

Hunting Alone: Aboriginal Australia's Declining Social Capital?

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work that has not been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution. The thesis has ethics approval (Permit Number 2011/185).

John William Scougall

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Abstract

This thesis examines the explanatory power of social capital theory as an aid to understanding disadvantaged socio-economic circumstances prevailing in many contemporary remote Aboriginal communities. The term '*social capital*' refers to social resources that fuel human cooperation such as relationships, civic engagement, support and norms of reciprocity and trust.

There are several strands of 'social capital' theory, but it is Putnam's take that is my main focus. His '*Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital*' (1995) analysed the state of community relatedness in the United States. By contrast my thesis explores the extent to which a social capital framework might be useful in seeking to understand the nature of connections between Aboriginal people in remote Australia. How is social capital formed and eroded in this vastly different context?

The contemporary relevance of the thesis is that it is occurring against the backdrop of widespread concern about wellbeing and cohesion in remote communities. By seeking to explain the phenomena through a social capital analytic lens, the thesis provides a relational perspective on Aboriginal advantage and disadvantage. The focus is on the quality and nature of relationships. The significance of social capital theory is that it purports to account for "*why some societies or groups work better than others, despite having comparable economic or material resources*" (Cox & Caldwell, 2000: 58).

It is the development of an understanding of remote Aboriginal community disadvantage through the prism of a social capital theoretical framework that is this study's original contribution to knowledge. While the concept is not new, its application in this context is. The thesis occupies contentious intellectual territory because '*social capital*' is a '*white western*' concept that may have little cross-cultural applicability or resonance. Yet despite limitations, it is nevertheless argued the concept provides useful analytical insights into the functioning of remote Aboriginal communities. A perspective informed by theorising about social capital, at least as Robert Putnam understands that term, might guide strategies that make for '*stronger*' (thriving and prosperous) communities.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

My thesis examines the explanatory power of social capital as an aid to understanding the socio-economic circumstances prevailing in contemporary remote Aboriginal communities. I understand '*social capital*' to refer to social resources that fuel human cooperation such as relationships, civic engagement, support and norms of reciprocity and trust. My interest lies in exploring the extent to which a stock of social capital might explain remote community circumstance.

In this thesis I use the term '*Aboriginal community*' to refer to a geographic place or locational community where desert people who identify as Aboriginal live. Across remote Australia many former missions, pastoral stations, stock camps, ration depots and makeshift settlements evolved over years into places that display some of the basic physical infrastructure of a small town and where hundreds of residents may now live. There is frequent movement of people across communities, into the bigger towns and out into traditional country for various cultural, health, social, work and educational reasons. But everywhere a formerly small-scale nomadic traditional Aboriginal society has become more concentrated.

There are contested schools of thought about social capital, but it is Putnam's (1994, 1995, 1996, 1999, 2000 & 2002) so called '*networks*' version of the theory that is of most interest in this thesis because of the claim it is a resource that can help overcome impoverishment. Disadvantage is an entrenched issue in remote Aboriginal communities, often seen as an intractable one. Social capital promises useful insights into contributing factors and appropriate policy responses. By seeking to understand the phenomena through a social capital analytic lens, the thesis provides a relational perspective on Aboriginal disadvantage. But the theory occupies contentious intellectual territory because '*social capital*' is a '*white western*' concept that may have little cross-cultural applicability or resonance.

This initial chapter outlines my research objectives and methodology, as well as presenting a discussion of ethical issues.

1.2 Objectives

The study has five objectives in respect of a remote Aboriginal community context:

- i. to identify the strengths and limitations of applying a social capital analytical framework;*
- ii. to describe how social capital was produced in traditional society;*
- iii. to analyse the impact of colonisation on social capital production processes;*
- iv. to describe the production of social capital in contemporary communities; and,*
- v. to consider how 'social capital theory' might account for disadvantage in remote communities.*

1.3 Significance of the Study

It is the theoretical exploration of the link between social capital and remote Aboriginal disadvantage that constitutes the study's original contribution to knowledge. While the concept of social capital is not new, its application to the context of remote Aboriginal communities is. This is the research gap this study seeks to address. Putnam (1993: 6) once wrote: "*It would be a dreadful mistake, of course, to overlook the repositories of social capital within America's minority communities*" (Putnam, 1993: 6). Ditto for Aboriginal Australia.

I hope to influence the way policy analysts think about the causes and consequences of remote Aboriginal community disadvantage. The study draws upon sources from disciplines of sociology, anthropology, history, economics and politics, but always for the purpose of informing future policy and practice.

The significance of the study is that it has been conducted against the backdrop of widespread concern about the wellbeing and social cohesion of remote communities (Sutton, 2001; Austin Broos, 2011). The concept of '*social capital*' provides one analytical lens that might throw some light on their functioning. It has been estimated that about a quarter of all Aboriginal people in Australia live in remote areas (Lawrence, 2007).

1.4 Methodology

1.4.1 Deductive Approach

There are two broad traditions of theory development (Baronett, 2008). The deductive approach that guides this thesis starts with theory development preceding fieldwork. The alternate inductive tradition moves from specific case to theory development (Baronett, 2008).

In this research I have undertaken no case studies, just interviews with individuals with relevant recognised expertise and deliberations based on reflections of my own practice and experience. Contributors to social capital theory have followed this approach, developing understandings ahead of any applied research or attempt at community level application (Labonte, 1999; Lin 1999). Following the line of deductive reasoning means giving initial attention to establishing a basis for expected '*cause/effect*' relationships between variables, undertaken prior to engaging in any community-based fieldwork designed to empirically test validity (Baronett, 2008).

1.4.2 The Ideal-type

My thesis utilises sociologist Max Weber's (1864-1920) '*ideal-type*' methodology (MacRae, 1974: 44; Weber et al, 1947; Weber & Shils, 1949). Weber used it to inform his social theorising about the concept of '*bureaucracy*' and the workings of formal organisations (Nisbet, 1966: 142; Albrow, 1970: 37-49). He argued that bureaucratic structure was fundamental in making the transition from feudal to capitalist society.

The '*ideal-type*' is a model, an idea-construct, created and organised by the researcher for the purpose of theory building and conceptual understanding. Theory consists of a set of concepts and definitions assembled in such a way as to demonstrate or hypothesise a cause-effect relationship between factors that influence change and determine outcomes (Nutbeam, 2010). Theory may be used to describe or to predict.

The construction of a model provides the advantages of sharp precision, consistent representation and unambiguous coherence in an otherwise complex, chaotic and murky social reality (Freund, 1966: 62-63; MacRae, 1974: 66 - 67). It makes it possible to focus upon and clarify the most important elements or features of empirical reality, while residing entirely in the realm of the hypothetical. Freund (1966: 64) writes:

The ideal type is not to be identified with reality in the sense of expressing reality's 'true' essence. On the contrary, precisely because it is unreal and takes us a step away from reality, it enables us to obtain a better intellectual and scientific grasp of reality, although necessarily a fragmented one.

Weber created his model of bureaucracy by generalising about the characteristics he saw as common to many institutions, but he also accentuated certain characteristics by arranging them in a way deliberately intended to give emphasis. He used his ideal-type to explain and illuminate a structure and processes of social change that involved a fundamental and distinct shift away from paying feudal homage to any individual as a consequence of their supposed charismatic attributes (Albrow, 1970: 43). Weber identified key features of bureaucracy such as impersonality, hierarchy, written codification, merit-based promotion and a specialized division of labour (Albrow, 1970: 41, 44 - 45). He also identified particular related social norms, understood as the established rules that guide group behaviour. These encompassed a belief in the legitimacy of legal authority and respectful obedience to an impersonal order.

Weber's '*bureaucracy*' is an extreme case purposely constructed to make its character and his conclusions stronger. In the real world the characteristics identified in a model may be more or less present because reality, unlike an ideal-type, is always variable (Albrow, 1970: 60). Thus while construction of an ideal-type does encompass elements of reality, it is simplified and does not display all of the features of any particular concrete instance (MacRae, 1974: 65-67).

Ideal-type methodology is suited to exploratory studies that aim to provide greater familiarity and clarity about a theoretical concept, providing insights into relationships that can be explored in subsequent empirical work. It is descriptive because it defines the distinctive features of the phenomenon that is the object of study. But beyond this it is also an analytical device. Having defined the characteristics of *'ideal-type'* bureaucracy and the social norms associated with it, Weber was then able to construct theoretical propositions or hypotheses (Albrow, 1970: 43).

In this thesis I make use of ideal-type methodology as a heuristic device guiding a process of logical reasoning about the association between variables (Freund, 1966: 66). Subsequent empirical testing could then be achieved through matching and comparing the characteristic features observed in a particular community with those highlighted in the models of Liyan and Wandang. Such work lies beyond the scope of this thesis.

There are risks involved in using this methodology. A model may be wrongly interpreted as if it were an actual description of a particular case. Doing so can fuel overly romanticised or negative stereotypes, tropes and cliché. The construction of an ideal type is the result of a process of synthesis that involves the identification, organisation and arrangement of diffuse and discrete typical features (traits and characteristics) of whatever phenomena is under study. But the unified analytical construct is the work of the researcher. The researcher imposes order on chaos by focusing on potential cause-effect propositions they regard as significant. The values of the researcher are always in play as Freund (1966: 51) explains: *"causal research always established an inequality among the various phenomena in that it treats some as important and essential and others as secondary and negligible."*

Ideal-type methodology deliberately overemphasises more extreme features at the expense of usual, everyday and taken for granted features. Real world characteristics of the phenomena deemed by the researcher to be of lesser significance may be entirely absent from a one sided construct (Freund, 1966: 60). For the ideal-type is not meant to be a full description, but a hypothetical explanatory device *"not actually exemplified in reality"* (MacRae, 1974: 65).

Another risk is that use of the term *'ideal'* can be wrongly read as implying perfection or preference (MacRae, 1974: 65). Weber was not suggesting bureaucratic organisation was better than other forms. While he saw strengths in bureaucracy, he was also well aware of its tendency towards oligarchy (Albrow, 1970: 36). Freund (1966: 64) explains:

The ideal type is not intended to be in any way exemplary, and must not be confused with an ethical model, or even with a practical rule of conduct. It seeks perfection of a logical, not a moral order, and it excludes all value judgements.

1.4.3 Ideal-Type Communities

Throughout the thesis I progressively develop two ideal-type models. Ideal-type methodology gives a researcher license to **"construct different ideal types of the same phenomenon; as many, in fact as he may deem necessary for a clearer understanding of that phenomenon from all possible points of view"** (Freund, 1966: 67).

In this thesis I construct two fictional and entirely opposite *'ideal-type'* communities of *'Liyan'* and *'Wandang.'* They are *'ideal'* representations of processes of contemporary social capital formation and erosion in a remote Aboriginal context.

The purpose of the Liyan model is to indicate what a remote Aboriginal community rich in social capital might look like, assuming one accepts the logic of social capital theory. The Liyan Community produces much social capital and only ever experiences its beneficial effects. Its residents benefit from webs of connectedness that start with family, but extend far and wide into networks of resources and support located in the wider world. It thrives as a result.

Liyan, is named in honour of a *Yawuru* concept from the Kimberley region that means *'good inner spirit'*. The term describes the good inner feelings and overall sense of wellbeing people have about themselves, their relationships with family and community, and with the wider world. Practicing and celebrating the things that give meaning to one's life, culture and connection to country is fundamental to sustaining good liyan. Peter Yu (2013) quotes fellow Yawuru man Patrick Dodson:

When we feel disrespected or abused our liyan is bad, which can be insidious and corrosive for both the individual and community. When our liyan is good our wellbeing and everything else is in a good place.

By contrast Wandang serves as a counterpoint, a place beset by unresolved relational issues on every level. Wandang inherits only the worst aspects of social capital as elaborated throughout the thesis. There are issues of material poverty, poor housing, low educational achievement, substance abuse, trauma and all forms of violence (including family violence, street fighting, self-harm and suicide). The general air is one of permanent chaos. Prolonged exposure to this social experience feeds a marginalised and alienated *'outback ghetto'* sub-culture much as that described by Brock (1993). The social capital at Wandang is localised, only located within extended family networks. It is not so much that Wandang is devoid of social capital, more a case that its composition is different and the community disadvantaged as a consequence. Wandang is a *Wiradjuri* language term from south eastern Australia that describes an evil spirit thought to cause illness. I stress that I am not implying that the lives of *Wiradjuri* people are inhabited by the evils that beset the hypothetical Wandang Community.

There is an ethical reason why I found it necessary to invent two ideal-types. To present the Liyan model alone would be to risk fostering a romanticised view of the current circumstances and prospects of remote communities. Conversely to have only Wandang, with all its attendant problems, would be to risk feeding into what may be seen as an existing discourse of dysfunction and despair around Aboriginal issues. In this thesis I say nothing about whether any particular community in reality might tend more towards one of these extremes or the other. Rather my purpose is to develop both models as tools of analysis that may assist a reader make a reasoned judgement in a real place.

A model is purposely a gross simplification without nuance or qualification. For instance I describe Liyan and Wandang as *'remote'* and as *'desert'* communities, the two terms being used interchangeably. Only in the world of simplified models is such a sharp binary distinction possible.

In the real world communities are variously positioned along a continuum ranging from remote to urban. There are degrees of remoteness. Communities are only more or less remote. Communities that are no longer considered remote once were. At some point in the last two centuries most Aboriginal people still lived remotely from mainstream society.

A community may actually be *'remote'* without being located in the *'desert'*, as *'saltwater'* (coastal) Aboriginal people can testify. However, ideal-type methodology permits me to use these terms synonymously. For model building purposes I draw evidence from remote, desert, saltwater, rural and even urban contexts.

It is also noted that the notion of *'remote'* exists only in the eyes of the outside observer. Use of the term *'remote'* in this research serves to position the researcher as separate, external and culturally distant from what is being described. Canberra is perceived as remote for some people, not as their homeland (Merlan, 1998: 52). Merlan (1998: 160) observes *"Given the objectively enormous, relatively empty interior of the continent, it has always been possible to think of remote areas as a space of traditional Aboriginal life."*

In TABLES 1.1 to 1.5 I summarise and compare twenty-three key characteristic features of the Ideal-type communities I construct. At a superficial level Liyan and Wandang have similarities of culture and location. On closer inspection, however, there are, significant differences as highlighted in those tables.

At Chapter 4 I discuss the traditional means by which social capital was produced in desert society. The focus of TABLE 1.1 (below) is on the extent to which the traditional means are still influential. The extended family unit remains the most valued and prominent feature of social organisation at both communities. The difference is that at Liyan there are a range of other factors of traditional origin that generate social capital; connections to country, inter-generational ties, traditional law, the skin group system of classification, and norms of reciprocity and exchange. Liyan is an orderly place because there is set of behavioural standards that everyone understands and adheres to.

At Wandang extended family is the only traditional factor standing intact. There is no unifying

set of shared behavioural norms. Social disorder and chaos are the norm.

TABLE 1.1: TRADITIONAL MEANS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL PRODUCTION

Characteristic Feature	Liyan Community	Wandang Community
Family bonds	<i>Extended family structure is a highly valued source of social capital.</i>	<i>Extended family structure is the only source of social capital.</i>
People-land bond	<i>Primary source of group identity. Bonds grounded in shared ancestral connection.</i>	<i>Disconnected from land with no sense of place or belonging.</i>
Inter-generational bonds	<i>Adults guide the development of youth.</i>	<i>Men are absent from the cultural education & development of boys.</i>
Internal authority	<i>Operating internal authority structure derived from Aboriginal law.</i>	<i>Total absence of social control.</i>
Social Classification	<i>System of social categorisation guides how people relate to each other.</i>	<i>People don't know how they are related or how to relate.</i>
Reciprocity & Exchange	<i>Valued as customary practice.</i>	<i>Extends to introduced practices that may be socially destructive.</i>

Chapter 5 considers the generally but not universally profound impact of colonisation on the production of social capital in remote Aboriginal Australia. I argue there can be a relational legacy. TABLE 1.2 (below) suggests the enduring impact can be variable, or that at least some places are able transcend the past. For within contemporary Liyan harmonious relations between neighbouring social groups, men and women, people with different spiritual beliefs and local community organisations have been constructed. There are also respectful broader links with the state and mainstream society.

At Wandang none of this is true. Colonisation has left a deep imprint. Division and intolerance are norms. It is only regarded as safe for people to mix with their own family. There is no semblance of gender balance, with men not involved in any aspect of family and community affairs. Relations with the government agencies are purely transactional and non-existent with mainstream society more generally.

TABLE 1.2: HISTORICAL LEGACY FOR SOCIAL CAPITAL

Characteristic Feature	Liyan Community	Wandang Community
Relations between neighbouring groups	<i>Harmonious & accepting.</i>	<i>Divisive & intolerant.</i>
Relations with Mainstream Society	<i>Inter-cultural & inclusive</i>	<i>Aboriginal & non-Aboriginal people live in separate domains. Insular attitudes prevail.</i>
Relationship with the State	<i>Relational</i>	<i>Transactional</i>
Religious beliefs	<i>Multiple belief systems are reconciled.</i>	<i>Multiple belief systems are divisive.</i>
Relations with Aboriginal Institutional Sector	<i>People design their own internal governance arrangements. Emergent source of bridging social capital.</i>	<i>Imposed western corporate model. Institutional arrangements are externally imposed & prone to capture by local interests.</i>

Chapter 6 examines how processes of social change have impacted on the contemporary production of social capital. TABLE 1.3 (below) indicates that these processes have

impacted differently on the two communities. At Liyan social change has been a uniformly positive experience. Information about life opportunities, health and wellbeing disseminates more quickly than ever before due to greater population concentration and improved communications. Exposure to western cultural influences means that men no longer exercise the level of control over women they once did. While men and women may play different roles, both are active in family and community life. Technologies ranging from vehicles to the internet are widely used to maintain and extend social relatedness. Access to the cash economy enables people to pool funds so they might engage in meaningful activities such as visits to country and attendance at funerals.

By contrast at Wandang people use any cash or means of communication and transport at their disposal to engage in substance abuse of one kind or another. Men in particular give expression to their masculinity in destructive ways, such as fighting that leads to contact with the legal system. The community is matriarchal by default because the men have gone *'missing'*.

TABLE 1.3: IMPACT OF SOCIAL CHANGE ON SOCIAL CAPITAL

Characteristic Feature	Liyan Community	Wandang Community
Technology & communications	<i>The spread of information about opportunities of all kinds is increased by improved means of communication.</i>	<i>Detrimental social practices spread quickly due to access to television, mobile phones, vehicles & alcohol.</i>
Cash economy	<i>Pooled to enable participation in cultural activities.</i>	<i>Pooled to enable participation in drinking and gambling binges.</i>
Gender relations	<i>Co-dependent.</i>	<i>Matriarchal because men are 'missing'.</i>
Social activities	<i>Participation in sport, art & cultural practices produce social capital.</i>	<i>Participation in drinking, gangs and contact with the justice system produce social capital.</i>

At Chapter 7 I am concerned, not with the total stock of social capital produced, but with its normative content. I explore how social capital can be produced in *'good'* or *'bad'* forms. In TABLE 1.4 (below) Liyan is portrayed as a community where the family unit remains a source of support, and even the most vulnerable citizens enjoy the security and protection it affords. The expectation is that one should always nurture relatives, but defence of their behaviour is not unconditional. The community is outward looking. There is the freedom to engage widely to fulfil one's life aspirations on the proviso that cultural connections, values and identity are retained. An *'us and them'* attitude prevails.

At Wandang the family unit is not a source of protection and nurturance. Its values have been hollowed out by substance abuse, violence and harassment of vulnerable citizens. There are no social standards of behaviour and family members are unconditionally defended, and regardless of what they might have done their behaviour is un-reproached. There is also an intense localism that closes the community off to all external influence. Vigilant enforcement means it is not possible for anyone to pursue external opportunities. The perception is that building new connections and retaining a strong localised cultural identity are constructed as incompatible binary opposites. An *'us or them'* attitude prevails.

TABLE 1.4: PRODUCTION OF ‘GOOD’ AND ‘BAD’ SOCIAL CAPITAL

Characteristic Feature	Liyan Community	Wandang Community
Mutual help & harassment	<i>Families are being strengthened by reconnection. Harassment is rejected as inconsistent with the cultural principle of nurturance of relations.</i>	<i>Family support is hollowed out by the impact of separation, alcohol & violence. Persistent harassment of relations is widespread practice.</i>
Openness	<i>Socially trusting outward looking society.</i>	<i>Closed society. Intense localism prevails.</i>
Freedom of association	<i>People are free to mix in multiple & diverse social networks.</i>	<i>People do not feel free to engage beyond localised family networks.</i>
Norms of behaviour	<i>Aspirational norms.</i>	<i>Downward levelling norms.</i>

In the final chapter I briefly explore what the practice of social policy might look like in a remote Aboriginal community setting, were a social capital perspective ever to be adopted. At TABLE 1.5 (below) I postulate how it might shape some of the features of Liyan. It is a community that invests its resources in its identified strengths, activities known to work well, and attract participation. It could, for instance, be an art centre, land care project or a youth initiative. In pursuing any such initiative there is willingness to source ideas, evidence of what works, and technologies from all over. It is also characteristic that the face the government presents to the community is only ever enabling and facilitative. This means it is responsive to local aspirations, but only ever a co-investing partner, never the leader of change.

By contrast at Wandang relations with the state are purely transactional. It presents only its *‘command and control’* face. Its concern is with generic objectives and funding accountability. Nationally identified disparities determine where resources go, as distinct from any place-based approach. Engagement with the outside world occurs through a narrow and very state centred prism. As a consequence there is little direct exposure to new ideas and influences.

TABLE 1.5: SOCIAL CAPITAL, INSPIRED PRACTICE

Characteristic Feature	Liyan Community	Wandang Community
Reciprocal exchange of ideas & information	<i>High exposure to information regardless of source. Local knowledge is both informed by & informs ideas in the wider world in what people understood as a process of reciprocal exchange.</i>	<i>Low exposure to external influences. New ideas are not sought & are dismissed as ethnocentric.</i>
Community Development approach	<i>Strength focussed & place based.</i>	<i>Problem focussed & generic.</i>
Resourcing	<i>External engagement is an important source of support. Corporate, public & community partnerships are fostered.</i>	<i>Narrow state-centred base.</i>
Role of the State	<i>Enabling & facilitative in support of locally led initiatives.</i>	<i>Command and control.</i>

No Aboriginal community is in fact a *Liyan* or a *Wandang*. The ideals of Wandang and Liyan have been deliberately constructed as binary. The danger is, however, that a model can be misused as if it were an actual description. There is also the added risk of possibly inferring that community characteristics are forever fixed, rather than dynamically responding and morphing over time as communities do.

In the real world a community might simultaneously display features resembling aspects of both Liyan and Wandang. Aboriginal communities are variously strung along a continuum. It is not my purpose to indicate whether any particular community, or communities more generally, tend more towards Liyan or Wandang. This is a matter for empirical research case by case. Development of the two models is intended only to provide predictive tools that might assist a researcher in doing such community-based research. Where communities display

particular structural and normative features, then certain social outcomes might be expected to follow. The value of the ideal-types I construct rests on their resonance and predictive power, something yet to be demonstrated empirically beyond this thesis.

Use of an *ideal-type* methodology provides the important advantage of enabling me to discuss sensitive matters, without having to refer to any actual community in a negative light. Davis (1992: 37) has previously employed the technique of using fictitious community names to safely discuss socially and politically sensitive issues in an Aboriginal context.

1.5 Data Collection and Analysis

1.5.1 Information Sources

Three information sources are used in this study; documentary sources, interviews and a few reflections on my own working life in remote community contexts captured in vignettes. Discussion is informed by the relevant literature, insights of those with expertise in this field, and my personal lived experience. These sources of evidence are inter-weaved throughout the study.

1.5.2 Written sources

The social capital literature is vast. It includes academic texts, research reports and policy documents. It extends across multiple disciplines.

The process of accessing relevant written sources about social capital proceeded as follows. Firstly I sought an overview of the breadth of writing about social capital. I read Putnam's work (1993, 2000) to help develop an international sociological perspective, and Cox (1995, 1997) and Winter (2000) to assist my understanding of the Australian context.

The '*snowball*' sampling technique (Faugier & Sargeant, 1997) was then used to identify other texts relevant to the thesis topic of '*Aboriginal social capital*'. Snowball sampling is a way of locating relevant information-rich sources. The key references I accessed in the initial literature search progressively led me to further relevant sources. I followed the existing information network, providing an escalating set of potential sources that zeroed in on my particular area of interest. Continuing this approach enabled me to eventually identify potential sources in a specific topic area where they were hard to locate.

I found social capital analyses relating to ethnic community enclaves and international aid and development especially relevant (Portes 1998; Krishna, 2002). However, I could only find a handful of texts focused on issues of social capital in an Aboriginal Australian context (Lahn, 2012; Brough & Bond, 2009; Brough et al, 2006; Brough et al 2008; Hunter, 2000 & 2004; Bell & Heathcote, 1999). Only the contributions of Christie and Greatorex (2006), Memmott and Meltzer (2003) and Bandias (2010) are specific to a remote Aboriginal community context. There is a dearth of literature in this area.

Classical anthropological and Aboriginal studies texts describing social norms and the nature of social relationships were as important to the conduct of this study as the social capital literature. Most relevant was the work of Myers (1980 & 1986). There are also contributions from researchers and practitioners who have lived and worked extensively in remote Australia, such as McCoy (2008) and Folds (2001).

The literature illuminates contemporary debates still being played out within disciplines in the background to this study. Anthropologists question whether their profession has tended to present an overly romanticised view of Aboriginal society in the past, attaching insufficient weight to evidence of community pathologies and dysfunction (Sutton, 2001; Austin-Broos, 2011). Historians, such as McGrath (1995 & 1987) are more likely to balance their accounts of frontier violence and exploitation with instances of cross-cultural cooperation in a way that was not evident in the earlier works in the discipline such as Rowley (1970 & 1987). Sociologists remain divided, with writers such as Portes (1998) less enamoured and more critical of aspects of social capital theory than the adherents to the Putnam worldview (1993 & 1994).

I have also drawn upon government reports that describe the circumstance of remote communities such as those produced by the Steering Committee for the Review of

Government Service Provision (SCRGSP 2007, 2011 & 2014) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2002) that describe the socio-economic circumstance of indigenous Australians.

Circumstance is shaped by particular social, historical, demographic, geographical, climatic, technological and economic factors. Within the Aboriginal Australian literature there are contextual nuances to be aware of. For instance the research of Myers (1980), Folds (2001) and McCoy (2008) occurred in a remote desert context with unreliable rainfall. The Aboriginal Studies literature provides some insights that I have chosen to draw from contexts that are not remote, such as a rural regional case study by Daly and Smith (2003). The research by Brough (et al, 2006) was conducted in an urban context, but I have nevertheless included consideration of it because it is one of the few available sources pertinent to issues of social capital in Aboriginal Australia. The research of Martin (1993) and Trigger (1988) involved '*saltwater*' people subject to a monsoonal climate. Traditionally these people had less reason to be highly mobile than those in the interior because their country was able to support a significant population. Such environmental factors would have impacted on the nature of relationships between social groups. So too do contemporary factors such as proximity to mining, demographic trends, and the variable impact of interventions by governments, developers and missionaries across the continent. The question to which findings from any study are transferable and applicable in a more remote setting is always in play.

1.5.3 Interviews

I conducted eleven semi-structured interviews with people with demonstrated expertise and experience relevant to understanding social capital in Aboriginal Australia. They included academics employed by universities and practitioners working in the field. It is a planned sample in the sense I sought to capture a cross section of considered opinion about the significance of '*social capital*' in understanding remote disadvantage, but it is not intended to be a representative sample of opinion.

Demonstrated interest in the concept of '*social capital*' was the criteria for inclusion as an interviewee evidenced by writings and/or contribution to public discourse and practice. Participants included Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal men and women. All of those interviewed shared an interest in the quality of social relations in an Indigenous context. Some had extensive first hand familiarity living and working with Aboriginal communities. Others had relevant research and publications. Some had both. One stressed she did not wish to comment specifically on the situation in remote Aboriginal communities because her direct experience was limited (Interview 9). Nevertheless she offered valuable third party comments more generally about social capital and how it might potentially be a useful tool and framework of analysis.

Interviewees were recruited through email contact and, where necessary, a follow up telephone call explaining the study. The email requesting their participation included information about my research, providing background and outlining the methods to be employed. Participation in the interviews was entirely voluntary and participants had a right to withdraw. Those wishing to participate signed a consent form. Interviews were conducted face-to-face in the following locations: Brisbane (3), Sydney (2), Fitzroy Crossing (2), Canberra (1), Melbourne (1), Perth (1) and Broome (1). Interviews lasted up to an hour or longer in a couple of instances, however one was significantly shorter because the participant was unexpectedly pressed for time.

Use of a semi-structured (conversational) interview technique allowed views to be heard in a process of naturally occurring social interaction. The informal process was designed to get participants speaking comfortably and openly, with prompts used to guide discussion where necessary. The line of questioning was responsive to issues identified by the participants themselves. In this way the process sought to demonstrate respect for their knowledge and experience. There was also a degree of reciprocity when experiences were shared.

With the permission of the interviewee a digital recording was made of each interview and notes taken. Participants were subsequently advised by email which of their own excerpts I proposed to quote in the thesis. They were invited to give feedback, clarify, add to, contextualise or edit. They had an opportunity to have their words amended or removed on request. None of the quotes or comments included in the thesis are attributed. The quotes are woven into the text as expert evidence together with other sources drawn from the literature. In most instances the interview comments lent support to the literature, but in a couple of

instances they extended or challenged it.

The eleven participants interviewed were variously spread along a continuum in respect of their views about social capital, at least as I assessed them. While responses were nuanced, essentially there were proponents of the notion of social capital at one end (3), sceptics at the other (3), with the mostly ambivalent positioned in-between (5). There was general acknowledgement that social capital may contribute to thinking about the value of social trust and networks. There was recognition by some that social capital has had influence in policy circles, both internationally and in Australia.

The term was, nevertheless, seen as contentious. Use of the term '*capital*' to describe rich social relations in desert communities was seen as risking an over simplified compression of complex webs of Aboriginal social connection. Three participants felt a tension in using the language of '*capital*' to describe Aboriginal social norms and networks. They questioned the possible applicability of social capital theory in a remote community context. Could it speak directly to the character, circumstance and ideals of desert people?

1.5.4 Personal Reflections

In several places I reflect on relevant aspects of my work experience. These are framed as brief stand-alone vignettes designed to provide an evocative descriptive account. The presentation of each vignette is clearly set apart from other data.

Feminist standpoint research methodology emphasises the value of personal lived experience and reflective practice, as well as the critical importance of being explicit about the positioning of the researcher (Harding, 1991). The vignettes reflect on my personal experiences prior to this study. I did not keep a diary. It is not systematically recorded data.

Vignette 1.1: Positioning the Researcher

Mine has been a long personal journey working in the particular context of the study. I have worked continuously with Aboriginal communities since the late 1970's in three capacities:

- i. From 1977 until 1991 I was a public servant involved in program management. The role was community economic development; employment and training; business development; and housing. The bulk of my work was in remote communities in the Kimberley and Pilbara and for most of this period I was based in Broome. I worked with four Commonwealth agencies:*
 - a. Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA);*
 - b. Aboriginal Employment and Training Branch of the Department of Education, Employment and Training (DEET);*
 - c. Aboriginal Development Commission (ADC); and,*
 - d. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC).*
- ii. From 1991 until 2003 I was a lecturer at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies at Curtin University. Mine was a community development outreach role teaching Aboriginal students from rural and remote locations across the continent. The position was based in Perth and later Broome. I completed my MA (Public Policy) at Murdoch University and focussed my policy research on social capital within enclave 'town camp' communities in the Pilbara and Kimberley (Scougall & Dick, 1997; Scougall & Osborne, 1998; Scougall 2002). I also joined the Australasian Evaluation Society and contributed to its journal (Scougall, 2007).*
- iii. Since 2003 I have worked as a specialised consultant in the niche field of indigenous policy evaluation, assessing the community level impact of numerous initiatives. My main focus is on family and community initiatives (Funnell, et al 2004; Scougall et al 2003; Scougall 2004a, 2004b, 2005, 2006, 2007 & 2008). For a decade I also served as an independent director on an Aboriginal trust fund in the Pilbara region. Presently (2016) I am part of a team assisting a remote Kimberley community explore options for private land ownership.*

In all these roles I was positioned as a visiting outsider. I have never been immersed in the same way some of my key sources have been. Mine is a different positioning.

1.5.5 Analysis

My analytical approach integrates documentary sources with the knowledge that comes from experience, expertise and judgement carried in people's heads and not necessarily recorded in documents. I triangulate the available information from multiple sources converging on a single set of conclusions.

The analysis encompasses the following activities:

- i. Summarising the findings of relevant and credible research, reviews and reports;
- ii. Generating additional evidence from interviews;
- iii. Reflecting on personal experience through vignettes; and,
- iv. Synthesising the evidence in a clear written form that informs future policy and practice.

The quality of any body of evidence is variable. Its credibility, reliability, veracity, relevance and appropriateness need to be carefully weighed. I have not assumed all information is of sufficient quality to include in the thesis. Rather I have relied on indicators of quality:

- i. plausibility i.e. based on a high degree of fit with pre-existing knowledge in the field;
- ii. trusted source i.e. originating from an individual or organization with recognised expertise and reputation;
- iii. independence i.e. validation by peers or a reputable body; and,
- iv. embedded i.e. derived from the particular context of Aboriginal Australia, rather than being misleadingly drawn from another people and place.

I regard data sources that meet more than one of these criteria as having high quality. Myers (1980, 1986) is an example of a researcher whose work meets all criteria. His remote field experience adds local validity to his work. His contribution is focused on a particular group of people in a particular place, living in a particular social and cultural context. His findings are not drawn from a case study in Italy or New Orleans. Thus his evidence is especially useful in informing understandings of the particular circumstances under which social capital formation occurs in remote Australia. What he describes differs markedly from the characteristic features of the communities Putnam (1993) studied.

A couple of simple rules have also been used as a tool to guide my decisions about what evidence has sufficient weight to include. My practice is to incorporate information if at least two sources stated it was important and also to identify any instances where the available evidence is disputed, appears contradictory or is inconclusive. Occasionally views expressed at interview may differ from those in written sources and, of course, writers and participants may disagree on points amongst themselves.

1.6 Ethics

1.6.1 Balancing Tensions

The conduct of ethical research in Aboriginal contexts requires a persistent striving to adhere to core values and ideals (Arbon, 1992). In earlier publications I describe some ethical tensions between principle and practice in my own profession of evaluation (Scougall, 1997 & 2006). This thesis too is not without ethical tensions and challenges as described below.

In framing this research I consulted:

- i. Values and Ethics: Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research Values and Ethics: Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research; and,
- ii. Murdoch University HREC policy and guidelines Ethics In Research Involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.

The conduct of this study gave rise to several ethical considerations that needed to be managed.

