaamendaa* want with the teachers and school and what are the crucial conditions that they believe would fulfil these relationships” Joseph began talking about the rules of skin relationships “as one of the bases of *Mirndiyan Law*” (*Personal Communication*, 12 September, 2000). This was and is a discourse that demands total respect for Elders and familiarity and reciprocity with the people one is related to. In the Aboriginal ‘skin’ system one is related to everyone. The ‘skin’ system in the North-Western Gulf of Carpentaria and Northern Territory areas is the basis of all relationships. I explain the skin system in depth in Chapter Three.

When I asked *Kulthangar* how should I introduce myself on Mornington Island and other Aboriginal communities he said?

When you’re here on Mornington you should come up with connections so quick. Say hello and when people say, ‘Who you?’ you say I call *Kulthangar* ‘yugud’,” my brother-in-law and *Bulthuku* my sister. Then straight away they know you. If it was me and I went over to Robinson River [in the Northern Territory] people know me there through my grandmother. I would say my skin real quick. So you would say ‘I *nimarama* skin’ and they would say, ‘Oh, you call me auntie.’ (*Personal Communication*, 1 October, 2001).

*Ngina* or skin relationships is another way in which the *Kunhanhaamendaa* categorised themselves. According to Memmott and Horsman (1991), “In this system, each individual from birth belonged to one and only one of the classes”

(p. 83). In reference to the 'skin' system *Yanyula* writer and artist, John Moriarty (2000) states:

In the skin system your parent's group automatically determines what your skin is. It is a very structured classificatory system that determines your relationships with others and traditionally signifies who you should and should not marry... Through the skin group I am automatically related to others within the traditional Aboriginal system... [This] creates certain obligations [which] can involve providing particular people with things and sharing with them [and] having responsibilities to certain land. (pp. 3-4).

In this respect, Moreton-Robinson (2000) suggests that, the protocol for introducing oneself to "Indigenous people is to provide information about one's cultural location, so that connections can be made on political, cultural and social grounds and relations established (p. xv). Thus Moriarty (2000) states that when meeting people, "I start with my skin name, which governs my whole relationship within the tribe... and gives me a great deal of strength in relating to different people through the tribal system" (pp. 3-4). Martin (2002), Smith (1998) and Moreton-Robinson (2000) also state that when meeting new people it is wise to claim and declare one's genealogy and ancestry.

### **Critical Social Theory**

Because of the accent on relationships my theoretical and analytical stance has been derived largely from sociological theory. I adopted a generally critical orientation that concerns itself with the oppressive character of practices and relations, seeing these in terms of the intricacies of daily practice. I used social critical theory as a tool to analyse and explore perspectives on the character of relations between the Elders and school and teachers and understand the social context. Critical social theory, informed by the founders of the Frankfurt School situated the way I framed the topic of the thesis and the way I framed my approach to the interactions and conversations which form the basis of the

information cited throughout the thesis as '*Personal Communications*'. It illuminated and explained the approach I took and framed my analysis and synthesis of data. I saw critical theory, particularly the work of Habermas, as a school of thought and a process of critique, which continually evolved as a process of transformation and emancipation. In this regard, and in its educational application, it shaped my work.

Habermas (1973) argued that the term 'critical' is used to refer to the potential people have for self-reflection and self-determination in a social structure. My theoretical position was critical theory partly because it accorded with the understandings of the literature to reflect and address the inequalities in Aboriginal education and partly because it accorded with the Elders' own sense of inequalities.

While I attempted to follow rather than disturb the data or use the Elders' information in ways that were contrary to their own views, as a technique of analysis, I critiqued the data that the Elders have given me about social situation between the school and community and that became the foundation of my critical perspective. Social acts can have multiple meanings, which are not immediately apparent, and analysis was required to clarify them. As 'Black Feminist' Patricia Hill Collins (1990) argues, "offering subordinate groups new knowledge about their own experiences can be empowering, but revealing new ways of knowing that allow them to define their own reality has far greater implications" (p. 221). The many discussions I had with the Elders over the last five years discussing race relations and ways of looking at oppression, domination and resistance was agentic for the Elders (*Personal Communications, Milmajah, Robinson, R. and Kulthangar, 17 May, 2002*).

Giroux (1983) maintains critiquing the social world is an ongoing process of analysing the veneer of the objectified world which research examines and portrays. He also suggests that social critical research exposes the underlying social relationships that those objectified, so called rational, appearances often conceal. Horkheimer and Adorno (1972) maintain that domination and oppression does not just take on a form of physical force, such as the police, but that domination expresses itself through the ideological hegemony of the ruling classes in the forms of church, schools, mass media and the family. Hegemony refers to

the ways which the *status quo* of relationships of subordination and domination is ensured through the control, manipulation and shaping of beliefs of subordinate groups. This statement could also be a statement about the historical process of oppression and domination that the Elders have endured from the government and church.

Critical social theory has three requirements: first, that it locate the sources of domination in actual practices, second, that it present an alternative vision and, third, that it translate these into a form that is understandable and is intelligible to the oppressed in society (Leonard, 1990). The Elders are presenting an alternate vision, which I articulate and analyse.

Adorno's (1967) ideas are vital to my theoretical stance because he analysed the cultural superstructure of *bourgeois* society and viewed culture as a political phenomenon. Likewise my work is shaped by Horkheimer's views. Horkheimer (1983) was critical of the utilitarianism and rationalism that unquestioningly dehumanised society and stripped individuals of willpower and a need to question any form of oppression.

Habermas (1980) suggests that thought and action should be grounded in compassion and in our sense of the sufferings of others. Critical social theorists, therefore, investigate those who would subjugate, dominate and marginalise 'others'. In this regard, Smith (2001) considers that oppression [to indigenous peoples] still exists in post-colonial practices. She states that imperialism was an integral part of Europe's economic expansion, but colonialism also facilitated this expansion by ensuring that Europeans controlled, secured, exploited and subjugated the indigenous populations. She states, "It is surely difficult to discuss research methodology and indigenous peoples together without understanding the complex ways the pursuit of knowledge is deeply embedded in the multiple layers of imperial and colonial practices" (p. 2).

Critical theory can also be applied to education systemically, institutionally, within the classroom setting and within the power relationships, which occur between non-Indigenous teachers in an isolated community and the indigenous community members. Authors such as Giroux (1985, 1993) and Cocklin (1992) utilise this approach to reinterpret what is happening in schools. Cocklin (1992) argues that critical theory, as an educational theory, is a way of thinking which

incorporates an explicit, analytic approach to the study of education and its practices. He also maintains that critical theory reveals how ideology is evident in the realities of curriculum, pedagogy, evaluation and language and, further, gives an understanding that the taken for granted beliefs or common sense beliefs are not as natural as they first appear. This, Cocklin (1992) suggests, is a first step to emancipation. Cocklin's (1992) perspective gives me the ability to analyse the Elders' data regarding pedagogy and curriculum, and relationships between community and the school.

Critical theorists maintain that there is a need to look outside schools to the context in which schools reside. The context in which action occurs must be taken into account because the situation in which events take place influences the events. In this instance, Chapters Three and Four explore the history of race relations and the history of Mornington Island to illustrate this context. My approach reflects Smythe's (2000) view that contemporary society is increasingly experiencing a dramatic loss of social connectedness or 'social capital'. He maintains that "the way of turning this wider loss of social capital around is to regard teaching as a social practice in which there is greater emphasis on teaching for social responsibility, democracy, social justice, and civility" (p. 491). He further makes a case that:

Teachers' work has always been an avowedly political process, long characterized by decisions about what knowledge is taught and what is omitted; whose view of the world is privileged and whose is denied; what forms of pedagogy are inclusive and which are exclusive; and whose interests are served and whose are marginalized and excluded. It is clear that if teachers are not political about their work (in the sense of being critically reflective about it, and the implications teaching has for the life chances of students), then they are the only group affiliated with teaching that operate in such allegedly detached ways. (Smythe, 2000, pp. 509-510).

In light of the previous argument, knowledge can be seen as fluid, and the authority of particular knowledges depends upon the power of the group supporting them. Further, the capacity of disenfranchised or disempowered groups to understand, and hence act on and in, their world in terms that reflect their own histories and experiences can be disrupted by the different knowledges disseminated by those with greater power. Thus, for example, the way the media reports situations on Mornington Island may be very different from the way the Elders see their society, and have a capacity to shape the ways Kunhanamenda interpret their community. With this in mind, I sought to maintain a non-judgemental distance from the views of the Elders, but to faithfully report their words regarding domination, oppression, disempowerment, racist issues, injustice and alienation within and without the school system.

Partington and McCudden (1992) argue that schools are one of the principal agents of socialisation in society and as such “they have a tendency to transmit [and reproduce] the dominant culture” (p. 16). My thesis reflects Giroux (1998) when he suggests that critical education should be vigilant about the elimination of those “ideological and material conditions that promote various forms of subjugation, segregation, marginalisation, often expressed through social forms embodying racial and class interest” (p. 6). Social critical educator Jude (1998) argues that Western educational theory sees schools as central to learning and “as institutions with the express purpose of socialising the young” (p. 14) and yet she wonders why if *gatha* (or community and teacher negotiating perspectives) is a fundamental Aboriginal concept, teachers cannot show respect for it. Cocklin (1992) maintains that the state dominates marginalised groups through hegemony, that is, controls beliefs and encourages views, which support its own beliefs, through schooling.

I have used critical theory as a tool of analysis and a theoretical framework because the Elders have said that, because of their race and geographical location, their people are being exploited and oppressed by a more powerful group than themselves: ‘educated’ outsiders in the form of state-government employed non-Aboriginal teachers. Social critical theory afforded me an understanding that the Elders’s view – that schooling as it currently exists, without the educational advice of the Elders, is confusing the students – is shaped by the unequal power

relations between white society and government on the one hand, and Aboriginal people on the other. It also points to an understanding of how and why this confusion leads to further oppression, alienation and domination in the form of unemployment, substance abuse, imprisonment and a general state of welfare dependency. Just as researchers Partington and McCudden (1992) argue about other Aboriginal people in regard to non-Aboriginal-oriented schooling, the Elders have gained an understanding that the local “school and the media as principal agents of non-Aboriginal socialisation have a tendency to transmit the dominant culture” (p. 16).

In an attempt to reverse the power imbalances that critical theory criticises, I gave central place to the voices of my participants. While clearly and inevitably any researcher selects, organises, juxtaposes and separates and in that sense takes over the voices of his or her participants, I sought, in the methods of collecting data, of referring drafts back to the participants, and in the writing up of the finished thesis, to allow their expressed concerns to shape, as far as possible, my own understandings, and to make extensive use of their own words, not only in brief snippets, but in more extended passages in which the flavour of their voices can be heard.

Critical theory is implicit in my own stance, in my exploration and articulation, in Chapters Four and Five, of the Elders’ understandings of the history of race relations and present race relations between the teachers and community, on Mornington Island. The Elders express a view that their history and the present strained relations between government representatives are about one of oppression by a panoptic system: first by missionaries, then by the government. I am writing because of my prior sense that the present circumstances are only a continuation of that history of oppression; this happens to coincide with the Elders’ views. Just as Aboriginal educator and researcher Martin (2002) emphasises that “social, historical and political contexts shape our experiences, lives and futures... so research must be responsive to” (p. 2) these concerns, my research responded to this “Aboriginal worldview” (Martin, 2002, p. 2). This is why I can say that when I adopted a critical theory approach to understanding race relations, this happened to coincide with the Elders views. Martin’s above view supports the Elders’ sense of ongoing oppression, by

outsiders. So I read the Elders' views as an articulation of an unequal social relationship, notwithstanding the complexities in the relationship between the Elders and me and my ontological background.

### **The conduct of research: an ethical stance**

So far I have discussed how I generated the data with a careful eye to proper protocols. I also sought to interpret, analyse and synthesise the data by attempting to follow rather than disturb the data or to use the data in ways that are contrary to the Elders' views. The methodology outlined for dealing with the data also was framed to adopt protocol in ways which enacted respect, not only with a view to attaining quality data but also with a view to following what I have outlined as ethically appropriate procedures.

A vital aspect of my research was my practical concerns or concerns in practice for the well being of the participants because they were generous enough to give their time and their experience to the research project. According to Martin (2000, 2002) and Huggins (1998) this is particularly important in this sort of context where there is a history of Aboriginal people being exploited by researchers.

To justify my research I gained confirmation from a number of notable Mornington Island public figures for my research. These included the mayor, *Kulthangar* and his brother-in-law, Pastor Richard Roughsey.

Free and informed consent was outlined in my consent forms, which were in written form, but because many Lawmen do not like reading I read this material to them verbally. The consent forms were worded so they would be understood easily. This procedure emphasised a social rather than technical approach. This is what I read to each participant:

*Kulthangar* says that he would like me to write down your ideas on kinship, ties or friendships between the community and the teachers and use your ideas to let university people and other teachers know how you think. Is that okay with you? I only want you to talk to me about these teacher-community friendships if you really want to and you

can pull out at any time if you are not comfortable. After I write down everyone's ideas about teachers and locals getting along I'll come back for a yarn to check that everything I've written down is okay with you.

Honesty, in my research proceedings, includes such practices as the process of informed consent, permission to repeat the dialogues, respect for those who did not want to be part of the research and not conducting covert research. I followed research principles and procedures for doing field research such as Bell's. Bell (1998) argues that, "People have known when I am making tapes or writing notes and they have had the opportunity to comment, correct and engage me reading my analysis" (p. 366).

After the end of 2001 the Elders preferred that I take notes of their conversations, and then return these transcripts to them. They asked that they have copies of ongoing chapters in 'Small English.'

### **Sensitivities, harms and problems**

The Australian Association Research in Education (1997) code of ethics suggests a number of principles that should be adhered to regarding effects on participants. Those are "harm, consent, deception and secrecy, confidentiality and general sensitivity" (pp. 116-119). The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) guidelines state, "The aim of the negotiation process is to come to a clear understanding, which results in a formal written agreement about research intentions, methods and potential results" (2000, p. 17).

Since I began the study three years ago six participants have died. The *Kunhanamendaa* prefer for a number of years after not to use the name of a person who has died. In respect for this protocol I asked their relatives if I could include their conversations and they agreed as long as I use another name.

Following the AIATSIS (2000) principles I reached an agreement with the participants that they could choose to be, or not to be, anonymous and that if they opted for anonymity anything that anything that they said would remain confidential. Only a few of the participants preferred to remain anonymous. Anonymity is at complete odds with the Elders' political ends. Historically they

had been silenced so it was important to them that I published their perspectives. *Kulthangar* told me emphatically, “Usfella [the Elders] don’t want to just be listened to. We need to be heard really loud!” (*Personal Communication*, 17 April, 2002). The Elders are proud of their contribution and saw its value as inseparable from who they are in the community. These insistences that the Lawmen’s voices be heard, recognised and respected, for the most part, must be understood in the context of a society in which authority, including the right to speak, and the value of a speaker’s knowledge is dependent on and guaranteed by the position the speaker occupies in a complex network of social relations, rather than any abstract certification of their knowledge, apart from the social investment of authority in their persons.

I made a decision to privilege the Elders and to represent their understandings, which accords with their decision to ask me to represent them. This decision reflected the views argued by recent reports and other critical writing such as Pearson (2001), Blitner (2000), Fitzgerald (2001), Collins (1999), and Clarke (2000). Not only are my co-researchers the major Elders or *Muyinda* and *kinenda* but some are also the democratically elected representatives of the community. *Kulthangar*, *Wuhnun*, Cecil, Gordon and *Dilmurrur* have all represented the community, touring with *Woomera* Dance Troupe. In fact most of the participants are highly respectable and respected members of the community. Nevertheless, I am still giving voice to one group in the community; consequently, my actions may aggrieve other groups. I cannot represent all the community and there are some quite hostile factions within communities (Fitzgerald, 2001). Even *Kulthangar’s* statement that the Elders are “one united Voice” for the community of Mornington Island could be – and has been – contested by a small number of people in the community.

An area of concern was “role breakdown” (Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy [DATSIP], 1999, p. 46) in the community. Not everyone in the community holds the same beliefs about traditional gerontocratic roles. *Kulthangar* told me after one of the senior women died on 27 September, 2002, “That old lady [was the] last of the Lawwomen here. *Bulthuku* and Clara, they the women who know their culture. Here the old dormitory women been turned away from their own culture by those missionary.” He continued, “In this

community, in Queensland they don't even know who we [Elders] are or what we do" (*Personal Communication*, 8 August, 2002) and another time he told me that someone in the community had said to him, "The Elders are just a group of fragile old men" (*Personal Communication*, 20 May, 2002). He also told me, "They forgot we Elders got wisdom and knowledge from the Law, from the ancestors, they only got white man knowledge" (*Personal Communication, Kulthangar* 17 April, 2003). However, I chose to listen to and I am still guided by the Elders, who:

before colonisation maintained social cohesiveness and good order. They were [as] Elders and traditional healers [the] holders of positions of authority in the kin-and land-based groups, and [they] fulfilled the functions of teachers, judges and spiritual leaders. The traditional healer played a major role in determining the type of behaviour that was correct and permissible. (DATSIP, 1999, p. 47).

The Elders are those healers. As *Kulthangar* told me, "I am number one doctor here" (*Personal Communication*, 17 May, 2002). The Elders still hold these traditional roles. There is a small faction of people in the community who oppose this. They are not alone. In fact, The DATSIP (1999) Task Force on Violence argues:

To survive [the] conflict [of cultures many] Indigenous people have gone through a process of acculturation whereby they have had to adapt to survive, with many trying to live between two worlds. Acculturation can produce a sense of low self-esteem, powerlessness, confusion, cultural disorientation, and alienation from the strength of [Indigenous] cultural values. Many Aboriginal people feel lost, unable to live in the Western world but unable to go back to the old culture either. (pp. 80-81).

In my research protocol and procedures I followed AIATSIS guidelines' view that "Consultation and negotiation is a continuous two-way process. Ongoing consultation is necessary to ensure free and informed consent for the research" (2000, p. 6). This negotiation was part of free and informed consent, but it was the length of the research process, which also made this constant consultation and negotiation problematic.

Another problem was distance. Geographically the Elders and I lived hundreds of miles away from each other. The financial expense of travelling from my home to theirs was exorbitant and yet regular face-to-face communication is their ideal means of interaction and it is the relationship that they would prefer to have with the non-Indigenous teachers. It is the norm to see one's relatives every day, and the Elders are my adopted relatives. Relatives are interconnected, interdependent and depend on one another financially, physically, emotionally and spiritually. Historically, it has been the case that relatives can pine away and die when they are separated (*Personal Communication*, Anon. A, 2 November, 2000) and *Kulthangar's* most frequent comment when I spoke to him on the telephone was "when are you coming up next" (*Personal Communication*, 17 April, 2003) which indicates that he finds it is too difficult to communicate about specific nuances on the telephone. Nor was there enough time on the telephone to talk about the research. I often walked to *Kulthangar's* house to begin listening to his stories and he would end the day at 12 pm that night. Weeks were needed to check the work (*Personal Communication*, *Kulthangar*, 17 April, 2003). *Milmajah's* normal comment when I left Mornington Island was, "Are you coming back next week?" These men were genuinely bewildered when I answered that I could not come up for a number of months.

Just as distance was a problem, so was time. The AIATSIS Guidelines state research must be planned according to the community and needs (2000). I found this necessity to balance my needs and participants' requirements was a delicate process. Even if I allowed two months for my visit each time I returned for ongoing consultation, many events interfered with planned research. Events such as funerals, ceremonies, and festivals are important community events, which affected research for considerable periods. Influenza and other illness could affect people for weeks so they did not feel like speaking about research. Seasons also

affected the research. When dugong and turtle were swimming close to the coast in autumn and winter many of the Elders were out hunting.

The potential benefits of the research were not as clear to me at the beginning of the research as they subsequently became. One participant asked, “Will this book go to parliament?” (*Personal Communication*, Anon. D, 7 September, 2000). In view of the fact that there had been two Human Rights Commissions investigating the behaviour of visiting European Australian service workers on Mornington Island and the Black Deaths in Custody Reports in the 1990s this was not an unrealistic expectation.

### **Constructivist and interpretive data analysis**

Although I have been formally adopted by the Jacob, Roughsey, Ben, Lanley, Moon, Hills and Williams families and come from ‘the bush’, I am a non-Aboriginal, female, academic researcher. The academic culture and the ‘white’ culture of North-West Queensland have particular epistemological orientations, characteristics and assumptions, while the culture from which the Elders come from has, by and large, a different set of epistemological assumptions. More specifically in their culture the spirit world is a tangible, ever present reality. In Western culture it is generally considered that however real the spirit world may appear to individuals it is in fact nothing like as tangible as in the Elders’ world. In respect for the Elders’ views I have elected to recognise their epistemological assumptions and present their information in its own terms without making any academic judgement about its claims to capture unproblematically the material of practical reality and spiritual reality.

I have not made a judgement about the reality that it claims to grasp or about its grasp of that reality. This is how the Elders experience and understand and represent the world, so this is what I write about. The Elders tell their truth, their reality, or their construction of the world, and I strive to report their truth as closely as possible to achieve veracity. Many of the Elders’ secular stories were realistic accounts at that time, but the context and the time they revealed those stories also situated them. I can never accurately, precisely capture the studied world; yet I persist in trying to give a sense of meaning to the Elders’ stories.

I have tried to capture the world of the community of the Elders in my writing, but because I am not a male, not Indigenous, did not live my whole life with them, and am not initiated into *Kunhanhaa* Law I can only approximate their perspectives and attempt to be as valid as possible by supporting each of their assertions by statements of other Lawmen and literature. The information that the Elders gave me is their interpretation or representation of the world; constituted in and from available ways of understanding the world, so that however the participants understand the epistemological status of their knowledge I must understand it as their construction.

The recursive interviews with the participants did not always reveal the same understandings, nor were they consistently clear. The world of Mornington Island community was not always predictable. In fact, in the last five years a number of Elders have died, a number of Chief Executive Officers have come and gone, new teachers arrived and went; new principals came and went. Although the Elders presented their truth and what they said was their reality, there were also silences. Another complexity in the analysis is that while the Lawmen consistently and repeatedly claim to speak with one voice, there are differences and ambiguities among them, and their views have changed, in some respects, and on some matters during the time over which I have conducted my research.

Like the researchers, Bullock and Tromley (2002), I used constructionism to summarise and thematicise the masses of detailed data. Bogdan and Taylor (1975) suggest an interviewer can code data in terms of themes. I have used thematic analysis to analyse the data or the conversations of the Elders. Burns (2000) argues that content analysis is used to identify, and classify themes, concepts and meaning. Burns (2000) maintains that as researchers we will never know whether our reading between the lines is what the informant was meaning. However, because I have met with most of the participants at least eight times in the last four years, for extended periods of time, and with some of the Elders such as *Jekarija*, *Kulthangar* and *Milmajah* many more times on the telephone, in hospital or in Townsville or Mt Isa, and because I have provided repeated the opportunities for them to confirm and correct my interpretations, I can say with reasonable confidence that the meanings I ascribe to their conversations in my analysis match their own intentions.

More specifically in analysing the Elders' conversations I searched for emergent themes. As with their comments on such as culture, language, history and Aboriginal Law, their views emerged in the context of more general discussion, intertwined with their comments on a range of other matters. It seemed possible, however, to tease out a number of dimensions to what they had to say, which, while inevitably closely interrelated, could be discussed separately. My theory emerged from the data that was built up over time. Burns (2000) and Neuman (2000) argue that research develops and reveals emergent ideas, which are strengthened and weakened by successive interviews. The structure of the chapters is part of precisely such an emergent thematic analysis. To be specific, the themes in Chapter Three reflect the worldview and position of the Elders and the nature of their authority, their beliefs and experiences of the tangible spirit world. Other themes within the overarching theme of the Law are the skin or subsection system, kin relationships, mutual obligations and the importance of being able to position someone within society as a way of regulating appropriate behaviour. Much of the methodology chapter is devoted to the theme of listening and deferential respect because there is such an emphasis on being heard in the Elders' talk. Chapter Four examines broad, abstract social critical theory themes of dehumanisation, injustice, oppression, disempowerment and racist issues, issues of past and present; time and timelessness, holistic spirituality, emotions and feelings, and less abstract issues of violent clashes, government and missions, good people and bad people and good relationships.

The conversations within each theme were further interpreted using the themes of social critical theory: power, oppression, and resistance. The relationships chapter took up the themes of inequality, paternalism, power and agency.

### **Summary**

I have discussed how I have gathered data while attempting to comply with correct protocol. I have sought to approximate the Elders' understandings faithfully and to re-present and reflect their beliefs. I have selected, edited and decided questions of significance, and I have included, focused and excluded certain material, and yet in all of this I constantly and recursively checked the

Lawmen's opinions on my work. I constantly sought their validation. In my discussion on social critical theory I have shown how I attempted to understand and analyse the data I gathered. I have used social critical theory to reflect what the Elders have said, and I followed rather than manipulated the Elders' language. My analysis was at the level of thematicising and my theoretical position was that of critical theory, in part because it seemed to accord with the understandings of the literature to reflect and to address the inequalities and in part because it accorded with the Elders' own sense of inequalities.

I also dealt with how I generated the data with a careful eye to protocols, which were in accordance with the Elders' worldviews. I have also discussed how I sought to interpret the data with an approach to attempting to follow rather than disturb the data or to use the data in ways that were contrary to the Elders' views. This research process assumed an ethical approach to the Elders as research participants. The methodology outlined for dealing with the data has sought to adopt protocols, which enact respect, not only with a view to attaining quality data, but also with a view to following what I have outlined in the literature as ethically appropriate procedures. Specifically, the research question, research design, my conduct, data analysis and interpretation, ethical procedures and writing recognise the Elders both as major participants, co-researchers and as the "mob everyone should be listening to!"

## Chapter 3

### The Cultural-Social-Political Milieu

In this chapter I establish whom the Elders say they are, the position that they see themselves as occupying in *Kunhanhaa* Aboriginal society and the nature of their authority. I systematically document, from the Elders' words, the character of the community and its relationships, outlining the nature and importance of kin and family relationships and mutual obligations, hierarchy, the position of the Elders, and the importance of being able to position someone within society as a way of regulating appropriate behaviour. The position of the Lawmen or Elders can hardly be explored without discussing the *Mirndiyan* Law itself, as it is the Law that confers the Elders' authority.

This discussion of the cultural-social-political milieu of the Aboriginal community of *Kunhanhaa* forms the context for the discussion of relations between school and community in Chapters Five and Six, as it is this understanding of the nature of the community and its culture that provides the framework within which Elders see the school as it presently is, the background against which they understand what they see as its failures, and the grounds for their accounts about what it should be.

I argue that two contexts exist here, where past and present intermingle. One is the context of traditional Law and the system of practices and beliefs that regulated the lives of the *Kunhanhaamendaa*. The other is that which has resulted from the intrusion of non-Aboriginal people with their different values, religion, laws and systems and structures of government. These, the Elders argue, have created conflict, confusion and chaos for the *Kunhanhaamendaa*. They also suggest that this intrusion has marginalised them (the Elders) until they have become one of the many community factions fighting for their authority, for the old ways, the traditional sacred *Mirndiyan* Law of their Ancestors, in fact fighting for their existence as rightful authority figures within their community.

While other accounts have been written about the *Kunhanhaamendaa* and other Aboriginal societies, in which the Elders occupy a subordinate colonised position as the "Other", in this chapter they occupy the privileged position, not only as the tellers of the stories on which the chapter is based, but as the central

figures of knowledge and authority in the community their stories are about. As in all of the descriptions of *Kunhanhaamendaa* life that the Elders have given me, their descriptions are entangled with, connected with, and related to, many of the other matters they discussed: the sacred and secular history of the community, the history and present state of relations between the community and non-Aboriginal people, and government institutions, and their sense of what needs to be done about them.

### ***Mirndiyan Law***

The Lawmen argue that, throughout the years of interaction with non-Aboriginal people, they upheld *Mirndiyan Law*, a set of Aboriginal spiritual Laws and practices. They, and the other participants, see themselves as tribal people within an Aboriginal Law-based life.

*Mirndiyan Law* – The Law – in the *Kunhanhaa* tribal society encompasses the spiritual pathway of right living, based on complex relationships between people, spirit ancestors, animals and the land. The Elders see the Law as an institution and practice which was handed down from the Creation Ancestors or totemic Ancestors who created the world, to generation after generation of *Kunhanhaa* Lawmen (*Personal Communications, Birdibir*, Moon, T., 17 May, 2002; Robinson, R., *Kulthangar, Milmajah*, Goodman, C., 16 May, 2002). The term *Mirndiyan* refers to subsection (skin) totemic dreamings. McKnight (1999) explains:

When inquiring about a person's dreamings (i.e., totems), one may ask, '*Ngaju ngimben Mirndiyan?*' [What is your dreaming (totem)?] In reply the person may list several phenomena such as dog, moon and black cockatoo. By knowing a person's *Mirndiyan*, one knows to which patrimoiety, and usually which semi-moiety or subsection couple he/she belongs. (p. 176).

In *Kunhanhaa*, if a person is part of the subsection system, s/he may work out his or her relationship to another person or phenomena according to their subsection

or 'skin'. Therefore, as the Elders point out, *Mirndiyan* Law is actually based on a system of relationships between man and nature.

Anthropologist Morton (2000) maintains that when "Aboriginal people allude in English to the complete field of ancestral precedent they speak not so much of the Dreaming, but of 'the Law' " (p. 11). The term 'Dreaming' originates from Spencer and Gillen's original English translation of the *Aranda* term '*altjiranga ngambkala*' (1996, p. 306). Anthropologist and Aranda linguist T.G.H. Strehlow (1971) noted that "the word 'altjira' means 'eternal' so the verb 'to dream' draws upon the idea of seeing eternal things" (pp. 593-4). Memmott and Horsman (1991) also see the "Dreamtime as a time in the distant past... but ever-present and eternal" (p. 33). Morton (2000) suggests that "particular ancestors and their creations may be referred to as 'Dreamings' but this term is a gloss on what we might otherwise call 'totems' or 'stories' " (p. 11).

According to the Elders the term 'story' may have many meanings. Stories may be historical or secular yarns, but they may also be sacred stories, intimately tied to the Law. Cubillo (2000) suggests that for Aboriginal Lawmen, "power, authority, status and prestige are established in the telling and retelling of ancestral stories" (p. 29).

'Stories' also document information about 'story places'. 'Story places' are analytically distinct from 'stories' although each 'story place' has its own story. 'Story places', or 'sacred sites', are the geographical locations where the Totemic Ancestors walked and left their imprint. Each 'story place' has a particular 'totem' or 'Dreaming'. For example, the *jindermendaa* (green leaf spirit people) 'story place' near *Birri* (on *Kunhanhaa*) is the home of the *jindermendaa* (*Personal Communication*, Hills, M., 20 April, 2001).

In *Kunhanhaa*, *Mirndiyan* means one's 'Dreaming' or one's 'totem'. *Kulthangar* would have said, "*Ngithun Mirndiyan Kulthangar*" which translates as "my dreaming [totem] is flying fox." 'Dreamings' or 'totems' were connected to one's skin, section or class in society. Totemism is based on the belief that there is a shared energy between a person and something in the natural environment and this energy unites the person and that thing or place in a special way. Swain (1998) argues that, "If a person is adopted, given a skin name and initiated they are related to every site where the energy of their totems lies, because the totem

energy links sites in direction-determined pathways” and that the “basic totemic assertion is that all Lawful existence emerges from the being of place” (p. 35).

McKnight (1999) asserts that in totemic thinking nature is humanised, so moon, kangaroo, lightning, spotted gum, mosquito, willy wagtail and frilled lizard all act like human beings and speak human language. However, the mating habits of totemic beings behave according to the subsection system: “Kangaroo may mate with frilled lizard and have mosquito offspring” (McKnight, 1999, p. 176). The Elders say that in Dreamtime animals and humans were one kind and spoke the same language, and that, in fact when one presently visits the wallaby story place the great totemic wallaby may metamorphose into a human and speak in a human language (*Personal Communications, Birdibir*, 21 May, 2002; *Milmajah*, 20 May, 2002). McKnight (1999) suggests that there is no anomaly when, according to the subsection system, different species mate, because the basis of the subsection system is concerned with totemic relationships that include all of nature. Thus, Percy Trezise (1993), who was adopted by *Kunhanaamendaa* Dick Roughsey, could state that “I was classed as Dick’s brother in the *Leelumbanda* clan, in the *borralungi* section with dreamings of broлга and stingray” (p. 11). Mussolini Harvey (Musso), a *Yanyula* second-degree Lawman from *Borrooloola*, *Kulthangar*’s uncle, a former Chairman of the Aboriginal Sacred Sites Protection Authority, and the Lawman who presided over *Kulthangar*’s initiation in 1979, states that “No matter if they are fish, birds, men, women, animals, wind or rain... all these things in our country have Law, they have ceremony and song, and they have people who are related to them” (Swain, 1998, p. xi). He distinguishes the Dreaming/Law and Dreamings, maintaining:

White people ask us all the time, what is Dreaming?

This is a hard question because Dreaming is a really big thing for Aboriginal people... The Dreamings made our Law. This Law is the way we live, our rules. This Law is our ceremonies, our songs, and our stories. One thing I can tell you though is that our Law is not like European Law, which is always changing; but our Law cannot change; we did not make it. The Law was made by the Dreamings

many, many years ago and given to our Ancestors  
and they gave it to us. (cited in Swain, 1988, p. xi).

*Kulthangar* told me that social organization of the community was determined by the Law, which told people how to live and behave (*Personal Communication*, 6 June, 2001). Memmott and Horsman (1991) describe *Mirndiyan* Law as not only the “set of values and customs that govern correct thought and behaviour in all aspects of life,” but also as a “system of beliefs about life and the universe [which] tries to explain [such] abstract ideas as time, change and stability, matter and spirit, the seen and the unseen, appearance, reality and human identity” (p. 27). Morton (2000) argues that the Law encompasses not only the rules and regulations by which people live, but also the laws of nature, and as such the “Law is the Constitution, a charter of all that was, is and shall be. It is everywhere binding the whole world together in a systematic way” (p. 11). Margaret told me, “Some of the Christian laws are not hard for us because they are like the old Law” (*Personal Communication*, 2 May, 2002) and, in this regard, Morton (2000) maintains that the “totemic beings have something in common with Judaeo-Christian notions of power, since, like the Christian God, who is sometimes referred to as the ‘word’, the totemic ancestors ‘sang’ the universe into being to make it consubstantial with themselves” (p. 11). Morton (2000) also suggests that if a totemic being is said to have created a particular story place it cannot be separated from that ancestor and such sites are grouped together to form ‘countries’ held by particular family groups who “likewise see themselves as consubstantial with the ancestors... [so] each country is protected from intrusion [from enemies or by trespass] under a regime of ‘really strict Law’ ” (p. 11). The Elders believe that the *Kunhanhaamendaa* “must constantly celebrate and actively maintain the relationships between people and nature through ceremony and ritual, as well as legend, dance and song” (Memmott and Horsman, 1991, pp. 160-162) to perpetuate Ancestral creation.

There are a number of interwoven concepts to social organization, which are all governed by the Law. As such, these were, and still are, the ideal. They are land occupation and ownership, laws for maintaining community life, skin groups and totems and how skin groups control relationships, family organization and life, events within the life of a *Kunhanhaamendaa* and sacred knowledge of the Law and

ceremonies. In fact, *Milmajah* told me that one's totem could also be determined by the place one was born as well as one's skin (*Personal Communication* 2 June, 2002).

*Yolgnu* Lawman *Wandjuk Marika* stated that *Kunapipi* Law, the same Law that *Kulthangar* learned from his *Yanyula* uncles, taught him, "how to behave... to be a sensible, kind, respectable man" (cited in Isaacs, 1995, p. 39). The Law can be seen as the basis of social practice, in that it sets in concrete, explicit discourses, rules and habits which construct the routines of traditional tribal Aboriginal life, and makes clear the rules about networks, relationships and groups by which people operate together. *Kulthangar* told me "the Law is the rules set down by the Dreamtime Ancestors" (*Personal Communication*, 17 January, 2001). I have read to *Kulthangar* what anthropologist Meggitt (1962) wrote about Aboriginal Law, and he agreed. This is what Meggitt (1962) states:

There are explicit social rules, which by and large everyone obeys. The totality of the rules expresses the Law... a term that may be expressed as the 'true straight way.' Its basic connotation is of an established order of behaviour (whether from planets or people) from which there should be no divergence. Adherence to the Law is... a basic value, for this is thought to distinguish the *Walbiri* from all other people, who are consequently inferior. As the Law originated in the Dreamtime it is beyond critical questioning and conscious change. (pp. 249-251).

Much earlier, but also pointing to the ways in which 'other groups' were constructed as inferior, Sharp (1935) had observed that members of a patrimoeity referred to themselves as *ngalmu juldarel* 'we people' and *bilma juldarel* as 'other people'. Sharp (1935) referred to *juldarel* as lineage. *Juldarel* could also loosely said to be 'relationships'.

*Mirndiyan* Law structured social practices such as relationships. The everyday life of the *Kunhanhaamendaa* was structured around kinship relationships. The kinship system was very complex and able to incorporate

everybody as a relative of one sort or another. Trezise (1993), who spent many years with Dick Roughsey, has argued that:

Aborigines have a very complex kinship system and are uneasy with anyone whose relationship to them, whether real or implied, is not clearly defined. Anyone with whom they are closely associated for any length of time must be given a place in the kinship system, and the entire tribe then knows how to behave towards them. (p. 11).

Memmott and Horsman (1991) also state, “Even strangers from distant tribal groups could fit into the system through their class [or skin] system” (p. 89) and “parents [could] also be related to their children by adoption” (p. 71). Aboriginal artist Lin Onus, who was adopted by *Yolgnu* people, states that kinship experience is “a spiritual experience... about belonging... . Having a skin name you know who else you’re automatically related to, you know who your brothers, uncles, aunties, sisters are” (cited in Neale, 2001, p. 14).

### **The *Kunhanhaamendaa* Elders**

*Kunhanhaamendaa* society was traditionally a gerontocracy in which the Elders were guardians and teachers of both secular and sacred Law. To the Elders, knowledge of spiritual matters represents power, and those who are able to receive Dreamtime communications through dreams and visions are called Lawmen (Memmott and Horsman, 1991). According to the Elders, to be familiar with *Mirndiyan* Law is to possess knowledge, but this knowledge and wisdom is only accrued gradually in the process and experience of growing older. Therefore the Elders, as knowledgeable people, hold the keys to their people’s wellbeing. The Elders’ accumulated knowledge incorporates both the activities of daily life and the sacred aspects of *Kunhanhaamendaa* culture.

In this regard, *Milmajah* told me in an authoritative manner:

Wefella [Elders are] the guardians of the knowledge. All over Australia Elders are spokesmen. Our Dreaming Ancestors pass these rules down to us. They make the rules. Through

them the Elders make the rules. Wefella [Elders] all say loudly, 'We should be passing on the knowledge before it [is] too late.' (*Personal Communication*, 15 May, 2002).

*Kulthangar*, *Milmajah*, *Kurnungkur*, Cecil, *Birdibir*, Teddy, Reggie and Calder all agreed.

As keepers of the sacred knowledge the *Muyinda* met privately, to make important decisions. Their discussions followed along the lines of a parliamentary debate. Some of the subjects of these meetings included problems related to sacred knowledge, planning marriages, public dances, ceremonies, the initiation of young men and public ceremonies (Memcott and Horsman, 1991).

According to Memcott and Horsman (1991), "Women did not share ritual or political equality with men and were not eligible to become *Muyinda*" (p. 128). Yet, if referring to *Balilyia* country, *Kulthangar* referred me to Clara for information. In *Mirndiyan* Law no one person assumed the role of overall political leader or chief. No one person became dominant because of wealth, physical power or military strength. Those in political power were the initiated men over fifty, as *Kulthangar* called them, the "Big Country Lawmen" (*Personal Communication*, 10 September, 2001); traditionally, there were about twenty of them (Memcott and Horsman, p. 128).

The concept of caring and compassion is very important to the Elders. As '*kuba marlda-mendaa*' or Lawmen with 'open hands' and 'open hearts', it is the Elders' role to show compassion and caring to everyone in the community, especially the young people. *Kulthangar* told me, " 'Open hand' could be translated as both welcoming strangers and forgiving transgressors, but also having the open hand of reciprocity" (*Personal Communication*, 2 April, 2003).

*Kulthangar* maintained:

A Lawman must be caring. When I went on [the] second tour with [the] dance team in 1971 I used to stay at Stanmore in Sydney... When I cross [the] road there was old lady with walking stick. I help her across and cars had to stop. Someone gave me

twenty dollars. I gave it back. 'I got money', I said. 'Anyone help old people.' Old lady said to me, 'Thank you my son, God be with you.' (*Personal Communication*, 16 May, 2002).

Even Margaret has said to me:

People think just because we Christian now that we caring: you know – love thy neighbour. But caring was part of old Law even before the missionaries came. We always look after our old. [We have] compassion, open heart for our old people. (*Personal Communication*, 29 September, 2000).

Both *Kulthangar* and Margaret showed a particular concern for the old and very young, perhaps, partly, because they were defenceless and partly because, in the case of the elderly, they were repositories of vast stores of knowledge. However, it is also obvious from the Elders' statements that it was part of *Mirndiyan* Law to show compassion and have *kuba marlda* (open hand and open heart).

The Elders also set an example for the young people through their habits. *Kulthangar* told me that the Elders are gradually "stopping drinking 'white man's grog' and stopping smoking 'white man's tobacco' [cigarettes]. We have to give a good example to the young people, show them our world is stronger than white man's world" (*Personal Communication*, 8 June, 2002).

The Elders still maintain their power as songmen and ceremonial leaders in the Woomera Dance Company, which tours the world. As dancers and songmen the Lawmen are successful, commercially and in the world of Indigenous culture (*Personal Communications*, Goomungee, *Kulthangar* and Goodman, C., 15 May, 2002).

As a political leader *Kulthangar* told me, "We leaders and that's a really big thing. We must to be respected and heard. Respect that's a really big thing for us" (*Personal Communication*, 16 May, 2002). The Elders expect their authority to be respected. They expect to be consulted with, because they are the gerontocracy. As the traditional authority figures of an Aboriginal community the Elders expect to be

the leaders. In education, and matters of law, culture and society, they expect to be respected, consulted, heard and acknowledged, and they expect their wishes to be acted on, not so much because they feel the need, personally, for respect and to be heard and negotiated with, but because it is Aboriginal Law (*Personal Communications, Kulthangar, Goodman, C., Moon, T., Birdibir, Peters, C., Milmajah, Kelly, R. and Robinson, R., 15 May, 2002*).

*Kurnungkur* told me he expressed the Elders' view to a key figure in the local school in 2002, that "We're the mob you should be listening to. We have long experience. We are not just a group of frail old men. Everyone knows you go to [see] the Elders first when you go to an Aboriginal community!" (*Personal Communication, 15 May, 2002*). Reggie added that he had said to the same person, "The Elders teach in the true straight way and they teach about the Law. The Law is true and straight. The children must listen to us and the teachers must listen to us!" (*Personal Communication, 15 May, 2002*). *Kulthangar* added, "I told that fella loud and clear, 'We don't just want people to listen to us! We want to be heard!' " (*Personal Communication, 15 May, 2002*). Cecil shook his head angrily, glared and agreed. He told me that he had enforced the Elders' view that, "Police and teachers come to us at the last minute when accident happen and they have trouble. They should have listened to us years ago" (*Personal Communication, 15 May, 2002*). Edgar also told me that he told the government representative, "Yes, those children should be taught to respect the Elders, the Law and each other" (*Personal Communication, 15 May, 2002*). I expand on this particular meeting with the school principal, a meeting where the Elders felt a deep sense of cultural miscommunication, in Chapter Five.

The *Kunhanhaamendaa* Lawmen's perspective that one is expected to consult and negotiate with local Elders when one visits an Aboriginal community is shared by a number of authors. Comments by Dobson, Riley, McCormack and Hartman (1997), Blitner (2000) and Dingo (1998), on the subject of protocol with Elders, suggest that *Kurnungkur's* statement is historically and culturally normative on remote Aboriginal communities. *Ngarinyin* Elder David *Mowaljarlai* also argues that, "In Aboriginal culture the elderly command the authority and respect they deserve" (cited in Bell, 1998, p. 104).

Others closely connected to Mornington Island also reflect the Elders' sense of miscommunication with the school principal in comments.<sup>7</sup> The Elders agreed and were appalled that the "whitefella outsiders do not deal with them by sitting down and talking through problems, the way all decent bush fellas do" (*Personal Communication, Kulthangar*, 17 May, 2002). The comments by the *Kunhanhaa* Elders also indicate that they feel a similar sense of "deep... confusion and mystification about the *Balanda* [white] world" (Trudgen, 2000, p. 2) that the *Yolgnu* people feel. In relation to this lack of cross-cultural misunderstanding and confusion, *Yolgnu* Reverend Doctor *Djiniyini Gondarra*'s statement about the strangeness of *Balanda* (non-Aboriginal) ways is enlightening:

No matter how hard we fought and applied ourselves the Balanda always won with strange lawless ways and advanced powerful technologies. Plus the missions and the Government welfare department used powerful leaders that acted like dictators... over us. This left the old people thinking, 'Maybe this new way schooling', is the path to getting this balanda power. So we sent our children to the mission schools in the hope of getting this power from the *Balanda*... I was so tired of the confusion and confrontation... my father would say, 'There is another way. In the old way of our people, our elders would sit down and talk through and analyse problems together, even if it took a long time.' (p. 2).

When I read this passage out to Lawmen, *Kulthangar*, *Milmajah* and *Jekarija* they agreed loudly. In Aboriginal world-views respect for Elders is vital. Evidence for this is widespread. In the fifteen Western Australian Aboriginal Independent Community

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<sup>7</sup> *Yolgnu* people had links with *Kulthangar* through his grandfather Sam Douglas and through Wilfred, Clara Reid and Cecily; Clara told me that *Mandawuy* and *Garralawuy Yunupingu* had come to visit them at Mornington Island at Christmas, 2001 because they had found out they were mutually related to Charlie Normanton, Clara's grandfather (*Personal Communication*, 22 April, 2002). This close connection, I suggest, makes it reasonable to use some comments by *Yolgnu* people and about the *Yolgnu* people to extend on the Elders' statements.

Schools, for example, “Whitefellas are only hired to assist in the education of their children [and] the Elders have the final say in matters. They are the white fellas employers” (Aboriginal Independent Community Schools, 2004, p. 1).

Bell’s (1998) call to stop “the destruction by European culture and settlement” (p. 172) suggests that the attempt by *Kunhanhaa* Elders to assert their traditional authority, and that of the Law, is happening on other Aboriginal communities. The words of David *Mowaljarlai*, *Ngarinyin* [Kimberley] Lawman’s, documented by Bell, regarding the negative future of the young Aboriginal people parallel the Mornington Island Elders’ statements. *Mowaljarlai* states that many Aboriginal people are:

lost to themselves, lost to the law, and lost to Australian society... We Lawmen say, ‘We *Ngarinyin* have not benefited from our relationship with whitefellas. For all the government money and policies, we are not better off- we are worse off. We have to get them out of the destruction and despair... before they get caught by anger, alcohol and death [so]... We [Elders] have set up a Bush University and *Ngarinyin* Culture College.’ (1998, p. 172).

My conversations with *Kulthangar*, Cecil, *Birdibir*, Teddy, Edgar, Roger, *Milmajah*, Johnny, *Wuhnun* and Calder suggest that although there has been a movement away from acknowledging the authority of the Elders at *Kunhanhaa* since missionaries Wilson and McCarthy took away their political power and attempted to remove their sacred power, the Elders practise and preserve their surviving knowledge to pass on to the younger generations (*Personal Communications*, 15 May, 2002). Although the Elders have been positioned as one of the many factions in Queensland Aboriginal Communities (Smith, 1999), there is evidence that in Aboriginal worldviews, that respect for Elders, who play the role of teachers, is an integral part of Aboriginal family life. The research of Walker (1993), *Manguri* and the Western Australian Council of Social Service (1994), Dingo (1998) and Bell (1998) supports the Elders’ arguments.

*Kulthangar* argues, “white man want power, but Elders have knowledge which big mob [much] more important” (*Personal Communication*, 15 May, 2002). Bird Rose (1987) and Suzuki and Knudson (1992) also maintain that the *Yarralin* Elders, in the Victoria River region [in the Northern Territory], view Europeans, who for more than a century have ravaged and displaced them and other communities, as tragically out of synchrony with Aboriginal Dreaming Laws. To the *Kunhanhaa* Elders the non-Aboriginal influence is a small matter compared to the greatness of the importance of their work of being custodians of the land and spokesmen for the Dreamtime knowledge. *Kulthangar* told me, “What do these whitefellas mean in relation to the land. The land is our mother it is always here. Those whitefellas haven’t even been here a hundred years” (*Personal Communication*, 5 October, 2002). Similarly, the Victoria River Lawmen of the Northern Territory said, “what we do matters so powerfully that to evade our responsibly is to call down chaos” (Suzuki and Knudson, 1992, p. 48). When I read *Kulthangar* the words of these Lawmen he had tears in his eyes, “That’s very true”, he said, shaking his head (*Personal Communication*, 26 November, 2002).

On another occasion I read a passage written by *Cherokee* Elder Michael Tlanusta Garrett to *Kulthangar*. Garrett maintains:

You are not just alive. You are part of life itself.  
You are kin to all things, and everything has life...  
and memory. The old stories and teachings... have  
been offered for the purpose of guiding us in our life  
journey to becoming better ‘helpers’ for the  
protection of Mother Earth and all of our relatives.  
(Garrett and Garrett, 1996, pp. ix-x).

*Kulthangar* was delighted and commented, “Quite true. Quite true. Rocks, trees, land all alive. The Land remembers. The spirit people remember. Our father’s stories guide us” (*Personal Communication*, 2 April, 2003).

The Elders worry that their traditional role of keepers of *Mirndiyan* Law is seriously diminished (*Personal Communications*, *Kulthangar*, *Milmajah*, *Chuloo*, Peters, P., Peters, M., *Wuhnun*, Goodman, C., Moon, T., Peters, C., Williams, J.,

27 September, 2001). However, their apparent lack of power may be precisely that: apparent. Three Elders are shire councillors, one holds a senior position on the council, one is a policeman, three Elders and four Lawmen perform worldwide in the Woomera team and teach in that role at the school. And as my later discussions of curriculum and pedagogy, in Chapter Six, show, the Elders also work with the school to educate young initiated men. What both the Elders' comments and the literature make clear is that Aboriginal Elders' role, as traditional Lawmen is not confined to Mornington Island. The Elders have told me that they still perform initiations with *Borrooloola* Elders once every two years and in that role perform totemic increase ceremonies on their land (*Personal Communications, Kulthangar, Goomungee*, Goodman, C., 20 September, 2001). The Elders regularly visit other places in Australia and the world to participate in Indigenous conferences on environmental protection, education and health (*Personal Communication, Kulthangar*, 15 January, 2001).

The Elders, thus, see their position and their knowledge they hold, as crucial to the wellbeing of their society. They say that they are the guardians and teachers of sacred knowledge and guarantors of the well being of their tribe as protectors of their land and social caretakers (*Personal Communications, Kulthangar*, 21 September, 2001; *Milmajah*, 18 Septemberr, 2001; Watt, J., 20 September, 2001). Yet, as *Milmajah* and *Kulthangar* have both emphasised, with almost frantic anxiety, "Elders are dying and when they die their knowledge turns to dust. We hafta pass on our knowledge before it is too late" (*Personal Communication*, 16 May, 2002).

### **Relationships are a vital part of the Law**

The hub of proper functioning of the community, based on the system of *Mirndiyan* Law is relationships: skin relationships or connectedness with the land, plant life, animal life and the spirit world are part of *Mirndiyan* Law and this cannot be disentangled from relationships between people. Relationships with the spirit world and the land are vital parts of the cultural background which contextualises the Elders' voices.

At this point I have to write myself into the sections on relationships and while being acutely aware of the risks of making myself the self-indulgent

protagonist of my own story, I take some assurance from the fact that others such as T.G.H. Strehlow (1971), Virginia Huffer (1980), Richard Kimber and Noel Wallace (1990), Percy Tresize (1993), Jennifer Isaacs (1995), Diane Bell (1998), Hannah Rachel Bell (1998), Sally Dingo (1998), Richard Trudgen (2000), Diane Hill (2001), Amanda Ahern (2002) and Edith Turner (1993, 1994) have similarly found it necessary to document their own position in such situations. The stories they write seem to be consistent with my sense of being incorporated into the skin system and having personal experience of the *Kunhanhaamendaa* spiritual world. Nevertheless, this is very difficult to write because it puts me, as researcher-writer, in the centre of action – a place not normally accorded to a researcher-writer and a place which makes it hard to maintain an appropriate reflective distance, as a writer, from what I am writing about. It is also a difficult position because I am positioned ambivalently, where one side of that ambivalence is a very privileged position and the other is a very subordinate position, when I am with the Elders. Yet the Elders put me in a delegated position of power and authority. All this makes my position a very complicated position that makes it very complex to write ‘objectively’.

### **Kin relationships**

According to Memmott and Horsman (1991), “the everyday life of the [Kunhanhaamendaa] was structured largely around kinship relationships” (p. 89). McKnight (1999) states that, “It is no exaggeration to describe the *Lardil* as a kinship and marriage society. All members are addressed and referred to by kinship and affinal terms” (p. 33). Stories about specific adoptions of outsiders are simply amplifications and illustrations of this and stories with the Elders provide evidence for the way they see relationships of various kinds. Mutual obligations are an integral and crucial part of the account.

Memmott and Horsman (1991) argue that, “Through sharing and conversation [the *Kunhanhaamendaa*] sensed a feeling of well being and harmony, [which] strengthened their relationships and friendships” (p. 89). *Kulthangar* told me in the company of other Elders, *Milmajah* and *Birdibir* that, “Everything in our tribal world is interrelated and interconnected, and relationships, connectedness and belonging are at the bottom of the way we feel.

They are the Law” (*Personal Communication*, 17 May 2002). *Kulthangar*’s statement is echoed by Arden (1994; 1998); Forrest (1998); Cataldi and Partington (1998); Heslop (1998); Corrie and Maloney (1998); Issacs (1995); Dingo (1998) and Pryor (1998). *Kunhanhaamendaa* writers Dick Roughsey (1971), and Elsie Roughsey (1984), as well as non-Aboriginal researchers of *Kunhanhaa* society, Memmott and Horsman (1991) and McKnight (1999), all maintain that relationships are the foundation of the wellbeing of the *Lardil*-speaking people.

Meggitt (1962) argues that ‘skin’ is a Gulf of Carpentaria region and “Northern Territory wide pidgin term” (p. 167) which refers to the eight kinship categories or classes that anthropologists such as Hiatt (1965) calls subsections. Meggitt (1965) suggests that “the names of the Walbiri subsections are cognate with those sections and subsection of tribes that are distributed from the Kimberleys to Alice Springs and from Musgrave Range to the Gulf of Carpentaria” (p. 165). McKnight (1999) maintains that in the traditional *Kunhanhaa* subsection (skin) system there are four semi-moieties each consisting of two subsections, and two patrimoieties each consisting of two semi-moieties, or four subsections. Hence the Windward and Leeward people are two separate moieties. The Leeward Moiety includes the northern and eastern people. According to Binion (1987):

By far the most important aspect of [*Lardil*] Aboriginal social organization is the division of the whole community into eight sub-sections or skin groups. These are relationship groups, which relate to the *Lardil* people, according to their birth line and each other and to objects in their environment. (p. 24).

Binion (1987) states that each skin group is related to several objects, signs symbols or totems of their skin group. These totems are the person’s link with the Dreaming ancestors and the land. In an ideal kin-structured society there is an age and gendered order and a land or country order. Mornington Island was divided into twenty-nine countries and each country was the responsibility of its own patriclan.

The head of each patriclan was called the *dulmada*. When people visited another country the *dulmada* told them what resources they could or could not take.

In the system of the eight classes or skins, people were divided into alternating generations. For example, if a man belonged to one class, his grandsons (like his grandfather) would belong to the same class. If he belonged to class A, his son (like his father) would belong to class B. These alternating generations were known as moieties. The class or skin names were often used as personal names, thus *Kulthangar* could be known as '*balyarini*'. According to *Kulthangar* there was no difference between a tribal or skin relative and a blood relative.

The Elders were the custodians of the kinship rules and social obligations outlined by the Ancestors. These rules outlined relationships on all levels: human to land, sky, bird, fish and plant; human to human; in short every relationship possible. These Laws were passed down to each generation and they included the correct country for each family and each skin group. By the time one reached adulthood one knew exactly how to behave to everyone else they met and what kind of behaviour to expect in return. Many kinds of behaviour were necessary to show respect and caring. This behaviour was correct protocol. Sharing food and giving gifts to certain types of relatives was Lawful behaviour. In fact, although I was oblivious to Lawful relationships, when I asked Joseph about relationships with the teachers, he outlined avoidance rules between skin and blood relatives. As this discussion was very early in the research, on 30 August 2000, it was not an obvious answer to me at the time. However, the regulation of the Law was Joseph's duty as an Elder, and it was, thus, the necessary and appropriate framework for answering any question concerning relationships. To do so, in fact, he discussed the avoidance relationships of *Marnbil*, *Dewal-Dewal* and *Djin-Djin*, the original *Kunhanhaa* Creation Ancestors on *Kunhanhaa*, who were the prototypes for all correct and incorrect relationships.

Although the above description of kin based society was the ideal in traditional *Kunhanhaa* society certain geographical, and socio-cultural-historical factors came into play making adoption of outsiders, as kin, an occurrence that could occur. Opinions are divided on the practice of incorporating outsiders into contemporary Aboriginal communities. In relation to Mornington Island's sister community, *Doomadgee*, for example, Smith states that, "To be... adopted as a

brother or sister... is the ultimate sign of acceptance” (1999, p. 26). *Kunhanhaamendaa* I have spoken with, about adoptions, argue that adoptions are not common and are only reserved for ‘special’ people (*Personal Communications, Kulthangar*, 7 September, 2001; Roughsey, U. and *Bulthuku*, 31 August, 2001; Hills, M., 30 September, 2001; *Jekarija* and *Chuloo*, 29 September, 2001), and *Bulthuku* and Ursula both told me that, “It is rare to adopt white people into a family” (*Personal Communication*, 31 August, 2001). From her experience with Top End tribal Aboriginal people in 1976 Shimpoo states, “Aborigines are reluctant to be related to anyone unfamiliar... An approaching stranger is silently watched. Their own personal interest is mainly limited to the affairs of their own clan or clan” (p. 51).

Four researchers suggest that adoption of outsiders, as a practice, is more common than the *Kunhanhaamendaa* participants and Shimpoo suggest. In general, Swain (1993) maintains that Aboriginal people have sought to accommodate outsiders and make a place for strangers. Trigger (2000) describes “the practice of incorporating significant non-Aboriginal visitors into the kinship system as fictive relatives [as] relatively common” (p. 374). Alpher (1993) writing about the *Lardil* [sic] people suggests they are a people who are more open than others about some aspects of their Law. And McKnight argues, for Mornington Island, that “adoption is quite common” (1999, p. 8). And evidence from their Ancestral ‘stories’ and their conversations, suggests that in this regard, the *Kunhanhaamendaa* are a generous people.

Because the issue of relations of non-*Kunhanhaamendaa* to *Kunhanhaamendaa* people is so central to this thesis, I briefly explore what my Participants have said about the history of adoption of outsiders on Mornington Island. They suggest that Leeward *Kunhanhaamendaa* were certainly more accommodating to outsiders as a matter of conciliation and survival, but the Windward people, of *Kanba*, and *Dunguru*, often killed outsiders they saw as potential enemies. In this respect, Joseph told me that *Leeward* people would intermarry with Denham Island or Forsythe Island people (*Personal Communication*, 5 May, 2002) and *Chuloo* told me that Allen Island people and Point Bayley people have also married *Kunhanhaamendaa* (*Personal Communication*, 10 May, 2002). According to Clara sometimes a man would be

blown off course in his *walpa* (boat) and be taken in by the *Kunhanhaamendaa* (*Personal Communication*, 10 May, 2002). Thus adoption and intertribal marriage took place in pre-non-Aboriginal contact days.