1.6.2 Demonstrating Integrity

Research integrity requires recognition of the principles of research involving humans and honest and ethical conduct extending through to the eventual dissemination and communication of findings. There is widespread scepticism about research in the Aboriginal community because of certain insensitive and exploitative processes that have occurred (Arbon, 1992; Arbon & Rigney, 2014). This places an onus on the researcher to engender trust and to be accountable to Aboriginal people.

In my own case I have over three decades of continuous direct experience working with Aboriginal people in remote areas, extensive research and evaluation experience, and related peer reviewed publications focussing on ethical issues (Scougall 1997 & 2006). I taught Indigenous research methodology and ethical research practice at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies at Curtin University for over a decade at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. I am also an active member of the Australasian Evaluation Society (AES) and bound by its code of ethics. In 2007 I shared an award for excellence for my work on the evaluation of the Indigenous component of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy.

I believe I have demonstrated a long-term commitment to working sensitively with Aboriginal people and a capacity to undertake research in respect of remote community contexts.

1.6.3 Researcher Accountability

A transparent accountability regime back to Aboriginal people is necessary to ensure the appropriate discharge of research responsibilities. The Kimberley Institute (KI) has a focus on fostering social policy innovation and research that contributes to inclusive relationships.

KI offered some practical research guidance and feedback, and suggested interview participants for this research. The relationship was formalised in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) setting out the advisory role of KI and my responsibilities as a researcher. The MOU outlines shared understandings about the research and the proposed purpose, methodology, conduct and manner in which results may be disseminated and potential outcomes and social benefits realised. I undertook not to publish information emerging from this study without explicit written consent from KI.

Effective dissemination of knowledge emerging from this thesis can only be achieved through greater awareness of the notion of '*social capital*' and its potential contribution towards improving community wellbeing. In this thesis I argue that before benefit can occur it may be necessary to render research findings about social capital into language comprehensible at community level, a task to be taken up beyond this thesis.

The intention is that research findings be shared as widely as possible with the prior approval

of KI. It is important that both the results and the methodology are accessible in ways that will permit scrutiny and contribute to public knowledge. Specifically it is envisaged the thesis will be made directly available as a resource to:

- i. KI;
- ii. Murdoch University (including Kulbardi Centre);
- iii. Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies;
- iv. Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) at the Australian National University; and,
- v. interview participants.

It is also proposed that findings be disseminated through conference papers and journal articles, subject to KI permission and a publisher. I will be guided by KI on broader issues of research dissemination appropriate to non-academic audiences. I am aware of innovative ways in which research can be shared in visual (pictorial, film, website and symbolic) forms that are not primarily reliant on text, as well as the way personal narratives can be used to illuminate and enhance the local relevance of abstract ideas. Again these are tasks to be taken up beyond this thesis.

1.6.4 Managing Sensitive Issues and Material

Respect for people, both individually and collectively, is a guiding ethical principle. It means having regard for Aboriginal people's rights, beliefs, wellbeing, values, customs, cultural heritage and time.

The way people view the world is a function of their particular social norms, values and experiences. From the earliest period of colonisation relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people have been strained by ill-formed perceptions and incorrect assumptions. This underlines the divide that exists between European and Aboriginal spiritual, social, political and economic perspectives. My study seeks to demonstrate respect by recognising, describing and contributing to understandings about the nature of these tensions as they relate to social capital.

Not exposing people to new ideas, such as social capital, might be considered patronising and insular. It is also the case that one way in which social science practice can be disrespectful in an indigenous context is by transplanting irrelevant '*foreign*' conceptual ideas from a different cultural context. There is necessarily an ethical tension involved in such judgements.

The claim that social capital theory is ethnocentric (Wilson, 2006: 351-352) needs to be taken, more especially seriously in an indigenous context (Hunter 2004). In my thesis I have purposely sought to avoid this charge by drawing on Aboriginal conceptual tools such as *ngurra* (country), *walytja* (family system), *Tjukurrpa* (law and spirituality) and *gurrutu* (social classification). These terms are drawn from different Aboriginal languages across the Australian continent as a device to demonstrate that, while my understandings are informed by Aboriginal conceptual logic, the model communities I discuss are not associated with any particular people or place. They are from everywhere and nowhere specifically. This device also serves to differentiate Aboriginal social structures and norms from those of other cultures.

My research process has not involved accessing, using, collecting or acquiring any culturally sensitive data. All of the information and material used is already in the public domain, with the exception of the interview data and my reflective anecdotes. Certain cultural knowledge that is already widely available has been referred to. The purpose is to provide examples of the critical place occupied by culture in social capital formation processes. No information of a secret or sacred nature has been accessed or used.

1.6.5 Safeguarding Interests of Interviewees

The thesis draws on the views of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people about social capital and networks in remote Australia. This research does not favour any section of the population or result in any unfair distribution of the benefits or burdens of participation. The only demands have been on the time of interview participants as a result of voluntary participation.

Information about the research, including its purpose, benefits and risks has been openly shared with all participants. By signing a Consent Form participants acknowledged they understood and were satisfied with the proposed research and its methodology.

There was no discrimination in the selection and recruitment of participants on the grounds of age, gender, disability or religious or spiritual beliefs. The eleven interviewees include five Aboriginal people and six non-Aboriginal people. There were eight men and three women. Four are based in WA, three in Queensland, two in New South Wales, and one each in Victoria and the ACT.

The interview data used in this study has been de-identified. No information of a personal or confidential nature was collected, other than interviewee name. Nevertheless a reader familiar with the public views of a particular interview participant might guess at the source of some material. No sensitive quotes have been used for this reason.

Recordings of interviews will be stored on a thumb drive locked in a filing cabinet for a period of not less than five years following submission of the thesis, in accordance with standard practice.

1.6.6 Risk of Over-researching

Aboriginal people within the academy have drawn attention to the risks and impacts of over researching indigenous communities (Arbon, 1992). Information collection is always a delicate matter, particularly when undertaken by cultural outsiders. Williams and Stewart (1992: 90) write:

Aboriginal people throughout Australia are saying loudly and clearly that enough is enough in respect of inappropriate and offensive research methods and practices that are largely associated with non-Aboriginal researchers ... It needs to be emphasized that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge has been extracted. Knowledge has been taken like the mining industry has taken minerals from our lands and transformed into academic text to benefit individuals and institutions ... Just as the mining industry has benefited from mineral extraction from Aboriginal land, the academic industry in its exploitation of Aboriginal knowledge, has also benefited from a similar process of extraction.

The established historic pattern of mistrust can be difficult to turn around in the short-term. A field researcher can easily be *'found guilty'* before having an opportunity to *'prove themselves innocent'*. People in remote communities may also assume a researcher is somehow representing *'the government'*. Strangers who come and ask questions can generally expect to be treated with suspicion, not least because they are an unwelcome reminder of past intrusion in peoples' lives.

While this study draws on the lived experience of people living and working in remote communities, it does not involve any community fieldwork. One reason for approaching the topic in this manner is an ethical concern about imposing on Aboriginal people. Rather, I have relied on existing secondary sources to illuminate the relevance of *'social capital'* in a remote context.

There is plentiful readily available evidence to enable examination of issues of remote community strength without recourse to collecting more primary data from community informants. Arguably the ethical onus is on the researcher to examine relevant secondary sources in depth before embarking on fieldwork. Doing so helps to identify pertinent issues, possible causal relationships, and helps frame empirical questions.

I am, however, conscious of the inductive approach that starts with immersion in the field, seeking to put preconceptions aside and build theory from the ground up through case studies (Yin, 2003). Too often social science starts with conceptual ideas taken from one context and inappropriately seeks to transplant these into a different cultural context. This is a risk in my research. Geertz (1973) argued for an ethnographic approach to qualitative research that seeks, through participant observation, to describe human cultures and ethnic groups from the inside out in ways that reflect their systems of knowledge. The ideal is to uncover the cultural meaning behind observed behaviour without any overlay of preconception.

My research is not ethnographic. It is the interpretation of a cultural outsider. Nevertheless I do draw on the writings and perspectives of people who have long lived and worked in remote Australia. I include their observations of everyday activities such as football carnivals, family reunions, social interactions and funerals. They provide personal insights of the observer into the complex webs of social relatedness that people create and within which they interact.

The ethical ideal is that the researcher '*do no harm*'. Through my choice of non-intrusive methods I have sought to minimise the risks for participants and for Aboriginal communities. Nevertheless I am conscious there is an ethical tension between the risk of over-researching on the one hand, and that of writing about Aboriginal people on the other, without providing opportunities for their participation. It is a tension that can, it seems to me, be minimised where research contributes to conversations in which Aboriginal people have opportunities to shape theory. Aboriginal voices and experiences can improve theory where they have opportunities to '*speak back*' to it, as distinct from being passive recipients of it.

1.6.7 Risk of Disempowerment

Ethical practice requires the recognition that tensions and delicately balanced judgments are always required in research. On the one hand there is a risk that a study might disempower Aboriginal people by adding to the existing body of work in Aboriginal Studies that can be read as tending to portray communities as dysfunctional or pathological (Lyon, 1990; Sutton, 2001). The risk is that research becomes an exercise in '*blaming the victim*'. Such a '*deficit*' approach that defines communities by what they lack may be harmful to the extent it undermines the crucial capacities of confidence and self-belief required for social change to occur. It is a critique often levelled at social capital theory itself, as discussed in Chapter 3.

On the other hand it might equally be considered unethical for a researcher to avoid open dialogue around sensitive issues. The dilemma is that both romanticism and silence in the face of uncomfortable truths amount to a denial of evidence. The tension is between being able to convey the message that all may not be well in remote Aboriginal communities, whilst at the same time ensuring the narrative does not further disempower. This entire thesis was written against the background of on-going public discussion about policy failure in remote communities (Austin-Broos, 2011). The risk is contributing to the erosion of the resource of optimism and hope necessary for community resilience (Uslaner, 2002). I am conscious reports of failure can be picked up by third parties and printed in the media. My thesis itself contains material that might suggest substance abuse, violence and crime are commonplace in remote communities, if used out of context.

Appreciative inquiry (AI) is a form of action research that builds on strengths rather than focussing on problems (Stowell, 2012). AI privileges those aspects of communities that are working well and the positive outcomes achieved. The starting point is the identification of existing capacities; resources, skills, knowledge, understandings and interests. This provides a context within which problematic aspects can be discussed. AI is not about ignoring shortcomings. But the process starts by asking positive questions. It does seek to balance positives and the negatives, and to present the latter '*softly*' in the form of future opportunities for change rather than as harsh criticisms (Bushe, 2007). The AI literature suggests the process of inquiry can be an empowering experience when negative aspects are placed as secondary to the celebration of achievements and the identification of factors that contribute to community success (Stowell, 2012). According to Cooperrider and Whitney (2005: 3):

Appreciative Inquiry is about the coevolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the relevant world around them. In its broadest focus, it involves systematic discovery of what gives 'life' to a living system when it is most alive, most effective, and most constructively capable in economic, ecological, and human terms. AI involves, in a central way, the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system's capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential.

While I have not used AI methodology, the approach has influenced both the way I approached asking questions of interviewees and the writing of this thesis. I have sought to present information about negative aspects of remote communities in ways that enable them to be understood in historic context, as demonstrated in Chapter 5. That any society would have some dysfunctional elements might be expected after having lost sovereignty, been dislocated from their estate, and cast into a form of slavery on the fringes of the colonial pastoral industry. Indeed it would be remarkable if it were otherwise. One of the community strengths on display is a resilience in the face of historic adversity.

1.6.8 Beneficence

The ethical principle of beneficence is about the researcher's responsibility to minimise risks of harm and discomfort to participants. It is about seeking to maximise the possibility of 'good' outcomes whilst minimising the 'bad'. An aspect of upholding this principle is to be explicit about the ways in which research might potentially benefit Aboriginal people (Howitt et al, 1990: 2-3). The researcher needs to be clear about how people might actually gain from the process.

A criticism of the conduct of research in Aboriginal contexts by Aboriginal people in the academy is that too often it benefits the researcher more than the researched. Arbon (1992: 1) writes:

[M]ost research has been undertaken by non-Aboriginals for reasons external to Aboriginal needs or interests, and has in most circumstances been done on Aboriginal people. This power imbalance has led to an inability to have input into, control over, or ownership of the results of research and has more often than not further dis-empowered Aboriginal people. The power imbalance permitted 'outsiders' to define the 'problem' and pose the 'solution' with little challenge to methodological and ethical issues.

The other side of the argument is that challenging and useful interpretations that promote debate can and should come from many perspectives (McGrath, 1995: 382-383). The risk, as McGrath (1995: 389-391) sees it, is that the academy becomes a place trumpeting tropes that exaggerate the boundaries between 'us' and 'them' rather than being a site of cultural exchange.

Sound theoretical research can enhance understandings of social processes such as social capital formation. It can help identify the factors that produce it and increase the capacity of policy-makers and communities to respond. At a general level this study may contribute to improved Aboriginal wellbeing by raising awareness of issues of social cohesion, the quality and nature of localised relationships, as well as relations with the wider world. Work such as this can be useful in the orientation and training of practitioners working with remote communities. However, for desert people any potential benefits from this process would be both indirect and long-term.

This study has, I hope, the potential to serve as a kind of 'mirror' that enables people who live and work in remote communities to see and understand the situation more clearly; what has been achieved, and the future challenges and relationship-building opportunities that lie ahead. There are two specific aspects to this:

- i. Understanding how the process of social capital formation in remote Aboriginal Australia may differ from mainstream processes; and,
- ii. Raising awareness of how social capital may contribute to improved socio-economic status in remote communities.

It is not only Aboriginal communities that may benefit from this research. Academics and practitioners, including those interviewed for this research, may perhaps be able to think and reflect more deeply on the significance of *'social capital'* as a result of this thesis. Potentially it may inform their future writing and practice.

In summary the potential benefits of this thesis take the form of enhanced knowledge about social practices that contribute to more sustainable and resilient (*'stronger'*) communities. I can, however, provide no guarantee of this outcome. The risk of inadvertently feeding negative stereotypes is very real in research of this kind.

1.7 Limitations

A limitation of this thesis stems from my positioning as, in shorthand, a *'white western male'* researcher influenced by both liberal democratic and Fabian socialist values. In doing so I follow McGrath's (1995: 362) example where she declares herself a *"white female historian"*. Life experience restricts my ability to see far beyond the confines of my own value system. While my external perspective can bring with it new insights, it is also the case that *"Any gaze is always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity"* (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998: 24). Researchers have an ethical obligation to declare their cultural biases (McGrath, 1995: 368).

My professional background lies in the narrow field of policy evaluation. My aspiration is to contribute to strategic thinking about issues of remote Aboriginal community disadvantage. However, in search of explanations throughout the course of my study I was inevitably drawn into disciplines beyond my own. I am not an historian, anthropologist, sociologist, psychologist or community development practitioner. A lack of depth of understanding in these discipline areas is therefore a potential weakness. My descriptions of aspects of history, culture, theory and practice may not always rise sufficiently far above a thumbnail sketch. The thesis is, therefore, limited by what I know and understand. The upside, however, is that my work is not blinkered by the particular emphasis of any one discipline, enabling me to take a step backwards from the subject matter in the hope of illuminating a big picture.

There is also the issue of gender bias. Gender inevitably impacts on what is seen to be significant and the cultural and experiential lens through which it is interpreted (Olesen, 1998: 300-341). A theme visited in this thesis is inter-generational relationships between males in remote communities. In part this reflects my understanding that the situation of men lies at the heart of the issues I explore. However, it is also the case I do not have the necessary lived experience or access to information to provide new insights into the relationship between Aboriginal women and girls. McGrath (1987: 36) observes *"Women are discreet about their own rituals and more private dreamings"*. Others, however, have worked in this space (Hamilton 1981; Bell 1983; Bell 1998; Gale, 1983), although not without contention (McGrath, 1995: 388-389).

Further work in this area lies outside the capacity of this researcher. While I do discuss aspects of the relationship between men and women, lack of gender balance is a significant limitation of this study. On the other hand, however, my research has benefitted from having experienced and had access to, aspects of the world of men.

While I identify social pressures confronting remote communities, like others, I am limited by my own knowledge of how to overcome them. I am further confined by thesis time and space. Remote disadvantage is not easily amenable to change. I therefore attempt no more than to point towards a general *"social capital inspired"* (Stewart-Weeks, 2000: 286) policy framework as a possible way forward. The scope of this thesis does not extend to the identification of specific strategic solutions that solve complex social problems.

Finally, mine is a non-Aboriginal perspective on social capital that draws heavily on the theory and findings of other non-Aboriginal people. Aboriginal expert opinion has informed the thesis through interviews and published sources. Still I will never be able to bring an emic perspective to my work, never be able to see what a vastly different world looks like from the inside out. A non-indigenous participant in this study (Interview 10) reflected:

Even with someone we deeply know we are not them. We can never be inside ... I really don't know, (how can I?), what's inside their minds, but based on my own deep familial experience with remote-living Aboriginal people I think it's a

very different interior life than mine. I believe it's a world in which one cannot actually conceive of oneself, in that deeply interior existential sense, outside of one's connections to others.

1.8 Thesis Structure

This section briefly describes the structure of the thesis.

The following Chapter 2 discusses the concept of social capital; what it is, how it is formed and how it may contribute to community wellbeing. Chapter 3 identifies the strengths and limitations of employing a social capital analytical framework. In Chapter 4 I describe how social capital was produced in remote traditional desert society prior to contact by way of processes that differ markedly from mainstream society. The focus of Chapter 5 is on how the traditional means of social capital production have been impacted and modified by colonisation. Chapter 6 describes how desert people have adopted and adapted new means of social capital production from the dominant culture. People continue to relate and build social networks amidst the changing social, political and economic circumstances of contemporary life. Chapter 7 considers how social capital theory, in part, might account for disadvantage found in many remote Aboriginal communities. In particular it discusses circumstances under which social capital may be generated in a distorted or toxic form, so called *'bad'* social capital.

The final Chapter 8 makes conclusions about each of the five objectives of this study outlined above. It then broadly suggests ways in which a perspective informed by theorising about social capital might guide future policies and practices that make for more thriving and prosperous Aboriginal communities. I also briefly consider potential avenues of further research, especially the need for empirical case studies to test out theory in practice.

The orderly organization of a thesis into structured chapters and sections can create a false impression of research proceeding seamlessly in a linear fashion from objectives to data gathering, analysis, findings and conclusion. I am the one who has imposed a conceptual order that does not exist amidst real world social processes. The reality is my research journey mirrored the *'fuzzy'* progress of Putnam's (1994: xiv) original work.

Social science is conventionally reported as though hypotheses were straightforwardly deduced from theory, evidence gathered, and verdicts rendered. Though theory and evidence have been important in this project, too, its progress has seemed more like an engrossing detective story, in which various suspects emerge and are cleared, shoe leather is wasted on false leads, new subplots materialize, some hunches payoff, earlier suspicions are reinterpreted in light of later evidence, each puzzle solved poses yet another, and the sleuth is never quite sure where the trail will lead.

CHAPTER 2: THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

2.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the origins and evolution of social capital; what the term means, its content, theoretical underpinnings and its significance internationally and in Australia. The core idea is that social outcomes result from cooperation for mutual benefit (Putnam, 1993: 35-36). Social capital, so the theory goes, is the resource that enables people to act cooperatively in many aspects of life. Critiques of this theory are the subject of Chapter 3.

2.2 Defining Capitals

2.2.1 Overview

In this section I firstly consider the defining characteristics of '*capital*' so that I might use it as a stepping-stone to then consider the sense in which '*social capital*' might be considered a form of capital. There are aspects both agreed and contested.

2.2.2 Defining Capital

The term '*capital*' refers to a resource that generates a return in the form of a reliable flow of benefits over time (Biddle, 2011: 3; Johnson et al, 2003: 6). It is characteristic that a significant investment of time and resources is required and capital takes time to mature (Cullen & Whiteford, 2001: 13; Portes, 1998: 3-4; Putnam, 1994: 167-169). Immediate benefits are foregone in order to (hopefully) reap a return in the long-term.

The term '*capital*' can refer to many things, depending on the context in which it is used. Physical capital describes plant and equipment. Financial capital describes a return on money invested. Originally capital had currency only in the economics and accounting professions. Subsequently use of the term broadened considerably in meaning as it entered disciplines such as sociology, psychology, community development, political science, policy and demography (Castle, 2002).

Now there are numerous categorises of '*capital*' (Anheier et al, 1995; O'Rand, 2001; Gartman, 1991; Bourdieu, 1986). Human capital is embedded in education and training. Natural capital is embedded in the land and environment. It encapsulates geology, soil, air, water and all living things on the land (Katz, 2000). Cultural capital is derived from processes of socialisation. Political capital refers to the level of public trust in government. Institutional capital describes public trust in the institutions of governance and regulation (the '*rules of the game*'). Finally social capital is about connections and networks that are constructed out of norms of trust and reciprocity.

Different forms of capital are complementary and mutually reinforcing (Putnam, 1995: 6). For example, a job creation program linked to community networks (social capital), political support (political capital), diverse funding sources (financial capital), skills training (human capital) and local norms of work (cultural capital) is likely to be more effective than one that is not.

It is also characteristic of capital that it can be transmuted from one form into another (Bourdieu 1986; Putnam, 1993: 4). For example natural capital in the form of bauxite can be transformed into aluminium, via the physical capital embodied in plant and equipment, and then sold to generate financial capital.

2.2.3 Is Social Capital Really 'Capital'?

There is debate about whether '*social capital*' satisfies the necessary criteria to be termed '*capital*' at all (Arrow, 2000). It all depends on what criteria are specified as essential. For while the different types of capital have commonalities, there are also significant differences.

Financial capital is a private good that can be banked, possessed, sold, transferred and counted. However, Putnam (1993) does not see social capital as a resource that can accrue to an individual. Putnam (1993: 4) writes it is "*not the private property of those who benefit from it*". Rather it is a collective resource that exists only in the relational space between interacting individuals (Coleman, 2000: 160; Krishna, 2002: 81; Johnson et al, 2005: 26). Social capital is constructed from trust and reciprocity, and one cannot be trusting or reciprocal alone (Putnam, 2000: 19). A participant in this study (Interview 9) stated:

What I like about social capital is that it's the only measure that I know that is a measure of the relationships between people. You can't have a measure of social capital that is not a measure of the relationship between people.

There is not, however, universal acceptance that social capital cannot be accumulated or individualised. For Sobel (2002: 139) social capital "*describes circumstances in which individuals can use membership in groups and networks to secure benefits.*" Bourdieu (1986) describes ways in which privileged social classes deliberately use social capital to accumulate financial capital for themselves. Thus "*Social relationships can be seen as investments that yield advantageous outcomes*" (Bankston & Zhou, 2002: 286). Social capital, however, may differ from other forms in that its production may be a purely incidental outcome and not part of any investment strategy. People do not consciously join a group, play sport or attend a meeting in order to produce social capital, yet in the course of doing all these things stocks of the resource are generated nevertheless (Putnam, 1993: 4).

Stocks of physical capital deplete if not replenished. Machines wear out. However, it is characteristic of social capital that it is self-reproducing (Putnam, 1993: 30; Johnson, 2003: 34). Natural capital has a similar quality (Wackernagel et al, 1999). Stocks of human capital also increase through use. The more skills are practiced the better they tend to become.

Arguably discussion about whether or not social capital is technically a form of capital or not misses the key point: that "*social networks have value*" because they make collective coordinated action possible and improve the efficiency and wellbeing of society (Putnam, 2000: 19).

The term '*social capital*' was purposely designed to counterbalance an overemphasis placed on financial capital according to Cox (1995), Rae (2002: XI) and Mclean et al, (2002: 3). Joining the terms '*social*' and '*capital*' is a way of emphasising that society and economy matter. The word '*capital*' is intended to communicate the importance of social organisation, especially to people from a business or economics background (Routledge & Von Amsberg, 2003).

Johnson (et al 2003: 33) describe social capital as "*a fashionable metaphor*" that in part rebadges what sociologists previously called social networks in order to associate them with "*physical capital and human capital as 'stocks' which deserve public policy attention and in which society should 'invest'*". In the literature of social capital metaphors abound. Sergelden (1996: 196) calls it "*the glue*" that binds society together, while for Hogan and Owen (2000: 75) it is the "*oil*" that lubricates communal action. Portes (1998: 1) writes that really social capital is no more than "*shorthand for the positive consequences of sociability.*" Mowbray (2004: 4) likened the spread of social capital rhetoric to "*an escaped laboratory virus*".

2.2.4 Defining Social Capital

There is no single universally accepted definition of social capital (Bankston & Zhou, 2002: 286). A participant in this study (Interview 9) reflected on the fault lines of opinion and the '*definitional wars*' that have been waged over the concept.

[Y]ou ended up with all the pithy little shit fights about what it meant ... and people started re-defining it, and re-arguing it and making it individualised. It became a sort of bickering thing.

Firstly there is confusion over whether the term is meant to describe a social outcome (the stock of capital) or the social processes that are involved in its production (Woolcock, 1998: 156). Pridmore et al (2007: 113) regard social capital as a *“stock of active connections among people (including trust, mutual understanding, and shared values and behaviours) that binds members of human networks and communities and that also empowers them to make co-operative action and participation.”* However Cox (1995: 15) uses the term to refer to processes that *“establish networks, norms and social trust between people which facilitate co-ordination and cooperation for mutual benefit”*.

Secondly there are differences over whether social capital should necessarily be defined as a beneficial resource or defined in a neutral way as a resource that may potentially have ‘good’ and ‘bad’ outcomes (Johnson et al, 2005). The literature does tend to assume social capital is productive of desired social benefits (Johnson et al, 2005: 26). Cox and Caldwell (2000: 53) pose a rhetorical question: *“If it was just as likely to be productive of bad outcomes as good ones, would we be attempting to promote its stocks or lamenting its decline?”*

However, according to Bankston and Zhou (2002: 291) like any resource social capital has no innate moral or ethical quality. Its formation does not always result in productive social relations. Vigilante groups, football hooligans, closed ethnic enclaves and political factions are all products of an emotional solidarity founded in collective activity (Wilson, 2006: 353). Any kind of capital is capable of producing net negative consequences and also of benefitting the few at the expense of the many. For this reason it might be more analytically useful to adopt a definition of social capital that assumes sociability to be necessarily neither ‘good’ nor ‘bad.’

Thirdly there are differences over how broadly social capital should be defined. There is agreement that it has a social networks component, but there are differences over whether it also encompasses a more nebulous normative component. If social capital does have a norms component, the issue for some becomes how to operationalize it? Values do not lend themselves to direct observation or measurement. A significant body of the social capital literature discusses issues of quantification (Stone & Hughes, 2002; Stone 2001; ABS, 2002; Lin et al, 2001; Lochner et al, 1999; Mignone, 2003; Narayan & Cassidy, 2001; Snijders, 1999; Van Deth, 2003; Wilson, 2006).

Sociologists, generally consider social capital does have both a networks and a normative component that comprises the values of trust and reciprocity that make cooperation possible. Cox and Caldwell (2000: 55) suggest the value of social capital is that it *“offers the possibility to think outside the measurement square to integrate feelings, perceptions and actions.”* Similarly Onyx and Bullen (2000: 126) argue that the value of connectedness cannot and should not be quantified because there is no scale that can adequately gauge the *“subtleties and complexities of human life.”* In other words it is the normative content that gives social capital its substance and meaning in a particular context.

However, economists such as Hunter (2004: 18) tend to favour narrower conceptualisations that focus on mapping the social networks, thereby stripping away the harder to measure normative aspects. It is possible to quantify the number of networks and the frequency of contact between people within them. However, Knack and Keefer (1997) argue that counting networks can be misleading to the extent it assumes all networks are equally effective in producing social capital.

There is concern that the term social capital may have been over extended and over generalised to the point where it now has little meaning (Putzel, 1997; Portes, 1998: 1). Nevertheless social capital is not the only broad notion that is subject to multiple conceptualisations. For example, definitional differences also surround terms such as ‘social exclusion’ (Johnson et al, 2003: 53). An absence of universal definition does not render a term analytically useless. It does, however, establish an obligation on the part of those who use it to be clear about what they mean when they do. In this thesis I use the term ‘social capital’ to refer to social resources that fuel human cooperation such as relationships, civic engagement, support, and norms of reciprocity and trust.

2.3 Origins of Social Capital Theory

2.3.1 Overview

In this section I describe the philosophical origins of social capital and provide a potted history explaining the emergence of the concept. The *'networks'* version of social capital theory promulgated by Putnam (1993) has liberal democratic roots, however there is a different version associated with the work of Bourdieu (1986) that emerges out of the epistemological tradition of conflict theory.

2.3.2 Liberal Democratic Roots

Putnam acknowledges the liberal philosophical influence of de Tocqueville (Putnam, 1994: 10). In *Democracy in America* de Tocqueville (1835) expounded his belief in individual liberty and freedom of association, but within a framework respectful of the rights of others. He saw inequality as providing the motivational incentive for the poor to escape their circumstance.

The social capital perspective is that free association between people is necessary to allow networks of mutual support to form (Stewart-Weeks, 2000: 296). Social capital theory regards active forms of civic participation as necessary for democracy (Sirianni & Friedland, 1997; Newton, 1997 & 2001). According to this view citizens are only likely to trust a nation state that is able to demonstrate that its decisions and actions are credible, consistent and made in good faith. Citizens might then choose to reciprocate by demonstrating their willingness to contribute to civic life (Braithwaite & Levi, 1998: 377; Peel, 1998: 334). Civic-mindedness is chosen, not something a state can impose (Braithwaite and Levi, 1998: 380). Citizens exercise discretion.

A cornerstone of social capital theory is that a thriving stable democratic society requires vibrant civic involvement. Putnam's (1995: 170) social capital is associated with the notion of a virtuous *'civil society'* that values the *'common good'* and volunteerism. The *'common good'* is the idea that personal and family interests can, and should, be put aside for some higher collective purpose (Robbins, 2007). It is a force for social cohesion. The *'common good'* can be understood as an ideal concerning virtuous behaviour and ethical action, at least in western societies. Rowse (1992: 55) states that, where the notion of the *'common good'* is absent, relations of patronage tend to be more easily established.

Societies that hold civic values do well according to Putnam (1995: 37). He suggests such values are found in a community with a substantial stock of social capital (Putnam, 1995: 167). Volunteerism and political participation are not found in communities where distrust, isolation, apathy, parochialism, feelings of powerlessness, exploitation, and alienation from public life prevail. Putnam (1993: 182) explains the rationale:

[C]itizens in civic communities expect better government and (in part through their own efforts), they get it. They demand more effective public service, and they are prepared to act collectively to achieve their shared goals. Their counterparts in less civic regions more commonly assume the role of early alienated and cynical supplicants.

Cullen and Whiteford (2001: 10) describe social capital as *"crucial to the success of civil society"* because when people come together in social networks they create a voice for those who might otherwise be *"locked out of more formal avenues to affect change"*. They do, however, need to be organised collectively (Putnam et al 1993: 182; Krishna, 2002: 16). Krishna (2002: 1) writes:

Concerted action made possible by civic associations enables citizens to engage state and market agencies more effectively ... service delivery is improved, accountability and transparency are enhanced, and the pool of resources is enlarged when organized groups of citizens engage constructively with the state.

Putnam (1994: 183-185) argues social capital may be more important than any other form of capital in explaining the achievement of political stability and effective representative democratic government. However, his ideas about what makes for a civil society do not attract universal support as discussed in the following chapter. McLean (et al 2002: 8-9) questions

whether there is a direct correlation between social capital and democracy. Nor is he excited about the prospect of reinvigorating civic-mindedness: *"The idea of civil society is often connected to a nostalgic yearning for the rejuvenation of old customs and institutions"* (McLean, et al, 2002: 9).

2.3.3 Brief History of Social Capital

Hanifan (1916) was the first to use the term social capital, recognising the contribution social connections can make to wellbeing. Goodwill, fellowship, mutual sympathy and social intercourse are identified as the factors that drive its production. According to Hanifan, 1916: 131) *"The community as a whole will benefit by the cooperation of all of its parts, while the individual will find in his associations the advantages of the help, the sympathy, and the fellowship of his neighbors."*

The currency of the term social capital subsequently waned, but after a long hiatus work by the sociologist Coleman (1988) resurrected the term (Woolcock, 2001). He used the concept to analyse the role networks play in socialisation and the promotion of shared social values. Coleman (2000: 16) writes: *"Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible."* His case study described how diamond traders in the Jewish community in New York were able to regularly do business with each other without need of contracts because they felt certain that others would behave ethically in accordance with this norm (Coleman, 2000). Ample stocks of social capital meant obligations were enforceable without recourse to law.

It was, however, Robert Putnam's work (et al 1993, 1993, 1995, 1996, 1999, 2000 & 2001) that brought the concept to the attention of policy-makers. He defined social capital as *"features of social organizations, such as networks, norms, and trust, that facilitate action and cooperation for mutual benefit"* (Putnam, 1995: 67). His work identified sources of social capital in Italy and the USA. He argued civil society was on the decline in the USA, and to symbolise it he marshalled the evocative image of a lone bowler playing in an empty alley where people once flocked to play together in leagues (Putnam, 1995).

Subsequently policy interest in social capital burgeoned (Ostrom, 1994 & 1999; White, 2002; Aldridge et al 2002; Knack 2002; Castle, 2002; Van Staveren, 2003; Subramanian et al, 2003). The term came into general usage in institutions such as the OECD (2001) and the World Bank (<http://www.worldbank.org/poverty/scapital/>). It attracted attention precisely because it claimed to be able to account for community disadvantage (Narayan, 2002; Narayan-Parker & 1999).

2.3.4 Networks Social Capital

Putnam's theory of social capital is sometimes referred to as the networks version because in essence his point is that *"voluntary cooperation is easier in a community that has inherited a substantial stock of social capital, in the form of norms of reciprocity and networks of civic engagement."* (Putnam, 1994: 167). Putnam not only argued that high levels of trust and reciprocity make sustained social cooperation possible but, furthermore, it strengthens both the polity and the economy. *"Strong society, strong economy: strong society, strong state"* he writes (Putnam, 1994: 176).

Putnam's (et al 1993) contribution to social capital theory arose out of comparative case studies he conducted in Italy in which he accounted for differences in socio-economic outcomes in terms of variable stocks of social capital. He was able to discount institutional governance as an explanatory factor because the regions he studied had the same system (Putnam 1994: 5-6). Putnam (et al 1993) observed that the north was associated with stability and prosperity, while disorder and poverty reigned in the south. He concluded differences in regional prosperity were due to different norms of civic participation. Where the north was socially trusting and outward looking, the south was insular and closed. Only the north enjoyed a vibrant society and prosperous economy. In other words the north had stocks of social capital the south did not. He reasoned such variation in performance must be due to differences in the cultural, social, political and economic environment and looked for particular contextual factors that might explain it (Putnam, 1994: 8).

Northern Italy has a long tradition of flourishing public and community institutions and voluntary civic participation extending back to mediaeval times (Putnam, 1994: 16). Active participation in political and social activities and a willingness to trust, reciprocate, and transact business with others are established norms. Putnam (1993: 30) found its *"networks of civic engagement embody*

past success at collaboration, which can serve as a cultural template for future collaboration.”