Once the missionaries came the *Kunhaamendaa* “opened their hearts” (*Personal Communications*, Anon. A, 2 November, 2000; Anon. D, 15 September, 2000; Anon. E, 19 September, 2000) to adopt outsiders, both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal, although there was previous enmity with some mainland Aboriginal tribes and the Bentinck Island people, after 1948 even these people were adopted. The major motive seems to have been kindness, which tallies with Alpher’s (1993) argument. Clara told me, “Old *Lemil Lemil* told me [that] from early days when white men first came to the gulf there were white fellas living over at Denham [Island]” (*Personal Communication*, 14 May, 2002). It seems, from what she told me, non-Aboriginal people had been an accepted part of the social framework from the 1860s. In 1914, when missionary Hall came to the island Tall Peter (*Jekarija*) of *Birri* and Charlie Normanton gave their teenage sons Gully Peters and Paddy Marmies to Hall as “helpers.” When Hall was killed they sided with the missionaries against his Aboriginal killers. One anonymous participant told me with tears dripping from her eyes, “[one of the *Kangalida* young women] was sent back to the mainland in the war years and died of a broken heart, so the compassionate Mornington Islanders rushed to keep us on the island. Some of us were adopted, some of us were married to *Kunhanhaamendaa*” (*Personal Communication*, Anon A, 18 November, 2000). When I asked him about adoptions, *Kulthangar* told me:

John *Dimirrur* married Kitty Bell, a *Waanyii-Garawa* woman. Gully married Cora a *Kangalida* woman; Paddy married Alice a *Kangalida* woman; Nancy Wilson, a *Waanyi* woman, married Scotty Wilson a *Kanba* man; my old Dad *Warrabudgerra* adopted Pat Reid, gave him land and Pat became my brother and married Clara. Fanny Lanley [was] adopted by old Kenny Roughsey and she married Larry, son of old Limerick and Charlie Bell. (*Personal Communication*, 28 September, 2001).

Margaret stated, “Old Willie [the brother of Gully Peters] only adopt me and my little sister because we were going to sent back to the mainland during the war [World War II]” (*Personal Communication*, 14 May, 2002). By adopting outsiders the Elders are affirming a practice of kindness and compassion that was carried out in the adoption of mainland Aboriginal (dormitory) teenagers by *Kunhanhaa* Elders in World War II.

Adoptions are relatively well documented in the literature. Teacher-academic Ralph Folds (2001), himself an adoptee, comments about his life as headmaster at a Pintubi settlement:

Long-term white-fella residents on Pintubi settlements are sometimes considered to be honorary members of the Pintubi families who adopt us. We have negotiable obligations as family members and, for their part, Pintubi extend their own custodianship to include us. (p. 47).

Williams (1987), an anthropologist, explains that when she first arrived at *Yirrkala*, an Arnhem Land remote Aboriginal community, she was assigned a kin position. Anthropologist Diane Bell (1998) was incorporated into the kinship system of the *Warrabri*, in the Northern Territory, teacher-author Dick Kimber was integrated into the social system of the *Warlpiri* as *Tjakamarra* sub-section (1990), writer, Jennifer Isaacs was adopted by *Yolgnu* Elder *Wandjuk Marika*’s wife as *Warrupa* skin (Isaacs, 1995) and author and long time friend to *Yolgnu* people, Richard Trudgen (2000) was adopted by *Yolgnu* people, as *Wamut* skin, as was Aboriginal artist Lin Onus. Author Amanda Ahern (2002) was also adopted by Sidney as *nungerima* skin.

After missionary Belcher came in 1950 a number of non-Aboriginal people were adopted. *Kulthangar* told me, “Lindsay, Dick, Kenny, Timmy adopted old Belcher as a son and gave him *kamarangi* skin and name Rock. Doreen Belcher was adopted by my old dad... . McKnight, himself, was adopted by my father, old *Warrabudgerra*” (*Personal Communication* 20 April, 2002) and Elder *Kurnungkur* told me, “Percy Trezise was adopted by old Dick Roughsey and old

Bill McClintock was adopted by Pat Reid. It is a great honour to be adopted and not common” (*Personal Communication*, 28 September, 2000).

Like Spencer (1928), Williams emphasises that kin-labelled relations entail reciprocal obligations of the strongest kind and, like Dick Roughsey (1971), she states that all *Yolngu* regard themselves as related in terms of kinship. Shimpo confirms this practice, which “entails the need for familiarity and personal face-to-face relationships” (1976, p. 51).

The Elders and senior women state that that adoptions such as the Belchers’ established an archetype of “good whitefella” behaviour, with such men as Belcher, McKnight, Trezise, Ken and McClintock as the ideal or ‘good whitefellas’ and men, such as missionary McCarthy, as the epitome of the ‘stinking whitefellas’ (*Personal Communications, Kulthangar*, Robinson, R., *Birdibir, Milmajah*, 17 May, 2002). *Kulthangar* has told me on many occasions that certain non-Aboriginal people he does not approve of are “just like those stinking missionaries who bugger up our life” (*Personal Communications*, 5 September, 2000; 15 January, 2001; 27 September, 2001; 20 May, 2002). The Williams, Peters, Hills, Marmies, Lanleys, Roughseys and the Jacob family had a history of adopting outsiders and were particularly friendly and trusting to non-Indigenous outsiders.

The people whom they adopted were people who have lived there for years on and off and have never forgotten the *Lardil* people. These people were appropriated into the skin system because of their compassion for and empathy with certain *Kunhanhaa* families. There were obviously not only precedents for adopting outsiders, but also a number of reasons for incorporating outsiders in *Kunhanhaa* social structure. Dick Kimber (1990) states that he was integrated into *Warlpiri* society in a way that allowed the *Warlpiri* to cope with him as a visitor (pp. 9-10) and in regard to Kimber’s comments about slotting strangers into the social system, Dick Roughsey states that there is no such thing as an unrelated stranger (p. 26). Ex-missionary and author Peter Willis (1988) maintains that, “Aborigines equipped with their lifestyle heritage and essentially religious worldview were often interested in establishing relationships with whites” (p. 129). Williams (1987) suggests, “Once a non-Aboriginal is assigned a kin position, other people base their relationship with him or her on it. The assignment

is usually, a close genealogical relationship to a particular individual. Behaviour as well as terms of address then follow” (p. 23).

There seem to be a number of factors that establish whether or not an outsider is adopted or not. Some of these factors are trust and the adoptee’s willingness to learn the local ways. When I asked *Kurnungkur*, *Birdibir* and *Kulthangar* about why some outsiders were adopted they answered cryptically. *Kurnungkur* suggested:

You know Dave McKnight was my brother. We knew him a long time. We mentioned those people like Belcher, Ken and McClintock because they were people who were close to the community. We adopted them. We trusted them. We had respect for them. They learned our ways. They used to have a cup of tea with us and a yarn and go camping and hunting with us. (*Personal Communication*, 21 May, 2002).

*Kulthangar* added, “Yes, that’s all we’re asking. It’s not much. We just want the teachers to come and visit and have a cup of tea. Old McClintock used to go and sit with Pat Reid” (*Personal Communication*, 21 May, 2002). *Birdibir* agreed, “Yes, I come and sit on your verandah and you come to Two Tanks [*Birdibir*’s land] with me and watch the sun go down and yarn about old times” (*Personal Communication*, 21 May, 2002).

In light of these three statements it seems reasonable to entertain the possibility that there is an expectation by the Elders that outsiders have large amounts of time to spare. There seems to be an expectation that adopted outsiders should regularly visit, go camping and go hunting with them over a number of years. ‘Yarning’ gives the feeling of slowness and relaxation. In Australian colloquial language to ‘yarn’ is to talk, chat or tell stories, which is what the Elders like to do, slowly, over time. A story is told leisurely while the recipient listens. “Learning our ways” takes years. Being trusted takes years. In light of the Elders’ repeated comments about being respected and listened to it also seems

reasonable to entertain the fact that they want people who will give them respect and stay to learn from their 'yarns' for many years.

The Elders prefer caring, feeling, people who "come from the heart" (*Personal Communication, Jekarija*, 10 October, 2002). When I asked the participants, "What relationships would you like with the school and the teachers?" many people replied at once, "Why don't you just write about how we adopted you into the community. We would like the teachers to be as friendly and caring as you and Ken have been," (*Personal Communications, Hills, M., Williams, J.*, 21 September, 2000; Goodman, C., Watt, J., Brookedale, I., Roughsey, U., *Dilmirrur*, 20 September, 2000; *Kulthangar, Bulthuku, Chuloo*, 26 November, 2000; Farrell, C., 30 November, 2000; Reid, C., 25 September, 2001; Robinson, R., 27 September, 2001; *Kurnungkur, Milmajah*, 26 September, 2001).

### **My connections and adoption by Mornington Island families**

It seems clumsy to discuss my own adoption, by *kamarangi* Lawman Hilary Lanley (*Jekarija*) as his *nimarama* skin sister, but the Elders and Lawmen were adamant it was a good example and insisted I include it. The process of my adoption illustrates a number of principles of adoption of outsiders by *Kunhanhaamendaa*. Although it seems to be a general principle that outsiders are watched carefully for friendly, caring behaviour for at least two years before they are adopted I was adopted the first afternoon I arrived at Mornington. I will relate the narrative and then draw conclusions about the significance of my positioning in Mornington Island society, as an illustration of the way this can happen.

The first afternoon I arrived at Mornington Island, the head teacher of the Secondary School, and my then-husband, Ken, took my daughter and me for a walk. As we neared the airport we were called into a garden where everyone shook my hand and said, "Hello." I was introduced to Hilary Lanley. The group laughed about our common name and enquired, "You *gammon*' eh? Your name really Hilary?" (*Personal Communication*, 27 July, 1998). *Gammon* is the term for joking. Amidst the laughter Hilary took my hand and said:

You can be my sister. Ken teaches our son up at the high school. Larry really likes Ken. Ken tells us that you come from the bush. Richmond eh? We had big

mob *Kunhanhaa* people down there: Andrew Marmies, *Milmajah*, Ellen Roughsey, Wilfred and Phyllis Walden, *Milmajah's* cousin. We heard Phyllis look after you when you little, eh. We want you to be part of our family. My mother would have liked you. She was adopted by a Mornington family too. (*Personal Communication*, 27 July, 1998).

Soon after this conversation I was introduced to Hilary's parents-in-law, *Chuloo* and Edna Ben. *Chuloo* told me we were welcome to go out to his 'country' anytime. I noticed the family always called Ken *bunji* meaning 'in-law' and *Chuloo* called me 'daughter-in-law'. Although I did not realise it at the time, I had been formally adopted as a sister to Hilary, David and Cathy Lanley and a daughter-in-law to *Chuloo* and Edna. In November, 2000 the Elders and I began talking about adoptions and the skin system so they could create an induction manual for incoming teachers. I began explaining the mechanics of how Ken and I were adopted by the Hills family in 1999, but *Chuloo* exclaimed loudly, "My girl you were adopted by our family the day you got here as *nimarama* skin; as the sister of Hilary and our daughter-in law" (*Personal Communication*, 26 November, 2000).

I asked *Chuloo*, "Father-in-law, was it a co-incidence that old Margaret, adopted Ken as her son. Her son and daughters are all *balyarini* and *balyarini* always marries *kamaringi* women. I am *kamaringi-nimarama*" (*Personal Communication*, 26 November, 2000).

"No it was meant to be, no co-incidence," he said matter of factly. "We knew you were an Aboriginal."

"No, I'm white. I can't claim to be an Aboriginal person," I said.

"No, my girl. Listen! You're an Aboriginal. We knew you. We knew you were an Aboriginal. Didn't you hear the kids singing out that you were an Aboriginal? You're *Lardil!* You belong with us," he said quietly as he looked into my eyes. He smiled and changed the subject.

When I told *Jekarija* about *Chuloo's* comments he answered, "He's a very loving man. That his way of saying you part of our family. We trust you. We call

you Aboriginal because we could feel you coming. We knew you would help us. You have an Aboriginal heart full of love. You walk around first day you come and say hello to everyone” (*Personal Communication*, 29 September, 2002).

My adoption cannot be said to be typical. It was based on a co-incidence of name and the fact that I came from an isolated area of the ‘bush’ where many Mornington Island stockmen had worked. It also was based on the fact that *Jekarija*’s son enjoyed a healthy relationship with Ken, at school. Ken had apparently already had talked about my ‘bush’ background, and told them that I had lived with *Burnum Burnum* and *Gaboo* Ted Thomas, and their family for a time, at Wallaga Lakes in 1983 and that I had taught at Bamaga. My adoption was also based on feeling and intuition. *Jekarija* and his father-in-law both “felt” that I was a caring person, in the manner that Aboriginal people were caring and “came from the heart.” *Jekarija* also told me that he and his father-in-law “knew who you were” and coupled with *Kulthangar*’s comments that Lawmen are trained to read minds and can see visions of the past and future it could be said that my adoption was based on instincts and “reading minds”, a practice which I will analyse later in the chapter. When I read this passage to *Milmajah* he concluded with this philosophical poem on my adoption:

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(*Personal Communication*,  
18 September, 2001).

### **My adoption by *Kulthangar* and *Bulthuku***

My adoption as sister to *Kulthangar*’s wife was a more gradual process. I had known *Kulthangar* and *Bulthuku* approximately two years when *Bulthuku* announced that I was her sister. In the light of my close association with *Kulthangar*, and Isaacs’ (1995) account of *Wandjuk Marika*, it seems reasonable to entertain the possibility that *Kulthangar* suggested my adoption, although I spent quite some time with *Bulthuku* in Mt Isa.

When I first met *Kulthangar* in July 1998 the first thing he said was, “You’re a bush girl aren’t you?” *Kulthangar* and I talked a great deal that night about our common bush background. Another of our bonds was our shared interest in *Kunhanhaa* genealogy, and the project to jointly construct an account of that genealogy that emerged from our shared interest. *Kulthangar* told me, “Family tree big part of our Law. I can see [that] you family tree person” (*Personal Communication*, 24 August, 1998). On a number of occasions he expressed the belief that, “most white people would not understand or remember the family tree, because they were too stupid, but you’re not” (*Personal Communications*, 8 August, 1998; 1 December, 1999; 15 January, 2001; 17 April, 2001). I had constructed my genealogy in 1986 by weeks of painstaking conversations with elderly aunts and visits to archives. As I have mentioned previously family history or the history and respect of ancestors was an important part of tribal society. Early in my time at Mornington Island I used to find *Bulthuku* at the store, but soon *Kulthangar* and *Bulthuku* arrived regularly at the library where I worked, without a formal request. Our meetings produced much genealogical information.

Between 1998 and 2003, I visited *Kunhanhaa* many times and spent a great deal of time with *Kulthangar* and *Bulthuku*. *Kulthangar* became my teacher and co-researcher. In January 2001 *Bulthuku* introduced me one day to a relative from Alice Springs as her sister. The woman raised her eyebrows, but *Bulthuku* smiled. After that *Kulthangar* said, “Hilary out of respect could you call me ‘yugud’ which means sister-in-law, because my wife is your sister” (*Personal Communication*, 16 January, 2001). All of his sons call me Mum. On 22 September, 2001 *Kulthangar* had just gone to pick up some of his stockmen and Kirk, one of his sons came out and asked, “Mum-Hilary, where Dad gone?” His sons are stockmen in their twenties and I was surprised. While I was waiting for *Kulthangar* on Monday 24 September 2001, I noticed a well-worn photograph of my daughter Sophia in *Bulthuku*’s photograph album among the other family photographs.

## The Spirit World

I also spent considerable time with *Bulthuku*'s mother, Elsie Roughsey. In 1998 I conversed with Elsie many times on her front veranda about the *jindermendaa* (the green leaf spirit people). I told her about my experiences and she told me about her experience as a teenager when a rainbow spirit man asked her to elope with her (*Personal Communication*, 8 September, 1998). Elsie had previously written that "As the old people say they [the unseen people or spirit people] look real human, but they hide themselves away and live altogether in the bush. They are real 'dinky di' people no doubt" (1984, p. 116).

The *Kunhanhaamendaa* believe that the spirit world is an actual tangible reality, which harbours the Ancestral spirits. They see the temporal and spirit world operating in a parallel manner. The ancestral energies exist at the same time, but in a different dimension. From their conversations with the *Kunhanhaamendaa*, Memmott and Horsman (1991) argue, "The spirit people are generally believed to be deceased members of the *Lardil* [sic] tribe, who live in a similar life style to the living people, but who are eternally and immortally in the Dreamtime dimension" (p. 113).

It is quite usual and normal for many of the Elders and Lawmen to have visions, although many people hear them rather than see them. I describe the experiences of two Elders and Margaret in regard to the spirit world. *Milmajah*'s is a Christian experience, which is not unusual for the Elders, while *Birdibir*'s experience relates to a totemic spirit. *Milmajah*'s spiritual life was probably his most important sphere of action and his visions contributed substantially to his career as a professional artist. A story that *Milmajah* told me highlights this point. He has told me this story twice and the versions were identical. This is what he told me:

When I was small I seen an angel come from heaven. Mum sent me up to the camp where her grandmother lived. She was a good old Christian woman. I went up with damper and tea, sweet tea and meat. Little children pull up and have their mind on something else and I see little tadpole in the

swamp. My grandfather Sandy Scholes had all these Slim Dusty records. I heard that music and it's really off, but this was a beautiful sound – it felt like lifting me off the earth. Sound of harp. It might be recorded in heaven I thought. I looked up and saw in distance, through inner vision. When I look up I see this object moving down; long golden hair with hands out. The angel had beautiful skin, beautiful white robes. It come down and take a soul to heaven. The soul of old Kitty Bell. Little children squeal when they see anything like that and I dropped the food and I ran straight to my mother's legs and I grabbed her. A few minutes later I could hear wailing down other end of the lane. (*Personal Communications*, 29 September, 2000; 1 May, 2002).

When Margaret read through the material about *Milmajah's* visions and *Kulthangar's* dreams, she laughed and said, “Mmm. Dreams and visions. The parents teach these things to kids. My mother and grandmother, *Wanilga* (means Light), teach us these things when we lived on the Nicholson [River]. Those old ladies had a lot of knowledge of the world, even though they didn't go to school” (*Personal Communication*, 15 May, 2002).

Margaret's statement indicates that visions were normal knowledge for remote Aboriginal people and part of the curriculum that was taught to children as a practice. *Birdibir* also told me information that confirmed that belief in the spirit world as a tangible reality is a normal part of education for tribal people:

When men go through Law they go out to their land. Our land at Sydney Island and we see *Warrenby*, the Wallaby Man. He great big fella. He half-wallaby and half-man. I seen him. He about seven feet tall. He lives just near sacred tree... The spirit people keep our land alive. We speak to them in language.

Women not allowed to come out there. We can talk about it with you, but you must stay home if we take our brother, Ken. Teachers must never go out there without us. Too dangerous. Send women mad. (*Personal Communication*, 15 May, 2002).

The belief in sacred trees, that *Birdibir* talks about, that are charged with the immortal vitality of the local totemic ancestor has been discussed at length by both Strehlow (1971) about the *Aranda* people and by anthropologist Hume (2002). White suggests that Paddy Compass *Namadbara* from Arnhem Land, who was “ ‘number one’ *marrkidbu* or clever man of the highest rank” (cited in Hume, p. 116), had a special relationship with and could communicate with the spirit in a sacred tree. White cites Paddy as saying about the tree, “It bin sing out. He just like a phone. That singing out him bin wake me up. [H]im bin pick up that man. He was a big man, like a gorilla. Him [the tree] like a spotlight. Him [the sacred tree] can’t kill, but that tree, him give me power. I know that tree got power” (cited in Hume, 2002, p. 10).

According to White, Paddy’s experience with the sacred tree had a revelatory impact, as after the incident he would not enter into disputes with anyone the way he used to (cited in Hume, 2002). In relation to *Birdibir*’s description and warning to teachers about the Wallaby Ancestor, *Warrenby* and the sacred tree, and Paddy *Namadbara*’s narrative, Hume’s statements are relevant. She maintains, “There are many ways of looking at religious and mystical experiences... [and] if these experiences are reduced to scientific analysis only the essence of the experiences of others is sadly neglected” (2002, p. 176). She also states, “to experience different realities is a normal human ability” (2002, p. 175). Anthropologist Turner’s (1994) argument after her own spiritual experience in Africa is also pertinent to *Birdibir*’s narrative:

Researchers can fight to establish legal and social rights for Indigenous groups they have spent a lifetime studying, but if they refuse to admit there may be a validity in the indigenous religious

experience of other realities... they are refusing to recognise Indigenous people as 'coevals.' (p. 91).

This belief in the spirit world also extends to the 'bush world' that I came from, so I felt comfortable with the senior *Kunhanhaamendaa's* stories of the spirit world as a tangible reality. As a bush person I had heard many people telling stories of seeing lights and spirit people in outback regions, but this is often treated with scepticism and people are usually loathe to speak about their experiences. But Kozicka (1994) reported an experience which was too traumatic for some 'bush' people to be silent about, when he commented, "Some shooters and drovers had no qualms in admitting that they have cried or wept when they encountered the [Min Min] lights" (p. 1). Chalker (2002) and Moravec (2001) admit that there have been sightings of the Min Min Lights now for nearly a century at Boulija, and even the sceptics are convinced that the phenomenon really exists. Similar lights have also been seen at Kynuna (Kozicka, 1994), only a few miles away from the pastoral property where I was raised. Cohen and Somerville (1990) also state that the Min Min Light has also been observed on numerous occasions by the Aboriginal inhabitants of Ingelba, a once-thriving Aboriginal community located 80 kilometres south of Armidale, New South Wales. Cohen and Somerville (1990) relate a sense of an ever present localised spirit world, which is expected to make itself manifest at any time in its own characteristic way. "The most characteristic expression [of the local spirit world] at Ingelba, are the min min lights" (Cohen and Somerville, p. 86) or "spirits that protect" (p. 19). The authors emphasise that the Ingelba Aboriginal people would not tell these stories of the spirit world unless there were a majority of "believers" (p. 81) present when the stories were being related.

My adopted relatives also tried to protect me from any dangers in the spirit world. Margaret was terrified every time that I had to drive over the White Mountain area between Torrens Creek and Pentland on the Charters Towers-Hughenden road – a long stretch with virtually no habitation for two hundred and forty kilometres. She was adamant that, "*gardagella* [yowies or giant hairy men] prowled around [the area] and take women away. Don't you drive around there after ten at night, girlie!" she admonished me. "*Gardagella* live up there. He real,"

she told me with her eyes protruding (*Personal Communication*, 20 November, 2000). When I asked her, “Are they like the giant *quinkan* Dick Roughsey wrote about?” she nodded. Margaret was not alone in believing in the “*gardagella*.” Her warning was no surprise, as I had been warned by a number of truck drivers not to stop at night at the White Mountain Lookout, near Pentland. Sightings of “terrifying hairy creatures” by numerous truck drivers have been documented (Macrae, 1999, p. 1). There have also been numerous sightings of giant hairy men reported by the media in recent years (Navarre, 1993; Kearney, 1999; Anderson, 2000). Raynal (1985), Bayanov (1985) and Becker (1985) also argue that the wild man of Aboriginal and Anglo cosmologies (Groves, 2000) is seen as a near human being by Aboriginal and pioneer Anglo-European people, and Aboriginal people have always believed they existed in the Eastern mountain ranges (Walker, 2000; Gilroy, 2001). To safeguard the giant hairy men who protect a sacred area, Russell Walker (2000), an Elder of the *Gumbaynggir* people of the Coffs Harbour area told *The Advocate*, a Coffs Harbour newspaper, that the National Parks and Wildlife has agreed to erect signs asking people not to climb the *Nunguu Miiral* Aboriginal Area Mountain. Walker (2000) said, “A lot of people who go up there get sick. The hilltop is a men’s only area. The *Barga* hairy men (like whitefellas call Yowie) [who live up there] are the protectors of the sacred golden kangaroo dreaming site. The older [Aboriginal] people tell the younger people not to go up there” (p. 1).

I had also spent a month in 1983 with *Yuin* elder, *Gaboo* Ted Thomas and *Burnum Burnum* and their family at Wallaga Lakes Aboriginal community and they spent many nights talking about their experiences with the spirit world. *Gaboo* was not happy about us being up on Mumbler Mountain after nightfall because he was worried that giant hairy men would take another woman and myself. *Gaboo*’s wife, Ann Thomas says, “Aboriginal people feel these things... the ancestors are all around us... we are bought up to live with my culture and not to fight against it” (Ann Thomas in Chittick and Fox, 1977, p. 140).

*Kulthangar* and I also spent considerable time discussing the spirit world. In February 2001, when he was thinking about initiating Ken. He told me, “I don’t know that the whitefella, Ken should be initiated because he can’t see the Light. He got fear. I can tell” (*Personal Communication*, 15 January, 2001).

When I spoke to *Kulthangar* about analysing this statement we realised there were a number of levels on which he was speaking. He was speaking metaphorically, in that he recognised that “he has seen the light” of wisdom as opposed to being ignorant and naive. He told me after he was ‘delivered’ from drinking by a visiting pentacostalist evangelist, “I see the light like St. Paul [on the road to Damascus].” He told me that, “Pastor Jessie, he drive that spirit of drinking out of me. I had a six pack [of beer] in each hand when I went to the service. I haven’t had a beer since” (*Personal Communication*, 20 May, 2002). He was speaking on a spiritual level that is well attested by anthropologists working with Australian Indigenous people.

On the second level *Kulthangar* related a vision he had after he was delivered by Pastor Jessie on his first visit to Mornington Island, a dream that continued for three nights in 1998:

This vision that stopped me drinking, Hilary. I was in a little boat. I wanted to get across the channel to the others. *Bulthuku* pulled the dinghy with me in it; swimming along in the dark. I saw a big boat go past with people yakkying out. I saw a light on the hill of the island and my wife pulled me straight there. She never drunk grog. I said, ‘*Bulthuku*, I want to give up drinking.’ That light really put me on my feet. It was my ancestors that gave me that dream. Part of my culture is that people have visions. When you have a vision it puts you straight. I now a vision to the people. I become their light. (*Personal Communication*, 12 June, 2001).

While he mixes pentacostalist Christian beliefs with his tribal beliefs both religions have a strong belief in the tangible spirit world. *Kulthangar*, *Bulthuku*, *Wuhnun*, Johnny and the Grannies go to church each week, yet still keep their own Law-based spiritual beliefs. *Kulthangar* told me:

You know I listened to Pastor Jessie when he first came up here because he told our minister Iri that he

have a vision of me in church with smoke coming out of the church. He right you know because we use smoke to clean out a place after someone just died and... had just died. He had vision of me. I have visions too. (*Personal Communication*, 12 June, 2001).

*Kulthangar* uses Pentacostalism with its strong belief in and use of the Holy Spirit, as a form of Christianity that is tapping into the same beliefs he has about the spirit world. They slide into one another. *Kulthangar* told me, in this respect, “Pastor Jessie told me that, ‘The Holy Spirit was the Lord High Spirit, the boss of all the spirits.’ It can boss them all” (*Personal Communication*, 12 June, 2001). McKnight argues a similar point. He also suggests that the missionaries based their power “on spiritual authority... and this made sense to the Aborigines who lived in the shadow of the Dreamtime” (p. 216).

There are a number of anthropologists and academics who have recorded and written material about the ‘light’ as spiritual phenomena. T.G.H. Strehlow (1971) wrote about the Western *Aranda* people who lived where *Kulthangar* has said the *Kunhanhaamendaa* Ancestors, *Marnbil*, *Dewal-Dewal* and *Djin-Djin* came from thousands of years ago. The *Arunta* believe that when “the totemic ancestors awakened from their sleep and broke through to the surface of the earth their birthplaces became the first sites on earth to be impregnated with their life and power and the earth was flooded with their light for the first time” (Strehlow, 1971, p. 15). According to Aboriginal Law “the Dreamtime radiated light and sent out something between 500 and 600 rays. Each light beam sprang from the earth and was lodged in the heart of all tribes” (Matthews, 1979, p. 11).

It is this ‘light’ that *Kulthangar* talked about in such a matter of fact way. Although non-Indigenous people may find *Kulthangar*’s belief in a Light that he can see as a mystical nonsense akin to the Min Min lights (*Personal Communication, Kulthangar*, 12 June, 2001), in North Queensland Aboriginal circles, these beliefs are a way of life. Remote Aboriginal people would never be irreverent enough to question his belief about the ‘Light’: “a Lawman. (a *kadaitcha* man) is a man with whom a sense of ceremony must be observed”

(Dingo, 1998, p. 16). *Kulthangar* has said, “The missionaries called us witch doctor, *kadaitcha* man, but I call usfella ‘clever fella’ and I ‘number one doctor’ ” (*Personal Communication*, 17 May, 2003). The Berndts (1977) also relate that “*karadji* (Lawmen) and dogs are the only ones able to see spirit beings. Among the *Wirradjeri* people where clever men are present *Baiame* appears [and] he is distinguished from other people by the light radiating from him” (p. 151).

When I returned to *Kunhanhaa* on 6 June, 2001 I spent a day with *Kulthangar* and I asked him to be more specific about the Light. He said:

I’m a little bit scared that in fifty or sixty years we’ll only have urban Aboriginal people left with no knowledge of the Law. They will be drunks. The only way they can be a leader, a Lawman, is to give up the rubbish whiteman things, you know grog, tobacco, drugs and violence. The Law is the light, Hilary. I am the light by showing direction to my people. You are the light by showing whitefellas, especially white teachers, knowledge of our culture. I have had two visions, which are about the light and our culture. When I was in *Borrooloola* last week I had a vision that mefella, old *Birdibir*, *Chooloo*, and *Goombungee* were walking across the plain with our spears towards Dugong River. We were blackfella style: no clothes and speaking language. Just near the bank a large group of young Aboriginal people stopped us and warned us in English to turn back. I know that in fifty or sixty years time we will have lost our culture. It is up to the school now to change the habits of the young people: to speak to them before it is too late because they don’t listen to their parents. We can only help them if they listen to us, but if they are drunk, they don’t listen to us. (*Personal Communication*, 6 June, 2001).

My relationship with *Kulthangar* not only suggested the fragility and continually developing nature of relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members of the community, but how important the spirit world was to *Kulthangar*. *Kulthangar* suggested when I conversed with him and *Bulthuku* on 12 January, 2001, that Ken was not a suitable husband for me because he could not see the Light, nor did he believe that Ken had any intention of trying to see the Light. However, when I returned and spoke to *Kulthangar* on 6 June, 2001 with Ken present, *Kulthangar* announced that Ken was his “best friend.” Ken had gone with *Kulthangar*, *Bulthuku*, and a visiting Aboriginal Elder fishing with a group of Aboriginal post-compulsory students walking out to his country in April 2001. *Kulthangar* changed his mind then and decided “Ken was alright” (*Personal Communication*, 6 June, 2001). Up until then *Kulthangar* had not co-operated with the school, but he suddenly saw the school as a potential vehicle to save his culture and Ken was the head of Department at the High School. He then started planning to initiate Ken.

It is difficult to disentangle my relationship with *Kulthangar* and Margaret from the relationship that I enjoyed with my adopted mother-in-law’s brother, *Kangala*. Although I had been introduced to *Kangala* at the canteen in 1999 I had not conversed with him at any great length until March, 2001. Dingo (1998) suggests, “The non-Aboriginal way of greeting whomever you feel like, expecting a friendly response as your right, even from strangers, is way off mark for blackfella [Lawmen] mindful of their cultural duties and responsibilities” (p. 16) and *Kangala* was no exception to the principle. When I met *Kangala* the second time at Margaret’s house, Ronnie Walden (both *Kulthangar*’s and *Kangala*’s cousin), whom I had met previously at *Kulthangar*’s house, pronounced that he had been watching me. Indeed he had been silently watching me when I went to see *Kulthangar* in November 2000, and January and February, 2001. He told *Kangala* that he had been impressed too, and he smiled and looked into my eyes (*Personal Communication*, 2 April, 2001). Ronnie told me, “*Kangala* was reading your mind” (*Personal Communication*, 6 June, 2001). The notion that Elders can ‘read people’s minds is attested by Elkin and Warner. Elkin argues that “Our medicine men assert that they can see or ascertain by invisible means what is happening at a distance and in some cases tell what another person is thinking”

(1944, p. 56). Warner (1937) had previously related the same phenomenon: “Sometimes,” said *Willidjungo*, a *Murngin* medicine man, to Dr. Warner, “I am sitting with a man and I look at his head and I can say to him, ‘You think so and so.’ The man says, ‘How do you know that?’ And I say, ‘I can see inside your mind’ ” (p. 214). *Anangu* Elder Bob Randall (2003) also maintains that Aboriginal people can ‘feel’ and ‘sense’ whether people are caring or not.

When I was formally introduced to *Kangala*, Margaret and I sat under her mango tree, *Kangala* was sitting cross-legged in the dirt with his back to us, because as a brother to Margaret he was not allowed to speak to her (*Personal Communication*, Hills, M., 12 March, 2001). He sat with Ronnie, his *Kangalida* cousin who is also a cousin of *Kulthangar*’s. He sat very upright and proud, but otherwise there was no real indication of who he was. Dingo maintains that, “Traditional Aboriginal people do not display their overall position and power” (1998, p. 14). *Kangala* spoke little English, but spoke five Aboriginal languages: *Lardil*, *Gangalida*, *Yanyula*, *Garawa*, and *Waanyi*. *Kangala* was a major Lawman for the “Top End” Gulf region. He had considerable sacred power and inspired a great deal of respect.

*Kangala* and I mainly communicated in sign language, whilst sitting cross-legged in the dirt. Some months later, both *Kulthangar* and *Kangala* told me that *Kangala* had read my mind as he looked into my eyes (*Personal Communication*, *Kulthangar*, 2 April, 2001; *Gangala*, 12 April, 2001; 20 April, 2001). *Kangala* checked all my moles with Ronnie. This inspection of moles proved that I had the ability to be a visionary, which is very important to be a Law-woman (*Personal Communication*, *Kulthangar*, 12 January, 2001; *Gangala* 12 March, 2001). Elkin (1994) also maintained that Elders, especially a medicine man, had to ‘select’ people to be trained as Law men or women (p. 16). *Gangala*’s pronouncement was interesting when coupled with *Kulthangar*’s request that I come back to Mornington Island and be his “Right-Hand-Man” to support him steering the young men away from drugs and alcohol (*Personal Communication*, 14 January, 2001).

### **“We have a relationship to the Land: She is our mother”**

During the early part of 2002 *Kulthangar* told me, “Our knowledge and relationship with our land is everything. Without our land we are nothing. We fade away and die. The sacred places teach you all you should know. The land feeds you” (*Personal Communication*, 6 June 2001). He also told me, “The land is the basis of all *Kunhanhaa* life: everything connected” (*Personal Communication*, 15 January, 2001). According to Memmott and Horsman (1991), “The cultural base of the *Kunhanhaamendaa* is the land” (p. 369) and the traditional relationship to the land is the basis of Aboriginal life. Memmott and Horsman (1991) quote Mornington Islander Larry Lanley, a former shire Chairman who states, “We need the land to be Aboriginal in our minds” (p. 367).

The Elders’ reverence of life and the natural world is part of the interconnectedness of all life for Aboriginal people. The land provides everything – not only food and shelter, but also connection to the sacred. To the *Kunhanhaa* Elders the land is sacred, but certain spots in particular, known as the sacred sites, give spiritual power to the land. Deborah Bird Rose (2000) writes about sacred sites:

A site is a place. The power that created the world is located here and when a person walks to this place, they put their body in the locus of creation. The beings that made and make the world have left something there-their body, their power, and their consciousness, their Law. To stand there is to be known by that power. (p. 40).

This is an important issue because the Elders are very angry with outsiders trespassing on their country, stumbling over sacred sites, perhaps damaging or destroying sites or taking things from the site, which can cause great harm. The sacred (Ancestral power) which one contacts on a story place is a hinge between orders of being: people, time, the earth, water, space, plants, birds, everything. A story place is an “enduring connection between foundational creation and current life” (Bird Rose, 2000, p. 41). The work of sustaining the world is ongoing for the Elders. Bird Rose describes this work as a “reflexive moral relationship of care

between all things, both sentient and non-sentient: human beings, animals, sun, earth, wind, rain. In sum, all that is, is included in this system” (1987, p. 260). A “site is a part of a living network of other sites and when a site is destroyed [or damaged] another connection between creation and the life of today is lost” (Bird Rose, 2000, p. 40). The Elders conduct rituals and ceremonies to keep the connection, but they must also stop ignorant people from creating damage (*Personal Communication, Kulthangar* 16 January, 2001).

*Birdibir*'s story illustrates the Elders' point that outsiders must listen and carry out all that the Elders say if the Elders allow them to go to a story place. Here is *Birdibir*'s warning:

Out off the shore of Sydney Island is a story place. We call it 'Fire and Jelly Fish Place'. You got to swim out there like *bulibul*, diamond stingray. Out there little black stones like black marbles. I told old \*\*\*, 'Don't touch 'em and don't take 'em away or we all be cursed.' Anyway he didn't listen and he musta taken one of those little black marbles. So, cause of what he took his place burn down. He lost wife. I got sick. Until he return that little stone out there to Fire and Jellyfish place we still have curse. Those smart arses who think they have more knowledge than us Big Country Lawmen don't know how dangerous these places can be. (*Personal Communication, 17 May, 2002*).

*Milmajah* sat with us while *Birdibir* told me the story and he warned me sternly, “That story true. I know how dangerous these places are. Only initiated men safe at these places. They know what to do. The Elders words are not idle flapping of lips. Whitefellas must listen if they work on our island. Every word is important and carries meaning” (*Personal Communication, 17 May, 2002*). *Birdibir* spent two days with me telling me the importance of the story places on Sidney Island on my last visit. I sensed desperation, because the Elders talked so much about the deaths of many of the Elders, and about their sense that time is

running out. Although as a woman I cannot go to most of the story places, he passed on much knowledge to me because he knew, “[I] would treasure it because [I] came from the bush” (*Personal Communication*, 16 May, 2002).

Marker (1999) writing from a First Nation American perspective affirms, “the fundamental importance of the land as an [Indigenous] epistemic centrepiece” (p. 23). To the *Yolngu* people of Arnhem Land, “land and waters consisted in part of the bodily substance of the... ancestors” (Keen, p. 103).

When we talked about this *Kulthangar* argued:

You know the land when you live from it. It's like my mother. Land is here to feed us. *Kunhanhaa* means never take more than your share. Don't be greedy. Some teacher catch our fish. Don't ask. Fill their freezer; don't share. The land watch them. A lot of people when they go to a strange land... have strange feeling. Bushman will know land watching him. City fella, maybe he not even feel anything. Numb from living in city. Those whitefellas from the cities say how much you sell your land for. But if I got money and no land I am poor. Our land is everything. We care for the land. Our land care for us. (*Personal Communication*, 28 September, 2001).

*Kulthangar* situated the land as a living entity, capable of thought, vision, reasoning ability and feeling and emphasises the land as a source of life giving food. He also emphasises the concept of a mother feeding its children. The Elders see the land as a vital part of their life. They have a precious relationship to it. As their mother it provides their substance. It provides knowledge and a link to the sacred *Mirndiyan* Law. They see many Europeans as intruders who trespass on the land without any respect.

Hume (2002) has argued that, “if one becomes attuned to the environment over a long period of time, one will eventually ‘hear’ the land talking to them” (p. 118). *Kulthangar* has spoken about the land watching people. Snyder (1990)

documents a similar sense of the spiritual intelligence of the land when he writes about a *Crow* Elder from Montana as saying:

I think if people stay somewhere long enough, even white people, the spirits will begin to speak to them. It's the power of the spirits coming up from the land. The spirits and the old powers aren't lost, they just need people to be around long enough and the spirits will begin to influence them (p. 39).

I spoke to *Kulthangar* about Snyder's comment and he said, "I told you before those Red Indians just like us. What they say is true" (*Personal Communication*, 21 April, 2003). One could speculate and conclude that this is one of the reasons why the Elders want the teachers to stay many years on a community and come out with them camping to their particular country.

*Kulthangar* told me that, traditionally, the Ancestors handed down, each country to one particular family with the *dulmadas* of each country having alternating skin groups as the country was passed to succeeding generations (*Personal Communication*, 20 May, 2002). Land can be inherited, given for a lifetime or gained through being born at a particular spot. However, with knowledge being lost as the Elders die, this ownership in the Lawful Aboriginal sense is being disputed. Disputes over the 'ownership' of units of land and the boundaries of land has been an ongoing source of conflict in the community. According to *Kulthangar* and *Birdibir* there is a problem with people who do not have a grounded traditional right to land when they make a claim to *Kunhanhaa* land (*Personal Communication*, 18 May, 2002). One of these traditions is that land is only passed down through the male line and the mother only holds the country. The women cannot pass land on. *Kulthangar* and *Birdibir* are referring to people who can only make a claim to land because of Lawful discontinuities and because of historical disruptions, such as people being brought to the island in mission times. This clashes with the traditional understanding of land rights which is grounded in an understanding of *Kunhanhaa* Law and the relationship between the land, the Law, kinship and the good order of daily life.

## **Conflict in the Community**

One of the key features that the Elders speak about is the conflict and disorder in present day *Kunhanhaa*. The Elders contend that violence, drunkenness and the erosion of Lawful society is part of the context that I am dealing with in a community that has been badly disturbed because of 88 years of terrible disruptions into the fabric of their traditional life. This conflict involves key contributors who historically disrupted the order of *Kunhanhaa* society and this disruption has enormous ramifications for the Elders now. The many human contributors were non-Aboriginal people, particularly violent, lawless European settlers, who arrived in the Gulf area in the 1860s, the missionaries who came in 1914 and an influx of foreign (mainland) Aboriginal tribes, many of whom were enemies, who were sent to the Mornington Island mission. Traditionally, Aboriginal Law regulated conflicts. The Law, in its integrity, routinely provided a way of dealing with all conflicts – normally, those that routinely arose in daily life, but in principal, any new conflict that could have arisen. The colonial history, the intrusion of non-Aboriginal people into their society, government regulation and the enforcement of non-Aboriginal laws by the missionaries have nearly destroyed the Law in all its facets. The Elders say that Aboriginal men and women left the island to work on the mainland and returned home with changed ways: love of alcohol, tobacco and white man's ways, but more importantly a disregard for Lawful knowledge. Tension is now ever present between the Lawmen and those who uphold and keep the Law and other people, especially non-Aboriginal, who contest the old regime. The traditional order was represented by correct marriages, the kinship structure, respect for the Elders, respect for the land and the traditional owners of the land and respect for the spirit world and the Laws that were passed down by the Ancestors. These traditional ways are contested by quite different bases of social organisation represented by white society.

Every time I returned to the island the conflicts and complexities appeared more apparent. Because I have been there so long some *Kunhanhaa* people grew to trust me more and told me things that upset them. One anonymous participant has said to me twice, "Why are you asking about the teachers and the school? You should be trying to fix up the divisions in our community" (*Personal*

*Communications*, Anon. F, 26 September, 2001; 3 May, 2002). The reasons for the conflicts are myriad and complex. *Kulthangar* and Anon F maintained, on 3 May, 2002; that European interference from the time of the missionaries has caused the conflicts by rupturing the ideal *Kunhanhaamendaa* Law-based state of social organisation. On many occasions participants told me that conflicts were caused because of old and ongoing intertribal and interfamily fights, gossip, drunkenness and substance abuse, power plays, and differences between between drinkers and non-drinkers, the haves and have nots, local people and ‘mainlanders’, the permanent population and itinerant workers and over externally and internally caused injustices (*Personal Communications*, Williams, J., *Wuhnun*, 20 September, 2000; *Kulthangar*, 16 January, 2001; *Kurnungkur*, 15 May, 2002; Clara, 18 May, 2002; *Jekarija*, 22 September, 2002; *Dilmirrur*, Roughsey, U., 15 September, 2000).

McKnight (1999) maintained that *Kunhanhaa* society was never homogenous and this lack of homogeneity, for many reasons has created many internal conflicts. Rowley (1966) suggests that concentrating Aboriginal people on church-controlled missions removed an unwanted minority to remote areas “out of sight and out of mind”, ostensibly affording them protection from outside immorality while attempting to influence their inner attitudes and conduct. However, this has created problems, because some of the mainland tribes (and the Bentinck Islanders) who were herded together on Mornington Island Mission were traditionally enemies. Institutionalisation, enforced removal and congregation of enemy tribes and nomadic factions who were expected to live peacefully in a village have created conflicts (Cawte, 1972; McKnight, 1999).

*Kulthangar* situates Captain Cook as the archetype of problems and all white invaders from 1770 to the present day who cause internal and external conflict whether it be disease, murder, alcohol, miscegenation or unjust and immoral laws (*Personal Communication*, 26 September, 2001). *Kulthangar* held, “The moment that Captain Cook stuck that British flag into our soil, our land; it was like sticking a knife into our heart. He bought guns [and] diseases we were defenceless against; grog, laws, all the things that muck up our world” (*Personal Communication*, 28 September 2001). Captain Cook is portrayed by many Aboriginal people as a symbolic figure of “destruction” (Saylor, n.d., p. 22) and

“the key figure of invasion” (Bird Rose, 1991, p. 17). Having been a stockman on the mainland in his younger years and having “told the truth about tribal Law in the High Court on *Murrandoo* [Yanner]’s behalf” *Kulthangar* spoke from his own experience of “Captain Cook’s law” (*Personal Communication*, 18 May, 2002). A Victoria River Aboriginal stockman like *Kulthangar*, Hobbles *Danaiyarri* positions, “Captain Cook as the archetype of all early Europeans, who initiates and establishes the law that governs relationships between Aboriginal people and white people” (cited in Bird Rose, 2001, p. 62).

The Elders suggest that the corrosion of their sacred Law, in particular includes the wilful undermining of their Aboriginal languages, the perpetuation of wrong marriages and the disturbance of family life by the dormitory system. They say this has created the psychological and physical damage in the Elders’ generation and the succeeding generations. An anonymous conversationalist highlighted the problems that result from the ‘dormitory days’:

The old fights from dormitory days and family fights live on at the school in the form of bullying and teasing which cause absenteeism, but the teachers don’t understand these old fights because they don’t know our history and they don’t understand Aboriginal culture. (*Personal Communication*, Anon. G, 31 August, 2001).

There are a number of issues encapsulated in this statement. The words “old fights from dormitory days and family fights” signal the conflict that has been caused on *Kunhanhaa* by the removal of Aboriginal children and people from *Yanggarl*, *Yolgnu*, *Yanyula*, *Yukalda*, *Garawa*, *Waanyi-Garawa*, *Kaidilt* and *Minkin* tribes to Mornington Island mission. Although many dormitory children were adopted by men such as William Peters, John *Dilmirrirr*, *Warabudgerra*, Kenny Roughsey, Larry Lanley, Henry and Gully Peters – acts which indicated compassion and kindness for outsiders – the missionaries forced dormitory teenagers to make wrong marriages with “wrong skin” people and people from different tribes. This has caused cultural problems where people do not know their own ‘skin’.

Some dormitory people still worry about being outsiders (*Personal Communications*, Anon. D, 15 September, 2000; 2 April, 2002) and some Elders still see some *Kunhanhaamendaa* whose ancestors came from the mainland as outsiders (*Personal Communications, Birdibir, Kulthangar*, 21 May, 2002). This has created disunity in the past and still does.

Another problem that “old fights” signal is that of friction between the *Kunhanhaa* residents who have no European ancestry and those who have mixed European ancestry. Cawte (1972) states that “European men miscegnated with Aboriginal women to produce what Top-End Aboriginal people call yeller-fellers” (1972, p. 63). Huffer and Roughsey (1980) also suggest that children who were produced from this miscegnation are not fully accepted by all the *Kunhanhaamendaa*, and that this has contributed to divisions in *Kuhanhaa* society. A number of *Kunhanhaa* participants informed me that some of the “yeller-fellers” returned to their original homeland on the mainland in the fifties so they would not be under “the Act”, but then came back and tried to take power and steal land when “the Act” was abolished (*Personal Communications*, Anon. J., 10 June, 2001; *Birdibir*, 17 April, 2002; *Kulthangar*, 26 April, 2002; 20 May, 2002; Anon. H, 27 April, 2001). *Kulthangar* has said on many occasions that “the yeller-feller and blackfella brawl is still not finished up” (*Personal Communications*, 15 January, 2001; 26 September, 2001; 17 April, 2002; 20 May, 2002; 8 June, 2002). In fact, one anonymous participant told me, “Some of the conflict over land, and family fights that this has caused lives on to this day at school” (*Personal Communication*, Anon. F, 17 September, 2000).

Clara, a *dulmada* of *Balilyia*, a Top End *Kunhanhaa* Country told me in regard to the original countries:

There was a delicate balance between the people of the Leeward (Western) and Windward (Eastern) side of the island even before Europeans arrived. Early days, we had to wait at the border, light a fire and make smoke signals to get permission to cross into somebody else’s land or we could be speared. (*Personal Communication*, 29 April, 2001).

Memmott and Horsman (1991) also state that there has always been a “traditional division between the *Jirrkaramben* [Leeward] people and the *Larumben* [Windward] people” (1991, p. 203). In fact McKnight (2002) argues that the Windward and Leeward moieties were enemies. He states that until recently there were still spectacular fights between the Windward and Leeward people (McKnight, 1986). Most Mainlanders and *Yangkaal* people identify with the Leeward people.

The conflict between Windward and Leeward people was reflected in the story of the killing of the missionary Hall by Peter of *Kanba* (a Windward country) in 1917 and the support of the white authorities by many Leeward Aboriginal people. An anonymous participant told me that, when they had the chance, the *Kunhanhaamendaa* killed their enemies. He said, “There are dozens of bones up at the ‘Top End’ of the island; dozens of them scattered all over the ground. You can pick up the skulls. These were Malacca people who our people killed. They were enemies who were killed because they were going to take our women” (*Personal Communication*, Anon. N, 30 September, 2000).

However, ever since the police rounded up ten Windward men associated with the killing of Hall and took Leslie Shilling away to Stuart Creek Jail in 1935 for an internal tribal killing, there has been a fear of the ‘white’ authorities. The police are still a visible presence at *Kunhanhaa* to quell internal conflict (Australian Race Discrimination Commissioner, 1993). Consequently, on this level, the *Kunhanhaamendaa* cannot use the traditional methods to deal with disorder. The Elders cannot use the threats of ritual spearing or killing for anyone who steps out of line with impunity any longer (McKnight, 2002). And although the threat of sorcery was used against initiated men who told women or non-initiated boys sacred knowledge (McKnight, 2002) missionaries Wilson and McCarthy (1988) did all they could to stop this. Some people say sorcery is still used (*Personal Communications*, Brookedale, I., 30 September, 2001; *Chuloo*, *Goomungee*, *Jekarija*, 15 November, 2002).

Non-Aboriginal law is also a source of conflict. The Elders want power back to work with the police, as custodians of traditional Law, but another faction only want European Law (*Personal Communications Kulthangar*, *Milmajah*, *Kurnungkur*, Calder, Wilfred and Johnny 26 September, 2001; 20 May, 2002). In

fact *Kulthangar* told me, “These factions gossip and spread rumours around the community and no one really hears what is really going on, the real truth” (*Personal Communication*, 20 May, 2002).

*Kurnungkur* argued that “The issue of conflict between factions has become steadily worse in the last few years” (*Personal Communication*, 21 May, 2002). Some of the Elders told me with a mixture of amazement and anger that, “The Elders have been called a faction by ignorant people” (*Personal Communications, Kulthangar*, 8 June, 2002; *Milmajah*, 8 June, 2002); a “group of frail old men by one power-hungry woman” (*Personal Communication, Kulthangar*, 2 June, 2002) and they have been called “mad by some other people” (*Personal Communication, Kurnungkur, Kulthangar*, 25 June, 2002). There are even factions who argue over education (*Personal Communications, Bush, L., Marmies, W.*, 26 September, 2001; *Dilmirrur, Koorabuba, B. and Watt, J.*, 20 November, 2002; *Kulthangar, Kurnungkur*, 21 May, 2002). There are now many committees and within the committees there are factions and that factional discord causes constant disunity in the community.

Some Aboriginal elder women have also revealed that the “younger people were taught to be ashamed of the old ways” (Bell, 1998, p. 448) in the assimilationist era and the mission days. The Elders argue that the missionaries encouraged the women to take power from the men (*Personal Communication, Peters, P., Peters, M., Kulthangar, Milmajah*, 27 September, 2001). Although Chaseling (1957) was speaking about *Yolgnu* society, nearly 50 years ago, his comment is also true of present European-run *Kunhanhaa* society, and the male *Kunhanhaa* Elders are very angry about this state of affairs. Chaseling (1957) says, “Woman’s influence is more important than is popularly imagined” (p. 63). However, the male Elders angrily state that the women have no ritual power and no spiritual knowledge. “Many of the women rely on ‘white’ forms of power while the men hope for a return of tribal Law where the Elders take power” (*Personal Communications, Moon, T.*, 17 May 2002; *Kulthangar and Peters, P.*, 29 September, 2001; *Milmajah, Birdibir, Kurnungkur, Robinson, R.*, 17 May, 2002). This causes the Lawmen to seethe in resentment at their sense of psychological emasculation. Paulie, Matthew and *Kulthangar* told all me, with no uncertainty, “They [the women] are less than children. They are nothing to us. We

should have all the power” (*Personal Communications*, 27 September, 2001). Another Elder stated, “How can those women up at the school discipline the initiated young men, they can’t even look after their own children. We Elders should be stepping in” (*Personal Communication*, Marmies, W., 27 September, 2001). But one anonymous participant stated, “The men might hate it, but them women have a lot of political power in the community” (*Personal Communications*, Anon. J, 10 June, 2001). McKnight (2002), Rowley (1966) and Cawte (1972) contend that the present children are the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of institutionalised dormitory people who were not taught to be parents and while the parents are fighting the children have become undisciplined and lawless.

The sense of crisis is also reflected in a communication failure between the Elders, Aboriginal community members and government employees (*Personal Communications*, Kulthangar, Milmajah, Goodman, C., Kurnungkur, Moon, T., Birdibir, 17 May, 2002). Trudgen (2000) also noted about the *Yolgnu* Elders, “when community elders lose control, lifelong dreams turn to nought, meaningful employment is lost and people experience a crisis in living” (p. 56). Just as *Kulthangar*, *Milmajah* and *Jekarija* agreed with *Djiniyini Gondarra*’s previous comments they also agreed with this comment. In 1978 when the state government set up community councils and these councils demanded elections and as Trudgen (2000) stated about the *Yolgnu* people:

elections were and are a very foreign concept to *Yolgnu*... the new Balanda processes were only understood by some of the younger Western educated *Yolgnu*. Many Balanda now living and working on communities found it easier to work with young *Yolgnu*. Some of these young people had really been pumped up at college. They were told when you return to your people you will be able to do a lot for your people. (pp. 55-56).

Trudgen (2000) has also suggested that some Aboriginal people are discounting their Elders and are ashamed of traditional knowledge because of

ineffectual non-Aboriginal education. *Kulthangar* constantly said the same thing and added the effects of the media (*Personal Communications*, 15 January, 2001; 26 September, 2001; 1 October, 2001). Trudgen (2000) maintains that many *Yolgnu* consider their traditional ways and knowledge “old hat”, with no real value in the modern world.

The lack of unity causes problems in that the whole community has become faction ridden and the sense of community unity has been lost. The power plays by women and those who have mixed-Aboriginal ancestry against those whose male ancestors originally came from *Kunhanhaa* before 1914 means that senior levels of authority lack unity and therefore lack strength. McKnight (2002) relates that Dick Roughsey was so disturbed by the power plays of the Mainlanders and those Aboriginal people with mixed-descent that he campaigned to have them sent back to the mainland. This was never achieved because the Mainlanders and those of mixed descent rioted soon after (McKnight, 2002).

This was an outward airing of the gossip that is part of Mornington Island politics. This internal gossip also causes conflict. This also would have been settled in traditional ways by “square up” fights, women being beaten by their husbands and recalcitrant youths being severely punished or killed by the Elders (Memmott and Horsman, 1991; Roughsey, 1971). But now, McKnight states authoritatively after his thirty year ethnographic study of the *Kunhanhaamendaa*, that “Mornington Island is a fragmented community which is at a distinct disadvantage when dealing with European Australians... and any authority that an elder person may possess is rapidly dissipated” (1999, p. 67). He reveals that:

the *Lardil* [sic], like many, if not all, Australian tribes, are aggressively egalitarian and stress autonomy. They seek to pull each other down so no one is better than the others are. Capable, industrious, and well-meaning people are often subject to acrimonious criticism and the internal politics is quite devastating. (1999, p. 67).

*Kunhanhaa* is not only a remote community, but also an island, which isolates the community and gossip in such a situation becomes distorted. Nearly

fifty years ago, missionary Chaseling (1957) commented on women's gossip causing conflict. He argued, "Women join in camp disputes: indeed their gossip can often cause them and their voices can often be heard above the din of shouting men and howling dogs" (Chaseling, 1957, p. 63).

The indirect follow ons from the loss of Lawful knowledge and personal family care not only include social disorder, but also substance abuse, violence and a range of endemic illnesses. The presence of alcohol further disempowers the Elders. With the introduction of the canteen (hotel) to the community in 1976 alcohol and its destructive effects of violence, foetal alcohol syndrome, alcohol related diseases, moral decay and suicide became a permanent reality. Many of the present children have foetal alcohol syndrome and suffer from the effects of smoking and drugs, but they are also damaged psychologically.

Men such as Dick Roughsey who had worked on cattle properties could drink alcohol after the 1967 Referendum, on the mainland, but it was still not permitted on Aboriginal communities at that stage (McKnight, 2002). After the canteen was built the presence of alcohol became a contentious issue. Former mayor, Larry Lanley, died of a heart attack while running to the canteen to try to quell a riot (McKnight, 2002), while the next mayor, Nelson Gavenor, said Aboriginal people had the right to drink (McKnight, 2002). Australian Race Discrimination Commissioner, Irene Mott (1993) suggested that the community of Mornington Island was "alcohol driven." (p. 1).

*Kulthangar*, the next mayor, who stopped drinking in 1997, hated people drinking alcohol after that. He believed that it was destroying the people and the community (*Personal Communications*, 5 September, 2000; 15 January, 2001; 22 September, 2001; 8 June, 2002) He told his wife *Bulthuku* and me:

You two are strong, because you have never drunk alcohol. In my dream *Bulthuku* pull me away form the darkness of white man's drink. It makes us weak. You saw men die from it in the bush, Hilary. They pass out after a night of drinking and they die in the sun. They fall off their horse when they are mustering and no one find them until they are dead. (*Personal Communication*, 15 January, 2001).

*Bulthuku* told me that the community is very concerned about the violence that is caused by alcohol. She told me:

We trying to bring back our boys from prison on parole but a few years ago one of our people who still in prison raped a white nurse. She still in a mental home because of that. I don't want him back. Before alcohol came we never had these problems. We never had suicide either. I can understand why some of the young women teachers are afraid here.  
(*Personal Communication*, 12 May, 2002).

McKnight (2002) concludes, in *From Hunting to Drinking: The devastating effects of alcohol on an Australian Aboriginal community*, that men and women are now literally drinking themselves to death [and]... community life has been destroyed" (p. 115). The Elders say that alcohol is another way of ignoring the old ways. As McKnight says (2002) beer talks louder than the Elders. Contemporary disorder in the community has all but drowned out the voices of the Elders. In fact rather than being drowned out, it is highly possible that they are largely ignored.

### **Conclusion**

The Elders still see themselves in contemporary *Kunhanhaa* life as tribal men within an Aboriginal Law-based society, regardless of the state of turmoil on their island. They see the breakdown of their society (educational, physical, political, moral and spiritual) as being perpetuated by miscegenation, the admission of alien tribes, the infiltration of alcohol, the government and missionaries intruding in the running of their society and the authority of the Elders being removed by ongoing colonialism. They argue that generations of Eastern *Kunhanhaa* Elders have been warriors and yet they also attest their practice of compassion for their fellow man.

According to their sacred Law, *Mirndiyan Law*, the Elders and Lawmen are tribal people and embodiments, custodians and spokesmen for that sacred Law. As tribal men they perceive humanity as part of the circle of life. They perceive the spirit world connecting all life. Therefore they see 'white' people as humans who live on Mornington Island. Thus the 'white' people are included in this sacred circle of life which connects them to the spirit world and the land. The Lawmen believe

that their Law, which has been passed down to them through the Dreamtime Ancestral beings who are eternally present, exists as an eternal guiding force, in fact a living religion. They live by this sacred Law in their daily lives.

*Kunhanhaa* society was structured around kinship relationships. *Kunhanhaamendaa* were related through family or subsection groups, which were generally known as 'skins'. There were eight kinship 'skin' categories and these groups were related to each other and objects in the environment. These objects were known as totems and they were the person's link with the Dreaming Ancestors and the land. The Law has explicit social rules regarding relationships and its basic connotation is of an established order of behaviour. Kinship relationships were a vital part of *Mirndiyan* Law. The Elders talk about the incorporation of outsiders into their kinship system as part of their sacred Law a possibility which as I show in Chapter Five, they would like, ideally, to be able to extend to teachers. Although the Elders expect to be consulted, heard and they expect their wishes to be acted on, in these matters, the Elders are facing lack of respect and lack of acknowledgment of their authority due to factionalism and lack of acknowledgment about *Kunhanhaa* culture by outsiders who work on the island.

This chapter argues that throughout the years of interaction with non-Aboriginal intruders, especially the missionaries who pitted tribe against tribe and took the Elders' authority from them, the Elders and Lawmen of *Kunhanhaa* have upheld their Law and culture. The Lawmen state they are 'tribal men' and as such they have a strong belief in their spirit world as a tangible reality and they believe these spirits do not travel randomly; but they have dwelling places at story places or sacred, Dreaming sites. These sacred, story places are desecrated by noisy, irreverent, trespassing people whom the spirit people regard as strangers. Chapter Five examines the theme of people trespassing, in a more detailed fashion, and more specifically in relation to teachers.