By contrast the relatively impoverished south displayed little civic-mindedness. There was no sense of hope and optimism about the future. An intense *'localism'*, a predisposition to only look inwards for resources and support, exacerbated disadvantage. People trusted only those they knew and who were closest to them. There was deep suspicion of outsiders. Consequently there was little civic engagement as gauged by a lack of participation in formal organisations.

Putnam (1994: 5-9) found the prevailing public view of civic and political institutions was that they were self-interested and corrupt. People were contemptuous of governing institutions, not even thinking of them as in any sense their own. Putnam (1994) concluded the absence of social trust and generalized reciprocity were obstacles to the generation of broader forms of social capital. Subsequent work by Krishna (2002) in the vastly different context of rural India lends support to Putnam's argument. Krishna (2002: 28) found: *“Conspicuous differences are apparent in performance levels among institutionally similar villages.”*

Putnam (1994: 173) concluded that established norms play a key role in social capital formation. Where people interact regularly in many contexts they are likely to develop informal rules about what constitutes acceptable social behaviour (Putnam, 1994: 173). Through many encounters, they reinforce their mutually trusting expectations. Past collective successes and failures become culturally embedded, providing a template for future cooperation. Putnam (1994: 174) writes:

The civic traditions of northern Italy provide an historical repertoire of forms of collaboration that, having proved their worth in the past, are available to citizens for addressing new problems of collective action.

Proponents of Putnam's (1994) version of social capital believe life opportunities stem from connections people have with each other and arise when social, economic, political and cultural transactions are embedded in broad rather than narrow social networks. A foundation of social trust enables norms of respectful and orderly behaviour to prevail, according to Gittel and Vidal (1998: 40). Hogan and Owen (2000: 96) succinctly summarise the essence of the argument:

Regions with high levels of social capital have vibrant civic communities, effective and responsive political institutions and thriving economies, while communities with limited stocks of social capital have diminished levels of civic community, ineffective and unresponsive political institutions, and weak economies.

2.3.5 Contribution of Bourdieu

French sociologist, philosopher and anthropologist Bourdieu (1985, 1986, 1990 & 1993) approaches the concept of social capital from a perspective grounded in the epistemological tradition of conflict theory (Randall, 1994). His interest lay in exploring the place social capital might play in class division.

Wilson (2006: 337) claims the philosophical roots of network social capital theorising can also be traced back to Weber (et al 1947) and Durkheim (1982). Their functionalist framework regards society as a system, the parts of which necessarily function together to promote cohesion, solidarity and stability (Block, 1996). However, Bourdieu (1986) opposes a functionalist understanding that assumes social processes trend towards social consensus.

Bourdieu (1993) distinguishes between the structural aspects of social capital (i.e. the type of networks formed) and their normative content (i.e. the customs they reinforce and spread). For it is not any particular structural unit itself that gives substance and meaning to social capital, but rather the norms and values it transmits. Familiar societal structures can promote quite different values in different cultural and social contexts. For example, while Bourdieu (1993) regards the family unit as an important site for social capital production, he does not assume it is uniform or even necessarily positive. In Chapter 7 I argue this insight is critical to understanding the changes impacting on the family unit in remote communities.

The term social capital is understood as being essentially about establishing networks that have economic utility in the short or longer term. Social capital is essentially a tool of privilege which Bourdieu (1986) says reduces everything to economics, a point where even the *'priceless'*

has a price. Bourdieu (1986: 52) writes: *“economic capital is at the root of all the other types of capital and that these transformed disguised forms of economic capital, never entirely reducible to that definition, produce their most specific effects only to the extent that they conceal (not least from their possessors) the fact that economic capital is at their root.”* Essentially he understood social capital as a legitimating mechanism for capitalism. Following the lead of Bourdieu, Portes (1998: 6) writes: *“social capital stands for the ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures.”* A participant interviewed for this study (Interview 8) reinforced the point:

Bourdieu, if you read him, sees all capitals as really only feeding into economic advantage. So [for him] social capital is really only the network of the elite by which they maintain their elite status and therefore enhance their elite status, and that can certainly happen.

Bourdieu (1986: 51) defines social capital as the aggregate of *“durable networks of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition.”* The greater the connections then the greater the power and influence that can be mobilised (Bourdieu, 1986: 51). Group formation and membership provide collective backing. Use of an institutional name, for instance, binds a group together in shared identity. Members represent, speak and act in unison, thereby *“enabling numerous varied, scattered agents to act as one man”* (Bourdieu, 1986: 530). Irrespective of whether it is a business, a school, a gang, a family or other kind of social structure, all can gain advantage by exercising certain institutionally guaranteed rights. Bourdieu (1986: 51-52) writes: *“The profits which accrue from membership in a group are the basis of the solidarity which makes them possible.”*

The term *‘habitus’* was coined by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) to refer to the values, expectations and lifestyles invested with meaning that are adopted by particular social groups and acquired through shared experience of everyday life. Habitus refers to a structuring of the mind through a set of acquired schemata by which they mean organised patterns of thought and behaviour, tastes and sensibilities. Bourdieu argues certain beliefs and ways of doing things become embedded in the social structure, perhaps even persisting long after the original purpose of that behaviour or belief may have been forgotten or become obsolete. The socialisation processes he describes do not necessarily presuppose any *“conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them”* (Bourdieu, 1990). Thus Bourdieu did not understand network formation as necessarily about the conscious pursuit of material self-interest. He acknowledges that feelings towards others, such as gratitude and friendship, could be deep and enduring (Bourdieu, 1986: 52). But essentially, as Bourdieu (1985: 249) sees it, social networks are used to mediate access to economic resources, be it conscious and purposeful or not.

Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) argue that social capital is created through the transmission of shared values and language, what they call *‘cultural capital’*. Amongst the more privileged members of a society, this resource is seamlessly embedded in family and community connections (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995: 132). Bourdieu (1986: 46-47) observed how privileged groups set themselves apart as a class that self-reproduces through shared habits and patterns of mutual interaction. Their socialisation into a set of institutionalised norms serves to concentrate social capital.

Less privileged minorities do not have these kinds of personal and institutional connections because they lack the *‘right kind’* of inherited capital (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). They are excluded because they do not display the requisite norms and values required to gain access. Hage (2004) has drawn on the work of Bourdieu (1986) to explore the intersection of issues of race and power in Australia. Hage (2004) argues that in order to secure a central position in the social hierarchy, people not of Anglo ethnicity can feel pressured to exchange the cultural capital derived from their own background for that of *‘whiteness’* which is defined, not as a stable or biologically determined trait, but rather as a set of shifting social practices (Dolby, 2000: 49). A circular field is envisioned with a powerful centre comprised of influential *‘white’ Australians’* effectively positioned to shape what it is to be *‘Australian’*. Marginalised cultures out on the periphery are not only ruled over by the values of the centre, but must also change and compete to secure influence, a theme revisited in Chapter 7.

Bourdieu (1986) makes categorical distinctions between different types of capital - economic, cultural, symbolic and social - in order that he might analyse the interactions between them. It is a device to illuminate the ways one form of capital can be transmuted into another, but

always trending towards economic ends. A recurring theme in this thesis is elaboration of the distinctive ways in which desert people mediate access to social capital by transmuting other capital from one form into another where it suits their purpose. In Chapter 6 I argue that desert people are particularly adept at transforming capital. But I also argue that it is social capital they pursue, with all the other capitals in its service.

2.4 Production of Social Capital

2.4.1 Overview

This section of the thesis describes the processes by which networks social capital is produced. In Putnam's view it is a product of trust and reciprocity. It is described as being the product of a virtuous circle, but its production is not guaranteed and it can also be eroded.

2.4.2 Human Motivation

Network social capital theory brings with it a particular philosophical understanding of what motivates people to connect with each other. People are seen as driven by desire for recognition and reputation that can only be attained in connection with others (Johnson et al, 2003: 6-7; Levitas, 1998; Fukuyama, 1992, 1996 & 1999). Feelings of status and self worth are pursued through family, at work and in the community. Where aberrant behaviour occurs it is interpreted as a consequence of this fundamental human need not being fulfilled.

Historically market economics has understood people as essentially self-interested maximising consumers in search of income, wealth and material satisfaction in the marketplace (Keynes, 1936). Conversely socialism saw people as selfless communalists safeguarded by a benevolent state (Marx et al 1992). Social capital theory rejects such ideological assumptions arguing that not only do humans seek to relate socially, their reasons for doing so are driven by both instrumental and intrinsic motives (Cox & Caldwell, 2000).

A participant in this study (Interview 11) placed understandings of human motivation in an Aboriginal context:

Affiliation is an underlying primary psychological driver of why we do what we do. To affiliate with others and to feel that we belong, probably for a whole range of personal reasons but also for a whole raft of other reasons, people need to locate where they sit in the schema of their family and their community and their society. A lot of the vehicles that provide that sense of belonging have, I suspect, been broken down over time.

2.4.3 Trust and Reciprocity

Trust is a firm belief that a person, group, organisation or institution can be relied upon and reciprocity is a process of exchange conducted with others for mutual benefit (Fukuyama 1996 & 1999).

When people place trust in each other they are, in effect, letting the decisions of others impact on their wellbeing (Sobel, 2002: 148). A participant in this study (Interview 11) observed *"It's sort of like there's a stage of faith one needs to have to engage with someone else where you may have to park or put aside fears as you step into the abyss."*

There are different types of trust (Fukuyama, 1996). Inter-personal trust is displayed between closely bonded people such as family and friends. Social trust is the generalised trust displayed in interactions between strangers (Putnam, 1995: 137; Hughes, Bellamy & Black, 2000: 225). There are other forms of trust too. Public trust, for instance, is about preparedness to place faith in institutions such as the state and the rule of law (Putnam, 1995: 137).

Social capital theory posits trust as oiling the wheels of engagement, communication, and collaboration (Putnam, 1993: 3 or 30). Falk (2000) writes:

Trust is an important dimension of social capital. Trust underlies and contributes to the quality of interactions between people ... Trust is certainly the critical component of any social cohesion.

More than a personal attribute, trust can become embedded in the norms of society, perhaps grounded in centuries of civic tradition and history as Putnam (1994: 16-19 & 171) suggests. According to Levi and Braithwaite (1998: 378) the more people are treated as trustworthy, the more an underlying ethos of trust is built. A set of underpinning cooperative norms is entrenched and embedded in the social structure (Fukuyama, 1999: 16; Cullen & Whiteford, 2001: 37). Social trust gives rise to an *“expectation that arises within a community of regular, honest and cooperative behaviour, based on commonly shared norms, on the part of other members of that community”* (Fukuyama, 1995: 26).

In a community where social trust is a norm, strangers are trusted and treated respectfully because the expectation is they will reciprocate in kind. Cox and Caldwell (2000: 62-63) highlight the challenges of life without trust:

Imagine a society where you would only ask the time of someone who had been recommended, or about whom you had evidence of reliability. How much more awkward than it is would life be with such a level of general distrust.

The significance of trust is that it lowers the transaction costs of conducting everyday business (Onyx & Bullen, 2000: 107; Hughes et al 2000: 229). People choose to cooperate with one another without the need for adversarial barter, formal rules and regulations, coercion, sanction or inducement (Onyx & Bullen, 2000: 108). Putnam (1993: 1) writes: *“Working together is easier in a community blessed with a substantial stock of social capital.”*

Efficient economies and commercial transactions require wide networks of social trust (Granovetter, 1985). The establishment of a corporation, for example, involves trusted non-family members occupying senior positions and serving populations they don't know personally. Trust is what enables people to do business with each other with a minimum of legal agreement (Johnson et al, 2005: 34, 37 & 44). As Leigh (2010: 121) observes, *“trust can lubricate commercial transactions, allowing a handshake to take the place of a complex contract.”*

Markets function efficiently only if underpinned by social trust according to Tanner (2012: 255). People in insular societies are reluctant to do commerce with those they don't know (Putnam, 1994:174). Where trust ends at the boundary of family and street, a small neighbourhood business must rely on localised bonds for its survival. In the absence of broader networks, people are isolated from commercial information and opportunities.

Social trust is a scarce resource in remote communities. In this thesis I will argue that people need to be prepared to work hard and patiently to acquire social trust - just like in their search for water in the desert.

2.4.4 The Virtuous Circle

Putnam (1994) understands the production of social capital occurring in a self-generating virtuous circle of interaction. It is the product of repeated on-going and self-reinforcing cooperation that becomes cumulative and habitual (Cox & Caldwell, 2000: 61). The pre-requisite is a social environment in which community members feel sufficiently safe to extend relations outwards beyond familiar family and friends (Plumptre & Graham, 1999: 1). The initial wellspring of trust may be a shared sense of collective identity (Braithwaite & Levi, 1998: 376).

Over time initial small-scale localised cooperation garners the confidence necessary to tackle larger scale issues requiring greater levels of social cooperation (Putnam, 1994: 167-169). More substantial social networks form and become embedded within a culture of generalised social trust and reciprocity that comes to encompass ever more distant people and institutions. Trust begets wider trust as people discover they have interests in common and realise the mutual benefits.

Recognition of mutual inter-dependence is required to support the establishment of a social norm of generalised reciprocity (Putnam, 1994: 177). An example provided by Putnam (1994: 167) is a farming community that discovers it gets more done with less labour and equipment when they share.

The greater the level of trust within the community, the greater the likelihood of cooperation. And cooperation itself breeds trust. (Putnam, 1994: 171)

The process of producing social capital is not a zero sum game. Increasing the stocks of one group need not occur at the expense of another. A participant in this study (Interview 8) described a dynamic process in which cause and effect were inseparable.

The magical thing about social capital is the more you use the more you get. So in the coming together ... you are actually creating more. That becomes a potential resource for next time as long as you keep the connections going ... It is iterative so it's all connected. Everything is producing each other all the time. It doesn't matter which are causes, which is chicken, which is egg, which causes which?

2.4.5 The Vicious Circle

A pre-requisite to the on-going production of social capital is an environment where people are considered sufficiently trustworthy to have trust placed in them (Putnam, 1994: 167). The difficulty is that trust is not always well founded. The trusted can exploit the goodwill of the trusting (Braithwaite & Levi, 1998: 377). According to Braithwaite and Levi (1998: 379) *"Bearers of communal trust are particularly vulnerable to those who seek advantage through breaching trust."*

Fundamentally social capital matters because it is the resource that a community uses to act collectively in its own interests, according to Onyx and Bullen (2000: 129). Putnam (1994: 168 & 1996: 163) writes that a failure to cooperate for mutual benefit does not occur because individuals fail to see the potential advantages of mutual support. Rather it happens because at a societal level insufficient people are convinced that placing trust in others is likely to be reciprocated. The difficulty is a phenomenon known as *'the tragedy of the commons'* (Hardin, 1968). It arises because the creation of a trusting environment is beyond the power and influence of any one individual to achieve alone and people fear their trust will be exploited (Putnam, 1994: 172 & 177). The barriers to cooperation are cynicism and expectations of betrayal and shirking: *"In the absence of coordination and credible mutual commitment ... everyone defects, ruefully but rationally, confirming one another's melancholy expectations"* (Putnam, 1993: 1).

Once a climate of distrust sets in, suspicions are always present and motives always questioned (Putnam, 1994: 170). Putnam (1994: 177) describes a potential *"suffocating miasma of vicious circles"* where social isolation, exploitation, disorder and stagnation rule the day. Just as trust builds social capital, a pervasive climate of distrust destroys it. Where social trust is scarce communities remain trapped in a cycle of disadvantage (Putnam, 1995). A participant in this study (Interview 9) saw risks for any society where trust doesn't extend further than one's immediate circle: *"It is the trust of the stranger, the unknown, the other that really is the crucial difference: no trust of strangers, no trust of the unknown, no trust of the other, you've got problems."*

Only with social trust are people willing to sponsor each other's careers, share information and transact business impersonally with a minimum of costly and protracted negotiation or legal agreement.

2.4.6 Benefits of Social Capital

Proponents of social capital see it as the resource that enables people to act together to achieve their collective goals (Hogan & Owen, 2000). The way in which collective benefits are gained is by widening and deepening social networks (Grootaert & van Bastelaer, 2002: 10-11). This section identifies the nature of these benefits, at least as claimed by the proponents of social capital theory.

Firstly a stock of social capital may facilitate the sharing of information. According to Cullen and Whiteford (2001: 26) it speeds up the adoption of ideas. Where social capital exists people are more likely to hear about opportunities from each other. Examples might be raised awareness of issues such as diet, effective parenting, and childcare options. There is a trail of evidence indicating health and social and emotional wellbeing may be positively correlated with social capital because there is better access to information from others in the network (Johnson et al, 2003: 41; Baum et al 2000; Kawachi et al, 1999; Kawachi & Berkman, 2000; Leeder & Dominello, 1999; Lochner et al, 2003; Muntaner & Lynch, 2002; Popay, 2000; Pilkington, 2002; Petersen, 2002; Veenstra, 2001).

Secondly a stock of social capital may contribute to community safety because connected people are likely to trust and look out for each other (Johnson et al, 2005: 32). They inform on suspicious activity and cooperate with police to catch culprits (Johnson et al, 2005: 43). The justice system is more effective because the population assists (Johnson et al, 2005: 43). There is evidence indicating communities with a high stock of social capital are likely to have a reduced incidence of violence, crime and corruption (Johnson et al, 2005: 41).

Thirdly social capital is said to contribute to social order. Those with differences are able to reconcile their disagreements in a civil manner without protracted disputation. Amongst people in the same social network there may be a greater willingness to recognise and acknowledge each others position as legitimate. Where there is a norm of tolerance, sectional interests can be put aside in the interests of the '*common good*'. Cox and Caldwell (2000: 59) argue: *Adequate levels of social capital facilitate adaptation to change and diversity, and develop the ability of individuals and organizations to deal with the inevitable conflicting demands of democratic processes.*

Fourthly proponents of social capital assert that it is enabling of economic participation (Winter, 2000a: 14; Cullen & Whiteford, 2001; Woolcock, 1998: 174, 2002 a & 2002b, Solow, 2000; Rothstein, 2003; Routledge & Amsberg, 2003; Schmid, 2000 & 2003; Woolcock, 2001). A study of the tightly knit Vietnamese community in New Orleans, for example, found parents provided intensive homework support because they felt ashamed if their children didn't achieve academically in accordance with high community expectations (Zhou & Bankston, 1996). Prevailing social norms of the community socially sanctioned against behaviours such as truancy and gang membership. Knack and Keefer (1997) report finding a correlation between trust and levels of economic growth in twenty-nine nations. Work by Hughes et al (2000: 237) also reports a positive association between cooperative behaviour and level of social and economic development.

Finally it is important to note that a stock of social capital, by itself, provides no guarantee of any benefit, for it is not just its quantity that counts (Krishna, 2002: Preface x). It is capacity to use the resource strategically that may open up access to an expanded range of life opportunities.

2.5 Types of Social Capital

2.5.1 Overview

Putnam (2000) makes a conceptual distinction between bonding and bridging types of social capital. It is critical to understanding his explanation of disadvantage.

My thesis limits itself to consideration of bonding and bridging. However, I am aware of attempts to extend the social capital typology that arguably have not fared well in the competitive world of ideas. The term '*linking social capital*' is sometimes, but not widely, used to refer to vertical institutional connections, such as between a community and the state (Adler & Kwon, 2000). However, social capital theorists generally describe it as a resource constructed out of horizontal, not vertical relations. Therefore, by such criteria, '*linking social capital*' does not qualify as social capital at all.

The term '*cognitive social capital*' describes social cohesion that is a by-product of shared thinking, common norms, values, attitudes, beliefs, rituals and routines. According to Wilson (2006: 346) it refers to "*cooperation between neighbours [that] may be based on a strong cognitive bond that may not be reflected in a formal structural arrangement.*" The term has some currency (Chiu et al; 2006), having similarities with Bourdieu's (1986) notion of '*habitus*', described earlier.

2.5.2 Bonding Social Capital

Bonding refers to the cohesive, emotionally intense and dependable ties people have with each other within their immediate circle of personal networks (Adler & Kwon, 2002). Bonds sustain localised cooperation. These are homogeneous social networks founded on mutual affection. Relationships are characterised by solidarity and shared norms of reciprocity and exchange based on a high degree of unquestioned inter-personal trust. Bonding ties reinforce homogeneity because they are forged between people with similar characteristics in similar circumstance (Putnam, 1994: 34 & 2000: 19-22; Wilson, 2006: 349). The family unit is a foundation stone of bonding social capital (Putnam, 1995: 73; Winter 2000; Stone, 2001). But

dense *'family like'* bonds may also exist within gangs, cults and cliques.

Bonds render survival easier in times of uncertainty, providing a source of mutual support and protection (Heffron, 2000). Those who are bonded are able to access resources from each other. Where bonds are strong, those within a group share what they have through favours and loans. Thus bonds are a collective social safety net. They provide a form of *'poverty proofing'*, effectively enabling people to cope and get by.

2.5.3 Bridging Social Capital

Bridging social capital is comprised of open, outward looking horizontal networks that connect diverse people with differing values and interests (Putnam, 2000: 22). Because bridging connections are broader than bonding ties, they are necessarily also weaker and looser. Unlike bonds these are connections that reach beyond one's own social group. Putnam (2000: 411) places great store in bridging social capital, seeing it as the factor that enables people to *"transcend our social and political and professional identities to connect with people unlike ourselves."*

Bridging social capital may open up previously closed social and economic pathways, enabling opportunities beyond family and friends (Wilson, 2006: 352). People are better positioned to access and share the knowledge and resources of others. According to Cullen and Whiteford (2001: 26):

Long term solutions to the problems of inadequate resources and social exclusion require connecting the marginalized to mainstream resources and services through mechanisms of bridging social capital, which unites these excluded groups with the majority ... Bridging social capital is most likely to help improve the standard of living for these excluded and marginalized groups.

2.5.4 Balancing Bonding and Bridging

Social capital theory is not simply about maximising the total stock of social capital (Johnson, et al, 2003: 35). There are limits to what can be attained through bonding alone. Both bonds and bridges are seen as required in order to reap its benefits (Lahn, 2012: 5).

Proponents of social capital theory advocate an optimized balance between bonding and bridging stocks (Putman, 1994: 175; Woolcock, 1998: 158). While bonding social capital is a valued safety net that enables people to *'get by'* in time of need, broader networks of connection are understood to be necessary to *'get on'* and prosper. According to this view, as a participant in this study (Interview 9) noted, it is not so much the cumulative stock of social capital that matters but having the *"right mix."*

Granovetter (1973) argued that ideally social ties should not be too dense and ought to be balanced by weaker ties to external networks. Overly dense bonds, it was argued, tended to foster segregated communities that shut themselves off, not only from resources and support, but also from values such as tolerance and diversity. In a healthy community the immediate bonding ties of close groups are therefore counter balanced by broader ties that connect people to others well beyond their immediate circle (Knack & Keefer, 1997; Krishna, 2002: 24).

Ideally communities are nourished by the strength of their internal bonds and their external bridges (Falk, 2000). A participant in Interview 9 for my study stated:

What you are dealing with in any community that has to face issues of change is to make the bonds resilient rather than tight, so you want sufficient flexibility. You don't want to destroy the bonds, because they are important, but you do want to ensure the experiences that people have enhance their capacity to deal with 'the new' and 'the different' without undermining the existing networks.

According to this view a community rich in bonds may nevertheless suffers the effects of social and material deprivation in the absence of resources of bridging social capital. The problem, as social capital theory sees it, is not a lack of social capital per se, but rather stocks of bonding and bridging social capital that are out of balance.

2.5.5 Putnam Explains Disadvantage

Social capital theory, the networks version, understands disadvantage as a form of relational deprivation (Easterly, 2000; Collier, 1998 & 2002; Narayan, 2002; Quillan & Redd, 2008; Veenstra, 2001; OECD, 2001; Schmid, 2003; Woolcock, 1998, 2002). Disadvantage occurs when people are cut off from support networks (Collier, 1998 & 2002; Price-Robertson, 2011). From this perspective communities where disadvantage is concentrated are typically characterised by a lack of social trust and an absence of shared norms of reciprocity, civic participation, and social behaviour (Johnson et al, 2003).

Putnam (1993: 50) describes poor black American and Latinos in ghetto communities as having *“profound deficiencies”* in their social capital. Their life chances depend on localised ties that do not provide access to the kind of networks and resources required to escape life circumstance. Connecting with their similarly disadvantaged neighbours does not help because they too suffer from not being enmeshed in broader *‘resource rich’* social networks. Thus there is no payoff for them in terms of escaping disadvantage (Wilson, 2005; Putnam, 1993: 6). For this to occur people need in connections outside their community. Johnson et al (2003: 45) write:

[C]ontacts in one’s own ethnic group can usually only take you a moderate distance up the career and business success ladders. To make it big, one needs contacts in the wider community; one needs ‘bridging networks’, or one might say ‘bridging’ social capital.

Escaping disadvantage ultimately requires awareness of social, cultural, educational, training, employment and business opportunities beyond ones immediate circle. In other words it requires bridging social capital. The difficulty is that people are only able to take up external opportunities if there is social trust between them. This is what enables information to be shared freely and business to be transacted. In the absence of social trust and generalised reciprocity people have only the resources of their own family and friends to fall back on.

A participant in this study (Interview 8) reflected on the difficulties faced by people without *“the social networks necessary to generate social action.”* They are closed off to information, services and external resources. Were a few individuals to ‘escape’ the community in hope of securing better life opportunities elsewhere, this only serves to further hollow out the collective social capital of those left behind, further eroding their networks (Putnam, 1993: 5-6).

The social capital perspective is that ultimately rising out of disadvantage requires that communities are able to get inside broader and more impersonal networks. Accessing them, however, assumes the development of a capacity for social trust between people who are not closely bonded.

2.6 Policy and Practice

2.6.1 Overview

This section of the thesis considers the policy and practice implications of a social capital perspective. It explains a so-called Third Way approach consistent with social capital theory and makes an important distinction between *‘community’* and the *‘community sector’* comprising organisations intended to serve it. This section also explores the ‘take up’ of the term social capital in Australia generally and use of the term specifically within an Aboriginal context.

2.6.2 The Third Way

Social capital theory is closely allied with the so-called Third Way policy approach (Giddens, 1998; Johnson, et al, 2005; Latham, 1998 & 2000). The Third Way can be thought of as social capital theory in practice (Winter, 2000: 13). It attaches primary importance to social networks and norms as the most fundamental source of community wellbeing and prosperity (Healy & Hampshire, 2002). It leads towards policy and practice that seeks to influence the quality and nature of those connections. The vision is of communities enmeshed in multiple and thriving social networks, enriching and extending them.

At the centre of the Third Way is the notion that good policy is that which creates a significant space and voice for community in civic affairs (Johnson, 2005: 5-7; Price, 2002). Fundamentally

it is about facilitating the empowerment of communities to decide and act. Proponents argue that audible community voices make society more effective by tapping local resources of experience, enthusiasm and commitment. Stewart-Weeks (2000: 285) writes:

If you want social capital to work its magic in public policy terms, you have to accept its logic, to work with the grain. You need to give people some space within which to associate, a reason to associate, a reason to associate in the first place, and significant scope to determine the outcomes they want to achieve.

The Third Way rejects old political dichotomies of 'left' and 'right' (Giddens, 1998). The 'left' leaning benevolent welfare state model is seen as harmful to the extent it intrudes upon and undermines the responsibilities of families and communities. The unbridled market capitalism advocated on the right is also seen as harmful because it undermines a social ethos of mutuality. Latham (2000: 203) writes:

The Left has allowed its distrust of markets and endless faith in the state to obscure the importance of civil society. The Right has been focused so tightly on replacing the state with economic markets that it has forgotten how to cultivate a trusting society.

Widespread use of the term social capital does not mean the notion is embedded in the thinking of policy-makers and practitioners. Christie and Greatorex (2004: 48) observe *"vagueness of social capital terminology in western debate has allowed different people to use it to bolster their own ideological perspective"*. Both 'the right' and 'the left' co-opt social capital terminology on occasion in support of older pre-existing political positions. For instance, the right has used 'social capital' to support arguments for 'small government'. While ideas about social capital do involve changing the role of the state, it is not necessarily about reducing it. The requirement is for more imaginative government, not less of it.

The emergence of social capital theory and the Third Way poses challenges for policy-makers. Stewart-Weeks (2000: 293) asks *"Is it possible to design policy systems that can tolerate, and even encourage, a wide divergence in style and approach and that, at the same time, can tolerate a high level of local discretion?"* Those conditioned to a 'command and control' approach of centralised accountability may find the transition difficult (Winter, 2000: 13). Peel (1998: 326) observes how the state may use 'empowered community' rhetoric while actually trending away from collaboration, with 'top down' approaches to service delivery predominating as before.

Cox and Caldwell (2000: 66) write that the growth of big government and big business can be detrimental to civil society, occurring at the expense of local communities. Both 'too much state' and 'too much market' may crowd out community voices (Onyx & Bullen, 2000: 106; Winter, 2000a: 3; Winter, 2000b: 31). Local people are excluded from the process of defining and interpreting their own needs. The Third Way stresses the maintenance of a balanced tension between the institutions of society: state, market and community (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992; Cox, 1995, 1997; Cox & Caldwell, 2000; Stewart-Weeks, 2000; Murphy & Thomas, 2000; Huntoon, 2001; White, 2002; Knack, 2002; Lyons, 2000).

The Third Way has certain characteristic features. Firstly citizens have opportunities to participate in the design of community governance systems and to grow their capacity for self-governance. There is a commitment to deliberative democracy to guard against any concentration of power (Bessette, 1989; Muhlberger, 2001). There are incentives to encourage collective community action and localised cooperation (Krishna, 2002: 21). There is recognition of the need for a robust institutional framework designed to protect citizens from the worst effects of misplaced trust and predatory behaviour (Levi & Braithwaite, 1998: 5).

Secondly the Third Way encourages initiatives that bring government, business and community together in partnership to achieve common goals. Partnership is understood as an enduring commitment to mutual support and processes of working together that involve the sharing of resources and joint action. Winter (2000: 15) calls for *"businesses to engage, for families to participate, and for governments to devolve."* Connections beyond the state are seen as absolutely required to overcome community disadvantage. In isolation the state is seen as incapable of effectively tackling community concerns. Noel Pearson (2013: 22) advocates a less state centred approach to indigenous affairs, promoting the virtues of broader community relations that extend beyond the state:

Our innovations in welfare reform and education would never be possible if governments were our only source of partnerships. Governments are, by their very nature, averse to risk and unwilling to support new approaches and new ideas.

Thirdly the approach looks for people and places with relational strengths considered worthy of *'investment'* (Hayes et al, 2008). A focus on what is working and what is workable in communities turns the focus towards strategically identifying what might usefully be leveraged to seed the growth of social capital. Effective community practice builds on the back of existing stocks of social capital. According to Participant 8 not everyone feels at ease in this space:

I think policy people felt very uncomfortable about trust. It's 'touchy'. We want policy paths and clear rules, steps to follow and if you do this and this and this ... then you will get this desired end point and forget about trust. But if you forget about trust you are not even going to get past first base.

Policy and practice seek to be *'place-based'* (Moore & Fry: 2011), responsive to local aspiration and circumstance. Issues are identified and addressed at community level. The focus is on supporting local people to be more engaged, connected and resilient and therefore able to address problems. Resource allocation is not directed towards producing uniform outcomes across diverse communities. According to proponents of the Third Way, it is within such a framework that community-based networks and norms of social trust and generalised reciprocity have a chance to flourish.

Fourthly the Third Way takes a particular position on what is the most appropriate role for the state. It is argued the state is generally not good at producing social capital, at least not directly, and broader strategic engagement with the private and community sectors is advocated (Bain & Hicks, 1998). Indeed over dependence on the state is seen as corrosive of community self-reliance. The state should not do what communities might be enabled to do. The challenge, so it is argued, is to re-invent the role of the state as enabling social capital growth by working in partnership with communities and the business sector. It exists to create a favourable social environment where community aspirations can flourish. The call is for the state to fulfil *"a distinctive role in supporting and fostering the preconditions for social capital"* (Hughes et al, 2000: 253).

A state focussed on command and control can communicate a lack of confidence in community (Peel, 1998). Citizens may distrust a state that acts as if it distrusts them (Peel, 1998: 316-319). According to Peel (1998: 320):

Distrust is learned, and all too often it is proved. People share stories of misunderstanding, ignorance, and occasional brutality: the indignities of the front counter, the police raid on the wrong house, the mother who killed herself when the welfare took her kids away. These ready-made interpretations infect every interaction, especially with the police and social workers, who form most peoples' daily experience of governance.

Finally Ideas about social capital establish new criteria for evaluating the worth of policies and practices. According to Cox and Caldwell (2000: 68) appropriateness *"should be assessed for their likely impact on trust and community cohesion."* Good policy and practice:

- i. supports locally based networks and solutions;
- ii. invests in the strengths of place;
- iii. fosters social networks that promote shared normative values of cooperation, optimism and tolerance;
- iv. looks for effective ways to build alliances between community and other sectors; and,
- v. explores solutions that draw on a hybrid mix of community, market and state input.

The examination of social capital in this thesis produces some conclusions consistent with a Third Way approach.

2.6.3 Distinguishing between Community and Community Sector

It is important to distinguish between a community and the community services sector. The latter is an umbrella term used to describe not-for-profit non-government organisations (NGO's) that work with communities. There is a substantial Indigenous Institutional sector of NGO's operating in remote communities, essentially a specialised sub-set within a broader community services sector.

The positioning of NGO's in the front line of community service delivery can be deceptive. Practice may be a long way from the rhetoric of the Third Way. Large NGO's with bureaucratic structure may have little capacity for meaningful local community engagement and few localised connections (Uslaner, 1998). Not all are equipped with the toolkit of skills, practices, processes and relevant experience to work effectively with community. The challenges of competence are compounded where localised knowledge of language, history and culture is absent (Hunt, 2013).

The organisational milieu in which the NGO's that make up the community sector are immersed may not be all that different from state bureaucracies. Peel (1998) describes a community sector immersed in onerous processes of excessive and repetitive consultation, submission writing, budgeting, planning, record keeping, reporting and accountability. The culture can be regulatory and risk averse. NGOs may be little more than extensions of state, entirely dependent on its resources according to Lyons (2000: 178). The state can have considerable influence over the objectives and service delivery arrangements of NGO's by way of purchaser-provider models and competitive tendering arrangements. Lyons (2000:187-188) argues the *"direct impact of such an approach is to disadvantage and finally destroy small non-profits - those that are rich in social capital - and to persuade larger ones to adopt many of the corporate practices of large for-profits."*

There are also practical issues that can diminish the effectiveness of NGO's, such as the struggle of a part-time committee to control full-time staff (Johnson et al, 2003: 72). Cox and Caldwell (2000: 65) caution against any presumption that shifting responsibilities to the *'community sector'* is necessarily beneficial.

Local capacities differ, and resources can be most inequitably distributed. The assumption that the community can manage its own affairs ignores much evidence of local power differences, corruption and the problems of combining the personal and political in ways that ensure equity.