The Lawmen's sacred experiences suggest that 'white' people would connect better spiritually to the land and experience and therefore understand the spiritual dimension better if they were to stay a number of years. Otherwise, the Elders' stories suggest that 'white' people would do well to entertain a spirit of reverence for the land and the interconnectedness for all life on an Aboriginal community.

The examples given of adoptions, in this chapter and Chapter Five serve as models for relationships that the Elders would prefer with 'white' people who come to their island. The Elders give a clear indication that outsiders are only adopted if they are caring; engage in reciprocity; can be trusted and respected; understand and obey the Law and listen to the Elders and spend a great deal of time with them on the Elders' ground. There is a major emphasis on 'coming from the heart', 'feeling' and instincts rather than a logical process of being adopted. The process of my adoption was based on 'feeling', reading my mind, instincts and the knowledge that I had been raised near some of the Elders, who were stockmen on nearby properties. These adoptions are a matter of cultural transformation that serves the purpose of keeping the 'old Law-based ways' existent.

## Chapter 4

### Past Events Live On to Shape the Present

In this chapter I weave in Western and Aboriginal concepts of time and timelessness and past and present. I analyse and synthesise the Elders' stories of their wonderful and romantic days. I explore the Elders' retrospective constructions of themselves in the 1950s and 1960s, as stockmen, in their halcyon days where they have attempted to make time stand still, in their role as Elders now. Nevertheless, the Elders emphasise the enduring presence of Aboriginal Law everywhere and throughout time, past, present and future. *Boori Pryor's* claims about Palm Island, that "the overtones of the past still hover" (1998, p. 81), particularly applies in an isolated closed Aboriginal community such as Mornington Island and the *Kunhanhaa* Elders emphasise that "the past lives on in the present and our memories affect how we think" (*Personal Communications*, Anon. H, 27 April, 2001; *Birdibir, Kulthangar*, 15 January, 2001; *Milmajah*, 8 June, 2002).

Aboriginal academic Marcia Langton (1997) states that Aboriginal-written histories, do not provide a "school textbook version of Australian history, which positioned Aboriginal people as the dark backdrop to the grand adventures of 'explorers'. [Their] account[s] does not tell a history of 'savages' and unnamed 'natives' but [they] re-institute Aboriginal people as human beings... with a knowable past" (p. xi). Similarly, in this chapter, the *Kunhanhaa* Lawmen have taken control of, and re-constructed, their own history. Just as the Elders insist that *Mirndiyan* Law is unchallengeable in terms of its truth claims and paramount in terms of its obligations, their account of their past is part of their culture. From their point of view, as the 'wise ones' of the Law, and custodians of traditional educational authority, on the island, the Elders insist that there is a culture and a history and that they are the embodiments of and proper informants about that culture and history.

Following the logic of their own accounts, this chapter forms a context for the Elders' ideas on relationships with the teachers and the school and their pedagogical preferences by exploring the Elders' concepts of time and the past. Teachers who go to work in remote communities may be unaware of the unwritten history of that community and the part non-Aboriginal people took in that history;

the Elders assert that they need to be aware, so that they might not follow in the shoes of previous teachers who may have made mistakes (Clarke, 2000), but may be seen by the community as like those who were well loved. Accordingly, this chapter documents their stories about past relations, good and bad, with ‘white’ people. I also explore the Elders’ stories because they have told me, “We now speak our stories with our heads held high so teachers understand our history and teach our children with a balanced knowledge” (*Personal Communications, Kulthangar, Birdibir, Kurnungkur*, Robinson, R. and *Milmajah*, 17 May, 2002). Just as Bell (1998) acknowledges reports from her work with the *Ngarrindjeri, Kulthangar, Milmajah, Birdibir*, Clara and Margaret have told me numerous times, “Our stories are from the old people, not books” (*Personal Communications, Birdibir*, 15 April, 2001; 27 September, 2001; 2 May, 2002; Hills, M., 1 September, 2000; 12 September, 2000; 24 September, 2000; *Kulthangar*, 6 August, 2001; 7 August, 2001; 11 September, 2001; *Milmajah*, 15 January, 2001; 18 January, 2001; Reid, C., 15 January, 2001; 17 January, 2001).

Moreton-Robinson (2000) has argued that with the shift of policies of self-determination and self-management Aboriginal people have finally “spoken up for themselves” (p. 5). Bell (1998), too, argued that Aboriginal people moved into active voice at that time and began to publish their own accounts of the past. Bell (1998) maintained that, “in the face of mission repression and state intrusion, the ‘old people’ held onto the only thing which could not be taken from them, their stories, but they were whispered stories not known by the general population of ‘white’ Australia” (p. 423). Her statement is notable because, with the encouragement of Dick’s friend Percy Tresize, Dick Roughsey (1971) and Elsie Roughsey (1982, 1984), wrote and published three accounts that documented the past and contemporary culture of Mornington Islanders in the heyday of the Mornington Island cultural revival. Missionary Doug Belcher made this cultural revival possible and at this time the Presbyterian Church shifted its policies to self-determination for Aboriginal people.

I explore the concept of time in this chapter because time is crucial to understandings of the existence or and relations between present, past and future. In fact, *Kulthangar* told me, “Before whitefella came whitefella-time not important” (*Personal Communication*, 15 January, 2001). Now the participants

define time by such phrases as “early days” (*Personal Communication*, Hills, M., 2 May, 2002), “naughty days” (*Personal Communication*, Reid, C., 21 May, 2002), “Wilson time”, “McCarthy time” or “Belcher time” (*Personal Communication*, Kulthangar, 20 May, 2002).

At the same time, the Elders as song men, Lawmen, and the carriers of ceremony and culture re-enact the Dreaming or *Mirndiyan* Law, so for them, especially, time “was and is everywhen” (Stanner, 1956, p. 51). For the Elders this sacred part of their culture still exists for them when they visit their country’s ‘story places’ or re-enact ceremonies. The sacred, or what Stanner called “the Dreaming”, involves “neither time nor history as we understand them” (1956, p. 51). Hume (2002) suggests that the relationship between ritual time and mundane time is “the relationship between the never changing to the ever changing” (p. 5). “Mundane time involves the events and their significance for the life of the people now that are important not the precise moment at which they happened” (Harris, 1984, p. 20). Harris also documents an Aboriginal student at Batchelor College “saying succinctly ‘Europeans record, Aborigines remember’ ” (1984, p. 18). *Kulthangar* has also told me, “I write down and remember all family tree, all sacred knowledge in a book in my head” (*Personal Communication*, 17 January, 2001).

The Elders have emphasised that this ‘university book’, and this chapter particularly, is about them remembering (*Personal Communications*, Robinson, R., *Kulthangar, Milmajah, Birdibir*, Goodman, C., 17 May, 2002). This chapter documents and analyses how the Elders articulated their frustrations of dealing with non-Aboriginal people who they say intruded into their culture, and their defiance and resistance to these intrusions. The Elders told me that this act of remembering, is more than just idle yarns. It is an act of re-mem-bering, on the part of the Elders, an act of “pulling themselves together”, a constant re-assembling and replacing of memories and cognitions from their ancestors to keep their culture and their people intact (*Personal Communications, Kulthangar, Milmajah* 17 May, 2002). And, as Harris and Malin (1994) and Gool and Patton (1998) also maintain, this re-mem-bering is not just an act of resistance to forgetfulness – to the nothingness and blur of alcoholism, petrol sniffing, learned helplessness and welfare dependency – but a defiant, interactive processing.

### **Why have a chapter on the past?**

The Elders have insisted that their history is part of the cross-cultural knowledge that the teachers should know and that local Aboriginal history is part of the curriculum that should be taught at the school (*Personal Communications, Kulthangar, Milmajah*, Robinson, R., Peters, C., *Birdibir*, 16 May, 2002), and for this reason an historical context chapter is vital to this study. It is not just the *Kunhanhaa* Elders who insist that their history is a vital piece of their culture. In 2000 Education Queensland carried out a major *Review of Education and Employment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples* in Queensland and the review states that one of the contributing factors to its writing was “a limited understanding on the part of school staff of cross-cultural issues and pedagogy” (p. 1). With the support of the South Australian Department for Education, Training and Employment, McInerney, Smyth, Lawson and Hattam (1999) maintain in their study on improving curriculum for an isolated Aboriginal community that the legacy of the past is “non-participation and exclusion [of the local Aboriginal community in Aboriginal education], a pedagogy of authority [and] low expectations of Aboriginal students” (p. 21) and they suggest as the Elders do that “knowing about the lifestyle and customs” (p. 21) of the Aboriginal community helps the teachers make sense of children’s and families’ behaviour. Aboriginal lifestyle and customs includes a vivid awareness of themes of the past continuing in the present.

I have created a general historical argument that says the present cannot be understood without understanding the past. Over and above that argument, in my context with the Elders, there are even stronger imperatives for exploring the past. *Kulthangar* says, *Milmajah* says, *Birdibir* says, Cecil, Wilfred, Ida, Margaret, Clara all say, “The past is still affecting us.” One of the Grannies told me emphatically, “My dear little *gumbin ningin ngerrigen nadam* (you listen to me my dear girl), the past is always in my memory and it affects the next generation” (*Personal Communication*, Anon. H, 15 September, 2001). The senior participants make assertions about the relationship between past and present. They are empirical assertions that “what the missionaries did still effects us now.” In terms

of the sacred/profane binary, they make assertions about profane links. These links are causal, in that they still have effects now.

They also make spiritual links, but these are grounded in what they understand as a different dimension in time: time as eternally present. The past as eternally present is a regular part of their conversations. There is a spiritual link between the past and present. *Kulthangar* agreed with the North American Indigenous people that “memories are marked in the rocks and the trees” and in this way *Kulthangar* makes assertions about these spiritual continuities. He says that not only in terms of statements about his own culture, but in statements about parallels with another Indigenous culture, the First Nations American culture. Alongside these assertions, there are also certain features of Elders’ conversations that do not so much assert as demonstrate the continuities of past and present. *Milmajah*’s statement about a recalcitrant ‘whitefella’, that “He could be speared for that,” involves a slippage from profane or secular time into the spiritual domain which assumes the present balancing of the ancient Law. When *Milmajah* says that he is mobilising that history, the past is there for him, otherwise he cannot make that statement. An Elder could not say, “He could be speared for that” without that Law being present. In fact, in certain parts of the Northern Territory people are still speared for breaking the Law (*Personal Communications, Milmajah, Kulthangar, Chuloo and Birdibir*, 16 May, 2002).

In the secular dimension, the past as eternally present is there in *Kulthangar*’s obsessiveness with truth. It is linked, time and time again, to his experiences with the missionary McCarthy and to being called a liar. There are a number of examples of where things the Elders say now; quite secular things are so tied to the past, as well as just the general narrative. Frequently, when I asked them a question about relationships with the teachers and they told me a story about the missionaries. This is not an assertion about the continuity about past and the present, but it is a demonstration of it.

I ground the Elders’ beliefs about listening and relationships in their stories of the past or the historical information, which they have passed on to me, just as Tuchman (1994) makes a case that, “Any social phenomenon must be understood in its historical context” (p. 18). She argues that “History [is] the story of lived experiences” (1994, p. 23) and that it is “more than the passage of events whose

sequence may be memorised and... the past has continuing relevance for the present” (p. 23). Atwood (1996) maintains history is a European construct rather than an Aboriginal discourse. He states that, “History... is marked... by a sense of anachronism, that is, a sense that the very nature of the past is different to that of the present; a doctrine of linear development or evolution, or, more particularly, a notion of progress; and an emphasis upon human agency and autonomy” (p. viii).

The European belief in their own values and systems as being progressive, evolutionary and useful to all peoples is at odds with the spiritual beliefs and holistic culture of the *Kunhanhaa* Lawmen. Atwood (1996) talks about a secular history that does not go anywhere near the sacred history that the Elders relate and explain. While some of the Elders’ stories, such as *Milmajah*’s story of Battle Mountain, are cause-and-effect secular histories, Atwood’s statement does not capture Joseph’s response when I asked him to elucidate about relationships he wanted between teachers and the community: situating the question and response in the context of the sacred Law and the Creation Ancestors, he said, “Well, you can’t have a relationship with your in-laws. A woman can’t have a relationship with her uncle” (*Personal Communication*, 2 November, 2000).

One can see a number of themes running through the Elders’s stories. The Elders’ stories tell not only of sacred moral codes, but also of injustice, disempowerment, racist issues, dehumanisation, uncompassionate treatment and the unfeeling values of the ‘whitefellas’. *Kulthangar* told me:

Tribal Law is unchanging. Our Law was passed down from the Creation Ancestors to our forefathers and down to us. My father teach me. It is only white man coming that made changes to our lives. When my grandfather see white-pipe-clay-face men and masts [of ships] he knew there would be trouble.  
(*Personal Communication*, 8 June, 2002).

This statement can be read as a mixture of two concepts. It can be read in a colonial context as ‘whitefellas’ bringing chaos, but it also can be read as an expression of the timelessness of time and space when ritual was continually enacted before non-Aboriginal people came. Hume (2000) argues, “Ritual

performance when carried out with purposeful intent, can transport participants to another time and another space” (p. 39). Bird Rose (1987) also maintains that Elders are pivotal actors in the cosmic processes as they are responsible conduits for life “to create a unity of time, life and space” (p. 268). The Elders see non-Aboriginal people’s intrusion into their world as depriving them of this relationship with the eternal.

As *Kulthangar* previously said ‘whitefellas’ not only reduced the Lawmen’s political and religious gerontocratic stature, but bought violence, humiliation, dehumanisation and unthinking injustice on the part of the non-Aboriginal intruders. The stories the Mornington Island Lawmen tell are paralleled by the participants’ stories in Bird Rose’s history. Victoria River Downs Lawman, Riley Young *Winpilin* reveals in Bird Rose’s *Hidden Histories* “the old [Aboriginal] people always warned their young people how to behave around Europeans. They warned, ‘Don’t fight [back, because]... Old men get flogged. Old woman got bashed. They shoot you like a dog and just let you burn on the fire’ ” (cited in Bird Rose, 1991, p. xix). Just as Bird Rose (1991) writes, “When I arrived in Yarralin... people told me stories from the past, linking those stories to the present in order to show the continuities that have made their lives so difficult” (p. xxii). The Lawmen told me their stories to illustrate the need to have productive relationships with non-Aboriginal teachers on the island, but also to show their inherent distrust of certain situations.

I have expanded on the concept that ‘whitefellas’ came to dehumanise whether through education or with guns, in Chapter Five, where I discuss their views regarding curriculum and pedagogy. The theme of “being treated like dogs” or “shot like dogs” comes out in stories by the Elders repeatedly to emphasise the concept of devolution from their original stature of highly spiritually evolved initiated Lawmen to dehumanisation. The whole concept of initiation, for a Lawman was to rise above the fact that a dog or dingo would copulate indiscriminately. The initiated man was bound to be sexually discriminating, because of his cultural and religious values and laws (McKnight, 1999). Many of the Lawmen are ex-stockmen, who say they were treated with dignity in the fifties and sixties. They have also told me that they are still indignant and angry about the 1978 state government takeover of the island. A statement by Aboriginal

Senator Neville Bonner's, in relation to the 1978 takeover of the island, that the Federal government should "help end the paternalistic nonsense" and colonial coercion on Mornington Island. Bonner, who was also an ex-stockman echoed the Lawmen's values of dehumanisation when he said "Kill us like dogs if you can't let us live like men" (cited in Thomas, 1978, p. 5).

The participants also relate a history of colonisation, a history of the Wellesley Islands and the Gulf of Carpentaria area to provide a context for what they say about relationships with the teachers and the government-run school. The Elder's stories contest the Western hegemonic colonial history of what happened to Aboriginal people after 'whitefellas' arrived in Australia. The word 'history' also contains the root word 'story' which denotes oral history and memories that are conveyed orally. *Kulthangar* often argues that he "carries whole books of history written in his head" and that "stupid whitefella could never remember what he has stored in his head" (*Personal Communication*, 17 January, 2001). This is an interesting juxtaposition of terms as he emphasises the role of the tribal-leader carrying his stories [his-stories] of that tribe written in his head.

The Elders' history is not a history as, Langton argues of "the grand adventures of 'explorers' [and] 'savages' and unnamed 'natives' " (1997, p. xi). In contrast, she suggests, Kidd's (1997) work "corrects the ahistoricism which plagues the vision of Australia" (1997, p. xi). The history I trace here reflects Scott's view of history, when she says:

History is inherently political. There is no single standard by which we can identify true historical knowledge... Rather there are contests; more and less conflictual, more and less explicit, about the substance, uses, and meanings of the knowledge we call history... This process is about the establishment [and challenge] and protection [and contestation] of hegemonic definitions of history. (1989, pp. 680-692).

As I listened to the Lawmen I was struck by the essentialism of many of their statements. Although *Kulthangar's* statement, "Whites are brainless. Whites

are heartless... they make you cry” (*Personal Communication*, 21 May, 2002) was made in reference to some of the teachers in the past, I have also heard him call his son-in-law “that silly whiteman” (*Personal Communication*, 26 September, 2001). *Kulthangar*’s essentialist statements could have also been made about other ‘white’ authorities or the ‘white’ system. They could have also have been made about the ‘white’ system just as easily by *Kulthangar*’s father *Warrabudgera* when in 1917 his brother, Jack *Kalaladiyan*, a second degree Lawman was taken in chains to Palm Island for trying to protect his people (*Personal Communication*, 15 January, 2001). Ida has made them about her brother Lesley Shilling, a second-degree Lawman being taken in 1935 to Stuart Prison in chains for upholding Aboriginal Law (*Personal Communication*, 20 September, 2001). They have been made by Margaret about “whiteman bringing grog to the island” (*Personal Communication*, 1 September, 2000). These men and women have forgotten none of these events. Their stories are passed on to their families as warnings. Here again is evidence of the Western culture that claimed hegemony. My understanding is that what these senior people are protesting against is an unfeeling, unjust race of people, who never see both sides of the story, who reduce and rationalise and who come from the head rather than the heart.

The Elders’ belief in a holistic, spiritual, interconnected world is encapsulated in *Kulthangar*’s statement: “We Lawmen get our Law from the past. Our forefathers become spirit people. Those spirit people live now. They keep the land alive. The past is connected to the present. We never forget what happened in the past” (*Personal Communication*, 8 June, 2002).

Most of the co-researcher-Elders were born in the 1940s. Many had parents who did not speak English and many can remember grandparents who were born before the missionaries. Most of them had at least one parent who was sent to the mission by the police from the mainland. Many of the Elders were in the dormitories in the days of the missionary McCarthy, some in Wilson’s time. Some had relatives who were involved in the death of the first missionary, Hall. The senior participants are the embodiments of their ancestral Law and the recipients of ancestral memory.

Larry Lanley, former Mornington Shire Chairman and father of present participant Hilary Lanley, gave an indication of the conflict between the old ways and the colonising European ways. Larry Lanley's comments provide a background to the Elders' comments in this thesis. Larry Lanley suggested in 1980 that:

Aboriginal people are living in a new way. Our old people [Elders] see many problems when we move too far away from being an Aboriginal man or woman. Today, my people can see more than one way of living. Many Aboriginal people work in the same job as Europeans and get their food with money. Now there are many things in our lives, which were not there before. These things have made our young people drift away from the Law and they don't think they need the old ways, our grandparents' ways. (Memmott and Horsman, 1991, p. 367).

Larry Lanley did not see the "new European ways" as progressive or evolutionary. Like many of the Elders whose voices speak in this document Larry Lanley sees his "grandparents' ways", where the Law, Aboriginal Law reigned supreme, as superior. Lawmen such as *Kulthangar* and Larry and Hilary Lanley do not share the European notion that change represents progress. *Kulthangar* argued, "The Law was given to us from Creation and we still stick with the Law today. It has never changed. White man's law has. If we stick with the Law which was given to us by our Creation Ancestors we carry on their teachings with respect. Teachers have no respect for the island, not for the people" (*Personal Communication*, 2 August, 2000).

Larry Lanley's *Gangalida* grandfather on his mother's side was King Dodo of the *Ilio* tribe, who were from Turn Off Lagoon on the Nicholson River, southwest of Burketown. Larry Lanley's grandmother Rosie was a *Gangalida* woman from *Mungabi* (Burketown), the sister of King Jimmy. "These 'old people' were rounded up by the Burketown police" (*Personal Communication*,

*Milmajah*, 27 September, 2001) and sent to Mornington Island Mission in the 1920s and 1930s for paternalistic, humiliating and degrading reasons. King Jimmy's grandson *Milmajah* told me, "No whitefellas listen to King Dodo, Rosie and his Turnoff Lagoon relatives, but those good old people are still remembered with respect by their many descendants" (*Personal Communication*, 17 May, 2002). Their descendant Larry Lanley emphasised, "We have no say. Europeans do not listen, but they give us their laws and their schools and tell us what they think is best for Aboriginal people" (Memmott and Horsman, 1991, p. 367).

Larry Lanley, a *Kunhanhaa Elder*, a former head of the Aboriginal Arts Council, a Mornington Island Shire Chairman, a man of recognised integrity and leadership abilities had no faith in the school or police listening to the community or the Elders. His statement indicates that he perceived the Western hegemony as imposing their alien ideas on the *Kunhanhaa* community. Consequently, one may deduce from Larry Lanley's statement that one perception of past Elders is that the school did not "listen." *Kulthangar, Kurnungkur, Jekarija, Birdibir, Reggie* and Wilfred say it is no different now (*Personal Communications*, 27 September, 2001).

The next Shire Chairman Nelson Gavenor also maintained that there was "interference from outsiders,... lack of funding, the island's isolation [and] a basic lack of understanding of Aboriginal problems and a lack of consultation" (Phillips, 29 April, 1978). Like Larry Lanley and Nelson Gavenor, the present Elders still believe that the school holds a paternalistic, colonialist belief that it knows "what [is] best for Aboriginal people" (*Personal Communications, Kurnungkur, Kulthangar*, 26 September, 2001; Robinson,R., 17 April, 2002).

As I noted in the introduction, Folds wrote in 1984 that his "school had a rhetoric of helping the Aboriginal people" (p. 101). The Elders see this dependency or 'sit down' rhetoric continuing in Queensland (*Personal Communications, Milmajah, Kulthangar, Goodman, C., Birdibir, Robinson, R.*, 17 May, 2002). This intrusive paternalistic colonialist attitude of removing Aboriginal people from Turn-Off lagoon to the Mornington Island Mission "for their own benefit" (Trigger, 1992, p. 235) mirrors what Larry Lanley, Nelson Gavenor and immediate past mayor *Kulthangar* all say. One may say that Larry Lanley's discursive positioning is caused by both his family connections and his

own experiences. His grandparents told many stories about their experiences at the hands of the police (*Personal Communication*, Chong, A., 2 December, 2000). Larry fought the 1978 takeover by Joh Bjelke Peterson's state government in which the State insisted that Mornington Island had "mounting education problems" (Memmott and Horsman, 1991, p. 24).

The Elders say that the missionaries imposed their schooling, language, culture and religion on the *Kunhanhaamendaa* from 1914. The Elders told me that the missionaries demanded, with physical threats, that the people give up their Law: their culture, their ceremonies, their language, their relationship (skin) system, their marriage system and acquiescence and respect for the 'old ways' beliefs and authority of the *Muyinda* and *Kinenda* (*Personal Communications*, Chuloo, *Kulthangar*, *Milmajah*, Robinson, R., 17 May, 2002). As a result many of the *Kunhanhaamendaa* songs, their ceremonies, the rituals of their sacred places with the accompanying language have been largely forgotten. Consequently, *Kunhanhaa* Elders agree that "Every time you [Hilary] talk with an Elder the conversation is flooded with a sense of the past" (*Personal Communications*, *Kulthangar* and *Milmajah*, 18 May, 2002). Every time a *Muyinda* interacts with a European teacher that *Kunhanhaamendaa* is influenced by layers and interconnections of memories and social, political, geographical and cultural complexities. Every relationship, present, past or future between an Elder and non-Aboriginal person is influenced by local Aboriginal Law which is suffused by unchanging cultural-political dictums that have been handed down by generations of *Kunhanhaa* Elders. Social, political, geographical and cultural history; the interactions, which have occurred between Europeans and Aboriginal people since 1914 have affected the present state of affairs on *Kunhanhaa*. Every interaction between the school and the community is infused by this social, political, geographical and cultural milieu.

The Elders insist that the past is vital to the *Kunhanhaamendaa* and their culture and they have insisted my 'university book' must have a chapter about their past. Most conversations I have had with the Elders are permeated by their memories. *Kulthangar* illustrated most of his stories with an historical background and rather than treating these stories of the past as the meanderings of old Indigenous people they must be acknowledged as an influence on the present.

Researchers who work with Indigenous people suggest that the past must inform the present. Marker (1999) states that the local history of “Indian-White relations” must inform contemporary ‘white’ educational practice. It is especially important to note, as researcher Ortiz (1977) does, that it is the local context that is vital rather than a homogenous colonial indigenous context. Ortiz (1977) while researching Pueblo [Indigenous people] suggested that “historians must develop a sensitivity to certain tribal traditions which had a bearing on people’s past, present and aspirations for the future, to wit, on their history, which have no meaning apart from where they occur” (p. 18).

And in this regard Marker maintains that:

when stories about the past are not acknowledged, or when they have been somehow suppressed they can grow to become more powerful as unseen but animating forces in the present. In other words, the invisibility of formative and revealing historical narratives becomes the prevailing impediment to understanding the complex and deep meaning of Aboriginal education. Stories of the past can grow in a certain kind of power when they are politically and culturally rejected as irrelevant to the present. (p. 17).

Likewise, Aboriginal writer, *Mudrooroo* (1990) suggests, “The past is of the utmost importance in that it is there that true Aboriginality resides” (p. 25). And for not only *Mudrooroo* (1990), but the *Kunhanhaamendaa* the past is not a sanitised, [white] idealised past but a “history in which Aborigines were butchered, beggared [sic] and beaten whenever they made a stand or attempted to retreat” (p. 25). The past here is not to be rejected but must be acknowledged as a continuous living part of the present, for the Aborigines are the living survivors of this past in the sense that their subjectivity is formed out of that past (Lattas, 1993, p. 59).

In this regard Noel Pearson (2000a), Cape York Aboriginal leader and activist, states that:

Central to the recovery and empowerment of Aboriginal society will be the restoration of Aboriginal values and Aboriginal relationships that have their roots in... traditional [Aboriginal] society. Even as... traditional [Aboriginal] society was ruptured by colonial invasion and [Aboriginal] people underwent an ugly colonial history we survived. Our ancestors struggled to keep our society alive... . And the thing that we have retained... was our Law: our Aboriginal values and relationships... these values and relationships make us a rich people. (p. 20).

In view of Pearson's comments about "traditional Aboriginal society... [the] Law, Aboriginal values and relationships" and "an ugly colonial history" it is essential to contextualise the historical background of the *Kunhanhaamendaa*, both the traditional culture and "the ugly colonial history" of the Gulf of Carpentaria area.

### **The End of Traditional Life**

The "ugly colonial history" began for the Gulf of Carpentaria Aboriginal people in the 1860s. When European frontier settlers moved into northwest Queensland around the Gulf in 1865 after Gregory, Landsborough, and Walker had reported that the area had good grazing land, traditional Aboriginal life in the Gulf region was disrupted and changed irreversibly. By 1865 the entire southern Gulf was occupied by pastoral properties (Memmot and Horsman, 1991, p. 52). The cattle stations cut the Aboriginal people off from their hunting grounds and fresh water, disturbing their traditional lifestyles and preventing them from obtaining their native foods (Kidd, 1997). From the 1880s onwards, many Aboriginal people in North-west Queensland had been removed from their land and relocated in camps around Burketown and other areas.

Contact between Aborigines and Europeans on the northwest frontier was violent then. According to Memmott and Horsman (1991), organised parties of frontier settlers both European and Chinese rode over the area, shooting Aboriginal men and carrying off Aboriginal women to be used as slave labour (pp.

52-53). In many cases they were paid with opium. McKnight (1999), who listened to the stories of the *Kunhanhaamendaa* from 1966 to 1998, stated that when the graziers took over, the Aboriginal people starved and began to make raids on the cattle to obtain food. “Aboriginal people were shot by ruthless pastoralists and Native Police and opium, alcohol, malnutrition, venereal disease, malaria, typhoid, whooping cough and other diseases to which the Aboriginal people had no resistance all took their toll” (McKnight, 1999, p. 4).

According to McKnight (1999) there were two major events that completely and irreversibly altered the traditional Aboriginal scene. These events were the founding of Burketown in 1865 as a port for the cattle stations in the Gulf area and the establishment of a Presbyterian mission in 1914 on Mornington Island (McKnight, 1999). Many of the neighbouring tribes were attracted to Burketown. McKnight (1999) claims that elderly *Kunhanhaamendaa* advised him in 1966 that *Kunhanhaa* men who visited the mainland were primarily concerned with obtaining tobacco, sugar, tea, knives and axes, but these men always returned to *Kunhanhaa*. However, unlike the *Kunhanhaamendaa* who had no intention of abandoning their homeland “some *Yangaal* and many *Yukulda*, with whom the *Kunhanhaamendaa* used to fight, trade and marry, moved away from their tribal territory and gradually the multi-tribal initiations on the mainland slid into abeyance until they were partially revived in the mid-1970s” (McKnight, 1999, p. 5).

It was undeniably the case that North Queensland Aboriginal people were commonly the victims of kidnapping, assault and murder by European men (Kidd, 1997). Roger’s grandmother, Roma Kelly, is famous for reporting the story of “a white man called McKenzie who drove the Bentinck people into the sea on his horse and shot them all for no reason” (*Personal Communication*, 16 May, 2002) in 1918.

When I asked *Kulthangar* on 8 August, 2002 about his father’s stories of white people before the missionaries arrived, he said, “My grandfather *Bulthud* saw sailing ships before the missionaries came” and Dick Roughsey also suggested that “for many years his father had seen the pale-faced men go gliding by [in their ships]” (1961, p. 62). *Kulthangar* continued:

Some people have said our ancestors could see into the future and see the white people coming. That’s

not true, but my father said when his father saw the ship's masts he knew we were in for trouble. We used to kill any enemies on the Winded side of the Island before whitefellas came. When I talk about whites being brainless and heartless we have blackfella history in my head I don't know whether whitefellas know family tree, what happened to their family. I do. I hold the island's whole family in my head. We can't forget what happen to our parents and our families. Most whites don't seem to know our history, the rubbish that happened after whitefellas came. (*Personal Communication*, 28 September, 2001).

Durack (1959) called the "ugly colonial history" a "conspiracy of silence" (p. 301), recognising that 'white' history portrayed the frontier settlers as brave men who opened up the pastoral areas, but kept silent about the atrocities that were committed to procure that land. G.W. Broughton stated that in 1908 he believed that, "Native life was cheap... if the blacks got in the way... or speared men and killed and harassed cattle, they would be relentlessly shot down" (1965, p. 53).

The *Kalkadoon* people of the Mount Isa-Cloncurry area were some of the 'blacks' who actively resisted European expansion. Tonky Logan, an Aboriginal Elder, whose ancestry connects him to *Kunhanhaamendaa* and *Yukalda*, *Waanyi*, *Yanyula*, *Kalkadoon* and *Garawa* peoples, still talks about his *Kalkadoon* grandfather and his father's eventual death in jail, even though he became a head stockman on a Hughenden pastoral property. Tonky has never forgotten the battle that meant that his great-grandfather's *Kalkadoon* tribal country was finally lost. He has never forgotten what happened to his father Nut Logan, "a giant of a man who could bring down wild beasts", a brother-in-law to *Kanba* man Scotty Wilson. Tonky told me:

They took him away from his family on a cattle drive and he ended up down at Richmond, in *Wanamurra* country. That broke his heart. You

know they couldn't stick a needle between that family they were that close. He was a *Waanyi* man. My Granny Polly Elroy was that good old Lawman's mother. Her sister was the last of the Law women on Mornington. I tell all my family, I tell my people; you got to know your connections to the past, to your roots, to your country. (*Personal Communication*, 8 July, 2002).

The stories of Tonky's cousin, *Milmajah* whose ancestry is a mixture of *Yukalda*, *Waanyi*, *Garawa*, *Yanyula* and *Yangarl*, suggest a history of warlike resistance to the European invaders. When *Milmajah* tells these stories he always takes on an aristocratic and assured warrior-like attitude. *Milmajah* assumes the continuity of the past, but a with certain chronological slippage when he has referred to people who have broken "the Law." He has often said, "They could be killed for doing that. Early days treating a Lawman like that meant death" (*Personal Communications*, 29 September, 2000; 3 November, 2000; 18 January, 2001; 18 September, 2001; 3 April, 2002; 17 May, 2002; 9 June, 2002). This is one of *Milmajah*'s stories of his ancestor's resistance to the invading Europeans:

My parents, grandparents and great-grandparents came from the Gulf area. My mother Muriel was a *Waanyi-Garawa* woman. She told me that her grandmother carried my grandmother, Topsy in a *coolamon* at the Battle of Battle Mountain, down near *Kajabi*. Aboriginal people from as far as Arnhem land and over to Tennant Creek, *Warramunga* people, *Mara* people, *Yanyula* people, *Kalkadoon* people, *Waanyi*, *Waanyi-Garawa*, *Yukalda* people fought the troopers, and the pastoralists who came to take our land. Kitty's husband, my great-grandfather Charlie Bell was there. Old Topsy and her mother Kitty Bell were hidden in a cave. It was a huge battle, a huge war.

After the battle the family finally made it up to Augustus Downs, where after a few years my grandfather, Old Barney Charles, was eventually caught by the police, put in chains and sent to Palm Island. Old Barney Charles never gave up though and he eventually got back. My grandfather came from Forsythe Island. He found my grandmother, Topsy on the mainland. (*Personal Communication, Milmajah*, 8 June, 2002).

This conversation gives a variety of sociological and historical information. It is clear that although the logistics, the preparation and planning for such a large number of tribesmen to move and gather with their families must have been huge, obviously there was a vast Aboriginal communication network, which provided information about European settlers. Coulthard-Clark (1998) states that this 1884 battle and the guerrilla warfare that preceded it for ten years class the Battle of Battle Mountain as the most famous frontier war that Aboriginal people had waged against European people in Australia (pp. 52-53). *Milmajah's*, Roger's and *Chuloo's* stories also imply a wide network of communication, which suggests that the Wellesley Island Aboriginal people had a good idea of what to expect before the first missionary arrived in 1914. In fact Aboriginal information systems already networked the continent and are probably thousands of years old (Bird Rose, 1991, p. 8). Aboriginal peoples' major tool in occupying and managing the Australian continent was knowledge (Bird Rose, 1991, p. 8).

Elders such as *Milmajah* and Tonky, proud descendants of Kitty and Charlie Bell are still understandably fiercely resistant to European people, who have no respect for them and for Aboriginal Law (*Personal Communications*, 8 June, 2002; 9 July, 2002). But one may deduce from the last few *Kunhanhaamendaa* stories that there were already layers of history, different views and expectations of non-Aboriginal people held by Gulf Aboriginal people before 1914. This knowledge of the past also indicates that many Aboriginal people whose ancestors were sent to the Mornington Island Mission have not forgotten the coercion that their ancestors were subjected to, and men such as *Milmajah* and *Kulthangar*

believe “the past is still alive in the present” (*Personal Communication*, 17 May, 2002).

The *1897 Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act* was proclaimed for the protection of Aboriginal people against exploitation as slave labour in the fishing industry and pastoral industry. And, although the Aboriginal Protector Howard did not think it was a good idea, the Presbyterian Church established a mission on Mornington Island in 1914. The police and other authorities believed that the Burketown Aborigines were incapable of caring for themselves and their children, so they sent reputed troublemakers, the old and the sick and children of mixed descent to the Mornington Island mission after it was established.

When I read her this passage Margaret told me, “Black children were not allowed to go to Burketown School. Only whites went to that school and my mother wanted me to have a good education so I had to go the Mornington Island where they had a school. She said I would be safe up there because my uncle Big Barney was up there” (*Personal Communication*, 15 May, 2002).

Cecily told me the following tale:

My mother, Alice, Amy Scoldes and Rosie Robinson were the first mainland women here. They came from Burketown in, maybe 1920. They used to run away from the police. But they were picked up by the police and sent here. They used to live around Escott Station. They had a camp over there; inland from the place they were born. The police sent relatives everywhere: Palm Island, *Worabinda*, *Mapoon*. (*Personal Communication*, 30 November, 2000.)

Cecily’s statement in this context reveals the fear and horror which the practical application of the Act caused; the emotional cruelty of the ‘divide and conquer’ policies of the European and the lack of compassion the European authorities had for the Aboriginal people in their care. However, no mainland children were sent to the Mornington Island Mission until the advent of the second wave of

missionaries: the Wilsons. This is because Peter of *Kanba*, a Windward Lawman, who had spent many unpleasant years on the mainland, killed the first missionary. The Windward people, who always repelled enemies, did not perceive the missionaries in such a good light. Many of the *Muyinda* from the Windward side are to this day hostile to most “white men.”

### **Whitefellas invade our world**

According to the *Kunhanhaa* Elders, until the first missionaries arrived uninvited by the Aboriginal people in 1914, the *Kunhanhaamendaa* were relatively unaffected by the carnage that European invasion caused to traditional Aboriginal life. *Chuloo* told me, “Our people knew what was going on the mainland because some of them would travel to the mainland, but most of them would come home again” (*Personal Communication*, 29 September, 2001).

For the Aboriginal people on the Western side of *Kunhanhaa*, the Leeward *Kunhanhaamendaa* and the *Yangaal* the coming of the first ‘white’ missionaries appeared not to have created such a perceived threat as they did to the Windward people. So the descendants of those people, particularly the Marmies and the Peters, do not have the great anger against ‘whiteman’ that the Windward people do.

It seems that the Leeward people were more passive by nature. When I read this passage to Wilfred he told me that his father Paddy Marmies told him:

[In the] early days people from Roper River came here in big canoes fighting and killing our people. We had to give three women from Forsythe [Island] to the men: *Jadbandu* [brolga], *Milididia* [red beak] and *Yanal* [cockatoo]. We had to give those Roper River people our women to them to keep the peace. (*Personal Communication*, 27 September, 2001).

It was young Gully Peters and Paddy Marmies, Leeward boys who tried to protect Hall and became the missionary Wilson’s valued councillors. Paddy Marmies’ daughter, Clara told me that her father had said:

An old Aboriginal woman, *Lemil Lemil*, who could speak English because of her dealings with white men spoke to Mr Hall when he first arrived.

Whitefellas muck around Namie [Denham Island] and Robert Island with black women before missionaries came. Sometimes they sail past. Some of them used to stay with the Aboriginal people and live with them. They used to make friends with them. That's where the black people learned English. They already knew it before missionaries came. Mr Hall saw the children when he first came and they hid. When *Lemil Lemil*, daughter of old *Yanal* (Cockatoo), saw Mr Hall was all right she said, 'You children come out!' (*Personal Communication*, 22 April, 2002).

In 1903 Roth, Northern Protector of Aborigines, visited the Wellesley Islands. He met a young woman who asked him why she was stopped, who the European party were, where they had come from and what they were doing on the island. Roth was a scientist whose appreciation of Aboriginal culture helped him to establish a friendly relationship with many Aboriginal tribes. Roth took an Aboriginal Ambassador, Friday, a *Yangaal* man with him. Friday had been blown out to sea nine years before and taken to live at Normanton. When Roth's party beached at Mornington Island where four men remained to meet them. One was a *Yangaal* man, Melville's grandfather, Old Barney Charles, "and a relative of Friday's, who was visibly happy to see Friday again" (Memmott and Horsman, 1991, pp. 52-55). Roth's visit seemed to have set another positive precedent for the *Yangaal* people and Leeward *Kunhanhaamendaa* for future positive encounters with Europeans.

The *Yangkaal* people of Denham and Forsyth Islands lived in close proximity to the *Kunhanhaamendaa* and the Appel channel between *Kunhanhaa* and Denham Island was easily crossed on mangrove rafts. There was much trading, fighting, marriage, and participation in initiation ceremonies between these peoples. Some *Kunhanhaamendaa* occasionally ventured to the mainland, mostly in the area of Point Parker and Bayley Point, to trade and most importantly

to participate in the intertribal initiation ceremonies involving the *Yangaal*, *Yulkalda*, *Yanyuwa*, *Karrawa* and *Waanyi* people among others.

The first missionary, the Reverend Robert Hall arrived on 19 May 1914, Dick Roughsey (1961) says, “to bring the gospel and [to] show [the *Kunhanhaamendaa* who, McKnight, 1999, notes, the *Kunhanhaamendaa* hated the mission garden and gardening] how to grow trees such as coconuts, custard apples, paw paw, mangoes and... vegetables” (p. 72).

### **Why we can't fight back**

Keen has argued that many Aboriginal peoples did not willingly tolerate the presence of the missionaries; rather, the coercive power of the State was necessary for the establishment and continuity of mission settlements (1994, p. 25). This was certainly the case at Mornington Island. The missionaries took Dick's wife, *Labumore* or Elsie Roughsey, as I knew her, from her parents in 1931 when she was eight. She wrote:

I can remember when I was young, I saw lots of girls, older ones, also boys being flogged with flagella piece of motor car tyre, saw blood streaming from their bottoms and legs where they'd been cut as they were flogged. They were cruelly treated and for days they would have these wounds with red sores. The missionaries did not care to cure or deal with the bruises and cuts... it was a way of life away from parents and relatives. (Roughsey, E., 1984, p. 16).

She emphasised that the European way of life, in comparison to the old ways of her people, was “hard, sad, frightening and destructive” (pp. 1-2). But the Elders' experiences as young boys in the dormitories were worse even worse than Elsie Roughsey's memories. The men emphasised that their experiences were worse than the women's. Elders such as Joseph and Wilfred hung their head and changed the subject when *Kulthangar* mentioned the missionaries. It was clear that this feeling of shame or taking of personal dignity (Horton, 1994; Vallance and Tchacos, 2001) had scarred these Elders “deep into their hearts and guts” (Vallance and Tchacos,

2001, p. 7). Munns argues that “shame not only disempowers and engulfs one from the outside, but also carries an even stronger meaning when it indicates that Aboriginal people had lost face in a relationship” (1998, p. 3). *Chuloo* told me that he was beaten severely by Reverend Belcher for running away (*Personal Communication*, 10 May, 2002). According to Lillian this feeling of shame from the disempowerment they suffered at the hands of the missionaries makes the men drink (*Personal Communication*, 1 May, 2002). Only *Kulthangar*, Cecil, *Milmjah*, *Kurnungkur*, Roger and Tonky had developed the resilience to speak out against continued perceived humiliation in the present day. Their shame had turned to anger. *Kulthangar* spoke out in anger and resentment:

Those missionaries turned the old dormitory ladies against our culture. They treated some of them as pets, but the men were powerless against white man’s guns, chains and diseases. They said they were Christians, but they took our freedom and our land with their Bibles and their guns and their flagellum. They said we were heathens and pagans. They were the heathens. McCarthy shot Gully’s dog and when they fought back that McCarthy and the police from Burketown flogged Paddy, handcuffed Gully and sent him to Palm Island. Those missionaries used to look at us poor little kids, wag their fingers at us and say; ‘You tell the truth now.’ Well, it’s about time someone tell truth about their evil ways. (*Personal Communication*, 6 August, 2001).

Cawte’s discussion on this incident is particularly interesting because he defends McCarthy. He states that while “serious tension seems to have been engendered between village and mission [because of this incident]... dogs were banished and a stride towards Western standards of hygiene taken” (1972, p. 9). Cawte seems far more interested in the hygiene than the psychological health of the *Kunhanhaamendaa* or productive relationships between the missionary and

the people. Regarding McCarthy's behaviour towards the *Kunhanhaamendaa*, *Kulthangar* said, "Christian love thrown out the window" (*Personal Communication*, 15 January, 2001). It is noteworthy that Cawte (1972, p. 9) states that Flinders, when navigating the Wellesley Islands had quoted an earlier Dutch explorer who said the people of this area were "divers cruel, poor and brutal nations." When I read this passage to *Kunhanhaa* Lawmen *Chuloo*, *Kulthangar* and *Milmajah* they answered together, "They the ones that cruel and brutal. Cruel heart, no heart" (*Personal Communication*, 26 September, 2001). *Kulthangar* interrupted, when we were discussing Cawte's last comments, "I told you before, whites [are] heartless" (*Personal Communication*, 15 May, 2002). All of these memories accumulate to make many of the Elders distrust present day teachers unless the teachers show good cause to be trusted.

Tonkinson (1982) suggests that Aboriginal people saw the coercive power of the State and Church as ideologically and morally as beneath power from the Dreaming or the Law. Tonkinson states that to Western Desert *Jigalong* Aborigines, "the power of the whites comes from afar and has long been personified by policemen and government officials" (1982, p. 127). Like the *Kunhanhaamendaa*, the *Jigalong* Aboriginal people speared the first whites to arrive "for acts of cruelty and desecrating sacred sites [and] subsequent police punitive expeditions... intensified the Aborigines' distrust of intruding whites" (Tonkinson, 1974, p. 29).

In this context it worth noting the case of *Gidegal* and the first missionary Robert Hall. Three years after the first missionary Hall arrived a *Larlumbenda* man, *Gidegal* or Peter from *Kanba* on the Windward side of the island killed Hall and was sent to jail for life. This is an event many Elders still talk about.

There were a number of complex reasons why this occurred and many of them still apply to present strained relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the community, even though this event occurred in 1917. So many values encapsulated in this historical tale could be seen as cross-cultural misunderstanding. *Gidegal* had experienced the inferior treatment of Aboriginal people on the mainland. He had worked at *Doomadgee* Station a cattle station close to Escott Station in the Gulf country and had gone droving down to *Kajabbi* near Mt Isa (Memmott and Horsman, 1991). As *Kulthangar* tells the story:

Peter bin droving up to the Leichhardt River and he bin used as a real slave by whitefellas. Peter shot a Chinaman and stole his horse and saddle, because he wouldn't give him a smoke. The Chinaman swore at Peter. It's against Aboriginal Law to swear at a big country Lawman. An initiated man especially if he's a good hunter can kill you if you swear him. From there Peter went on to Denham Island. He could see the mission house on the hill over the channel and he knew his people didn't build houses. It must be a white man and white man meant trouble. (*Personal Communication*, 14 September, 2001).

*Kulthangar* argues that *Gidegal* and other Aboriginal people on the mainland were maltreated and even shot by ruthless graziers who drove the people from their land and he had become hardened and venomous because of his mainland experiences. Memmott and Horsman (1991) argue that "after being educated in the ways of poverty, violence and conflict... [Peter would have] expected conflict between the Aborigines and non-Aboriginal people" (p. 203). *Kulthangar* also commented, "*Gidegal*, a fully initiated Aboriginal man, would have been wary of his land being taken by a white man" (*Personal Communication*, 13 September, 2001). When I read what *Kulthangar* had said about *Gidegal*, Margaret, a *Kangalida* woman who lived in the Burketown area from 1920 to 1930 told me, "Most mainland Aboriginal people had become addicted to tobacco" (*Personal Communication*, 12 September, 2001).

Unfortunately, McKnight (2002) argued, Hall mistook Peter for a mainlander. He believed that mainlanders were a bad influence on the *Kunhanaamendaa*, so when Peter asked him for a job he refused to employ him. As *Kulthangar* continues the story, "Peter pestered Hall for tobacco, but the missionaries didn't keep tobacco" (*Personal Communication*, 15 September, 2001). Finally, "Hall threatened Peter with a gun, told him to get off the island and not to come near the mission station again" (Memmott and Horsman, 1991, p.

197), which no doubt incited Peter to violence. Clara, however, whose father Paddy Marmies was with Hall in 1917, disagrees with this account and said that Peter was totally recalcitrant and bitter (*Personal Communication*, 29 September, 2001). *Kulthangar* argued retrospectively:

I think if Hall treat Peter all right he not kill that missionary. Peter ask him for tobacco a second time because he want to test him out to see if he really a man of peace or one of them cruel bastards on the mainland who treat blackfella like slave. If Hall had said, 'Come along with us to *Birri*', he would have bin alright. All he have to do was show a bit of friendship, a bit of kindness. (*Personal Communication*, 11 September, 2001).

*Kulthangar* has expressed the words, "show a bit of friendship, a bit of kindness" that he uses here many times in relation to 'whitefellas' visiting him" (*Personal Communications*, 15 January, 2001; 17 January, 2001; 17 April, 2001; 21 May, 2002). According to *Kulthangar*, *Milmajah*, Cecil, and *Kurnungkur*, to come and sit and listen at the feet of the Lawman is to recognise a tribal discourse of deferential obedience and respect (*Personal Communications*, 17 May, 2002). And it is particularly relevant to the case of Hall's killing and present circumstances that McKnight (1999) states, "A big Lawman has the right to attack people... if they break the Law. For *Lardil*-speaking people it is human nature to feel ashamed about refusing a request. And a person whose request is refused is likely to harbour a grudge" (1999, p. 226).

McKnight continues, "Just as *Mirndiyan* or Dreamtime is timeless and unchanging, so is the Law" (1999, p. 228.) I read out my written version of the story and *Kulthangar*'s comments on *Gidegal* to some Elders and they stated that the story of *Thuwathu* was vital in relation to the moral of this whole situation (*Personal Communications*, *Chuloo*, *Kulthangar*, *Birdibir*, 15 January, 2001; *Milmajah*, 2 August, 2001; Peters, P., 20 September, 2001).

The Rainbow Serpent or *Thuwathu* Dreamtime Story emphasises that *Thuwathu* "a Big Law Man in spirit form" (*Personal Communication*, *Kulthangar*

26 September, 2001) broke the Law when he refused a request from his own sister. In the story *Thuwatu* claimed that he needed his space, his Country, all for himself. He was unwilling to give succour even to his sister's child, even when asked directly and repeatedly by his sister. His refusal was utterly selfish (McKnight, 1999, p. 243). The *Marnbil*, *Djin Djin* and *Dewal Dewal* and *Thuwatu* Ancestral Stories are complete statements of social ordering, categorisation and relationships (McKnight, 1999, p. 244) and the Lawmen believe that this Law still orders *Kunhanhaa* society and certainly did in 1917 (*Personal Communications, Kulthangar, Chuloo*, 26 September, 2001; Peters, P., 27 September, 2001).

The state of affairs that Roth described in the following passage not only explains the killing of the Reverend Hall by Peter of *Kanba*, Billy *Wamba* and Myall Dick (Roughsey, 1971, p. 101), but Roth's observation also informs the present belief held by the *Muyinda* that any teacher or non-Aboriginal person who is not a friend or kinsperson to the *dulmada* of Mornington Island countries is seen as an "outsider, a stranger and therefore a trespasser and likely enemy" (*Personal Communication, Kulthangar*, 16 September, 2001). In 1905, when he was living in the area of the Gulf of Carpentaria, Roth (1905) wrote the following passage in regard to trespass:

Anything may be done to a non-tribesman, old or young, unless he comes to see, a friend, the latter being responsible for his good conduct. The general underlying principle appears to be that anyone who is not a friend must be an enemy. For one family or individual to obtain vegetable, fowl or meat without permission upon the land belonging to another family constitutes punishment. This however is usually not of very serious character... [however] for a non-tribesman to trespass means death and risks run on occasion are enormous. (p. 8).

Although this statement was made nearly one hundred years ago, when I read this statement to a group of *Muyinda* in 2002, they agreed that they wished this was still the case, as the Roth statement reflected Aboriginal Law, and

Aboriginal Law did not change (*Personal Communications, Birdibir, Kulthangar*, 21 May, 2002; *Milmajah*, 20 April, 2002; Robinson, R., 17 May, 2002). In fact, *Milmajah* angrily said, “Thirty years ago people breaking the Law on Cape York and the Gulf area would have been speared and strung up in a tree and left to die” (*Personal Communication*, 20 May, 2002) and because people had shown disrespect for the Lawmen, he said, “If this had been over in the Northern Territory in my old Auntie’s country (*Borrooloola*) these people would have been speared to death for breaking the Law” (*Personal Communication*, 20 May, 2002).

However, the Northside people, with whom Hall worked closely, adopted his new set of values. Nevertheless, the *Larlumbenda* people, who were closely related to *Gidegal*, supported him and these men aided him on his raid on the mission and were sent to jail in Palm Island as a result. Among the Lawmen, there is still support today for those men, as *Kulthangar*, a nephew of Jack *Kalaladiyan*, one of the men who accompanied Peter and eight other men to prison argued, “White people think *Gidegal* bad; he kill, but our people never make an outcaste of him. That missionary bought the wrong culture. He came to take our Law, our culture, our ceremony, our children. He said that our ways were evil. He the one that bad” (*Personal Communication*, 13 September, 2001). And it is certainly true that the killing of Hall affected the Windward men. Because ten men went to jail and only two returned 25 years later a huge amount of ritual knowledge was lost (McKnight, 2002).

Diane Bell’s research with the *Ngarrindjerri* people reveals a similar situation. Bell (1999) found that “Captain Barker was killed by the *Ngarrindjeri* because they had little reason to trust the whites... They could well have believed he was in danger of trespassing on a sacred site” (pp. 429-430). Both accounts, the killing of missionary Hall by *Gidegal* and the killing of Captain Barker, concerned the fear of violations of sacred places and violation of women. Both stress that newcomers did not behave according to Aboriginal Law and were punished.

However, not all the participants agree about killing the missionaries. When I read this statement out to Clara she responded, “In the old days the Law said girls (eight year old) were put in the man’s camp to grow up and the parent’s stayed away. That child was promised to the old men. It was a cruel law, but you can’t break the Law. It still does happen in some places in the Territory”

(*Personal Communication*, 25 September, 2001). The missionaries put a stop to this by putting the girls in the dormitories. The creation of this and other forms of liberation for the women may be one of the main reasons many of the women welcomed the advent of the Wilsons. The missionaries made them teachers and “made a fuss of us” (*Personal Communication*, Brookedale, I., 20 September, 2001). Many of “the dormitory ladies”, as *Kulthangar* calls them, called the Wilsons “mother and father” and lived happily with them (*Personal Communications*, Hills, M., Brookedale, I., 2 October, 2000; 2 December, 2000). On many instances Ida talked with love about “Mother Wilson playing the piano” (*Personal Communications*, 20 September, 2001; 18 December, 2001; 25 December, 2001) and spoke tearfully about “when Father Wilson was run down by a car” (*Personal Communications*, 20 September, 2000; 1 October, 2000). When I went to see one of the Grannies in hospital she had a photograph of the Wilsons on the bedside table and at her home a photograph of the Reverend Wilson and his family was always on the lounge wall.

This sense of a policy of ‘divide and conquer’ is revealed from the conversations I have had with the men and women who lived in missionary times. The men reveal stories of being beaten, targeted for humiliation, and of running away from the mission (*Personal Communications*, *Birdibir*, 17 September, 2000; *Kulthangar*, 15 January, 2001; 17 April, 2002; *Chuloo*, 28 September, 2001; Watt, J., 2 December, 2000; 15 January, 2001; Robinson, R., 15 January, 2001; 17 May, 2002; 27 September, 2001) while particular women tell stories of being pampered and loved by the missionaries (*Personal Communications*, Anon. E, 19 September, 2000; 10 April, 2001; Hills, M., 2 November, 2000; Brookedale, I., 18 September, 2000).

The death of the missionary Hall had a two-fold effect. The Mornington Islander Elders were introduced to the police and court system, which was a system which they quickly learned to fear and despise and the incident also demonstrated to the Islanders that the missionaries and their culture had bought a power which was to eradicate the influence of the Lawmen and largely eradicate the strength of the Law (Memmott and Horsman, 1991).

New missionaries, Mr and Mrs Robert Wilson arrived in 1918, but children were not brought in from the bush until 1924 and 1925. Although

*Ngurrumu*, whose country is *Dimerah*, next to *Kanba* said, “Wilson must have tricked the parents to bring the children in from *lar* bush” (*Personal Communication*, 12 November, 2001) Clara responded to this statement when I read it out by saying, “They were teenagers, not children. They were worried about the girls being taken by the old men” (*Personal Communication*, 2 April, 2002). Gully Peters and Paddy Marmies eventually persuaded the parents to bring the children in, but before that the parents forcefully resisted. *Jaurth*, a *dulmada* or owner of Sydney Island, threatened to spear Gully and Paddy if they took his son Fred to the mission (Memmott and Horsman, 1991, p. 207) and “the Elders threatened to spear *Warrabudgerra* because he wanted to take Dick Roughsey into the missionaries because he had terrible sores all over him” (*Personal Communication, Kulthangar*, 13 September, 2001).

Like the story of Peter from *Kanba* and his nine *Kunhanhaamendaa* sympathisers, who were tried and sent to jail, *Kulthangar*’s story emphasises the Aboriginal people’s resistance but almost complete lack agency – the coercive power of white authorities, the lack of choice, and the institutionalisation of people who were seen to be childlike and incapable of running their own lives. As Foucault states: “Where there is power there is also resistance... [The] strictly relational character of power relationships... depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support or handle in power relations” (1978, pp. 95-96). It is this lack of power that haunts the Elders. They have never forgotten the humiliation of their ancestors in these years (*Personal Communications, Milmajah*, 8 June 2002; *Birdibir*, 16 May, 2002; *Kulthangar*, 8 June 2002).

Perhaps the most important change that Hall introduced was that of Western schooling. By focussing on the children he set the pattern for the future of intense instruction in European culture rather than education in their parent’s traditional Aboriginal culture and “any culture will be rapidly eroded if children that would normally be taught that culture are not taught its laws, beliefs, customs and skills” (Memmott and Horsman, 1991, p. 194). Many of the Lawmen still believe that the present teachers are continuing the missionaries’ patterns of schooling (*Personal Communications, Kulthangar, Kurnungkur, Birdibir, Milmajah, Goodman, C., Robinson, R.*, 17 May, 2002), so that this historical information is of great

importance as an historical context for the analysis of many of the conversations with the Lawmen.

### **Dormitory Days**

The stories of the relationship between the missionaries and the Elders are fragmented. However, above all, the Elders make it clear that the missionaries and managers broke the political and disciplinary power of the Elders.

Throughout my research the Elders have said that the missionaries deliberately took their power (*Personal Communications, Kulthangar, Chuloo, Milmajah, Birdibir*, Robinson, R., Peters, P., Goodman, C., 17 May, 2002). Johnston's (1991) evidence supports the Elders. He argues that, "In material prepared for the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in Queensland, Dr Paul Memmott noted how the political and disciplinary powers of the elders was weakened or destroyed as a matter of policy by the managers of the Aboriginal settlements" (p. 52). Johnston (1991) adds that, "At Mornington Island... unless senior men were prepared to forsake their religious beliefs and join the church elders, they found themselves in marginal roles, or else on Palm Island" (p. 92). McKnight (2002) states that the missionary, "Mr McCarthy, is remembered with intense dislike if not hatred by many... Mornington Islanders" (p. 61). McKnight (2002) reiterates what many Mornington Islanders had told him, specifically, that McCarthy beat Gully Peters and Paddy Marmies and sent them to Palm Island for a year; that he severely beat *Kulthangar's* adopted brother Pat Reid and that he forced some marriages without consideration of kinship relationships (*Personal Communications, Kulthangar*, 15 January, 2001; Brookedale, I., Hills, M., 2 December, 2000; Goodman, C., and *Jekarija*, 1 December, 2002). *Kulthangar* also told me he sent his father's second wife, Myrtle, and her baby to Palm Island and Jack Oakley (*Namie's*) wife, Mabel and their daughter, Joan to *Woorabinda* when Jack died (*Personal Communication*, 15 January, 2001).

Although there seems to have been a ubiquitous, bitter hatred for missionary McCarthy, some of the Elders speak well of Reverend Belcher because he allowed a partial cultural revival. Others are more critical. One anonymous woman elder suggested quite angrily that he tried to introduce wine to Elders such as Sandy

Scoldes and Gully Peters, saying that it was civilised (*Personal Communication*, Anon. A, 2 December, 2000), although McKnight (2002) argues that Belcher could do nothing about the canteen being built and he tried to introduce the idea of moderate drinking rather than binge drinking.

The Wilsons also are spoken of in generally loving ways by the women, but with condescension by such men as *Yarakara* and *Ngurrumu*. Even the positive comments by the women, however, are sometimes offset by resentments. Ida speaks in one breath about how she loved Mother and Father Wilson and in the next breath she would say how those missionaries took her language and took her from her Aboriginal mother (*Personal Communications*, 18 September, 2000; 25 December, 2001). Even though Margaret never criticised the missionaries she emphasised the breadth of her education before she went to the Mornington Island mission. *Kulthangar* argued that, “those stinking missionaries turn our old ladies against our culture, married the wrong people and stopped ceremony [ritual and initiations]” (*Personal Communication*, 15 January, 2001). The historical proscription of initiations and subsequent removal of Lawful power from the *Muyinda* caused a giant psychic fracture in *Kunhanhaa* society. Particularly important in this background is the relationship the Indigenous people of Mornington Island had with the missionaries, as the missionaries provided the European schooling until 1961.