In order to be effective the devolution of responsibilities to a community level that a Third Way political perspective envisions may need to ensure that NGO's really do have community ties and the necessary capacities to work locally. It is a philosophical approach that may be more effective in practice when accompanied by sustained investment in governance and management (Johnson et al, 2003: 71).

2.6.4 The Australian Experience

It was the Boyer lectures delivered by Australian sociologist and social commentator Professor Eva Cox (1995) that first brought social capital to public attention in Australia. Academic interest culminated in the publication of *Social Capital and Public Policy in Australia* (Winter, 2000).

Onyx and Bullen (2000: 129) explored the conditions associated with social capital production in several Australian contexts. They emphasise the importance of widespread feelings of trust and safety; the valuing of connections between family, friends, neighbours and workers; high levels of civic participation; proactive community responsiveness to social problems when they arise; and social values such as tolerance of diversity and a belief that life is worth living.

Ideas about social capital have captured the attention of prominent Australian politicians such as Latham (1998), Tanner (2012). Tanner (2012: 319), for example, writes

At the heart of a decent society lies strong social and economic trust. For human beings to truly function as social animals, trust is essential. The absence of trust cripples any relationship, personal or communal.

The term acquired currency within government agencies (SCRGSP, 2003; ABS, 2002). A participant in this study (Interview 6) recalled a *“big push for social capital”* within the former Commonwealth Department of Families, Housing and Indigenous Affairs at the time of the *‘Strong Families, Strong Communities’* initiative 2000-2008 (Winter, 2000: 4). According to Lahn (2012: 3-4) social capital *“shifted from being the focus of policy discussion concerning situations of disadvantage to an integrated element of policy frameworks.”*

The notion of social capital, has, however, always attracted a divisive mix of support and suspicion in academic circles. According to Winter (2000: 9) social capital is *“the most fundamental resource a community requires in the creation of economic, social and political wellbeing.”* Hogan and Owen (2000: 96) state there is a clear association between stocks of social capital, levels of civic engagement and socio-economic status.

On the other hand community developer Mowbray (2004: 6) saw it as *“a vogue concept.”* A participant in this study (Interview 7) felt the rhetoric of social capital had peaked and was now waning in policy circles, having achieved influence only for a limited period:

At the time social capital people, governments and others took note of it. That gave it a potential kind of leverage that other theories didn't have. It wasn't so much it was a new idea, but the fact that people would listen to it.

2.6.5 Social Capital in Aboriginal Australia

It is the contribution of social capital theory to understanding the circumstances of remote Aboriginal communities that is of interest in this thesis. My review of the literature found the concept has seldom been applied to Aboriginal people in Australia, and even less often in a remote context. Essentially I scoured the literature for snippets. One discipline where the term does have some currency is education (Walker et al, 1998; Schwab, 1998, Schwab 1995).

Prominent Aboriginal people in the academy such as Professors Marcia Langton, Pat Dodson and Mick Dodson have seldom used the term social capital, nor is it pre-eminent in the policy advocacy of Noel Pearson. Indigenous psychologist and academic Professor Pat Dudgeon (et al, 1998: 1) does provide a rare Aboriginal perspective on social capital. Although the ontological origins are fundamentally different, she sees some parallels between ideas about social capital and the emphasis Indigenous people place on relatedness.

Social capital is about relationships, about sharing, about transactions between people. Within Indigenous society the notion of groups developing, maintaining and investing in relationships is a cultural way.

Dudgeon (et al, 1998: 3) reflected on what might be required to foster trust between the Indigenous community and the tertiary education sector. Conscious of a power imbalance between Aboriginal people and the academy, she writes that social capital is *“a concept that has risks for Indigenous people”* (Dudgeon et al (1998: 3). Her fear is the assimilation of the latter to westernized notions of *‘good’* citizenship (Dudgeon et al (1998: 5-6):

While we develop social capital by building on what we have in common, rather than by using our difference, ... we need to be careful that claims made in terms of the ‘common good’ do not become a justification for silencing voices of groups that are only just starting to be heard.

Given that social capital theory is concerned with the quality and nature of relationships as an explanatory factor, superficially at least it is reasonable to consider its possible strengths and limitations as a framework that might provide insight into remote community circumstances. Lahn (2012: 12) suggests that the value of social capital thinking is as a heuristic device. She notes: *“Placing value on the importance of relationships in social life and their interaction with wider social structures potentially resonates with core social values and understandings held by Aboriginal people.”* Similarly Memmott and Meltzer (2005: 119) state that the foundations of social capital formation, trust and reciprocity, are constructs well understood by Aboriginal people. They describe *“high currency in the social capital of the Aboriginal cultural networks of the community”* (Memmott and Meltzer, 2005: 114).

Hunter (2004) from the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research at the Australian National University responded to the rise of social capital in Australian public policy with

scepticism about its likely contribution in an Aboriginal context. Echoing international critiques he describes social capital as ill defined and *“hydra headed”*, cautioning that *“while the general notion of social capital shows promise in terms of its ability to explain ongoing Indigenous disadvantage, the panoply of definitions and lack of theoretical clarity threaten to undermine its potential contributions to the policy debate”* (Hunter 2004: 3).

Brough et al (2008: 191) found the concept *“conceptually immature, hence open to vagueness and ambiguity.”* Their study found Aboriginal people can feel a tension between striving to simultaneously improve their socio-economic circumstance and holding onto their own cultural values (Brough et al, 2006). The Aboriginal people they spoke to were conscious of being positioned on the margins of a more powerful socio-economic order and concerned access to mainstream social networks might only be attainable by crossing a deep cultural divide. They may, in effect, have to choose non-Aboriginal networks over their own. Interestingly research by Biddle (2011: 25) cites evidence suggesting *“Higher levels of education appear to put Indigenous Australians in situations where they feel they are treated unfairly.”*

Christie and Greatorex (2006) and Memmott and Meltzer (2005) provide the only studies I have found that utilise a social capital theoretical framework to account for the current circumstances of Aboriginal people in a remote community context. They focus on the situation of Yolngu people dislocated from traditional lands and the resulting schism in intergenerational bonds between young and old.

Other writers in the field of Aboriginal studies tend to refer to social capital only in passing, without elaboration (Daly and Smith, 2003: 14; Burchill, 2004: 7). The term *‘strong community’* is alternative language that does have currency in Aboriginal contexts (Fejo et al, 1996; Scougall, 2009). Several government programs have used this term. The Commonwealth had a *‘Stronger Families and Communities Strategy’* (2000-2008). The Australian Government’s *‘Northern Territory Intervention’* has been re-badged as *‘Strong Futures’*. The Department of Child protection in WA currently has a *‘Strong Families’* program. And there is a Stronger Smarter Institute that addresses issues of Aboriginal education reform.

Folds (2001: 91) had reservations about ‘strong community’ terminology from the start: *“Indigenous people are invariably called ‘strong’ when, and only when, they seem to be embracing western ideals, but such judgement posits wholly premature assumption of the westernisation of their cultures.”* A participant (Interview 7) in this study shared his concern that the term ‘strong community’ might infer a universal standard. The risk is of imposing western values on a desert society that already has its own: *“The danger we all ought to be wary of is the imposed benchmark of what a strong community is”* (Participant 7). It was stressed that in order to be useful a concept must have *“real content”* beyond purely *“enticing language”* (Participant 7).

Vignette 2.1: Conceptualising Community Strength

In a previous role I worked on a national evaluation of Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004-2008 focussing on the indigenous projects (Scougall, 2008a, 2008b & 2008c). It provided an opportunity to reflect on what the notion of a strong community might actually mean, as others have done (Stone & Hughes, 2002; Western Australia Department for Community Development, 2006; Lawrence, 2007).

I conceptualised the notion of 'community strength' as having multiple dimensions, extending well beyond most definitions of social capital (Scougall, 2009):

- i. Social strength e.g. close bonds and sound family and community relationships;*
- ii. Cultural strength e.g. felt connections to country, a positive sense of cultural identity and spiritualism;*
- iii. Psychological strength e.g. esteem and a sense of emotional well-being;*
- iv. Institutional strength e.g. good governance and appropriate decision-making authority;*
- v. Physical strength e.g. good health, nutrition and longevity;*
- vi. Environmental strength e.g. clean water, warmth, biodiversity and protection of eco-systems; and,*
- vii. Economic strength e.g. a viable economy, access to education, training opportunities, access to finance and other resources, essential infrastructure, income and wealth creation.*

2.7 Ideal Communities

The two ideal-type Aboriginal communities of Liyan and Wandang are similar in many respects: including formal governance arrangements, natural resource endowments, physical environment and the extent of their geographic isolation. The critical difference is that they are associated with vastly different stocks of social capital.

Liyan has ample stocks of both bonding and bridging social capital. Community members are enmeshed in multiple networks that provide opportunities to prosper and thrive. People mix freely and regularly gather at community events and are active in local organisations. They have opportunities to participate in conversations, decisions and actions that contribute to the future direction of the community. Neighbours look out for each other. They draw together and support each other through hard times. Community members consider themselves enriched by their connections, for both inter-personal and social trust are norms. People are both trustworthy and trusting of others well beyond their immediate circle of family and friends. Cooperative behaviour is the expectation people have of each other.

Wandang has only bonding social capital. It is a place devoid of social trust, so there is no bridging. All relationships are personal. People do not attend community events or participate in local affairs. There is no civic participation because residents believe it is risky and that nothing good will ever come of it. Children play indoors because it is considered unsafe to go out after dark. Sustained and effective collective community action beyond family is unknown. There is not even recognition of matters that may be of collective community concern. Every attempt to bring social groups together is charged with the possibility of conflict. The inclination always is to revert to, and only place enduring trust in, family bonds. There is a pervading sense of distrust and social isolation.

The potential of social capital theory, according to Cox and Caldwell (2000: 58), is that it may *"explain why some societies or groups work better than others, despite having comparable economic or material resources."* Exploring why Liyan might work where Wandang doesn't is a recurring theme in this thesis?

2.8 Summation

While there are definitional contentions, social capital is essentially a shorthand term for a resource that builds social cooperation (Putnam 1994). People may secure benefits from their connections. It is understood as produced in a reinforcing virtuous circle founded on growing trust and reciprocity, but can be eroded if those norms are fractured. A participant in this study (Interview 11) observed:

Relationships are important for Aboriginal people generally, but on the nature and the quality of those relationships, if I were to summarise overall, I'd say on the whole across communities the quality of relationships is quite poor ... When you are struggling for day-to-day survival (think Maslow) that tends to dominate and it does tend to make relationships quite transactional.

My interest in social capital theory has been sparked by the suggestion that it has the potential to contribute to understandings about the kind of approaches, policies, and practices that can assist communities to overcome disadvantage. Despite widespread concerns about the quality of social networks in contemporary communities, the relevance of the concept has never been comprehensively considered in a remote Aboriginal context.

In describing how social capital can be implicated in social disadvantage, the literature makes an analytical distinction between bonding and bridging forms. Social capital theory hypothesises that soundly functioning societies require a healthy balanced mix of the two. In a later chapter this proposition will be explored and questioned. But first it is necessary to explore the strengths and limits of applying a social capital theoretical framework in a remote Aboriginal community context. This is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL THEORY IN REMOTE COMMUNITY CONTEXT

3.1 Introduction

Social capital theory occupies a contested space in the literature, attracting both passionate adherents and critics (Portes & Landolt 2000; Navarro, 2002; Boggs, 2001; Lin, 1999 & 2001 a & b; Lin et al, 2001; McLean et al, 2002; Maloney, et al, 2000; Paldam & Svendsen, 2000; Schultz, 2002; Schuller et al, 2000; Scanlon, 2004; Winter, 2001).

This chapter considers the strengths and limitations of employing a social capital analytic framework in a remote Aboriginal context. I begin with the general critiques of social capital. I then consider its potential strengths in this particular setting. I again make use of the ideal-type model communities of Liyan and Wandang to consider why the benefits of social capital may be more to the fore in one rather than the other.

3.2 Limitations of Social Capital Theory

3.2.1 Overview

Critics like Fine (2001:4) dismiss social capital as *"a product of intellectual faddishness and sloppy thinking."* More diplomatically Bankston and Zhou (2002: 286) state *"the concept of social capital should be approached with caution"*. The perceived shortcomings of social capital are, in summary, that:

- i) the language of capital is inappropriate;
- ii) the concept is Eurocentric;
- iii) the theory overreaches with its beneficial claims;
- iv) social capital is blind to power relations; and,
- v) social capital is blind to gender relations.

Given such critiques there is a need to seriously weigh the limits of social capital in a remote Aboriginal community context. The potential weaknesses of applying social capital theory in a remote Aboriginal community context are summarised in TABLES 3.1 and 3.2 (below). The left hand column makes a statement about the value of applying social capital theory in a remote context and provides a rationale for the statement. The middle column relates the finding directly to a remote Aboriginal community context. The final column draws the implications for social capital theory, policy and practice.

TABLE 3.1: LIMITATIONS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL IN REMOTE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY CONTEXT: ISSUES OF TERMINOLOGY, ETHNOCENTRISM & EVIDENCE

Key Findings	Relevance to Remote Aboriginal Communities	Lessons for Theory, Policy & Practice
<p>'Foreign' Language The language of capital is inappropriate in a remote Aboriginal community context.</p> <p>Rationale: The term social capital is used in mainstream policy circles, but rarely in the Indigenous sector.</p>	<p><i>'Social capital' does not speak directly to Aboriginal communities. They have their own culturally distinctive language & symbols to describe & represent their relationships, networks & connections.</i></p> <p><i>Those who work with Aboriginal people may feel a tension involved in using the language of 'capital' to describe rich patterns of Aboriginal sociability & connection. Cultural distinctiveness & complexity may be compressed into a narrow & over-simplified conceptual framework.</i></p>	<p><i>In order to be meaningful ideas about social capital may need to be rendered into language & symbols that are understood, acceptable & accessible in communities.</i></p> <p><i>Use of the term 'capital' to describe rich social relations in desert communities is reductionist.</i></p> <p><i>Universal theory runs the risk of depicting Aboriginal people as no different from disadvantaged people the world over, irrespective of culture or context.</i></p>
<p>Ethnocentrism The concept of social capital is ethnocentric.</p> <p>Rationale: The foundational ideas of social capital were produced in mono-cultural nuclear families, schools, cafes, churches & community organizations.</p>	<p><i>The risk is that social capital theory will be insensitively applied to desert people who have culturally distinctive values. Traditional Aboriginal society was a highly evolved social system that reproduced itself for millennia in the harshest of environments without the need for western social structures & norms. Generally people were able to collectively feed, protect, nurture & support each other.</i></p>	<p><i>Social capital is a western construct. 'Foreign' concepts may be seen as having little cultural relevance elsewhere. There is caution about the application of frameworks & theories of western origin in a remote Aboriginal community context.</i></p>
<p>Overreach Social capital theory overreaches with beneficial claims.</p> <p>Rationale: There has been a tendency to overstate the explanatory power of social capital in areas such as health, wellbeing, law & order & economic development.</p>	<p><i>The policy history of Aboriginal affairs is littered with the unfulfilled promise of social transformation. Social capital theory also risks fuelling false expectations to the extent it overstates the potential benefits of the resource.</i></p> <p><i>Social capital may provide one analytical lens for examining relational issues. However not all social problems in Aboriginal communities are necessarily problems of relationship, attributable to insufficient social networks.</i></p>	<p><i>The benefits of social capital are yet to be demonstrated by substantial empirical research & evidence collected in a remote community context.</i></p>

TABLE 3.2: LIMITATIONS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL IN REMOTE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY CONTEXT: ISSUES OF POWER & GENDER RELATIONS

Key Findings	Relevance to Remote Communities	Lessons for Theory, Policy & Practice
<p>Power Relations Social capital is blind to power relations</p> <p>Rationale: Sound policy and practice ought to be informed by an appreciation of asymmetric power relations, as well as other factors.</p> <p>Structural issues that contribute to disadvantage do not feature in social capital discourse.</p>	<p><i>Analysis of remote Aboriginal people conducted solely in terms of social capital theory provides only a partial view devoid of considerations of the impact of colonisation, social exclusion & minority status.</i></p> <p><i>Social capital theory risks inferring Aboriginal people bring about their own disadvantage by failing to develop the right kind of networks. Explanatory power is attached to the level of social trust and reciprocity. The implication is that disadvantage is due to localised ‘grass roots’ factors.</i></p> <p><i>The risk is that disadvantaged remote communities may be depicted as ‘lacking’ in social capital contributing to a discourse of deficit focussed on social dysfunction & pathology. Desert people may perceive themselves as culturally different, rather than disadvantaged.</i></p>	<p><i>Social capital theory alone cannot provide a complete explanation of remote community disadvantage. Laying stress on community level relations alone risks deflecting attention away from other factors such as state or market failures. Both structural and relational factors need to be considered in seeking to understand remote disadvantage.</i></p>
<p>Gender Relations Social capital is blind to gender relations</p> <p>Rationale: Social capital theory has largely ignored the fact that some social networks are gendered.</p>	<p><i>In remote Aboriginal communities many aspects of social organisation are gendered. In traditional society men & women had co-dependent relations, playing separate roles in the customary economy & in religious life.</i></p>	<p><i>It is not possible to understand the processes of social capital production & erosion in Aboriginal society without an understanding of gender differences.</i></p> <p><i>In traditional society men had more authority than women, although the latter always retained some agency. Now the role of men is much diminished.</i></p>

3.2.2 Contentious Language of Capital

There is an intellectual tension involved in tying the words ‘social’ and ‘capital’ together to describe human relations. The term ‘social capital’ is contentious in the academy (Adams & Hess, 2001; Adler & Kwon 2002).

One view is that use of the word ‘capital’ amounts to colonisation of the social sciences by economics (Fine, 2001: 15). ‘Capital’ is an impersonal and instrumental notion that devalues intrinsically rich human social connections by association (Fine 2001). References to ‘stocks’ of social capital that are ‘produced’ through ‘investment’ may sit uneasily (Smith & Kulynych, 2002). In this vein Scanlon (2004: 6) writes “ethical relations are made over into a form that is radically continuous with the exchange relations of the market, insofar as both are detached from broader frameworks of social and cultural meaning grounded and bounded by the face-to-face relations which to some extent limit and constrain such relations.”

An alternate view is that the term ‘social capital’ generates recognition of the value of social relations in policy circles (Carroll & Stanfield, 2003). The message is that social outcomes matter just as much as the economy (Cox, 1995 & 1997). Social capital communicates with policymakers in language they understand argue Healy and Hampshire (2002). It is also Woolcock’s (1998: 188) position:

Social capital provides sociologists in particular with a fruitful conceptual and policy device by which to get beyond exhausted modernization and world-systems theories and make potentially important contributions to questions of economic development, contributions that complement orthodox economic approaches in some respects and challenge them in others.

While social capital theory provides one framework for exploring issues of relatedness, alternative conceptual language is available. The notion that social connections matter and can be instrumental in all sorts of ways was part of social science tradition long before Putnam reinvented it. Portes (1998: 2) observes: *"the term does not embody any idea really new to sociologists."* Similar intellectual terrain might be traversed using closely related ideas about *'social network analysis'* (Scott, 2013) or the notion of *'social sustainability'* (Cernea, 1993).

Decisions about appropriate language arise in relation to many concepts, not just *'social capital'*. The emotionally loaded term *'community'* is one example, the critique being that its use risks implying a false social cohesion that *'papers over'* internal division (Mowbray & Bryson, 1981; Smith, 1989). Participant 10 noted that the term *'Aboriginal community'* can be used as *"legitimizing discourse"*. Officials may speak only with a handful of people employing what is essentially a 'take me to your leader' approach that avoids the really hard work of broad, deep and meaningful local engagement with naturally occurring social groups and individuals. This pattern of behaviour is inappropriate in a social context largely devoid of hierarchy in many matters including the means of everyday sustenance. An egalitarian ethos reigns. Thus use of the term *'community'* can actually be a convenient term that enables government to escape the need to engage effectively.

Choice of terminology always requires considered and delicate judgement, a weighing of philosophical and political positioning, alongside more pragmatic considerations of utility. One participant in this study (Interview 8) saw their decision to utilise social capital terminology as strategic.

A lot of community workers at the beginning ... used to attack us: 'Why do you need to bring capital into it? We are having enough problems trying to deal with 'capital' and now you're trying to impose capital into the social arena and that's allowing ourselves to be co-opted by the capitalists'. Whereas the reason a lot of us, including Putnam ... started to use 'social capital' was to make the economists stand up and listen. Because at that point in time everything was 'the economy' and there was absolutely no recognition of 'the social'. And we have been singularly successful in policy terms in getting governments to take notice ... The old leftie sociologists didn't like 'social capital' either ... They said that it's been there forever. There's nothing new in the term. But the point is that by using social capital as a frame we've been able to think and say and predict and do things we couldn't do before.

By contrast Participant (Interview 7) was cautious about accepting a neo-liberal view that implies that economics is everything. It poses a dilemma for those contemplating using the language of social capital:

*I can recall some of the critiques people felt uncomfortable about. I mean capital is usually associated with physical capital and drawing that kind of thinking into 'the social' is kind of reductionist ... On the other hand what people would say is there's an opportunity here. This is the kind of stuff policy makers will actually listen to. You can have more finessed theories of 'the social', but if no one listens to them and they don't have any influence then they can just become great discussions in academia or whatever.
(Interview 7)*

The concept of social capital has seldom been applied in reference to a remote Aboriginal community context. Not only do desert people not use this terminology, it also has little currency with academics, program managers and community development practitioners working with the Indigenous sector. A participant in this study (Interview 10) commented.

I won't use the language of capital because I find that hard ... Perhaps cultural difference is nowhere more stark than with hunter gatherers (and potentially their descendants) on the one side and the modern state on the other. It throws into stark relief the problems with 'capital' as an analytical framework. At least it seems to me that I'd have to constantly squeeze the complexities of the Aboriginal world I know into the language.

Currently '*social capital*' terminology may have value as a tool that enables people working at a policymaking level to comprehend a relational perspective on disadvantage. But its value does not lie in enabling desert people to better understand their own society. *Tjukurrpa* (or Aboriginal law) was their reference point to make sense of their social universe (Keen, 2004). Desert people have their own language and culturally distinctive symbols to represent their people and place connections. Embedded in Aboriginal people's kinship and social structures are complex dynamic systems for '*theorising*' relationships, as will be made evident later. Indeed, literally and metaphorically they see their ancestral country as holding people in social relationship. They make extensive use of iconography in their art practice (Watson, 2003). Poems, songs and story telling are also rich devices for expressing social relations (Beston, 1977; Shoemaker, 1989).

Participants in this study were asked to reflect on why social capital theory had not been influential in Indigenous affairs. One (Interview 8) thought that when there are immediate and pressing pragmatic concerns to address in communities it is hardly surprising that "*obscure continental debate*" is not at the forefront (Interview 1). One suggested there might be a desire to avoid "*technical jargon*". Another participant (Interview 10) posited that there may still be people yet to encounter the concept.

Aboriginal affairs and thinking around it, has always been a bit of an enclave. It hasn't always been really connected to mainstream currents. It hasn't always drawn on international literature. (Interview 10)

Arguably the field of Indigenous Affairs is laden with practitioners with limited relevant experience, conceptual grounding, and training. It is a field in which people may practice without any pre-requisites of training. Participant 10 regarded the "*bricolaging*" of terms such as '*social capital*' into the everyday speak of government, and the attaching of over simplified internal meanings to such terms, as means to disguise a lack of capacity within government to act effectively in this field and "*to avoid engaging with a complex political and social reality*".

Participant 7 felt it was important to find appropriate, meaningful and culturally sensitive terminology fit for discussing issues of social connection in ways that truly resonate with Aboriginal people. They felt social capital theory would only have value if it formed part of an inclusive collaborative dialogue in which there was an "*accountability of ideas*" back to Aboriginal people:

To some extent social capital had some kind of leverage because it speaks to the importance of 'the social', but potentially in a way in which some people who wouldn't normally be influenced by other language might be influenced. But somehow it also ought to speak to real people in real communities. It's got to achieve the very thing it says is important, that is speak across various different groups of people ... Where there is success I think it's always where there's shared understanding, so whatever the language, that's the on-going challenge.

Arguably terminology used to describe any society ideally ought to be negotiated with members of that society, at least that would be a phenomenological perspective (Heidegger, 1962). The alternative is to unilaterally speak and write about Aboriginal people in a theoretical language not their own. Is it possible to find terminology that truly connects with the people whose lives it seeks to describe? Ideas about social capital might need to be rendered into relational language that is accessible to desert people and those who work with them if it is ever to have much influence at a community level. Lahn (2012: 13) argues social capital theory "*will only hold practical analytical merit if adapted to suit Indigenous circumstances and aspirations*".

Participant 7 was inclined to think the language of social capital was already on the decline.

Is it time for other language? I don't know ... Do we mourn the passing or celebrate the passing? ... I don't want to sound cynical, but is it possible to breath life back into it or not? Is it time for other language? I don't know.
(Interview 7)

3.2.3 Ethnocentric Roots

In the social sciences there is caution about assuming the relevance of any universal theoretical perspective. There is awareness about the risks of ethnocentric research and interpretation (Geertz, 1973; Arbon, 1992; Howitt et al, 1990). According to Lincoln and Denzin (1998: 422) *"all texts are socially, historically, politically and culturally located."*

Social capital has been criticised for having narrow ethnocentric roots, for being a construct with little relevance beyond western cultures (Wilson, 2006: 351-352). Brough et al (2008: 191) wrote *"For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, already too familiar with euro-centric research, the concern about constructing 'another' non-Indigenous representation of their issues is very real."*

The social capital Putnam (1993, 1994 & 2000) came to understand was generated in ethnically homogeneous nuclear families, schools, cafes, churches, community organizations, clubs and bowling leagues (Knack & Keefer, 1997). A participant in this study (Interview 9) observed of Putnam's work *"social capital is highest in his terms in places that are most mono-cultural and that sets up a serious problem"*.

A lack of involvement in the forms of association described by Putnam (1993, 1994, 2000) is not likely to be a marker of much at all for Aboriginal Australians. The forms of association identified by Putnam are particular to his own historical and cultural experience. Amongst those he studied there was a distinct homogeneity in terms of culture, language, education, gender relations, religion, modes of civic participation and the manner of social discourse. Putnam found social capital where there were shared values, ideology and identity that facilitated easy social interaction. While social capital theory claims to have universal principles, Putnam does not address its production in circumstances of cultural diversity, a gap in the theoretical knowledge base that this thesis sees to redress.

Writing from a conflict theory perspective Boggs (2001: 199) is dismissive of Putnam for ignoring issues of social structure, suggesting he *"wants more picnics, card games, dinner parties, club activities, and just plain outings among friends and relatives, hoping all the while for a reinvention of the kinds of local organisations that held sway in the United States through the 1950s."* To be fair Putnam has acknowledged the importance of avoiding an *"uncritical nostalgia"* for the 1950's (Putnam, 1996: 17). However a participant in this study (Interview 7) did see Putnam's work as shaped by an idealised *'1950's middle class white picket vision'* of what a strong, prosperous, civic minded, *'white'*, middle class society should be.

Putnam's framework was initially developed as a tool to understand communities in a vastly different context, potentially blinding his analysis to the significance of cultural difference. His research was conducted in Italy and the USA, not the Central Desert. When applied in a remote Aboriginal community context the weakness of social capital is its ethnocentric origins. It is the transferability of the concept to the cultural context of remote Aboriginal Australia that is in question (Hunter, 2004, 52-53). A participant in this research (Interview 1) questioned whether social capital was a construct with limited cultural relevance: *"Maybe it just doesn't work in this context?"*

Another participant in this study (Interview 7) also regarded social capital as a concept that had not transcended its white western origins.

Where I would problematize it is that, like many other tools that can be used working cross-culturally that emanated from another cultural space ... you always have to ask to what extent is this based on ethnocentric kinds of assumptions? That's an area of critique of someone like Putnam ... You could argue it's a middle class American view of what good social capital in 'communities' looks like. So it certainly concerns me that we ought to be careful not to take that as the kind of way in which to benchmark Aboriginal communities.

Aboriginal people have been subject to much ethnocentric research with narrow theoretical frameworks of western origin applied in an effort to describe their people and circumstance (Arbon, 1992; Williams & Stewart, 1992). As a consequence there is now caution when it comes to assuming the applicability of any mainstream theory in an Indigenous cultural setting, including social capital. The risk is a reductionist compression of desert culture into a *'one size fits all'* universal frame. Memmott and Meltzer write (2003: 118): *"An important theoretical issue is whether social capital is a phenomenon associated with all human cultures or particular to only some."*

The rich webs of sociability found in Aboriginal society, its social structures and norms, are not captured by social capital theory. Whatever utility it may have as a tool of analysis, it cannot be conflated as if it were a descriptor of Aboriginal society. Social capital was never designed to deal with denser issues of cultural identity and anthropological complexity. There are risks involved in applying it in ways that infer it can represent an Aboriginal relatedness that is constructed through unique systems of social classification and land tenure. They are discussed in the following chapter. One participant in this study (Interview 6) stated social capital theory should not be used in ways that imply it is a descriptor of the depth of Aboriginal social connections grounded in spiritual belief: *"The social capital model just sits over the top of it, the group structures within it are complex."*

Care is required in applying the term *'social capital'* in Aboriginal Australia precisely because it originates from another cultural context. Lahn (2012: 13) writes that to have much relevance social capital theory would need to be *"adapted to suit Indigenous circumstances and aspirations."* In the final chapter of this thesis I argue that it can be so adapted and, further, that there are elements of social capital theory that may illuminate understandings of disadvantage in remote Australia.

3.2.4 Overstated Claims

Numerous writers suggest the social capital literature suffers from an *"unmitigated"* celebratory tone that exaggerates its transformative powers (DeFilippis, 2001; Scanlon, 2004; Fine, 1999 & 2001 & 2007; Navarro, 2002; Foley & Edwards, 1997 & 1999; McLean et al, 2002). In Australia too Bryson and Mowbray (2005: 255) find a proliferation of over-the-top *"claims about strengthening communities, rebuilding social capital and addressing human needs in innovative ways."*

The claims Putnam (2002: 139) makes in the name of social capital are certainly grand: *"Where trust and social networks flourish, individuals, firms, neighbours and even nations prosper."* He is enthusiastic about the prospects of fostering civil democracy and achieving greater prosperity (Putnam, 1993: 36). Social cohesion and economic development lie within its ambit.

There is also suspicion about the seemingly endless flow of public goods said to flow from the production of social capital by its proponents (Leonard, 2004). According to Portes (1998: 2) it has evolved into *"a cure all for the maladies affecting society"*. He sees little reason to believe social capital is a ready remedy for social disadvantage (Portes, 1998: 21). Chupp (1999: 2) makes an analogy with *"a wonder drug."* Fine (2001: 190) dismisses social capital as mere intellectual fad that promises to heal *"the sick, the poor, the criminal, the corrupt, the (dys)functional family, schooling, community life, work, and organization, democracy and governance, collective action, transitional societies, intangible assets ... any aspect of social, cultural and economic performance' without regard for context."*

Social capital discourse, like any other, must adhere to the general rules of evidence rather than relying on inference (Portes, 1998, 18). The critics of social capital claim it is not good theory. A good theory is one with explanatory power (Popper, 1959). It usefully explains the workings of social systems, predicts social patterns and processes and guides the design of effective strategies. The available evidence ought to support the theory and consideration ought to be given to any competing or contradictory evidence. Good theory is:

- i. Plausible i.e. conceivably possible, logical and persuasive (Popper, 1959);
- ii. Credible i.e. believable and trustworthy because it is supported by recognised authoritative sources and expertise;
- iii. Triangulated i.e. its validity is established through reliance on multiple data sources which furnish justifiable conclusions; and,

- iv. Transferable i.e. findings drawn from one place also apply in other similar settings which gives them utility (Davidson 2005).

What is questioned is whether social capital research has actually established all of the beneficial causal relationships claimed in its name (Boggs, 2002; Fine, 2001: 190). For instance one meta-review of the literature found only mixed support for a relationship between levels of social capital and poverty reduction (Quillan & Redd, 2008). Knack and Keefer (1997: 125) found no correlation at all between participation in local community organisations and prosperity. In any case, while correlation between variables is a necessary pre-condition for sound theory, by itself it does not establish causation (Miles & Huberman, 1994: 217).

The concern is one of explanatory overreach, that social capital *“risks trying to explain too much with too little”* (Woolcock, 1998: 155). While case studies may show association between levels of social capital and certain positive outcomes, explanations of the precise way in which social capital achieves them tends to be vague. Writing in an Indigenous Australian context Hunter (2003: 4) argues: *“The mechanisms through which social capital can affect a range of outcomes need to be made explicit if it is to provide a credible framework for analysis.”* Too often social capital theory is stretched to match outcomes and theory by way of a circuitous logic and ad hoc rationalisation (Hunter (2004: 10 & 19).

The problem it seems is that some writers may be too eager *“to idealise the value of social connections”*, according Brough et al (2008: 192). Portes (1998, 62) wants a more dispassionate stance towards social capital: *“As a label for the positive effects of sociability, social capital has, in my view, a place in theory and research provided that its different sources and effects are recognized and that their downsides are examined with equal attention.”* A participant in this study (Interview 1) labelled the tendency of social capital theory to overstate its benefits as *“the rainmaker effect”*.

There is reason for desert communities to be especially tentative when it comes to claims of the supposed benefits of social capital. The Aboriginal policy field is littered with false hope, the search for a policy *‘silver bullet’* capable of overcoming remote disadvantage. At various times, governments have prioritised investment in health, housing, economic development, governance, education and income management initiatives. New initiatives in the past decade include *‘whole-of-government’* COAG Site Trials, the Northern Territory Intervention, Remote Service Delivery Site Trials and welfare reforms. There is little evidence to suggest any of these initiatives have been to great effect (SCRGSP, 2014). There is a recurring pattern of initial bold and extravagant policy rhetoric, followed by disappointing implementation and outcomes, and eventually the announcement of the next *‘great leap forward’* (Martin, 2006). When social capital is portrayed as panacea it too runs the risk of raising expectations it cannot fulfil.

Vignette 3.1: Social Capital and Youth Suicide

I have a long association with the Kimberley region where in recent decades there has been a spate of youth suicides in remote communities. Does social capital have something to say about this? It seems to me it can be used to construct plausible explanations of all sorts of phenomena. Whatever the problem, social capital is the answer.

In traditional society everyone had a people and place. These connections held and nurtured, providing a stable social and emotional foundation for life. Suicide was entirely unknown.

In post-colonial society individuals experienced prolonged separation due to factors such as forced removal and dislocation, the missionary dormitory system, stolen generations, ill health, alcoholism, prolonged incarceration, and family dysfunction (Cummings, 1990 & 1996; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997). For the first time suicide emerged as an issue in desert society (Hunter, 1996; Tatz, 2001). The incidence appears to be increasing (Hope, 2008).