The missionaries made the women teachers and “Wilson considered the initiation ceremony to be heathen and had them stopped in 1932” (Memmott and Horsman, 1991, p. 214). The banning of ceremonies left “The old people confused and frightened, and although most of the boys and young men were glad not to have to go through the hard times of initiation, the laws left by *Marnbil*, *Thuwatu* and all the other big men were now ignored and the old way of life gradually died out” (Roughsey, 1971, p. 137). Memmott and Horsman point out that, “Without this way of passing down the vital sacred knowledge, tribal Law was threatened at its basis. It also meant that elders no longer performed the role of teachers and leaders in the ceremony, and thus lost an important part of their power, as well as the respect of the tribe” (1991, pp. 214-215).

By 1940, Wilson had secured the role of the Councillors, the Church and some new industries, as well as the commencement of a cash economy; many

parts of traditional culture were seriously weakened, because there was no role for the Elders in Wilson's visions of the future. In 1944, missionary McCarthy began to actively interfere with the Elders control over the Aboriginal adults in the camp. By bringing the Elders under mission control, he reduced their political control. By replacing the Elders and their old laws, McCarthy attacked the methods of maintaining the values and standards in their society. Memmott and Horsman maintained, "the new system of law and political leadership was very unsatisfactory to the Aboriginal elders" (1991, p. 215). Johnston's (1991) *National Report* (Volume Two) from the *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* argues that that the dormitory system and the policy of disempowerment of the elders by the missionaries had wide-ranging and highly destructive effects. Johnston (1991) suggests:

The dormitory system operated for many years at Mornington Island to break down traditional kinship responsibilities. Role of the disciplinary relative (whether it be parent or uncle) was usurped by the mission manager, and later the head teacher. This loss of social control by the elders was accompanied by the erosion of values concerning traditional social values, the qualities of leadership and the desirability of social control. Consequently many young people have grown up without respect for... traditional leaders and traditional methods of social control. (p. 52).

These shifts continue to have ramifications to the present day, and in Chapter Six I explore the Elders views about the destructive effects on the young people of having the headmaster as a leader rather than the Elders.

McCarthy was removed in 1948, and his lieutenant, Belcher, a man more sympathetic to the cultural needs of the islanders, took over until he retired in 1970. Initiations were gradually resumed; "Pompey Wilson was initiated in 1958 and then mefella, Arthur Paull and Jackson Jacob were initiated in 1972 on the island, but much sacred knowledge was lost in those years" (*Personal*

*Communication, Milmajah*, 8 November, 2002). The next ceremony was held in 1979 at *Borrooloola* because “the Northern Territory Elders were concerned about how lax the Mornington Islanders were about sacred matters” (McKnight, 2002, p. 87). By the 1980s only the very old *Kunhanhaa* men could remember how to practice the increase rituals and many young people no longer believed in the traditional culture (*Personal Communication, Milmajah*, 15 November, 2002).

It is necessary to explore the earliest mission years as they set the scene for the panopticism that was to rule in the mission years. Johnston (1991) has suggested that, “two completely external agents – the Christian Churches and the police – have now become part of the repertoire of social mechanisms to which people can appeal” (p. 52), a situation which the Elders suggest was deliberately engineered by the missionaries and the government and set in place in the dormitory days (*Personal Communications, Kulthangar, Birdibir, Chuloo, Milmajah*, Goodman, C., Moon, T., Peters, C. and Robinson, R., 17 May, 2002).

The stories I have heard range as far back as the days of Hall. Towards the end of 1914 missionary Hall started school classes with a daily average of eight children attending. The mainland children were housed in the mission dormitories, but the island children still saw their parents and the Elders still spoke their own language and held power in the bush (*Personal Communications, Kulthangar* 15 January, 2001; *Yarakara and Ngurrumu*, 12 September, 2001). Consequently, the experiences of their dormitory years were quite different for the children who came from the mainland. *Kunhanhaa* women such as Elsie Roughsey and Ida could at least see their parents, but such women as Margaret (a *Kangalida* woman) and Lettie Sam (a *Yanyula* woman from the Borrooloola-Robinson River region) never saw their mothers again.

In this respect *Yarakara*, a Windward (Sydney Island) Elder told me:

My father Kenny Roughsey, who should have been in the dormitory in the time of Wilson, managed to escape and he lived out in the bush. He never spoke English. I was his eldest son and I wanted to be a good old hunter like him. I was in the dormitories in McCarthy’s time, but I ran away a lot. Old Sandy from *Manaltharrba* [White Cliffs] carried me on

his shoulders to escape the mission. (*Personal Communication*, 12 September, 2001).

Although many of the very elderly women participants, who were educated by the early missionaries, portrayed missionaries such as the Wilsons as benign people, in the main, the missionary system gained its ends through force as well as persuasion, with “radical cultural surgery such as a dormitory system, banning of ceremonies, prohibition of arranged and polygynous marriages and enforcement of the use of English” (Keen, 1994, pp. 26-27). Most of the Elders will not speak at all or speak very little about their mission days. They all say that they were very cruel times. To the men the cruellest thing that the missionaries did was to ban initiations as this left many of the men without “manhood” (*Personal Communications, Birdibir; Milmajah*, 16 May, 2002).

Another factor that badly affected the continuation of the correct protocol of culture and ritual was the banning of language in the dormitories. Clara told me, “The children were taught English and were expected to speak English in the dormitories, but we learnt language from my mother and my old people” (*Personal Communication*, 29 September, 2001). In fact Clara argued that “the children would make fun of homesick newcomers who tried to talk to each other in their own language” (*Personal Communication*, 29 September, 2001). Memmott and Horsman (1991) make a case that “for most of the children it was difficult to understand why life was so rigid and different from life with their parents in the bush” (p. 211). Elsie Roughsey’s memories parallel the conversations I have recorded with Clara, Ursula and *Bulthuku*. These conversations include information about the ‘dormitory days’. The discussions also cover arguments for homeland schools and a community-run school with teachers who travel among family homes to teach (*Personal Communications*, Reid, C., 29 September, 2001; Roughsey, U. *Bulthuku*, 31 August, 2001). Elsie Roughsey said in her book:

We grew up to do everything what European laws, rules and life was like. Although it looked good, the life, but to feel it was tough, sad, lonesome, friendless of family’s circle... hardly any happiness

to make us feel we were contented of everything nice being in the dormitory. We were not free. (Roughsey, E., 1984, p. 23).

As I related earlier about some women welcoming the missionaries, opinions are divided, and many girls who are now *kalalabal* became teachers and related happy memories of the dormitory days (*Personal Communications*, Hills, M., Brookedale, I., 21 September, 2000). When Ida talked about her friend May Williams, Elsie Roughsey's sister calling "Mother Wilson 'Basket-ball-head'" she laughed. Ida often told me that, "The Wilsons wanted to adopt me because I was their pet", but she said, "I wanted to marry Alfred *Jimmi*, old *Jimmi* Denham's son" (*Personal Communications*, 18 September, 2000; 17 November, 2000; 25 December, 2001; 30 September, 2001). But although Ida speaks of genuinely loving 'Mother Wilson' and her sons Andrew and Hugh Wilson, her memories can be said to be fragmented, because Ida occasionally made such comments as, "Those missionaries stole our language" (*Personal Communication*, 20 September, 2000) or "they took me away from my parents" (*Personal Communication*, 20 September, 2000) or "I only spent the terrible sad years with my mother" (*Personal Communication*, 18 September, 2000). She loved the Wilsons as individuals, but from the point of view of her culture and her biological family she bitterly resented what the missionaries did.

The "terrible sad years" are the years when old *Kulthangar*'s old great-aunt, Maudie had leprosy. *Kulthangar* told me:

Old Maudie was taken out to Phantom Island [the leprosarium]. I was in Townsville in 1961 and I went to see her in hospital. I loved that good old lady. She was one of the 'old people'. Half her face was eaten away and half one leg was gone. She was crying because I came to see her. She wail, 'Oh, please take me home with you!' I ran out with tears streaming down my face. How could I take her home? I nearly vomited. Poor old Ida, that old lady didn't grow her [Ida] up because of the

missionaries. They really mix her mind up. I was too young to cope with the [emotional] pain then. It tore my heart out, but I never forget. (*Personal Communication*, 12 September, 2001).

The old people had their rights stripped from them by institutionalisation, but to be a leper was to be an outcaste. Like the people who were sent to Palm Island by McCarthy, the lepers were destined to live the rest of their lives away from their families if the police found them (*Personal Communication*, Hills, M., 12 September, 2000). In this regard Bird Rose (1991) wrote, “Those old people saw [their children] taken away to institutions, saw their sick relations taken to leprosariums, and submitted to a variety of indignities, both petty and severe” (p. ix).

*Kulthangar* was only seventeen then, and, as he said, too young to cope with the horror of the results of colonisation, but he was fifty-seven when he told me the story of old Maudie at Phantom Island and he had not forgotten. Elsie Roughsey wrote about the years when Mornington Island people were sent away to work on sheep and cattle stations on the mainland:

In 1939... Kippy and Molly and some boys left the island, to start a new life, to go out and work on cattle station. They went to Abingden Station and soon got used to the place, and loved their work. Since then men and boys were able to go out and work on stations for a year then. (1984, p. 35).

*Kulthangar* was one of those ‘boys’. He had taken leave from Abingden station to visit Ida’s old mother. His years as a ringer were the highlight of his life (*Personal Communication*, 15 January, 2001). He loved horses and rode horses (*Personal Communications*, 20 September, 2001; 8 June, 2002). It gave him an affinity with other [First Nation American] Elders, with whom he rode in Mexico, the United States and Canada, and he brought cattle back onto the island in 2002 (*Personal Communication*, 14 March, 2002).

### **The glamour of working on the mainland**

The stories of the Lawmen, in their role as stockmen, emphasise a number of points. They generally highlight the glamour of being a ringer. They emphasise the isolation of *Kunhanhaa* as an island as opposed to the mainland of Australia where Aboriginal people travelled around, and they call attention to the role of women as valuable commodities. The conversations also provide a record of white authorities who listened to Aboriginal people and valued them. “Unlike the missionaries European stockmen never sought to change the Aborigines to any great extent. Thus Aboriginal culture was not attacked” (Broome, 1994, p. 136). These ‘white’ people gave the ringers a degree of power and control over their lives for the first time and provided a role model for good relationships with other white people on Mornington Island.

Dick Roughsey’s experiences provide a record of a Protector who listened to the needs of the Aboriginal stockmen. Dick and his fellow workers living on Lorraine Station recalled that the cook’s idea of cooking was “to keep a big pot of curry and rice going and serving it three times a day” (1971, pp. 125-8). When this did not improve they threw in their jobs and reported to the Protector in Burketown. He returned them to the same station and the cook was replaced with a better one (May, 1994, p. 155). Dick also recalled that Oscar Boon, the manager of Tallawanta, where he worked during World War II, treated him well. When Dick arrived at the station Boon greeted him with the words, “Good day mate, what can you do? Can you ride?” (1971, pp. 125-8).

*Kulthangar*, Wilfred’s brother, *Milmajah* and Wilfred all told me that their years on sheep and cattle properties were some of the happiest years of their lives. Wilfred’s brother called me, “My darling blue-blood” (*Personal Communications*, Anon. I, 30 July, 1998; 2 December, 1998), because I was the daughter and granddaughter of graziers, who were known to be fair. Wilfred’s brother also worked on properties close to the property where I was raised in the Richmond area and he had very happy memories of those years.

Strang (2001) sees “pastoralism as a distinct sub-culture within Australian society” (p. 4), and it was easy for the *Kunhanhaamendaa* to fit into this culture. McKnight (2002) suggests it was easy for the present stockmen-Elders to fit into

this life because moving from a village camp to a cattle station camp was a “move from one camp environment to another” (p. 54). McKnight also argues that the *Kunhanhaamndaa* took to this work because it overlapped with hunting since it involved working with animals, tracking and being in the bush (p. 54). The work was dangerous and hard, and “they were proud of their expertise” (McKnight, 2002, p. 54). The work on pastoral properties gave them dignity, a new identity and independence free of the surveillance that existed on the mission.

Cole (1990) suggests that this subculture was “composed of the ‘squattocracy’-pioneers with sufficient resources to invest in property and so create an Australian version of the British landed gentry and stockworkers from lower down on the social scale” (p. 10) who could move up through the ranks to managerial jobs or even acquiring properties of their own. These Elders were involved in this world where people could move class and they knew that some Aboriginal men had acquired properties (*Personal Communications*, Anon. C, 30 July, 1998; 2 December, 1998).

Strang (2001) suggests that youths who work on outback cattle properties have images and ideas of the stockman image. The image is drawn from Marlborough advertisements and the Man from Snowy River. The image changes boys into men. Indeed *Kulthangar* used the image ‘the Man from Snowy River’ on a number of occasions when he explained the process of changing boys into men during initiation (*Personal Communication*, 16 January, 2001). It was his favourite film. One could surmise that on a secular level, because none of these men were initiated when they went away to work on pastoral properties, this was the experience that changed them from boys into men. In the conversations that they have had with me it is one of their favourite subjects, and their dress and demeanour reflects this. Indeed McKnight (2002) remarks that, “The stockmen generation were much concerned about their appearance. Some of them were real dandies” (p. 60). Certainly *Kulthangar* and *Milmajah* were. It was rare to see them without high-heeled cowboy boots, hats, R.M. Williams moleskins and leather belts.

*Milmajah*, who was a ringer (stockman), rodeo rider, drover and park ranger often speaks of Tallawanna Station as a property with “a boss who was good to Aboriginal stockmen.” Even before the advent of the missions the pastoral

properties gave the Aboriginal people of the gulf a new identity: they were even named after the properties where they lived. *Milmajah's* father Prince Escott was named after Escott Station. Before that he was Bob Brown. *Milmajah* told also told me:

Numa Valley and Tallawanna were outstations of Augustus Downs. Mr Murphy the manager. My Uncle Eric Murphy, my mother Muriel's brother, was named after him. He must have been there about 1910. My grandfather Old Barney Charles from Forsythe Island married my grandmother Topsy, the daughter of old Kitty and Charlie Bell. Charlie was also known as Charlie Farley, because he came from Farley Station. (*Personal Communication*, 20 April, 2002).

When I asked *Milmajah* why his grandfather had moved from the safety of Forsythe Island to the mainland he answered, "The normal reason that men leave: you know, he was looking for women. There weren't enough women on Forsythe Island, so he had to go to the mainland to find one and he started working on stations there, you know the same as *Gidegal*" (*Personal Communication*, 1 May, 2002).

*Milmajah's* cousin, Tonky, was not as positive as *Milmajah* about the glamour of being a ringer. When Tonky and I were talking about Margaret's first husband, Albert Stewart. I asked Tonky, "Old Albert Stewart was your Grandmother Polly's brother wasn't he?" He nodded and told me more about his version of station life:

My father Thomas-Nut Logan was head stockman at Wangaloo Station at Hughenden. Old Logan from Richmond Downs called my dad Logan. All those old fellas got called many names. He got the name Nut from Camooweal fellas. He was gathering pandanus nuts up on the Nicholson River when he was a youngun. That old lady that just die, Cecil's

mother, she was my Dad's aunt. All those brothers and sisters, those gummint people split them up. Those gummint fellas, call em protectors, give um different names so they could never find each other. Albert Stewart down at Cloncurry as a stockman, Polly Elroy sent to Doomadgee, Maisie sent to Palm, Topsy died on the mainland, Pincher Bell at Mornington. They were all on the mainland as stockmen and women. But all that glamour, where did that get 'em. When station life over, they turn into drunks or get put into jail. Those old people die with torments in their head. (*Personal Communication*, 9 July, 2002).

Although the adoption of the strike weapon by the Aboriginal people in the Pilbara region in Western Australia reverberated throughout the pastoral industry and some of the worst abuses of Aboriginal labour ended most Mornington Island men never heard of this (*Personal Communication, Kulthangar*, 15 May, 2002). For the most part they recall that they were treated decently. Only Clara's older brother Andrew Marmies, was a serious Land Rights activist who knew about Vincent *Lingari*. Tribal leader, Vincent *Lingari*, a *Gurindji* man, declared that the issue on which "we are protesting is neither purely economic nor political but moral and on August 22, 1966 the *Gurindji* tribe decided to cease to live like dogs" (Rowley, 1972, p. 341; Bird Rose, 1991), but when many of the Mornington Island Lawmen left the cattle stations and jobs on trawlers and went home they left behind some of the only glamour, respect and fun they had experienced during their lives. While Vincent *Lingari* and the Victoria River Downs people went out on strike in 1966 for better conditions and gained the ear of Prime Minister, Mornington Island men such as *Milmajah* who had been a respected man on the mainland, just went home to eventual unemployment, diabetes, alcohol and lack of respect.

However, I argue that it is because of their experiences and memories of being treated with respect on sheep and cattle properties and cargo boats that the

Aboriginal stockmen-Elders of Mornington Island, such as Billy, *Milmajah*, *Kulthangar*, *Chuloo*, *Ngarrawurn*, *Kangala*, Paulie and *Goomungee* are so friendly to outsiders, particularly people who were born in the 'bush'. They often relived their amazing adventures of the bush and high seas enthusiastically to me and I listened because I was a 'bushie'. I maintain that it is the 'good people' that the Mornington Islanders encountered on the mainland and their own island who engendered this sense of agency: an ability to choose their futures and take opportunities which were presented. Such 'good people' were pastoral property owners Keith and Percy Mott in the Richmond district for Melville; Sergeant Don Bix for *Kulthangar* and Sergeant McQuilty in the Croydon area for Margaret Hills and her son *Ngerrawurn*. Dick's book also provides a record of a close and mutually supportive friendship between him and Percy Tresize, a non-Aboriginal pilot.

#### **"We still under the Act"**

The Elders still are suspicious of the government and have a sense of prevailing panopticism. *Kulthangar* told me, "We still under the Act. We still under the thumb. Police can walk into my home without even knocking. School don't listen to me fella or other Big Country Lawmen. Government not listen to us" (*Personal Communication*, 27 September, 2002). This was a telling statement. It was said in anger but also with a sigh. It was not the statement of a hopeless man who had given up the struggle for rights, but after I read and re-read the newspaper articles of the 1978 *Kunhanhaa* struggle for political freedom, it seemed reasonable to entertain the possibility that it was a statement of disillusionment and extreme disappointment.

Attwood and Markus (1999) maintain that in Queensland there was little Aboriginal political activity, which was surprising because there were large reserves, such as *Cherbourg*, where Aborigines were able to acquire literacy skills; these were circumstances that underpinned activism in other states. However, it would seem that Aborigines 'under the Act' were powerless to form political organisations because of the extremely repressive state regime, headed by Protector Bleakly. When Aborigines were released from reserves to work for wages, their access to those wages was tightly controlled through trust funds. The

*Act* removed Aboriginal people from their kin. Troublemakers from other places were removed to the notorious Palm Island. On Mornington Island, McCarthy sent Gully Peters and Paddy Marmies to Palm Island for a year and he also sent *Warrabugerra's* second wife Myrtle and her baby boy there (*Personal Communication, Kulthangar*, 10 April, 2002). They used physical violence: "McCarthy also severely beat Pat Reid [Clara's husband]" (McKnight, 2002, p. 219) for insubordination. These factors made Aboriginal protest very difficult and so relationships with sympathetic whites or Aboriginal organisations were crucial to the representation of their plight.

However, after the 1967 referendum, elected community councils were formed and the federal Government made provisions for elected Community Councils to receive and administer grants (McKenzie, 1976, p. 171). And, after 1972 Whitlam government policies encouraged Aboriginal communities to administer their own affairs. Consistent with these changes in government policy the Uniting Church shaped its own policy of withdrawing from the direct control of Aboriginal settlements and of acting solely in advisory and pastoral capacity where requested (Keen, 1994, pp. 31-32). This policy led to conflict with the Joh Bejelke Peterson National Party State Government in 1978.

In the 1970s members of the Presbyterian Church began to be concerned that they were working for the government instead of for the Aboriginal people and Christianity (Memmott and Horsman, 1991), whereas since 1914 they had seen no such contradiction in acting on behalf of the State Government Department of Aboriginal and Island Affairs as well as the Church. It was ironic and tragic that the Church, which had largely caused the destruction of Aboriginal culture from 1914 to 1948, became a major advocate of Aboriginal self-determination and cultural revival in the 1970s on both Mornington Island and *Aurukun*. Initiations were held in 1958 and 1974, but there were problems with them because much of the knowledge about the ceremony had been lost. *Milmajah* told me, "Everybody went over to *Borrooloola* after that, none of our old fellas were alive any more" (*Personal Communication*, 17 May, 2002).

In the early 1970s a "dispute involving the Church, the State Government and the *Aurukun* community arose over bauxite mining on the *Aurukun* Aboriginal reserve" (Memmott and Horsman, 1991, p. 249). A large company planned to

establish an alumina mine and refinery at *Aurukun* reserve. The Presbyterian Church opposed this, so the State government decided to take over *Aurukun* and its sister reserve Mornington Island. The Church opposed the State takeover because they suggested the government was motivated by a desire to gain access to mineral resources rather than give the Aboriginal people self-determination (Lippman, 1981). Lippman (1981) argues that the Aboriginal people and the church were 'punished' for their resistance to mineral exploitation by the State Government. However, the State Government suggested that while under Church control *Aurukun* and Mornington Island had become areas of uncontrollable drunkenness, and lacked law and order. In March 1978 the (State) Minister for Aboriginal and Islander Affairs declared that the take over would go ahead "because both communities were facing mounting education, health, maintenance and other problems" (Memmott and Horsman, 1991, p. 249). The *Kunhanhaamendaa* Elders, Lawmen and senior women have not trusted representatives of the State Government since the State takeover by the Bjelke-Petersen government.

Lippman (1981) cites a letter that the Aurukun Council, whose members were related to Mornington Islanders, wrote to the Prime Minister after a meeting that they had with him:

We came to you believing that we had your support and with our trust in you in the fight against the Queensland Government. We came away totally disillusioned with you and your government as an ally... The Aboriginal people time and again put to you that they do not wish to be under a Queensland Local Government Act and a lease with the Queensland Government because 'They Do Not trust the Queensland Government.' (p. 87).

The Federal Government became involved because its policy of self-determination was opposed to the State assimilationist policy. After wrangling for several months both federal and state government agreed that a special act, the *Local Government (Aboriginal Lands) Act 1978* was passed. On July 4, the first all

Aboriginal Shire Council held its first meeting on Mornington Island. The Council was granted a fifty-year lease to all the islands in the Wellesley group except Sweers Island. However, in August the council was sacked and an Administrator was appointed with an accompanying contingent of white police to ensure law and order. In April 1979 the all-Aboriginal council took office again.

Cecil told me, “The Mornington Island community opposed the State takeover of the island, insisting that they wanted to stay under Church control. Many, many *Kunhanhaa* people had the guts to speak out on television and in the newspapers, but no one listen to us blackfellas” (*Personal Communication*, 20 September, 2000), and nothing happened. Bird Rose’s comments about the Victoria River Downs people partially sum up what happened to the people who spoke out at Mornington Island. She maintained, “when the blackfellows at last began to speak openly their voices would soon become muffled, not this time by overt repression but by being absorbed into a spongy bureaucracy” (1991, p. xxi). *Kulthangar* added, “They didn’t listen to us, they bought state police in, in that state take over and they have been here ever since watching us blackfellas” (*Personal Communication*, 17 May, 2002). The glimmer of freedom that the *Kunhanhaamendaa* gained in the 1960s and 1970s from the Federal Government and Uniting Church were curtailed yet again and the surveillance that lasted from 1917 to the mid 1940s began again.

Patrick Dodson’s (2004) Australia Day speech echoes the Elders’ sentiments on surveillance and lack of ongoing consultation, negotiation and respect. He argued that,

Problems in Aboriginal communities are contributed by inept programs that cold shoulder genuine dialogue between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and turn an introspective focus on supervising Indigenous people’s behaviour... These programs are meant to be partnerships with Aboriginal people and are supposed to build capacity and governance in their communities. They are really about conformity and compliance with mainstream objectives and allow little

accommodation of Aboriginal cultural and social values. (pp. 1-2).

### **Nothing Days**

The Church has had negligible political power since the 1970s (Memmott and Horsman, 1991, p. 304), which many Elders think has affected the running of the school. They believe the teachers before state takeover were very compassionate, caring people who mixed socially in the community (*Personal Communications, Kulthangar, Milmajah, Reggie, Birdibir*, 21 May, 2002; McKnight, 2002). Elders such as *Kulthangar, Joseph, Kurnungkur, Milmajah, Roger, Cecil, Tonky, Birdibir, Teddy, Paulie, Johnny and Wuhnun* still want the school to listen to them. They say that love for your fellow man has no colour and only life experience can make a good educator and communicator (*Personal Communications*, 17 May, 2002). They know their people, they know their history, they know their culture and they perceive that they have the right to teach that culture and history to their children. They are still struggling for the right to speak and the right to be, but what they dread is what Bird Rose calls the continuing “miasma of frustration which develops when one’s words find no one to hear” (1991, pp. xxii). It is notable that Elders such as Lawman Hilary Lanley’s father asked the government for ‘help’ and *Kulthangar* and Clara have asked me to come back and ‘help’. Rather than asking to be dependent these people were asking to be educated, the way Belcher educated them, so they could regain their feet. Investigative reporters Schubert and Toohey (2003) note in a front page *Australian* article that “the women [in remote communities] are ‘crying out for help’ ” (p. 1). Jenny Pryor (2003), writer *Boori* Pryor’s sister and a political leader in the Townsville Aboriginal community, is cited in the same article as arguing that there has been no transition between the paternalistic administration stage of the missionaries and self-determination, and that the communities have not been taught to govern themselves.

However, because so many reports have been written and so many Royal Commissions have been carried out, the Elders still do not trust government workers and officials. *Kulthangar* and *Milmajah* told me on 17 May, 2002 when we broached this subject, “So many promises have been made by the whitefellas. They are all broken. Words, just words.”

## Conclusion

The Elders stories have shaped this chapter. When I asked them a question about the school or teachers they told me a story about the past. They implicitly told me that if I wanted to understand the school I must understand their sacred and secular history. Particular themes and events have been prevalent in the Elders' conversations. In fact, themes and memories of particular events live on to shape how things in the present are seen by the Lawmen. Some of the themes that arise continuously are issues of unfairness and injustice on the part of the non-Aboriginal invaders. The senior participants say their people have been inhumanly treated, like slaves and dogs, with a lack of compassion and a lack of feeling. They say that they have been humiliated and reduced to statistics rather than treated as feeling human beings. The consequences of this violent inhumane treatment are inter-tribal, inter-family, inter-sex fighting and factionalism, alcoholism, drug addiction, confusion about their own culture, disorientation, domestic violence and loss of culture and sacred knowledge. However, the Elders maintain that, among the disastrous events of the past and men such as McCarthy who nearly eradicated their culture and indirectly caused confusion, disillusionment and eventual substance abuse, there have been some happy times and glamorous times, which some of the Elders still relive. There have also been some caring, humane people in their lives, who restored their faith in humanity. I discuss more fully some of these helpful, caring people, teachers, missionaries, anthropologists, headmasters, policemen and pastoral property owners in subsequent chapters. These honourable people caused the Lawmen and senior participants to have some trust and faith in non-Indigenous people and that because of their good relationships with these people in the past they believe that productive relationships with some teachers are still possible.

The stories the Elders tell suggest that non-Aboriginal intrusion into *Kunhanhaa* life has caused great psychological, political, social and religious diminishment for the Elders. Their ancestors were rounded up like cattle, shot or destroyed through disease and inadequate nutrition; their Law was removed in all its facets; and their ways of dealing with daily living destroyed. They were imprisoned, and psychologically weakened for fighting back or resisting covertly.

With the stripping of their hunter-gatherer culture and replacing that culture with a money economy, now the Elders see their people dying, hopeless and confused from welfare dependency and substance abuse, and media and an educational system which has stripped the Elders of their power and make them seem fools in the eyes of the young people. These themes arise in many of the Elders' conversations and are explored in subsequent chapters.

The Elders' narratives imply that the historical factionalism and division which exist presently in the community between some women and the Lawmen was begun by the first missionaries and perpetuated by the missionary, McCarthy. The Lawmen have argued that instead of the senior Lawmen supervising the girls, the missionaries maintained a 'divide and conquer policy' designed to destroy the Indigenous culture. The participants' anecdotes suggest that the missionaries pampered and converted the women to Christianity and non-Aboriginal ways, cultivating a distrust and dislike of their own culture. They stripped the Elders of their religious power and authority, humiliated them, and acted violently to the males and psychologically emasculated them. More recently, the frustration with the Federal Government and the takeover by the Queensland State Government has left the *Kunhanhaa* Lawmen and senior women even more disillusioned and lacking in trust for government employees. The Lawmen are not only still trying to regain their educational power and political authority, but fighting for the return of their Law and language, and to purge the island of the drugs, alcohol, suicide, chaos and violence that threatens their children and their culture.

It is because of their times of agency on sheep and cattle properties and cargo boats that the Aboriginal stockmen-Elders of Mornington Island are so friendly and trusting to outsiders, particularly people who were born in the 'bush'. It is the people who empowered them on the mainland, on sheep and cattle properties and their own island who engendered their belief in their own agency: an ability to decide their futures.

I contend that it is their memories that gives them their passion and fortitude to keep fighting for their rights and a sense of things they do not want. Their sacred history gives them a sense of what they do want. They not only re-member their wonderful halcyon days in their dress, demeanour and stories, but their act of remembering is an act of courageous, interactive processing which counters the

ever present welfare dependency and helplessness. It is not only an act of not forgetting but also an act of re-remembering or of putting themselves and their people back together again to gain spiritual and physical strength. I suggest that the Elders' agentic sense of hopefulness and belief in their Law is still present, otherwise they would not make their claims and assertions about the past being ever present. The Lawmen both demonstrate and assert the secular and sacred closeness of the past and connections of the past to the present by their stories.

## Chapter 5

### **Relationships between the Community, the Teachers and the School**

This chapter explores relations between the Elders and community on the one hand, and the teachers and the school on the other, on two distinct levels: first, the level of relations between teachers as individuals, and the community; and second, the structural level of formal, institutional relations and connections between the school, the Lawmen and community of *Kunhanhaa*. Although their colonial history reveals that non-Aboriginal institutions tend to be impersonal, and policies are enacted in a detached, dispassionate behaviour, because of the nature of their kinship Law the Elders still have the expectation of warm, friendly face-to-face interaction with the teachers. Face-to-face relationships, both structural and personal are vital to the *Kunhanhaa* Lawmen, but the implementation of policy by schools is by nature impersonal. . Because the Elders' memories are of marginalisation by the 'system' the *Kunhanaa* Lawmen are wary of government policies. Policies are made by systems or government institutions and are carried out by government employees. Schools are government structures and by nature their politics are systemic and impersonal. Nevertheless, the Elders make it quite clear that they want the teachers and the school to hear their "united voice."

The chapter begins by examining what the Elders, and others who discussed these matters with me, said about the teachers as individuals: the interpersonal relations between teachers and community members; and the knowledge and behaviour of teachers in relation to matters of land and protocol. The chapter examines the Elders's views, first, on how they characterise the current state of affairs, and second, on what they see as a more appropriate, even ideal, situation. Chapter Five then examines the structural, institutional relations, again considering first, the situation as the Elders see it in the present, and second, the sorts of structural relations they consider would be more appropriate.

#### **The teachers as individuals**

*"The teachers don't relate to us"*

Fundamentally, the participants say that the teachers are people who do not connect on a social or personal level or interrelate with community families. I

examine the participants' explanations of teachers and their attributions of why they do not relate well to the adults of the community. I present, analyse and synthesise a range of short conversations about both lack of relatedness at many levels and the attributes of that behaviour. I also investigate the few exceptions in a discussion, elsewhere in this chapter, of exemplary behaviour by some teachers.

Margaret became very angry when I talked to her about the schoolteachers in June, 2001, even though she was generally a person of very even temper. She told me:

You know, Ken, Dan, Saemus and those other old headmasters are the only ones we know. We don't know the other teachers. They should come out and mix [socially in the community]. We don't know who they are or what their names [are]. The others, we don't know the others. I don't know if they want to know us (*Personal Communication*, 10 June, 2001).

*Kulthangar* amplified her comment; he spat the words out: "I don't know what those white teachers look like! I don't even know their names!" (*Personal Communication*, 20 February, 2002). The words "I don't know what those white teachers look like," indicates that these two senior figures cannot differentiate teachers from other transient strangers who work on Mornington Island.

*Wunhun* comments added another dimension:

We want to have a look at them, see their eyes and see whether they have a good face. How can you know a person and trust a person if they can't even look you in the eye? They can't trick me up if I look into their eyes (*Personal Communication*, 20 February, 2002).

*Bulthuku*, Ursula and *Dilmirrur* also told me, "We think it fair enough to want to know who teach our children" (*Personal Communications*, 20 September, 2000).

*Wunhun's* and Johnny's comments were scathing. They told me:

When those teachers come here they are told to stay away from us. We have friends who've told us. You and Ken are different. You go out and walk around

the community. It was bad in the late seventies and eighties and most of the teachers still don't mix [socially] in the community. If teachers are friendly in the community the others will they tell on them and you get into trouble for being friendly to us. So you watch yourself. They tell on people. They act like small babies, fighting, gossiping and telling on each other. (*Personal Communication*, 30 August, 2000).

I was told a month later, "We heard those teachers don't talk to you because they thought you with the Human Rights Commission. They worried about people telling on them. People like you don't drink, work too hard, and the big thing is you mix with us, so they discriminate against you" (*Personal Communication*, *Wunhnun* and Williams, J., 30 September, 2000).

These statements indicate three levels of lack of socialisation or personal interconnectedness. The first thing the participants complain of is the relatively simple social level of face-to-face relationships. The participants are asking for a bottom-up approach where people work collaboratively to shape the children of the community. McMurray (1999) suggests that the 'top-down', impersonal, imposed delivery system of determining government policy in public health has been replaced by a " 'bottom-up, inside-out' approach, wherein people are seen to be the best judges of what they want" (p. 3). But, it seems, the participants in my study still see the teachers as imposing a service in schools hours, but as not considering themselves under any obligation to be sociable outside school hours. Both Ah Mat (2001, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c) and Pearson (2000, 2001), Indigenous leaders of the Cape York Partnership Plan, also warn against a 'service-based' government-imposed delivery to Indigenous peoples.

According to McMurray (1999) the 'bottom-up' approach is based on seeing a community as an interdependent group of people, where people depend on one another and interact with one another in a reciprocal way. As I have explained in Chapter Three, reciprocity is a vital part of *Kunhanhaa* culture. Campbell, Charlesworth, Gillett and Jones (1997), Pearson (2001) and Huggins (2003)

emphasise that outside workers who come into Indigenous communities must realise that their behaviour on a social, as well as professional, level must be couched in local cultural practices and based on “respect for the old people” (Pearson, 2001, p. 1).

On the second level, when the participants state that the teachers do not even want to know them, they are saying that the transitory non-Aboriginal teachers do not connect because of their contempt for the community members. They may also be suggesting that the teachers feel the community members are not worth socialising with. The participants express a sense that the teachers are condescending. Again, as I have suggested in Chapters Three and Four, the participants’ comments are feeling, emotional responses ‘from the heart’.

On a third, spiritual level, Hale’s (1997) and Roth’s (1901) research reveals that interconnection and relationships between people are vital to the *Kunhanaamendaa*, as they have been traditionally, and continue to be, to Indigenous people worldwide (Smith, 2000; Walker, 2000; Hill, 2001; Battiste, 2002; Martin, 2002; Randall, 2003). However, Hale (1997) and Roth (1901) suggest that a relationship with a stranger is a cultural impossibility to the *Kunhanhaamendaa* and as I have mentioned, in Chapter Two, Margaret, *Bulthuku* and Ursula all argue that they could not speak to a stranger. A relationship with a *dubal* (a mate) suggests a move towards a totemic or kinship relationship. This is the ultimate relationship that the Elders seek.

Another of the senior participants commented, “White people just don’t know our life. I just wonder how they put us into little box; what they think we are. We all the same in flesh and bone. We are all human, black and white” (*Personal Communication*, Anon. H, 2 December, 2000). On a different occasion this participant remarked in angry tones, when we were talking about most of the teachers not mingling in the community that, “We are human too!” (*Personal Communication*, Anon. H, 10 April, 2001). She put her head on the side and her hand on my arm and looked into my face and said, “And you talking to them girl, explaining things? You must talk to them. Will this book go to parliament, to explain how we feel? They might read it and understand our life” (*Personal Communication*, 10 April, 2001). As I have mentioned in Chapter 3, some of the participants knew parliamentarians Bob Katter and Tony McGrady, and they

believed these men could precipitate moves to make the teachers aware of their “feelings.”

When I read these comments to another senior participant she smiled and replied, “Those comments come from her days in missionary times when the police removed her and her family to Mornington Island and all that trouble that Pauline Hanson stirred up. We all saw it on television and we were horrified” (*Personal Communication*, Anon. N, 30 September, 2001). The first comment seems to follow *Kulthangar*’s comments that some ‘white Australians’ had perceived Aboriginal people as ‘stone-age’ people and as sub-human (cf., Howson, 2000 or in McKnight, 2002). This participant also believed that the Pauline Hanson phenomenon had caused many ‘white’ Australians to be racially biased and there was a mention that “Aboriginal people had been cannibals at some time in history” (*Nyungah Circle of Elders*, 1997, p. 1; Randall, 2003).

While *Kulthangar* and *Bulthuku* suggested that alcohol abuse and violence might cause teachers to be fearful around Aboriginal people (*Personal Communications*, 15 May, 2002), they also saw problems in the teachers’ views of them. *Kulthangar* added, “Some whitefellas call us stone-age people, us tribal people: they chuck off at us” and he shook his head. Both *Bulthuku* and *Kulthangar* had conversed with me about negative comments by politicians, ‘red-neck’ North Queenslanders, Hansonites, and the sensationalist press – about them being deficient when compared to the ‘white’ population, being labelled as ‘barbaric’ (c.f. Howson, 2000), and being generalised as ‘drunks’ (Koch, 2003).

When I asked another conversationalist what relationships he wanted with the teachers he told me:

Those white teachers cut themselves off from us, like apartheid. They didn’t want to speak to us. They thought we were dirt. They were snobby. They thought they were better than us. They thought we were the wrong colour. We all the same blood. They just don’t want to talk to us. (*Personal Communication*, Anon. O, 20 November, 2000).

This comment concurs with previous comments by participants that suggest that the teachers are condescending and contemptuous.

Johnny argued, “Someone is telling them not to mix with the community. Someone is telling those teachers we are no good. That’s racist. I only ever see them at *Birri* Lodge, where they drink. They live behind those big high fences. They don’t want people knocking on their doors” (*Personal Communication*, 30 August, 2000). On another occasion an anonymous senior participant told me, “I reckon they’re scarred of black people everywhere. They cut themselves off because don’t like to be here. They don’t go to church and they don’t shop at the shop. The shop and the church are places to have a yarn, to catch up” (*Personal Communication*, Anon P, 19 September, 2000).

Exceptions to this general behaviour, however, were noted, and one of the senior women said, “We see Trudy, Paul, Cheryl, Dan, Saemus and Ken at the shop and Cheryl, Ken and Trudy go to church. All those other teachers should know church is for everybody. It’s where we all meet and talk together” (*Personal Communication*, Anon E, 19 September, 2000). *Kulthangar*, *Bulthuku*, *Jekarija*, *Dilmirrirur*, Wilfred, Margaret, Ida, Ursula, Johnny, *Wunhun*, two anonymous Grannies, and two anonymous Lawmen all made it clear that part of a teacher’s job was to have good relationships with people in the community by associating socially with the local people (*Personal Communications*, *Kulthangar*, *Bulthuku*, 5 September, 2000; *Wunhun*, Williams, J., *Dilmirrirur*, Roughsey, U., 6 September, 2000; Anon. F, 17 September, 2000; Anon. A, Anon. E, 2 December, 2000; Brookedale, I., 18 September, 2000; Anon. J., Hills, M., 2 November, 2000; *Jekarija*, 10 April, 2001; Marmies, W., 24 September, 2001).

Comments on the teachers and their interpersonal relations with members of the community ranged from “I don’t know if they want to know us” to “they are told to stay away” to “they are scared of black people everywhere” to “they cut themselves off... like apartheid” to “they don’t think we are human” to “they think we are stone age people.” The community see a range of attitudes expressed by the teachers which were clearly hurtful to the participants. These previous comments mentioned by the participants can be grouped with other comments the participants report that non-Aboriginal people on Mornington Island have made over time. The participants report that non-Aboriginal guests on the island have

suggested that the *Kunhanhaamenda* are all alcoholics, they are Stone Age people, and they are the wrong colour, so they the participants conclude many of the non-Aboriginal people do not want to know the Aboriginal community. The participants clearly conclude that the teachers consider themselves to be superior. The participants suggest that the comments and attitudes they have reported over the three years of my field research constitute racism. Indeed, a number of the participants saw the issue precisely in terms of racism, prejudice and discrimination (*Personal Communications*, Anon. O, 19 September, 2000; Anon J, 2 November, 2000). *Wuhmun* and Johnny said to me, “If these teachers weren’t racist they’d be out in the community talking to us” (*Personal Communication*, 22 September, 2000).

At the level of interpersonal behaviour, then, the Elders and others who discussed the matter with me emphasised the lack of interaction between teachers and the community. Statements such as: “they don’t speak to us”; “they don’t mix with us socially”; “they don’t visit us”; “they don’t talk to us”; “they don’t shop at the local shop” and “they don’t go to church” were indicative of this emphasis on the lack of teacher interaction. These statements all highlight behaviours or practices. The participants see the lack of interaction as a failure, or unwillingness, to relate to the community and its members when they say: “they don’t relate to us”; “they don’t connect with us.” They also perceive the teachers as having certain attitudes, which are underlying generators of behaviour: they see their practice as symptomatic of an unfavourable, if not hostile, attitude to Aboriginal people: “they don’t like Aboriginal people; they think we are drunks.” The participants construct the teachers as being condescending at a personal level. I conclude that the participants cannot help but find the teachers’ behaviour exceptionally offensive. They are, then, concerned about how the teachers relate to the community as individuals, on an interpersonal level.

**“They break our Law. Their behaviour is gravely deviant”**

The senior *Kunhunhaamendaa* also found some teacher behaviour more than offensive. One anonymous Lawmen told me, “I don’t hate them unless I find they hate me. I won’t say I dislike them, but I dislike what they are and what they do. They talk about helping, but its just words. They don’t do anything and they’re

very bossy” (*Personal Communication*, Anon F, 20 September, 2000). The two Lawmen sitting with him agreed and spat in disgust.

In addition to not relating to them the participants see other forms of behaviour such as drunkenness, gambling, stealing, trespass and selfishness as not only seriously anti-social, inappropriate, behaviour but as dangerous in some cases. *Kulthangar* warned, “Those teachers can’t set bad example for our kids” (*Personal Communication*, 15 May, 2002) and Indigenous leaders Ah Mat (2003a, 2003b, 2003c) and Pearson (2000, 2001) caution that all Indigenous leaders must work towards confronting substance addiction because it leads to violence, jail sentences, selfishness, gambling and ill health. However, one could also say that ideologically conduct such as drunkenness, gambling, stealing, trespass, greed and selfishness was despicable behaviour to the Lawmen because they were not only seriously undesirable actions, but according to their ancient sacred Law they were sacrilegious behaviours. *Kulthangar* stated, “Greed, trespass, selfishness and stealing are all behaviours that broke the Law” (*Personal Communication*, 17 May, 2002.) I will expand on this statement after the appropriate example.

I begin with the participants’ concern that teachers drive where they like and fish where they like in boats. *Kulthangar* warned:

We put sign up to stop people trespassing, [but] they [the teachers] stumble onto story place they in big trouble. They get very sick. Their family get sick. They act strange. You know sick in the head. We seen it happen to some teachers who come here. (*Personal Communication*, 21 May, 2002).

*Birdibir* issued a similar warning about wrong behaviour causing illness (*Personal Communication*, 17 May, 2002), which I discussed in Chapter 3. *Kulthangar* also counselled, “If people go to strange place, maybe tribal area. They camp there for night, but get strange feeling. The land watching them. It shock anthropologists when they come here” (*Personal Communication*, 16 January, 2000).

As I have discussed in Chapter Three, the Lawmen were issuing practical warnings to all non-Aboriginal people who did not know the local area. The warnings were not just, “don’t trespass because of lack of respect”, but “if you

break spiritual Laws you reap the consequences.” Ida advised me, “We have warned white teachers and missionaries for years about dangerous places.” She said sternly:

People die from going to dangerous sacred places. You need permission to go out to people’s land and you need one of the old people with you so you know where you’re going. Don’t let those teachers do what they like. Old Simon, Heather Toby’s grandfather never let [missionary] Wilson go off alone without him. (*Personal Communication*, 25 December, 2001).

While teachers might understand that intruding on another’s property is trespass, it is highly unlikely that many teachers would understand or believe that spiritually certain places could cause a human being to sicken or die. However, for the Lawmen, this ignorance constitutes blasphemous behaviour. Although I have already mentioned the effects of noisy, irreverent intrusion on sacred sites in the Chapter Three, it is worthwhile repeating the Elders’ warning that trespassing on ‘story places’ can cause desecration to the ‘story place’, and the spirit people and Totemic Ancestors who live at ‘story places’ can physically harm irreverent strangers.

In this regard Johnny and *Wuhnun* warned me:

You know the corner at *Lemutha*, after ‘the jump up’. That’s where those *durramendaa* [‘hollow log’ spirit people] live: those big fellas with spears. They don’t like noisy strangers. Have you noticed how Ken drives faster and faster there? Remember that afternoon when we were going to *Birri*. You and I and all our family were in the back, thumping on the window and we’re yelling at him to slow down. If we hadn’t stopped him he would have driven off the cliff. Well that’s those *durramendaa* influencing his

thoughts. You bin in the car too. We know you see them.

I nodded. Johnny looked at me and advised me:

Well, they do that to other whitefellas. Remember when that carload of white nurses, who just arrived here, were nearly killed on that corner? They had to be airlifted to a hospital on the mainland. They drive too fast: didn't show proper respect for our country.

I nodded again.

Well that's what happened to them. The *durramendaa* tried to kill them. It's their [the *durramendaa*'s] country. And there have been a whole heap of cars roll on that corner. Whitefellas just don't know and most of them wouldn't believe in the spirit world anyway! (*Personal Communications*, 24 September, 2001).

Besides trespass, one of the other seriously deviant behaviours that teachers do is, "scabbing off Aboriginal people" which includes making an income from working on an Aboriginal community, and taking on another job as well as teaching and selling seafood or yabbies that they catch back to the mainland. In short, it is greed. While I was sitting on the beach at *Birri* with a lot of Lawmen and their wives and families, one of the Lawmen said:

Those teachers 'scabbing off' us Aboriginal people make me sick. Those whitefellas have no idea what we go through, our poverty. They are all talk. They say they're going to help us, help our kids, but they never do it. They stay a couple of years and they're off to Cairns. (*Personal Communication*, Anon. J., 10 June, 2001).

Johnny spoke up, "You know, those new teachers only stay two years. They just come and go, not nearly long enough to learn our culture and how can they

understand our children if they don't know the culture" (*Personal Communication*, 10 June, 2001).

As I have mentioned in Chapters 3 and 6 there are sacred and secular reasons for the Elders wanting the teachers to stay long periods of time. The sacred reason is that as *Kulthangar* and a Crow Elder from Montana have already mentioned:

If people stay long enough, even white people, the spirits will begin to speak to them. It's the power of the spirits coming up from the land. The spirits and the old powers aren't lost, they just need people to be around long enough and the spirits will begin to influence them. (Snyder, 1990, p. 39).

The Elders are saying if the teachers stay long enough the totemic ancestors or spirit people will teach them the Law and influence them to listen to the Elders.

On the secular level, Aboriginal educator Blitner (2000) is in concurrence with the Lawman's ideas. As I have already mentioned in the literature chapter, she maintains, "*Balanda* (non-Aboriginal) educators... stay for a short time, some stay for a long time, but eventually when the wind blows they blow away" (2000, p. 8). And although Arber (1997) suggests that "Aboriginals... have become essentialised, separated, excluded, abused and differentiated... from the main body of Australians" (p. 2), in the mental constructions of the community the 'white' teachers are reduced to 'other' and 'them', a minority; a stream of nameless faces "who endlessly come and go" (*Personal Communications Kulthangar, Dilmurrur*, 18 September, 2000; *Bulthuku*, 14 September, 2000; *Chuloo, Birdibir*, 17 September, 2000; *Wunhun*, 17 September, 2000). Cowlishaw (1990) also argues that the:

less desired rural areas in Australia are serviced by a circulating group of nomadic professionals, usually from urban backgrounds pursuing their own career trajectories. Most of the medical staff, schoolteachers, police and welfare personnel arrive

as outsiders and leave after a number of years. (p. 52).

Fitzgerald (2001), Collins (1999) and *Katu Kalpa* (Australian Senate. Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, 2000) all document a history of outsiders coming and going from Aboriginal communities and the subsequent lack of trust for outsiders that results from this transitory behaviour. *The Partners for Success Review* (Education Queensland, 1999) and McInerney, Smyth, Lawson and Hattam (1999) also maintain that a constant turnover of new teachers erodes trust in the school system and strains school-community relations. The teachers' behaviour is, by definition in the private domain, but from the participants' perspective the teachers are in a 'fish bowl' situation. They stand out because they are temporary and they are obvious because of their 'newcomerness'. But as I point out and explore later in this chapter, instead of the 'whiteness' of teachers being invisible because it is so fundamentally assumed, the primary category here is 'blackness' and a unifying category of these teachers which makes them stand out, is their 'whiteness'. Because they are 'white' they are on view constantly. They cannot avoid being noticed. They are seen whatever they do and commented on, and their behaviours such as greed, trespass, theft, drunkenness, and gambling also set them apart. These behaviours are quite apart from their relationships with the community. The participants tie these behaviours to greed and materialism: consumerism and typical white Western urban behaviour. A number of the Lawman who have spent many years outside *Kunhanhaa* and are now highly educated in Western concepts, suggest that greed is consumerism as well as a personal failing – a culturally located analysis (*Personal Communications*, Anon. F, 20 September, 2000; Anon. J., 2 November, 2000; *Wuhnun*, 22 September, 2000).

I remarked to *Wunhun*, "I've heard you yelling things out at the teachers about their high fences and saying they only come to make money, that they don't care about the Aboriginal people." *Wunhun* glared, then laughed, looked at me closely and answered:

Yeah... No one else is going to say it. I swear them and growl them about stealing our fish. And the new

teachers get a cheap house straight away. It takes us five years to get a house here. They have cheap house, flash car, flash boat and they still steal our fish! It makes me very angry! (*Personal Communication*, 16 April, 2002).

*Wunhun's* comments relate to the previous remarks by participants, but also affix an extra dimension of denial and fear, which the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity and the World Conference Against Racism (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity, 2001) indicates about racism. Dodson (2004), Gledhill (1994), Morris (1989) and King and Vick (1994) also argue that Aboriginal people have spent years on missions or reserves under surveillance. Two of the anonymous participants also spoke about the fear many people feel about speaking up against the authorities (*Personal Communication*, Anon. F; 21 September, 2001; Anon. J. 10 June, 2001) and many of the Lawmen speak about the missionaries "playing with the minds of the dormitory women and turning them against their own culture so they always stood by whitefellas" (*Personal Communications, Kulthangar, Kurnunkgur, Chuloo*, Robinson, R., Peters, P., Peters, C., Peters, M., Birdibir, Chuloo, Moon, T., Milmajah and *Wunhun*, 17 May, 2002). *Wunhun's* comments also indicate material concerns, which show ignorance about local culture and protocols.

Regarding material concerns of teachers who go to remote communities Ankrah-Dove (2000) has suggested that the sociological orientation held by the individual would influence the manner in which that professional reacted to a rural or remote appointment. She suggested that those individuals who hold a challenge viewpoint focused on the positive, beneficial, personally and professionally satisfying aspects of rural lifestyle and enjoyed their time in the community, but those who hold the 'deficit' viewpoint focused on the lack of services and sporting facilities, the isolation from friends and family, the long distances to go anywhere, the need to receive compensatory benefits for the hardships/dislocation from larger centres. Ankrah-Dove (2000) suggests that people holding a 'deficit' view are often in the rural location because they see it as a fast-track promotional move for their career or they were initially attracted to the idea of a rural appointment

because of the fringe benefits such as extra salary. This research may explain some of the Elders' comments on teachers who "come to *Kunhanhaa* for the money." *Milmajah* added, "Those teachers go out in their flash boats to catch our fish and put them in their big freezers, but they can't be bothered coming to visit us" (*Personal Communication*, 17 May, 2002). *Wunhun* and Johnny added after *Milmajah's* comment, "Yeah they come here with their big boats and their cars and please themselves to go anywhere without permission. They go here and there and do whatever they want" (*Personal Communication*, 17 May, 2002).

In 2002, after *Wunhun* had been back to Sydney for a year, he was clearly incensed about the issue of teachers 'fishing out' country that belonged to local people. He told me:

You know there was a teacher here and he was going down to the dam, our water supply, to get yabbies. He used to take his crab pots down and get them. He sell them to the mainland. And then the spirit people punish him for stealing. His mother get sick and dying. That's what happens if they steal from us, someone in their family will be punished. If you're not doing good you get punished and if you don't do things in the proper manner you'll get punished. All the community know that. It's the Law. (*Personal Communication*, 16 April, 2001.)

*Wunhun's* story illustrates the Law of cause and effect and the Law of respect. Because he is a *Birrimendaa*, *Wunhun's* presiding totem is *Thuwatu* (Rainbow Serpent). In the *Thuwatu* story the Big Country Lawman *Thuwatu* was punished for not caring for his sister, *Bulthuku* and her child (*Personal Communication*, *Chuloo*, 20 November, 2002). She sets him on fire and he eventually dies. This story is the basis of the cultural law of reciprocity. It is the same Law that *Kulthangar* evokes when he tells the story of Peter of *Kanba* being slighted by all the non-Aboriginal people who do not give him the respect a Lawman deserves. The other story regarding greed is the Moon or *Gidegal* story. *Gidegal*, an outsider to the country gains access to a night of feasting by

whispering gossip in the women's camp. Even though the men indicate that he must leave, the women sympathise with *Gidegal*. He eats all the Elders food and rapes the women. He is speared by the Elders, dies and ascends to heaven with seven of the women.

The Lawmen know that these Laws are “everywhere and everywhen” (Stanner, 1979) present and are natural Laws. They are Laws that were put in place by Dreaming Ancestors. *Milmajah* and *Birdibir* both maintained, “Whether whitefellas believe them or not they still exist” (*Personal Communications*, 17 May, 2002).

Another gravely inappropriate behaviour on the teachers' part was their regular drinking. Many of the Lawmen and senior women believe alcohol should be prohibited from the island (*Personal Communications*, Anon.A., 2 September, 2000; Anon. E, 2 December, 2000; *Wunhun*, 30 September, 2001; *Kulthangar*, *Bulthuku*, 16 May, 2002). The participants said the ‘white’ teachers drank alcohol at ‘white’-teacher-only parties and at *Birri* tourist lodge. There were three issues here, a time when it was public knowledge that teachers were drinking at school after school hours (*Personal Communications*, *Kulthangar*, 18 September, 2000; *Wunhun*, 17 September, 2000), a time when teachers were known to be drinking in the ten day alcohol curfew for public mourning for a plane crash in 1999, where two Elders died (*Kulthangar*, *Milmajah*, 15 May, 2002) and a further incident of participants being excluded from teacher interaction (*Wunhun*, 6 September, 2000; Marmies, W., 26 September, 2001).

The following incident appears typical of what participants saw as this process of exclusion. I was with Calder and a number of other Lawmen at *Birri* Lodge one Saturday afternoon, when Calder exclaimed to the other side of the restaurant where the non-Aboriginal teachers usually sit, “Hello white teachers. How are you white teachers?” (*Personal Communication*, 18 September, 2001). There was silence. All the Aboriginal Lawmen laughed loudly. Calder's friendliness and humour was an act of bravery because, generally, there is no interaction between the two groups. It was an act of agency because Calder was a *dulmada* of *Birri*. Though the Lodge leased the land, it was Peters' and Williams' country and their totem was *Thuwatu*, the Rainbow Serpent. Therefore the abiding sacred edict was that of reciprocity.

Many of the non-drinking Elders and senior women blame 'white man' generically for introducing alcohol to the island. Margaret's statement is typical:

Where does that drinking and smoking come from girl? I tell you! It comes from white man. The old people tell us not to drink in language: *gunna nageeda mulla!* I have never drunk a drop in my life. I know if I get drunk someone might rape me; kill me. That's why we trust you girl. You never drink either. Wise people don't drink! (*Personal Communication*, 20 September, 2001).

Smith (2000) has criticised Western education systems that do not include knowledge of local communities and this knowledge of local practices surely includes teachers having a friendly drink with the people who own the land where one is a guest. In this respect Clara and Cecily argued, "You don't drink beer, but you still come and sit with us at the canteen" (*Personal Communication*, 14 May, 2002).

Journalist Gregory (2003) has documented some Education Queensland teachers in a remote community who "have received official warnings for trying to evade recently introduced alcohol restrictions" (p. 3). Gregory (2003) reported "Bamaga Community Council chief executive officer Chris Foord as saying, 'Teachers should be role models for students and uphold the policies of the government, but they are setting a bad example for the whole community' " (p. 3).

In short, the teachers' behaviour was sacrilegious and blasphemous to the Lawmen and senior women of the community. They saw the teachers as stealing, trespassing, breaking promises, lying, being consumerist and greedy in their behaviour, lacking in respect, drinking alcohol when they should not and being foolish. They saw the teachers as breaking spiritual Laws, and causing trouble to themselves and the community.

#### Those white teachers have no idea

There is a third level in which the participants construct the teachers as gravely socially deviant, and this is at the level of total lack of knowledge. They suggest this because the teachers are young and inexperienced in worldly wisdom, do not

come from the bush, have not learned correct Aboriginal protocol and by reputation did not do well at university.

The participants perceived the teachers' generally young age as presenting difficulties on many levels. *Kulthangar* argued, "Those white teachers very young, most of them only in their twenties. What that fella in Townsville we saw say to us? Yeah, 'you can't put an old head on young shoulders'. Age of twenty something a long way to go to catch up to learn about Aboriginal people and what this land mean to us." Later in the same conversation he returned to the subject:

The Elders have always taught in this culture. I never learnt from any young people, like those young teachers. It a bit like the blind leading the blind. The community should be able to have a say in what teachers come here. Young people get out of hand. White teachers might say, 'Why *Kulthangar* and the Elders tell us what to do when we know it all', but they don't know enough. (*Personal Communication*, 17 January, 2001).

However, *Kulthangar* and all of the eleven anonymous participants did not believe that many of the teachers respected the Lawmen or senior community members. *Kulthangar* suggested:

because those teachers think we are old, we are stupid. But they the ones that stupid. White man never been over caring for their self. They never caring for their spiritual self. Those young teachers, they sick in their minds, because they drink a lot. You see them at school: they not troubling at school, you know they hesitate. They live in a dream. Their mind tired. (*Personal Communication*, 18 September, 2000).

He also saw it as a deficiency that many 'whitefellas' had no respect for older people. *Kulthangar* maintained:

Those teachers gotta learn if they drink when the community not drinking when we mourning [especially for the plane crash over the Gulf of Carpentaria where seven local people died] they must see it's a big mistake. They very rude people. They have no respect, not for the island or for the people. I can tell you anything about young people today. We Elders tell them what right and wrong. You know they think they different, but those young teachers are like young Aboriginal people today: just young children in their minds. They just want to listen to loud music and get drunk. We never learned from young people in their twenties, thirties, even forties. I learn from old men. If you learn from someone young you don't know wether he's telling the truth or not and that can get you in a lot of trouble. You maybe learning something bad. You know they think they smart, them teachers to become a big high teacher, but they still got a lot of growing up to do. (*Personal Communication*, 27 November, 2000).

When I asked *Wunhun* what could be done to improve the relationships between the teachers and the community he answered:

They are only in their early twenties: too young to have any real life experience, just book learning. In our culture only older men usually teach, certainly not girls in their twenties. They just don't seem to want to know anything about Aboriginal culture. They don't want to listen and they are very self-centred. They're like that with everyone, white or black. They just communicate among themselves. (*Personal Communication*, 17 September, 2000).

In regard to this issue of age and the young ‘white’ teacher’s attitudes, Bly (1996) and Gardiner (2000) both refer to a contemporary movement, a cult of the need of everlasting youthfulness, rather than a belief that age and experience begets wisdom, which they refer to as the “teening of America.” This ‘teening’ is a trend that applauds the imagery and lifestyle of adolescence throughout the media. Because of this media-inflicted-propaganda many people may believe anyone that looks older than thirty is not acceptable (Gardiner, 2000). One is expected to remain beautiful and ‘young’ for as long as possible.

Carrigan and Szmigin (2000) suggest, “The advertising industry either ignores older people altogether or presents them in caricatures or negative stereotypes” (p. 217). Gardiner (2000) proposes that the media and the fashion industry contribute to the selfish, arrogant attitudes of youth. According to Gardiner (2000) these attitudes cut across race and class and focus more on consumer individualism. She argues that these attitudes, “isolate people from the commitment to others and refract their identities through brand loyalties, beauty and ‘coolness’ ” (2000, p. 128). Gardiner (2000) states, “young people now prefer consumer individualism to old-fashioned liberal individualism, which focuses on personal responsibility” (p. 128). She also believes that this isolation, lack of empathy, insensitivity to the needs of others and “selfish aggression are required to keep a stably inegalitarian world” (p. 128).

The observations of numerous middle-aged and senior *Kunhanhaamendaa* about the attitudes which characterised many of the young teachers at *Kunhanhaa* are in agreement with Gardiner’s (2000), Bly’s (1996), Correll’s (2000) and Carrigan’s and Szmigin’s (2000) research. The topic of ‘the ignorance of youth’ exposes many aggressive and selfish attitudes and values, which several of the *Kunhanhaamendaa* conversationalists spoke about in various tones of despair, anger and disgust.

Some of the participants agreed that, “the older teachers introduced themselves around the community, but we never see them new ones” (*Personal Communications, Dilmirrur*, Anon. J, Anon. K, Anon L, 2 November, 2000). I talked to the Williams family in their front yard. There were five Lawmen present, on this occasion, and their mother. Their wives and two sisters sat with them. They were all concerned about preserving their culture. Johnny told me angrily:

Those teachers are very young and selfish. They should get a piece of paper from the council to tell them the rules of the community and if they put it in the bin, we will tell them. They should be sacked by the council and sent away if they don't obey the rules. The community should interview them before they are allowed to teach here and then we wouldn't get these people who have no respect for us. They have no idea of what we think of them and they don't care. (*Personal Communication*, 30 August, 2000).

Another factor that the participants saw as contributing to the teacher's ignorance was their urban background. I asked *Wunhun*, Johnny and the Lawmen sitting with them did they think the teachers came from the city or country. *Wunhun* replied, "They're city fellas. You can see the way they act. I lived in Sydney for a few years. I know what city fellas are like" (*Personal Communication*, 30 August, 2000). *Kurnungkur* commented on another occasion, "And we're also dealing with bush children, not city children. Most of these teachers don't come from the bush and they don't understand how it feels to live in the bush. Growing up in the bush you are isolated from the things city people do" (*Personal Communication*, 15 September, 2000).

This sense of contrast between city and bush people came out frequently. Margaret also told me, "Cheryl's husband [is] bush-fella; butcher. He born in bush on a property" (*Personal Communication*, 10 June, 2001). *Wunhun* remarked in September 2000, "I see Ken, Dan and Saemus spending time with Aboriginal people and the butcher, that bush fella and his teacher wife they take out ole Nancy. They go to church too" (*Personal Communication*, 2 October, 2000).

*Wunhun's* conversation and his contemptuous expression revealed that he had a bad impression of non-Aboriginal people who came from the city. *Wunhun* stated clearly, "We want people who've had some background with Aboriginal people, been around Aboriginal communities, or like working with Aboriginal people. We want people who've come from the bush because they've generally

grown up with Aboriginal people or been to school with them” (*Personal Communication*, 27 November, 2000). *Wuhnun*, “Unless those teachers have known Aboriginal people before they just don’t understand us or like us and our children. Mr O’Leary studied Aboriginal culture at university and he comes and asks us fishing with him in his boat” (*Personal Communication*, 30 September, 2000).

*Dilmirrur*, another Aboriginal person, and I were talking over breakfast one morning at my house. This anonymous participant was quite agitated about the teachers not talking to him, “They just don’t talk to us. Those teachers that were here in the seventies, they were loving teachers. Each teacher said hello to me. I introduced them around. But, this new lot just don’t speak to Aboriginals. Why?” (*Personal Communication*, Anon. M, 30 September, 2000). *Dilmirrur* said with his usual quiet good humour, “I know why. They just don’t know Aboriginals ways. People don’t talk to each other in the city. Ursula and I have gone on tour a few times in cities. And those teachers come from the cities.” (*Personal Communication*, 30 September, 2000).

*Wuhnun*, a Lawman who had lived in Sydney for some time said, “We know people from the bush because they friendly. These teachers come from the city and city people are different” (*Personal Communication*, 30 September, 2000).

There is a possibility that *Dilmirrur*, *Wunhun* and the ex-stockmen Lawmen, whose conversations I analyse later, are essentialising the ‘bush’. However, as sociologists Murdoch and Pratt (1993) and Lowe, Clark, Seymour and Ward (1997) argue, it is more important to explore how the ‘bush’ is socially constructed in a variety of contexts which may include romantic constructions from the film *The Man from Snowy River* [which *Kulthangar* watched on video regularly], the television series *Blue Heelers* (cf., Share, Lawrence and Gray, 2000, p. 410) and the image of ‘bush’ politicians such as Bob Katter senior and junior, whom many of the senior *Kunhunaamendaa* have known personally. I suggest, as do Share, Lawrence and Gray (2000), that this friendliness is a “cultural value” (p. 407) and in this context the *Kunhanhaamendaa* are describing ‘bush’ people as the ideal in moral terms and in terms of their identity in relation to space.

As *Milmajah* has said, “No ‘bushy’ would ever drove cattle, shoot pigs or fish in their cod holes [fishing spots in a river or dam] on someone else’s property without permission first. It’s the law of the bush. It’s common sense and it’s respect” (*Personal Communication*, 26 September, 2001). Again as *Milmajah*, *Kulthangar*, Paulie, Matthew, Margaret, and *Ngerrawurn* have argued at various times ‘bush’ workers “tend to see more similarity than difference between themselves and their employers and may adopt an attitude... that country life [and people] are superior to that of the city” (Share, Lawrence and Gray, 2000, p. 417). Share, Lawrence and Gray (2000) also argue, as do the Elders I have cited that “an egalitarian ideology and a belief in a shared fate in the face of the common external enemy, the city and the government may militate against the development of class consciousness” (p. 417). *Milmajah*, *Birdibir*, *Kulthangar*, Margaret and *Ngerrawurn* all agreed, “A city fella could be turned into a bushie over time” (*Personal Communications*, ;*Birdibir*, 17 September, 2000; *Kulthangar*, Hills, M., 17 January, 2001; *Milmajah*, 28 September, 2001; *Ngerrawurn*, 30 September, 2001).

However, *Kulthangar* told me he had heard of a particularly a grave insult to their culture. *Kulthangar* said he had been told that a non-Aboriginal male teacher who had taught on a community in the Northern Territory had been proclaiming that he had been initiated in the Northern Territory (*Personal Communication*, 14 January, 2001). He said furiously, “Mefella soon see. I tell him to get up here and drop his pants. We see then whether he’s a man. He won’t have the guts to face a big Lawman like me” (*Personal Communication*, 14 January, 2001). As Grosz suggests “the body... [has] a specific history within a socio-cultural context” (1994, p. 15) and in *Kulthangar*’s case he can read the bodies of Aboriginal men throughout North Western Queensland and the Northern and desert regions of Northern Territory by their scars (*Personal Communication*, 14 January, 2001). The idea of a non-Aboriginal teacher talking publicly about initiation shows a total lack of respect for the sacred aspects of the Aboriginal community and a complete lack of respect for the culture. *Kulthangar*, *Milmajah*, *Kurnungkur* and Reggie all told me that if a man was initiated in another community he would have made “a visit to the Elders his first port of call” (*Personal Communication*, 17 May, 2002).

*Kulthangar* added, “There are a few teachers who have lived on communities, but have they really mixed up with Aboriginal people, mmm? This tells usfella truth! Red Indian say whiteman speak with forked tongue. We say that too. Wefella say white man speak with empty heart too!” (*Personal Communication*, 17 May, 2002). When *Kulthangar* was very angry about ‘whitefellas’ the greatest slur he could give was to construct them as ‘heartless’. Over the five years I have known him he has been working on his ‘onion poem’, one of his constructions of ‘whitefellas’:

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(*Personal Communication*, 15 January  
2001).

*Kulthangar* compared himself as a compassionate, knowledgeable, fatherly tribal Aboriginal leader to white people who come in to try to provide an authoritarian role for his people. When he was using himself and the Elders as a comparison he added the ‘apple’ part of the poem: “Apples are sweet and juicy, full of love, goodness and inside they have [a] heart. We Elders are like [an] apple.” He told me that what he means by heart is that an apple has seeds that can regenerate and that the Elders are the heart of the culture, whereas at the centre of the onion there is only a hole and the bitter juice which makes one cry. One day when we were talking about astronomical black holes as phenomena that ‘gobble up’ other planets he said, “Yeah, whitefellas gobble up our culture and create a big nothing, just sadness, and confusion, that is like the inside of onion: nothingness” (*Personal Communication*, 26 April, 2002). This was his essentialist construction of ‘whitefellas’. It is understandable that *Kulthangar* and the Elders think like this, because historically they have been “humiliated, dispirited and marginalised by racial and intellectual inferiority dogma” (Harslett, Harrison, Godfrey, Partington

and Richer, 1998, p. 2) and treated with intense paternalism by government agents and the church (Wilson, 1997; Beresford and Omaji, 1998; Harslett, Harrison, Godfrey, Partington and Richer, 1998). One can argue from the participants' conversations that they still perceive themselves as being treated in a derogatory way, although two Royal Commissions have been held at *Kunhanhaa* and so much material abounds to warn government workers against continuing racist, discriminatory practices.

One of the notable points that emerges from *Kulthangar's* 'onion poem' and comments by other participants is the concept of 'whiteness' itself. Nakayama and Krizek (1995) argue that whiteness becomes a default when used as a strategic rhetoric. However, just as Ellsworth (1997) notes, "White people are never just white. [They are] always positioned within gender, language, sexuality, class, ability, size, ethnicity, and age" (p. 266) and this is notable in this section on interpersonal relationships with teachers. The 'white' teachers are positioned within a structurally defined role. The participants never essentialise them totally, because there are exceptions. If the participants essentialised 'whiteness' as a deficiency they would not have been talking with me. In this regard *Wunhun* shook his head when I asked him about the teachers' educational and cultural backgrounds:

Do these people think we are stupid? All this has been going on for years. None of it is new. We know that the teachers with a low mark come here to get a high mark and move up the ladder. They've only been at school. They've never been out in the wide world. We've been told in the past. They make me sick. (*Personal Communication*, 26 September, 2000).

*Milmajah*, *Kulthangar*, *Birdibir*, *Chuloo* and *Wunhun* informed me that the temporary teachers do not have a consciousness of and respect for local knowledge and culture unless they are taught at university level, by some previous experience with Aboriginal people or by local Elders (*Personal Communications*, *Kulthangar*, *Milmajah*, 29 September, 2000; *Birdibir*, *Wunhun*, 26 September, 2000, *Chuloo*, 28 September, 2001). In response to *Wunhun's* previous remarks

regarding careers, university 'marks' and their empty words of caring I cite Kincheloe (1999) who argues, "No matter how loudly whites proclaim their border identities... their commitment to a common humanity... they can still 'pass' as white people when they seek employment and job promotions" (p. 273).

Connelly (2002) maintains that:

education scholars such as Fine, Powell and MunWong (1997) and Kincheloe (1999) are a few among many who, in contributing to the materialisation of whiteness discourse, claim that a focus on whiteness consciousness can create dispositions in teachers that lead to the eradication of racist... practices in schools (p. 3)

in the communities that the students come from. I bring the concept of whiteness to light because 'whiteness', 'blackness' and colour are mentioned numerous times by participants. Non-Aboriginal teachers are mostly known as "white teachers" and Calder's previous comments (*Personal Communication*, 18 September, 2001) highlight this.

To conclude my exploration of what elders see as a lack of connectedness between the teachers and community I note from the participants' comments that a significant part of the teachers' lack of relatedness to the community is ignorance. They simply lack knowledge: they are young and you cannot put an old head on young shoulders; they are not from the bush: they mostly have not studied Aboriginal studies; they have not fraternised with people before on Aboriginal communities; they do not observe local behaviour and most importantly they are ignorant of *Kunhanhaa* Law, they do not know protocol. The Elders regard the teachers as ignorant individuals in their behaviour. That is a personal attribute and personality defect. They are deemed stupid for various reasons: they get low marks at university and their ideology and culture makes them so. The combination of young, non-Aboriginal and urban does not bode well as a construct.

### **Institutional relationships that the Elders say exist**

The policy document *Partners for Success* ( Education Queensland 2000) states there are:

a range of key factors, rather than any single issue that effect student outcomes. These included: the quality of the relationship between the school and its community; the level of cultural understanding among school staff [and] the stability of staffing, particularly in remote areas. (p. 5).

Although the document no doubt means geographical stability of staff, when I read this to Elders *Milmajah*, Reggie, and *Kulthangar* they said, “Is this stable feelings [mentality and emotions]?... balance of heart and mind?” (*Personal Communications*, 17 May, 2002). But the emphasis in the policy appears to be the establishment of productive relationships, with an accent on cross-cultural understanding. The analysis and synthesis of the conversations in this chapter regarding institutional-community relationships may add to this understanding.

In addition to their need for quality interpersonal relationships and acceptable social behaviours the Elders constructed the institutional relationships as wanting. The institutional relationships carried all the aforementioned interpersonal characteristics, and inextricably entwined in the institutional practices are the personal attributes.

#### *Institutional power: institutional hegemony*

The school has certain capacities to exercise power. There are certain institutional practices that the school does. There are also certain practices they do not do.

One of the things that the school does not do, according to several of my Participants, is to call meetings when they should be called. The Elders and some of the Grannies told me that they were not being asked to meetings or being consulted. *Kurnungkur* told me, “We oldfellas are not asked to parent and community meetings. We are not told when they are on. We were not asked to give advice about this *Partners For Success*. What is going on here?” (*Personal Communication*, 17 May, 2002).

Another institutional action which created lack of trust occurred at a meeting outlining a cultural awareness program for the new teachers at the beginning of 2001. The Elders came to the meeting to meet the new principal and new deputy principal. They expected that these people would listen to their ideas

about respectful community-school relationships (*Personal Communications, Kulthangar*, 15 January, 2001; Marmies, W., 17 May, 2002; *Birdibir*, 15 April, 2001; *Wuhnun*, 16 April, 2001). The Elders and many senior community members had written a comprehensive induction brochure for the new teachers and new principals, which they expected to be tabled at this meeting. *Birdibir* said:

We know Hilary typed the small book, but wefella Elders and a lot of the community put our ideas into this small, little book. She just went backwards and forwards around usfella to make sure the ideas were what we wanted. They our ideas. Not hers. Took six weeks. Then that principal say in front of whole meeting, 'I saw something Hilary wrote' when all our name on the front, not hers. No respect for us. So we all walk out. No respect! He must think we stupid. We the mob he should be listening to. The school doing same thing McCarthy did to [the] Elders [in the 1940s]. (*Personal Communication*, 15 April, 2001).

*Kulthangar* and Wilfred agreed. They were very angry. *Kulthangar* was also incensed. He fumed:

Wifred and I went to a meeting with that headmaster and some of the teachers last year, before school started and he promised that he would visit us all, and visit the community. He broke that promise. When he come to see us? Never. We have four headmasters in four years and only one keep promise, that Jay, that one adopted by the Peters. That one got proper respect for us. (*Personal Communication*, 17 May, 2002).

*Wuhnun* agreed with *Kulthangar* and argued:

The teachers getting cheap accommodation immediately, when it took the locals five years to

get a house, is racism. The lack of consulting the community, the low standards of teaching, the Human Rights Commission people need to come back here to see what's going on. What the school, the education system is doing to us is discrimination. We're isolated well away from half the world out there. No one in the community will say anything. They've been beaten down by years of surveillance by missionaries and police. (*Personal Communication*, 16 April, 2002).

To summarise, the Elders and Lawmen perceive that the school as an institution does not respect the Elders and the community. The school and principal doesn't keep its promises or invite the Elders to school meetings or keep them informed about current educational reports and practices. They perceive the school as a government institution to be no different to the missionary McCarthy who tried to break the power of the Elders. The school does not listen to the ideas of the Elders or the community and the school continues its practices because the community is afraid to speak up.

*Institutional relationships: linking the institutional practices and institutional relationships to the principal's personal characteristics*

I have explored the abstracted institutional aspects of the institution and the principal's role of the head of the institution, but principals are still people. When acting in the formal role and position as head of the school, the principal is subject to the same set of personal expectations regarding behaviour as an individual, as I discussed above. This tension between the institutional and the personal can perhaps be best explored through a hypothetical, example. Take, for example, a headmaster, such as McClintock, that the Elders consider favourably. As the principal, there would be a range of institutional matters over which he would have no control. The school would still stand in the same formal relationship to community and would still have certain accountabilities to the state government over and above their accountabilities to community. The principal would certainly have no control over the appointment and transfer system, including, crucially, the

accrual of transfer points for service at Mornington, or the number of points a teachers would need to go to Cairns (although he may be able to effect compassionate transfers). While he might be able to exercise limited power of office over particular appointments and personnel, in such matters he would have limited capacity to shape the school to meet community needs. However, his personal characteristics would come into play in finding space to respond to the community on a range of other issues. At one end of an imaginary scale, he might listen to requests for culture teaching and would solicit community advice on best ways to do things. At the other end, he might simply say, “no culture.” A middle position might be possible, where he would receive a deputation, say “I hear you”, but check with the staff before he decided either way. Where the principal sits on this scale is where the personal comes into the institutional, the space where the personal interacts with the systemic. In the Elders’ views, personal distancing from community engagement has been common, and has made the school as an institution less responsive to the community, even within the parameters structured by the education system itself.

In regard to such an array of possibilities, the Elders argue that, although they presently have inadequate influence, there have been times when they have had a voice in institutional practices, for example, in setting up culture classes at school. The Elders and senior women maintain that they have been recognised at some stage by principals Jay Mills, Cath Johnson, Athol Dury and Bill McClintock (*Personal Communications, Kulthangar, Marmies, W., Wunhun, Williams, J., Robinson, R., Milmajah, Jekarija, Watt, J., 17 May, 2002; Chuloo, 20 November, 2002; Kelly, R., 19 September, 2001; Reid, C., 20 November, 2000; Brookedale, I., 18 September, 2000; Anon. A, 2 September, 2000; Anon. E, 2 December, 2000; Anon, H., 10 April, 2001*). *Kulthangar, Johnny, Wunhun, and Clara especially favour McClintock, “because he walked around the community to see what everyone wanted” (Personal Communications, Kulthangar, Wunhun, Williams, J., 16 May, 2002; Reid, C., 15 May, 2002)*. *Kulthangar* argued, “That old McClintock he was a good headmaster. He was adopted by my adopted brother, old Pat Reid. Old Pat really loved that good old man” (*Personal Communication, Kulthangar, 8 August, 2002*).

These principals set up committees that included the senior people of the community. They made space in the curriculum for culture. In the present principal's time the institution made some space for a programme where the Elders taught twelve initiated young men at the Festival Grounds every two weeks (*Personal Communications, Kulthangar, Milmajah, Moon, T., Birdibir, 17 May, 2002*). The Elders have been training the young men in the ways of Aboriginal Law: hunting, fishing, the seasons to hunt and collect bush food; sacred songs, stories and dances, sacred information about the land and story places and generally sacred information which they must learn as part of their cultural education as young lawmen (*Personal Communications, Kulthangar, Milmajah, Robinson, R., Birdibir, Moon, T., Kurnungkur, 17 May, 2002*). Teddy argued forcefully that the school be asked to keep a file on the two weekly meetings with the young Lawmen and that they be able to inspect the file periodically (*Personal Communication, 17 May, 2002*). A young male teacher who comes from the 'bush' and Ken Steele go with the young Lawmen for their afternoon education with the Elders.

In addition to the role of principals in creating spaces to respond to local community deputations or introduce culture programs, the Elders express concern for more personal relationships. They cite the extra-curricular relationship that one recent principal formed with some families in the community as an exemplary practice. I use this example to outline some community concerns and protocols on such matters.

Initially, *Bulthuku* told me that the new principal did not socialise in the community, or even go to the shop (*Personal Communications, Bulthuku, Kulthangar, 5 September, 2000*), but when I returned on 2 November, 2000, *Bulthuku* told me that she and her grandson Michael had met the principal in the shop and the principal had said, "Hello Michael." *Bulthuku* told me she had no idea who the woman was, although she thought she might be a teacher. *Bulthuku* laughed, "I asked her, 'Who are you?'" *Bulthuku* told me the principal answered, "I am the principal." *Bulthuku* went straight home to tell *Kulthangar*. They repeated the conversation a number of times to me and laughed uproariously. *Kulthangar* stated with a laugh, "She has no name. Her name is 'the principal'. Funny name. What her name really?"

It was clearly her institutional title and a safeguard for her at the shop when she may have been intimidated by all the community members around her. I assume this because I have seen *Kulthangar* show his 'mayor' name badge when people have forgotten his name and had to ask him again. By naming herself as 'the principal' Jay designated herself as the head of a local institution rather than as an individual. We all knew what the principal's name was but until she formally told *Bulthuku* and *Kulthangar* her name, they pretended they did not know her name.

Having related the story *Bulthuku* asked me, "Do you think she'll come to visit? What about asking one of the Aboriginal teacher aides to ask the principal down for morning tea. Maybe Ellen. Ellen is my cousin-sister." Both *Bulthuku* and I looked at Ken and asked, "What do think Ken?" He agreed. *Bulthuku* asked Ken, "Would she bring tea and pikelets?" I answered, "I'm sure she will. Ken will set it all up with Ellen."

The next afternoon I saw *Bulthuku* and I asked, "Did she come?" She laughed with obvious joy, "Yeah, she came. She bought a thermos, tea bags, milk, sugar and a cake. The cake was nice. We made her sit on our dirty old mattress out the front, on the ground. But, you know she got a red face because she forgot the cups, but she was a very nice person, very easy to yarn with. I liked her and *Kulthangar* liked her too. Her name Jay" (*Personal Communication*, 14 November, 2000). By visiting and using her first name Jay became a person, a warm and empathic individual rather than a detached administrator of an institution. Jay also visited *Bulthuku*, and became part of *Bulthuku*'s culture, rather than expecting *Bulthuku* to visit her, as an administrative figure, sitting behind a desk, in her office, at the school.

*Bulthuku*'s interaction with the principal illustrates a number of protocols, which are standard practice. First, many participants have said the shop is a good place for teachers to meet people in the community (*Personal Communications*, *Kulthangar*, *Bulthuku*, 2 November, 2000; Williams, J., 6 September, 2000; *Dilmirrur*, *Roughsey*, U., 15 September, 2000; Watt, J., *Chuloo*, 26 November, 2000; Hills, M., 20 November, 2000). By bringing food and drink the principal also was adhering to a standard protocol of bringing gifts of food when one visited people in the community (*Personal Communications*, Hills, M., *Bulthuku*, 20

November, 2000). *Kulthangar, Kurnungkur, Birdibir, Milmajah* have also said a number of times, “We want the teachers to come down and sit on our verandahs and listen to us” (*Personal Communications*, May 17, 2002). And Jay did that: she adhered to the cultural norms of the *Kunhanhaa* community, rather than the authoritative norms of a senior government administrator; she visited *Bulthuku* and *Kulthangar* at their home and sat on their mattress with them on their front veranda.

However, these cultural norms are not as casual as they may appear. One may deduce from both this and another example of adoption that a non-*Kunhanaamendaa* must be invited first, rather than invite themselves. In this regard Clara also told me, “My husband invited old McClintock to our place, but that was after a year of him being at the school. Old McClintock told me, ‘I waited to visit people in the village for a year. I wouldn’t have gone if I wasn’t invited.’ My husband asked McClintock, the headmaster in the seventies, to be his brother” (*Personal Communication*, 17 January, 2001). So there is a formal protocol that teachers must be invited before they are adopted. If they reveal caring, friendly behaviour and behaviour from the heart they may be adopted.

The interaction also highlighted a number of difficult issues for the Aboriginal people in the community. Money and food are problematic areas to the *Kunhanhaamendaa* because many people never have enough to eat and many families are poverty stricken. Jay bought cake and a thermos of tea which made her welcome. Time is also a concern. The Elders have told me that they like people to visit regularly “sit on their veranda and learn little by little” (*Personal Communications, Kulthangar, Kurnungkur, Milmajah, Birdibir, Robinson, R.*, 15 May, 2002). This, actually reduces outsiders, particularly teachers to student stature and places the Elders in an authoritative position as wise and learned, educators. Many local residents also maintain that teachers are often judgemental about *Kunhanaamendaa* hygiene and cleanliness. Yet Jay sat on what *Bulthuku* said was “Our dirty old mattress.” By sitting on that mattress the principal also passed another test, that of accepting people as they were and not making any judgments about cleanliness, hygiene, dirt or untidiness (*Personal Communications, Bulthuku*, 20 November, 2000; *Wunhun*, 6 September, 2000; *Dilmirrir, Roughsey, U.*, 15 September, 2000; Anon. D, 7 September, 2000).

Many participants are pleased to see teachers at the shop because they are spending money buying their groceries locally rather than placing bulk orders in Cairns (*Personal Communications*, Williams, J., 30 September, 2000; *Wunhun* 20 September, 2000). Johnny and *Wunhun* said that money is an important issue for them because they believed it was unfair that the teachers earned so much money and local people were so poor (*Personal Communications*, 20 September, 2000). Yet *Bulthuku* and Calder both said, “We see that principal and her husband up at the shop. They sit out the front and have a chat with the old people” (*Personal Communications*, 14 September, 2000).

In January 2001 Calder and Paul told me:

We adopted Jay. She very nice. Very friendly. Her husband always very helpful. He tow people broken down in their cars. She learn the ways of the community fast, but those school fellas got rid of her. Maybe cause she listen to Elders eh? We will miss her! (*Personal Communication*, 16 January, 2001).

These comments make it clear that the initiative for positioning teachers within the social structure comes from the community. It is not an initiative that teachers can take, so when *Kulthangar* and Joseph say they want teachers to be incorporated into the skin system, they are saying teachers will only be incorporated if they are ‘read’ as suitable. The Lawmen want suitable teachers to be appointed, but at least some aspects of suitability can be learned.

The principal had done everything that had been expected of her by the community as soon as she found out those expectations. Joseph also told me “Jay started culture teaching again at the school” (*Personal Communication*, 20 September, 2001). As Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Council regional councillor and Margaret’s nephew, *Murrandoo* Yanner, states, “any white person coming to work there really should make the effort to learn local rules” (cited in *The Courier Mail*, 1999, p. 27) and Jay did that.

Journalist Wayne Smith (1999) argues that the *Doomadgee* Aboriginal people make it difficult for:

any white worker who wants to involve himself or herself in the community... It takes months for a white worker to win respect in Doomadgee, and usually years to win friendship. To be accorded a 'skin', effectively to be adopted as a brother or a sister of the Aborigine conferring it, is the ultimate sign of acceptance. (p. 25).

However, the Elders' standoffs with both the principal who preceded Jay, and the principal who succeeded her, was distinctly symbolic of the refusal to be subservient to the dominance of the school system. It was notable that the men who were the most resistant to the authority of the school were community leaders such as the mayor, *Kulthangar*, and shire councillors Cecil and Teddy. Also resistant to the dominance of the school system were the sons of past councillors: *Milmajah*, *Wunhun*, Johnny, Calder, and Paulie. Men who had also become famous in the outside world as a result of dancing with the Woomera Dance Team also favoured the reproduction of their own culture, including Joseph, *Goomungee*, *Wunhun*, Johnny, *Kulthangar* and Cecil.

A number of senior people in the community commented on the personal attributes of the principal. I was sitting on the beach at *Birri* with a number of the Williams family and friends. One of the Lawman told me, "I saw that headmaster when he first came and he made all sorts of promises. Now I know he's a liar. He never came out into the community once. We need a decent principal who will do the job" (*Personal Communication*, Anon. J., 10 June, 2001). One of the senior women said; "Some teachers just don't like Aboriginal people. This headmaster just turn his back on us. He doesn't come into the community" (*Personal Communication*, Anon. N, 20 November, 2002). *Kulthangar* said, "At meeting we give that principal skin name and ask him to come and see us. 'Yes, yes', he say. But he break promise" (*Personal Communications*, 10 April, 2002). Six months later another senior participant, who is normally very gentle, told me, "That man is so unpopular in the community. I don't know how he can show his face around here" (*Personal Communication*, Anon. N, 20 November, 2002).

These stories by the Elders about how different holders of office have moved to amplify or diminish the responsibility of the Aboriginal community exemplify the effect that a principal “as leading man” (*Personal Communication, Kulthangar* 17 May, 2002) has on the community’s estimation of the school as an institution.

*The participants’ construction of the present is still sharpened by different practices in the past*

At times Elders’ concerns about structural-political areas where they feel aggrieved also reflect their sense of their responsibility for the wellbeing of the young people of their community, including how they fare as Aboriginal students in the school. *Wuhnun*’s spoke of this in the broadest of terms, as both past and present practice, transcending the school to encompass the whole structure of colonialist relations in which it was and is situated. His voice was shaking with emotion and anger as he said:

No one knows how they treat us. Nobody in the community will say anything. They’re used to being beaten down, by the missionaries and police. The trouble is they are teaching our kids. Our kids get mixed up being taught white man culture. They don’t even know who they are any more. Because of that white rubbish, our kids don’t respect the old people any more. They hear that rubbish at school. They see it on videos. White man got no respect. Self-determination is just empty rhetoric and propaganda to cover the lack of respect for the culture of each local Aboriginal community, especially respect for the Elders. (*Personal Communication*, 22 September, 2000).

This is the deepest and most long term level of the damage that non-Aboriginal government and church institutions have done to Aboriginal culture on *Kunhanhaa*. The effects are widespread. As I have outlined in previous chapters, and *Wunhun* argues the effect of this panopticism, institutional fear still pervades

the island from the days of the missions, and most of the community are still afraid to speak up for fear of incarceration. The panopticism does not just include fear but a lack of interest and respect for the original tribal culture. In fact in some cases the young people's respect for the Elders has eroded away to the point where some are "little more than laughing stocks and a target for the kids' jokes and violence" (*Personal Communication, Milmajah, Watt, J., 17 May, 2002*).

At another level, historical effects have effected the Lawmen's perception of the educational system. It would be repetition to address all the historical events that effect the Lawmen's construction of the present. Needless to say many of the Elders remember the horrific and panoptic treatment by missionary McCarthy and his systemic curbing of the Elders' power. They also remember one principal who fought with the Mornington Island Council to make sure the teachers did not have to pay 'the levy', yet each member of the community had to pay the levy "even though they were so poor compared to the teachers" (*Personal Communication, Wunhun, 22 September, 2000*).

Equally so, *Kulthangar* also compares many of the present teachers to such loving compassionate teachers such as Miss Bain, Belcher and McClintock. The latter were both principals and yet they both "bent the rules" (*Personal Communication, Kulthangar, 17 May, 2002*) and tried to change the educational and church system because of their compassion.

### **What the Elders say should be happening**

#### *Institutional Practices*

I spoke with one of the Lawmen about his thoughts concerning the relationship between the teachers and the community. One of his most telling statements regarding the school's perceived hegemonic position in the community was an answer to my question, "Do many parents come to parents and teachers night? Is there communication between parents and teachers to talk about these problems?" He replied, "It's not us who should go to them. It's them who should come to us" (*Personal Communication, Anon. F, 20 September, 2000*). Again in 2002 the same subject arose when *Milmajah* and *Kulthangar* were together and both replied at once, "It's not us who should come to them. It is them who should come to us" (*Personal Communication, 20 April, 2002*).

*Kulthangar, Kurnungkur, Cecil and Milmajah* told me in authoritative and angry tones that they told the headmaster that the Elders should be giving advice to the school on a regular basis (*Personal Communications*, 17 May, 2002). *Kurnungkur* told me fiercely, “I told that headmaster, ‘Yes, our mob are the people you teachers should be listening to’ ” and, “Monthly meetings are important to sort out a whole of things that are happening at the school” (*Personal Communication*, 15 May, 2002).

Joseph argued with a big smile on his face: “Ah yes! Usfella big mob of Elders. We’ve got to run this culture ourselves. Everyone, school, council, police, hospital, government, even those Woomera fellas gotta listen to us. We gotta run this culture ourselves” (*Personal Communication*, 16 May, 2002). Joseph was making a very clear statement about the Elders’ expectations about political relations between government (through institutions such as the school) and the Elders. Joseph was talking about a number of issues here: the normative social practices set down by *Mirndiyan* Law; cultural awareness for teachers and the restoration of correct protocol with Elders. Joseph’s demands are in line with Education Queensland’s *Review of Education and Employment Programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Education Queensland* (1999) as the section on “system support for Local Decision Making” outlines, “Communities in Queensland are beginning to demand the right to retrieve and maintain their own cultures while participating in and benefiting from mainstream community life” (p. 8). *Partners for Success* (Education Queensland, 2000) maintains that “Aboriginal... community representatives [should be] involved in the development of curriculum and pedagogy... policies and programs to meet the needs of Aboriginal... students” (p. 16). Joseph has taught culture at the local school for many years and has been a dancer in the Woomera (Mornington Island) Dance Team for many years. As a senior *dulmada* of the island he is an appropriate representative to teach song and dance and *Lardil* language at the school (*Personal Communications, Kulthangar, Kurnungkur, Marmies, W., Reid, C., Jekarija*, 17 May, 2002; Hills, M., *Bulthuku*, 15 May, 2002; *Goomungee*, 1 December, 2002,).

The Elders told me these issues were vital. Keeping promises is dependent on respect. The *Partners for Success* (Education Queensland, 2000) policy

document maintains that a successful approach to the development of local solutions for successful educational reform will be, “Fundamentally changing its relationship with Aboriginal... communities to one of partnership based on mutual respect... and shared responsibility” (p. 9). Respecting the Elders, listening to and negotiating with the Elders go hand in hand. The Elders demanded that they should have monthly meetings with the principal to keep him informed and to be informed by him, but nothing ensued. A critical reading says headmaster may be unaware that keeping of promises is a ‘bush’ way of communication. Fitzgerald (2001) warns breaking of promises leads to lack of trust. *Wunhun*’s comment was very similar to *Kulthangar*’s comment a year later; “White man’s schooling is nothing but rubbish in our heads.” When I read *Wunhun*’s comments back to *Kulthangar* he stated, “Respect is basis the society. What *Wunhun* say a really big thing.” *Kulthangar*’s comment is not only about cultural relevance but lack of respect; both indicated institutional and personal cultural ignorance (*Personal Communication*, 16 April, 2002).

In discussing how the participants construct interpersonal and systemic relationships between the school and the community, specifically the Lawmen and senior members of the community, I deduce from a critical social theory perspective and induce from the data that the teachers are treating the geographical community as a blank zone where they are not obliged to be after hours. The participants also warn that any teachers who befriend community members are likely to be excluded by other teaching staff. The literature in regard to critical theory gives various clues as to reasons for lack of interaction. Cowlshaw (1990) argues that the teachers and police believe they are martyrs to distance, isolation and constant control and regulation of the Aboriginal population. Cowlshaw (1988) suggests that these professionals “put up with the ‘Aboriginal problem’ and ‘isolation’ and are rewarded by subsidised housing, faster promotion and choice of future jobs” (p. 58). Cowlshaw suggests that “discrimination is quite legitimate [for teachers] if [it is] on the grounds of behaviour rather than race [and it] excludes those who are not respectable” (p. 51) “in the construction of rural respectability” (p. 52). Morris and Cowlshaw (1990) maintain that:

racism cannot be reduced to either the will of individuals or to the rationale of white bureaucracies, to individual or institutional racism, [but it] is manifested in a range of everyday social forms and cultural processes and reproduced in multiple institutional sites in contemporary Australia... in a variety of contexts. (p. ix).

The other possibility was suggested to me by a combined reading of the data, the history of *Kunhanhaa* in missionary times and an article by Herbert, Anderson, Price, Stehbens (1999). The latter suggest that:

schools are a complex interplay of power relationships based within interplay of social, economic, gender and racial elements. To a large degree, schools have historically been gatekeepers in assimilating Indigenous children into the values and mores of the dominant mainstream culture. Those children who step outside of this assimilatory process are often labelled as deficit in social and educational terms, and are subsequently placed in programs to redress the alleged personal deficit within the child or his or her family. (p. 11).

My analysis suggests that the transitory “white” teachers could be similar to the pre-McCarthy missionaries who defined their efforts to assimilate the *Kunhanhaa* children into the values and mores of the mainstream but regarded the Elders in the camp and in the bush as alien, and impossible to assimilate.

***The ideal: relationships according to Mirndiyan Law***

The Elders expect more than casual friendships with teachers. When I first asked Joseph (*Personal Communication*, 12 September, 2000) what sort of relationships he would like with the teachers I thought he must have imagined another question, but it soon became clear that he was speaking about the *Mirndiyan* kinship rules. I asked Joseph, “How do you think we can improve relationships between the Elders, community and the teachers and school?” He said, “Well you see in a

relationship you can't talk to your sisters or in-laws. Like one parent you can't talk to them. You can't talk to your cousin. Teachers should know this!" (*Personal Communication*, 12 September, 2000).

Although the missionaries had tried to eradicate all rules explicit under *Mirndiyan* Law regarding relationships such as skin (subsection) cousins not marrying, Joseph made it clear that these rules were still the normative social practices in the community and should be in the classroom. Joseph had skipped all casual relationships; even face-to-face personal relationships between close friends and jumped straight into *Mirndiyan* Law. He was talking about connections in the Aboriginal sense, skin relationships, family relationships, the relationships that each person has with the land and which story places he had on his country. What Joseph was speaking about was a set of practices, which was part of *Mirndiyan* Law. *Mirndiyan* Law set out for the *Kunhanhaamendaa* the set of cultural rules for conducting relationships. It was obvious that the Elders preferred that outsiders who come to work and live on Mornington Island "have a place in the system" (Ahern and the Mornington Island Elders, 2002). Reggie told me on 17 May, 2002, "If teachers are not adopted into the skin system the local people do not feel comfortable in relating to them." Many of the Elders and senior women have said that the ideal would be that teachers should become skin relations (*Personal Communications*, Hills, M., 2 October, 2000; *Kulthangar*, 20 September, 2001; *Bulthuku*, Roughsey, U., 6 September, 2001; *Birdibir*, May 2, 2002).

When I read Joseph's comments to *Milmajah*, he argued that in the Northern Territory and Western Australia such schools as Strelley, Groote Island and *Yuendumu*, where the Elders and the community ran the school, they would only accept teachers if those teachers chose them to become skin relations (*Personal Communication*, 20 May, 2002). "In an almost totally Aboriginalised school" (Blitner, 2000, p. 72) all children learn their skin groups by the time they are six or seven and the skin system is a part of a community (Blitner, 2000).

Clearly, the Elders seek to incorporate acceptable non-Aboriginal teachers into the Aboriginal ontology of place where people are part of a totem. While various Elders and some other participants made it clear that they wanted teachers to take their place in the 'skin' system, they made it equally clear that this could

only happen if teachers themselves were prepared to conduct themselves in ways that would make their acceptance in that system possible (*Personal Communications*, Hills, M., 2 October, 2000; *Kulthangar*, 20 September, 2001; *Bulthuku*, Roughseyy, U., 6 September, 2001; *Birdibir*, 2 May, 2002). Rather than explain a set of rules the Elders told stories about exemplary people, people who, over the years, had demonstrated the sorts of conduct they wanted in the schoolteachers.

Johnny and *Wunhun* cited Athol Dury and McClintock as exemplary figures, *Jekarija*, *Birdibir* and Clara mentioned McClintock and Belcher, while *Kulthangar* and *Milmajah* also spoke highly of Belcher, and added McKnight to the list. Margaret and her son *Ngerrawurn* spoke about their adoption of Ken. Calder and *Bulthuku* informed me about Jay.

The participants did not separate behaviour and relationships, so there was obviously specific conduct expected for certain roles. Not only were the virtues of specific behaviour important but also when I asked many participants what sort of relationships they wanted with the teachers a number of participants related to me examples of the process of behaviour they considered appropriate in their community.

#### *An exemplary community-teacher relationship*

I use Margaret's comments on Ken as a second example of productive community-teacher relationships. Margaret compared Ken, the teacher whom she had adopted, to the popular missionary Belcher. She stated:

Ken is in the way of Belcher and he's remembered. Belcher was a loving man. Belcher used to get around when he was a missionary. He used to sit with the people, scrape boomerang. You know you've gotta go and sit among the people, walk around the different homes and have a little chat with people. You should just go visiting and say hello and see how everyone is, well or sick, those kind of relationships and later in life they'll trust

you. They'll never forget about that. (*Personal Communication*, 17 September, 2001).

I replied, "Do you think all the teachers should do that?" Margaret answered:

Yeah, well we [the Grannies] want to know more about them, the teachers, too, you know. They might want to tell us more about the school, what need to be done, all those kind of things. We have been teachers and headmistresses at that school for years. We know all about the children, the culture and language. Well, now they only taking us in for breakfast. That not enough. (*Personal Communication*, 17 September, 2001).

Margaret clearly wanted more information about the teacher's backgrounds, inclusive curriculum, the school organisation and a greater part for the Grannies to play in the school. It is actually quite difficult to know whether these are her essentials or just the examples she mentions.

She added more information about Ken later in the month:

You know, that boy, my son, comes down and chops firewood for me at night. *Ngerrawurn* has taught him to hunt and spear crabs and fish. He sits with me and Gloria and is learning spin hair to make hats. He come a long way since he came here. Four years now. He is a good son. (*Personal Communication*, 17 September, 2001).

Ken's adoption could be said to be an example of a process by which outsiders are eventually trusted on Mornington Island. It was a process and relationship that involved a mutual friendship on the part of *Ngerrawurn* and Ken, but involved a long period and process of time, solemn watching, thinking, and eventually trust.

In November 1999 *Ngerrawurn* asked his mother Margaret whether she would adopt Ken as her son. She thought about it for some time (*Personal*

*Communication, Ngerrawurn*, 30 September, 2001). There were two obstacles. First, a “white teacher” had previously been adopted by Margaret but he and Margaret’s daughter had divorced and he no longer visited Margaret. This created an issue of broken promises and broken trust. The second obstacle was that Ken was a “city man not a bushman” (*Personal Communication, Kulthangar*, 5 September, 2000). Because Margaret’s brother, *Kangala*, a man who did not regard city-people highly, was a Big Country lawman, who had a great deal of influence on Margaret and her family, it took them two years to decide whether to adopt Ken as Margaret’s son.

*Kangala* laughed loudly when he asked me about Ken’s background and I told him Ken had spent most of his life in the city. Like *Kulthangar*, *Kangala* had been a stockman and identified with this archetype in words and behaviour. *Kulthangar* and *Milmajah* told me that *Kangala* positioned people from the city as impractical fools because they had no knowledge of the land, the birds, the animals, the sky, the weather, the cycles of climate and they are seen as selfish people with no sense of community or caring for their fellow man (*Personal Communications, Kulthangar*, 5 September, 2000; *Milmajah*, 2 September, 2000). According to *Kulthangar* people from the city only think of money rather than caring for the land (*Personal Communication*, 2 December, 2000).

*Ngerrawurn* trusted Ken as an intimate friend and had frequent meals at Ken’s residence (*Personal Communication, Hills, M.*, 21 September, 2000). Ken and *Ngerrawurn* and his brothers, *Birdibir* and *Clem*, often went fishing and crabbing together (*Personal Communication, Birdibir*, 17 September, 2000). Cecil’s mother told me, “*Ngerrawurn* teach Ken to be real good old hunter. That’s the biggest thing [compliment] you could give any man in *Kunhanhaa*” (*Personal Communication, Anon. H*, 27 April, 2001). *Ngerrawurn* told me, “Kenny looked after brother *Clem* too. *Clem* stayed the night with Kenny when *Clem* had been in a big brawl. Kenny a good, kind man” (*Personal Communication*, 30 September, 2001).

Ken arrived at *Kunhanaa* in January 1998 and in the first six months *Ngerrawurn* visited occasionally. “We yarned and yarned. Kenny offered me cups of tea, dinner or smoko whenever I called in. He never threw me out. I was his best friend” (*Personal Communication, Ngerrawurn*, 30 September, 2001). The

fact that he said that Ken “never threw him out” indicated that he had been “thrown out” by some non-Aboriginal people. *Ngerrawurn* told me, “We adopt Kenny because he spend time with me. He treat me as equal” (*Personal Communication*, 30 September, 2001). *Ngerrawurn* had also worked as a stockman in the Georgetown area and he and his mother and father had worked on the mainland on cattle properties for non-Aboriginal people. *Ngerrawurn* and his mother and father had worked for a non-Aboriginal sergeant, McQuilty.

Ken had given *Ngerrawurn*’s family many gifts and looked after Margaret. These factors were major considerations towards Ken’s adoption (*Personal Communication*, Hills, M., 2 May, 2002). Ken chopped wood, caught her fresh fish, cleaned her house, and made sure she had food. Ken was perceived as a caring, kind and generous man in the Aboriginal community (*Personal Communication*, *Kurnungkur*, 24 September, 2000). Age was also an important factor. Ken was also fifty years of age at the end of 1999 and people of that age are seen as mature and responsible by the local Lawmen (*Personal Communication*, *Kulthangar*, 24 April, 2002). Finally, Ken was adopted. Margaret informed me, “It is because you and Ken come back, you write to me and look after me, so we trust you and because you two love learning about our culture” (*Personal Communication*, 21 September, 2000).

Ken became the subject of much discussion among the Elders. *Kulthangar* told me, “You’re a woman. We can’t initiate you. What about Ken?” (*Personal Communication*, 27 September, 2001). The process of preparing Ken for initiation never directly involved him. Information was passed onto me to tell to him, because he did not seem interested in being initiated and the Elders hoped I would persuade him.

Stories such as those surrounding the decision to adopt Ken, as well as those I discussed in Chapter Three provide considerable information about teachers being placed and taking their place. From the information *Kulthangar* has given me, Margaret’ perception of Ken’s role was quite different to *Kulthangar*’s. Ken had become *Kulthangar*’s brother because *Bulthuku*, his wife adopted me as her sister. Whereas Margaret informed me on 2 November, 2000, “Darling, I adopt your husband as son because my son *Ngerrawurn* want him as brother. I thought about it for a year and then I take him as son.” In the community, among the

Aboriginal population it was widely accepted that Ken and *Ngerrawurn* were brothers. As *Nwerrawurn*'s brother he became *balyarini* skin and he became a brother to all other *balyarini* men such as *Kulthangar* and a father to all *bulanyi* men such as *Kulthangar*'s sons. There are a number of implications and consequences to Ken's adoption.

*Kulthangar* often asked Ken about influencing decisions at school because Ken was head of the High School. This put Ken in a politically difficult situation, because he had a personal relationship with men such as *Kulthangar*, but a professional and systemic relationship to the other teachers and the school as a government institution. This might well have alienated him from the staff at school, but as I have only listened to the Elders, I can only speculate on this matter. One could assume, however, from Johnny and *Wunhun*'s comments about the teachers being suspicious if non-Aboriginal people associate with community members, that the teachers are likely to have found Ken's involvement in the community abnormal, to say the least. One could also speculate about Ken's adoption by using information about Jay's adoption by the Peters family. Their adoptions may have also alienated Ken from other families who were not close to the Hills, Jacob, Moon, Peters, Jingles, Williams, Escott, Roughsey and *Binjari* families. This seems likely when one reads articles by Smith (1999) on community politics and factions. Ken also became the recipient of many requests for 'loans' and gifts of food, money, lifts in the car, and gifts of (electrical) power cards and furniture and he was visited regularly at all hours of the day and night at his home (*Personal Communications*, Hills, M., 24 September, 2000; 10 June, 2001; Williams, J., 24 September, 2000; 10 June, 2001; 15 May, 2002; *Bulthuku* 31 August, 2001; *Ngerrawurn*, 20 November, 2000; *Kulthangar*, 15 January, 2001; 15 May, 2002; *Birdibir*, 17 September, 2000). One can surmise, without much difficulty, that many of teachers would not have tolerated this situation.

Morgan and Slade (1998) have maintained that the philosophical approach of Aboriginal culture situates individuals as a plural extension of the community, the land and spirit world, but they maintain that for non-Aboriginal Australians personal identity is individualistic. However, Ken essentially was incorporated into the community in a similar fashion to a worker bee in a beehive, for the good of the community. Budby and Foley (1998), Schiff (1976), Stearnes (1973) and

McGraw, Piper, Banks and Evans (1992) all maintain that community participation improves school performance and student achievement and this study extends this argument to argue that the Elders and senior women all say that a teacher's social and participation in the community improves student achievement and attendance.

*Kulthangar* suggested that the incumbent Chief Executive Officer in 2001 was a good example of what a teacher should be like.

That fella gave us his background when he first came here. He worked in an Aboriginal community before. He promised to stay at least two or three years. He mixed with Aboriginal people He used to go down to the old people's home and play the guitar. He was a caring man. He never missed one funeral. He dressed well to show his respect. He visit people. His wife shook my hand when I went to Townsville and bought her children down to the airport to say goodbye. His gate was always open, never locked. He was with me and our people. He was a man who was really concerned for our people. Friday night before he left he came down to visit me. He often came to my house. The police and the teachers should be like that. (*Personal Communication*, 12 September, 2001).

*Kulthangar* was stating the characteristics that he expected in a teacher: respect for local people and protocols such as funeral attendance, regular visits, with his wife and children, to the Elders. It was important to *Kulthangar* that the teacher should bring their family to the community and that the family should involve themselves respectfully in the community. *Kulthangar* stated twice that it is important that visiting workers should socialise in the community and he also mentions caring and compassionate behaviour as important, using the example of visiting the old people home and playing the guitar. It is this concern for the Aboriginal people's well being that is important to *Kulthangar*. It is a feeling,

emotional argument that gives an expectation of the behaviour of a community minded social worker rather than just a person who works to office hours and goes home.

It is obvious that it is important to *Kulthangar* that people who come to work at Mornington Island have previous experience working with Aboriginal people on communities. *Wunhun* and Johnny also mention this as a pre-requisite to teaching at Mornington Island. This issue also is promoted in *Emerging Themes* (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2000).

*Kulthangar* also commented on the length of time a teacher should stay. On one occasion he told me that he hoped Ken would stay at least five years (*Personal Communication*, 15 May, 2002). On the same occasion with *Kulthangar*, *Birdibir*, *Reggie*, *Milmajah*, *Kurnungkur* a man who is normally calm and collected, completely lost his temper and became very angry about the issue that *Kulthangar* had just raised. *Kurnungkur* shouted, "Who do they think we are. They have no respect for us. Four principals in four years. Unbelievable. We are going to do something about this" (*Personal Communication*, 15 May, 2002).

All these men told me it was very important that teachers stay for many years because you could only get to know and trust people over a long period of time. In regard to the subject of teacher turn-over two senior women told me, "We worked with that linguist on a language programme at the school, but she only stayed two years and when she went it all fell apart. We need someone to stay a long time" (*Personal Communication*, Reid, C., 18 May, 2002; Hills, M., 21 May, 2002). Reports such as *Katu Kalpha* (Australian Senate. Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, 2000) and *Learning Lessons* (Collins, 1999) also both emphasise that communities prefer teachers to stay a number of years. *Emerging Themes* (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2000) also cites evidence remote area students even would prefer teachers to stay for at least five years.

Basically *Kulthangar* was using the Chief Executive Officer's respectful behaviour as an example of good teaching, but he specifies a principal's behaviour too. The role of a principal is clearly important to him because he or she is a leader as all the Elders are. The two passages below go back to the theme of caring for old people. *Kulthangar* said that the old people were and are the carriers

of wisdom and to be respected, revered and cared for. He told me that if teachers visit the old folks of the community the students would have better relationships with them because they could be related, and the parents and families would be happier to send the children to school if they got to know the teachers. His words suggest a way of seeing teachers as part of holistic and connected community rather as disparate individuals. Although *Kulthangar* used the story of the old lady he helped in Stanmore to illustrate the concept of a *kuba danka* as a caring, compassionate man, he also used the same concept and story to talk about what the principal and teachers should be. After repeating the story, he told me:

A good principal same. He be a good leader. Leader should show example. I learn to be a *kuba danka*: good man from my father. Principal should be caring too. Teachers should visit old people, take them out, show some caring. Community hear about it. Kids be nicer because it could be granny or relative. If teachers started mixing in community people be happier to send their kids to school. You see teacher Saemos; he talks to Aboriginal people. He plays with the kids. I don't know what the other white teachers think of him, but we like him. (*Personal Communication*, 15 November, 2002).

The concept of compassion for one's fellow man was important to *Kulthangar*. He made it very clear that it was part of a teacher's role to visit old people and socialise with community members after schools hours. He used one of the teachers, Saemus, as an example of a teacher who was caring. This need to be feeling, caring and to work from the heart, rather than displaying a 'nine-to-five' logical working mentality comes up again and again in the Participants' statements. *Kulthangar* was very angry about a comment a government worker had made about visiting workers staying aloof from the community. He told me,

*Thuwatu* story say, 'Care and share.' That fella say teachers and policeman mustn't care too much. Bullshit! We get him thrown off this community.

What wrong with caring? He racist. He know nothing about our culture. That fella he in McCarthy time. Good missionary like Belcher he out singing with kids before they go to bed under light. He bring torch. We had one little cyclone and old Belcher and our teachers they worry for our people. You know, no kids missed school them days. Maybe teachers afraid of alcohol, but teachers can't just go home after school. They got to mix in community. Not in city now. (*Personal Communication*, 22 September, 2001).

Some of *Kulthangar*'s previous statements are similar in their concern with teachers spending extra-curricular hours 'caring' and 'worrying' for people in the community. In August, 2001 when *Kulthangar* visited me in Townsville, we were driving around in my car and *Kulthangar* noted that he believed 'city' people were not interdependent or local community minded, but isolationist, standing aloof from those they worked with and for. On this occasion he was critical of teachers because, he said, like missionaries, nurses, doctors and police, they should serve the community (*Personal Communication*, 6 August, 2001). Here I return to Martinez-Brawley who sees community as "an alternative to emphases on individualism, self-sufficiency and mass society ordered by comprehensive, legal rational authority [rather than]... emphasiz[ing] local ties, affectivity" (1990, p. 219). In the previous paragraph *Kulthangar* stresses affectivity, by using the words "caring", "angry", "singing", "worry", "mixing [socially]." He emphasises mutual interdependence and a nourishing sense of personal meaning and participation. *Kulthangar*'s values as an Elder are actually part of *Mirndiyan* Law, but as an ex-stockman and Mayor he also emphasises affectivity and looking out for one's neighbour as part of the belongingness of life in a 'bush' community. This relatedness, kindredness, connectedness and interconnectedness is also part of Indigenous worldviews worldwide (Martin, 2002; Walker, 2000; Cajete, 2000; Forrest, 1998; Dugdeon and Oxenham (1989).

*Kulthangar* also suggests that because Belcher spent so much of his ‘after hours’ time with the children, they responded by attending school regularly. In this regard, Witherell and Noddings (1991) state that we cannot separate education from personal experiences, Morgan and Slade (1998) maintain that Aboriginal learning is “related to experiences and is broadly subjective” (p. 9), and Darling-Harmond (1998) suggests that strong personal relationships between teachers and students develop empathy, emotional intelligence and a sense of social justice. *Bulthuku* added to *Kulthangar*’s comment, “They need to understand the problems at home, but not interfere.” *Kulthangar* and *Bulthuku*’s comments both indicate the necessity of such emotions such as concern, worry, caring, but interference in family matters was unacceptable. *Bulthuku*’s comment can be compared to a rather ambiguous statement from an Education Queensland document, *Partners for Success* (Education Queensland, 1999) which suggests that:

It is often tempting for teachers, who, in the main, are people of tremendous goodwill, to try to deal with many of the social issues that affect students. However, such practices tend to shift the focus of schools from education and ‘enabling’ to welfare provision, which is rightly the province of other agencies. (p. 7).

Whether this means that teachers should or should not visit student’s homes after hours or at a deeper level that they engage in social work is questionable. However there is no doubt that the senior participants believe that teachers should visit the homes of students, visit the Elders and at least walk to the shop. In this respect when I saw *Kulthangar* on 20 September and 1 October, 2001 he told me about the Belcher’s friendliness and his habit of regularly visiting people in the community. When I read his words back to him on the telephone *Kulthangar* answered:

That’s very, very true. You know since Ken come back [in January] this year... When I see him walking up the street, at the shop, at the jetty, I notice everyone says ‘Hello.’ People trust him now.

Yeah, he's stayed four years straight and he's listening to us and learning from us. (*Personal Communication*, 20 February, 2002).

*Connectedness: we want people who've come from the bush*

Morgan and Slade emphasise the interconnectedness of "such inseparable aspects, such as identity, spirituality, knowledge, truth and values" in Aboriginal perspectives (1998, p. 9) and they also state that personal identity is a plural extension of the spirit and the land. In fact they say all reality is interconnected when one has an Aboriginal worldview (Morgan and Slade, 1998).

People such as *Kulthangar*, *Milmajah*, *Birdibir*, Paulie, Wilfred, Lillian, Reggie, Cecily, *Kurnungkur* and Margaret have pleasant memories of their days of working on pastoral properties in the bush and they have connections and commonalities with people who were born or who have worked in rural or remote areas. The bush and the land are an important connection for many of the Elders and 'bush' teachers (*Personal Communications*, *Wunhun*, Williams, J., 20 September, 2000; *Milmajah*, 29 September, 2001; *Kulthangar*, 15 January, 2001, Brookedale, I., 1 October, 2000; Hills, M., 12 April, 2001; Anon.A., Anon. E, 10 April, 2001; Anon. N, 20 November, 2002).

Although some Elders had laughed about Ken's city background he became more popular with the students and Elders after he took a group of teenage initiated male post-compulsory students to Katherine in the Northern Territory for a course on fencing, and cattle work in late 2000. Ken came back wearing R.M. Williams clothes with photographs and stories to prove that he and the young men had mastered some cattle and done horse work. Ken gained a new reputation among the young men and the Elders as a capable bushman. As Strang (2001) suggests men who have worked in the bush, "Go home as men" (p. 5). Ken also became constructed by the community as a *Kunhanhaamendaa*: "a man who could hunt, spear, cut bark, tell stories like a *Kunhanhaa kuba danka* (good Aboriginal man)" (*Personal Communication*, Hills, M., 2 December, 2000). *Birdibir* told me, "For the first six months didn't go out much. He didn't know much about black people, but he know about bush people" (*Personal Communication*, 27 September, 2001.)

On many occasions when I was at Bible Studies with the Grannies in 1998 and we saw a non- Aboriginal person outside the church they asked me, “Who dat? We don’t know them. They not a bush girl like you. Most of them don’t stay very long. It’s only a job to them, not their life.” This conversation three areas that were recurring themes. First, “they don’t stay long”, second, “we don’t know them”, and third, “They’re not a bush girl like you.” I will analyse the time concept of this conversation now and the bush concept in a later section of this chapter. “They don’t stay long” is a well recognised bush discourse in that older bush people treat people as outsiders if that person has lived in the community less than thirty years or if their parents were not born in the community (*Personal Communication, Milmajah, 8 June, 2002*). *Kulthangar, Reggie, Milmajah, Birdibir and Kurnungkur* also stated that they would all like principals to stay at least five years (*Personal Communication, 20 May, 2002*). Boylan (1991) found that long staying rural teachers believed, on the whole, that their contributions to the community were valued and the community valued the teacher living locally. “Few teachers stay longer than two years, but we reckon its better for the kids if they do. We get to know people who stay four or five years”, argued *Kurnungkur* (*Personal Communication, 21 May, 2002*).

By saying “We don’t know them. They not a bush girl” the people in the church revealed a lack of connectedness with many of the teachers. My own experience in conducting this research perhaps illustrates something of this sense in which a ‘bush background’, or at least a knowledge or appreciation of ‘the bush’, might provide a common ground between ‘outsiders’ and members of the community. Many of the older members of the community not only recognised me as a ‘bush girl’, but knew of my family’s property. When we spoke of surcingles, black soil country, being bogged in gullies, when the brolgas came, and laughed about ‘city fellas’, we spoke a common language. We had a common base to construct a productive relationship.

Many of the conversationalists believed that better communication between the non-Aboriginal teachers and the community would occur if the teachers had lived in the bush or had studied Aboriginal culture and worked on communities before (*Personal Communications, Williams, J., 20 November, 2000; Wunhun, 27 November, 2000; Kulthangar, 15 January, 2001; Kangala, 12 March, 2001;*

*Milmajah*, 8 June, 2002; Anon. C, 30 July, 1998; Anon. G, 20 September, 2000; Anon. A, 18 November, 2000; Anon. F 26 September, 2001). Boylan and Bandy (1994) suggest almost twice as many first year teachers who were raised in a village or rural area, reported a high level of satisfaction with their position in rural and remote communities than those raised in urban settings. Alexander and Bandy (1994), researching perceptions of first year teachers in rural and remote Canada, suggest the sense of cultural gulf (that the participants express) might be paralleled by urban teachers appointed to rural communities, and that those teachers raised in the bush are more likely to enjoy their experience there, no doubt partly because they find it easier to relate to. Jo Ward, Employee Adviser for the Cairns and Cape District states in a brochure that for “a person who has never lived outside a city or large township taking up a position in rural or remote areas can be quite daunting” (2001, p. 1). Ward (2001) warned that new teachers should be “prepared to learn as well as teach; meet as many parents as possible when [you] first arrive; familiarise yourself with local history and culture; find out who is related to whom and respect and be sensitive to local people’s feelings and opinions.” Ward’s (2001) first statement acknowledges that city and remote discourses are the antithesis of each other. Martinez-Brawley (1990) argues that as a generalisation the openness, belongingness, friendliness, cohesiveness, helpfulness and slowness of older ‘bush’ people in a small community contrasts with the city discourse of individuality and, impersonality of ‘city’ people.