It might be hypothesised that suicide is a consequence of social isolation, in effect of having no social capital. Feeling lost and alone is especially devastating in Aboriginal society that has always placed a premium on maintaining connection. Suicide and self-harm may be driven by feelings of separation, a cry for help by those in desperate need of reconnection. McCoy (2004: 81, 141, 143, 151-155 & 247) describes desert youth feeling alone, without purpose or a sense of belonging. He writes "They discover that they are cut off from the power and relationship of older men who can provide them with authority, protection and care" (McCoy, 2004: 248).

The problem with hypothesising a lack of social capital as cause is that there is a body of research literature available that indicates multiple factors are implicated in Aboriginal suicide (Tatz, 1999; Taylor, 2012; Kirmayer et al, 2007). In Canada Chandler and Lalonde (2009) argue it is mostly to do with cultural discontinuity. Social capital may well be a factor, but it is unlikely to be the whole story. Suicide is complex. A contributing factor is believed to be loss of identity amongst youth who do not know their place and have suffered the loss of cultural continuity.

In this thesis I posit that substance abuse can fuel the production of social capital, but again causation is unlikely to be simple. Other propositions circulate for intellectual air, such as the 'drinking as a form of resistance' argument advanced by Sackett (1988: 76) and Brady's (1990, 1995 & 1998) 'drinking symbolises racial equality' argument.

When it comes to the application of social capital theory, the distinction between hypothesis and empirical evidence is too easily blurred.

3.2.5 Power Relations

A criticism levelled at the networks version of social capital theory is that it places too much weight on community agency, being blind to issues of power relations (Muntaner et al, 2000: 118-119; Fine 2001; Muntaner & Lynch, 2002: 118-119). Putnam did not explore the relationship between social capital and asymmetric power (Navarro, 2002: 427).

Social capital theory is taken to task for failing to address the power of real capital by Thompson (2007: 7). Scanlon (2004: 3) argues that too great a focus on trust and reciprocity is a distraction from *"the deeper cultural mooring points to which those relations are tied, and without which they would be impossible."* Laying stress on community level relations can deflect attention from any higher societal level market and state failures. A narrow concern with the quality and nature of community relations may ignore issues such as a fundamental need for redistributive justice (Mowbray, 2004: 22-25; Wilson, 2006: 338-340; Muntaner et al, 2002: 118-119; Scanlon, 2004; Fine, 2007). Boggs (2002: 189) argues social capital theory ignores factors such as the growth of global corporatism in its account of the state of social relations. According to Boggs (2001) insufficient attention is given to deeper structural issues and asymmetric power relations.

DeFillipis (2001: 790) notes it is only disadvantaged neighbourhoods that are materially disadvantaged by disconnection. He observes affluent gated communities actually socially isolate themselves and concludes:

'Bridging capital' is really needed only if a community's residents are poor and therefore on the losing end of a set of power relations. What needs to change are those power relations, not the level of connections.

Not all problems are problems of relationship attributable to insufficient trust and reciprocity. DeFillippis (2001) argues social outcomes are not only a function of internal community characteristics, but also of a complex interplay between internal and external power relationships. Poverty stricken communities have social networks and have community organisations: What they lack is power and the capital that partially constitutes that power (DeFillippis, 2001: 801).

A participant in this study (Interview 1) was concerned Putnam's networks version of social capital theory lends itself to a simplistic view that disadvantage is entirely due to localised factors *"It's not all about relationships"*. Participant (Interview 7) commented:

One of the ways in which I think social capital can be misused is that it puts all of the understanding on individual social capital and what can be achieved out of that. We all ought to be very wary of individualising deeply social structural kinds of social backdrops.

In the absence of considerations of power relations, social capital theory can be read as inferring communities bring about their own disadvantage because they have failed to build the requisite social networks (Mowbray, 2004: 22). Those who are poor are deemed to be so because they have failed to accumulate or balance their stock of social capital. The inference is that all problems have localised community origins (Mowbray, 2004: 25). DeFillippis (2001: 796) is concerned certain communities may be stereotyped, portrayed as *"bereft of values, norms, morals, trust, and relationships"* that can only be found in white neighbourhoods. Such depictions may be disempowering for communities in that they feel weak and without influence. Social capital theory portrays disadvantaged communities as universally lacking in social capital and in this respect little different from one another the world over.

Folds despairs of a western society seemingly intent upon convincing desert people *"they are merely living like 'poor whites', rather than as competent indigenous people, secure in their own ways on their own land?"* (Folds, 2001: 161). It certainly seems unlikely desert people in traditional society would have regarded themselves as disadvantaged. Theirs was an elaborate evolved system where people were able to feed, protect, nurture and support each other in one of the harshest environments on Earth (Cane 1987; Keen, 2004). Society was able to function collectively and reproduce itself for millennia. There were a range of different cultural methods and processes capable of building social solidarity, as discussed in the following chapter.

A participant in this study (Interview 1) stated it would be cruel irony indeed if, after generations of discrimination and exclusion, Aboriginal people were now portrayed as disadvantaged because they had failed to develop the right kind of networks. She had a *"major problem"* with the notion *"if you don't have the right networks it's because you are not working hard enough."*

It is not only social capital literature that may be criticised for producing a discourse of deficit in relation to impoverished communities and neighbourhoods. It is a charge also levelled at the Aboriginal studies literature (Morley 2015; Hunt 2013). There is a component within the contemporary Aboriginal studies literature that emphasises social pathology and community dysfunction (Sutton, 2001). Folds (2001: 3, 64, 161) argues there is a long list of things Aboriginal communities are said to be deficient in such as parenting, schooling and employment. He is critical of *"a representation that defines their society in terms of what it lacks, instead of what is distinctive and workable in its own right"* (Folds, 2001: 3).

At the opposite end of the spectrum, however, I note that elements of both the Aboriginal studies literature and the social capital literature are also open to criticism at times for producing overly romanticised accounts. There is a middle course. Communities can be approached as simultaneously being both repositories of social capital, as well as places in need of producing more of the resource, as places where the state of relationships is never wholly *'good'* or *'bad'*, a point revisited in chapter 7.

The risk is that social capital theory approaches Aboriginal disadvantage with an inbuilt set of relational assumptions that open eyes to some causal possibilities, while closing them off to others. *"One of the dangers of bringing ideas of social capital and poverty together is that notions of social capital can be used to create an individual deficit type of model that blames the disadvantaged for their situation"* according to Lahn (2012: 12).

As Denzin and Lincoln (1998: 417-418) declared the era of grand theory is over. Intellectual modesty demands recognition of multiple theories, with none able to claim complete explanation of any phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998: 22). *“The move is toward pluralism, and many social scientists now recognize that no picture is ever complete, that what is needed is many perspectives, many voices, before we can achieve deep understandings of social phenomena, and before we can assert that a narrative is complete.”*

To the extent a social capital perspective is useful, it can only be as an additional analytical lens, not the only one. Analysis conducted solely in terms of social capital theory can only ever provide a partial view (Bankston & Zhou, 2002: 289; Fine, 2007: 5). Social capital theorists need to be open to the possibility that factors in addition to social norms and networks have explanatory power. Nevertheless, the recognition that structural factors are at work does not render a concern for the value and nature of social connections irrelevant. Policy and practice can be informed by both an appreciation of social connections and power relations.

3.2.6 Issues of Gender

A weakness of social capital theory is that generally it does not explore the gendered nature of social networks (Burt, 1998; Molinas, 1998; Muntaner & Lynch, 2002; Snyder, 2002; Silvey & Elmhirst, 2003). Putnum did not address the intersection of social capital with gender, largely rendering women invisible in this respect. There has, however, been some exploration of the issue by others (O’Neil & Gidengel, 2006; Norris & Inglehart, 2003). But the literature is most certainly silent on the gendered production of social capital in a remote Aboriginal community context.

The separation of male (*‘men’s business’*) and female (*‘women’s business’*) roles is a fundamental feature of Aboriginal social organisation (Bell, 1998; McGrath, 1987: 53). In traditional society men and women were co-dependent. They had distinct roles in activities such as hunting and gathering, ritual and ceremony, and in meetings where they sat apart. The pattern of gender separation is well documented in the literature (Kaberry, 1939; White, 1970; Hamilton, 1981; Bell, 1983; Gale, 1983; Bell, 1998; McGrath, 1987). In remote Aboriginal communities men and women still tend to maintain separate social networks, playing different roles in many aspects of life.

Traditional Aboriginal societies were mostly patriarchal (Keen, 2004). In many respects women had secondary status (Hamilton, 1981: 74-75). Women were a source of social wealth (Bern, 1979: 123). They were *‘promised’* by the old men and traded as commodities. Through the bestowal of women, older men created strategic alliances with neighbouring groups and reciprocal benefits (Keen, 2004: 204-207). Those with multiple wives enjoyed a widespread relatedness that enabled them to make claims on the resources of others (Austin-Broos, 2011: 33-36). They had opportunities to visit, hunt and engage in ceremony with other groups, and as a consequence to seek further marriage partners. It was the wife who had to leave her father’s country to be with her husband. Effectively the capital embodied in women’s labour and sexuality was being transmuted into bridging social capital.

Women, nevertheless, were far from being entirely subordinate to their men. Gendered delineation of roles carves out a separate female domain, thereby establishing a precinct of female free agency (Hamilton, 1981; Bell, 1983; Gale, 1983; Bell, 1998; Goodall, 1995: 79-81). Women can never be entirely subordinate to men so long as there is discrete *‘women’s business’*.

A recurring theme in this thesis is that the role of Aboriginal men in contemporary communities is diminished. They lost their identity as hunters when their customary economy collapsed. In traditional society young men became knowledgeable lawmen and skilled hunters in the company of other men together out on country. This gave meaning to their lives.

For several decades stock work provided a valued means to express a new kind of masculine identity, as discussed in chapter 5. However, by the 1970’s the pastoral industry requirement for a plentiful supply of Aboriginal labour subsided for economic and technological reasons (Brock, 1995: 103 & 108). Again men were severely impacted psychologically by the loss of a meaningful role (McGrath, 1987: 90).

Onyx and Bullen (2000) posit a meaningful life worth living as a pre-condition for the production of social capital. Desert men without meaning in their lives may give expression to their

masculinity in destructive ways. Pursuit of a *'bad blackfella'* image now provides a source of status for some men (McKnight, 2002; McCoy, 2004: 162). The new male identity may be as a heavy drinker, fierce fighter, gang leader or tough prisoner. These are forms of behaviour that may serve to bond men. Men's position at the centre of family and community life is directly impacted by addiction, relationship breakdown, chronic illness, and premature death (Brice et al, 1992; Austin-Broos, 2011; McCoy, 2008).

Women may have been less impacted by these social changes. They are still able to contribute to family function as grandmothers, aunts and so forth. A participant interviewed for this study (Interview 8) observed:

The women have been able to manage a lot better than the men because their roles have not been destroyed: they are still mothers, they still manage a lot of that stuff. The older men have lost their authority ... so there is no point to living ... So the very point of social control has gone at the very point where it should be at its strongest in relation to issues such as child sexual abuse. That would be my reading.

In one remote setting Tonkinson & Howard (1990: 140) found women's voices were heard. Although they did not exercise power as a bloc, women nevertheless showed *"no inhibitions about making their opinions known to all in camp meetings, especially when the topic under discussion arouses their attention and concern"* (Tonkinson, 1990: 50).

Women exercise far greater influence than in traditional society. One regional (not remote) study by Davis (1992: 37) found women playing the main community leadership role, as well as exerting *"the dominant influence in family functioning"*. It was not that women sought to display overt power, but rather that quiet matriarchal figures became increasingly involved in family and community affairs out of necessity (Davis, 1992, 34-36). A participant in this study (Interview 2) drew attention to the stabilising role women increasingly play in framing bottom-up responses to issues such as alcohol and family violence, noting that local initiative was driving community change, *"it wasn't so much the government."*

Arguably desert society has become matriarchal by default because the men are *'absent'* much of the time, physically and/or psychologically. It is what I term the *'phenomenon of the missing men'*. The men might yet return to occupy a central place in family and community life. A participant in this study (Interview 2) described how sober men began to attend school assemblies with their children in one community, displaying resurgent *"stronger ability to inform and educate and teach culturally young people"*. It followed the introduction of tighter alcohol restrictions advocated by women. An independent evaluation it credited with social benefits such as a declining incidence of violence and suicide (Kinnane et al, 2010).

A participant in this study (Interview 2) stressed that while alcohol is heavily implicated in social problems, deeper contributing factors need to be recognised. The risk, as they saw it, was that responses focus too narrowly. While substance abuse is often blamed for the *'absence'* of men from active community life, it may be more symptom than cause according to Davis (1992: 38):

The destructive influence of alcohol is often cited as a reason for the low level of male involvement, although it is debatable whether it is really a cause of the situation or the effect of other pressures on, or inputs into, the Aboriginal consciousness. Alcohol excess certainly inhibits participation in community affairs, but may well be the consequence of a perceived lack of place in the community or the denial of a necessary social function.

3.3 Strengths of Social Capital Theory

3.3.1 Overview

Despite these critiques and potential limitations application of social capital in a remote Aboriginal community context can create at least two opportunities:

- i) To act as a conceptual device that aids thinking around issues of Aboriginal disadvantage; and,
- ii) To contribute to a process of universalising social capital theory, utilising an understanding of social organisation and functioning in remote Aboriginal community context to '*speak back*' to theory.

TABLE 3.3 summarises the strengths of applying a social capital theoretical framework in remote community context. The format aligns with TABLES 3.1 and 3.2 above. The content is elaborated in sub-sections 3.3.2 and 3.3.3 below.

TABLE 3.3: STRENGTHS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL: THINKING WITH & SPEAKING BACK TO THEORY

Key Findings	Relevance to Remote Communities	Lessons for Theory, Policy & Practice
<p>1. Using a Social Capital Framework to Think With Social capital provides a different way of thinking about remote community disadvantage.</p> <p>Rationale: Social capital is a heuristic device that contributes to thinking about the value of social trust & social networks.</p> <p>It informs thinking by recognising the value of social connections as a fundamental source of wellbeing.</p>	<p><i>Little theoretical or practical work has been done in a remote Aboriginal community context using a social capital framework. The extent to which social capital is a theoretical or practical aid to overcoming remote disadvantage is, therefore, open to question and yet to be demonstrated.</i></p> <p><i>While social capital is a non-Aboriginal theory with different ontological origins, there may be some parallels in thought between this relational perspective and the worldview of desert people.</i></p>	<p><i>Social capital theory may provide new insights into factors that may contribute to remote community disadvantage, providing policy-makers & practitioners with plausible relational understandings.</i></p>
<p>2. Speaking Back to Theory There is an opportunity to extend social capital theory by learning lessons from its application in remote desert communities.</p> <p>Rationale: Social capital theory may claim universal principles, but it was essentially developed in a mono-cultural environment. Over time social capital theory has been applied in increasingly diverse cultural contexts & lessons learnt have informed the theory.</p>	<p><i>There is a need for caution in applying any 'universal' theory to remote Aboriginal communities. Desert people have been subject to much ethnocentric theorizing. In traditional Aboriginal society Aboriginal law (Tjukurrpa) provided an explanation for most things, not western theories.</i></p>	<p><i>Sensitive application of social capital in remote community contexts may present opportunities to improve theory, enabling it to outgrow its ethnocentric origins.</i></p> <p><i>Many of the factors that produce social capital in remote communities are not identified in the social capital literature.</i></p>

3.3.2 Using Social Capital as an Aid for Thinking About Policy and Practice

Social capital is principally a heuristic device that provides a conceptual framework that may aid thinking about the significance of relational issues. It is more abstract than applied I argue.

A participant in this study (interview 7) suggested social capital was a tool that might help in framing relational questions such as *“What kinds of outcomes are associated with different kinds of social capital?”* Fundamental insights to be drawn from social capital theory are that:

- i. the social networks that connect people are a potential resource;
- ii. trust and reciprocity play a critical role in producing this resource; and,
- iii. the resource of social capital can contribute to well-being (Lahn, 2012: 3).

From this assumptive base it is possible to pose focussed questions about how people network, the extent of trust between them, and how these factors impact on community wellbeing.

The challenge for the researcher is that the form of social networks, the ways in which trust and reciprocity are displayed, and what people consider as critical to their wellbeing vary across societies. Krishna (2002: 56) explains that social capital manifests in different ways in different cultural settings, rendering the search for universal measures redundant:

Networks, roles, rules, procedures, precedents, norms, values, attitudes, and beliefs are different among people who have different patterns of life. Measures of social capital that are relevant for one set of cultures might be quite irrelevant for others.

Formal organisational membership, for example, has been used as a proxy indicator of civic participation, but in some cultures few people belong to associations (Chibber, 1999: 57-59). In rural India Krishna (2002: 5) found:

Neighbors come forward to help neighbors at times of need, and it is known that such help will be offered and accepted. Villager helps villager in raising crops, in training children, in combating disease, in any number of tasks that are associated with life in these agrarian settings. Few formally registered associations exist, however, to assist villagers with such efforts.

A factor that makes social capital difficult to measure is inconsistency in the definition and use of the term (Bankston & Zhou, 2002: 286). The more quantitative disciplines, such as economics, tend to favour narrower definitions of social capital focussed on mapping and counting social networks. Yet while it might be possible to do so, Knack and Keefer (1997) argue the process is misleading because it incorrectly assumes all networks are equally effective in producing social capital. Sociologists take a broader view, generally considering social capital to have networks and normative components, the latter comprising *‘trust’* and *‘reciprocity.’* Values do not lend themselves to easy observation or quantification.

It has been argued that a restrictive definition of social capital concerned only with the networks component, would make it easier to operationalize. It would involve stripping away the hard-to-measure normative aspects, leaving only the more quantifiable *‘networks’* component intact (Hunter, 2004: 18). However, Cox and Caldwell (2000: 55) suggest that such a narrow definition misses the crucial point about social capital, namely that it *“offers the possibility to think outside the measurement square to integrate feelings, perceptions and actions.”* It is not only the quantifiable that counts. Similarly Onyx and Bullen (2000: 126) also argue that the value of human connectedness cannot and should not be quantified because there is no scale that can adequately gauge the *“subtleties and complexities of human life.”*

Nevertheless there is a significant body of literature concerned with seeking to quantify stocks of social capital (Day, 2002; ABS, 2002; Biddle et al 2009; Bullen & Onyx, 1998; Cavaye, 2004; Lochner et al, 1999; Mignone, 2003; Narayan & Cassidy, 2001; Snijders, 1999; Stone & Hughes, 2002; Stone 2001; Van Deth, 2003; Wilson, 2006; Edwards, 2004; Lin & Hsung, 2001). Biddle (2011: 6) has collected hard evidence indicating that Aboriginal people in remote Australia enjoy frequent regular face-to-face contact with their family and friends.

Social capital is similar to other concepts such as *'power'* and *'class'* in that it is difficult to define and not amenable to measurement. And, like them, its primary value lies in the conceptual insights it provides, not in overcoming the intractable methodological issues involved in measuring human wellbeing.

In this thesis I argue that social capital theory can contribute fresh insight into understanding how social networks and trust shape socio-economic outcomes in the remote Australian outback. Specific examples include understanding:

- i. the role attachment to ancestral lands can play in shaping social networks;
- ii. the social processes that transmute financial and other forms of capital into social capital;
- iii. the ways in which an inter-cultural life experience creates new opportunities to produce social capital; and,
- iv. the social conditions under which *'bad'* (non-beneficial) forms of social capital are likely to be produced.

These are all ways in which the application of social capital theory is a useful tool for thinking about remote Aboriginal community disadvantage. I find social capital in a remote community context has intriguing qualities.

3.3.3 Speaking Back to Theory

There is potential for understandings of remote communities to not just be informed by social capital theory, but also to inform it. Not only may social capital provide insights into the factors that contribute to disadvantage, but it may also enable the theory to be refined in ways that enable it to transcend its ethnocentric origins. I argue that a social capital theory informed by ethnographic and anthropological understandings may contribute to the task of universalising it. The combination of theory and remote Aboriginal community context present opportunities for theory development.

Social capital theory is not frozen in time and can be further extended to accommodate additional information. Learning from its application in new and different cultural contexts, such as remote Aboriginal communities, provides a way of doing so. There is an opportunity to collect data *"informed by social capital theory"* in order to test its validity in indigenous contexts (Hunter, 2004: 8). Doing so also presents the opportunity to refine theory.

When Putnam did his initial work on social capital it was recognised that here was a concept still in intellectual infancy and in need of further development (Edwards & Foley, 1998; Hofferth et al, 1999). Woolcock (1998: 188) also pressed the case for further work:

[I]t is important to concede that we still have much to learn about social capital, and that for the time being our empirical expectations of it should be correspondingly modest. Theoretical claims and policy recommendations made on the basis of the incremental accumulation of evidence constitute the surest and most responsible agenda for future research.

Healy (2001: 3) urged considered exploration of both the strengths and limitations of social capital theory, striking out at *'armchair'* critics for being *"cocooned in the familiar world of academic discourse, rather than venturing out to where social capital operates."*

Arguably it is application in new and different cultural milieus that will enable social capital theory to outgrow narrow origins. Better theory may yet evolve as a consequence of the two-way interplay between theory and practice (Torpe, 2003). Social capital theory has been applied in numerous cultural contexts (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995; Zhou & Bankston, 1996; Heller 1996; Rose 1998; Pantoja, 1999; Chhibber, 1999; Collier & Gunning, 1999; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000; Johnston & Soroka, 2001; Isham et al, 2002; Danieri et al, 2002; Isham & Kankonen, 2002; Krishna & Uphoff, 2002; Zhao, 2002; Leonard, 2004; Hitt, et al 2002). In rural India, for example, Krishna (2002: 48) found evidence of villages mobilising effectively to build social capital and benefit their communities.

Rae (2002: xv) is upbeat about the prospects of further development of the concept: *"In the theories of scholars like Putnam, and the hands of his critics ... the idea of social capital will be refined, and may very well become a critical element of the way we seek our future as a society in coming generations"*.

3.4 Ideal Communities

This section of the thesis begins to unpack the reasons why my hypothetical model of the *Liyan* Community inherits all the *'good'* of social capital and *Wandang* only the *'bad'*. The communities have been constructed with different attitudes and potentialities for engagement with ideas about social capital. The priority attached to broadening social connections, openness to ideas, power relations and gender relations are not the same.

Liyan is envisioned as a community enriched by the extent and quality of its thriving social networks. It has relational strengths. Residents share an intuitive perspective that values the transformative potential of social connections. Ideas related to social networks and norms routinely inform thinking and problem solving. People give credence to a social capital analytical frame, even if they never use this terminology to express it. Discussions about the benefits of both familial and extra-familial connections are routine, regardless of whether the term *'social capital'* is used or not. People recognise that their social networks and norms are a valuable resource. *Liyan* is a place open to new ideas and influences, whatever the source.

Gender relations at *Liyan* are co-dependent and balanced. The expectation is that a soundly functioning society requires both men and women engaged at the centre of community life. Governance and family are seen as responsibilities that require the presence of men and women. The social norm is to recognise men and women as having different strengths and preferences, but to also recognise them as mutually supportive. The gendered nature of roles is evident in activities such as separate active women and men's groups. It is, however, the norm for men and women to form long-term family relationships.

People at *Liyan* understand their values differ in certain respects from mainstream society, but they never see themselves, or allow others to ever portray them, as anything less than equal partners on their own country. People perceive themselves, and are perceived by others, as having a different but never a lesser status. A factor that contributes to a strong sense of identity and solidarity is that social networks between people at *Liyan* are grounded in shared connection to ancestral land.

At *Wandang*, not only are the words *'social capital'* not spoken, there is no meaningful dialogue about relational issues whatsoever. Ideas informed by social capital thinking do not feed into problem solving. Men are noticeably not present in family or community life. Relationships beyond family are transactional; concerned with matters such as access to resources. People feel disconnected, having no sense of place or belonging. They also perceive they have dependent relations with mainstream society.

Wandang is a community closed to outside influence. It does not seek to inform or to be informed by the wider world. Patterns of Aboriginal sociability are seen as culturally unique, thereby rendering the use of any external frameworks irrelevant. The residents of *Wandang* understand themselves as totally culturally distinct, with values only ever at odds with those of the coloniser. Ideas of external origin are ethnocentric by definition and any set of universal principles automatically regarded as inapplicable. People have no social networks or norms with any commonality with those in Europe and America where social capital theory developed.

The community provides an extreme instance of the *'phenomenon of the missing men'*. It is not inferred that men are literally always physically absent from community and family life, although they often are. Rather they are disengaged from it. The male population *'floats'*, constantly moving between households and communities. Children grow up without fathers and uncles as a stable presence in their lives. Women alone, especially older women, are responsible for family functioning, struggling to hold *walytja* together without the active involvement of men. There are no long-term relationships between men and women. At *Wandang* men and women lead entirely independent lives.

Finally the portrayal of *Liyan* as strong and *Wandang* as weak is as much perceptual as reflective of any objective *'reality'*. For the understanding of places is constructed from the values of the observer as much as anything else. Communities can be seen as empowered or

deficient, depending on where we choose to look. *Liyan* and *Wandang* may in fact be the same place. It is just that *Liyan* is approached as a community with relational strengths and *Wandang* as purely dysfunctional and pathological.

3.5 In Search of Better Theory

A participant in this study (Interview 1) framed the intellectual dilemma about social capital with a rhetorical question: “*Do we fix up the theory or do we need a better theory?*” On the one hand critiques of the theory are substantial, and on the other hand social capital may potentially provide some insight into Aboriginal disadvantage.

In this thesis I argue that it is possible to strengthen social capital theory by identifying what it is good for and being explicit about its limitations. The term’s lack of resonance at a community level might be addressed by rendering ideas about social capital into ‘*local language*’. In the following chapter I draw on Aboriginal concepts to describe the traditional mode of social capital production.

Indigenous people have been subject to much ethnocentric research. Use of a universal theory risks depicting impoverished people the world over as if they were the same, irrespective of culture or context. There is now caution when it comes to applying any universal theory. However, the ethnocentric roots of social capital might be tempered through broader application in diverse cultural contexts. Arguably good theory displays universal applicability beyond any specific cultural setting.

The tendency to overstate the beneficial effects of social capital can be addressed by adherence to the principles of sound theory and the laws of evidence. Reticence is required in making any beneficial claims about the transformative powers of social capital, until there is compelling empirical evidence collected in context.

The failure of social capital theory to deal with asymmetric power relations demands humble acceptance that one theory may explain something but not everything. Events also need to be placed in historical context. In respect of Aboriginal people post-contact history is marked by instances where Aboriginal people have been excluded from participation in mainstream social networks. It is not plausible to suggest that the current circumstances of remote communities can be explained by social capital without reference to power relations.

The other ‘*blind spot*’, the gendered nature of its production, requires analysis that bothers to explore the different impacts that historical events have had on men and women’s social capital. In this thesis I argue that what is going on in contemporary remote Aboriginal communities cannot be understood without such a distinction.

If social capital theory is to display universal credentials, arguably it might benefit from demonstrating its capacity to accommodate the ways in which this resource is produced in different cultural milieus. The Australian desert is a context vastly different to that explored by Putnam. For as the following chapter reveals, remote Aboriginal communities are important repositories of particular forms of social capital and they generate the resource in innovative ways.

CHAPTER 4: ABORIGINAL PRODUCTION OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

4.1 Introduction

This chapter identifies factors of traditional origin that produce social capital in remote Aboriginal society.

Social capital in the desert is generated by factors markedly different from those described by Putnam (1993, 1995 & 1996). He identified nuclear family, club membership, meeting attendance, political activism, discussion groups, hobby groups, union membership, church attendance, neighbourhood watch and sporting teams as activities generating social capital in the places he studied.

A theme in this thesis is that while social capital theory has generic principles, such as trust and reciprocity, the factors that produce the resource need to be understood as culturally distinctive. Participant 8 remarked in respect of the context of my study: *“The underlying principles are, I think, universal, but the form which it takes would of course be different.”*

In rural India Krishna (2002) found social capital takes on a character of its own derived from particular people and place. He (2002: 670) concludes:

The extent of social capital in any community must be verified in relation to activities that are usually carried out collectively for mutual benefit. What these activities are, however, varies from one context to another.

4.2 Relational Identity

My thesis argues desert people have a relational identity primarily concerned with the production of social capital. By this I mean the norm is to only conceive of oneself in connection with others and to identify as part of a social group, not individually. To be a desert Aboriginal person is to be closely related with many other people. The relationships they have with each other are inseparable from *‘who they are’* (Folds, 2001: 41; Myers 1986). A participant in this study (Interview 10) summed up the view of classical Aboriginal society as *“that it’s impossible to understand oneself outside the nexus of connections to others”*.

Processes of socialization from childhood shape a deep sense of collective identity. Geography and the demands of survival in a harsh physical environment also orientate people towards collective thinking. According to Participant 3:

If you try to be an individual out here mate, you’re going to do it hard. You’re on your own. You’re not only on your own, but you’re really isolated and remote.

The complexities of social organisation and relatedness in desert society have been the subject of intense anthropological examination (Myers, 1980; Rose, 1992). Central is the notion that everyone has social and cultural obligations and accountabilities to each other that are binding. These are made dense by common connections to country, a shared belief system, norms of sharing and reciprocity, holding relationships and the everyday practice of hunting and gathering together.

A participant in this study (Interview 3) described desert people as enmeshed in social networks: *“There’s so many ways you can have relationships in these remote areas - blood-lines are one way; marriage lines, skin group and just through your families knowing one another - and they all count.”*

People are motivated by a persistent urge to extend their social networks ever outwards. The business of constructing and managing webs of connection is a highly visible activity, for much of the relating is conducted outdoors for all to see (Folds, 2001: 175). Whenever people meet their immediate concern is to discover the basis of their connection. Therefore people begin by stating who they are and from where they come.

Over their life course people pursue opportunities to grow the depth and range of their connections. To have a large network is to acquire social status. Furthermore the generations following behind can only hope to acquire such status for themselves by being in relationships

with older people who possess the knowledge they need to acquire. Typically, as Myers (1980: 163) observes, social networks expand with age. *“Critically, as a person grows older, the field of those considered to be relatives increases in breadth and complexity. This is of great significance because relations are the source of most valuables in ... life, including food, a spouse, rights in ceremony, and protection.”*

Making connections is always a work in progress; always formative, always in need of reinforcement, forever being realised and re-realised all over again. Relationship complexities are a topic of conversation constantly mulled over, always at the forefront of the mind, always being thought through, discussed, speculated about, smoothed out, strategized, worked upon, affirmed and reaffirmed. Relatedness is not, however, unproblematic. There is a persistent tension between the simultaneous desire for relatedness and for autonomy according to Myers (1986). Memmott and Meltzer (2003: 105) observe: *“A number of researchers have argued that Indigenous people actually invest significant time and energy into building social capital; however, it often manifests in ways that are not registered in terms of ‘economic development’ or that do not match the mainstream criteria of ‘good governance’.”*

To build an extensive social network is ultimate life purpose. A sense of wellbeing is inseparable from the quality and quantity of connections. Every aspect of people’s wellbeing is sustained and progressed through social networks. In a society where non-material values hold sway, feeling in *‘right’* reciprocal relationship with those to whom one feels connected may be all the *‘riches’* desired, reflecting a conscious deliberate choice to not ever place individual material goals higher than social connections. Folds (2001: 52) writes that for desert people *“spending time with relatives is the essence of a fulfilling life.”* It is sociability that gives meaning to life.

Remote Australia is a place where the accumulation of social capital has precedence over the accumulation of material wealth. Aboriginal people tend to interpret thrift as *“shameful greed”* according to McGrath (1995: 24). In desert society it is not income that determines a sense of worth and physical and emotional wellbeing. Rather it is the extent and quality of the web of social networks constructed. By way of comparative example the Nuer people of South Sudan may be described as having a *‘cattle-centric’* worldview (Hutchinson, 1992; Evans-Pritchard, 1951). The number of stock owned is their predominant source of wealth and social identity. From their perspective foreigners are *‘jur’*, translating as a people who are entirely *‘cattle-less’*.

In traditional society the social trait of anomie was all but non-existent according to Memmott and Meltzer (2005: 112). From the perspective of desert people the poorest of the poor are the *‘relationally impoverished’*, meaning those without social networks. A participant in this study (Interview 4) stated:

I tell all my kids ‘See that elder sitting down there, old people, don’t you walk past. You say ‘Hello, good morning’ ... And the old person might turn around and ask ‘Who’s your family?’ They’ll know your family, even though you don’t know, that person they’ll know.

For desert Aboriginal people the imperative to relate remains strong. It survived the socially disruptive exodus out of the interior of the continent to dispersed missions, pastoral stations and remote towns all around the desert fringe, separated by hundreds of kilometres. Myers (1980: 22) writes:

No community represented, for any individual, the entirety of the social universe. Every individual stressed ties to other people in faraway places. They had gone out of the desert in all directions, but their deepest aspiration was to somehow sustain these relations.

Even amongst Aboriginal people who do not live remotely Lahn (2012: 7) found the *“value of work, money and even home ownership was consistently articulated in terms of importance within family or community life, rather than individual needs, aspirations or socio-economic advancement.”* According to Lahn (2012: 7) the fact people might aspire to income and home ownership should not necessarily be interpreted as evidence of material aspiration driven by processes of individuation. Rather, she concludes, the motivation is often to take advantage of new opportunities to strengthen bonds through sharing. Such aspirations can be understood as the continuity of cultural values in new form, as distinct from enculturation.

The social capital literature asserts a fundamental human need for social connection and affiliation (Johnson et al, 2003: 6-7; Levitas, 1998; Fukuyama, 1992, 1996 & 1999). It rejects the notion that individual economic self-interest is the sole source of human motivation. On this aspect at least, there is a parallel with a desert worldview. Reflecting on the values and aspirations of the desert people, Myers (1986: 40) concludes: *“They want, as far as an outsider can see, primarily to remain in close proximity with their relatives.”*

4.3 Bonding Mechanisms

4.3.1 Overview

In this section I argue that the primary factors that construct bonding social capital in traditional desert society were *walytja* (extended family ties), *ngurra* (connections to country) and *kanyirninpa* (inter-generational connections), as summarised in TABLE 4.1 (below).

Broader societal level factors that bridge social groups together in remote Australia are discussed later in the chapter.