*Kulthangar* and *Kurnungkur* argue that Mornington Island is not only an island, but also an isolated island far from “eyes [statutory bodies] who would see” – that is, who would normally check to see – that harmony rather than disharmony was being built (*Personal Communications, Kulthangar*, 20 May, 2002; *Kurnungkur*, 21 May, 2002). Martinez-Brawley (1990) elucidates this comment when she states “where two cultures interact within the same environment there is potential for culture conflict [within Aboriginal communities] especially when members of the conflicting groups close ranks and withdraw from the other, rather than” co-operating to build a system of community support. Without mutual support mechanisms, there is little support meeting its common goals” (p. 234).

I argued in Chapter Four that bitter memories on the part of the participants contribute to fragile relationships between non-Aboriginal teachers and the community. I explore the concept that recurs through the Elders' comments, that only the slow process of the building of trust with teachers will develop productive relationships, if the teachers want a non-structural, outside school hours relationship with people in the community.

Shimpo (1978) has suggested that "non-Aboriginal officials do not give Aboriginal people time to make meaningful decisions" (p. 29). This also applies to the situation of trust. *Kulthangar* and various anonymous participants have stated that the *Kunhanhaamendaa* need at least two years to be able to trust non-Aboriginal teachers (*Personal Communication, Kulthangar, 15 January, 2001; Birdibir, 2 October, 2000; Anon. F, 3 May, 2002*). Regarding the process of building trust with the school, I spoke to Margaret on 2 September, 2000 about what she believed were good relationships with the teachers. She was happy to talk about the subject. But a year later on 20 September, 2001 she told me that up until 1999 she had been a "culture teacher" at the school and worked with the linguist, who also took her out to the bush to cut bark for the hair hats Margaret made for the men's ritual dances (*Personal Communication, 20 September, 2001*). When the linguist left and new schoolteachers replaced those with whom Margaret was familiar, the school did not employ Margaret and Joseph any more and the subject of teachers became a sensitive issue.

In this respect, Boylan and Bandy (1994), conducting research on "Education and training for rural teachers and professionals", found that professionals who wish to remain in a rural community are often mature people with families (p. 154). They also found that professionals who stayed in rural and remote communities were "stable in family life (often a professional couple where both partners were employed) who were self-contained introspective people and they were joiners... who became actively involved in the life of the community" (p. 154). This was certainly true in Ken's case where he was adopted and stayed many years.

*The ideal. The Elders as leaders of the community and custodians of culture and knowledge*

The Elders' comment with concern that teachers do not understand what 'culture' is. They argue that because the teachers do not understand culture they act 'inappropriately', where 'inappropriately' means 'offensively' in terms of community values and practices. Therefore, the Elders say, they should be teaching 'white' teachers about the local culture; further, ideally, the teachers should have already learned about Aboriginal culture and race relations either at university or in another Aboriginal community. And according to *Mirndiyan Law* the Elders are the only people who can teach the teachers. The Elders say that the teachers need to know that they can only gain the knowledge that they need from the Elders and that they should respect the Elders as both guardians of the culture and educators.

Traditionally correct behaviour for Aboriginal people was not written down in Law books, so Lawmen had to memorise the tribe's genealogy, skin positions, language, and secret sacred knowledge. In a juxtaposition of oral and written knowledge *Kulthangar* told me, "I have all the knowledge of the tribe written down in my head" (*Personal Communication*, 16 January, 2001). Much of the knowledge that he kept in his head was secret and sacred knowledge that must never be revealed to anyone except other Lawmen. Consequentially this knowledge was conveyed orally and never written.

However in recent years Indigenous writers such as Martin (2002), Moreton Robinson (2000) and Dingo (1998) have outlined some protocol that should be assumed when talking to Aboriginal people. As Dingo (1998) maintains the Elders are the leaders in the community and as *Kurnungkur* argued protocol demands that you visit the Elders when you first arrive in an Aboriginal community. Correct protocol also demands that you state your geographical and family background and connections (Moreton-Robinson, 2000) and answer the Elders' questions.

The politics of relations between administration and the Elders and community concern the Elders. The Elders do not accept that they should be subordinated or that the community should be distanced.

Cawte (1972) wrote about life on the mission thirty years ago, a time when assimilation was still a prevailing policy, “Probably the most difficult feature of living in the village would be the pressure toward a more intimate incorporation into kinship obligations” (p. 27). Cawte continued:

By living at a... distance the mission staff feels it has a better chance of retaining objectiveness... ‘Culture shock’ in the sense used by Oberg (1960) would be a reality for most Westerners having to adapt to the village. It is an open question as to what extent the Aborigines resent the contrast. Seemingly, most accept it as the natural order... The caste system of the mission and village signifies an authoritarian social order with a European summit and a hierarchy of dominances and submissions unknown in traditional life. (p. 27).

Although from the point of view of my co-researchers this state of affairs still persists to a large extent (*Personal Communications, Kulthangar, Kurnungkur, Milmajah, Birdibir, Robinson, R., Kurnungkur, 17 May, 2002; Wunhun, 25 September, 2000; Williams, J., 24 September, 2000*) this is about the politics of relations between the administration and community/Elders. Many participants complained that teachers came and went before anyone knowing who they were (*Personal Communication, Margaret 20 November, 200, Wunhun, 25 September, 2000; Williams, J., 24 September, 2000*). *Kulthangar* comments were similar:

Since old Belcher and old McClintock... left in seventies wefella Elders haven’t felt easy in our relationship with those white teachers. Old Athol Dury was a good one, but most of them just come and go before we even know their names. All we asking is they come and pay their respects to us and listen to us. Maybe they have a cup of tea with us on our veranda. (*Personal Communication, 17 April, 2002*).

*Birdibir* added, “That’s all we ask... Just come and yarn,... sit and watch the sun go down together” (*Personal Communication*, 17 April, 2002).

The Elders and senior women are quite concerned about those aspects of the culture that the teachers do not know about. *Kulthangar* used an image from the movie *The Man From Snowy River* to make the non-Aboriginal teachers understand the concept of uninitiated boys becoming initiated men through an act of protocol, ritual, bravery and knowledge, within traditional Aboriginal Law.

As Waterhouse (1993) remarks “the human body is never free from signification, it is always circumscribed in layers of cultural meaning, ritual and custom” (p. 112) and in the case of traditional Aboriginal culture a man’s body is a map of his spiritual standing as a Lawman. Prominent feminist writers view the body as a “social construction of relations of power” (Turner, 1994, p. 23) rather than just a biological entity, and although these writers may not have been thinking of Aboriginal men, relations of power are constructed in Aboriginal society by the act of circumcision, subincision and scarring. In ‘dormitory times’ the missionaries prevented the men from going through initiation. This literally emasculated them, physically, psychologically, politically and spiritually. *Kulthangar* remarked that many of the really old men are not circumcised but because they have the knowledge they are respected as Elders by the initiated Elders.

In September 2001, the Elders said they were not pleased about the school’s lack of respect for initiated young men. They said because the teachers had little or no cultural knowledge about *Kunhaanhaamendaa* customs they seemed to be unaware that it was culturally and ethically improper for women to admonish initiated young men at the school. One of the Elders who worked at the school had alerted the school’s inappropriate practice to *Kulthangar* and that Elder emphasised that the Elders and the young men’s uncles should be going up to speak to them rather than the women, as women, especially white women, have no knowledge of the Law. The Lawmen said they were angry because the teachers were unaware that the young man’s total persona – physically, mentally and spiritually – had been changed through knowledge, ceremony and circumcision.

When talking about the physical act of removing the foreskin from the penis *Kulthangar* emphasised the connection between the mind and the body. He said,

“when a man is circumcised the foreskin is removed and he has clean body, clean mind. I should know. I am number one doctor from here to *Borrooloola*” (*Personal Communication*, 15 January, 2001). *Kulthangar* constantly asserts the spiritual superiority of traditional Aboriginal people because of the relationship between their being and the land.

### **Conclusion**

On the interpersonal level of relatedness and connectedness between teachers and members of the community I have explored three levels of personal teacher behaviour from the perspective of the participant’s construction of the teachers. First, there is the level of lack of relatedness or lack of connection with an attribution of underlying racism. Dehumanisation, unfriendliness, marginalisation of the *Kunhanhaamendaa* and insensitivity on the part of many of the teachers were topics of contention for many senior *Kunhanhaamendaa*. Second, there is a level of seriously undesirable behaviour that reeks of sacrilegious behaviour and consumerism. From the perception of many senior participants greed, theft of their fish and crustaceans, taking on extra work in the face of obvious local poverty and the ease and speed in which the teachers obtained housing is insulting. Third, intersecting with the concerns for interpersonal behaviour and other forms of anti-social behaviour is a serious lack of knowledge which comes from being young, urban and ignorant.

On the institutional level, I have explored the relationships between the schoolteachers and the principals as members of a government institution remembering that on a personal level that teachers also can take the initiative to be friendly. The standoff between one principal and the Elders was distinctly symbolic of the refusal by the Elders to be subservient to the dominance of the school system. The Elders say they are not asked to meetings, they are humiliated and not consulted or informed about current practices. They say that the headmaster has broken promises he made to them. Yet they say there have been at least five exemplary school administrators in the past, who included the Elders as respected school advisers and teachers. In short, they say that the school, as an institution, pays the Elders no respect and they say the community is too frightened to voice their opinions because of factionalism and ongoing

government panopticism. They are not happy because they have no say in an inclusive-situational culture program, even though a program was set up in May 2002 for the Elders to work with twelve initiated male students. Uniformly, they agree that the principals should be coming into the community to consult the Elders and they specifically use the words, “We are the mob you should be listening to!”

They expect, because of the rules of their sacred Law, that teachers should be part of the kinship system in the community. They especially expect teachers to stay for a number of years for both sacred and secular reasons. They prefer teachers who come from the ‘bush’ or have previously worked on Aboriginal communities, yet they will accept ‘city-fellas’ if they are caring people. They also point out that if teaching was a caring vocation, a way of life, rather than just a ‘job’ (and they present missionary Belcher as an example of this philosophy), the teachers could form relationships after hours, with community members. They expect teachers to follow the protocol of the community, which includes attending funerals, regular visits to the Elders and old people. They say that teachers should bring their family to the community and mingle socially. They articulate that teachers should be caring, compassionate and helpful, in the manner of social worker-teachers rather than just nine-to-five workers who isolate themselves socially, away from the community, after school hours. The Elders and participants reveal that their preference is for people who ‘come from the bush’ and/or have worked on Aboriginal communities. The Lawmen emphasise the concepts of helpfulness, community cohesion, helpfulness, slowness and unlimited time to yarn and listen. Because of their bitter memories of cruel missionaries and ‘snobby’ teachers who stayed for a short time they say relationship building is a slow process that needs a reciprocal process of caring, sharing and promise keeping to build trust. But the Elders say, “All we ask is have a cup of tea with us on our verandahs” and “Sit with us and watch the sun go down over the sea!”

## Chapter 6

### The Lawmen discuss Curriculum and Pedagogy

This chapter explores those aspects of the *Kunhanhaa* Lawmen's discussions that dealt with the two broad areas of curriculum and pedagogy. Within those two categories I explore what the Elders say is happening now and what they say should be happening. The Lawmen argue that appropriate curriculum should include local Aboriginal language, genealogy, skin placements, survival skills and bush foods which should, on the whole, be taught by the Lawmen and senior women. They are concerned that if children do not learn Aboriginal culture now it will be lost very soon.

On the whole there are considerable disparities in the educational practices the Elders are demanding and what they see as happening at the school and on the whole. One of the tensions that this chapter highlights is the tension between schooling and education, and teaching and pedagogy. The Elders note the difference by referring to dominant teaching as 'schooling', while *Kulthangar* says the "Elders educate for life" (*Personal Communication*, 25 June, 2002).

One part of the Lawmen's distinction between caring, spiritual, life-long education and a disjointed, disconnected, dominant schooling corresponds, roughly, to the distinction between 'pedagogy' and 'teaching'. Where the term 'teaching' tends to mean the functional counterpart of 'learning' in the 'teaching-learning' couplet, and is more readily reduced to 'instruction' or the techniques for facilitating 'learning', the term pedagogy is wider in scope, and includes the more explicitly ethical dimensions of caring, sharing knowledge and problem-solving.

Hamilton (1999), tracing the history of pedagogy, suggests that pedagogy in its classical sense denoted education as nurturing, discipline, teaching and moral training. He also comments that classical Greek education was split up into two stages roughly parallel with *Kulthangar*'s definition of the "education of boys into men" (*Personal Communication*, 15 January, 2001). Atherton (1998) argues that in Classical Greece, pedagogics related to the induction, framing, taming and positioning of male children within an initial set of cultural practices. The work of the *didaskalos* (teacher) focused on pre-adults who were "instructed... in activities

shared with adult males in the elite” (p. 229). Hamilton (1999) also comments that the Anglo-American use of pedagogy mirrors the mainland European use of ‘didactic’. He suggests German educationalists in the early twentieth century saw didactics as a situated classroom craft steered by a constellation of assumptions about the past, current and future lives of learners. Hamilton (1999) argued that didactics, as such, should not be “reduced to a set of teaching methods” (p. 145). Hamilton’s arguments also parallel *Kulthangar*’s definition of lifelong education rather than “just schooling” (*Personal Communication*, 17 May, 2002).

Such critical educators as Giroux (1985, 1991, 1993), McLaren (1993), Friere (1970), Gore (1993) and hooks (1994) all advocate caring pedagogies, while Crockett (2002) and Hladki and Stanworth (2002) also examine the ethics of inclusive and caring pedagogies for principals and teachers. Generally, this literature offers rich understandings of pedagogy rather than technical approaches in ways that parallel the way the Elders talk of education. The Elders, in fact, outline a range of Aboriginal pedagogies, which this chapter discusses.

There is a second tension, between the authority the Elders regard as properly theirs in school matters and that which they see as actually accorded them. As I have shown, the Elders see themselves as the upholders of *Mirndiyan* Aboriginal Law, and their words are the Law. As such they consider that both the school administration, and the teachers individually, should respect this, however, they say they are neither respected nor listened to. Rather the Elders say they are either ignored or seen as dinosaurs in a modern age, and just another faction.

Both tensions, that of teaching and pedagogy, and the authority of the Elders in educational matters, can be seen as revolving around the teachers’ ignorance. That ignorance, the Elders say is the fact that the transitory teachers do not know anything about *Mirndiyan* Law. The Elders position as custodians of the Law underpins their discussions about curriculum and pedagogy. The chapter explores implications of these views for the relevance of Aboriginal education versus Western schooling and the Elders’ perceptions of the actualities of Western schooling and the possibilities of Aboriginal education.

Except for a few comments by *Kurnungkur*, and a younger anonymous Lawman, the Elders have made broad abstract statements of what they want in the area of pedagogy, curriculum at the school and their role at the school. Rather than

fill in the finer details of pedagogy and curriculum, their frequent comment was, “You know!” As I noted earlier (in Chapter Two), “You know” was a frequent comment to what the Elders considered trifling detail that I already knew or we had discussed some days, months or years before.

This chapter also analyses the Elders’ silences on this subject and their forms of resistance to the contemporary educational situation as well as their words, in view of their belief that the government is not respecting them, listening to them nor heeding their advice.

I investigate what the Elders say is happening at the school and what they say should be happening, first, in terms of pedagogy, and then in terms of curriculum. I specifically note that the Elders do not use the terms pedagogy and curriculum. They say, rather, “how the teachers teach” and “what they teach.” I begin with two global statements by Elders before, and conclude with a discussion of the Elders’ views of the possibility of their taking control of the local school. For the sake of clarity, I make some somewhat arbitrary choices in separating curriculum and pedagogy as separate themes in the discussion that follows.

### **Global Statements by the Elders on current schooling**

When I was reading back to the Elders what they had previously said about relevant curriculum and pedagogy for Mornington Island students *Milmajah* told me, “They are teaching our kids to be white in the brain and at the end of the white road there is nothing but grog” (*Personal Communication*, 20 November, 2002). *Milmajah* also told me on the same occasion, “Those teachers are here to take away your mind.” More recently, *Kulthangar* told me that, “Mongrel school bugger up our culture” (*Personal Communication*, 21 April, 2003). Speaking from quite a different background, and as an outside observer, Federal Race Commissioner Irene Moss also concluded that the decline in participation rates at the school should be seen as “a rejection of the inappropriate way [education] is structured and delivered” (Australia: Race Discrimination Commission, 1993, p. 9), and her statement adds credibility and depth to the Elders’ statements. These comments can be understood as broad, ‘global’ comments on the school’s impact in the community. While my principal concern here is to document the Elders’

views, the comments of such an authoritative outsider suggest that they are not alone in their views, and such views ought to be taken seriously.

## **Pedagogy**

*What the Elders say is happening*

### “Principals and teachers come and go”

On 16 May, 2002 *Kurnungur* told me, “There have been four principals in four years. That’s unbelievable. That’s completely unacceptable.” Two years earlier, when I was sitting with *Dilmirrur*, his wife Ursula, *Goombungee*, Joseph, *Burrud*, *Milmajah* and Ken out at the Watt homelands at *Barakiya*, I asked the participants the usual question, “What relationship do you want with the teachers?” They all agreed that, “They [the teachers] leave after two years and know nothing of our culture” (*Personal Communications*, 18 September, 2000).

In light of these time-related comments, and the more extended views they have expressed regarding other aspects of the importance of relationships in the community, I investigate some possible understandings of what, from the Elders’ point of view, might be required for the school to function effectively. First, in a kinship-based small community where personalised relationships are a vital part of the culture, participants may perceive that both families and students need to have ongoing, regular, casual face-to-face conversations with teachers, where they “get to know the teachers” over a number of years, with the aim of understanding the teacher’s personal and educational values and attitudes. In a small-interconnected community where the culturally accepted norm is that everyone knows and is related to everyone else school students need to understand and relate to the teachers for some substantial time. McInerney and McInerney (1998) argue that effective learning occurs most easily for field-dependent students when they can socially relate in class. Shipman and Shipman (1985) suggest that field-dependent students are influenced by the opinion of prestigious others and prefer shorter physical distances between themselves and others. The way participants describe students and their families suggests that they may be field-dependent in the way they learn. Entwistle (1991) also argues that field-dependent students may be more concerned with interpersonal relationships in class. McInerney and McInerney (1998) maintain that some students are motivated by rapport with their

teachers. McInerney and McInerney (1998) also reason that social learning occurs through modelling. If students live in a small community where long term face to face relationships are the norm they are likely not to trust and not learn from transient teachers whom they and the community regard as strangers. I have discussed the issue of strangers at length in Chapter Four. When integrated with Elders' comments on the school, this information suggests that stable long-term relationships with teachers may produce better learning.

Crucially, good pedagogy assumes some sort of depth of knowledge and understanding on the part of the teachers of their pupils (Christie, 1984; Malin, 1994; Hudspith, 1997; Cook, 1995; Noddings, 1997) and some sort of reciprocal knowledge and understanding between the teachers and the children (Cook, 1995; Malin, 1998; Christie, 1984). That is precluded by the high transience of teaching staff. When good constructive, pedagogical, caring relationships start to be formed the teacher leaves the community. In fact, one could say that, according to the participants, most teachers are in and out of the community too quickly for a relationship to be formed. Another point on pedagogical discontinuity is that if a child is at school for ten years they may experience five or six major discontinuities at the school with teachers they may have become personally attached to going every two years. These major discontinuities that form when a teacher only stays for two years are fatal to good, constructive, caring pedagogy.

How they teach: "You gotta listen and obey like a dog!"

When I was re-reading some of the interviews to *Milmajah* he responded to *Bulthuku's* words, "They [our teachers] didn't teach us properly" with the angry statement, "Yeah, you gotta listen and obey like a dog" (*Personal Communication*, 26 September, 2001). As I have already shown, many of Lawmen saw the missionaries in the past, as having a 'growl and belt' attitude. In general, they say, the school still adopts this approach, although Joseph, an Elder who has taught dance at the school for many years, insists that the teachers "are very caring with the kids" (*Personal Communication*, 5 May, 2002). Wilfred, *Wunhun*, *Kulthangar* and another younger Lawman, however, all agreed with *Milmajah's* statement. Margaret suggested that the children needed to be 'belted', adding, "That's what we did when I was a teacher, otherwise they don't learn"

(*Personal Communication*, 17 January, 2001). The Lawmen seemed to perceive the 'listen and obey' approach to instruction as largely irrelevant to their culture. Like Ursula's comment that teachers who only stay for two years cannot possibly learn the culture and *Kulthangar's* argument that Peter of *Kamba* might not have killed missionary Hall if Hall had been more understanding, the Lawmen are arguing that a more caring form of instruction is appropriate. This argument resonates with their assertions, explored earlier, that if the teachers interacted socially in the community with the families and students, the students would have more respect for the teachers and the teachers would not have to resort to an authoritarian method or external locus of control.

*Milmajah's* statement also suggests a total lack of respect and ignorance for their culture. He suggested that non-Aboriginal teachers treat Aboriginal students like dogs. For the Lawmen this is the ultimate insult, young Aboriginal men are initiated to rise above the state of animality that is associated with dogs (McKnight, 1999). Dogs copulate freely without restraint and any sense of Law or culture. The Elders consider it seriously disrespectful to be compared to and treated like 'a dog'.

When I asked *Milmajah* to be more specific he suggested that the teachers were practising teaching as a form of dehumanisation. Because the Lawmen generally discuss their feelings, their emotions and the spiritual aspects of life and one gains an understanding that the *Kunhanhaa* culture has a nature of being, a cosmology, which is formed around something quite different than the rational individualism of Western culture. The school's culture is premised on that rational, calculating mentality, which the Lawmen challenge.

#### They are teaching our kids to be white in the head

On a number of occasions *Wunhun* and a younger Lawman told me, "Those teachers are here to take away who we are" (*Personal Communications*, *Wunhun*, 6 April, 2001; 10 April, 2001; Anon. F, 20 September, 2000; 21 September, 2001). As they both danced for Woomera it was understandable that they used the same words. While sitting together they added, "You know, they wanted to beat me down and take away my Aboriginality: take away who I am."

These Lawmen's statements suggest that they see the school as having an assimilationist pedagogy, which imposes on children, dictating the ways in which they should learn and behave. They saw this type of pedagogy as having nothing to do with what they want. They argue that the teachers repetitively teach the students until the students give up and learn what the teachers want them to learn with nothing of their own culture. The Lawmen's argument assumes a history of the making of Aboriginal people into a slave class of domestics and labourers who were cowed and unquestioning. My analysis, here, assumes Noel Pearson's (2000) argument that this history has produced a general, present learned helplessness and welfare dependence, and that, as Irene Moss (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1993) and Ralph Folds (1987, 2001) suggest, a Western style of delivery of education is inappropriate on tribal Aboriginal communities.

The Lawmen's insistence that the teachers are there to "make kids white in the head", to "take away their Aboriginality" and to "beat them down" echoes Folds' (1984; 2001) and Hughes' (1984) perceptions that school is an outside institution enforced on communities and that teachers' pedagogical practices continue longstanding practices of expecting Aboriginal people to be passive recipients of imposed and irrelevant education. *Learning Lessons* (Collins, 1999) and *Recommendations* (Human Rights Commission and Equal Opportunity, 2000) both admit that teachers coming to teach on remote Aboriginal communities have little cross-cultural preparation and a lack of knowledge of Aboriginal culture which would give them an understanding of more appropriate pedagogical practices.

Likewise, the same Lawman's statement, "Those teachers don't respect the kids as Aborigines," (*Personal Communication*, 21 September, 2000) adds another facet to the need for caring pedagogies. Caring pedagogies assume respect between student and teacher; reciprocal respects for another's culture life experiences. One Lawman has said, "I've heard you're here to take away who I am and you're not telling it to my face" (*Personal Communication*, Anon. F, 21 September, 2000). The Lawman is saying that teachers are still taking an assimilationist attitude. Because of a history of assimilationist teaching the Lawman is assuming that instead of celebrating the local culture and making the student proud of their own cultural background they are still using an assimilationist pedagogy. It is essentially a generic statement about 'white'

teachers with 'delivery' pedagogies. If a teacher did not have an understanding of Aboriginal culture and a flexible attitude he or she might find the Lawman's statement, "I know there are kids who question the teacher and say, 'You're here to take away who I am!' " extremely challenging.

"If there were good caring people like Ken, I would have been okay"

Several of the Elders talked about what they saw as the related issues of truancy and dropping out, and the confusion that leads to substance abuse, violence and eventually jail. Those I spoke with all emphasised that the answer to both problems was caring teachers who understood children's home difficulties, essentially people who could act as teachers and social workers.

I deal with 'dropping out' first, because the school and community actually had devised a successful programme for young people who 'dropped out' and wanted to return to school in their late teens and twenties in 2001. The young people learnt art, family tree, basic numeracy and literacy and gained their driver's licence and basic cooking and sewing skills. *Wunhun* told me:

Those kids who come back after school to those *Yuenmanda* classes [post-compulsory classes] they have children while they're still at school. The boys have dropped out of school. Some of the Lawmen and Ken taught the kids and it was a way to get their confidence back again. (*Personal Communication*, 15 May, 2002).

There are a number of reasons why students cease to attend school. Children may be teased because they are illiterate. They see no reason to learn because schooling is not seen as relevant. Personal and family reasons mean they cannot attend. Students may fear teachers and other students. And their families may disagree with the Western schooling system.

When we were talking about the *Yuenmanda* post-compulsory educational programme one Lawman told me that if "there had been good caring teachers like Ken I would have been okay" (*Personal Communication*, Anon. F, 26 September, 2000). This man had not succeeded academically at school, and had become a substance abuser in his teens, but had a successful career as a dancer with the Woomera Dance troupe. He emphasised that a caring teacher would have spent time dealing with his domestic problems which interfered with his learning. This

Lawman argues the case for a teacher as social worker and psychologist as well as pedagogue. Earlier, I have characterised Ken as a teacher who was adopted by various families into the skin and kinship system, who was learning the local Aboriginal language, who spent much time after school and on weekends hunting and fishing with his adopted family, who had set up a program for young adults who wished to gain practical academic skills to enable them to enter the work force and was very popular with the students at school. Ken also spent five years at Mornington Island and knew all the families and children well.

The Lawman seems to be suggesting an approach that parallels the views pioneered by Maslow (1968, 1971, 1976): that before a child can learn, their physiological, safety needs, need to belong and need for self-esteem must be fulfilled. Like the other Elders this Lawman perceived that effective teaching is largely a function of positive teacher-student relationships. He is arguing that a teacher's central role is in building positive inter-personal relationships and promoting a positive socio-emotional climate. In short, this Lawman urges teachers to be aware that academic learning depends on a whole range of qualities which the student brings to class which include not only their cognitive but the emotional and social development and the way a child interprets the life experiences which are a result of prior home, culture and community factors.

Humanist psychologist Carl Rogers (1976) also emphasises that empathic teachers not only help the child to see and develop their inherent potential, to disclose their feelings, but have the ability to develop a "sensitive awareness of the way the process of education and learning appears to the student" (McInerney and McInerney, 1998, p. 363). As Aboriginal educator Paul Hughes (1984) states, "to develop an appropriate pedagogy for Australia's indigenous people, one must first look at [Aboriginal] society... [and note that Aboriginal] people place a high value on social relationships" (p. 20). The American Psychological Association Task Force on Psychology in Education (1993, p. 8) maintains that, "teachers' states of mind, stability, trust and caring are preconditions for establishing a child's sense of belonging, self-respect, self-acceptance and a positive climate for caring. There is, thus, abundant support for the Lawman's supposition that teachers who come to Mornington Island Aboriginal community should adopt a caring pedagogy. Koch's (2003) argument that Mornington Island needs a social

worker in light of the alcohol and domestic violence problems that seriously effect student's lives further supports the Lawmen's statement about the need for caring teachers, who need to work with social workers.

"No one taught them properly"

*Bulthuku* told me, "Sometimes the kids say school is boring. They don't want to go, but I still think they should learn to read and write. Those teachers mustn't teach properly, because there's lot of us who didn't learn to read and write and spell properly" (*Personal Communication*, 29 September, 2000).

On another occasion when we were talking about the post-compulsory class, I asked *Wunhun* why the young men and women left school. *Wunhun* used *Bulthuku's* words although I had not told him what she had said. He told me, "No one taught them properly when they were still at school so they dropped out" (*Personal Communication*, 30 September, 2000).

"Those teachers mustn't teach properly because there's a lot of us who didn't learn to read and write properly and spell properly" is a cause and effect statement. As a result of bad teaching *Bulthuku* and her peers cannot read and write well. It is also a statement that harks back to the past. The statement may be a reflection of the distrust that the community has had for state government employees since the 1978 state takeover. *Bulthuku* has told me at other times and on other occasions that she does not think the teachers have changed. Because the senior women and Lawmen are so prone to consider the past, they may judge the teachers as guilty until proven innocent unless they prove otherwise.

Christie (1984) has suggested that many teachers are used to teaching in a style that is suitable for non-Aboriginal children. He also suggested that "the children cope with the teachers' demands through ritualising strategies" (p. 384). In light of Christie's statement what the participants may be suggesting is that the teachers investigate the methods that the Grannies and Elders use to teach, and an inclusive, situational pedagogy.

Another clue pointing to the importance of this historical legacy is that most of the 'dormitory ladies' became teachers. In Clara's words, they were freed from having to go and live in the men's camp as children, so there was an incentive to learn. After McCarthy's time the children were allowed to live at home rather than

in the dormitories. Parental attitudes to education are passed on to the children and these are not positive, because many of the parents did not like school.

There is also a question of engagement. Although *Kulthangar* speaks with love of Miss Bain, his teacher in McCarthy's time, *Bulthuku* has never mentioned any teachers. She is thirteen years younger than her husband, and by the time she began her schooling, "the school was run by the government teachers who didn't stay and didn't care about the children the way the missionaries did" (*Personal Communication, Kulthangar, Bulthuku*, 15 May, 2002). Memmott and Horsman (1991) mention a stream of missionaries who came and went after Belcher left, which indicates similar pedagogical discontinuity to the present day.

According to a number of the Lawmen, "Most of those teachers are sent here. They don't really want to be here teaching our kids. The system treats them like numbers, not people" (*Personal Communications, Williams, J., Wunhun, Anon. L., Anon. J., 20 September, 2000; Hills, M., 21 September, 2000*). McInnerney and McInnerney (1998) suggest that unmotivated people would not put their maximum effort into an act. If the teachers were sent to a remote school against their will they would not want to teach in that school and it is more than likely that they would not be engaging with the children, nor would they be putting maximum pedagogical effort into the teaching.

### Behaviour Management

"The school can't control those kids. Ken can. The kids like him" (*Personal Communication, Reid, C., 1 May, 2002*).

*Kulthangar* told me, "Those missionaries flog[ged] us with flagellum, lock us in holding room. Wilfred say it still happen at school. Those teacher gotta learn it not missionary time no more" (*Personal Communication, 29 September, 2001*). The Elders all emphasised that, "Those teachers oughta learn it's not McCarthy time any more" which indicates neither force nor violent means are acceptable pedagogy (*Personal Communications, Kulthangar, Milmajah, Peters, P., 29 September, 2001; Marmies, W., 27 September, 2001*). They were adamant that the teachers should practice a traditional *Kunhunhaamendaa* style of behaviour management rather than 'growling' the students and locking them in the office or "holding room" as Wilfred called it.

A string of painful and humiliating memories are triggered for the Elders whenever discipline for boys at the school is mentioned. From what *Chuloo*, Paulie, *Milmajah* and *Kulthangar* all have told me *Kulthangar*'s above statement seems to be a response to the Elders' experiences when:

McCarthy bumped our heads together in church to wake us up, after making us wash in the salty sea, beat us with a flagellum for not working and running away and locked us away in a hot box when he was particularly angry at us [boys] for playing up [insubordination]. *(Personal Communication, Kulthangar, Peters, P., Milmajah, 29 September, 2001).*

However, Margaret's suggestions were quite to the contrary. She told me, "I was a teacher. I know what children are. They're not belting the kids like they used to. We go to meetings. We know" *(Personal Communication, 20 September, 2001)*. Scott and Evans (1996), writing on the education of Aboriginal women early in the twentieth century, maintained that obedience, discipline and order were important values instilled in Aboriginal people. Margaret still sees these values as important values to be taught to Aboriginal children.

It is noteworthy that two Elders who had taught in the culture program at the school for a number of years supported the school. Joseph told me that:

The teachers are doing their best to try and help the kids. The small-little kids listen to me when I teach art, but the teenagers pull away. They go their own way and they don't want to listen to the old people telling them stories or teaching them language. A lot of those kids sniff petrol and take drugs. It's not the school's fault. It's the parents' fault. *(Personal Communication, 16 May, 2002).*

Because Joseph has actually taught at the school daily for ten years he may well know more of what is actually happening inside the school walls than the other participants. He is not one of the *kinenda* even though he is a senior

*dulmada* and he is a gentle and forgiving man. He also comes from a different family grouping than *Milmajah* and *Kulthangar* and his country does not have the warlike tradition of the South-Eastern side of the island. When I asked Joseph about the missionaries he made a face and looked at the ground, but when I asked he and his brother *Goomungee* whether the women should share power with the Elders and teach at the school they both agreed that, “The women should be equal with the men. Times have changed” (*Personal Communication*, 2 December, 2000). However, they looked around to see if any men were watching or listening and quickly changed the subject. What they did agree on was that most of the “teachers genuinely made an effort and seemed to love the children.”

An anonymous senior male community member, who had also taught at the school, but was aligned with another family, told me, “The new teachers should be told about Aboriginal culture so they’ll know how to treat the kids and they will love and care for the kids” (*Personal Communication*, Anon. G, 1 September, 2000). He continued, “The teachers are generally blaming the kids and their parents and they’re not getting to know their parents and the background in the family.”

There was, thus, no consensus on the matter of ‘growling’ the students or caring for or loving them. The issue can be seen, not just in terms of a knowledge of what actually happens in school in the present day, but in terms of a transformation of roles and the undermining of Elders’ authority associated with the colonisation of the Island and the role of the school in that, more generally. Traditionally it was the male Lawmen’s position to discipline or ‘growl’ young people. Historically, the missionaries gave the women who became teachers, more power, which included ‘belting’. Whereas the Grannies believed that teachers should “belt” the students (*Personal Communications*, Reid, C., Farrell, C., 20 November, 2000; Hills, M., 21 September, 2000), the Lawmen say it should be themselves and uncles who ‘growl’ the students.

Beyond this issue of power and authority in the community, there is the issue of the effect such an authoritarian approach might have on children’s learning. *Wuhnun* told me, “My daughter... said when she go to school there’s a teacher who growls them. He hits them. She doesn’t want to go to school” (*Personal Communication*, 21 September, 2000). I replied, “Teachers aren’t

supposed to hit the kids.” He answered, “They do it anyway.” This view, that the ‘growling’ approach discourages students is supported in the literature. The Indigenous educators who informed Fasoli and Ford (2001) continually emphasised the “need to talk gently and calmly to children and not growl” (p. 2). They emphasised if the students “were spoken to harshly they would not come back to school and that only certain family members had the right to growl at their children. [Educator Ann said that it was] inappropriate for others to take on that role” (Fasoli and Ford, 2001, p. 2). Indigenous Australian students interviewed at Murdoch University believed, “If the teacher was intimidating or overbearing [it] was detrimental to participation by the student, who then would keep quiet” (Barnes, 2000, p. 13).

Educational theorist Van Manen (2000) comments, “In recent years there has been a search for an ethics-sensitive language of teaching and an epistemology of practice that is guided by an interest in the child’s experience and in the relational sphere between teachers and their students” (p. 1). Van Manen (2000) urges teachers to be “sensitive to the uniqueness” (p. 10) of other people. He quotes a high school teacher as saying, “I do a lot of listening. Everyday I know what is going on in their lives” (2000, p. 10) to illustrate this care for the student’s uniqueness.

Consequently, my argument returns to Clara’s original statement, that, “Ken can control the kids because they like him.” Ken is related to them by adoption, and socialises in the community. Long term caring pedagogies and relationships with community members seems, in the Elders’ views as well, as in much of the current educational literature, to be the answer to effective behaviour management.

### **“The kids are being bullied and teased at the school”**

Many Elders and community members voiced concern about the bullying and teasing at the school. Both *Bulthuku* and *Wunhun* stated, “The kids are being teased and bullied at school. That’s why they don’t want to go” (*Personal Communications, Bulthuku*, 20 September, 2000; 2 November, 2000; *Wunhun*, 27 November, 2000). A number of people, who preferred to remain anonymous rather than risk reprisals, mentioned the bullying. Lillian and Clara added, “Those teachers can’t control those kids at school. We all know who is doing the bullying. We all know whose family is involved and you know too.” I nodded. They

continued, “This is a community problem. This is a power issue. Those kids see the father beat up the mother, so they beat up other kids” (*Personal Communications*, 1 May, 2002). “Well”, Clara said, “The teachers don’t seem to have any control. The police can’t control the kids. The Elders should come in and take control. People will listen to them” (*Personal Communication*, 1 May , 2002).

There are a number of issues here. There is an issue of absenteeism because of fear, and while the children are not attending school they are not learning. From what the Elders and senior women have said, there is an issue of ‘power and control’. Neither the police nor the school nor the parents can control the children, but the Elders can. As Sanderson (2002) states in her work on punishment, discipline and crime prevention that, “Schooling may not be the single solution for all the ills that befall Indigenous youth” (p. 10). Rigby (1996) and Slee and Rigby. (1994) suggest that the most successful anti-bullying strategies have focussed on a ‘whole school’ approach or a “shared concept” approach between the school, caregivers and community. Ruddock, Chaplain and Wallace (1996) suggest that although some students found teachers supportive the tensions and pressures of the personal and social lives were more important.

The level of bullying that is being described here seems to be perpetuated by the violence that is witnessed ‘at home’. This perpetuation of bullying, absenteeism, and violence, which involves the police, Sanderson (2002) suggests, creates a nexus between inevitably poor educational outcomes and “offending” (p. 2). These problems of bullying and home violence also suggests a strong relationship between educational marginalisation and social deviance (Beresford and Omaji, 1996), which is inevitably punished by the ‘white’ legal system (Boe, 1999). Sanderson (2002) maintains that, rather than blaming the child and the family, the school should be concentrating on long-term change to curriculum and pedagogy, which includes the inclusive curriculum and pedagogical strategies of using the Elders to deal with bullying.

Cecil had told me that the police even went to the Elders when there was “trouble” (*Personal Communication*, 16 May, 2002) and the Elders told me that as senior members of the families and senior initiated men of their totems younger men would listen to the Elders. As Dingo (1998) has argued, Elders are seen as

men of considerable power in the community, but it seems they are only being used, by the police, as a last resort. *The National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy* (Commonwealth of Australia, Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2000) has suggested using mentoring projects for students, using the “skills and leadership of Indigenous Elders” (2000, p. 1) and according to linguist Norvin Richards (2003) this is now happening with a language programme.

### Unmanageable Young People

Many senior *Kunhunaamendaa* mentioned that “unmanageable young people” had become a very sensitive issue on *Kunhanhaa*. Wilfred, who had been a teacher at the school, was also concerned that the children “were out of control.” He stated angrily, “The grandparents and uncles of the kids who make trouble at the school should be going up to the school to talk to the kids” (*Personal Communication*, 24 September, 2001). He said, “At the moment only two women put them in a holding room and talk to them.” As he spoke he became more annoyed, “The parents and Elders should have a say in this, but they don’t listen to us up at the school. They are supposed to, but I know they don’t. There’s a new policy that says they have to, but words are cheap.”

The same argument holds here as with bullying. The Elders were not afraid to step in privately to speak to the parents of the ‘unmanageable young people’ and these young people were often sent out to the homelands to be ‘dealt with’ where there was no alcohol.

### ***What the Elders say should be happening***

#### Teachers should stay for longer periods of time and become part of the community

I argue in this section, as McLeod (1998) does, that “a contextualised perspective of teaching implies that teachers must position themselves to extend interaction beyond the classroom and physical school into the immediate local community and its culture” (p. 346).

In this regard one Granny told me:

All of us Grannies said we'd like the teachers to come out into the community. Cheryl, Ken and Trudy and Paul come to church. Teachers should mix up in the community. Last meeting us old ladies had at the school, we said to them [the teachers] that we want them to come and mix up in the village so we can all know them. It's good to have white people mixing up with Aboriginal people. That way they learn more about our culture and how to look after the children. (*Personal Communication*, Anon. E, 2 December, 2000).

It is notable that the 'old dormitory ladies', as the Elders call them, like teachers to come to church. It could be construed that they want the teachers to behave like Christian people such as Miss Bain, McClintock and Belcher. Over the three years of the research, *Kulthangar*, Cecily, Clara and Margaret have favourably compared teacher Ken to McClintock and Belcher, men who had both been adopted by community families, were compassionate with the children and had encouraged a revitalisation of the 'culture'.

Other participants mentioned teachers Paul and Trudy as people who visited families after school and participated in community life. *Dilmirrur* told me:

Paul drives around every afternoon... lets the kids climb all over him and cuddle him up. He comes out to the homelands [schools] too. He really got to know everyone in the community and they [Trudy and Paul] stayed five years" (*Personal Communication*, 6 September, 2000).

Similarly *Kulthangar* emphasised that teachers should stay in the community for a number of years. He saw his role and the community's role as educating the teachers in the local. He argued that the best way to learn was "slow time: you can only learn li'l bit by li'l bit, like Ken" (*Personal Communication*, 17 May, 2002).

While there were many complaints about young teachers who had made no attempt to socialise in the community, Lawman *Jekarija* argued the case for the Elders' ideal teacher. He maintained that, "Only Ken understands our ways,

because he listens to the Elders. He listens to the kids and he's related to them. He's *balyarini* skin. *Bunji Ngerrewurn* teach him to hunt and fish and spear. The kids respect him because of that" (*Personal Communication*, 29 September, 2002).

*Milmajah* also used the example of one exemplary teacher:

I listen around the community and parents say they don't even know teacher's name. They don't even know what those teachers look like. Good teacher know the family, like Ken. Ken know everyone in community. He know everyone. He related to us. He come here to teach because he like kids. Kids like him. (*Personal Communication*, 20 April, 2002).

*Kulthangar* told me:

When Ken is initiated he will he be an Elder and will he be a Lawman and he will be respected in the community. He will sit with us when we have meetings. Ken as an Elder will be able to help the kids. He will have Aboriginal common sense. He knows how our community works now. He's been here nearly five years. (*Personal Communication*, 2 April, 2001).

Ken's interaction involves a reciprocal and continuous negotiation and interaction with students, Elders and community. If Ken is initiated he will be answerable to the Elders, although he is still answerable to Education Queensland.

While the Elders hope that Ken will consent to be initiated, the other reason that the Elders may want the teachers to stay for many years is a spiritual reason that they may see as a tangible reality. In the Chapter Three, I suggested, on the basis of *Kulthangar's* statement and a similar statement by a Crow Elder from Montana, that if "people stay long enough – even white people – the spirits will begin to speak to them [and]... influence them" (Snyder, 1990, p. 39). I also suggested that the Elders are hoping that by staying longer and connecting with the land, the teachers will feel a sense of belongingness and relatedness on all

levels, with the *Kunhanhaa* community and become better teachers, precisely because they have had the spiritual experience that the Crow Elder describes.

Elders should take children into the bush and teach education for life

*Jekarija* told me:

The kids need to learn out bush away from whitefella influence. Out there they can make a mistake and no one will laugh. I've seen teachers laugh at them. Elders never laugh at them. They make them practice and practice until they got things right. (*Personal Communication*, 30 October 2002).

I argue in this section, following the Elders' views, that because the children may never leave the community it may be wiser for them to be taught by their own people than largely by 'outsiders'. Even if they do leave the community, the Elders, as traditional educators, will give them a sound base to understand themselves and their own identity. In this regard, *The Coolangatta Statement* (1999) makes it clear that each local Indigenous community has its own particular pedagogy, which must be respected. Likewise, Heitmeyer and Perry (1998) argues that pedagogy must be specifically adapted to local conditions to traditional pedagogy, where children were taught in a personalised mode of learning by the educator-elders.

The transmission of knowledge and the knowledge that is transmitted in Aboriginal societies is totally different from the reproduction of Western culture in schools. The *Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody: Schooling* (Johnston, 1991) states that, "Aboriginal societies have always had a means of transmitting knowledge about land, history, kinship, religion and the means of survival even if this knowledge was never written in books or stored in libraries as non-Aboriginal people have done" (vol. 2, p. 335). Younger generations learned from older generations by participation, observation or imitation; much learning is unstructured and takes place in social contexts amongst kin and certain types of knowledge, such as religious and religious knowledge, are imparted at specific times and in an organised and managed way, often as a part of initiation ceremonies (Johnston, 1991).

In 2002, the school decided, after pressure from the Elders, that they would allow the twelve young initiated men be educated by the Elders every two weeks (*Personal Communications, Kulthangar, Milmajah, Moon, T., Birdibir, 17 May, 2002*). The Elders have been training the young men in the ways of Aboriginal Law: hunting, fishing, the seasons to hunt and collect bush food; sacred songs, stories and dances, sacred information about the land and story places [sacred sites] and generally sacred information which they must learn as part of their cultural education as young lawmen (*Personal Communications, Kulthangar, Milmajah, Robinson, R., Birdibir, Moon, T., Kurnungkur, 17 May, 2002*). This initiative contributed a great deal to positive school-community relations.

#### Teachers should be caring and compassionate

The Elders have made it abundantly clear that they want to see caring, compassionate teachers in their community. Elders such as Joseph and his brother *Goomungee* have nominated a number of teachers who are very caring with the children. They have both said that caring teachers can help and that, “Caring teachers can help kids who have problems at home and stop them ending up in jail” (*Personal Communication, 2 December, 2000*).

These values of “well-being” (*Coolangatta Statement, 1999, p. 7*) are key parts of Indigenous-style pedagogy. Giroux (1985, 1991, 1993), McLaren (1993), hooks, Crocket (2002) and Hladki and Stanworth (2002) all advocate for caring pedagogies for principals and teachers, and Indigenous social workers. Lynn, Thorpe, Miles, Cutts, Butcher and Ford (1998) argue that people who work with Indigenous people should have “after hours availability... friendliness, respect and spirituality, level relationships, [and] mutual sharing” (p. 16).

*Kurnungkur* told me that he speaks for all the Elders when he believes that “the kids aren’t learning because of lack of attention.” *Kurnungkur* told me:

I think that the teachers should learn to understand Aboriginal children more directly. What I mean by directly is whatever a child wants to do, but can’t grasp anything the teacher should understand the child’s background and work more closely with that child. A lotta times I’ve noticed this, when a child

can't grasp something (he threw his arms in the air) the teacher seems to get bored or something. You know something like that and just doesn't care. I don't know why they don't give more careful care to the child. And listen, those teachers have gotta listen to what the kids say and what the kids want, teach what the kids want.

I replied, "So they've really got to understand those children. They are children from a different culture than the teachers have come from". (*Personal Communication*, 24 September, 2000).

Essentially, I argue that *Kurnungur* is saying that teachers must listen compassionately to the child's problems, whether they are psychological problems from home or problems with mathematics or literacy. He is asking, essentially, that the teachers use child-centred pedagogy. His vision is echoed by *Anangu* Elder, Bob Randall, who commented that "the colonial system had taken away the caring" and not given any respect or dignity" to Aboriginal youth or their culture (cited in Wall, 2000, p. 2).

## **Curriculum**

*What the Elders say is happening*

### "Teachers come and go"

In September 2000, Margaret and I were talking about the language programme, which she had helped the school to establish. She said:

Joseph, Clara, the linguist and I carried on with the language programme for a while but then I don't know what happened. I think it was because the linguist went. There are so many changes of teachers coming and going. Changes of teachers means programmes are never completed. Teachers must stay more than two years. They go so quickly

nobody in the community knows who they are.

(*Personal Communication*, 24 September, 2000).

Blitner (2000) is in cynical concurrence with Margaret's statement when she says, "An Aboriginal principal from the Top End once said:" *Balanda* educators are like pieces of paper... when the wind blows they blow away" (2000, p. 8). Just as Partington (1998) states this perspective points strongly to a clear process of social reproduction.

"The school thinks it knows what is best for the kids, but they need to understand our culture"

In this respect one participant told me:

I think there's a failure in this time now in that the teachers are coming in [to the community]. They've got the university knowledge or the teaching knowledge in white man's culture. They've got their system of teaching and the syllabus to follow. They bring it all here and try fit it all into the Aboriginal way of life instead of listening to the Elders. (*Personal Communication*, Anon. G, 1 September, 2000).

This participant is suggesting that the teachers come straight from their university to impose what Connell called a "competitive academic curriculum" (Connell, 1982), based on high culture, individualism, abstract learning and rationalism, on Aboriginal students. I also argue, as critical academic Cowlshaw (1988) suggests, "The experience of many Aboriginal people is of harassment, fear and humiliation due to... inexperienced school teachers" (p. 263). Both John and *Wunhun* have told me, "We want people who have lived or worked with Aboriginal people before, not people who come from the city. They don't know our ways" (*Personal Communication*, 20 September, 2000). This contrasts dramatically with what currently happens; as Christine Nicholas (1999), a long time principal in Northern Territory remote community schools, argues, "many [teachers] who went to live and teach on a community which was 99 percent Aboriginal have never actually met an Aboriginal person before in their life" (p.

103). *Learning Lessons: An Independent review of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory* (Collins, 1999) and *Recommendations: National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education* (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2000) argue that “most teacher training does not adequately prepare new recruits with the skills and knowledge needed for teaching in remote Australia and there is commonly a lack of knowledge among teaching staff” (p. 44).

Andrew Boe (1999), a lawyer who travelled with the justice circuit to Mornington Island, comments on racist comments made by “white service providers” about the “locals” such as “looking at the things we are doing for them” (p. 3), but the “lack of regard [for the local Aboriginal people] sometimes in the guise of pity was always present” (p. 3).

Malin (1998) notes that Anglo-Australian families invest considerable time and energy to developing in their children particular “correctness concerning dress, manners, bearing, health and hygiene in keeping with a set of clearly stated expectations” (p. 10). It seems highly likely that white teachers who teach on Mornington unconsciously expect this same behaviour on the part of Aboriginal families. Such expectations are likely to widen the gap of misunderstanding and miscommunication between teachers and families rather than facilitate communication and respect.

#### “The children are not learning their own culture”

*Milmajah’s* global statement about education, cited at the opening of this chapter, indicates that the Elders are on the whole very concerned about the general atmosphere of malaise, and confusion among the young people issuing from drunkenness, drugs, and general lack of direction. But, when I asked *Wunhun*, who has lived in Sydney for a number of years, what the real problem was he answered, “They teaching the kids to be white in the head. They teaching them to be consumers. The kids are learning consumerism. They really believe the stuff they see on television, magazines at the shop and scary movies” (*Personal Communication*, 15 May, 2002).

‘Scary movies’ is *Kulthangar’s* term for horror movies. “I don’t like the effect scary movies have on the kids”, *Bulthuku* said, “And if those missionaries said we practised witchcraft and those teachers still don’t believe in our sacred

sites and why do white people have films like the *Blair Witch Project* and *Harry Potter*. They watch the films, but they say they don't believe in it" (*Personal Communications*, 27 September, 2002). She added that she found 'whitefellas' "pretty strange" in this respect. *Kulthangar* added, "Some of those teachers used to hire out those scary movies out on the video run after school. Now our kids believe them. This not our culture. They're teaching our kids to be white in the head."

*Kulthangar* continued in the vein of temptations that entice and confuse Aboriginal culture if they are not strong in their own culture. *Kulthangar* told me:

You know television and videos are really bad for kids. This whiteman culture really confuse them. They believe all this stuff they see on television. It's not our culture. Scary movies are especially bad; they really sink into the kid's minds. They think they're true. In my day we had no TV. We listened to the stories at night, sat around the fire and laughed and joked and listened to the old people. We grew up with a steady mind. (*Personal Communication*, 27 September, 2002).

*Kulthangar* is talking about his resistance to cultural imperialism. Television is "emblematic of a wider cultural imperialism – the spread of a certain Western-modern lifestyle" (Tomlinson, 1991, p. 2). Allen cites critical social theorist Adorno (1967) as arguing that "the culture industry" has manufactured a series of cheap accessible products such as popular songs, films and television to distract people "from reality with dreams of wealth, love and power" (1998, p. 255).

The Elders fear this acculturation is ruining their children and dampening their desire for the old ways, particularly recursive education which emphasises learning about *Kunhunhaa* culture in a slow, gradual way (*Personal Communications*, *Kulthangar*, 21 April, 2002; *Milmajah*, 20 April, 2002; *Birdibir*, 2 October, 2000; Robinson, R., 17 May, 2002).

Lears and Fox (1983) suggests that such 'scary movies' are part of a global lifestyle consumerism, which has created a market for the chronically bored, who

have a need for “self-fulfilment and immediate gratification” (p. xii) and argues that the consumers of these movies define themselves by and through a discourse of goods. Such writers as Mander (1991), and Zimmerman (1996) also suggest that this mass media is part of a single global culture, which is another form of Western cultural imperialism that is marginalizing Indigenous cultures. Appadurai (1990); Langton (1993); Priest (1996); Awaye (1997) and Marcus (1997) also maintain that the New Age movement, which is also a global culture, is also modifying and mythologising spiritual areas, which should not be bought. Schofield-Clark (2003) and Callaghan (2002) maintain that many TV shows aimed at teens and early 20-somethings are all about witchcraft, sorcery and vampires overlaid with heavy doses of teen angst. Callaghan (2000) insists that these shows, “feed on perennial adolescent yearnings: such as the fantasy of sudden empowerment over your peers” (p. 9). Callaghan’s (2002) statement reinforces Lears and Fox’s (1983) statement about chronically bored youth who need instant gratification.

I am suggesting that cultural imperialism or the power of the media has a capacity to distract from the real issues of hopelessness, violence, substance abuse, unemployment and confusion and reproduces inequalities. What *Kulthangar* argues is that television and the media are propaganda, but are believed by the children. He offers an alternative, that of listening to the old people or being educated by the Elders in his culture in a physically healthy environment as opposed to being taught during the day inside the walls of the school. There are silences in this statement and one of those silences encapsulates previous training by the senior *Kunhanhaamendaa* about food gathering and hunting, seasons and times. *Kulthangar* has made the point on numerous other occasions that daytime was for gathering food and hunting and the night was for listening. In traditional education young people were educated both in a practical, ‘hands-on’ ways and in the oral tradition.

*What the Elders say should be happening*

The Law is the curriculum. Kids should learn their own culture first

“The children must learn their own [Aboriginal] language”

Senior people such as Henry Peters and Larry Lanley taught *Lardil* language at the local school after the Reverend Belcher took over the mission in the 1950s. Up until 1999 the school employed a linguist who worked with Margaret, Joseph and Clara. In my discussions with Joseph, *Kulthangar*, Clara and Margaret this subject came up regularly, indeed, almost obsessively. After a landmark meeting on 15 May, 2002 Roger stated that he told the principal, “The Elders need to teach language and the Law at the school. Most communities have funding for these programs: *Doomadgee*, Mt Isa have” (*Personal Communication*, 15 May, 2002).

I asked *Kulthangar* and Margaret, “Why is it so important that the young people learn ‘language’?” They both answered, “We need language to talk to the land and to the spirit people” (*Personal Communication*, 26 November, 2002;). Margaret added, “Remember girl when we go to *Balaliya*, when you first come here, I call out to the land in language that I am here. Remember when we see those *jindermendaa* [spirit people] out at *Lemutha* I call out in language to go away and leave my girl alone.” *Kulthangar* also argued, “Remember when we go fishing I talk to the fish in ‘language.’ We talk to the land.”

There are other related reasons why the Elders want language to be taught at the school. *Kulthangar* told me, “The kids should be taught (language) as well as the other stuff... if they’re going to school to be taught something. Language is important knowledge and it should be taught as well as whiteman’s English” (*Personal Communication*, 17 April, 2003).

In September, 2001, *Bulthuku*, *Kulthangar*, Ken and I were planning to take photographs of *Kulthangar* teaching Ken to hunt. We were planning to make books from Grade One to Grade Ten on themes of hunting, fishing and bush tucker. They were to have texts in Standard Australian English, Aboriginal English and *Lardil* language. *Bulthuku*, *Kulthangar*, *Kurnungkur* and *Birdibir* preferred that teachers should specifically integrate Aboriginal language with reading and writing in writing in the context of culture. *Bulthuku* told me said,

“That will definitely help the children to read and write” (*Personal Communication*, 30 September, 2001).

Likewise the Elders of *Lajamanu* community want their children to learn *Walpiri* as a first language (Nicholls, 2001) Christine Nicholls, an ex-*Lajamanu* Aboriginal community principal and informant for Senator Bob Collins’s *Review on Aboriginal Education* (1999), maintains that “The bilingual education approach... has important implications in terms of Indigenous identity formation and self-determination” (2001, p. 26). As *Kulthangar* said, teaching local Aboriginal language to the students is politically empowering. The *Coolangatta Statement on Indigenous Peoples’ Rights in Education* (1999) suggests that, “language is the medium for transmitting culture from the past to the present and into the future... The survival and revival of Indigenous languages is imperative for the protection, transmission, maintenance and preservation of Indigenous knowledge, cultural values and wisdom” (p. 7). Nakata (1999) and *Yunnuipingu* (1999) argue that the power to speak both one’s own Indigenous language and speak the language of the dominant culture, especially the academic language, is a ‘double power’.

“Children must know the Law and their own culture”

On *Kunhanhaa*, the Elders are custodians and spokesmen for a culture that demands that the culture, and specifically *Mirndiyan* Law, occupy a hegemonic position. The Elders have said that, ideally, the *Kunhanhaamendaa* Elders would be the policy makers, the constructors of the curriculum, and the decision-makers about how the curriculum will be taught (*Personal Communications, Milmajah, Kulthangar, Dilmirrur, Chuloo, Peters, P., Goomungee, Jekarija, Korrabuba, B.*, 20 November, 2002; Robinson, R., 15 January, 2001; Peters, M., 2 April, 2002; Peters, C., 15 May, 2002).

*Jekarija* told me:

It’s okay to have European reading and writing, yeah, but European schooling didn’t do much for me. My culture, the Law and the land keeps me going. Yeah, our children need to learn Aboriginal ways of life like hunting, fishing, cutting bark, bush foods, language

because if they are stranded the land will look after them. (*Personal Communication*, 30 October, 2002).

Although he is presently an educational worker, *Jekarija* constructs himself as an authority figure, a custodian of the ancient Law rather than a conveyor of non-Aboriginal teaching at the local school. In this role he argues that non-Aboriginal education doesn't give him the spiritual succour and survival skills that initiation and its progressive process of learning does. *Jekarija* hung his head and said quietly after we had read through a lot of the chapter on curriculum:

What did *Milmajah* say, 'After school there nothing but grog at the end of the road'. No job. The land is all we have to survive. You got nothing in your pocket and your family is hungry at least you can catch food if can hunt'.

Although he was not with him, Cecil said, word for word, the same phrase on 16 May, 2002, "They need to learn out bush away from European influence." When I asked *Jekarija*, "Why away from Europeans?" both he and Johnny answered at the same time; "Because whitefellas would laugh at the kids and they'd give up." *Jekarija* added:

We seen it at school. They get laughed at and shamed. The teachers think they're gammin. Whether it is learning a dance, cutting bark or throwing a spear, they won't try it again if people laugh. Out bush with the Lawmen there they can practice over and over and over again and no one laughs. They are taught to respect each other. That's how we learn in the bush, slowly with no distractions. (*Personal Communication*, 29 September, 2002).

Johnny nodded.

Vallance and Tchacos (2001) maintain that shame is enough to create absenteeism from school. While *Jekarija* talks about shame as a real deterrent to motivation and learning, there is a general belief between senior *Kunhunhaamendaa* that the children and older students should know their own

culture first before they learn “white man’s schooling” (*Personal Communications, Kulthangar, Bulthuku*, Brookedale, I., Roughsey, U., *Dilmirrur*, Watt, J., Williams, J., *Wunhun*, Anon.L., Anon.J., 20 September, 2000; Watt, J., 2 October, 2000). When I asked some of these senior people their meaning of ‘culture’ *Milmajah* maintained, “Culture, its for life-long learning, culture and knowledge” (*Personal Communication*, 28 September, 2001). *Milmajah* is defining Aboriginal culture as *Mirndiyan* Law or all the rules of life handed down to the *Kunhanhaamendaa*, the kinship structure, the dances, the languages, in short the curriculum that the Elders and traditionally in this context, what is the existing social structure.

According to Bourke and Bourke (2002) rites or initiations in traditional Aboriginal life “led to a change of status, a graduation from one level to another”, and *Milmajah*’s words “Culture... is for life long learning” indicate that *Milmajah* still sees traditional Aboriginal education as more important than “white man’s schooling.”

Writing in 1978 about the large number of Aboriginal people living a “tribalised existence on communities... in Western Queensland” (Budby, 1978, p. 45), Budby maintained that, in these contexts, “the living culture was passed on from generation to generation... [and] education was developed in stages and was a continuum. Education was never ending in that even the old people were involved in some form of learning” (p. 45).

The *Kunhanhaa* Elders still claim to be the authoritative custodians and sources of that traditional education. *Kunhanhaamendaa* culture can be understood as the totality of communication practices and systems of meaning that encompasses seven characteristics. As *Milmajah* said, “Education is for life.” Hart (1970) also argued that definite stages of wisdom were acknowledged according to age and status within the community. Education was mainly oral with pride of place to storytelling rather than direct instruction as I outlined in Chapter Two. Learning was informal and occurred through actual participation in daily life. Spirituality or religion saturated all parts of education. The Law stipulated rules for food gathering, kin relations and family life. Education was to ensure survival. In fact, *Kulthangar* told *Bulthuku*, Ken and me, “Without any bush experience those kids could die if they were stranded out in the bush” (*Personal*

*Communication*, 20 April, 2002). Practical skills for hunting and food gathering were vital as were knowledge of the seasons. Knowledge of the kinship system was considered mandatory (*Personal Communications*, Anon. A, 2 November, 2000; 2 September, 2000; *Kulthangar* 15 January, 2001). Personal development within an apprenticeship system, which led to initiation, was encouraged. These seven characteristics match what Gary Partington describes as the characteristics of traditional Aboriginal culture (1998).

*Kulthangar* attributes his strength of mind and character to his “continual learning” (*Personal Communication*, 20 February, 2002) and knowledge of *Kunhanhaamendaaa* Law and believes that the young people of *Kunhanhaa* would not be in a state of drugged confusion if they had a strong knowledge of Aboriginal culture. *Kulthangar* told me, “You know before kids go to school they must know their own culture first. If they’re strong in their own culture, they’re strong in their own self... [and] they wouldn’t get confused. You know I’m strong in my culture, I have all this knowledge of the Law because my father and the old men taught me” (*Personal Communication*, 20 February, 2002).

His statement suggests that he constructs Aboriginal culture as a phenomenon that gives him moral strength, a knowledge base and a foundation for other experiences and Western education. Although he does not mention the word values he is talking about philosophies, values, and standards of his own culture, which clash, with those of Western culture.

*Kulthangar* told me on 29 September, 2001:

You know when I went overseas... I was strong in my culture. A lot of people might have been changed because they saw all those places. I went to Papua New Guinea, China, France, Great Britain, India, Italy, The United States, Arizona and New Mexico and Germany If I hadn’t been strong in my own culture I might have been tempted by grog, women, gambling they offered me.

Essentially *Kulthangar’s* constructs learning one’s own culture as a stable, strong foundation before one can be schooled in another culture.

Pryor (1998) suggests that “hearing stories from and about your own culture gives you a strong sense of belonging” (1998, p. 17) and a sense of identity. Like Pryor, Blitner (2000), Dingo (1998) and Bell (1998) also highlight the idea that Aboriginal students should respect and listen to their Elders and respect nature.

There are a number of points to comment on here. There are many Aboriginal cultures, not one, and the Elders insist that Mornington Island is still a tribal society with a traditional culture. Bourke and Bourke (2002) also insist that in pre-colonial Aboriginal societies the worldviews and culture of these societies formed the curriculum and pedagogy of the education agenda and included law, religious tenets, ceremony, the arts, social customs, medicine, technology, food preparation and collection, natural science, conversation and interactions and economic activity.

“The kids should know their own identity: their Aboriginality”

When I asked *Milmajah* what his definition of culture was he answered:

Everything, storytelling, hunting, singing, walking out in the bush. How to survive traditional way, how black man survive thousands of years ago. This is culture. Culture is an identity; you know your identity, and your Aboriginality, in your heart, mind and soul, mainly in your heart. You were taught by the old men, the Elders and taught that you must pass on this message to the next generation. (*Personal Communication*, 20 November, 2002).

*Kulthangar* also told me, “If you learn your own culture as a strong foundation you are not going to be tempted by the temptations of another culture” (*Personal Communication*, 17 May, 2002).

In this respect the Elders believed that the teachers probably had no idea about initiated young men. The Elders were adamant that boys be initiated ceremonially in *Kunhanhaa* Law so that their “knowledge would not turn to dust.” In traditional *Kunhanhaa* Law men have the right to go through Law, or initiation. Boys as young as nine may be initiated. At that point, they become men. According to *Kulthangar* and Wilfred the school does not recognise the status of initiated men

within the Western schooling system. They are given no respect and are treated the same as boys and girls who have not been through initiation ceremonies, but the Elders see them as young Lawmen (*Personal Communications*, 15 May, 2002). For the Elders, those young men are their trainees, who will inherit the Elders' skills, knowledge and be future leaders, but to the non-Aboriginal teachers, they say, they are just the same as any other Aboriginal 'kid.'

John Bucknall, a qualitative researcher who based his account *Socialisation during Childhood On a Remote Traditionally Oriented Aboriginal Settlement* (n.d.) on a number of interviews with an Aboriginal woman from a remote Arnhem land tribe, noted that "the day after ceremonies at school was a bit of an anti-climax for all concerned" (p. 13). His interviewee informed him that ceremonies associated with the *Djangua* cycle are still maintained as large open events involving considerable numbers of people including young initiates. Bucknall suggested that a young Aboriginal man who has been elevated to the status of a man in his own culture would be bored, angry and disillusioned by a number of factors within Western schooling. *Anangu* Elder Bob Randall echoes this comment, when he suggests that substance abuse is "a symptom of boredom, [and] their [Aboriginal young people's] multiple language skills and their intimate knowledge of traditional life and flora and fauna as distinct from knowledge of a theoretical nature, are not adequately acknowledged by white people" (cited in Wall, 2000, p. 2).

"The teachers should learn about the culture and learn to respect the culture"

There was ubiquitous approval among the participants that the teachers should have a formal induction program to teach them local ways, meet the people and an informal program where they visited the Elders to learn culture, and history over the period of time that they stayed on the island. This extended to learning about the spirit world.

*Kulthangar* told me, "We Elders really should be going up to the school to educate the principal. Those teachers have no knowledge in these matters" (*Personal Communication*, 26 November, 2002). According to the Elders, excepting a few art lessons from *Joseph* and *Milmajah*, and some dance lessons from the Woomera dance company, "culture" has not been taught at the school as

part of an ongoing education program since 1999 and *Kulthangar* argued that, “if the boss man at the school isn’t a friend to the Elders we won’t have a proper culture program” (*Personal Communication*, 26 November, 2002). And they comment often that, in fact, the culture program at the school has operated sporadically, dependent on the principal.

One anonymous participant suggested:

I think that when the new teachers are coming in they should be aware there are some Aboriginal ways of doing things. There should be a small committee so that when the new teachers come they can brief them about Aboriginal culture and the customs and other things so they will be aware and then how they treat the kids and how they should love them and all those other things. That should be ongoing. They should have some knowledge in that way. (*Personal Communication*, Anon. G, 1 September, 2000).

Clara also suggested that the senior Aboriginal people in the community should be advising the school on educational policy. Clara maintained, “The school should be getting advice from us” (*Personal Communication*, 15 May, 2002). As I have shown previously Blitner, Dobson, Gibson, Martin, Oldfield, Oliver, Palmer and Riley (2000), a group of Aboriginal teachers from communities in the Northern Territory, agree with Clara’s statement.

There is no doubt from these comments that the senior community members expect the teachers to listen to them. Indeed, as I noted in Chapter Three, all the teachers, except Ken, are under fifty and therefore, according to traditional *Kunhanhaamendaa* culture, they would be expected to listen to the Elders.

*Bulthuku* told me, “If those teachers are teaching the Aboriginal children English then I think they can learn our traditional ways too. They can learn about family relationships and skins, our ways” (*Personal Communication*, 21 April, 2001). When I read *Bulthuku*’s remarks to *Kurnungkur* he suggested that, “The teachers can walk over to sit down with the parents in the afternoons, so they can

build up a relationship, so there will be trust but they will also learn that way. They will have knowledge” (*Personal Communication*, 26 September, 2001).

Another anonymous participant suggested, “Teachers should gain an understanding of Aboriginal community life, family life, who is related to whom and what the children do at home. All this information could provide rich information for both formal and impromptu lessons, and units of work and correct teaching at school (*Personal Communication*, 20 September, 2000). *Kurnungkur* also told me, “You got to have that experience with Aboriginal people to teach properly. We had an Aboriginal teacher here about five or six years ago and he understood the children and the community” (*Personal Communication*, 28 September, 2000). In addition, an anonymous Lawman argued, “Those teachers should go to university to learn Aboriginal culture, race relations; all that stuff, like you did, Hilary. Those young teachers, what they need to know is the kids backgrounds here from us people because they go into a classroom and no matter what they think they just don’t know” (*Personal Communication*, Anon. F, 21 September, 2001).

This view that teachers should learn about Aboriginal culture extended to the spirit world. When I asked Reggie about the teachers learning *Kunhanhaa* culture he told me, “The kids should go bush and be taught to listen to the spirit people and the ancestors. The teachers should know that this is normal for us. We learn from them, from *Jindermendaa* [green leaf spirit people]. Our old people got songs from *Jindermendaa*” (*Personal Communication*, 17 September, 2000). To the *Kunhunhaamendaa* the spirit world co-exists with the mundane world as the *Mirndiyan* Dreamtime. But *Kulthangar*, Reggie, *Milmajah*, Cecil and *Birdibir* warned me that the teachers should be careful of going where they want on the island (*Personal Communication*, 16 May, 2002). *Kulthangar* told me:

Initiated men get power from sacred site, but them teachers get sick or drunk because of power of sacred sites. They don’t know where they are. We got hundreds of them. They go to wrong place on weekend and come home and behave stupid. Like I said white man never care much for his spiritual

self. He don't know much. (*Personal Communication*, 9 September, 2001).

*Kulthangar* sees whitefellas' interest in 'scary movies', with their invocation of an extra-material, extra-rational dimension, as relevant here. "Yet", he said, "I know white fellas' watch scary movies, but the teachers are too thick skinned to understand sacred sites" (*Personal Communication*, 26 November, 2000). *Kulthangar* added on 21 May, 2002:

We have one woman here who went crazy from going to wrong place. We don't just put sign up to stop people trespassing. They stumble onto [sacred] story place they in big trouble. They get very sick. Their family get sick. They act strange. You know sick in the head. We seen it happen to some teachers who come here.

Similar observations about the power of the land, story places and the spirit people, also made by the participants in Rose's book (1992). The *Kunhanhaa* Lawmen were issuing practical warnings to all non-Aboriginal people who did not know the local area. But, there are unlikely to be any shared meanings between the world of middle aged Aboriginal men who take their directives from the spirit world and young non-Aboriginal people who are generally sceptical of anything except scientific facts, although many of them would be most likely to watch 'scary movies'. If any of the teachers saw any of the spirit people they may believe they were hallucinating from lack of sleep or too much alcohol.

However, the Elders are essentially remonstrating with the white teachers to stop confusing the Aboriginal students with their 'strange' media and allow them to believe their own cultural phenomena. From the interactionist point of view, without any sense of shared meanings in this area interaction would be virtually impossible and culture, as representative of the general store of shared meanings and the basis for constructive social interaction is certainly not shared. From the critical perspective, anthropologist Sansom (2001) maintains that all 'Top-End' Aboriginal stories that "return power to age old Aboriginal Divinities [or original Dreaming powers] must surely be ranked as texts of cultural resistance" (p. 32).

Indeed it seems that stories such as *Birdibir*, *Milmajah* and *Kulthangar* tell have a “political significance contesting whitefella paradigms and re-asserting the world-view of the original Australians” (Sansom, 2001, p. 32). When I read this to *Kulthangar* he replied, “I think those teachers get a big shock if they watched festival. White people say we evil for initiation ceremony. Stinking missionary turn old women away from our culture. Them missionary say we heathen. They the ones that heathen. They say we practice witchcraft. That’s not true” (*Personal Communication*, 27 September, 2002).

Many of the participants also argued that the teachers should have a knowledge of the local Aboriginal history and ‘things that have happened to us’. One participant told me, “There’s a lot of cultural things, a lot of truth about past history, a whole lot of things that have happened that those teachers need to know about us. It might be too much for them to fathom but they need to understand us, and the kids. They need to. They need to learn our history and culture. I didn’t want to stand there and listen to all their rubbish. I ran away instead” (*Personal Communication*, Anon. F, 26 September, 2000). In response I asked him, “What do you think of *Wunhun*’s idea of white schooling in the morning and culture after lunch?” He answered:

Technology. You know technology is here to stay. You know we can’t walk back out there and sit in a humpy. Like I said before his way is right. He teaches them every day who they are. You know *Wunhun*’s idea is good. It can be realistic. In the afternoon after the white teachers have taught you can get up and sing and dance and enjoy your blackness... Come out in the light. (*Personal Communication*, 26 September, 2000).

That Lawman’s ideas, especially his need to validate and express his family experiences, resemble Freire’s notion that educators have to work with the experiences that students, and the community bring to the school. As I stated in the methodology chapter Freiere suggests confirming and legitimising these experiences in order to give those who live and move within them a sense of

affirmation and to provide the conditions for students and community to display an active voice and presence (Giroux, 1985).

While the participants emphasised that the teachers who came to Mornington Island needed to learn the culture and to respect the local culture the Elders needed ultimate respect as the custodians and guardians of the sacred Law and culture. Once again, *Kurnungkur*'s comment to the principal seems relevant: "Our mob are the people you teachers should be listening to" (*Personal Communication*, 17 May, 2002).

In September 2000 I spoke to one participant about his perceptions of relationships between the teachers and the community. One of his most telling statements in regard to the school's perceived hegemonic position in the community was an answer to my question, "Do many parents come to parents and teachers night. Is there communication between parents and teachers to talk about this problems"? He replied, "It's not us who should go to them. It's them who should come to us" (*Personal Communication*, 20 September, 2000). Again in 2002 the subject about the school came up when *Milmajah* and *Kulthangar* were together and both replied at once, "It's not us who should come to them. It is them who should come to us" (*Personal Communication*, *Birdibir*, 2 October, 2000; *Milmajah*, 3 April, 2002; *Kulthangar*, 2 April, 2002).

*Kinendas Kulthangar*, *Kurnungkur* and Cecil and Lawman *Milmajah* told me in authoritarian tones that they told the headmaster that the Elders should be giving advice to the school on a regular basis. "The monthly meetings are important to sort out a whole of things that are happening at the school," added *Kurnungkur* (*Personal Communication*, 15 May, 2002). *Kulthangar* was very angry, "Wifred and I went to a meeting with that headmaster. He broke that promise. When he come to see us? Never!" (*Personal Communication*, 8 August, 2002).

A critical reading might entertain the possibility that the headmaster is unaware that keeping of promises is a 'bush' way of communication. However, Justice Fitzgerald warns breaking of promises leads to lack of trust. And this keeping of promises is certainly part of the respect for the culture that the Elders expect the teachers to learn.

“Double power: we need white man’s language and Big English. We want our kids to become doctors and lawyers”

On the whole the Elders tend to dismiss European schooling as largely irrelevant to the lives of young people growing up on a remote and isolated Aboriginal community, as I have shown. *Milmajah*’s statement about the lack of ‘jobs’ at the end of school and the consequential hopelessness young people see which leads to their substance abuse and in some cases suicide exemplifies this view. Instead, the Elders stress the need for practical life skills, which are learned slowly and taught by senior people.

However, in May 2002, *Kulthangar* and his wife *Bulthuku* made a dramatic turn around in their views about ‘white’ education. They began to articulate a need to understand and master the literacy, legal and financial skills that such education might offer. Although *Kulthangar* said in September, 2001 that “white man’s schooling is nothing but rubbish in our head” in May, 2002, he and his wife now expressed the view that English was vital to an understanding of politics of power and control in their community. Henceforth they saw English as a core subject within the curriculum. *Kulthangar* and his wife have stated that they believe that *Kunhanhaamendaa* need to learn English, especially spelling, vocabulary and grammar to an advanced level to share a common structural and social world with non-Aboriginal people.

In this regard *Bulthuku* told me:

The groups who hate one another are dividing the community. One group shouts at the other and uses big words that confuse us. This is white man’s ways. We need to learn these big words so we can stop this fighting and make things right again. (*Personal Communication*, 2 April, 2002).

*Kulthangar* added:

Yeah they think they can trick us up with their big words, control us. Sweep the dirt under carpet. We need to understand the big words to understand their tricks... Young people must learn at school properly

and take advantage of their schooling. Those kids get paid for going to school. We never did. They must become our doctors and lawyers in the future. (*Personal Communication*, 2 April, 2002).

*Bulthuku's* statement also reveals the need for high standards of English literacy and understanding of functional English. She told me:

We really need adult education up here for the adults who realise they need to learn to read and write properly. We might be bored at school but its after we leave school that we realise we can't spell big words and don't understand how to read anything that has big words. I had a job as child protection officer but I really need a good education to do it. My real interest is children. They made me child protection officer, but they just stood me down and never gave me a chance, because they said I couldn't fill out reports properly. (*Personal Communication*, 2 April, 2002).

They believed that a grasp of advanced English was vital to being a leader in any organisation in the community. After an incident in May 2002 where *Kulthangar* and the Elders tried and failed to regain their traditional political power they realised that meanings are shared through language. The senior people of the community have realised that social situations are influenced by a shared knowledge of 'whiteman's language' and an awareness of structural, social and personal features such as shared body language are vital.

Similarly, Indigenous educational theorist Nakata sees English literacy as a way to "access Western knowledges and manage our own life worlds in the changing economies of the technological era" (1995, p. 23). Linguist Anna Shnukal (1996) maintains that although English is seen predominantly as the language of powerful European systems such as education, the media, the courts and the bureaucracy it is for many Indigenous students and "alien and difficult language" (p. 44).

Kimberley region welfare worker Sullivan (1996) notes that remote Aboriginal people often have “to call upon the literacy and financial skills of the service centre to organise the entire economic life of the group” (p. 29). *Kulthangar* is saying that Aboriginal children have the opportunity to gain skills previously unavailable to the people of his age group and he believes that the students must grasp these opportunities to further the political independence of the Aboriginal people on their community. From his research Trudgen (2000) reached similar conclusions to those expressed in *Bulthuku*’s statement. He states that remote Aboriginal people are confused and mystified by unfamiliar terminology and need to understand concepts in a practical way.

Cressey’s statements are relevant to *Kulthangar*’s statements about the need for Western education. Cressey (1983) states:

Literacy may be analogous to teaching FORTRAN computer language to a literature scholar. It is alien and external until a situation arises in which it can be useful (p. 41).

Similarly Langer (1987) argues:

This usefulness grows out of the realities the learners face, at home, in their communities, at work and in school. Literacy learning begins and continues when people understand its advantages and know it will benefit them; when they take ownership for their ideas and are empowered to use them for their purposes (p. 13).

Interpretations and meanings that are contiguous with literacy in the student’s first language and first culture are ignored, as are cultural differences in ways of learning and assumptions about learning. (Heath, 1983; McDermott, 1977).

*Kulthangar* and *Bulthuku*’s statements are in agreement with *Kurnungkur*’s statements about the need for education at the local school which leads to a university education or an apprenticeship at the mines (*Personal Communication, Kulthangar*, 26 April, 2002; 26 November, 2002; *Bulthuku*, 12 May, 2002; 1 December, 2002), but previous to April, 2002 when he realised the political need

to gain high standards of literacy, *Kulthangar* frowned on what he and many of the other Elders called “Big English.”

On 12 September, 2001 *Kulthangar* told me:

My law never change from Dreamtime when we [were] created and [the] land [was] created. White man think we talking about rubbish when we talk about land- sea claim, but their schooling is nothing but rubbish in our head. We Elders got all the knowledge. I told old McKnight I go to Grade 7 at white man school and I learn nothing, but I learn real knowledge from years with the old men. I learn real knowledge. I get sacred knowledge from being at sacred places. If the kids don't learn [in the] tribal way they [will] get in white man's foolish way of living. Those city fellas, government fellas, those teachers who work for the government, [and] those urban Aboriginals they all been to higher white school than us, but all they learn is Big English. We can't understand Big English.

For *Kulthangar* “Big English” not only includes vocabulary he cannot understand, but mathematical, scientific and technological knowledge, which is not within his frame of reference. When I met him at the Local Government Conference in August 2001 in Townsville he looked exhausted and confused. I said, “*Kulthangar* would you like to have a cup of tea and a sit down before we go.” He was clearly threatened by the non-Aboriginal people in immaculate white shirts and ties and the physical structure of the large conference centre, “I want to get out of this place. Their Big English makes me tired. I just don't understand what they're talking about” (*Personal Communication*, 6 August, 2001).

*Kulthangar* was made aware in April 2002, as Dingo (2000) makes clear, that his standards “did not fit any of the accepted standards of the outside white world” (p. 38). He realised as Gary Partington (1998) states, that advanced education “provides a source of empowerment for Indigenous people. It gives

them the potential to take charge of their own lives without the need to intermediaries or to continue as clients of a welfare system, which for many perpetuates the paternalism of the colonial era” (p. v), but the Mornington Island Lawmen still struggle to be masters of their own destiny.

However, they now consider that by understanding and using Big English they will have more political power. As Gary Partington (1998) maintains, an “imperfect understanding of the other’s perspective due to cultural differences, culture conflict is frequent in schools” (p. 13), but in this case it has created a standoff situation in a small closed and geographically isolated community due to a lack of shared generational, structural and cultural understandings between mainly young non-Aboriginal teachers and a group of senior Aboriginal Elders.

#### Inclusive Curriculum. Situation based curriculum

There is a widespread perception that teachers must teach for local conditions. An anonymous Lawman told me, in this respect, “If school teachers are teaching from syllabus documents that were not devised locally their teachings will not be relevant” (*Personal Communication*, Anon. F, 20 September, 2000). If they do not speak to the Elders, speak to and get to know the families; understand the local culture, the families and the problems their teaching will not be relevant to the needs of the *Kunhanhaa* people (*Personal Communication*, Anon. G, 20 September, 2000).

*Wunhun* was particularly angry that irrelevant Western schooling was being imposed on *Kunhanhaamendaa* students without due consultation with the community. He stated: “The kids are not interested because they’re not learning anything that’s relevant to them. It’s all white stuff and nothing that relevant to Aboriginal culture and ways and its white ways of teaching. It’s not the Aboriginal way of teaching. This has been happening for thirty years” (*Personal Communication*, 26 September, 2000).

I also told *Bulthuku*, “In the Northern Territory the parents come into the classroom and help with the classes and the parents talk about what the kids are going to learn. The day isn’t cut up into little bits of time. They might learn about bush tucker for a month and go out to the bush. Elders come into the classes and teach” (*Personal Communication*, 15 January, 2001). *Bulthuku* replied

enthusiastically, “That’s a good idea. It’s a mix of Aboriginal traditional culture and white man’s culture and everyone is involved.” She added, “And they really need to learn about Aboriginal history and about what is happening now.”

In November, 2001 I explained the role of curriculum in schools to *Kulthangar*. I told *Kulthangar* that exclusive dominant core curriculum for all schools was the programs and lesson plans, tests in school, but inclusive curriculum would include *Lardil* language lessons, knowledge of the intricate patterns of skin and kinship relations, culture camps, sports days, excursions. *Kulthangar* replied: “If inclusive curriculum is knowledge, knowledge of Aboriginal Law is the only curriculum that is of any importance” (*Personal Communication*, 28 September, 2001). *Milmajah*’s statement is also typical of the Elder’s statements. He told me, “If they [the children] learn black culture first before they go into white man world they got solid background to be recognised by everyone and anyone” (*Personal Communication*, 8 November, 2002).

The conversations and experiences I have had with such Elders as *Kulthangar*, *Paulie* and *Milmajah*, and senior women such as *Margaret* and *Clara*, made it clear that traditional Aboriginal curriculum should be gender specific so as to be culturally appropriate. Much of what I have learned about that should be learned by girls was taught to me by the actions of my informants. *Margaret* took me to places repeatedly rather than tell me information. *Kulthangar* indicated to me that this silent pedagogy was the way senior Aboriginal women taught the girls when they participated in a recent school culture camp. This teaching included such skills as catching fish, collecting plants for food and medicinal purposes, but the silent; unassertive and seemingly directionless pedagogy was in direct contrast to the way the girls were taught at school.

When the traditional Aboriginal ceremonies and initiations occurred in September, 2001 I sat with my skin mother-in-law *Margaret*, who sat with the *Borrooloola* woman. She told me, “We sit with these [*Borrooloola*] women because *Thelma Douglas*, the Law woman from *Borrooloola* is my countryman” (*Personal Communication*, 17 September, 2001). Most of the time we sat silently and *Margaret* pointed to things that I should learn. Although I spent nearly every day of that month with *Kulthangar* when it came to the physical positioning of where I sat while the festival was on he told me, “You must sit with the women.” Even

though at other times *Kulthangar* treated me as an equal, at ceremony time I was expected to behave as a woman would in traditional tribal ways. Because part of my training by *Kulthangar* was to see how women were expected to behave traditionally, I was expected to translate this into curriculum for women. When I asked *Kulthangar* about curriculum for the girls, he answered “You know”, lit a cigarette and then said, “What have I taught you?”

When I asked *Kulthangar* about “women’s business” at the school he always told me that I should talk to Clara about that. I also asked *Milmajah* in 2002 why the Elders didn’t seem to be concentrating on a cultural program for the young women and he answered:

Mmm, we need to pass on knowledge about collecting bush tucker. Maybe Heather, Clara know about the Law for women, and old Margie. A lot of the women’s knowledge is gone. Cecil’s old mother was the last of the old Law women and that old Waanyi-Garawa Law-woman Limerick and John *Dimirrur* taught her everything. (*Personal Communication*, 2 June, 2002).

Up until November 2002 there was nothing for the girls at school in the cultural program that the Elders had outlined. However, since this became apparent, the Elders and women have moved to change this. They have spoken to me about constructing a program at school which will cater for specific ‘women’s business’ such as *Lardil* language, family tree, women’s skin groups, sex education, women’s songs for birthing, collecting bush foods and bush medicines (*Personal Communications*, *Bulthuku*, 21 April, 2001; 12 May, 2002; Roughsey, U., 30 August, 2001; Watt, J., 17 September, 2000; 2 October, 2000; 10 April, 2001; 26 September, 2001; Williams, J., 10 April, 2001; Bush, L., 10 May, 2002; *Dimirrur*, 2 September, 2002; 20 November, 2002; Hills, M., *Koorabuba*, B., 20 November, 2002; December, 2001; Kelly, R., 10 April, 2001; 19 September, 2001; Marmies, W., 20 May, 2002; 20 November, 2002; Robinson, R., 17 September, 200; 2 October, 2000; *Kulthangar*, *Jekarija*, *Goomungee*, *Chuloo*, 1 December, 2002), but only Clara remains of the original *Kunhanhaa* women who had much knowledge. Margaret always defers to her, because the learning of culture is a slow process and, although Margaret came to Mornington Island in 1930, she is still not a ‘local’. My experience camping out in ‘the bush’ and

talking with *Milmajah*, *Ngerrawurn*, Johnny, *Kulthangar*, Margaret and Cecily is that relevant knowledge is learned on camping trips rather than in a classroom and it is learned by practical methods: coming upon a particular plant; spearing and cutting up a particular food and talking about a particular family branch. It is a slow and practical process that is revealed at the right time at the right place.

When I read this passage to *Milmajah* and *Kulthangar*, on 20 April, 2002, *Kulthangar* he replied:

That's right; that's right. Our tribal education is a lifelong thing. It is not schooling. That schooling at the school is only for twelve years. I only did four years schooling, but I have been learning from the Elders my land, and my visions ever since. I also go to conferences to learn from other people. My son Caleb; he only got lil bit schooling but he good hunter. He can catch big mob turtle, dugong, crabs, and fish. He can live off the land.

If one recalls Gary Partington's (1998) seven characteristics of traditional Aboriginal education, *Kulthangar*, as the embodiment of his culture is referring to his son's superior Aboriginal education rather than an inferior Western schooling.

While *Kulthangar* now sees an important role for Western education on Mornington, he clearly continues to regard it as not only imposed but also inferior in many aspects. In traditional *Kunhanhaa* Law the *Muyinda* are the authority figures in society because they are the purveyors of knowledge, the keepers of Ancestral Law and the teachers of this Law. In *Kunhanhaa* the Law and the Elder's knowledge of the Law is the dominant traditional discourse. In traditional *Kunhanhaa* society power and authority are gained through knowledge; spiritual knowledge of the Law; the knowledge of the relationships and connections between the land and her children. The land is "Mother Earth" (*Personal Communication, Kulthangar, 20 February 2002*). There is much in these views that parallels the views and experiences of North American Indigenous peoples. First Nations Cherokee scholar Polly Walker, who is employed as a lecturer in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Unit at the University of Queensland argues

that, “Communication with the natural world and ancestors, as well as knowing that comes through dreams, visions and intuitions, forms an integral part of Indigenous Knowledge Research” (2001, p. 18). She continues, “The sacred aspects of Indigenous experience are directly silenced when they are eliminated from formal academic research, relegated to religion or labelled as lacking [academic] rigour” (p. 19).

Research by Boylan and Brady (1994) on rural communities in Canada suggests that settling into a new community is a personally challenging process. The degree to which local cultural values, traditions and beliefs impact upon the professional will affect the ease of settling into the district. In Aboriginal communities teachers encounter other cultures and worldviews to the one they know. Depending on the personality, experiences, maturity and knowledge held by the teachers these differences can be exciting, challenging and inviting as well as being sources of anxiety, isolation and alienation. Research by Crowther (1988) on teachers in Aboriginal communities in rural Queensland and the Northern Territory suggest that the differences in the cultural perspectives were one of the main contributory factors in the high turn over rate of these professionals. When I suggested to the Lawmen that young teachers often felt alienated and anxious, the response was, “They shouldn’t be here. We don’t want people who don’t feel at home with us” (*Personal Communication, Wunhun, 20 September, 2000*). There was no acceptance of hegemonic power here. Harslett, Harrison, Partington and Richer’s (1999) studies of an effective teacher of Aboriginal children suggests that teachers should have an understanding of Aboriginal culture and histories. Those teachers should also be conversant with their students’ home and family backgrounds and circumstances. The effective teacher would also have an ability to develop good relationships with Aboriginal students and their families and a capacity to be empathetic, flexible and to adjust to adjust to the dynamics of student behaviour.

### **The implications of inappropriate pedagogy and curriculum**

I return to *Milmajah*’s global comment about the effects of inappropriate schooling. It seems appropriate here to document his whole statement:

By the same [education] system they are running now, we [Elders] need to take them kids out [bush] to teach blackfella stuff. They are teaching our kids to be white in the brain and at the end of the white road there is nothing but grog. They [the students] t[h]ink grog give them courage or make them forget. But grog leading to drunkenness, murder and rape. Devil-Water, it doesn't make you act socially; it makes you stupid in the head. The parents don't bother. The teachers do what they want to do. If they not have education those kids running wild like brumbies. Because of booze and drugs and teachers not listen[ing] to parents at home, you come here, you come here and listen to us Elders, no one else. (*Personal Communication*, 20 November, 2002).

This statement is essentially a global statement about what one Elder, speaking for the other Elders, perceives the school to offer. He suggests that the results of what the school offers are social alienation and possible incarceration and death for the students. *Milmajah* does not mention other substance abuse problems which Mornington Island youth are experiencing such as smoking marijuana and inhaling paint fumes, petrol fumes, pesticide fumes, and the high incidence of 'break and enters' on the island (Human Right Australia, 1992), but it is evident that he sees contemporary education as irrelevant, confusing and destructive to life in a remote Aboriginal community. This perception is supported in other community contexts by Wearne (1986) and Folds (1987), who maintain that education systems should be working to address the cultural needs of the Aboriginal community that they serve. As *Milmajah* has said, the consequences of schooling for many children is literally being 'white in the head' – 'vacant space', as there would be very little brain power left after petrol sniffing, alcohol and drug addiction.

Federal Race Commissioner Irene Moss's comments about young people being confused parallel *Milmajah* comments. She maintained that the "distinctive

problems facing young people on Mornington Island include over-representation on criminal charges, under employment and the breakdown of their relationship to traditional values” (Human Rights Australia, 1992, p. 6). She added that the decline of participation rates at the school should be seen as “a rejection of the inappropriate way [education] is structured and delivered” (Human Rights Australia, p. 9). *Milmajah*’s statement and related conversations makes it clear that he regards a range of issues of inseparably linked: a loss of culture due to dominant society schooling; a lack of parenting due to alcohol and lack of knowledge of parenting; a perception that since the church has not run the school that there is a lack of compassion and caring on the part of the itinerant teachers, an over-dependency on the welfare state and drugs and alcohol causing violence and crippling lethargy. These, he argues, are the broad consequences and linkages that result from the present failure of Aboriginal education on *Kunhanhaa*.

I further explore *Milmajah*’s statements by using literature written about the *Yolngu*, a Northern Territory tribal Aboriginal people who are, as I have shown, are closely related to the *Kunhunhaamendaa*. They too adhere to their ancient *Mirndiyan* Law (Trudgen, 2000). Trudgen, who worked for the *Yolngu* people from the early 1970s and writes about the effects of Western education on the *Yolngu* people in Arnhem Land, concurs with *Milmajah*’s observation. Trudgen maintains that, “When *Yolngu* continually experience ineffective Western education, it can have far reaching negative effects, leaving them confused about the modern world and even about the nature of knowledge itself” (2000, p. 124). Trudgen’s statement about his invitation back to Arnhem Land in 1991 also parallels and adds light to *Milmajah*’s words about “teaching kids to be white” and grog “at the end of the white [school] road.” Trudgen states that there are no jobs at the end of the road, “only jobs for outsiders... welfare... hopelessness [which] turns into destructive social behaviour” (2000, p. 7).

In March, April and May, 2002 *Kulthangar* also talked about the lack of relevant curriculum at the school. *Kulthangar* blames the petrol sniffing among the children on the lack of relevant curriculum being taught at the school and Western influences. He told me:

I was invited to a petrol-sniffing meeting, but I’m not going. All these people on committees are

outsiders. We are doing the wrong thing here. The Elders are not included on committees. The school is not teaching the right thing. The Elders and the school should be working together here. Those kids walk around like robots without a brain. You know next week I want to go up to the school and have a talk about schooling. They need to know when kids go to school they learn something for the future. They need to go out and learn how to become good doctor and good lawyer, not ending up on the scrap heap, dead from suicide or on drugs or that sniffing. (*Personal Communication*, 20 April, 2002).

*Kulthangar* uses many metaphors to describe the temptations of alcohol and drugs. He constantly emphasises the need for tribal knowledge, knowledge of *Kunhanhaa* culture to strengthen Aboriginal youth. He talks about the ability to see the “light” a great deal as the greatest strength and safeguard a person can have. From the conversations I have had with *Kulthangar* I perceive that he means by this is the ability to have common sense; the ability to have the strength of character and resilience to withstand the peer pressure to drink alcohol or take drugs, and the ability to have visions. An initiated man should gradually develop psychic ability: the ability to see into the future and see people’s true character.

*Wuhnun* told me:

The teachers try and teach them things they don’t want to do when they grow older. We say what’s the use of learning these things that they can’t use on Mornington Island. Some of them can hardly go to college or school on the mainland. The standard here is not high enough. They’re not going to leave Mornington. They’re going to stay with their families, but because the standard here is so low we have to send them out to school. That’s what we have done with all our son’s and nephews. They

have gone to... school on the mainland. (*Personal Communication*, 25 September, 2000).

**“We’re the mob you should be listening to” – teachers should listen to the Elders**

*Kulthangar* told me, “If the government recognises our Law wefella Elders could control that school” (*Personal Communication*, 25 June, 2002). In fact the Elders statements are in keeping with many Top End Aboriginal community schools where the Elders are the advisers and policy makers (Blitner, 2000; Bell, 1998; Dobson, Riley, McCormack and Hartman, 1997). In 1991, *The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* commented that:

School based education systems in Australia have historically been unwilling or unable to accommodate many of the values, attitudes, codes and institutions of Aboriginal society. (Johnston, p. 336).

When I read this to Elders *Milmajah* said, “That’s what we say all along, listen to us, listen to us, please listen.” *Milmajah* maintained, “Yeah, the teachers got to know the parents and families, go and sit down and yarn with the community instead of isolating themselves. How else are they going to learn about our kids and our culture” (*Personal Communication*, 8 June, 2002).

Like the Elders’ other frequent statement “the teachers must listen to us” the words “the teachers gotta sit down with us and yarn and learn our culture” is a recurring statement. The process the Elders want seems to be that teachers study generic Aboriginal culture and race relations at university and then go through a gradual process of learning the local culture from the Elders. The Elders perceive this process as the only way the teachers can learn appropriate pedagogy.

*Kulthangar* also told me, “*Hilary ningi merri de jika mangkalmangkal. Yuenmen laka wankarl kuba.*” He translated this as “Hilary, you listen to the Elders. The old ways [the Law] are true, straight and good” (*Personal Communication*, 26 November, 2002). One could also construct this statement as telling the school that the Elders’ Law and education has worked for thousands of years. Coupled with *Milmajah*’s previous statement that, “At the end of the white

road there is nothing but grog”, this is a grim indictment on a non-Aboriginal government education system that has only been officially in place without church support since 1978.

Here the Elders maintain that they are custodians of a culture, a Law, which understands itself in terms that it demands that the culture occupies a hegemonic position. Consequently, here is a culture that understands itself in terms, which demand that the Elders occupy a hegemonic position. Its own claims for itself insist the Law be unchallengeable and paramount. Therefore, the Law is unchallengeable in terms of its truth claims and paramount in terms of its obligations it puts within its worldview.

Coupled with the memories of the 1978 state government takeover of Mornington Island, *Kulthangar*'s statement reveals a concern by the Elders to oust government control of the school. *Milmajah* and *Kulthangar* often speak about Aboriginal community run schools in the Northern Territory so just as Aboriginal educator Blitner (2000) maintains that Northern Territory Aboriginal community school policy makers should be Aboriginal Elders and educators, so do the *Kunhunhaamendaa* Elders (*Personal Communications, Kulthangar*, 26 November, 2002; *Milmajah*, 20 November, 2002; *Jekarija*, 1 December, 2002; *Chuloo*, 20 November, 2002; *Goomungee*, 15 November, 2002). The literature suggests that the Elders' views are widely shared. *The Coolangatta Statement on Indigenous People's Rights in Education* (1999), for example, argues that the “involvement of community in all pedagogical processes” (p. 7) is vital.

The Elders believe that they should be advisers and teachers to the non-Aboriginal teaching staff at the school, especially on matters regarding the unchallengeable demands of *Mirdiyan* Law. In this regard, *Kurnungkur* and Cecil, told me, “We had a meeting with that principal at the festival and we told him, ‘Our mob are the people you should be listening to.’ We Elders need to make a program to teach those teachers and those teachers need to come to us to learn. We do not have to come to go to their school.” (*Personal Communications*, 15 May, 2002). Later that day, when he was reflecting on *Kurnungkur* and Cecil's statements *Kulthangar* told me, “Who those teachers think they are. They only guests on this island. We the owners. They should listen to us.”

Dobson, Riley, McCormack, and Hartman (1997), *Arrente* Aboriginal educators, and Blitner, Dobson, Gibson, Martin, Oldfield, Oliver, Palmer and Riley (2000) Northern Territory Aboriginal educators, all maintain adamantly that the Elders are their teachers, the policy and curriculum makers, the connection-makers and the people they go to for advice. In fact when I read the previous paragraphs back to *Kulthangar* over the telephone in the next month he told me, “We are the real educators. We not teachers. We educators. We educate our people for life. Those teachers should know that” (*Personal Communications*, 8 June, 2002).

I use the comments of a number of non-Aboriginal researchers to support the comments of the *Kunhunhaamendaa* Lawmen. Cecily Willis a veteran of thirteen years teaching at Maningrida states that “It is time for Aboriginal people to speak for themselves” (1996, p. 10). Researchers Gool and Patton (1998), who work with Aboriginal students at Queensland University of Technology, also argue, “Indigenous students would benefit from actively enlisting Elders... into educational establishments” (p. 6). Rowley wrote sixteen years ago in 1986, that a field officer who works with Aboriginal people must “look in two directions – back to his department for promotion and to his community for what they wish to do” (pp. 138-9). The Elders at Mornington Island have higher expectations than their sister community, *Doomadgee*, where Trigger, writes the, “Aboriginal maintenance over the Blackfella domain occurs in spite of the formal pervasiveness of White authority. It is predicated on exclusion of Whites from physical space, styles of behaviour and modes of thought [and communication] rather than on the capacity to wrest economic or political power from wider society” (1986, p. 116).

The Elders want the school to listen to them as advisers because it is their traditional role as the gerontocracy. In this respect the Elders operate as one power structure, essentially in competition to the power of the school. The Elders also expect the principal of the school to listen to them as knowledgeable advisers because other academics and knowledgeable people have respected and listened to the Elders in the past. As such respectful people, they cite missionary Belcher, Chief Executive Officer of the Island’s Shire Council, Ian Ogden, linguist Ken Hale, anthropologist McKnight, architect Memmott, headmaster McClintock and

teacher Ken (*Personal Communications, Milmajah, Kulthangar, Birdibir, Moon, T., Peters, C., Goodman, C., Robinson, R., 17 May, 2002*).

The Elders have made statements backed by their Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal civil authority, but Lawman *Jekarija's* simple statement could bridge any culture. He argued, "The school must listen to us, because we know what is best for our kids" (*Personal Communications, 30 October, 2002*). Like Joseph, *Goomungee*, Clara and Margaret, he has taught at the school for many years on and off since 1980 when he started teaching as an assistant teacher to his friend "Kinga." His mother and father and his Aunt Annie Chong also taught at the school. *Jekarija* also has two sons who are now adults. *Jekarija* is in a reasonably central position to be able to construct a reason for the school to heed the community's suggestions.

### **Conclusion**

A number of conclusions can be drawn from analysing and synthesising the data in this chapter. The Elders' views regarding the education that they want from Education Queensland fit the characteristics of traditional Indigenous education. Under the traditional institution of *Kunhanhaamendaa* Law pedagogy and curriculum would be one and not separate from daily life, yet the Elders and other participants see the school and the non-Aboriginal teachers as separate from the community and believe the Elders should be teaching *Kunhanhaamendaa* culture just as the previous Aboriginal Elder-teachers used to teach at the school in the seventies.

*Kurnungkur's* definitive statement to the principal, "We are the mob you should be listening to" is symbolic of the Elders stance of re-becoming educators, as representatives and custodians of their traditional culture. By re-enforcing this pedagogical role the Elders refuse to be constructed by the 'whitefella system' which, they say, believes it is the dispenser of truth about the needs and requirements of Aboriginal people. Rather, they have re-constructed themselves as regaining control over their communal identity and their ability to define themselves.

The Elders are saying that they want their traditional culture to frame the school curriculum. It is my understanding from their conversations that they

consider that the school should also be producing academic results, but that it is not – that it is not offering the full competitive academic curriculum, but only an attenuated version.

Further they see students emerging from their schooling as confused individuals not only because the school is offering an attenuated academic curriculum, because the school and its teachers are oriented to a rational, pragmatic, calculating, individual Western mentality, while the *Kunhunhaamendaa* know themselves as feeling, emotional, spiritual type people.

Consequently, one of the major conclusions of this chapter is that good quality, caring face-to-face relationships which value a student's uniqueness can gain the knowledge to improve and create appropriate curriculum and pedagogy. In fact after analysing and synthesising the Elders' conversations it is evident that non-Aboriginal teachers must develop close relationships with the students' parents and the community as a whole to enhance the education of the Aboriginal students. To facilitate this, the Elders declare themselves willing to meet young teachers and teach them appropriate curriculum and pedagogy, and to be educational policy makers in their community. However, what the Elders make clear that the school teachers must come to the Elders, rather than the Elders go to the school for meetings about curriculum and pedagogy. This position problematises the notion of whose knowledge is more relevant to the *Kunhanhaa* students, that of the Elders or of young teachers who may have just left university, may not have received training in Aboriginal culture and education and may never met any Aboriginal people before they went to *Kunhanhaa*.

## Conclusion

Thus far, I have set the issues facing education on Mornington Island – *Kunhanhaa* – in the context of the wider literatures about both Aboriginal education, and the colonialist race relations of which, arguably, it forms a part. I have outlined an approach to gathering reliable information about the views of the *Kunhanhaamendaa* – the Mornington Island Elders – about education in their community, and, in particular, relations between their community and its school. And I have documented and discussed those views at length and in depth. Here, before proceeding to draw conclusions, suggest some possible implications, assess the strengths and limitations of this study and point to possibilities for further research, I summarise the substance and main arguments of each chapter.

Many of the topics that emerged in my conversations with the Elders were reflected in the literature and discussed in Chapter One. These topics were, first, the educational failure of Aboriginal students and of the system in enabling Aboriginal success, especially in remote communities, and the nature of this educational failure. The accounts of ongoing colonialism, continued racism, Aboriginal educational failure and school community relations discussed in that chapter bear out the broad character of the findings of this thesis. The little literature that exists on relationships with Elders suggests that Elders do not just want to be listened to; they want to be consulted with, negotiated with, and deferred to in long-term, respectful relationships where promises are kept and trust is established over a period of time. One writer sympathetic to remote ‘Top-End’ Elders argued that they want partnerships with Westerners who understand them, know how they think and know their culture, Law and language.

An extensive body of literature recognises that Western education for Aboriginal people on remote communities is, by and large, a failure. This literature documents and argues that schooling for remote Aboriginal people continues to be experienced as a vehicle of oppression, assimilation, intrusion and alienation, and that there is racism and prejudice among teachers.

Many authors argue that, despite this, there is a widespread desire for education both Western and of the local Aboriginal culture. The literature outlines

many reasons why Elders would prefer to be agentic and self-determining in the field of Aboriginal education.

Studies cited in Chapter One demonstrated a history of broken promises by non-Aboriginal individuals and non-Aboriginal institutions, and of long-standing Aboriginal resistance to governmentality, administrative intrusion and authoritarianism. They also indicate that colonialist practices and beliefs, however unconscious or unintentional, continue in schooling in remote communities, especially regarding the spiritual beliefs of Aboriginal people.

Recent educational policies suggest that there must be local involvement and participation of Aboriginal people in schooling policy and practice, and there must be partnerships forged between schools and the community, for schooling to work for Aboriginal people. However, several authors maintain that within communities, the loud voice of the ruling faction often drowns out all others, while more broadly, the voices of the Elders at the local level are subordinated to those of outside activists. Despite this, both policy and research suggest that Elders should be consulted and negotiated with as a matter of, not just respect, but with ongoing reciprocal trust, and it is this point of negotiation and ongoing reciprocal trust and respect that this thesis examines.

The literature on social relationships points to the conclusion that belongingness, personal relationships and connectedness are important to Aboriginal people, especially those on closed communities and that belongingness within a classroom situation is an extension of this. Anthropological literature also suggests that kinship is an important concept to Aboriginal people and some literature suggests that ‘outsiders’ are often incorporated into Aboriginal society to fit into their kinship system and engender reciprocal benefits.

Chapter Two outlined my methodology. In particular, this chapter explored why listening to Aboriginal Elders required me, as a researcher, to go beyond traditional unstructured in-depth interview techniques to fit my approach to a way of life on a tribal Aboriginal community. As a means of addressing the issue of the credibility of the data and my interpretation of it I described the set of practices I adopted to demonstrate that my listening to the Elders followed protocols of respect, while still adhering to established academic principles for qualitative research.

Chapter Three explored what the Elders said about their culture, society and their sacred Law. Along with Chapter Four, the information in this chapter formed a backbone for the other chapters. In Chapter Three, I documented how the Lawmen explained that *Kunhanhaa* society is structured around kinship relationships, that explicit social rules regarding relationships are embodied in the Law, and that all relationships should be based on *Kunhanhaa* Law. In this context, I outlined the way the Elders explained the possibility of adopting ‘outsiders’ into their system of relationships, and provided examples of such adoptions; this formed a basis for the discussion in Chapter Five of the sort of relationships that the Elders said they would prefer to have with the teachers. The chapter shows that outsiders are only adopted if they are caring, engage in reciprocity, can be trusted and respected, appreciate and observe the Law, listen to the Elders and spend time with them. It also shows that the Elders emphasised the process of ‘coming from the heart’, ‘feeling’ and instincts as fundamental characteristics of proper relationships among people. I suggested the possibility that these adoptions are a matter of cultural transformation that serve the purpose of keeping the ‘old ways’ which emphasise the tangibility of the spirit world.

This chapter also recounted the way the Elders and Lawmen perceive themselves as tribal people and the embodiments, custodians and spokesmen for their sacred Law. As tribal men they perceive humanity as part of the circle of life. They perceive the spirit world connecting all life. According to the Elders, teachers are humans who live on Mornington Island and as such the teachers must be included in this sacred circle of life that connects them to the spirit world and the land. The Lawmen argue that their Law has been passed down to them through the Dreamtime Ancestral beings who are eternally present, and this Law exists as an eternal guiding force, in fact, a living religion. They live by this sacred Law in their daily lives. The chapter also documents their views regarding sacred ‘story places’, and their consequent deep concerns over the behaviour of outsiders who fail to recognise these places and their significance, and the consequences of such behaviour. It explains that they are so concerned because a ‘story place’ is a part of a living network of other sites and when a site is damaged another connection between Ancestral creation and present is lost, and that they contend that they

must stop ignorant people from creating damage. The Elders see the present problems on the island as stemming from this damage.

Finally, Chapter Three showed that the Elders are disappointed that the young people in the community do not know their relationship categories according traditional Law, that the community is characterised by disorder collectively and individually and that there is a widespread lack of respect for the Elders, their knowledge, and the culture they embody and represent. Chapter Four also revealed that the Elders attribute this disorder to colonialism past and present, but they believe that more than mere political power is at stake. They assert that every time a Lawman dies (and they are dying thick and fast) a library of vital knowledge of Aboriginal Law dies with them and they are very concerned that this knowledge, which is vital to the survival of the land, is not being passed on to the young people.

Chapter Four documented and analysed the Elders' accounts of both a sacred and a secular past and present, and the relations among them. It showed how the secular past survives in memory to shape current practice, while the sacred past is permanently present. It also showed that for the Elders the normative present and future are fundamentally grounded in traditional Law, and how this shapes the ways they talk about the present and future by telling stories about the past – stories which, even when they are secular, are infused by an understanding of the sacred dimension they embody. Chapter Four also disclosed, too, that the secular past that they recount is full of racism, inequality, loss and oppression. The Elders also have a deeply felt anxiety that the intrusion of non-Aboriginal people into their world has deprived, and is depriving them of their culture and sacred knowledge and their relationship with the eternal that this knowledge sustains. They also perceive that non-Aboriginal encroachment has produced a rash of serious secular disorders.

This chapter showed that the Elders lay much of the blame for the undermining of traditional culture, the weakening of the authority of the Elders and the rise of factionalism on missionaries in general, and on one missionary, McCarthy, in particular. They see McCarthy as inverting the social order by placing the Christianised 'dormitory ladies' in the position of educators that was rightfully occupied by the Lawmen, and treating young men violently, and

psychologically emasculating them. It also shows that one particular incident – the killing of the first missionary as an enemy – and its consequences serves to illustrate and explain their hostility to government panopticism, the non-Aboriginal police and court system, and, in large measure, the school, as a set of powerful institutions calculated to eradicate the influence of the Lawmen and largely eradicate the strength of the Law. It shows, further, that the Elders still are suspicious of the government and its school and legal systems and that they still have a sense of prevailing panopticism. They maintain that they are still under the Act, ‘under the thumb’ of government authorities. Such views provide a context for the belief they express that the school and teachers still do not listen to them or heed their presence.

Among the catastrophic events of the past, however, the Elders recount pleasant memories, including positive experiences with what they portray as some exemplary missionaries, teachers, pastoralists, policemen, writers, anthropologists and researchers who restored their faith in humanity. Such people, they say, caused them to have some trust and faith in non-Indigenous people, adding that because of their good relationships with these people in the past they believe that fruitful relationships with some teachers are still achievable. The Elders’ stories suggest that it is because of their times of agency on sheep and cattle properties, park rangers and cargo boats that they, as the stockmen-Elders of Mornington Island, are so welcoming to outsiders, particularly to people who were born in the ‘bush’. The Elders speak of their memories giving them power and faith in the future. They not only re-member their fantastic halcyon days in their dress, demeanour and stories, but suggest strongly that their act of remembering is an act of courageous, interactive processing which counters the ever present welfare dependency and helplessness. They maintain that this constant remembering is not only an act of not forgetting but also an act of re-membering or of putting themselves and the members of their tribe, their people back together again to gain spiritual and physical strength. Consequently, the Lawmen are not only still trying to regain their educational power and political authority, but fighting for the return of their Law and language, and attempting to eliminate the drugs, alcohol, suicide, chaos and violence that threatens their community, their children and their culture.

Chapter Five narrowed the focus and documented the Elders' views concerning their preferred relationships with non-Aboriginal teachers who come to the community. This chapter analysed the protocol of preferred relationships, the Elders' preferred communication styles and the crucial conditions that the Elders believe are necessary to build up productive relationships which, they argue, will lead to a better education for the students of the community. Chapter Five also examined the participants' understandings of power relationships and systems of educational power both in the community and outside the community. The Elders contend that their knowledge, rather than the knowledge that is taught in dominant schooling system is the correct knowledge for the young people of the community, and they argue as the custodians of the correct knowledge they should hold power, not the school.

The Elders say that the 'white teachers' do not connect with them and do not relate to them, and they see this as apartheid and racism. They state that the 'white' teachers display seriously inappropriate behaviour such as greed, selfishness, trespassing and lying about such important matters as claims to be initiated. They argue that these breaches of conduct amount to breaking their Law; some assert that this un-Lawful behaviour is punished by Ancestral spirits in the form of misfortunes and curses on the teachers and their families. Chapter Five also showed that at an individual personal level they want better relations, but they see the teachers standing outside the structure of 'kin' relations and as personally standoffish and self-segregating. They suggest that the teachers should be open personally and available to be incorporated by community in the community's own kin based social structure, along the lines discussed in more general terms, through the issue of adoptions, in Chapter Three. Chapter Five then showed that such incorporation of teachers would lead to outsiders acquiring a knowledge and appreciation of the sacred Law and local culture and Law, no longer desecrating the 'sacred' story places, and coming to respect the Elders' authority and expertise in education and matters of Law, society and culture. Although, they expect to be consulted, heard, negotiated with and they expect their wishes to be acted on, in these matters, the Elders suggest that they are facing lack of respect and lack of acknowledgment of their authority due to factionalism and lack of recognition

regarding their embodiment and custodianship of *Kunhanhaa* culture by outsiders who work on the island.

They expect, because of the rules of their sacred Law, that teachers should be part of the kinship system in the community. They especially expect teachers to stay for a number of years for both sacred and secular reasons. They prefer teachers who come from the 'bush' or have previously worked on Aboriginal communities, yet they will accept 'city-fellas' if they are caring people. They expect teachers to follow the protocol of the community, which includes attending funerals, regular visits to the Elders and old people. They say that teachers should bring their family to the community and mix socially. They articulate that teachers should be caring, compassionate and helpful, in the manner of social worker-teachers rather than just nine-to-five workers who isolate themselves socially, away from the community, after school hours. They emphasise the concepts of helpfulness, community cohesion, slowness and unlimited time to yarn and listen. Because of their bitter memories of cruel missionaries and 'snobby' teachers who stayed for a short time they say relationship building is a slow process that needs a reciprocal process of caring, sharing and promise keeping to build trust. But, the Elders say, "All we ask is have a cup of tea with us on our verandahs" and "Sit with us and watch the sun go down over the sea!"

Chapter Five also considered that school-community relations at an institutional level; at this level, the Elders claim that they are denied any voice in school affairs. The Elders say they are not asked to meetings, they are humiliated and not consulted or informed about current practices. They say that the headmaster has broken promises he made to them. The analysis suggested that the standoff between one principal and the Elders was distinctly symbolic of the refusal by the Elders to be subservient to the dominance of the school system. It suggested that it is notable that the men who were the most resistant to the authority of the school were community leaders such as the mayor, and shire councillors. At the same time, the chapter showed, they insist that they *should* be heard.

The chapter also analysed, from the Elders point of view, the relationships with the schoolteachers and the principals as members of a government institution, with a standpoint that on a personal level teachers may also take the initiative to

be friendly. It showed that the Elders say there have been at least five exemplary school administrators in the past, who included the Elders as respected school advisers and teachers, and it documents an inclusive culture program in the times of those sympathetic principals. The chapter suggests that the Elders are not pleased with the present schooling, although they are pleased that a program was set up in May 2002 for the Elders to work with twelve initiated male students. Uniformly, they agree that the principals should be coming into the community to consult the Elders and they specifically use the words, “Our mob are the people you should be listening to.”

Chapter Six analysed the Elders’ ideas on culturally appropriate curriculum and pedagogy, recognising that these ideas are a continuation of the Elders’ discussions about culturally correct relationships with the school. This chapter extends the concept that Indigenous education is designed to recognise and support cosmic and secular interconnectedness. Pedagogically *Kunhanhaa* interconnectedness not only recognises mind, body, emotion and spirit as one in people, but also sees connections between people, knowledge and the natural world. This chapter explored the Elders’ beliefs that itinerant state government teachers should learn respectful and appropriate pedagogy and curriculum based on local knowledge, through productive relationships with teachers. In Chapter Six the Lawmen argued that the teachers have a coercive pedagogy, and that they confine their interest in students to the school. The Elders insist that pedagogy ought to be caring and inclusive of the community and its culture. They also insist that the curriculum should be situationally based to adapt to the local culture and socio-historical and economic conditions. The Elders’ stories tell of a curriculum that is a bastardised version of an urban mainstream curriculum, whereas, in so far as they want a Westernised curriculum they insist that it should be of a high standard. Crucially the Elders want space for themselves to teach Law and culture and to be able to educate the young people in traditional ways. The Lawmen argue that appropriate curriculum should include local Aboriginal language, genealogy, skin placements, survival skills and bush foods. They are concerned that if children do not learn Aboriginal culture now it will be lost in fifty years.

On the whole there are considerable disparities in the educational practices the Elders are demanding and what they see as happening at the school. The

Elders note the difference by referring to dominant teaching as ‘schooling’, whereas they say of themselves, “Elders educate for life.” This distinction corresponds, roughly, to the distinction between ‘pedagogy’ and ‘teaching’, where the term teaching is readily reduced to ‘instruction’, and pedagogy includes ethical dimensions such as caring.

Under the traditional institution of *Kunhunhaamendaa* Law pedagogy and curriculum would be one and not separate from daily life, yet the Elders and other participants see the school and the non-Aboriginal teachers as separate from the community and believe the Elders should be teaching *Kunhunhaamendaa* culture just as the previous Aboriginal Elder-teachers used to teach at the school in the sixties and seventies. In this context, the statement, “We are the mob you should be listening to” refers not only to the politics of school-community relations but to curriculum and pedagogy, where the Elders should be both teachers, and the recognised custodians of knowledge. The Elders are saying that they want their traditional culture to frame the school curriculum.

It is my understanding, outlined in Chapter Six, that the Elders also contend that the school should be producing good academic results, but that it is failing to do so, in part because it does not offer the full competitive academic curriculum, but only an attenuated version. However, as the chapter also showed, these diverse concerns entail tensions. The Elders say that the students are emerging from their schooling as confused individuals. The accounts they provide of the school system as it stresses that both the system and the teachers adopt and encourage a rationalist, pragmatic, calculating, individual Western mentality when the Elders portray the people of Mornington Island as a feeling-oriented, emotional, spiritual people.

Consequently, one of the major conclusions of this chapter was that good quality, caring face-to-face relationships which value a student’s uniqueness can make it possible for teachers to gain the knowledge to develop appropriate curriculum and pedagogy. In fact one part of the Elders’ distinction between caring, spiritual, lifelong education and a disjointed, disconnected, dominant schooling corresponds, roughly to the distinction between ‘pedagogy’ and ‘teaching’. After analysing and synthesising the Elders’ conversations it is evident that non-Aboriginal teachers must develop close relationships with the students’

parents and the community as a whole to enhance the education of the Aboriginal students. The Elders say they are willing to meet, and teach young teachers appropriate curriculum and pedagogy and be educational policy makers in their community.

### **Drawing conclusions**

The main thrust of the Lawmen's statements is that they are not happy with the practices and performance of the school both as an institution and on a personal level. Although they talk about exemplary teachers and administrators, on the whole, they place the practices of non-Aboriginal schoolteachers and institutional performance in a long history of schools and white institutions generally not doing very well by them. The Lawmen have deep misgivings about both the prevailing relations and the contribution of the school to what they insistently refer to as their 'tribal community'. Yet, both the Elders themselves, and the analysis of their stories, also suggest possibilities for productive cross-cultural relationships between remote communities, such as theirs, and non-Aboriginal teachers. The Elders suggest that school community relations, and with them, learning outcomes, can improved if the school listens to them. They also note exemplary teachers and principals in the past and exemplary community schools in the Northern Territory and Western Australia. The literature on education in such contexts also points to ways in which curriculum and pedagogy might be made more appropriate, in line with Elders' views, and in which teachers' relations with the children they teach and their families and communities might be improved and enriched.