TABLE 4.1: FACTORS PRODUCING BONDING SOCIAL CAPITAL: FAMILY, COUNTRY & SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

Key Findings	Relevance to Remote Communities	Lessons for Theory, Policy & Practice
<p>Walytja (Extended family) Bonds are produced within extended family networks rather than the nuclear family.</p> <p>Rationale: Affiliation between family members is a source of security.</p> <p>In contemporary society <i>walytja</i> remains a highly visible unit of social organisation.</p>	<p><i>In traditional society walytja was the primary unit of social organisation, found right across the interior of the continent, even in the harshest environments.</i></p>	<p><i>Strategies that sustain walytja are critical to bonding. Family is a primary source of bonding in many societies</i></p>
<p>Ngurra (Country) Desert people have a capacity to transmute the resource of natural capital embodied in land into social capital.</p> <p>Rationale: The land-people relationship is culturally understood as one of reciprocal co-dependence.</p>	<p><i>Ngurra provides an enduring foundation of shared identity. Those who belong to the same ancestral land (country) enjoy lifelong bonds as a consequence.</i></p> <p><i>The bonds of affinity between members of walytja and their shared bonds to ancestral country (ngurra) are mutually reinforcing.</i></p>	<p><i>An intrinsic felt sense of belonging to the land can be a driver of social capital formation. Desert people generate social capital out of a shared sense of belonging to ngurra.</i></p>
<p>Kanyirninpa (Intergenerational-bonds) Desert people may construct social capital through an inter-generational process of cultural education.</p> <p>Rationale: <i>Kanyirninpa</i> (holding) ensured care, guidance & nurturance of the young in traditional society.</p>	<p><i>The attainment of cultural knowledge is critical to the achievement of social status in Aboriginal society.</i></p> <p><i>In traditional society the life cycle involved moving from being held to holding others.</i></p> <p><i>The process depends on the presence of men.</i></p>	<p><i>Cultural education is critical to social re-production & is a way of building inter-generational bonds.</i></p> <p><i>The role of men is diminished in contemporary Aboriginal society.</i></p>

4.3.2 Walytja

The social capital literature identifies the family unit as a universal source of this resource that furnishes physical and emotional support (Putnam, 2000; Winter, 2000). It is important to note, however, that the social capital literature specifically has nuclear family in mind, not the extended family groups that generate bonds in remote communities (Putnam, 2000; Winter 2000). Daly and Smith (2003: 14) observe:

The central importance of family and kin in everyday life is a valued form of social and cultural capital in many Indigenous families and communities. If family is the fundamental source of social capital ... then for Indigenous people it is the extended family formation, not the nuclear family, which serves that pivotal role.

The Pitjantjatjara word '*walytja*' is used in this thesis to refer to extended family group relations amongst desert people (Austin-Broos, 2011: 25). An extended family is "*a nuclear or polygynous family, or part of one, plus one or more other relatives, such as a spouse's parent, a child's spouse, or a grandchild*" (Keen, 2002: 309). *Walytja* defines the members of a group of relatives who share a common ancestral association with particular estate of land, their clan estate (Bern, 1979: 127).

Desert society is not comprised of concrete bounded autonomous social units (Merlan, 1998: 166; Myers 1986). However for my purposes the term *walytja* is also synonymous with what anthropologists might call a clan, local descent group, estate group, hearth group, horde, a band or a camp (Radcliffe-Brown, 1913; Berndt, 1959; Keen, 2004: 277; Merlan, 1998: 79; McGrath, 1987: 131-132). I am aware of long running debate within anthropology about the meaning and appropriateness of such terms (Sahlins, 1976; Myers, 1986; Merlan, 1998: 112-119), but for my purposes of constructing simplified models of community social capital they may be conflated as all meaning *walytja*. I am also aware the term *walytja* is sometimes used to refer to relationships over a large area, extending beyond the extended family group, to also encompass others connected through the skin group classification system discussed later in this chapter. The term is not used in this broader sense in this thesis.

The literature describing the central place of extended family, the impact of colonisation, and contemporary family issues in Aboriginal society is extensive (Barwick, 1974; Beasley, 1975; Malinowski, 1913; Collman, 1979; Healy et al, 1985; Myers, 1991; Bourke & Bourke, 1995; Gray et al, 1994; Haebich, 2000; Gordon et al, 2002; Saggars & Sims, 2005; Morphy, 2006; Wild & Andersen, 2007; Slattery, 1987). Extended family is described as located at the very heart of social life, indeed at the core of what it means to identify as an Aboriginal person (Birdsall, 1987; MacDonald, 2000). Relations are sustained by strong and enduring felt connections grounded in mutual empathy, interpersonal trust, and easy rapport. The bonds that hold *walytja* together were once forged through cooperation on a daily basis for purposes such as hunting and gathering. As discussed in Chapter 6 these bonds may now be forged through a different set of shared life experiences.

Use of the term '*family*' can be misleading when applied to desert communities where notions of '*family*' composition are far removed from non-indigenous western understandings of a nuclear family living together in a single household (McCoy, 2004: xv). Certain mainstream concepts related to family, such as '*household*', '*parent*', '*sole parent*', and '*resident*' reflect a non-Indigenous value system that does not translate easily into Aboriginal realities (Daly & Smith 2003: 2).

Relational norms within *walytja* do not distinguish between a father and an uncle or between mother and aunt (Tonkinson, 1978: 44). Similarly no distinction is made between a sibling and a cousin (Austin-Broos, 2011: 33). '*Cousin-brothers*' and '*cousin-sisters*' have parity with more immediate biological family members. The felt intensity of each of these relationships, and the responsibilities and obligations they gave rise to, carry the same weight.

Communalised child rearing is characteristic of *walytja* life. Children grow up in multi-generational families in close proximity to their grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles. Parents still rely on others to assist with the feeding, development and socialisation of their children. Whenever they can, fellow *walytja* also routinely help each other to pay for food and clothing courtesy of an intricate operating network of financial support.

In traditional society *walytja* always lived and camped separately, meeting up only periodically

with neighbouring social groups. In traditional society an extended family group might typically have consisted of 12-50 people, much larger than a typical non-indigenous family, but not so large as to lose the advantages of mobility and self-sufficiency (Berndt, 1959: 103). Membership was multi-generational, each social unit perhaps consisting of a man, his wives, their children, his surviving parents and a few single men. Keen (2004: 252) writes: *"It was important for an individual's security and support that they have an extensive network of relatives - people stressed that they were not alone."*

In many contemporary communities *walytja* is still the primary unit of social, economic and political organisation in remote communities (Martin 1997; Mantziaris & Martin 2000: 169-170; Sutton 1998: 55). It furnishes means of survival, nurturance, learning, security and everyday social interaction. People rely on *walytja* bonds in times of hardship when they need support (Folds, 2001: 81 & 85). A participant in this study (Interview 3) described family ties as *"the glue that keeps everyone together."*

However, desert people now typically reside in large-scale community settings comprising numerous other *walytja*. In traditional society *walytja* consisted of a handful of people. Now *walytja* may typically contain a hundred or more affiliates. The new demographics are attributable to the removal of natural constraints on food supply, improved infant mortality and a high incidence of teenage pregnancy. Desert people value having a large family, but large *walytja* also brings new pressures according to Tonkinson (1978: 45).

In contemporary remote communities *walytja* may seek to replicate aspects of ancient principles of socio-relational spatial organization by maintaining separate '*camps*' (McGrath, 1987: 132; Merlan, 1998: 190). They generally put down a marker of identity by choosing to locate on the side of the community that lies in the general direction closest to their ancestral country (Merlan, 1998: 1). Typically each social group occupies an enclave cluster of adjacent houses, thereby enabling kin to live in close proximity to one another (Merlan, 1998: 206). Typically family members, including children, live across several related households, rather than permanently in a particular home. It is not just that it is a norm that relations should live together in this way, but further that social order is understood as achieved via spatial order (Merlan, 1998: 204).

Affiliation with one's *walytja* plays a central role in defining and organising group relations that may stand in opposition to the interests of other *walytja*. In the different places where they conducted research Sutton (1998: 55) and Martin (1993: 267) concluded the extended family unit provided the bedrock foundation from which each extended family group advocated their political interests. People still like to live in enclaves surrounded by those to whom they are most closely related (Merlan, 1998: 44).

Walytja is not an entirely bounded, impenetrable, pre-determined or fixed social unit (Myers 1986: 95). Merlan (1998: 43) writes of the groups with whom she worked, *"While there tends to be close interaction and kinship among many of the residents of any given camp, no camp is entirely self-contained and independent: networks of kinship and connection extend outward from all camps to other locales."* Women would marry in and individuals would be adopted. Sometimes people would leave for a while. It was always the practice of single young men to travel widely, traversing the desert for months at a time moving between groups (Myers, 1986: 75). The impulse to travel and stories of great ancestral journeys are deeply embedded in Aboriginal oral history, religion and ontology. Boundaries ought not to be confused with barriers (Merlan, 1998: 119). Sometimes individuals were banished because of misdeeds or chose to distance themselves in the hope of escaping sanction or punishment.

A form of group solidarity is engendered that manifests in demonstrations of unconditional family support for *walytja* group members. Any action that might place family bonds at risk is best avoided. Family have a seemingly limitless capacity to unquestioningly defend and forgive each other. Myers (1986: 115) observed no matter how often someone might transgress, they were still given *"one more chance."* According to Folds (2001: 109) *"The sight of exhausted relatives storming into community meetings and loudly protesting, to the point of physical violence if necessary, in order to defend their petrol-sniffing children from the slightest innuendo of wrongdoing, is not uncommon"*

Folds (2001) recalls an instance where the justice system forbade a man from visiting the community where he had offended. His family angrily defended his actions when he was re-imprisoned, claiming he was jailed just for seeing his mother (Folds, 2001: 108). Martin (1993: 178 & 182) refers to the reluctance of Aboriginal Police Aides to intervene in a street

fight because it meant apprehending members of their own family. Whatever formal authority mainstream society might attach to such a role, the local expectation is that it should be secondary to *walytja* obligations (Myers, 1986: 260).

While *walytja* is the primary idiom through which warmth and geniality is expressed, no social group is entirely immune to internal friction, anger, envy, jealousy, dislike and rivalry. Keen (2004: 264) identifies common catalysts for disputation:

The causes of fights included adultery and quarrels over the distribution of food. Fighters goaded each other with obscene insults, often implying incestuous relations. Women fought with digging sticks or men's clubs, usually over adultery; sisters would aid each other. Men killed or threatened to kill women and uninitiated young men for seeing men's sacred objects, and attacked other men for infringements of rights over the making of totemic objects.

Disputation in desert society is a reaction to circumstances where someone feels aggrieved because they believe relations are out of balance (Myers, 1980: 179). Internal group disharmony is so traumatic that *walytja* are always keen to see harmonious relations restored as soon as possible (Mantziaris & Martin 2000: 282-283). Prolonged internal conflict endangers the survival of small isolated social groups (Austin-Broos, 2011: 37). Cooperative collective effort is required everyday in a customary economy. In traditional society *walytja* might ill afford to be without the labour of fit and functional hunters who might be injured in fights or leave. Thus while *"people used speech to goad and enrage"*, they *"also had techniques to intervene and calm"* including reminders of their mutual ties to heal frictions (Keen, 2004: 93).

Communalised child rearing is a characteristic feature of *walytja* relations. Several family members, especially grandmothers and aunts, contribute in ways that might ordinarily fall only to parents in non-Aboriginal society. Senior family members are obliged to care for younger generations. Older children too are expected to share the load of supervising younger ones. Mountford (1961: 35) describes the shared parenting practice he observed in central Australia.

The wealth of affection that exists between the adults and the children in an aboriginal tribe has to be seen to be believed. There was one baby boy in camp, perhaps nine months old, who was seldom in his mother's arms except for meals. At all other times some man, woman, boy or girl was either carrying him about or playing with him. The older children seemed to go their own sweet way, without hindrance from anyone.

In the desert the unrestrained freedom of children is tolerated to a far greater extent than in mainstream society. Aboriginal child rearing practices typically include paying selective attention, encouraging children to imitate actions, and the use of stories to communicate values. Tonkinson (1982: 117) writes:

In the desert environment, children were allowed free rein to do as they pleased within very broad limits. Australian Aboriginal culture is noted for the extreme permissiveness of adults towards children, who were generally indulged to a remarkable degree. Children were accustomed to getting their way and were rarely subjected to physical punishment by adults. If chastised or hit, their typical reaction was a violent and prolonged temper tantrum, which include verbal and physical abuse of their adversaries until their feelings were assuaged by capitulation, bribery, and great shows of affection.

In traditional nomadic hunter-gather society there was little enduring damage an out of control child could inflict. As Tonkinson (1982: 118) noted *"There were no houses to burn down, and in the desert there was little danger of a blaze getting out of hand."*

A lenient attitude is seen as developing personal responsibility, independence and emotional and physical resilience from an early age, thereby enabling children to cope better with circumstances encountered later in life (Malin et al, 1996). The preference is to let children learn experientially. From the earliest age children are socialised to be autonomous, encouraged to make their own life choices and to accept the consequences of their own actions with a minimum of intervention (Keen, 2004: 245). Adults generally avoid directly telling children what to do (Tonkinson, 1982: 123). One reason is that to chastise or discipline a child is to risk sparking conflict between adults.

In a society where expressions of the unrestrained freedom of youth are acceptable, the behaviour of young people may be of more concern to outsiders than it is to *walytja* (Folds, 2001: 162). Tonkinson (1982: 121) found: *“The Aborigines do not share the great concern of the local whites about some aspects of the discipline problem, such as vandalism and breaking and entering, but are primarily worried because the onus has been placed on them to apprehend and punish the offenders.”*

Mainstream society may tend to regard Aboriginal parenting as lacking discipline (Gray et al, 1994: 83-84). The following is an Aboriginal mother’s response to such value judgements:

Because they are only seeing things through their white culture, they will misinterpret the way I discipline the kids, and they won’t notice that my kids are happy and loved and growing up in a way that they can look after themselves and do the right thing by their family. They know who they are and where they belong and that their family would stand by them through thick or thin. They know that I’ll give my last cent for them and that if I lost them, my life would be destroyed. Now they are older, I know they can and will be there for me if I am sick and need them. (Malin et al, 1996: 43)

There may, however, be more than a persistence of traditional child rearing practices going on here. There has also been a fundamental change in power relations between adults and children which limits the extent of family restraint: *“children possess power that they never had traditionally - the power to abandon Aboriginal culture in favour of that of the whites, which is increasingly impinging on them and offers many attractions”* (Tonkinson, 1982: 126). Demands for soft drink and lollies or a refusal to attend school may be acceded to because to do otherwise is to create a fractious situation that puts carefully accumulated and valued bonds at risk (Folds, 2001: 84).

Walytja do not like to place bonds at risk. The fear is youth might choose to leave their people and place behind, psychologically or physically. Christie and Greatorex (2004: 45) describe the situation in one region in northern Australia.

Increasing numbers of young people are looking westward, as the grasp of community life weakens. Today, as is frequently reported, ‘the youth control the elders’. These tensions have led to great distress, concentrated in the former mission settlements.

Walytja has proven to be a most resilient social structure, but it may not be what it once was. While the structural unit remains, the normative content of family can be hollowed out (Atkinson, 1990 & 2002; Sam, 1991; Bolger 1991; Robertson, 2000). A raft of research and official reports highlight the long escalation of family violence (Bell, 1983 & 1998; Bolger, 1991; Sam, 1991; Blagg, 2000; Dudgeon, 2000; O’Donoghue, 2001; Huggins, 2002; Cunneen, 2002; Lawrie & Mathews, 2002; Memmott, 2002; Gordon et al, 2002; Quayle, 2002). A Domestic Violence Task Force (Robertson, 2000: 45) in Queensland vividly reported:

Appalling acts of physical brutality and sexual violence are being perpetrated within some families and across communities to a degree previously unknown in Indigenous life. Sadly, many of the victims are women and children, young and older people who now in many cases are living in a constant state of desperation and despair.

Respectful relationships within *walytja* may be damaged by alcohol-fuelled violence (Cunneen, 2002: 24). Men are most often the perpetrators and women and children the victims, although not always (Burbank, 1994). Possessiveness and disputes over women are commonplace in some communities (Martin, 1993: 34 & 69). It may be that social interaction with both potential partners and rivals is more frequent in a large community environment, and therefore jealousy is more easily fired, but there have always been fights over women.

There is also substantial literature documenting the disadvantaged socio-economic circumstances of Aboriginal children (O’Connor, 1993; Cockington, 1980; D’Souza, 1994; Chisholm, 1985; Butler, 1992; Litwin, 1997; Wild & Andersen, 2007). Increasingly parents are also teenagers, too young to be well grounded in parenting skills (Martin, 1993).

Those who find the demands of parenthood restrict their social life may cease to be the primary source of child-care. It is a cultural norm to leave children in the care of older family members. However, whereas in traditional society this practice once freed parents to forage (Keen, 2004: 105), it may now enable them to make extended trips to town. Martin (1993: 170) describes

what he witnessed in his research:

[T]he increasingly fractured nature of domestic life left many children with no clearly defined primary caregivers or even household. With so many of the adults who had nominal obligations to provide food and care for them involved in gambling, drinking, and fighting or dealing with their consequences, all of which entailed considerable material and social resources (including time), many children suffered real physical deprivation.

In traditional society ones' country would never let any of its people go hungry, but away from their protective *ngurra* some do. Typically now it is older women who are left struggling to hold *walytja* together. Families may be matriarchal by default because children live in households that are often without men. Women play the family support and anchor role. Gray et al (1994: 108) depict women as straining to provide care, nurturance and economic stability under social pressure.

[E]conomic deprivation and the traditional marriage responsibilities of men have left women in a vulnerable position. There is less obligation for husbands to stay with the family and women may not have appropriate 'care-taking' relatives to whom they can turn, for instance in the case of male violence. (Gray et al, 1994: 108)

In summary *walytja* is a primary unit of analysis in seeking to understand social organisation and functioning in remote Australia. The long established norm is to show deep affection towards fellow *walytja*. It is the source of support, identity and bonding. Its influence is manifest in dense family solidarity and the ways in which each generation is socialised to adulthood. Desert people continue to attach primacy to their bonds with their own *walytja*, not to any acculturated western notion of nuclear family or broader notions of community or nation. Much of the social capital in remote Aboriginal society is of the localised bonding kind, located in the intricate webs of connectedness that constitute Aboriginal extended family networks. In post-contact society *walytja* remains the site of the most intense formation of bonding social capital. It is largely, but not solely, on account of these ties that desert people are able to accumulate stocks of bonding social capital. What is in question is the extent to which it necessarily gives rise to positive social norms. After all, as Folds (2001: 86) explains, "*walytja is the reason for living, irrespective of whether relatives bring pleasure or pain.*"

4.2.3 Ngurra

The social capital literature primarily understands bonds as being produced within the family unit. However, people in remote communities have bonding connections with each other as a consequence of having shared connections to ancestral country. The effect is to reinforce and deepen ties, potentially making bonds significantly stronger than in other cultural contexts.

Each *walytja* is associated with a particular defined ancestral estate (*ngurra or country*) from time immemorial. *Ngurra*, a term used by language groups in Central Australia, means "*the place where one belongs*" (Myers, 1986: 55). The term is inclusive of land, waters and particular sites that a group is culturally obliged to hold and nurture. *Ngurra* affiliation creates a sense of localised group identity.

Relationships between the members of a *walytja* derive, to no small extent, from common relationship with their country. *Ngurra* and *walytja* ties are inseparable and mutually reinforcing. Myers (1986: 92) writes these two concepts are "*interchangeable indices of a single experienced reality.*"

In patrilineal traditional societies primary rights and interests in land are inherited from one's father and his father before him (Merlan, 1989: 79-80; Austin-Broos, 2011: 31). People are possessed of many generations of connection stretching back to when mythical ancestral beings arose out of the land and traversed the country in partial human-like form, giving rise to its physical features and song lines. The oral history of desert people is replete with such travel stories (Folds, 2001: 8; Austin-Broos, 2011: 46; McGrath, 1987: 174). Berndt (1959: 98) writes:

Those persons united by common patrilineal descent, who share a given site or constellation of sites, constitute the local group; this is the land-owning group, with special spiritual and ritual ties, of which the land itself represents the most obvious, most enduring, and most consistently visible, tangible focus.

The norm is for *walytja* members to show affection, not just towards each other, but also towards their '*ngurra*'. Each member of a group has a deep spiritual and emotional connection with their country. Thus they are not only held in relationship with each other, but also with the rituals, totems and sites of spiritual significance that belong to their country.

When desert men married tradition required they stay within their own family group (Keen, 2004: 204-207). It was their sisters and daughters who moved to live with the husband on his estate (Shapiro, 1979:41). When a woman married into another group she was, nevertheless, still regarded as always belonging to her father's country, such was the importance attached to local descent group identity (Berndt, 1959: 98).

In desert communities the owners or '*boss*' for particular land is known as *kirta* for that country. To be *kirta* (Walpiri and other languages) is to have a legitimate basis for spiritual association with, and responsibility for, *ngurra*. During ceremony *kirta* wear or carry a distinctive totemic decoration, known as *Purruuwatji*, symbolising their association with country. *Purruuwatji* may be worn as decoration or drawn on a board. The cultural obligation is to follow in the footsteps of one's father and grandfather by maintaining the use of *Purruuwatji* because, as a primary symbol of *walytja* identity, it shows one's patrilineal line linked to a particular estate. It '*tells*' all who see it, unmistakably, both the *walytja* from whom one is descended and the *ngurra* to which one belongs; in effect who you are and where you come from.

To the untrained eye much of inland Australia is a uniform fairly featureless land; a vast waterless plain dominated by dry spinifex vegetation. The European explorer Carnegie (1989: 292-293) wrote: "*What heartbreaking country, monotonous, lifeless, without interest, without excitement save when the stern necessity of finding water forced us to seek out the natives in their primitive camps!*" Yet to countless generations of desert people it is a living (socialised) cultural landscape imbued with great meaning (Smith, 2000: 70-77). Sites associated with ancestral beings demarcate the whole country. Desert people see ancestral traces everywhere that they believe were created by their forebears: in the rocks, in living animals and even in human birthmarks and moles (Keen, 2004: 281; Merlan, 1998: 213). People have socially created "*totemic estates*" with a "*totemic geography*" (Bern, 1979: 125-127). Myers (1986: 93) eloquently writes: "*To hear mention of a place is ... to identify the persona associated with it, and to hear of people is to think of their places.*"

The ideal for a desert person is to be born in country in proximity to places of importance, as this reinforces *kirta* rights and interests in it. Berndt (1959: 96-97) writes: "*a child should be born at or near a particular sacred site, or constellation of such sites, with which his father is closely associated, to facilitate inheritance of his totemic affiliation.*"

Desert people seek to maintain a balanced relationship with their *ngurra*, just as they do with each other. The land-people connection is understood as one of reciprocal co-dependence. Their *ngurra* is said to hold them and they it. If people look after their country, it will look after them. The protection and security *ngurra* affords can only be assured if they maintain spiritual belief, language, custom and ritual. McCoy (2004: 43) writes:

[A]s with other holding relationships, their respect for the land that holds them is reciprocated by the ways in which they care for the land. They perform their ceremonies and burn off the old grass, and in return the land gives them food and 'living water'.

The cultural obligation is to respect the integrity of *ngurra* and manage its natural resources by:

- i. protecting sites of sacred significance;
- ii. '*cleansing*' (burning) country for ceremony and hunting;
- iii. practicing increase rituals believed to enhance species diversity and ensure a plentiful supply of plants and animals;
- iv. learning, performing and maintaining ceremony and songs related to ones own country; and,
- v. passing on knowledge of country and related rituals to future generations.

A participant in this study (Interview 5) stated the notion of connection to *ngurra* -the idea that "*everybody has country*" - remains fundamental to the worldview of Aboriginal people and their

sense of belonging.

It's about a oneness, being at one within yourself and also within your country and you can't project you're identity if you're not at one with those two elements for starters ... It requires a fundamental understanding of who you are and where you fit within your country. It determines your relationships with other humans at one level. But it also determines your relationship with features on the landscape; landmarks, animals, plants, stars, bodies of water and so on ... Just as you are living, those elements are living too.

Walytja relate to their country as a fellow living being (Rose, 1992). They sing and talk to their ancestral land to let it know they are there. They perform ceremony and ritual to keep it bountiful. In return country is understood as bestowing gifts in the form of usable plants, animals and materials. A participant in this study described desert people singing their “*country alive*” (Interview 5). Desert people refer to those places of greatest significance in the same way as they might a beloved family member. Rose (1996: 7) elaborates:

Country is not a generalised or undifferentiated type of place, such as one might indicate with terms like ‘spending a day in the country’ or ‘going up the country’. Rather, country is a living entity with a yesterday, today and tomorrow, with a consciousness, and a will toward life. Because of this richness, country is home, and peace; nourishment for body, mind and spirit; heart’s ease.

Maintaining relationship with *ngurra* is central to desert people’s holistic understanding of physical, social and emotional wellbeing (McCoy, 2004: 93). Good health is “*an embodied quality of living*” according to McCoy (2004: 84) that depends, not only on maintaining relationships between people, but also on maintaining the bonds between people and their country. McCoy (2004: 43) writes people “*still believe that having a relationship with the land will continue to provide the strength and nurturance that is needed for the health of their young people*”. By contrast poor health and wellbeing are understood to be a consequence of relationships with *ngurra* that are out of balance. There is research evidence lending support to a hypothesis of correlation between the social health of Aboriginal people and their connections to culture, language and country.

Ngurra provides a stable mental and emotional foundation for life (Merlan, 1998: 93). The notion of connections to country has a metaphysical element derived from an embodied sense of people and place. A felt inner sense of spiritual belonging can be a source of rejuvenation. The Aboriginal perspective is that those connected to country are able to draw strength from it everyday. People are reinvigorated in its presence. Some people say their inner spirit feels good when they are on country (McCoy, 2004: 93). They may become excited and cry for their country after a long absence. Participant 5 described his personal experience travelling back to country with an aged and unwell elder who was suddenly reinvigorated by places he had not been able to visit in many years.

Martin (1993: 221-222) writes of a “*socialised landscape*” with psychological healing effects. He vividly captures feelings evoked by re-connection with country (Martin, 1993: 221-222).

On several occasions I witnessed the deep emotion of older men and women on visiting country that they had not been in for many years. This was ,not as I understood it at least, sentiment for ‘land’ itself, but rather was aroused by the recollections of the people - in many cases long deceased - who had been associated with the sites, and the events that had taken place there; gatherings for wallaby drives, fights with spearings, crocodile attacks, lovers’ escapades, cattle mustering camps and so forth.

Myers (1980: 157) observed that the desert people he worked with returned to country whenever they felt insecure or in danger. People still yearn for country in times of social stress as a source of spiritual strength and nurturance because the spirits of their ancestors dwell there. Young people fighting or in other trouble may be sent to an homeland (outstation) on country to recover or might choose to go (Austin-Broos, 2011: 168). People also believe the way to manage excess drinking is through kind of *spatial strategies* such as removing someone far from their drinking circle or declaring an area ‘*dry*’ (Merlan, 1998: 198 & 204; McDermott et al, 1998).

Connections to country can be understood as building social capital in two ways. Firstly it reinforces a lifelong connection between fellow people with common ancestors. Desert people have bonds with each other that are grounded in, and emerge out of, shared cultural connections with their ancestral country (*ngurra*). Shared relationship with land structure their family relationships with each other. The notion of belonging to country has the effect of reinforcing familial bonds, never one without the other. A common grounding provides a foundation for social networks. People understand themselves and their relationships with each other as inseparable, bound up with their connections to country. The strong sense of belonging to the land is known as *kuruwarri* in some parts of the interior (Watson, 1996).

Secondly connections to country provide the solid ground from which desert people can confidently engage outwards from a position of felt security and to which they can retreat if need be. Social capital theory posits that it is too much bonding that inhibits the formation of broader bridging relations. However, a participant in this study (Interview 2) describes strong *walytja* and *ngurra* foundations as enabling broader relationships, empowering people to speak from a place of secure identity.

The core of the family is the sense that the unit finds in land, and the sense of identity that that land gives back to the family, and the need to maintain its structure and its strength so they can look after what they see as their place. And then the whole depth of your cultural connections and your knowledge of the country underpins who you are as a person and how you look after each other and respond to adversity as a family. And that family forms a set of relationships with other families and that then becomes the nation.

While the bonds between people in desert society may be intense, they are not necessarily so tightly compacted as to exclude the possibility of bridging social capital. From this perspective it is strong bonds that makes the construction of bridges possible.

In their analysis of social capital in Yolngu country in north east Arnhemland, Christie and Greatorex (2004: 42) observe: *“the land recognises, respects and makes secure the people, just as much as the other way around.”* Those who belong to the land have a strong sense of identity. They know who they are and where they come from.

Commenting generally on the factors that generate social capital anywhere a participant in this study (Interview 9) remarked on the value of strong identity: *“A sense of belonging is extraordinarily important because that’s where you get that sense of identity as determined by relationship with others.”* This grounding provides a firm foundation from which people can build secure relationships with others. Thus it is a resource that not only reinforces local bonds, it also provides the necessary confidence to engage outwards with the world.

A sharp distinction between social and natural capital is not always easy to sustain in Aboriginal Australia (Memmott & Meltzer, 2005: 116). The production of social capital can involve the transmutation of the natural capital embodied in country, and all that lives on it, into social connections. In effect there is a process of leveraging the natural capital embodied in land into social capital embodied in relationships. This ability of desert people to transmute capital from one form into another is a theme to which I return in this thesis.

Ties between people the world over may have their origins in a felt sense of connection with the natural environment (Flora, 1998). It can nurture, providing a sense of security and a stable mental and emotional foundation for life. Although it may take different cultural forms, a sense of belonging to the land is not unique to Aboriginal culture. Connections with the environment may be an important source of social capital in other societies, although its character and ontological origins may differ (Pretty & Ward, 2001). However, while discussion of felt connections to land and environment is a prominent theme for the land care and deep ecology movements, it is not so in the social capital literature (Kheel, 1990). A sense of belonging to land and environment can generate social capital. It is a gap in the understanding of social capital Aboriginal people might help to fill. They often strive to tie non-indigenous people to country like themselves reasoning that those with a *“sense of ‘belonging’ to the country ... could be more relied upon”* (McGrath, 1987: 102).

Wider recognition of the place connections to country may play in building social capital provides a way in which indigenous people can *‘speak back’* to the future development of social capital theory. A participant in this study (Interview 5) suggested that connections to country

are not easily compressed into a bonding and bridging typology of social capital. As he saw it, an understanding informed only by social capital theory would fail to capture important aspects of the nature of Aboriginal relatedness:

As a departure point [from social capital theory] I would see ... extensive relationships that are derived from many, many, generations beforehand, that are derived from relationships of law and culture, that maintain and link people in the community beyond that.

4.2.4 Kanyirninpa

In traditional society knowledge was handed down socially and acquired over a lifetime. Initiation, followed by a commitment to ritual discipline, is the age-old social process for developing a sense of duty and responsibility (McCoy, 2004: 28). It provides moral guidance following the relatively unrestrained freedom of childhood. The sense of responsibility and direction that is grown contributes to social order (McCoy, 2004: 28; Keen, 2004: 270). The continuity of desert culture is sustained by learning and passing on Aboriginal law (*Tjukurrpa*) (Myers, 1980: 198-199). McCoy (2004: 21) writes: *“the power of the tjukurrpa (ancestral dreaming) is mediated through the old to the young.”* Thus anything inhibiting the inter-generational transfer of knowledge threatens the future existence of society.

In the desert the social world is understood as a series of generations, each *‘holding’* or caring for the ones that follow. Elders generally have this responsibility (McCoy, 2004: 370). Myers (1980: 214) writes:

Older people, those from ‘before’, look after those who come ‘behind.’ This is usually structured along the lines of generational seniority, although other persons can be said to ‘hold’ or ‘look after’ and grow up a younger sibling, until that person becomes independent.

In this section I discuss *kanyirninpa*, the cultural education process whereby older desert generations are responsible for the socialisation, learning and initiation into adulthood of younger ones (Myers, 1980; McCoy, 2004). The cultural significance of *kanyirninpa* is that it establishes inter-generational bonds that enable social reproduction to occur (McCoy, 2004). There are parallel processes for women and young girls (McCoy, 2008: 20-22).

In desert society in times past men were integral to the development of boys. Cultural practices stress the value of older male companionship in guiding young men. They were obligated to share expertise, such as bush craft and other life skills, as well as secret-sacred knowledge when young men were considered ready to receive it (McGrath, 1995: 381). While women played the crucial role in caring for infants and young children, only the cultural education and guidance of older males can turn boys into men. *Kanyirninpa* is the male process for passing on both religious and practical experience from one generation to the next (Myers, 1986: 67).

Becoming an initiated man makes it possible to regularly keep male company, attain self-esteem, and enjoy the benefits of enhanced stature as knowledge of the law grows over time. Bern (1979: 124) describes the process:

Initiation orders social relations by regulating a person’s (in particular a male person’s) progress through life. The person is made cognizant, in stages, with the knowledge needed for him or her to attain full adulthood. The progress into and out of each stage is ritually signified.

A young man moves away from his mother and younger siblings and resides in the company of men (Austin-Broos, 2011: 32). The life cycle of males can be understood as a process of *“transformation from passive receptivity and subordination, from being ‘held’, to autonomy and authority, to ‘holding’ and looking after’ others”* (Myers, 1980: 207). The long and embodied process of acquiring esoteric ritual knowledge begins (Myers 1980: 220). Initiation is a male cult in which the young learn cultural values such as nurturance and caring under the influence of their elders (Myers, 1980: 207; Keen, 2004: 246; Folds, 2001: 9). Much of the learning occurs by observing body language, imitation and being around senior men, rather than through pedagogical instruction (Merlan, 1998: 102 & 107; McCoy, 2004: 231 & 340).

Kanyirninpa, like all relationships in desert society, has a reciprocal quality. Myers (1980: 202-

203) explains the cultural logic: *"The superordinate's obligation is to 'look after' the subordinate, in return for which the subordinate owes his 'boss' deference, respect, and a degree of obedience"* (Myers, 1980: 247). In this way holding constructs inter-generational bonds.

Those who do the holding are accepting a responsibility to protect those not yet schooled in Aboriginal law. McCoy (2004: 350) elaborates on how desert men are expected to defend and support those they hold, even to the point of the older person accepting physical punishment for their misbehaviour. He explains: *"under the authority of older men, a young man begins to understand his place within desert society, and discovers a confidence and ability that he can 'step out', hold and grow others"* (McCoy, 2004: 246).

The term *'boss'* is sometimes used to describe the superordinate in a *kanyirninpa* relationship. Western understandings of this term conjure a hierarchical relationship involving a workplace supervisor and subordinate. In desert society, however, *'boss'* describes a helping role that extends well beyond the domain of labour relations. A *'boss'* is responsible for the wellbeing of others (Myers, 1980: 203). A good *'boss'* takes their obligation to hold another seriously (Myers, 1980: 223).

A *'boss'* exercises localised control over knowledge and other valued resources. Keen (2004: 247) explains that to become a *'boss'* *"one had to control a resource (such as a ceremony or a place rich in swan eggs) that required the work of helpers and entailed the responsibility to provide for them generously."* However, status is retained only so long as the *'boss'* shares with others.

Willingness to nurture and the attainment of high social status represent *'two sides of the same coin'* in desert society. The latter is achieved through expressions of concern, compassion and a demonstrated willingness to consistently nourish and protect others (Myers, 1980: 118, 200). According to Myers (1980: 283) those who fulfil the role are well regarded. Myers (1980: 247) also observes that it is only possible to move through the stages of initiation and ritual development by demonstrating concern for others. Myers (1980: 209-210) explains:

Men who are desirous of enhancing their reputations and esteem do all they can to 'help' others ... The authority of elder males is legitimized as acceptance of a responsibility to 'carry' and 'pass on' the Law and to 'look after' those who follow.