In summary, the Elders consider that the children are being taught to be 'brain-dead', and that 'white' schooling is undermining the perpetuation of any traditional culture, but offering nothing substantial in terms of acquisition of white culture. They make two demands of the school, as it affects their children and community. On the one hand, and most insistently, it should provide support for the maintenance and revival of traditional culture. On the other, and less insistently, it should provide a good enough 'white' education to enable at least some of the community's children to become lawyers and doctors, to come back to the community to put the community on its feet. In fact, however, what runs

through the conversations is a devastating sense of an overwhelmingly bleak future of substance abuse, violence and total loss of knowledge – in fact, of cultural and social annihilation and oblivion.

The fact the school appears this way to them, as the senior figures in the community, is in itself a problem. In so far as their views might be more widely shared, the problem is even more pressing.

### **Implications**

The implications from these conclusions are threefold. First, the school needs cultivate the trust of the community, and in particular, given the culture on which the community is founded, of the Elders, as the most significant people of knowledge, power and responsibility in the community. If this significant group are concerned that there is a problem with the school, the school needs to address that problem. Second, whether or not the Elders' concerns are well grounded in terms of what actually happens in the school, the school needs to convince the Elders that it is interested in the community and its wellbeing. The school needs to address this problem because this very significant group are angry about the school's performance and the teachers' behaviour in the community. This need is even more pressing if others in the community share the Elders' view. Third, the school needs to be aware that its practices are creating displeasure in the community and that the Elders have grounds to establish an Aboriginal-run community school. To transform the school it needs to have well-trained, well-educated, friendly, caring, long term teachers and a caring considerate head-teacher who will listen and negotiate space for community curriculum and pedagogical work. For that transformation current social relations and power relations need to be equalised and a formal or informal, cross cultural awareness program, taught by the Elders needs to be put in place permanently. The Elders need to interview teachers before they are hired and teachers need to agree to accept the obligations of skin positions and listen respectfully to the Elders.

### **Limitations and Strengths in the research**

While it has been necessary to draw conclusions, and suggest possible implications of the research, it is also important to acknowledge the limitations in the research, and its capacity to argue strongly for particular lines of action. One

of the major limitations of this research is its state of incompleteness. As an academic project, sufficient data has been collected to support analysis and argument around the questions posed at the outset. However, for the practical purposes that prompted the project in the first place – the concerns of senior members of the Aboriginal community on Mornington Island about the school in their community and its relation to the community – it remains incomplete and insufficient. There is every reason to believe that every visit deepens trust for myself, and every conversation yielded new and exciting tidbits of serendipitous information. One could say that this sets in place a model or process of trust for outsiders. Further, *Kunhanhaamendaa* culture is itself in a process of transformation and, as I have shown, the views of participants change over time. Yet again, participants, among them the most knowledgeable, die, taking with them their rich stores of knowledge and understanding.

Any account of *Kunhanhaa* and *Kunhanhaamendaa* culture I might develop is also partial, and, in the end, shaped by my position as an outsider. Inevitably, nuances and subtleties of the culture escape me because I was not born into it. Although I am a ‘bush’ person and understand one discourse of ‘bush’ life, I was not born into Aboriginal community bush life. While aspects of my life enable me to share with many people in the community some understanding of the societal cruelty of marginalisation and an understanding of the psychological devastation of family trauma, I was also born into a grazier’s family and therefore I have not been scarred and paralysed by the cruelty of missionary times. Nor have I dark skin so I have never been demeaned by racist comments and behaviour. Further, although I have been adopted into some Mornington Island families as a *nimarama* woman I am just that – a woman – and within tribal *Kunhanhaamendaa* culture women never have political and spiritual equality with men.

Finally, there are the limitations that follow from the necessary restriction of the research to a topic that could be kept within the bounds appropriate to a three year doctoral project, notably, the decision to focus solely on the voices of the Elders and others in their circle, and not to even begin to document or explore the practices of the school, or the views of those who staff it.

Regardless of my sense of the incompleteness and limitations of the research, I have at least one strong sense of certainty: that the Elders would like the teachers to engage in reciprocal relationships with members of their community.

While privileging the Elders and Lawmen and their perspective entails limitations, it can also be seen as a source of strength. First, it has made it possible to document and explore virtually the whole population of the Elders on one Aboriginal community. Second, it has made it possible for them to claim power – a voice – and, in doing so, it has enabled them to claim an audience and to be, as they insist, ‘heard.’ Such opportunities, both the literature, and they, suggest, are relatively rare.

### **My Conclusion**

The Elders see the school and the teachers, curriculum and pedagogy in strongly negative terms. They see it in the context of a long history of oppressive and destructive relations with white society, government, institutions and culture. Yet they are not entirely pessimistic. They cite exemplary individuals and practices in both past and present. Fundamental to any relationship and practice, in their view, is respect for the Law, for the spiritual and material culture it supports, and for the Elders themselves as custodians and embodiments of the Law.

Their views and their experiences are not, in general terms, unique to themselves and their community, but are widely shared among other Australian Aboriginal communities, and in important respects, other Indigenous peoples elsewhere. Some of their views, in particular those relating to education and the requirement that it be grounded in caring, compassionate, respectful attitudes on the part of teachers towards the children, parents and communities with whom they work, find strong support in academic research literature.

In important respects, what they ask of teachers and schools is not excessive or difficult. All they ask is that the teachers recognise that they are visitors in the Elders’ community, that the teachers take the time to get to know the people and their culture, and that they show respect for that culture and people. Crucially, such an approach requires that teachers be prepared to listen and learn. In that

process of listening and learning, the role of Elders is crucial. As the Elders have stated, “We’re the mob you should be listening to!”

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## List of Personal Communications

- Anon. A. (2 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Anon. D, at a social gathering, at the Richards' house, Gununa.
- Anon. A. (2 November, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of her two sisters and brother-in-law, Anon. D and Anon. E, at a social gathering, at the Richards' house, Gununa.
- Anon. A. (18 November, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Anon. D, at a social gathering, at the Richards' house, Gununa.
- Anon, A. (2 December, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Anon. D, Hills, M. and my daughter Sophia at a social gathering, at the Richards' house, Gununa.
- Anon. A. (10 April, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Anon. D and Anon. E, at a social gathering, at the Richards' house, Gununa.
- Anon. B. (28 April, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Anon. C, Peters, C. and Peters, M., at a social gathering at the Peters' house, Gununa.
- Anon. C. (30 July, 1998). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Marmies, A. and Steele, K., at a social gathering, in front of the shop, Gununa.
- Anon. C. (2 December, 1998). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Lanley, D., Ngerrawurn and Peters, C., at a social gathering, at the library, Gununa.
- Anon. C. (28 April, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Anon. B, Peters, C. and Peters, M., at a social gathering at the Peters' house, Gununa.
- Anon. D. (7 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Anon. D's two daughters and her grandson at a family gathering, in Anon. D's garden, Gununa.
- Anon. D. (15 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Anon. D's family at a social gathering, at Anon. D.'s house.
- Anon. D. (2 April, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of myself, at a social gathering, at Anon. D's house, Gununa.
- Anon. E. (19 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Steele, K., at a social gathering, at the beach, Gununa.
- Anon. E. (2 December, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of her two sons, at a family gathering, at her house, Gununa.
- Anon. E. (10 April, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Anon. A and Anon. D, at a social gathering, at the Richards' house, Gununa.
- Anon. F. (17 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Anon F's family, at a meeting to discuss the thesis, at Anon F's home, Gununa.
- Anon. F. (20 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Steele, K., at a casual meeting, at the jetty, Gununa.

- Anon. F. (26 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Steele, K., at an interview for the thesis, at the beach, Gununa.
- Anon. F. (21 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Steele, K., at an interview for the thesis, at the beach, Gununa.
- Anon. F. (26 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Steele, K., at a social gathering, at the beach, Gununa.
- Anon. F. (3 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Kulthangar* and Lanley, D., at a casual social gathering, Gununa.
- Anon. G. (1 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of his wife and Steele, K., at an interview for the thesis, at Anon. G's house, Gununa.
- Anon. G. (20 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Anon. G's wife, his daughter and grandchildren, at a social gathering, at Anon. G's house, Gununa.
- Anon. G. (31 August, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Anon. G's wife and Steele, K., at a formal interview for the thesis, at Anon. G's house, Gununa.
- Anon. H. (2 December, 2000). *Personal Communication*, at a meeting to discuss the thesis, at Anon. H's house, Gununa.
- Anon. H. (10 April, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Anon. H's daughter and her two grandchildren at a family gathering, at Anon. H's house, Gununa.
- Anon. H. (15 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of her daughters and her grandchildren at a family gathering, at her house, Gununa.
- Anon. H. (27 April, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Goodman, M., at a family gathering, to talk about Anon. H's memories of her childhood, at the Goodmans' house, Gununa.
- Anon. I. (30 July, 1998). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Milmajah* and Steele, K., at a meeting for breakfast, at my residence, Gununa.
- Anon. I. (2 December, 1999). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Gavenor, L., *Milmajah* and Steele K., at a social gathering, at my residence, Gununa.
- Anon. J. (20 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Steele, K., Williams, J., Williams, D., Williams, *Wuhnun* and *Yarrak*, B. at a social gathering, at the Williams' residence, Gununa.
- Anon. J. (2 November, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Anon. K, Anon. L. and their brothers and family, at a family gathering, at their mother's house, Gununa.
- Anon. J. (10 June, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Anon. J's family, watching a dugong and turtle hunting expedition, at Birri beach, Mornington Island.

- Anon. K. (2 November, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Anon. J, Anon. L and their family, at a family gathering, at their mother's house, Gununa.
- Anon. L. (20 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Anon. J, Steele, K., Williams, D., Williams, J., Williams, K., *Wuhnu* and *Yarrak*, B. at a social gathering, at the Williams' residence, Gununa.
- Anon. L. (2 November, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Anon. J, Anon. K and their family, at a family gathering, at their mother's house, Gununa.
- Anon. M. (30 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Dilmirrur* at a social gathering, at my residence, Gununa.
- Anon. N. (30 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, at a casual meeting in the main street, Gununa.
- Anon. N. (20 November, 2002) *Personal Communication*, in the company of Jack, E., at a casual meeting, in the main street, Gununa.
- Anon. O. (19 September, 2000). *Personal communication*, at an interview to discuss the thesis, at Anon. O's residence, Gununa.
- Anon. O. (20 November, 2000). *Personal Communication*, at an interview to discuss Anon. O's previous conversation with me, at Anon. O's residence, Gununa.
- Birdibir*. (17 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Chuloo*, *Kulthangar*, Robinson, R., Steele, K. and Watt, J., to discuss the structure of the thesis and the nature of the interviews, at the Festival Grounds, Gununa.
- Birdibir*. (26 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Steele, K., at *Birdibir's* home (Two Tanks), Mornington Island.
- Birdibir*. (2 October, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Hills, C., *Milmajah*, *Ngerrawurn*, Steele, K. and Watt, J., at a social gathering, at my residence, Gununa.
- Birdibir*. (15 January, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Steele, K., at a social gathering, at my residence, Gununa.
- Birdibir*. (15 April, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Steele, K., at a social gathering, at my residence, Gununa.
- Birdibir*. (27 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Anon. B, *Chuloo*, *Goomungee*, *Kulthangar*, Marmies, W., Peters, M., Peters, P. and Watt, A., at a meeting to discuss the Elders' power, at the Peters' house, Gununa.
- Birdibir*. (17 April, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Hills, C. and Steele, K., at a social gathering, at my residence, Gununa.
- Birdibir*. (2 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Steele, K., at a social gathering, at *Birdibir's* residence, Two Tanks, Mornington Island.

- Birdibir.* (15 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Goodman, C., Kelly, R., *Kulthangar*, *Kurnungkur*, *Milmajah*, Moon, T., Peters, C., Robinson, R., Steele, K. and Wilson, E., at a meeting to discuss the Elders' role at the school, at the Festival Grounds, Gununa.
- Birdibir.* (16 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Goodman, C., *Kulthangar*, Moon, T., Robinson, R. and Steele, K., at a meeting to discuss the power of the Elders, at the Festival Grounds, Gununa.
- Birdibir.* (17 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Goodman C., Kelly, R., *Kulthangar*, *Kurnungkur*, *Milmajah*, Moon, T., Peters, C., Robinson, R. and Steele, K., at a meeting to discuss the thesis, at the Festival Grounds, Gununa.
- Birdibir.* (19 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Paull, C., and Steele, K., a social occasion watching the sun go down, at *Birdibir's* beachside residence, Gununa.
- Birdibir.* (21 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Binjari*, M., *Binjari*, D., *Kulthangar*, *Milmajah*, Roughsey, R. and Steele, K., at a meeting to discuss the thesis, at my residence, Gununa.
- Birdibir.* (15 November, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Kulthangar*, *Milmajah* and Steele, K., at a meeting to discuss the thesis, at my residence, Gununa.
- Bulthuku.* (5 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Kulthangar* and Steele, K., at a meeting to discuss the thesis, at *Kulthangar's* home, Gununa.
- Bulthuku.* (14 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Kulthangar* and Steele, K., at a meeting to discuss the thesis, at *Kulthangar's* home, Gununa.
- Bulthuku.* (20 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Kulthangar*, at a meeting to discuss the thesis, at *Kulthangar's* home, Gununa.
- Bulthuku.* (29 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Kulthangar*, Steele, K., at a meeting to discuss the thesis, at *Kulthangar's* home, Gununa.
- Bulthuku.* (2 November, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Kulthangar* and Steele, K., at a casual meeting, in front of the shop, Gununa.
- Bulthuku.* (14 November, 2000). *Personal Communication*, at a social gathering, at *Kulthangar's* home, Gununa.
- Bulthuku.* (20 November, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Kulthangar* and Steele, K., at a social gathering, at *Kulthangar's* home, Gununa.
- Bulthuku.* (26 November, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Kulthangar* and Steele, K., at a social gathering, at *Kulthangar's* home, Gununa.

- Bulthuku.* (21 April, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Kulthangar*, at a social gathering, at *Kulthangar's* house, Gununa.
- Bulthuku.* (31 August, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Roughsey, U. and my daughter Sophia, at a social gathering, at the Pamela Street Hostel, Mt. Isa.
- Bulthuku.* (6 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of my daughter, in a phonecall to discuss family matters, from Townsville, to the Pamela Street Hostel, Mt Isa.
- Bulthuku.* (30 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Jacob, E., Roughsey, U. and my daughter Sophia, at a gathering to check the thesis, at the Pamela Street Aboriginal Hostel, Mt Isa.
- Bulthuku.* (2 April, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Kulthangar*, Roughsey, K. and Steele, K., at a meeting to check the thesis, at *Kulthangar's* house, Gununa.
- Bulthuku.* (12 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Kulthangar*, at a social gathering, at *Kulthangar's* house, Gununa.
- Bulthuku.* (15 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Jacob, C., Jacob, O., Jacob, P., their families, *Kulthangar* and Roughsey, K., at a family gathering, under *Kulthangar's* house, Gununa.
- Bulthuku.* (27 September, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Kulthangar*, in a phonecall to discuss the thesis, and *Kulthangar's* book, Gununa.
- Bulthuku.* (1 December, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Kulthangar* and Roughsey, K., at a meeting to discuss the thesis and *Kulthangar's* book, at *Kulthangar's* house, Gununa.
- Brookedale, I. (18 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Anon. A, Anon. D. and Anon. E, at Bible Studies, at the church, Gununa.
- Brookedale, I. (20 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Steele, K., at a social gathering, at my residence, Gununa.
- Brookedale, I. (1 October, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Peters, A., Peters, M., Peters, V. and Steele, K., at a meeting about the thesis, at the Peters' house, Gununa.
- Brookedale, I. (2 October, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Steele, K., at a social gathering, at my residence, Gununa.
- Brookedale, I. (17 November, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Hills, M. and two Grannies, at a social gathering, after church, Gununa.
- Brookedale, I. (2 December, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Anon. A, Anon. D and Anon. E, at Bible studies, at the Church, Gununa.
- Brookedale, I. (20 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Dimon, L. and my daughter Sophia, at a social gathering, at Shalom Elders' Village, Townsville.

- Brookedale, I. (30 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Alfred, E., Dimon, L. and my daughter Sophia, at a social gathering, at Shalom Elders' Village, Townsville.
- Brookedale, I. (18 December, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Dimon, L. and my daughter Sophia, at a social gathering, at Shalom Elders' Village, Townsville.
- Brookedale, I. (25 December, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Alfred, E., Dimon, L. and my daughter Sophia, at a social gathering, at Shalom Elders' Village, Townsville.
- Bush, L. (26 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, at a lunch to discuss the thesis, at my house, Gununa.
- Bush, L. (1 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Bush, O., at a social gathering, at the Bush's house, Gununa.
- Bush, L. (10 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Bulthuku and Bush*, O., at a social gathering, at the Bush's house, Gununa.
- Chong, A. (2 December, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Goodman, R. and Steele, K., at an interview to talk about the thesis, at the Chong residence, Gununa.
- Chuloo. (17 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Jekarija* and Watt, J., at a family gathering, at *Chuloo's* house, Gununa.
- Chuloo. (26 November, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Ben, E., Ben, J., Ben, S., *Jekarija* and Watt, J., at a family gathering, at *Chuloo's* house, Gununa.
- Chuloo. (15 January, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Hills, C. and *Ngerawurn*, at a social gathering, at my residence, Gununa.
- Chuloo. (26 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Birdibir*, Goodman, C., *Kulthangar* and *Milmajah*, at a meeting to discuss the power of the Elders, at the Peters' house, Gununa.
- Chuloo. (27 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Goodman, C., *Kulthangar*, *Milmajah*, Moon, C., Peters, M., Peters, P., Peters, T., Robinson, R., Watt, J. and *Wuhnun*, at a meeting to discuss the power of the Elders, at the Festival Grounds, Gununa.
- Chuloo. (28 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Goomungee* and *Jekarija*, at a social gathering, at *Chuloo's* house, Gununa.
- Chuloo. (29 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Ben, E., Goodman, C., *Goomungee*, *Jekarija*, Marmies, W., Watt, A. and Watt, J., at a meeting to check the history chapter, at *Chuloo's* house, Gununa.
- Chuloo. (10 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Ben, E., Ben, J., *Goomungee*, Jack, E., Nero, F., and Reid, C., at a family gathering, at *Chuloo's* house, Gununa.

- Chuloo*. (15 November, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Ben, E., Ben, S., Goodman, C., *Goomungee*, Jack, L., *Jekarija*, Watt, A. and Watt, J., at a family gathering, at *Chuloo's* house, Gununa.
- Chuloo*. (16 May, 2002). *Person Communication*, in the company of Goodman, C., *Goomungee*, *Jekarija* and Lanley, L., at a social gathering, at *Chuloo's* house, Gununa.
- Chuloo*. (17 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Ben, E., Goodman, C., *Goomungee*, *Jekarija* and Watt, J., at a social gathering, at *Chuloo's* house, Gununa.
- Chuloo*. (20 November, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Ben, E., Ben, S., *Goomungee*, *Jekarija* and Watt, J., at a family gathering to discuss the thesis, at *Chuloo's* house, Gununa.
- Chuloo*. (1 December, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Goomungee*, *Jekarija* and Watt, A., at a family gathering, to discuss the thesis, at *Chuloo's* house, Gunnuna.
- Dilmirrur*. (6 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Roughsey, U., at a casual meeting, in front of the shop, Gununa.
- Dilmirur*. (15 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Goomungee*, *Koorabuba*, B. and Roughsey, U., at a family gathering for interviews for the thesis, at *Dilmirur's* house, Gununa.
- Dilmirrur*. (18 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Burrud*, *Goomungee*, *Milmajah*, Roughsey, U., Steele, K., and Watt, J., at a meeting to discuss the thesis, *Barakiya*, Mornington Island.
- Dilmirrur*. (20 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Roughsey, U., at a social gathering, at *Dilmirrur's* house, Gununa.
- Dilmirrur*. (30 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Anon. M, at breakfast, at my residence, Gununa.
- Dilmirrur*. (2 November, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Birdibir*, *Goomungee*, *Koorabuba*, B., Roughsey, U., at *Dilmurr's* house, Gununa.
- Dilmirurr*. (2 September, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Birdibur*, *Goomungee*, *Koorabuba*, B. and Roughsey, U., at a card game and social gathering, at *Dilmirurr's* house, Gununa.
- Dilmirrur*. (20 November, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Goomungee*, *Koorabuba*, B. and Roughsey, U., at a social gathering, at *Dilmirrur's* house, Gununa.
- Farrell, C. (20 November, 2000). *Personal Communication*, at a brief afternoon tea, at the Farrell residence, Gununa.
- Farrell, C. (30 November, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Hills, M., Steele, K. and my daughter Sophia, at a family gathering, at the Marmies' house at *Balaliya*, Mornington Island.

- Farrell, C. (15 January, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Jack, E., at a social gathering, in front of the shop, Gununa.
- Farrell, C. (14 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, at a brief afternoon tea, at the Farrell residence, Gununa.
- Gangala. (12 March, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Walden, R., at a family gathering, at the Hills's residence, Gununa.
- Gangala. (12 April, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Gavenor, G., Gavenor, R., Hills, E., Hills, M., Ngerrawurn and Walden, R., at a family gathering, under the mango tree, at the Hills' residence, Gununa.
- Gangala. (20 April, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Hills, E., Hills, M., Gavenor, G., Ngerrawurn and Walden, R., at a family gathering, under the mango tree, at the Hills' residence, Gununa.
- Goodman, C. (20 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of the Goodman family, at an interview to discuss the thesis, at the Goodman residence, Gununa.
- Goodman, C. (20 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Goomungee and Kulthangar, at a meeting to discuss the Elders' powers, at the Festival Grounds, Gununa.
- Goodman, C. (26 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Birdibir and Kulthangar, at a meeting to discuss the Elders' power at the Peters' house, Gununa.
- Goodman, C. (27 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Chuloo, Kulthangar, Milmajah, Moon, T., Peters, M., Peters, P., Williams, J. and Wuhnun, at a meeting to discuss the Elders' power, at the Festival Grounds, Gununa.
- Goodman, C. (15 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Birdibir, Kelly, R., Kulthangar, Kurnungkur, Milmajah, Moon, T., Peters, C., Robinson, R., Steele, K. and Wilson, E., at a meeting to discuss the Elders' role at the school, at the Festival Grounds, Gununa.
- Goodman, C. (16 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Kulthangar, Chuloo, Goomungee, Watt A., Steele, K., at a meeting to discuss the thesis, at Chuloo's home, Gununa.
- Goodman, C. (17 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Kulthangar, Kurnungkur, Moon, T., Milmajah, Robinson, R., Birdibir, Peters, C., Kelly, R., Steele, K., at a meeting to discuss the thesis, at the Festival Grounds.
- Goodman, C. (1 December, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Ben, E., Ben, S., Chuloo, Goodman, L., Goomungee, Jack, L., Jekarija, Lanley, L. and Watt, A., at a social gathering, at Chuloo's house, Gununa.
- Goomungee. (1 Decmeber, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Watt, A. and Watt, J., at a casual meeting, at the canteen, Gununa.
- Goomungee. (2 December, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Watt, A. and Watt, J., at a casual meeting, in front of my residence, Gununa.

- Goomungee*. (20 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Goodman, C. and *Kulthangar*, at a meeting to discuss the Elders' power, at the Festival Grounds, Gununa.
- Goomungee*. (15 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Birdibir* and *Kulthangar* at a meeting to discuss my thesis, at the Festival Grounds, Gununa.
- Goomungee* (15 November, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Chuloo*, Goodman, C., Jack, E., *Jekarija* and Watt, A., at a family gathering, at *Chuloo's* house, Gununa.
- Goomungee*. (1 December, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Chuloo*, Goodman, C., Lanley, L. and Watt, A., at a social gathering, at *Chuloo's* house, Gununa.
- Hills, M. (1 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Gavenor, G., Hills, E., *Ngerrawurn*, Steele, K. and my daughter Sophia, at the Hills' residence, Gununa.
- Hills, M. (12 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Ngerrawurn* and Steele, K., at a social gathering, at the Hills' residence, Gununa.
- Hills, M. (21 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Anon. F, Anon. L and Brookedale, I., at a casual meeting, at church, Gununa.
- Hills, M. (24 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, on a drive in the car to the cemetery, Gununa.
- Hills, M. (29 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Gavenor, G., *Ngerrawurn* and Steele, K., at a family gathering, at the Hill's residence, Gununa.
- Hills, M. (2 October, 2000). *Personal Communication*, on a drive to Birri, Mornington Island.
- Hills, M. (2 November, 2000). *Personal Communication*, on a drive to cut bark, in the car, on the road to *Lemutha*, Mornington Island.
- Hills, M. (20 November, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Gangala*, Gavenor, G., her son-in-law, Hills, E., *Ngerrawurn*, Steele, K., Walden, R. and my daughter Sophia, at a family gathering, at the Hills' residence, Gununa.
- Hills, M. (2 December, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Anon. A, Anon. E and Brookedale, I., at Bible studies, at church, Gununa.
- Hills, M. (17 January, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Reid, C., at a casual meeting, in front of the shop, Gununa.
- Hills, M. (12 March, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Walden, R. and my daughter Sophia at a family gathering, at the Hills' residence, Gununa.

- Hills, M. (12 April, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Gangala*, Gavenor, G., Gavenor R., Hills, E., Walden, R. and my daughter Sophia, at a family gathering, under the mango tree, at the Hills' residence, Gununa.
- Hills, M. (20 April, 2001). *Personal communication*, in the company of *Gangala*, Gavenor, G., Hills, E., *Ngerrawurn*, Walden, R. and my daughter Sophia, at a family gathering, under the mango tree, at the Hills' residence, Gununa.
- Hills, M. (10 June, 2001). *Personal Communication*, on a drive to *Lemutha*, Mornington Island.
- Hills, M. (17 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, on a drive to *Lemutha*, Mornington Island.
- Hills, M. (20 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, on a drive to Birri, Mornington Island.
- Hills, M. (30 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Gavenor, G., Hills, E., *Ngerrawurn*, Steele, K. and my daughter Sophia at a family gathering, at the Hills' residence, Gununa.
- Hills, M. (2 December, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Anon. A, in the car, on a bark gathering expedition, on the road to Birri.
- Hills, M. (21 April, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Brookedale, I. and Steele, K., at a picnic at Gold Cliffs, Gununa.
- Hills, M. (2 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Hills, E., and Gavenor, G., at a family gathering, under the mango tree, at the Hills' residence, Gununa.
- Hills, M. (14 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Bulthuku*, Nero, F. and Reid, C., at a social gathering, in front of the shop, Gununa.
- Hills, M. (15 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Nero, F. and Reid, C., at a meeting to check the thesis, at *Chuloo's* house, Gununa.
- Hills, M. (21 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Steele, K., at a social gathering, at the Hills' residence, Gununa.
- Hills, M. (26 November, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Steele, K., at a social gathering, at the Hills' residence, Gununa.
- Jekarija*. (27 July, 1998). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Escott, O., Lanley, C., Steele, K., Wilson, M. and my daughter Sophia, at a social gathering, at the Wilsons' residence, Gununa.
- Jekarija*. (10 April, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Ben, E., *Chuloo*, *Goomungee* and Watt, A., at an interview, at *Chuloo's* house, Gununa.
- Jekarija*. (27 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Birdibir*, Ben, E., *Chuloo*, *Goomungee* and Watt, A., at a social gathering, at *Chuloo's* house, Gununa.
- Jekarija*. (28 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Chuloo*, *Goomungee*, and Lanley, L., at a social gathering at *Chuloo's* house, Gununa.

- Jekarija*. (14 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Chuloo*, *Goomungee* and Watt, A., at a social gathering, at *Chuloo's* house, Gununa.
- Jekarija*. (16 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Chuloo*, Goodman, C., *Goomungee* and Watt, A., at a meeting to check the thesis, at *Chuloo's* house, Gununa.
- Jekarija*. (17 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, at a casual meeting, in the main street, Gununa.
- Jekarija*. (22 September, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Logan, T. and my daughter Sophia, at an afternoon tea to discuss the thesis, at a café, Alligator Creek, Townsville.
- Jekarija*. (29 September, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of my daughter Sophia, at afternoon tea, at a café, Alligator Creek, Townsville.
- Jekarija*. (30 October, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of my daughter Sophia, at a meeting to discuss the thesis, at a café, at Alligator Creek, Townsville.
- Jekarija*. (10 October, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of my daughter Sophia, at an afternoon tea to discuss the thesis, at a café, at Alligator Creek, Townsville.
- Jekarija*. (15 November, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Ben, E., Ben, S., *Chuloo*, Goodman, C., *Goomungee*, Jack, E., Lanley, L. and Watt, A., at a family gathering, at *Chuloo's* house, Gununa.
- Jekarija*. (1 December, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Chuloo*, Goodman, C., *Goomungee*, Jack, E., Lanley, L. and Watt, A., at a family gathering, at *Chuloo's* house, Gununa.
- Kelly, R. (10 April, 2001). *Personal Communication*, at a casual meeting, on the bus, Gununa.
- Kelly, R. (19 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Gavenor, G. and Hills, M., at a social gathering, in front of the shop, Gununa.
- Kelly, R. (15 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Birdibir*, Goodman, C., *Kulthangar*, *Kurnungkur*, Moon, T., Peters, C., Robinson, R., Steele, K. and Wilson, E., at a meeting to discuss the Elders' role at the school, at the Festival Grounds, Gununa.
- Kelly, R. (16 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Birdibir*, Goodman, C., *Kulthangar*, *Kurnungkur*, Moon, T., Peters, C., Robinson, R. and Steele, K., at a meeting to discuss the thesis, at the Festival Grounds, Gununa.
- Koorabuba*, B. (20 November, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Birdibir*, *Goomungee* and Roughsey, U., at *Dilmirrur's* house, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (8 August, 1998). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Bulthuku*, at a meeting to discuss the family tree, at the council library, Gununa.

- Kulthangar*. (24 August, 1998). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Bulthuku*, at a meeting to discuss the family tree, at the library, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (1 December, 1999). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Bulthuku*, at a meeting to discuss the family tree, in the council library, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (2 August, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Bulthuku*, at a meeting to discuss the thesis, on *Kulthangar's* verandah, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (5 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Bulthuku*, at a meeting to discuss the thesis, on his verandah, *Gununa*.
- Kulthangar*. (18 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Bulthuku*, at a meeting, to talk about the thesis, at *Kulthangar's* house, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (20 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Bulthuku*, at a social gathering, at *Kulthangar's* house, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (29 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, at a casual meeting, in front of the shop, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (2 November, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Bulthuku* and Steele, K., at a social gathering, at *Kulthangar's* house, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (26 November, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Bulthuku*, Jacob, C., Jacob, O., Jacob, P., and their families, Walden, R. and my daughter Sophia at a family gathering, on *Kulthangar's* verandah, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (27 November, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Bulthuku* and the Jacob family at a family gathering, at *Kulthangar's* house, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (2 December, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Bulthuk* and Steele, K., at a meeting to check the thesis, at *Kulthangar's* house, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (12 January, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Bulthuku* and Walden, R., at a gathering to discuss *Kulthangar's* book, on *Kulthangar's* verandah, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (14 January, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Walden, R., at a meeting to discuss the making of a Law-woman, on *Kulthangar's* verandah, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (15 January, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Bulthuku* and their sons, Jacob, C., Jacob, O. and their families, and Walden, R., at a final sitting for *Kulthangar's* portrait, at *Kulthangar's* house, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (16 January, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Bulthuku*, Jacob, C., Jacob, O., Jacob, P. and Walden, R., at a meeting to discuss *Kulthangar's* book, on *Kulthangar's* verandah, Gununa.

- Kulthangar*. (17 January, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Bulthuku*, Bush, L., Bush, O. and Walden, R., at a family gathering, under *Kulthangar's* house, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (2 April, 2001). *Personal Communication*, at a meeting to discuss *Kulthangar's* book, at *Kulthangar's* house, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (17 April, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Bulthuku*, Jacob, C., Jacob, O. and Robinson, R., at a meeting to discuss the thesis and *Kulthangar's* book, under *Kulthangar's* house, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (6 June, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Bulthuku*, in a telephone call to discuss my thesis and *Kulthangar's* book, to *Kulthangar's* house, Gununa from my house, North Ward, Townsville.
- Kulthangar*. (12 June, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Bulthuku*, in a telephone call to check the thesis and *Kulthangar's* book, to *Kulthangar's* house, Gununa, from my house, North Ward, Townsville.
- Kulthangar*. (6 August, 2001). *Personal Communication*, at lunch, at KFC Townsville and talking at the Mercure Inn, Townsville.
- Kulthangar*. (7 August, 2001). *Personal Communication*, shopping for saddles and clothes, in Townsville.
- Kulthangar*. (7 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Vick, M. and his partner at a social gathering, at the Vick residence, Townsville.
- Kulthangar*. (9 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Steele, K., at a social gathering, at the Steele residence, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (10 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Jacob, C., Jacob, P. and Robinson, R., at a meeting to discuss *Kulthangar's* book, on *Kulthangar's* verandah, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (11 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Jacob, C., Jacob, O., Jacob, P. and Robinson, R., at a meeting to discuss *Kulthangar's* book, on *Kulthangar's* verandah, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (12 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Robinson, R., at a meeting to check the history chapter of the thesis, at *Kulthangar's* house, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (13 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, at an all day meeting to discuss his book, at his house, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (14 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, at a meeting to discuss the thesis, at his house, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (15 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, at an all day meeting to discuss his book, at his house, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (16 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Milmajah*, at a meeting to discuss *Kulthangar's* book on his verandah, at Gununa.

- Kulthangar*. (20 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Escott, K., Escott, O., Jack, L. and Marmies, A., out in the work utility most of the day, on *Kulthangar's* country, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (21 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Goodman, C. and *Goomungee*, at a meeting to discuss the Elders' power, at the Festival Grounds, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (22 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, at an all day meeting to discuss *Kulthangar's* book, at his house, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (25 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Escott, K., Escott, O. and Jack, L., at lunch with the fencing gang, at Market Garden, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (26 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Escott, O., Jack, L. and Marmies, A., at lunch with the fencing gang checking the thesis, at Market Garden, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (27 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Anon. B, Marmies, W., Peters, M. and Peters, P., at a meeting to discuss the power of the Elders, at the Peters' house, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (28 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Jacob, C., Jacob, O., and Jacob, P. and their families, and Steele, K., at a meeting to discuss my thesis, under *Kulthangar's* house, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (29 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, at meeting to discuss *Kulthangar's* book, on his verandah, Gununa.
- Kulthungar*. (1 October, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Bulthuku*, *Bulthuku's* niece, Jacob, C., Jacob, O. and Jacob, P. and their families, Robinson, R., Steele, K. and my daughter Sophia, at a family gathering, on *Kulthangar's* verandah, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (20 February, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Bulthuku*, in a telephone to discuss *Kulthangar's* book, to *Kulthangar's* house, Gununa, from my house, Alligator Creek, Townsville.
- Kulthangar*. (14 March, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in a telephone call to discuss the thesis, from James Cook University, Townsville, to *Kulthangar's* home, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (2 April, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Bulthuku*, Roughsey, D., Roughsey, K. and Steele, K., at a meeting to discuss the thesis, at *Kulthangar's* house, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (10 April, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Bulthuku*, at a meeting to discuss *Kulthangar's* book, at his house, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (17 April, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Milmajah*, Peters, P. and Robinson, R., at a meeting to discuss a letter, at the Festival Grounds, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (20 April, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Bulthuku*, at a meeting to discuss my thesis, on *Kulthangar's* verandah, Gununa.

- Kulthangar*. (24 April, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Bulthuku*, at a meeting to discuss *Kulthangar*'s book, at his house, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (26 April, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Bulthuku*, at a meeting to discuss the thesis, at *Kulthangar*'s house, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (15 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Birdibir*, Goodman, C., *Goomungee*, Kelly, R., *Kurnungkur*, *Milmajah*, Moon, T., Peters, C., Robinson, R., Steele, K. and Wilson, E., at a meeting to discuss the Elders' role at the school, at the Festival Grounds, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (16 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Birdibir*, *Milmajah* and Steele, K. at a meeting to check the thesis, at my residence, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (17 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Milmajah*, Robinson, R., *Kurnungkur*, Moon, T., *Birdibir*, Goodman, C., Wilson, E., Peters, C., Kelly, R., Steele, K., at a meeting to discuss the thesis, at the Festival Grounds, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (18 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Birdibir*, *Milmajah* at a meeting to check the thesis, at my residence, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (20 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Milmajah*, *Kurnungkur*, *Birdibir*, R. Robinson, K. Steele a meeting to discuss the thesis, at the Festival Grounds, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (21 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Birdibir*, *Binjari*, D., *Binjari*, M., *Milmajah*, *Roughsey*, R. and Steele, K., at a meeting to discuss the thesis, at my residence, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (2 June, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Bulthuku*, in a telephone call to discuss the thesis, from my house, Alligator Creek, Townsville, to his house, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (8 June, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in a telephone call to discuss the thesis, from my house, Alligator Creek, Townsville, to his house, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (24 June, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Milmajah* and Steele, K., in a telephone call to discuss the letter I had just received from the Elders as a "united body", from my office, School of Education, James Cook University, Townsville to the Steele residence, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (25 June, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Kurnungkur* and Steele, K., in a telephone call to discuss the thesis, from my office, School of Education, James Cook University, Townsville to the Steele residence, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (8 August, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Bulthuku*, in a telephone call to discuss the thesis, from my house, Alligator Creek, Townsville, to *Kulthangar*'s house, Gununa.

- Kulthangar*. (27 September, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Bulthuku*, in a phone call to check the thesis, from my house, Alligator Creek, Townsville, to *Kulthangar's* house, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (5 October, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company *Bulthuku*, in a telephone call to discuss the thesis, from my house, Alligator Creek, Townsville, to *Kulthangar's* house, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (15 November, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Birdibir*, *Milmajah* and *Steele, K.*, at a meeting to discuss the thesis, at the *Steele* residence, Gununa.
- Kuthangar*. (26 November, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Bulthuku*, a meeting to check the thesis, at *Kulthangar's* house, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (2 April, 2003). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Bond, I.* and *Bulthuku*, in a telephone call to check the thesis, from my house, *Cornubia*, to *Kulthangar's* house, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (17 April, 2003). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Bond, I.* and *Bulthuku*, in a telephone call to check the thesis, from my house, *Cornubia*, to *Kulthangar's* house, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (21 April, 2003). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Bond, I.* and *Bulthuku*, a telephone call to check the thesis and *Kulthangar's* book, from my house, *Cornubia*, to *Kulthangar's* house, Gununa.
- Kulthangar*. (17 May, 2003). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Bond, I.*, and *Bulthuku*, in a telephone call to check the thesis and *Kulthangar's* book, from my house, *Cornubia*, to *Kulthangar's* house, Gununa.
- Kurnungkur*. (15 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, at a formal interview for the thesis, at the *Mornington Shire Council* office, Gununa.
- Kurnungkur*. (24 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Steele, K.*, at a casual meeting, in front of the shop, Gununa.
- Kurnungkur*. (26 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Birdibir* and *Kulthangar*, at a meeting to discuss the *Elders' power*, at the *Festival Grounds*, Gununa.
- Kurnungkur*. (27 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Kulthangar*, at a meeting to discuss the *Elders' power* at the *Festival Grounds*, Gununa.
- Kurnungkur*. (28 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of his wife and *Steele, K.*, at a casual meeting, in front of the shop, Gununa.
- Kurnungkur*. (15 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Birdibir*, *Goodman, C.*, *Kelly, R.*, *Kulthangar*, *Milmajah*, *Moon, T.*, *Robinson, R.*, *Peters, C.*, *Steele, K.* and *Wilson, E.*, at a meeting to discuss the *Elders' role* at the school, at the *Festival Grounds*, Gununa.
- Kurnungkur*. (16 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Birdibir*, *Goodman, C.*, *Kulthangar*, *Milmajah*, *Moon, T.*, *Robinson, R.* and *Steele, K.*, meeting to discuss the educational program for the initiated boys, under a tree at the *Festival Grounds*, Gununa.

- Kurnungkur*. (17 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Birdibir*, Goodman, C., Kelly, R., *Kulthangar*, *Milmajah*, Moon, T., Peters, C., Robinson, R., Steele, K. and Wilson, E., at a meeting to discuss the thesis, at the Festival Grounds, Gununa.
- Kurnungkur*. (21 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Birdibir*, *Kulthangar*, Robinson R. and Steele, K., at a meeting to discuss the thesis, at the Festival Grounds, Gununa.
- Kurnungkur*. (25 June, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Kurnungkur* and Steele, K., in a telephone call to discuss the thesis, from my office, School of Education, James Cook University, Townsville to the Steele residence, Gununa.
- Logan, T. (8 July, 2002). *Personal Communication*, at a social gathering, at my house, Alligator Creek, Townsville.
- Logan, T. (9 July, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of his family and my daughter Sophia, at a family gathering, at the Logan residence, Townsville.
- Logan, T. (22 September, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Jekarija* and my daughter Sophia at a luncheon to discuss the thesis, at a restaurant, at Alligator Creek, Townsville.
- Marmies, W. (10 April, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Kulthangar*, at a casual meeting, at the Festival Grounds, Gununa.
- Marmies, W. (24 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Kulthangar*, at a casual meeting in front of the shop, Gununa.
- Marmies, W. (26 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Kulthangar*, at a meeting to discuss the Elders' power, at the Festival Grounds, Gununa.
- Marmies, W. (27 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Kulthangar* and Steele, K., at a meeting to discuss the Elders' powers, at *Kulthangar's* house, Gununa.
- Marmies, W. (16 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Marmies, A., at a casual meeting, in the main street, Gununa.
- Marmies, W. (17 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Kulthangar*, at a casual meeting, at the Festival Grounds, Gununa.
- Marmies, W. (20 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Kulthangar*, at a meeting to discuss the thesis, at the Festival Grounds, Gununa.
- Marmies, W. (20 November, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Chuloo*, Goodman, C., *Goomungee*, Jack, E., *Jekarija*, Lanley L., Watt, A. and Watt, J., at a social gathering at *Chuloo's* house, opposite the shop, Gununa.
- Milmajah*. (2 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Bell, C., *Binjari*, D., *Binjari*, R., Escott, P., Steele, K. and my daughter Sophia, at a social gathering, at *Milmajah's* house, Gununa.

- Milmajah.* (29 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Binjari, D., at a family gathering, at *Milmajah's* house, Gununa.
- Milmajah.* (3 November, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Anon. B, Peters, M., Peters, P. and Peters, V., at a card game, at the Peters' house, Gununa.
- Milmajah.* (20 November, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Binjari, D., at a social gathering, at *Milmajah's* house, Gununa.
- Milmajah.* (15 January, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Binjari, D., at a family gathering, at *Milmajah's* house, Gununa.
- Milmajah.* (16 January, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Binjari, D., at a social gathering, at the canteen, Gununa.
- Milmajah.* (18 January, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Binjari, D., Binjari, M. and Roughsey, R., at a social gathering, at *Milmajah's* house, Gununa.
- Milmajah.* (2 August, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Bell, C., Bell, P. and Binjari, D., at a social gathering, at *Milmajah's* house, Gununa.
- Milmajah.* (18 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Binjari, D., Escott, A. and Escott, O., at a social gathering, at *Milmajah's* house, Gununa.
- Milmajah.* (26 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Birdibir, Kulthangar and Watt, J., at a meeting to discuss the power of the Elders, at the Peters' house, Gununa.
- Milmajah.* (27 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Binjari, D., at a social gathering, at the canteen, Gununa.
- Milmajah.* (28 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Binjari, D., Binjari, M. and Roughsey, R., waiting for the surgery to open, at the front of the hospital, Gununa.
- Milmajah.* (29 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Binjari, D. and Roughsey, R., at a casual meeting, outside the hospital, Gununa.
- Milmajah.* (3 April, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Binjari, D., Binjari, M. and Roughsey, R., at a social gathering, at my residence, Gununa.
- Milmajah.* (20 April, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in my company, at a casual meeting, along the main street, Gununa.
- Milmajah.* (1 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Binjari, D., at a meeting to check the thesis, at *Milmajah's* house.
- Milmajah.* (15 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Birdibir, Kulthangar and Steele, K., at a meeting to discuss the thesis, at the Steele residence, Gununa.

- Milmajah*. (16 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Birdibir*, Goodman, C., *Kulthangar*, *Kurnungkur*, Moon, T., Robinson, R. and Steele, K., at a meeting to discuss the thesis, at the Festival Grounds, Gununa.
- Milmajah*. (17 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Birdibir*, Goodman, C., Kelly, R., *Kulthangar*, *Kurnungkur*, Moon, T., Peters, C., Robinson, R., Steele, K. and Wilson, E., at a meeting to discuss the thesis, at the Festival Grounds, Gununa.
- Milmajah*. (20 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Birdibir*, at a meeting to discuss Steele K.'s initiation and the stories he should learn, at *Birdibir's* land, Gununa.
- Milmajah*. (2 June, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Bell, C., *Binjari*, D. and Escott O., at a social gathering at *Milmajah's* home, Gununa.
- Milmajah*. (8 June, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of King, M., at a social gathering, in *Milmajah's* hospital room, Townsville Hospital.
- Milmajah*. (9 June, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Binjari*, D., waiting outside the airport to fly back to Gununa, at Townsville Airport.
- Milmajah*. (8 November, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Chuloo* and *Goomungee*, at a casual meeting, in front of *Chuloo's* house, Gununa.
- Milmajah*. (15 November, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Birdibir*, *Kulthangar* and Steele, K., at a meeting to discuss the thesis, at the Steele residence, Gununa.
- Milmajah*. (20 November, 2002). *Personal Communication*, at a casual meeting, in front of the shop, Gununa.
- Moon, T. (27 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company *Chuloo*, Goodman, C., *Kulthangar*, *Milmajah*, Peters, C., Williams, J. and *Wuhnun*, at a meeting to discuss the power of the Elders, at the Festival Grounds, Gununa.
- Moon, T. (15 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Goodman, C., *Kulthangar*, *Kurnungkur*, *Milmajah*, Peters, C., Robinson, R., Kelly, R., Steele, K. and Wilson, E., at a meeting to discuss the role of the Elders, at the Festival Grounds, Gununa.
- Moon, T. (17 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Birdibir*, Goodman, C., Kelly, R., *Kulthangar*, *Kurnungkur*, *Milmajah*, Peters, C., Robinson, R., Steele, K. and Wilson, E., at a meeting to discuss the thesis, at the Festival Grounds.

- Ngerrawurn.* (17 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Hills, C. and Steele, K., at a social gathering, at the Steele residence, Gununa.
- Ngerrawurn.* (20 November, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Gangala*, Hills, M., Steele, K. and my daughter Sophia, at a social gathering at the Hills's residence, Gununa.
- Ngerrawurn.* (30 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Hills, C. and Steele, K., at a social gathering, at the Steele residence, Gununa.
- Ngurrumu.* (12 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Gabori, P., Gabori, S., and *Yarakara* at a social gathering, at the Aged Persons' Home, Gununa.
- Ngurrumu.* (12 November, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Anon. L, Brookedale, I. and *Yarakara*, at a meeting to discuss the thesis, at the Aged Persons' Home, Gununa.
- Peters, C. (14 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, at a casual meeting, in front of the shop, Gununa.
- Peters, C. (20 November, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Milmajah*, Peters, M., Peters, P and their family, at a social gathering, at the Peters' residence, Gununa.
- Peters, C. (16 January, 2001). *Personal Communication*, at a casual meeting, in front of the shop, Gununa.
- Peters, C. (18 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Oakley, S. and Steele, K., at a social gathering, at Birri restaurant, Mornington Island.
- Peters, C. (27 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Chuloo*, Goodman, C., *Kulthangar*, *Milmajah*, Moon, T., Peters, P., Peters, M., Williams, J. and *Wuhnun*, at a meeting to discuss the Elders' power, at the Festival Grounds, Gununa.
- Peters, C. (15 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Birdibir*, Kelly, R., *Kulthangar*, *Kurnungkur* and Moon, T., at a meeting to discuss the power of the Elders, at the Festival Grounds, Gununa.
- Peters, C. (16 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Birdibir*, *Kulthangar*, *Kurnungkur*, *Milmajah* and Robinson, R., at a meeting to discuss the power of the Elders at the Festival Grounds, Gununa.
- Peters, C. (17 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Koorabuba*, B., *Milmajah*, Peters, M., Peters, P., at a social gathering, at the Peters' house, Gununa.
- Peters, M. (27 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Chuloo*, Goodman, C., *Kulthangar*, *Milmajah*, Peters, C., Williams, J. and *Wuhnun*, at a meeting to discuss the power of the Elders, at the Festival Grounds, Gununa.

- Peters, M. (2 April, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Milmajah*, Peters, A., Peters, C. and Peters, P., at a social gathering, at the Peters' residence, Gununa.
- Peters, M. (17 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Koorabuba*, B., *Milmajah*, Peters, C. and Peters, P., at a social gathering, at the Peters' house, Gununa.
- Peters, P. (16 January, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Peters, M., at a casual meeting, at the Peters' house, Gununa.
- Peters, P. (20 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Anon. B, *Kulthangar*, *Milmajah* and Peters, M., at a meeting to discuss the Elders' role at the school, at the Peters' house, Gununa.
- Peters, P. (27 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Chuloo*, Goodman, C., *Kulthangar*, *Milmajah*, Moon, T., Peters, C., Peters, M., Williams, J. and *Wuhnun*, at a meeting to discuss the power of the Elders, at the Festival Grounds, Gununa.
- Peters, P. (29 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Anon. B, *Kulthangar* and Peters, M., at a meeting to discuss the power of the Elders, at the Peters' house, Gununa.
- Peters, P. (17 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Koorabuba*, B., *Milmajah*, Peters, C. and Peters, M., at a social gathering, at the Peters' house, Gununa.
- Reid, C. (20 November, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Marmies, A. and Marmies, W., at a social gathering, at the Reids's house, at Gununa.
- Reid, C. (15 January, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Marmies, A., at a social gathering, at the Reids's house, Gununa.
- Reid, C. (17 January, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Marmies, A., at a social gathering, at the Reids's house, Gununa.
- Reid, C. (29 April, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Marmies, A., at a social gathering, at the Reids's house, Gununa.
- Reid, C. (25 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Jack, E. and Nero, F., at a casual meeting, in front of the shop, Gununa.
- Reid, C. (29 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, at a casual meeting, in front of the shop, Gununa.
- Reid, C. (2 April, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Marmies, A., at a social gathering, at the Reids's house, Gununa.
- Reid, C. (22 April, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Chuloo*, Jack, E. and Nero, F., at a family tree gathering, at *Chuloo's* house, Gununa.
- Reid, C. (1 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Ben, E., Hills, M. and Jack, E., at a casual meeting in front of the shop, Gununa.
- Reid, C. (14 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Bulthuku*, Hills, M. and Nero, F., at a social gathering, in front of the shop, Gununa.

- Reid, C. (15 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Chuloo*, Goodman, C., *Goomungee*, *Jekarija*, Nero, F. and Watt, A., at a meeting to discuss the thesis, at *Chuloo's* house, Gununa.
- Reid, C. (18 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Nero, F., at a family gathering to discuss the family tree, at *Chuloo's* house, Gununa.
- Reid, C. (21 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Hills, M., at a social gathering, in front of the shop, Gununa.
- Robinson, R. (17 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Kulthangar* and his family, at a social gathering, at *Kulthangar's* house, Gununa.
- Robinson, R. (2 October, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Kulthangar*, at a social gathering, at *Kulthangar's* house, Gununa.
- Robinson, R. (15 January, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Bulthuku* and *Kulthangar*, at the final sitting for *Kulthangar's* portrait, at *Kulthangar's* house, Gununa.
- Robinson, R. (27 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Kulthangar*, at a meeting to discuss the Elders' power at *Kulthangar's* house, Gununa.
- Robinson, R. (17 April, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Kulthangar*, to check the thesis, at *Kulthangar's* house, Gununa.
- Robinson, R. (15 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Goodman, C., Kelly, R., *Kulthangar*, *Kurnungkur*, *Milmajah*, Moon, T., Peters, C., Steele, K. and Wilson, E., at a meeting to discuss the Elders' role at the school, at the Festival Grounds, Gununa.
- Robinson, R. (16 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Kulthangar*, *Milmajah*, *Birdibir*, *Kurnungkur*, Steele, K., at a meeting, at the Festival Grounds, Gununa.
- Robinson, R. (17 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Birdibir*, C. Goodman, Kelly, R., *Kulthangar*, *Kurnungkur*, *Milmajah*, Moon, T., Peters, C., Steele, K. and Wilson, E., at a meeting to discuss the thesis, at the Festival Grounds, Gununa.
- Roughsey, E. (8 September, 1998). *Personal Communication*, at a social gathering, at the Roughsey residence, Gununa.
- Roughsey, U. (6 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Dilmirrur*, at a casual meeting in front of the shop, Gununa.
- Roughsey, U. (15 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Anon. J, *Dilmirrur*, *Goomungee*, and *Koorabuba*, B., at an interview for the thesis, at *Dilmirrur's* house, Gununa.
- Roughsey, U. (18 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Burrud*, *Dilmirrur*, *Goomungee*, *Milmajah*, Steele, K. and Watt, J., at a social gathering at *Barrakya*, Mornington Island.

- Roughsey, U. (20 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Bulthuku* and *Dilmirrur*, at a social gathering, on the seats in front of the shop, Gununa.
- Roughsey, U. (30 August, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Bulthuku* and another *Kunhanhaa* Granny, at a gathering to check the thesis, at the Pamela Street Aboriginal Hostel, Mt Isa.
- Roughsey, U. (31 August, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Bulthuku* and another *Kunhanhaa* Granny, at a gathering to check the thesis, at the Pamela Street Aboriginal Hostel, Mt Isa.
- Watt, J. (12 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Goomungee* and Steele, K., at an interview to discuss relationships on Gununa, at my residence, Gununa.
- Watt, J. (17 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Steele, K., at a social gathering, at my residence, Gununa.
- Watt, J. (20 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Chuloo*, *Dilmirrur*, Goodman, C. and Roughsey, U., at a social gathering, at *Chuloo's* house, Gununa.
- Watt, J. (2 October, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Steele, K., at my residence, Gununa.
- Watt, J. (2 November, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Goomungee*, at an interview for the thesis, at my residence, Gununa.
- Watt, J. (2 December, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Goomungee*, at my residence, Gununa.
- Watt, J. (15 January, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Gavenor, G., Hills, M., *Ngerrawurn*, having a chat after shopping, at the shop, Gununa.
- Watt, J. (10 April, 2001). *Personal Communication*, at a casual meeting, in the main street, Gununa.
- Watt, J. (20 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Steele, K., having dinner, at my residence, Gununa.
- Watt, J. (26 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Birdibir*, Goodman, C., *Kulthangar*, *Kurnungkur* and *Milmajah*, at a meeting to discuss the Elders' power, at the Peters' house, Gununa.
- Watt, J. (5 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Steele, K., at a dinner party, at my residence, Gununa.
- Watt, J. (16 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Steele, K., at a casual meeting, in front of my residence, Gununa.
- Watt, J. (17 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Goomungee*, Steele, K. and Watt, A., at a meeting at *Chuloo's* house, Gununa.
- Watt, J. (20 November, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Birdibirr*, Goodman, J., Goodman, V., *Goomungee*, *Koorabuba*, B.,

- Roughsey, U. and my daughter Sophia, at a family gathering to discuss my thesis, at *Dilmirurr's* house, Gununa.
- Williams, J. (30 August, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Anon. J, Williams, D., *Wuhnun* and *Yarrak*, B. at the Williams' house, Gununa.
- Williams, J. (6 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Steele, K. and *Yarraara*, at an interview for the thesis, at the Williams' house, Birri, Mornington Island.
- Williams, J. (20 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Steele, K., Williams, D., Williams, K., *Wuhnun*, *Yarrak*, B., *Yarrak*, P., *Yarrak*, V. and my daughter Sophia, at a family gathering at the Williams' mother's house, Gununa.
- Williams, J. (22 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Wuhnun*, at a casual meeting, in front of the shop, Gununa.
- Williams, J. (24 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Yarrak*, B., at a social gathering, in front of the shop, Gununa.
- Williams, J. (30 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Anon. J, Anon. K, Williams, D., *Wuhnun* and *Yarrak*, B., at a social gathering, at the Williams' house, Gununa.
- Williams, J. (20 November, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Anon. J, Steele, K., Williams, K., *Wuhnun*, *Yarrak*, B., *Yarrak* P., *Yarrak*, V. and my daughter Sophia at a family gathering to discuss my thesis, at the Williams' house, Gununa.
- Williams, J. (10 April, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Yarrak*, B., *Yarrak*, P., *Yarrak*, V., at a meeting to check the thesis, Birri, Mornington Island.
- Williams, J. (10 June, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Yarrak*, B., at a meeting to check the thesis, at the Williams' house, Birri, Mornington Island.
- Williams, J. (27 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Chuloo*, Goodman, C., *Kulthangar*, *Milmajah*, Moon, T., Peters, M., Peters, P. and *Wuhnun*, at a meeting to discuss the power of the Elders, at the Festival Grounds, Gununa.
- Williams, J. (1 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company Steele, K., *Yarrak*, B., *Yarrak*, D., *Yarrak*, V., and my daughter Sophia, a family gathering, at the Williams' house, Birri, Mornington Island.
- Williams, J. (15 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in my company, at a casual meeting, in front of the Williams' house, Gununa.
- Williams, J. (16 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Steele, K., at a casual meeting, in front of my residence, Gununa.
- Williams, J. (17 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Steele, K. and *Yarrak*, B., at a social gathering, at the Williams' house, Gununa.

- Wilson, E. (15 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Birdibir*, Kelly, R., *Kulthangar*, *Kurnungkur*, *Milmajah*, Moon, T., Peters, C., Robinson, R. and Steele, K., at a meeting to discuss the Elders' role at the school, at the Festival Grounds, Gununa.
- Wuhnun. (30 August, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Anon. J, Williams, D., Williams, J. and *Yarrak*, B., at a family gathering, at D. Williams' house, Gununa.
- Wuhnun. (6 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, at a casual meeting, in front of the shop, Gununa.
- Wuhnun. (17 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Anon. J, at a discussion about the thesis, at the Williams' house, Gununa.
- Wuhnun. (20 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Anon. J, Williams, J. and *Yarrak*, B., at a family gathering, at *Wunhun's* mother's house, Gununa.
- Wuhnun. (21 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Williams, J., at a casual meeting, in the main street, Gununa.
- Wuhnun. (22 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Williams, J., at a casual meeting, in front of the shop, Gununa.
- Wuhnun. (25 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Steele, K., Williams, J. and *Yarrak*, B., at a casual meeting, in front of the shop, Gununa.
- Wuhnun. (26 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Williams, J., at a casual meeting, in front of the shop, Gununa.
- Wuhnun. (30 September, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Anon. J., Anon. K., Williams, D., Williams, J. and *Yarrak*, B., at a social gathering, at the Williams' house, Gununa.
- Wuhnun. (27 November, 2000). *Personal Communication*, in the company of the Steele, K. and the Williams family, at a meeting to discuss the thesis, at the Williams' house, Gununa.
- Wuhnun. (6 April, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Williams, J., at a meeting to check the thesis, at the Williams' house, Gununa.
- Wuhnun. (10 April, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Kulthangar*, at a casual meeting, in front of the shop, Gununa.
- Wuhnun. (16 April, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Kulthangar*, at a casual meeting, in front of the shop, Gununa.
- Wuhnun. (24 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Williams, J., at a social gathering, at the Williams' house, Gununa.
- Wuhnun. (27 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Chuloo*, Goodman, C., *Kulthangar*, *Milmajah*, Peters, M., Peters, P. and Williams, J., at a meeting to discuss the power of the Elders, at the Festival Grounds, Gununa.

- Wuhnun.* (30 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Anon. L and Anon. J and their families, Anon. K and Williams, J., at a gathering to check the thesis, at the Williams' house, Gununa.
- Wuhnun.* (20 February, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Anon J, Williams, J. and *Yarrak*, B., at a meeting to check the thesis, at Anon. J's house, Gununa.
- Wuhnun.* (16 April, 2002). *Personal Communication*, at a casual meeting, in front of the shop, Gununa.
- Wuhnun.* (15 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Kulthangar*, after a meeting about the power of the Elders, at the Festival Grounds, Gununa.
- Wuhnun.* (16 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Kulthangar*, at a meeting about the thesis, at *Kulthangar's* house, Gununa.
- Wuhnun.* (17 May, 2002). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Kulthangar*, at a social gathering, at *Kulthangar's* house, Gununa.
- Yarakara.* (12 September, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of Gabori, P. , Gabori, S., and myself, at a social gathering, at the Aged Persons' Home, Gununa.
- Yarakara.* (12 November, 2001). *Personal Communication*, in the company of *Ngurrumu*, Brookedale, I., another Granny and myself at a meeting to discuss the thesis, at the Aged Persons' Home, Gununa.