Until such time as one became a fully initiated man many things were denied in traditional society; the right to hunt for meat, the privilege of having it cooked by a female relative, the right to use certain decorative designs, to sing particular songs and tell certain ancestral stories, practice particular rites, perform totemic rituals, play ceremonial roles, and gain access to sacred objects (Keen, 2004: 251). These could only be attained through long religious practice (Berndt, 1959: 98). Men played a similar role in training youth for the stamina and skills necessary for station work according to McGrath (1987: 37): *"Doing things 'properly' according to prescribed procedures was essential to hunting and ritual activities, and now to the new station work."*

In desert culture the role of older males in nurturing younger ones remains highly valued. The significance of sustained holding as a source of social reproduction and bonding between men is only now being fully appreciated in the mainstream literature, due to the work of McCoy who writes (2004: 117).

To hold and grow up those younger than themselves, men need to have experienced the holding power of older men. The expression and experience of holding and being held by other men, is a critical ingredient of men's physical, emotional, social and spiritual health.

Kanyirninpa relationships are under pressure. It can no longer be assumed that older men are passing on knowledge from one generation to the next (Bauman, 2006: 5). Martin (1993: 172) observed youth *"grew to maturity in a world where older men essentially played little direct part in rearing them."* In post-contact society holding relationships have substantially broken down in some places. There are a myriad of contributing factors; illness, premature death, substance abuse, alcoholism, frequent absences in town, incarceration, relationship breakdown, and limited fatherhood skills, as noted by McCoy (2004: 248).

Where men are no longer an active presence in boys' lives, *kanyirninpa* ceases to function. McCoy (2004: 139) writes of the loss young people feel and of the difficulty of finding older

men who can be part of their lives (McCoy 2004: 157).

Some of the young men in the region have lost their fathers through accidents and premature deaths. Fathers have moved away, married again or have gone drinking in town. These are young men who were only babies or very young when their father died or when they were given to someone else to grow up. (McCoy, 2004: 139)

Men of all ages once hunted collectively, shared knowledge and built lifelong bonds in the process. Desert people still believe cultural education should occur directly between men and boys together out on their country. Now, unthinkable like Putnam's (2000) metaphorical bowler, they may have to contemplate a future hunting alone. Austin-Broos (2011: 1) recounts the experience of accompanying a group of Aboriginal people travelling back to a remote homeland with just one solitary surviving old man. He was a cultural custodian holding extensive knowledge of songs for his father's country.

We travelled to her son's outstation and camped for days with just a mob of grandchildren and her late husband's ageing next elder brother and his wife. The other brothers were dead.

It is not just older males who may go missing. Davis (1992: 38) describes a scenario in rural NSW where a father was unable to pass his cultural knowledge onto his sons primarily because of their alcoholism. Older people in these circumstances are not able to fulfil their obligation to educate the younger generation.

Two participants in this study expressed their concerns about the quality of inter-generational bonds. One (Interview 4) recollected how at Noonkanbah in the 1980's young men had stood shoulder to shoulder with elders in the struggle for land rights. Now he felt youth risked losing connection with the older generation. "*How can we bring those people who have lost that confidence back, how?*" (Interview 4). The other participant (Interview 2) stated:

You're talking about a cultural education system breaking down ... You've got this group of men who are either dying early or are just not there to provide the leadership and examples for a young male to grow up and have a good relationship with their partner or be strong in themselves ... A lot of elders who died might have had knowledge that they didn't get to transfer over. That's the cultural impact.

Young people may no longer experience the life guidance and restraint of older people (Merlan, 1998: 226). There has been "*a fundamental diminution in the role of older men in reproducing a socialised male ethos*" writes Martin (1993: 75). With so many of the older men missing, physically or psychologically, an important protective factor has been unpicked from the social fabric (McCoy, 2004: 47). McGrath's (1995: 377) assessment is that "*Aboriginal elders are deeply concerned about their younger generation's loss of interest in traditional law, and consider the continuing life of 'the Dreaming' and education about land and history as essential to their survival as a people.*"

4.4 Bridging Mechanisms

4.4.1 Overview

Social capital theory distinguishes between bonding and bridging forms of the resource, as discussed in chapter 2. In desert society not only are there factors at work to build internal group bonds, but also unifying structures that bridge neighbouring groups. These create broad social ties that extend well beyond biological relations.

In this section of the thesis I argue that common systems of belief (*Tjukurrpa*), social classification (*gurrutu*) and exchange (*wunan*) enabled co-existence between constellations of neighbouring *walytja*. These were classic features of traditional society.

The way in which these features of traditional society generate bridging social capital is summarised in TABLE 3.2 below. Together they provide means by which more distant social groups could create webs of far reaching connection with each other. Alliances between different groups of *walytja* were possible only after delicate negotiation and a careful balancing

of group interests. While primary connection may be with one's own *walytja*, people also occupied a place within a broader constellation of ties that connected them to neighbouring social groups. (Merlan, 1998: 119-120). Collectively they are all '*fellow countrymen*'. As a consequence people could travel and relate over considerable distances.

For the most part desert people identify themselves by reference to their *walytja* and country. However, there are times where an individual will choose to emphasise broader aspects of their identity. As Keen (2004: 170) observes "*identity depended on context - in some contexts what counted was one's language and country, in other contexts one's broader region, and so on.*" At large ceremonial occasions, for instance, hundreds of people might regard themselves as essentially one.

Myers (1980: 166) describes a "*logic of expansiveness, the principle that everyone in the region is related (walytja turta), that they are 'all one family'.*" However, collective social identity emerges in response to circumstance and emotion (Myers, 1980: 160; Folds, 2001: 151). Desert people do not always feel a need to prioritise their collective identity. Any notion there might be a solidified and permanently unified people is an external cultural construct. Nevertheless social processes capable of building a wider social relatedness were central to the functioning of desert society. These broader connections were, however, always constructed outwards from a foundation of strong localised *walytja* identity, not in opposition to it.

TABLE 4.2 FACTORS PRODUCING SOCIAL CAPITAL: SYSTEMS OF BELIEF, SOCIAL CLASSIFICATION & EXCHANGE

Key Findings	Relevance to Remote Communities	Lessons for Theory, Policy & Practice
<p>Tjukurrpa (Belief System) Aboriginal law (<i>Tjukurrpa</i>) provides a set of shared belief, norms & an operating authority structure.</p> <p>Rationale: A form of authority & rules delineating acceptable behaviour may be a pre-condition for effective social functioning.</p>	<p><i>Practiced together with other social groups, Tjukurrpa provides a shared spirituality and moral behavioural code that contributes to social order.</i></p>	<p><i>Tjukurrpa facilitates bridging relationships between walytja, providing a common foundation for social networks.</i></p>
<p>Gurrutu (Social Classification System) The social classificatory system (<i>Gurrutu</i>) provides a means by which people who are not blood related may relate to each other.</p> <p>Rationale: Established norms of civic participation & behaviour may contribute to shared values that underpin social order & stability.</p>	<p><i>In traditional society everyone knew how they were related. The Gurrutu social system guides how one should behave in the presence of others, even those one does not know.</i></p> <p><i>Gurrutu categorises the population into skin groups. Possession of a skin name is necessary to gain cultural acceptance as an 'insider' in desert society. Those without are always strangers by definition.</i></p>	<p><i>Gurrutu is a bridging mechanism that may build social inclusiveness beyond walytja to those one does not yet know.</i></p> <p><i>Social capital theory posits processes that enable people to relate beyond their circle of family & friends as critical to social functioning.</i></p>
<p>Wunan (Exchange system) Exchange sustains broader social networks in desert society.</p> <p>Rationale: Exchange relations require a foundation of social trust.</p>	<p><i>More than a material transaction, the exchange of gifts is a mark of respect and may extend to the sharing of ceremonies & songs between fellow countrymen.</i></p>	<p><i>Exchange may construct on-going relatedness in desert society, where it is still practiced.</i></p>

4.4.2 Tjukurrpa

Tjukurrpa is the Aboriginal Law of the desert, commonly referred to as the Dreaming (Stanner, 1979; Folds, 2001: 8; Merlan, 1998: 215). It is a body of practical and religious knowledge that includes elaborate ceremonies and song-lines (McGrath, 1995: 377). Tonkinson (1982: 127) described *Tjukurrpa* as *“the source of all life-sustaining power and knowledge.”*

In this section I argue the practice of *Tjukurrpa* across vast regions of central Australia constructs bridging social capital. It unites people beyond *walytja*, holding an otherwise decentralised society together. It does so by furnishing a common code of acceptable behaviour, effectively drawing a behavioural *‘line in the sand’*. Myers (1980: 206) describes it as a moral order, *“a standard against which the whole community can judge the merits of a case.”* This is not to suggest its religious tenets are fixed, only that Aboriginal people are quite capable of reconciling doctrinal differences and interpretations. As Keen (2004: 268) observes *“People could cooperate with those having a certain mythological tradition at one ceremony, and with those espousing a rather different tradition at another.”*

A remarkable feature of traditional society was the achievement of social order without the need for centralised hierarchic authority. Arguably the principle of *‘subsidiarity’*, the notion that decision-making ought always to be exercised at the least centralised feasible level of competent societal functioning, is never more on display than in desert society. Pre-contact desert people had no supreme source of formal political authority, nor any state apparatus able to direct a society wide distribution of resources (Austin-Broos, 2011: 36; Myers, 1980: 204). There were no elections, no parliament, no court system, no army, no police and no sovereign rulers (Myers, 1980: 220; McCoy, 2004: 30). Keen (2004: 244) writes: *“The genius of ancestral law was that people of a wide region could agree to a body of legitimate law without there being legislators, and in spite of the autonomy of individuals and kin groups.”* Desert society was governed by collective social and religious norms.

Periodic large ceremonial gatherings between neighbouring groups counter-balanced the social isolation of small-scale nomadic life (Bern, 1979: 127). Myers (1986: 78) writes: *“At large water holes, groups could gather for a time to perform religious ceremonies and general camp singing, learning new song cycles from their distant relatives.”* People would travel considerable distances to actively participate and socialise (Keen, 2004: 123). Ceremonial networks provided a basis for regional cooperation (Keen, 2004: 244; Myers, 1980: 233).

To the extent desert people understood themselves as having a collective identity, it is arguably as a consequence of a unifying religious practice (Bern, 1979: 119). Myers (1980: 180) writes *“The organization of ceremony, requiring participation of others from far away, provides one way of constituting ... society as a whole.”* It was Tjukurrpa that principally served as the social glue that bridged a network of neighbouring *walytja* together (Myers, 1980: 204 & 221).

There is ceremonial inter-dependence right across the desert, with complementary verses of intersecting song-cycles and stories held by different groups (Myers, 1980: 224). The shared responsibility to maintain them weaved a complex mosaic that holds groups in loose federation. Keen (2004: 280-281) explains: *“Stories and songs linked each site to others through the narratives of long ancestral journeys from place to place across the desert ... A person with responsibility for a particular site joined with people of other locations on an ancestral track to sing and enact the ceremonies of their common ancestor.”* To share and re-tell these creation stories, and to perform the ceremonial dances associated with the various ancestral song-lines criss-crossing the continent, is to participate in the widest form of relatedness known to desert people in traditional society, according to Myers (1980: 224).

Sharing knowledge of a secret-sacred nature constructed a collective identity amongst senior lawmen known as *kurtungurlu*. Keen (2004: 270) writes: *“Events such as male initiation required the largest-scale cooperation in Aboriginal economic and social life (albeit involving only a few hundred people on any one occasion), and involved loose coalitions of local leaders and ritual specialists.”* *Kurtungurlu* are the cultural guardians responsible for managing ritual and ceremony in desert communities (Myers, 1980: 190-191).. Their role encompasses:

- i. getting ceremonies organized;
- ii. ensuring they run smoothly and are conducted correctly;
- iii. providing instruction in the law and songs;

- iv. regulating access to land for the purposes of ceremonial activity and maintaining ceremonial protocol in relation to the protection of sites; and,
- v. oversighting who can access and use ceremonial resources such as ochres, blood, leaves, boards and other objects.

Considerable status is bestowed upon *kurtungurlu* because they are '*bosses*' responsible for ceremony (Myers, 1980: 190 & 205). Necessarily they are older people steeped in the law and able to make decisions about the maintenance of sites, ritual participation and ceremonial instruction. Trigger (1988: 534) writes:

[T]he senior 'law' experts do receive super-ordinate status which is uniform in that it goes with them in most settings, not just the restricted ones focussing on their 'law' knowledge. This is because they are apparently seen to almost embody knowledge which from earlier times has continued to be regarded as deserving of quite special significance. Senior people 'embody' such knowledge in that they are conceived as being the only repositories of it, and this is the predominant feature of their social identities.

Desert people do not regard themselves as transcendent beings able to change their society. Rather Myers (1980: 219) writes they "*interpret their society as the continuation of the preordained cosmic order, The Dreaming; it is a human responsibility to follow this up.*" The desert people he worked with appeared to attach little importance to human decisions, transactions and negotiations (Myers, 1980: 219). That life circumstance could ever be made substantially different by the actions of humankind is an alien notion: "*power is not the result of personal struggle, and it cannot be achieved through egotism*" according to Myers (1980: 206).

When elders speak, they assert it is not their personal ideas being expressed, but rather *Tjukurrpa* law handed down to them through the ages. The expectation is that everyone should follow the ways of ancestors (Austin-Broos, 2011: 29). Tonkinson (1982: 116) elaborates: "*For Aborigines, power lay in the spiritual realm of the Dreaming, where creative ancestral beings saw that the flow of power into the physical world was maintained in response to ritual action and the faithful following by Aborigines of the life-design bequeathed to them from the Dreaming.*"

There is some debate around the degree to which the religious authority of elders is confined to spiritual matters or influential in broader aspects of social and political life (Bern, 1979: 131). The narrow view is that religious authority is restricted to the sphere of ritual and ceremonial activity (Meggitt, 1966 & 1962). He could find no solid group of elders consistently wielding power and authority as a whole at any local social level. Similarly according to Trigger (1989: 537) "*senior men and women cannot be said to hold positions of authority which entail the power of command so typical of political hierarchies*".

Older people do generally possess greater ceremonial and ritual knowledge than younger ones. However, they position the locus of power outside of themselves (Bern, 1979: 121-127). Placing *Tjukurrpa* outside the influence of human action can be understood as a device that helps maintain social order because it means that the interpretations of elders are non-negotiable for younger generations (Austin-Broos, 2011: 36). The exercise of power by elders operated under the guise of '*help*' that the young were obliged to reciprocate (Austin-Broos, 2011: 131). Paradoxically it is a strategy that enables older men to hold influence over younger ones by claiming not to be exercising it.

Religion is the one area where there is some approximation of institutionalized leadership according to Bern (1979: 120). He argues that elders were also more broadly influential, observing "*ritual power was extensively used in the pursuit of secular quarrels*" (Bern, 1979: 124). The western governance principle about separation of '*church*' and '*state*' does not necessarily apply in a remote context.

In theory *Tjukurrpa* is the only source of legitimate authority. In reality considerable latitude is necessarily exercised in any interpretation of a law handed down orally. Keen (2004: 244) argues: "*The extent to which a person could gain acceptance of their interpretation of law in order to justify their actions depended on the social resources he or she could bring to bear on the matter.*" Arguably it is, in reality, the better connected whose opinion ultimately holds sway, for they are able to muster the greatest social capital (Keen, 2004: 246).

Traditional religious and other cultural knowledge has declined in some communities (Stanton,

1983: 167; Myers, 1980: 204; Austin-Broos, 2011). In the region he studied Martin (1993: 216) found the social conditions necessary for the reproduction and transmission of *“the more formal, esoteric and prestigious aspects”* of cultural tradition had eroded. Ritual and ceremonial practices had been discontinued (Martin, 1993: 172). Massacres and introduced diseases following first contact resulted in a significant loss of cultural knowledge (Wilson 1997: 152; Keen, 2004: 10). Subsequently many Christian missions actively discouraged the practice of *Tjukurrpa*. McCoy (2004: 131) found:

As older men pass away, especially those who were born in the desert, they take much knowledge of the Law with them. They also take a confidence about land and ceremony that their older sons, many of whom spent time in the [mission] dormitories, do not have.

Desert people, in some cases, may not be familiar with the basic tenets of *Tjukurrpa*. No longer are they necessarily unified by a shared spiritual belief system that encompasses all. Where Martin (1993: 219) conducted his research he found contemporary life dominated *“by practices such as massive drinking and public brawling.”* In another region Merlan (1998: 21) states *“The sense of places as linked and forming Dreaming tracks that connect and intersect as a larger regional system has faded.”* There are places where Aboriginal people know their forebears once lived, but which they are yet to experience (Merlan, 1998: 113).

A participant in this study (Interview 3) stated acculturation pressures in the region where he resided meant people had less time for cultural practice than in the past.

They’re doing this and they’re doing that. There are a lot of things that pull people away now so the quality time that used to be enjoyed to pass on all that cultural knowledge stuff is not there anymore. You have to make a living. Governments are pushing you down this road of ‘standing on your own two feet’ and becoming an individual and it goes against the whole grain of what a community is.

At the other end of the spectrum Ackerman (1979) described *‘ring of fire’* ceremonial resurgence on the rim of the Great Sandy Desert and Kolig (1981) described a dreaming that was adapting and morphing in the face of change. Ceremonies began to attract hundreds of people and continue to do so. A new *“pan-Aboriginal consciousness”* had emerged (Preaud, 2009: 51). A participant in this research (Interview 5) observed how in some regions cultural blocs have evolved which *“sit together”* to deal with matters of common interest: *“Language and cultural centres, land councils have been able to capture the collective issues and voices of people.”*

4.4.3 Gurrutu (Skin Group System)

Skin groups classification is a system of social organisation that structures relationships by locating people in categories which anthropologists term *‘sections’* and *‘subsections’* (Meggitt, 1987; Austin-Broos, 2011: 9; Wafer, 1982). There is regional variation in structure; some comprising four categories, some eight and some sixteen (Dousset, 2011; Hansen & Hansen, 1979; Wafer, 1982; Hiatt, 1965). But everywhere it is practiced in desert communities the system is a mechanism for building social inclusiveness.

Each section and sub-section has a classificatory name into which everyone is born and which is maintained for life (Keen, 2004: 175). Indeed the surnames adopted by desert people are often Anglicised versions of their classificatory names. A confusing consequence, at least for non-Aboriginal people, is that biological brothers and sisters end up having different surnames because the kinship system ensures they necessarily belong to different skin groups.

The classificatory system gives rise to family like relationships (Austin-Broos, 2011: 33). Everyone is classificatory *‘mother/father’*, *‘daughter/son’* or *‘brother/sister’* to others, even though they may not be biologically related and may never have met. Thus people have numerous classificatory kin in addition to their biological family (McCoy, 2004: 265). Tonkinson (1978, 43) elaborates:

All people with whom a person comes into contact are classified and known by a particular kin term, and most interaction is modelled on an ideal set of behaviours that characterize the kin relationship involved ... [T]he classifying principle can be applied to a theoretically infinite range; the web of kinship

thus extends far beyond consanguineal and local limits to include the most distant kin and former strangers.

To have a skin name is to inherit a defined social position and an accompanying set of core responsibilities and accountabilities towards others. It defines such matters as who one can marry, who is responsible for caring for the sick and the aged, who should look after children in the event a parent were to die, and even who is responsible for another person's misdeeds or debts. A skin group name is, in effect, a shorthand statement that describes a network of interpersonal relations.

The skin group system is known as *gurrutu* amongst the Yolngu people of East Arnhemland (Christie & Greatorex, 2004: 41).

Ever since the ancestors first moved over the land and sea, every Yolngu has been born into a vast network of kinship called gurrutu. While each figure of the tapestry has its own history and identity, the figures combine to produce a broader complex in which the group is always prior to the individual. Yolngu spend much time discussing and re-exploring kinship, and re-fitting newcomers and distant kin into the system. It is not unusual for an adult to detail hundreds of direct predecessors, detailing all their kinship connections. (Christie & Greatorex, 2004: 41)

The skin system is one of the most pervasive features of desert society. To identify someone by their skin name is to express an important aspect of cultural identity, for to know the skin of another is to be able to place that person in relation to oneself and to know how to behave in their presence. Possession of a skin name is an essential prerequisite to acceptance into this society. Those who share one are bridged together, those without are by definition 'outsiders'. The latter may be rationalized into the social universe by giving them a skin name, in effect adopting them (McGrath, 1987: 81). This may include non-Aboriginal people who live and work in a community. Even in regions where the skin group system is no longer used, the practice of relating to (naming) someone as 'brother' or 'sister' still remains as a term of endearment.

The skin group classification system provides an idiom through which relations of social amity are expressed (Mantziaris & Martin 2000: 282-283; Sutton 1999: 56-57). Those who share the same skin should be mutually supportive of each other. Everywhere it is practiced people can expect to be greeted by others. Those who ascribe to this tradition have a right to reciprocity. Berndt and Berndt (1964: 47-86) describe it as a system that members cannot ignore if they are to live in relative harmony.

There are limits to skin group support. Classificatory kinship never confers interests at the expense of actual family members. While it is permissible to visit classificatory kin, ownership and residential rights in land do not derive from the kinship system. People might, however, refer to 'kinship country' stemming from a classificatory relationship they have with a traditional owner, but their rights are in no way comparable.

A participant in this research (Interview 3) observed how the skin group system continues to provide a point of connection in those communities where it still operates, "even though you are separate and may not be directly related". They described its socially inclusive power based on life experience.

I've been accepted here like I'm one of the mob and it makes me feel like I'm part of the place. I get treated like that because I'm married in and there's a respect, a right in Aboriginal culture, that you're given that goes with that. I'm given a skin name based on my wife's skin name. So that skin name gives me a position and a place and a way of knowing how to relate to other people.

Cultural knowledge of skin group social classification has declined in some communities, the system no longer practiced in all language groups (Stanton, 1983: 167; Myers, 1980: 204; Austin-Broos, 2011). Another participant in this study (Interview 11) observed that in traditional society relationships had a "pre-ordained" character about them because people were born into them:

We tend to romanticise the past, but I think there was a lot more structure and formality, just looking at things like the kinship system. Where it is intact those relationships are solid because there's very clear rules in place about

how people relate to each other. I guess the thing underlying that is respect. Where those formal roles have dissipated over time I think it's harder for people to respect each other or hold each other to account because there is no 'line in the sand' about what's acceptable and what's not.

In summary skin classification is a mechanism that builds bridging social capital by extending potential avenues of support well beyond the confines of family and friends. In traditional society it bound desert people together in a wide and complex web of social connection that regulated relational behaviour. It was the skin group classificatory system that served the 'civic' purpose of creating a point of connection between people right across the desert. It provided a set of social norms capable of guiding behaviour in the presence of others. It ensured a widespread sharing of resources, making for a more inclusive society. Its significance in the context of social capital theory is that in mainstream society broader relations are built through activities such as club membership, sports participation, church attendance and other avenues of civic participation. There is, however, no western bridging equivalent of a complex skin group classification system that is deeply rooted in ancient association (Shapiro, 1979: 59-74).

4.4.4 Wunan

'Wunan' (sometimes spelt 'wurnan') is a term used in the Kimberley region to describe the practice of ritualised social exchange and barter, and the networks that support it (Taylor, 2003: 2; Keen, 2004: 371; Redmond & Skyring, 2010; Redmond, 2012). In traditional society trade between groups in materials of religious significance and practical use spanned the continent (Stanton, 1983: 166-170; McGrath, 1987: 155). An expectation of reciprocity constructed on-going relatedness between social groups. Exchanges of all kinds - food, materials, ritual, women - served principally to fix individuals into a social matrix (McGrath, 1987: 157). Bi-lingual skills are important in opening up social and exchange relations, so most desert people spoke multiple tongues; extending to Macassan, English and creole when required (McGrath, 1987: 165-166).

In traditional society exotic items such as pearl shell were traded from the coast deep into the interior (Merlan, 1998: 690). Improved hunting technology was also acquired in this way, with steel axes and glass spearheads reaching the furthestmost places long before the arrival of white men (Carnegie, 1989: 243). These items were acquired indirectly, through a network of exchange, passed on through neighbouring groups acting as intermediaries.

The social capital literature identifies reciprocity as universal mechanism for producing social capital. The mutual exchange of information about employment, training and commerce, for example, may create economic opportunities. Putnam (1994: 172) distinguishes between balanced and generalized forms. Balanced reciprocity describes the circumstance where someone gives because they have an expectation something of equal value will be given in return. It is most often the nature of exchange relations between people who do not know each other well.

Generalised reciprocity is purely altruistic in nature and most often embedded within a network of close family and friends (Putnam, 1994: 172). There is no expectation of exchange of equal value. Putnam (1994: 172) identifies generalized reciprocity as a positive attribute of society:

The norm of generalized reciprocity is a highly productive component of social capital. Communities in which this norm is followed can more efficiently restrain opportunism and resolve problems of collective action. The norm of generalized reciprocity serves to reconcile self-interest and solidarity.

In desert society Myers (1980: 170) found *"an expectation of exchange marks every form of social transaction."* Generalised reciprocity is primarily practiced within the confines of extended family and friends (Keen, 2004: 336). Balanced reciprocity was the practice of exchange between more distant people (Keen, 2004: 336). In the latter instance the expectation is that transactions result in parity (Myers, 1989: 210).

In traditional society all relationships are understood as reciprocal, even extending to the administration of physical punishment to redress wrongs (Myers, 1980: 258). Mountford (1961: 179) writes *"the law of reciprocal punishment is as much a part of the code of aboriginal behaviour as is the law of reciprocal giving."* This system of 'payback' restored harmony and balance to

relationships. Myers (1980: 171) observed this process of restorative justice: *"If one man spears another, the former should offer his leg to be speared in return."*

The practice of *Wunan* in remote communities could serve practical, religious or peace-making purposes. It can refer to a trade in objects, tools, raw materials, religious knowledge, stories, ceremonies and symbolic resources. Harmonious relations between neighbouring groups are sustained through reciprocal exchange (Stanton, 1983: 166-170). An instance might be where spears are given in return for forgiveness (Keen, 2004: 354). Mountford (1961: 187) describes *"a system of reciprocal giving and receiving that reaches out to every aspect of life, social intercourse, ceremonial procedure, and the gathering and distribution of food."*

As discussed in the next chapter colonisation, rapid de-population, mission influence, dislocation, poor health status, competing faiths, destructive substance abuse, and low life expectancy have all taken a toll on social networks and therefore on the practice of *wunan* that flows from it. In particular those dislocated from their country may have grown up with few opportunities to participate in ritual and ceremony, thus also removed from those kind of exchange relations.

4.5 Ideal Communities

The composition of social capital is very different at *Liyan* and *Wandang*. At *Liyan* the three pillars of *walytja*, *ngurra* and *kanyirninpa* that produce traditional bonds all operate. Ditto for the traditional means of producing bridging social capital; *Tjukurrpa*, *gurrutu* and *wunan*.

Extended family is a prominent feature of social organisation, furnishing residents of *Liyan* with a strong sense of identity. Family members routinely help each other out. Yet while people value family interests above others, they also value connections to the wider world and participate in broader social networks. As a result they are able to draw on diverse sources of support if they need to.

The residents of *Liyan* live with *ngurra* as part of their daily life. Traditional owners speak respectfully to their country and perform increase rituals in order to sustain this most fundamental of all their relationships. Not only does it reinforce their sense of who they are, it is a constant reminder of a shared ancestral connectedness with each other. They may temporarily leave their *'mother'* (land) for purposes such as education, training and employment, but all know where home is and feel the imperative to return. It is their primary source of spiritual strength and rejuvenation in times of stress. *Ngura* is the source of cultural security and belonging for *Liyan* people. The ageless nexus between *walytja* and *ngurra* persists. Merlan (1998: 130) writes of people-place connections as having an *"enduring dimension."*

The essence of *kanyirninpa*, understood as an inter-generational system of education and support, is still practiced at *Liyan* between men and boys. Child development is seen as a whole-of-family responsibility. Mothers, fathers, aunts and uncles all play an integral part. There is an on-going community conversation focussed on exploring old and new ways in which the generations might remain connected.

At *Liyan* it is not only social bonds that remain strong. Neighbouring groups are still bridged together to varying extents by *Tjukurrpa* law, a skin group classificatory system and the sharing of resources across groups. People still know to whom they are related and how they should behave in each other's presence. The result is that the residents of *Liyan* have extensive networks with neighbouring groups. People are unified within a loose federation.

The composition of social capital is different at *Wandang*. People have reserves of bonding on account of a particularly emotionally dense level of family solidarity not present at *Liyan*. Only at *Wandang* do people feel obligated to always defend their own against others. Thus while at first sight *walytja* appears to be a common feature of both *Liyan* and *Wandang*, closer inspection reveals critical normative differences within family. At *Liyan* *walytja* is an important source of social capital. At *Wandang* it is the only one. People function exclusively within their own extended family group.

Connections to country play no role in bonding people at *Wandang*, for they have not grown up in proximity to their *ngurra*. Generations reach maturity away from their ancestral country, unfamiliar with the rituals required to sustain it. Country is not a source of nurturance. It is waiting for its people to re-introduce themselves to their totemic ancestors embodied in its

natural capital, but people do not have this opportunity.

Nor is there a process of *kanyirninpa* working to bond men and boys together. *Wandang* has no male role models to guide and nurture young men. Youth grow up in households where men are completely absent. Boys might aspire to become men with the help of those who are older, but they are simply not there. There is no one to pass on knowledge to future generations; no one to guide and teach social restraint. Youth live entirely outside the guidance and authority of men.

Another critical difference between *Wandang* and *Liyan* is that the former has no traditional means of producing bridging social capital whatsoever. *Tjukurrpa*, *gurrutu* and *wunan* are not present. No unifying system of spiritual belief, skin group classification or exchange is practiced collectively with neighbouring groups. As a consequence there is no operating authority system or shared standards of behaviour, and people are unsure how they should relate to each other. Social capital at *Wandang* has been completely hollowed out, residents being entirely reliant only on their familial bonds to get by. And while solidarity of *walytja* may remain, in Chapter 7 I will prosecute the argument that it is not necessarily productive of 'good' social capital.

4.6 Culturally Distinctive Social Capital

Social capital takes its character from particular people, culture and place. Its sources, the types of social networks it gives rise to, the norms it spreads, and the social outcomes it produces are culturally distinctive. Social capital may be the 'glue' enabling social groups to live and work together, but the recipe is not generic. The general principles underlying social capital theory, such as the value of social trust and reciprocity, may be universal but not the form they take.

For millennia ceremony, song cycles and the extensive trade routes that criss-cross the whole Australian continent have built Aboriginal social capital. These customary norms and networks have provided "*fertile soil for the growth of social capital*" (Memmott & Meltzer, 2005: 120-121).

Implicit in the *Liyan* model is the notion that the persistence of traditional social structures and norms can still be the source of much social capital. Implicit in the *Wandang* model is that the persistence of the traditional means of social capital production cannot be assumed or assured. The following chapter examines the impact of colonisation on the traditional means of social capital production.

CHAPTER 5: SOCIAL CAPITAL AND COLONISATION

5.1 Overview

Whereas the previous chapter considered the production of social capital in traditional society, this chapter explores the impact of colonisation on its production in post-contact society. Historical events have left an imprint on social capital. In a changed environment it cannot be assumed the traditional mode of its production will continue as it once did.

It is not possible to adequately explain the current social capital and disadvantaged socio-economic circumstances of desert people without understanding the legacy of a colonial history. Explorers, pastoralists, missionaries, welfare officials, the state, and community employees all left their mark. The experience might, generally be described as characterised by deep inequalities, injustice and miscommunication. Contact history has not only impacted on how desert people relate to each other, but it has also given rise to issues concerning relationships with non-Aboriginal people.

In TABLES 5.1 and 5.2 (below) I broadly categorise the post-contact history of remote communities into eight epochs. The timeframes should be read as being only broadly indicative. The account is also greatly simplified, for example, intentionally leaving out Aboriginal relations with the mining sector, a topic recurring discussed by Altman and Martin (2009).

Colonisation was not, a uniform process across the continent (Keen, 2004: 2). Rather it affected different places at different times in different ways (McGrath 1995: 3). For example, not every region has a contact history of pastoralism (Merlan, 1998: 76). McGrath (1995: 21) notes *“Generally the less successful the enterprises, and the less land intensive the industries, the greater the chances for Aboriginal survival and relative independence.”* Each region has its own unique set of power relations between desert people and missionaries, pastoralists, police, and other government officials. Later in this chapter I create different histories for *Liyan* and *Wandang* with different implications for the on-going production of social capital.

TABLE 5.1: A BRIEF HISTORY OF COLONISATION AND SOCIAL CAPITAL: CONTACT RELATIONS

Period	Impact of Interaction with Western Society on Social Capital
Relations with Exploratory Expeditions (> 1850's – 1900's)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desert people began to have occasional contact with early exploratory expeditions passing through their country. • Prospects of harmonious relations were damaged by acts of cruelty by expeditions in desperate search of water. • There was little attempt to establish enduring social relations between desert people and these visitors. Tentative caution prevailed, not social trust. • The introduction of new '<i>artefacts</i>', such as glass spearheads & steel axes, stimulated reciprocal wunan trading relations between desert groups, building bridging social capital between them in the process.
Relations with Pastoral Stations (1880's - 1970's)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stock driven overland by pastoralists cause conflict on the semi-arid desert fringe over access to water holes & the depletion of flora & fauna that traditional owners relied upon. • The identity of desert people as hunters was diminished. Desert people eventually '<i>settled</i>' at established stock camps on the pastoral stations, accepting the reciprocity involved in the exchange of their labour in return for rations. • Customary cultural practice such as ceremony & seasonal hunting were still possible where people resided on or near their ancestral country. • Men adapted by adopting a new identity as stockmen. • There was widespread exploitation of Aboriginal labour and women by non-Aboriginal men employed in the pastoral industry. • Through the 1960's and 1970's Aboriginal labour was laid off from the stations in response to both technological change occurring in the industry and the introduction of equal wages. • Aboriginal groups were dislocated from their own country to that of their neighbours, with pre-existing balanced reciprocal relationships being fractured in the process. • A fragile social cohesion between different <i>walytja</i> shattered.
Relations with Police (1880's - 1930's)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police saw their role as protecting the pastoralists rather than upholding the law for all citizens, inclusive of desert people. • Punitive raids, imprisonment and massacres in response to the spearing of stock depleted the Aboriginal population, adversely impacting on the cultural knowledge required to sustain <i>Tjukurrpa</i> law and social order. • Few bridges were built between desert people and the police. Fear was the pre-dominant emotion. There was no social trust.
Relations with Missions (1850's - 1970's)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christian missions provided refuge from the worst excesses of station men, especially in respect of sexual exploitation. • Some desert people eventually began to identify as Christian and various faiths now have a presence in central Australia. • In the absence of tolerance, different religious beliefs may be a source of division within remote communities in a way that was not possible when <i>Tjukurrpa</i> was the only spiritual practice. • Social reproduction & intergenerational bonding in desert society were damaged by missions because: - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christianity discouraged the practice of <i>Tjukurrpa</i>. • A mission dormitory system separated children from their families, disrupting both <i>walytja</i> and <i>kanyarninpa</i> relations in the process.

TABLE 5.2: A BRIEF HISTORY OF COLONISATION AND SOCIAL CAPITAL: INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS & GOVERNANCE

Period	Impact of Interaction with Western Society on Social Capital
Relations with Welfare Authorities (1930's – 1970)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welfare officials removed some desert children from their families and institutionalised them far from their <i>ngurra</i>. • Institutionalisation was destructive of social capital because it was isolating, but it may also have generated it in new form making possible connections to other people from far away. • Breaking up families adversely impacted on the stock of bonding social capital. • There may be friction between those family members who were taken and those who were not. • Desert people have demonstrated resilience & perseverance in finding their way back to <i>walytja</i>.
Relations with the Public Sector (1970's > present)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government was slow to present itself as a provider of public services for Aboriginal people. Police and welfare officials may have been public sector employees, but desert people did not perceive them as serving their interests. • The '<i>early state</i>' did not facilitate the production of bridging social capital between remote communities and mainstream society. • Government program funding to communities for housing, health, education, and other functional activities has been available since the 1970's. • Most desert people are now financially reliant on the social security system because there has been nothing of substance to take the place of former collapsed customary and pastoral industry economies. • Desert people may see the state as having accepted a responsibility to '<i>hold</i>' them. • The relationship between desert people and the state is damaged where the state is perceived as failing to live up to its '<i>holding</i>' responsibility.
Relations with Community Organisations (1970's – present)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Former missions and stock camps morphed into large established more sedentary communities with basic town infrastructure. • Legislation enabled the incorporation of Aboriginal communities, creating elected Governing Councils with localised decision-making and service delivery responsibilities. • The number of Aboriginal organisations grew rapidly. • Governance dysfunction and '<i>capture</i>' by extended family groups are risks for Aboriginal corporations. • Corporations may, but do not always, build bridging social capital that unifies social groups across communities.
Relations with Mainstream Society (2000 – present)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The rhetoric of '<i>reconciliation</i>' envisions a '<i>new relationship</i>' between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. There is a shift towards '<i>mainstreaming</i>' service delivery to Aboriginal communities. There are instances where connections with mainstream society extend beyond government to encompass the not-for-profit and business sectors. There may be emergent opportunities to build forms of bridging social capital inclusive of the broader society beyond government.

5.2 History as Relational Legacy

The portrayal of historical events as occurring back in a distant past may be seen as part of a strategy of erasure by a dominant society keen to distance itself from the worst aspects of colonisation. According to Vazquez (2009: 1): *“chronological narratives are at the heart of the modern/colonial systems of oppression”*. Events are rendered less visible when relegated to the status of a mere object of knowledge that can be confined to books and museums - then they cease to be someone’s lived experience. Vázquez (2009: 2) is awake to claims that seek to deny the past as a source of meaning and value in life, a view *“that the present is the only site of the real, while dismissing the past as archaic.”*

Whereas western society tends to view the past, present and future as part of a linear trajectory, desert people display little interest in chronology (McGrath, 1987: 178). A participant in this study (Interview 8) noted:

Within a very much more cyclical concept of time it’s still very much part of the present. That means people remember the stories, remember what happened, and that is because it’s an oral verbal culture. Because we can write things down we can put them away, but these stories are still part of the now.

The ontological perspective of desert people is that the past lives in the present. A participant in this study (Interview 8) recalled their own experience, *“as if it occurred yesterday”*, of hearing old people retell the details of a massacre:

One of the things we’ve all had to come to learn, specifically, talking about Aboriginal people here, is that they’ve never had a written history and their sense of oral history is far, far, far, stronger and deeper than ours. So we think ‘That’s ancient history, it happened last century’. But for them its not, it’s very current. They bring it with them. It’s here now, all the time. So we can’t say ‘Well that happened then and we don’t do that now and we’re good guys’. And they say ‘Well I don’t have any evidence, my history says otherwise’.

Oral accounts of what colonisation did remain a powerful social force in remote communities impacting both on their relations with each other and with the broader society. Participant 10 commented on the resonance of past events in shaping present Aboriginal attitudes and behaviours towards the wider world:

Whether it’s you or me or an Aboriginal person or whoever, none of us are free of history. None of us, despite modern pretensions to the contrary, invent ourselves. There is always a legacy. There is always an historical trajectory to where we’ve arrived ... So if we’re looking at phenomena, such as violence or suspicious ethnocentrism, we also need to see them against the background of people’s own and their forebears’ experience of exclusion, discrimination and so forth.

5.3 Relations with Explorers

The early European exploratory expeditions into the remotest regions of the continent commenced in the 1880’s. These were sporadic incursions into desert society that did not fundamentally change it (McCoy, 2004: 58). There was little engagement between desert people and those passing through. From first contact early European expeditions observed numerous relatively small groups of *walytja* living right across the interior of the continent, even in the harshest of environments (Warburton, 1968; Carnegie, 1989). Traditional social capital formation processes within and between desert people were essentially left intact.

Augustus Gregory’s North Australian Exploring Expedition of 1855 and 1856 was the first to venture into the centre of the continent (Waterson, 1972). Gregory was the Surveyor General of Queensland and the Colonial Office had given him the task of exploring the interior. He was followed by the ill-fated expedition of Burke and Wills of 1861 and 1862. In 1873 Warburton (1968: 206) led another party out from Alice Springs. Forrest in 1874 and 1879, Giles in 1876-77 (McGrath, 1987: 8-9) and Carr-Boyd in 1896 all followed. Also in 1896 another group led by Carnegie (Folds, 2001: 7 & 10; Folds, 2001: 7; Myers, 1986: 30) ambitiously set out to establish a stock route between the Coolgardie goldfields and the East Kimberley, eventually concluding

it simply wasn't feasible. A still later expedition led by Canning (Toussaint, 1995: 245-246) surveyed the stock route between the East Kimberley and the Murchison region of WA that now bears his name.

The journals of these men record regularly seeing the smoke of Aboriginal peoples' fires, but for the most part only an occasional human sighting as they passed through (Gregory, 1884; Carnegie, 1989: 223). Aboriginal people, in accordance with the traditional attitude towards strangers, were cautious about approaching. In describing first contact with one group Carnegie (1989: 239) writes *"the trembling fear of the natives was painful to witness - never by any possibility could they have seen camels or white men."*

The general pattern appears to have been an absence of meaningful interaction and engagement right across the continent. Desert people too mostly preferred to watch the new arrivals from a safe distance, although Gregory's journal (1884) does record being attacked on two occasions (Waterson, 1972). The difficulty with these accounts is that the circumstances are not known and only one side of the story is available. It is possible some may have been reluctant to keep detailed records out of fear misdeeds might be revealed.

Early expeditions in the desert were severely hampered by a lack of knowledge about how to find water. Mountford (1961: 75) writes:

It is small wonder that travellers without native helpers, or a knowledge of Australian bushcraft, die of thirst in that country. Waterholes ... are almost impossible to find, except where experience has taught the significance of the faint game-pad, or the flight of the diamond-sparrows, those small, beautifully coloured birds that cannot live a day without drinking, and whose presence, therefore, always indicates water.

The social system in the desert had always worked to minimise competition for water and other resources amongst neighbouring Aboriginal groups. Sharing was a means of producing relatedness between neighbours. While water has a primary place in the law, language and culture of desert people, visitors have never been prohibited from taking water for physical survival. Someone drinking causes no harm, unless they seek to monopolise the resource.

One party failed to find a single water source by themselves: *"None of us have any idea where water is, and by travelling North, East, South, or West, we stood an equally good chance of getting it"* (Carnegie, 1989: 185). Later Carnegie (1989: 432-433) adds: *"Throughout our journey we never once found water by chance - though chance took us to more than one dry hole - but found it only by systematic and patient work, involving many scores of miles of tracking, the capture of the wild aboriginals, and endless hours of manual labour."*

It is unfortunate that the first 'whitefellas' desert people encountered resorted to inhumane methods in order to access water. Exploration parties invaded Aboriginal camps securing those they caught with ropes until they led them to water (Carnegie 1989: 189; McCoy, 2004: 58-59). On the publication of his journal he asked not to be judged harshly, arguing the threat of death gave him little choice.

I decided to take the gin back with us, as it had been clear to me for some time past that without the aid of natives we could not hope to find water ... I felt myself justified ... in unceremoniously making captives from what wandering tribes we might fall in with. And in light of after events I say unhesitatingly that, without having done so, and without having to a small extent used rough treatment to some natives so caught, we could not by any possibility have succeeded in crossing the desert, and should not only have lost our own lives, but possibly those of others who would have made search for us later. (Carnegie, 1982: 232).

Canning adopted similar practices. The well sites along the Canning Stock Route, constructed at 25-30 kilometre intervals, were at soaks that had been relied upon by desert people for thousands of years. In 1908 a Western Australian Royal Commission inquired into the treatment of Aboriginal people by the 1906 Canning expedition (Toussaint, 1995: 254). It heard evidence of random violence, serious injury and extreme distress inflicted on desert people chained and deprived of water.

By the time the first cattle were eventually driven down the Canning Stock Route in 1911 the

opportunity to build trusting relationships with Aboriginal people had been well and truly lost. A member of the droving party was fatally speared at Well 37. Relations remained poisoned for generations. According to Smith (2000: 150) *“The Canning was soon superseded when an abattoir was constructed at Wyndham, but its short history was strewn with acts of violence against the Aboriginal people and with acts of retaliation.”*

While it is far from certain, arguably they might have negotiated access without violence had they known the local protocol was to share natural resources with visitors who behaved respectfully and generously towards traditional owners. McGrath (1987: 161) goes to the point:

It was possible for Aborigines to permit other groups to forage and camp on their land, provided they respected the sacred sites; similarly they could grant white men the right to use the land, but not to own it, because their complex and deep-seated land tenure and inheritance systems could never permit this.

Desert people had no way of knowing the first European visitors to pass through their country would eventually be followed by legions of pastoralists, missionaries, police, government officials, researchers, employees and non-government organisations. It is difficult to conclude other than that subsequent efforts to improve social relations between desert people and mainstream society have been rendered more difficult because of the enduring legacy of *‘first impressions’*, kept current by a vivid Aboriginal oral story telling tradition. The process of reconciliation is a work in progress.

5.4 Relations with Pastoral Industry

A second opportunity to forge meaningful relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people occurred with the droving of sheep and cattle across the continent to the semi-arid desert fringe from the 1880s onwards (Tonkinson, 1982: 125). Unlike the previous travelling expeditions, these people had come to stay.

The establishment of pastoral stations was largely complete by the 1930’s, although industry expansion, including the construction of beef roads, continued until the 1960s. Smith (2000: 109) writes:

Although explorers were generally able to pass through the region without conflict, the post-invasion period, approximately between the mid-1880s and 1920s, was a period of conflict, chaos and oppression. The Aboriginal people were confronted with rapid and radical social and economic change.

The belief system of most pastoralists was not always conducive to the development of close and equitable relationships with desert people (Mulvaney, 1989: 68-69). Carnegie (1982: 328) wrote ominously: *“let us take it for granted that the white men’s civilisation must advance.”* Such views reflected prevailing Social Darwinian *‘scientific’* assumptions of racial superiority (Reynolds & May, 1995: 177). Fundamentally different cultural socialization processes produced incompatible values evident in divergent spiritual beliefs, attitudes towards material possessions, the relative importance attached to work, and understandings of the people-land relationship (Green, 1981: 72).

Pastoralists justified their claim to the land in the name of *‘progress’* as Smith (2000: 123) explains:

The pastoralists perceived the failure of the Aboriginal population to develop the economic potential of the land as a moral failure. In fact, traditional methods of harvesting, the storage of surplus dried fruit and seed and the concern for the seasonal regeneration of all flora and fauna expressed through ritual and in species management were largely unnoticed by the pastoralists. The pastoralists, with no understanding of, or concern with the subtleties of Aboriginal culture, incorporated them into the lowest rung of their pastoral economy.

Desert culture distinguishes between the rights of traditional owners and those of other land users. As traditional owners, the local descent group always retains primary spiritual rights in country. From their perspective the interests of newcomers were secondary, befitting their status as *‘visitors’* using their country. While the first white men came to establish permanent

stations on the desert fringe, Aboriginal people may have assumed they would only stay briefly and share the country in accordance with established protocol, being respectful of the rights of its owners and custodians.

European pastoralists did not understand the Aboriginal expectation of compensation for the use and occupancy of their land. Desert people accepted food and goods offered as due to them. Their view was they retained inalienable possession of specific stretches of country through many generations of connection. For their part local desert people felt they had a right to eat any animals on their country, including recent arrivals. In 1898 Carnegie (1982: 327) found the spearing of stock frequent in the Kimberley region. According to Smith (2000: 10):

The pastoralists brought cattle, and cattle were quickly recognised by Aboriginal people as an easily obtained and desirable source of food. Cattle spearing became rife, not only for food but as a form of resistance.

The arrival of cattle meant, for the first time, desert people had to compete for water resources (Taylor 1988: 39). Stations were established near the few permanent pools in the more fertile areas. In many instances these were also areas that previously furnished ample supplies of 'bush tucker' food for local people, as well as having ritual significance. Smith (2000: 152) writes: *"Those not living in the station camps, mostly older people and children, were unable to access their waterholes and became trespassers in their own country."*

Elsewhere on the continent Green (1981) provides a contrasting account, describing the early development of friendly relations between Europeans and Nyoongar people near Albany. Green (1981: 74) describes *"a sharing relationship without fierce competition for resources."* An explanatory factor for the difference might be the plentiful water supply and other natural resources on the southwest coast. Here it was possible to accommodate the needs of both 'visitors' and traditional owners, provided a respectful autonomy and distance was maintained between the two populations and there was non-interference with Aboriginal women.

In the dry interior, however, the introduction of thousands of stock and monopolisation of the best water holes made conflict between Aboriginal people and pastoralists inevitable. There was widespread killing of Aboriginal people from the 1880's onward, a time of violence and fear. Smith (2000: 2) writes: *"The growing body of evidence for the number of Aboriginal people maimed or killed during this period makes it increasingly doubtful that the pre-invasion population numbers can ever be estimated."* Those not shot or imprisoned for spearing stock were driven away from the billabongs. In addition to massacres, there was also widespread loss of life associated with introduced diseases on such a scale that the demography of Aboriginal society was profoundly altered (Wilson 1979: 152; Keen, 2004: 10).

Aboriginal people resisted fiercely, but *"spears were never a match for guns"* (Smith, 2000: 110). A meeting of pastoralists in northern Australia in 1901 called for policing *"methods similar to those employed in North Queensland"* (Clement 1987b: 26). This is a euphemism for shooting any Aboriginal person found on a pastoral lease on sight. Austin-Broos (2011: 44) observes: *"The pastoralists were responsible only to the Director of Native Affairs, a long way away."* Governments established institutions and reserves to which Aboriginal people were forcibly removed to reduce the on-going conflict, such as Palm Island (Watson, 1995). According to Watson (1995) the community at Palm Island was capable of demonstrating *"enormous solidarity"*.

With so many killed a loss of cultural knowledge and social capital was inevitable, adversely impacting on the capacity for social reproduction. Wilson (1979: 156) writes:

[M]any of the key elders who were legitimate holders of sacred sites and rituals died in the epidemics. Normally, the kin and religious systems could adjust to deaths by providing adequate replacements; but massive depletion of important people was another matter.

The remnant population surviving the initial onslaught nevertheless began to slowly adapt to a new way of life. Former hunters and gatherers built an identity for themselves built on their station skills. The lifestyle was hard, but it at least allowed desert people to retain their connections with country and their social and ceremonial networks with each other.

Pastoralists permitted Aboriginal people to reside at makeshift stock camps adjacent to the homestead, while continuing to shoot at others still encountered in the bush (Smith, 2000: 17; Taylor 1988: 39). The survival choice for Aboriginal people was to either move well away

or live in a station camp and receive rations from the pastoralists. According to Smith (2000: 17) the latter was generally seen as the lesser of two evils: Those who survived being shot at the waterholes worked for rations at the station camp. Others who found refuge well away in the bush were still at risk because their diet included sheep and cattle (McGrath, 1987: 13-16). Most Aboriginal people adapted to station life sooner or later. According to Smith (2000: 126): *"A new culture had emerged on the stations based around a stable Aboriginal population."* According to McGrath (1987: 20) the move to the stations constituted neither *"acceptance or submission"* to the colonists.

When Carnegie's (1982: 328) expedition finally walked out of the desert into the Kimberley region in 1898 he found large numbers of Aboriginal people already living around pastoral station homesteads. There had been an accommodation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Elsewhere in central Australia the process took longer: *"Aboriginal people and their neighbours began to settle on stations and government settlements from the 1930s, encouraged by prolonged drought starting in 1926"* (Keen, 2004: 9).

Over time the remaining desert people were drawn in from the bush because they were eager to maintain the social networks with extended family and friends that are *"so central to Aboriginal culture"* (Smith, 2000: 17). They were also attracted by other factors such as the prospect of using tobacco and flour (Smith 2000: 102). Unlike bush flour, processed flour did not need to be painstakingly ground from harsh seeds collected out on the spinifex plains.

The pastoralists provided rations for the station population living at the stock camp as a strategy to stop the spearing of cattle and sheep, especially valuable breeding stock. Spearing was a serious issue and stock losses high. Pastoralists also needed a cheap labour supply being dependent on Aboriginal workers (Smith, 2000:120). Rations typically consisted of a quantity of flour, tea, sugar, tobacco, salt beef, powdered milk, tin food and clothing (Smith 2000: 120). Much depended on the *'generosity'* of station owners and managers. Some groups received little more than leftover hoofs, bones and offal (McGrath, 1987: 122). Desert people supplemented their diet with whatever *'bush tucker'* they could find, an unintended consequence of which was the maintenance of hunting and gathering skills.

Anthropologists Ronald and Catherine Berndt (1969) reported appalling living conditions in many stock camps, although some pastoralists were better at meeting their obligations than others. In the worst camps, due to poor environmental health, unknown numbers succumbed to infectious disease, especially infant diarrhoea.

Desert people had their own relational perspective on their situation (Merlan, 1989: 26). They understood work for a station as a reciprocal arrangement, not one of servile subordination (McGrath, 1987: 102). They exchanged their labour and use of their land in full expectation that *'station bosses'* would reciprocate by looking after them as a matter of right (McGrath, 1987: 141). Notwithstanding asymmetric power relations Aboriginal people considered it a personal relationship, not purely economically instrumental.

A participant in this study (Interview 3) urged a nuanced understanding of station relationships. Although careful *"not to say it was right"*, they observed that desert people did not regard all station managers as 'hard' bosses. This was not to suggest that cruel treatment had been forgotten as Participant 4 explained: *"Feeling inside, you still have that pain ... that's how a lot of people feel."* They described the complex dualistic nature of the relationship with non-Indigenous station men with a local expression: *"He bin hard, but him bin good"*.

Merlan (1998: 26) writes: *"There are many instances of Aboriginal workers staying with the same boss for a long time or of there being a binding relationship between some family member and the white employer - sometimes, but not always a sexual one."* Close relationships could also be forged between Aboriginal women employed as domestics and the station children they essentially raised (McGrath, 1987: 63). Toussaint (1995: 260) recounts a similar story.

Amidst the mistreatment mutually respectful relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal men were forged through working the stock together for years. A participant in this study (Interview 2) commented:

Some stations had a good working relationship and Aboriginal people, those traditional owners, felt safe on those stations. A small sector of the community used to provide services like stock work and domestic work in the homestead and that, and some even got the chance to do work with the windmill people or work on cars.

Station life fundamentally changed gender relations in desert society (McGrath, 1987). The general pattern was that men worked the stock while women were employed as domestics. According to Tonkinson (1974: 129-130) station life provided females with greater agency and influence than previously.

[T]he women who were housegirls tended to become much better speakers of English than their menfolk because they spent more time in informal interaction with the pastoralists than did the men. Housegirls whose husbands were not employed on the stations became the sole conduit to the highly desired alien goods, the reason for the family being able to remain on the property, and the mediators in relationships between house and camp ... As housegirls and providers of rations, women were furnishing their men not only with food but also with needed and desired knowledge.

Colonisation also profoundly altered the relationship between Aboriginal men and women in another way. All along the frontier some non-Aboriginal men exploited Aboriginal women as sexual partners (Toussaint, 1995: 248; McGrath, 1987: 57, 68-94). Unpacking gender and power relations is a complex business (McGrath 1987: 49 & 75 & 90). By introducing non-Aboriginal men into the equation, colonisation altered the relationship between Aboriginal men and women, but not in any uniform manner. As McGrath (1987: 68-94) explains there were several different kinds of relationships between men and women, ranging from cruel to loving and these cannot be conflated as purely exploitative. An analysis that only focuses on non-aboriginal men's use of Aboriginal women is partial. In different ways, in different contexts and at different times, all parties might use relationships to their advantage.

Female employment at the homestead enabled women to act as intermediaries between their *walytja* and mainstream society, thereby enabling them to attain resources (McGrath, 1987: 76-77). Their acquired English language skills alone gave them a new found influence. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal bosses on both sides, used women to pass on instructions, requests and complaints (McGrath, 1987: 117). Women might also benefit by escaping a marriage to an older man they did not want.

It might be posited that, relying on their own internal cultural logic, Aboriginal men rationalised they might expect some reciprocal benefits in return for the 'trade' of their women, such as tobacco or rations. After all McGrath (1987: 74) reports "wife lending" could be considered acceptable cultural practice providing the husband agreed and some form of payment was given. This is a traditional culture in which men had always bestowed women. Difficulties occurred, however, when the anticipated reciprocity did not take place, perhaps because white men did not have a shared understanding of the nature of the arrangement or the wife chose not to return (McGrath, 1987: 74-76). A deep sense of resentment might then fuel tensions between all parties.

The Aboriginal workforce was denied equal pay and conditions until the mid-1960's when the federal Conciliation and Arbitration Court decided to extend award wages to Aboriginal stockmen (Merlan, 1989: 7). Implementation of 'equal pay', together with technological change, resulted in reduced demand for station labour. The general response of station employers was to reduce the numbers they employed and to no longer provide sustenance to non-working family members (Merlan, 1989: 20). Most desert people were no longer required or welcome on their own country.

A participant in this study (Interview 2) suggested 'equal pay' was a greater moral issue for 'white Australia' than it ever was for non-materialistic desert people. For the latter did not assess the quality of their relationships with non-indigenous society on the basis of income. "When you look at it, it wasn't a good thing that people weren't getting paid ... but from a rights or societal equity point of view for Australia it mightn't have looked like a good thing". Merlan (1998: 60) observed that despite the oppression Aboriginal people experienced on the stations, they tend not to describe it in these terms, perhaps because they are without "a distinctive vocabulary of inequality."

The eviction of Aboriginal people when they were no longer required on the stations was a traumatic experience (Toussaint, 1995: 259). Arguably the men were most impacted. From this point their role as family providers ceased and purpose drained from their lives. The move from the relative security of the stock camp to the insecurity of a distant fringe camp was a traumatic experience. Social circumstances deteriorated rapidly:

Only those who know the close link between the native people and their land can realize the heartache and sorrow they suffer when driven from their homes, and the homes of generations before them, because the land is wanted by the white man for his sheep and cattle. (Mountford, 1961: 38)

Prior to their removal from the stations, desert people had never been away from their traditional country for more than the briefest time. Work, despite the hardships, enabled family groups to sustain their cultural connections to country and with each other (Read, 1995: 278). People felt culturally secure for so long as they remained on their ancestral land. Station life also enabled continuance of rituals for country and participation in ceremony with neighbouring groups during the lay off period. As Wilson (1979: 156) observes it *“provided time for the refurbishing of Aboriginal social ties and beliefs.”*

By contrast living on someone else’s country created feelings of great consternation and a lost sense of identity and belonging. The unexpected arrival of Aboriginal people in towns and communities contributed to growing social tensions with traditional owners. The newcomers were not introduced to country in the proper way described by Merlan, 1998: 70). Displaced desert people were now reduced to ‘visitor’ status in country that cannot nurture them because it does not know them or perhaps does not recognise the language they speak (Merlan, 1998: 126). A participant in this study (Interview 2) emphasised the absence of any form of *“structural adjustment assistance”* to enable a transition from the pastoral economy to some kind of *“new economy”*.

Prior to the 1970s there were few desert men and women who had not worked stock or been domestics in the homestead at one time or another. For men stock work was more than an economic activity (McGrath, 1987). Over the years it also became the primary means through which men might acquire prestige and status. It gave expression to their masculinity and cultural identity, just as hunting had done for previous generations.

Aboriginal men used cattle work to regain or maintain their pride as men, in a colonial context. Their use of this work to continue ritual ties with land challenged colonial ownership and the domination of white Australia culture. (McGrath 1987: 46)

Being a stockman from a particular station had been an important source of status, especially for men, and marker of their identity (McGrath, 1987: 46, 160 & 167). According to McGrath (1987: 44) *“It was not the western work ethic, but rather a unique mixture of ‘cowboy complex’ values and distinctive Aboriginal values – especially land-related – which motivated Aborigines to work with cattle.”* Even today an aging generation of stockmen still hold onto the imagery of the cowboy shirts, jeans, elastic sided boots, rodeos and *‘country and western’* music. Many take their European surnames from the stations where their families had lived and worked or from their former non-Aboriginal managers. The knowledge of country, waterholes, landscape, collective norms, and bush survival skills made Aboriginal people uniquely attracted to and suitable for stock work; *“an indispensable asset”* according to McGrath (1987: 46).

Furthermore the work complemented the traditional, highly nomadic desert lifestyle, allowing people to stay in touch with their Dreaming places. McGrath (1987: 145) writes: *“Aborigines used the cattle station for their own purposes; they managed to secure European goods, as well as maintain links with their land and follow the precepts of Aboriginal law.”* Workers from neighbouring stations would meet up for ceremonial purposes when the seasonal nature of work permitted (McGrath, 1987: 159). In many ways desert people *‘colonised’* the pastoral industry, culturally incorporating it until they were abruptly dispossessed for the second time. The pastoral industry, at least as practiced by Aboriginal people, actually retained many aspects of the earlier customary economy (McGrath, 1987: 153). It was possible to reconcile family, culture and work responsibilities because there was not a rigid demarcation between them.

Removal from the stations was the singular event that most fundamentally changed the social dynamic, at least according to a participant in this study (Interview 2):

People felt safe and secure, even in those tyrannical type of relationships on the stations in a strange way. They weren't in charge of their destiny, but at least they were on their traditional ground and enjoying their resources or what the cattle owners gave them like rations, and also the ability to go out and hunt. When people got kicked off the stations, that was a big disconnect for a lot of Aboriginal groups.

An era of destructive substance abuse was about to begin as the anguish and despair of the dispossessed turned inwards and lateral violence (Dudgeon, 2000) escalated amidst a more concentrated population, seemingly much in the manner of displaced people everywhere (Havermann et al, 1985: 984). Onyx and Bulletin (2000) argues that valuing life as being worth living is a necessary social condition to enable social capital formation. For many Aboriginal men in remote Australia life had just lost much of its meaning.

Vignette 5.1: Living History

When I first went to live in northern Australia in the late 1970's there were Aboriginal people who would relay first hand accounts of a brutal history I knew little about.

The Anthropologist Tindale (1953-4: 175) recorded the following notes in his field journal.

Old Moses [also known as Tjulku] ... was born before white men came to the country. He said he first encountered white men when he was a child at Marala ... when white men droving bullocks came up and shot at them as soon as they were seen. The same white saw them again at Kardarj. The blacks didn't understand. The whites were 'cheeky' and shot an old man and a young man. Tjulku was a little boy and ran away with his mother ... His second experience with whites was some time later when Willie Magistrate ... shot and killed his elder brother Maltjudu in a 'row over bullock'.

The manager and cook on a remote Kimberley station were speared and killed in 1922. The Aboriginal man thought responsible was pursued by police and shot dead. A more general massacre of the local Aboriginal population then ensued. The massacre site is common knowledge. The following is a first hand oral history account of what took place.

Oh big mob there, longa billabong ... And they sneaked up. There may have been about twenty or thirty police boys too. They did not tie them up or take them to jail house; they murdered the whole lot of them, shot them all ... women, piccaninnies, dogs, old people, young people, middle-sized people - finished them. I was there when it happened. But they did not shoot me because I came from this other way and I was a stockman. (Grant Ngabidj quoted in Ngabidi & Shaw, 1981: 47)

I was astounded to find the following oral account of the massacre at Luunia in the Mirli-Mirli Wangkalan Tukurlu Katjungka (Catholic) Parish Newsletter No 10 when visiting Balgo in 1997.

On top of Sturt Creek, the old station on top of the hill. The old people used to spear cattle. Cut 'em up - use a rock. They didn't know white man owned those bullock. Hungry for a feed and the bullock was easy to catch. White man came along and caught them.

And that's when kartiya [white people] started shooting those people. They want to shoot them like a dog. Shoot them like a bullock for stealing cattle.

They took them to Sturt Creek. Tied them between two big trees, in chain. White blokes started shooting them from one end and other end. And they meet up in the middle. Finish. That tree was full of blood.

They get a horse. Put a rope along their neck and drag them to the well. Chuck them in - whole lot. Get 'em kerosene. Pour 'em in and then light 'em. Burn all the blackfella in that well after shooting them.

We mob bin kids. We were playing in the water... Me and my brother was there. Watch 'em all them dead fellow. We used to see them draggin' 'em those body with a horse. We bin hear 'em shoot 'em till they were finish."

It was sobering to think that the Coniston massacre in the Northern Territory had occurred as recently as 1928 when my own father was a child of seven years. Many events were indeed recent and raw. According to Smith (2000: 119) most indiscriminate shooting ceased by the 1930s, although there were incidents as late as the 1950s.

Local people still remember 'the Killing Times'. And while the killing may have stopped, throughout the 1960's, 1970's and early 1980's Aboriginal people continued to be threatened by people with rifles and forcedly run off pastoral stations. According to McCoy (2004: 59) "colonial contact formed the basis of an Aboriginal oral tradition that remembered violence, sexual exploitation of women, and survival."

5.5 Relations with the Missions

Numerous Christian faiths established Aboriginal missions in the first half of the 1900's (Reynolds & May, 1995: 189). The main motivation was a religious zeal to convert the natives (McCoy, 2004: 71). Most missions had strong views about appropriate morals, modes of dress, work habits, education, the importance of religious instruction, and child rearing that they sought to impose.

There was often tension between missions and nearby pastoral stations (Wilson, 1997: 157-158). The missionaries sought to provide a buffer against the worst excesses of western society, providing a safe refuge from the rampant sexual exploitation of Aboriginal women at cattle stations and mining camps. The missionaries actively discouraged Aboriginal fraternisation with the non-Aboriginal world for reasons of moral hazard. Desert people observed that not all *'whitefellas'* were the same.

Initially the missions were little more than rough bush camps, where food and fresh water were often in short supply (McCoy, 2004: 55). In a harsh environment they struggled to achieve some semblance of self-sufficiency. Water was a constant problem because there were not enough wells and bores. There were instances where the missionaries were grateful for *'bush tucker'* supplied to them by local Aboriginal people. It could be surmised that this *'reverse rationing'* sat comfortably with Aboriginal notions of relational reciprocity.

One mission was in a particularly difficult situation because they were dependent on nearby pastoral stations for fresh meat and, in one case, land tenure. The Berndt's (1969: 6) found *"the rights of the Mission are virtually subordinated"* to the claims of the cattle station. They pushed government to establish *"an Aboriginal refuge"* and *"training establishment"* (Berndt & Berndt, 1969: 7). A reserve subsequently was declared *'for the use and benefit'* of the Aboriginal inhabitants.

While initially cautious, desert people slowly began to have more regular contact with the missions. Sunday was a popular day to be around, for this was when rations were usually distributed. Aboriginal people were motivated by several factors in addition to food (McCoy, 2004: 69). Some were *'pushed'* towards the mission by in-humane treatment meted out by pastoralists, miners and police. Others were *'pushed'* out of the desert by drought or because livestock had supplanted them in their own country, seriously inhibiting access to natural resources and depleting their *'bush tucker'* supplies.

Others were *'pulled'* out of the desert by the lure of new foods, tobacco and stories of vehicles traveling at speed (Folds, 2001: 13 & 20-21; McCoy, 2004: 77). People were curious to see and acquire such things for themselves (McGrath, 1987: 4). From early on there was interest in learning about and adapting those aspects of the non-Aboriginal world they might find beneficial to their own lifestyle. But as McCoy (2004: 77) observes: *"Their movement did not necessarily suggest they were interested in participating in the society that provided it"*. Arguably the strongest pull of all was the desire to stay socially connected with members of their own extended family network already living at the missions. For desert people have always followed their *'walytja'* (Folds, 2001: 13).

Initially people living in and around the missions had a quasi-traditional existence. They fulfilled their responsibilities under their law, while also consuming the advantages of the mission when it suited them. The pattern, which continued into the 1960s in some cases, was intermittent mission contact with people moving in and out. The last of the hunter-gatherers did not move permanently out of the desert until the 1980's.

Over time the physical infrastructure of missions steadily grew to typically include a church,

parish accommodation, school, dormitories, dining hall, health clinic, housing, airstrip, workshop and other buildings. Local people provided most of the labour in return for rations, in marked contrast to what generally happens now with construction work contracted out to external building companies.

Missions often took a hard line against pre-existing desert religious practices, which portrayed Aboriginal law as the *“work of the devil”* (Tonkinson, 1982: 119). They condemned traditional religion as pagan and sought to forbid practices such as initiation. Internal community tensions were heightened in circumstances where individuals were coerced to renounce the traditional law of *Tjukurrpa* in favour of a new Christian faith (Read, 1995: 289). In these circumstances missionaries could struggle to build close social relations with Aboriginal people according to Tonkinson (1982: 119).

The missionaries spent much less time in close working relationships with Aboriginal men than did station bosses and there was a greater awareness of deeply opposed interests. The language barrier was formidable for a start, but so too was the antipathy generated by the Aboriginal men’s knowledge that the missionaries, unlike the frontier Europeans, wanted to destroy the Law. (Tonkinson, 1982: 133)

McCoy (2004), a priest at Balgo Mission for more than thirty years, argues that the agency of desert people in these circumstances can be overstated and that social relations between desert people and missionaries were far from equal (McCoy, 2004: 320). He provides an insider's view of an authoritarian superintendent.

He administered and managed a community ... in a most remote part of Australia. He was not expected to learn any of the local languages or understand the culture. His authority gave him control over the health, rations, work and movement of all who lived there. He could have people removed from the community, just as he could prevent people entering it. He employed almost all kartiya staff and was responsible for the rations, health and wages given ... In addition, he was also the minister who performed regular church ceremonies including marriages and funerals. The priest, at that time, held enormous social, economic, religious and political power.

It would be overstatement to suggest missionaries were able to or always sought to exercise total control (McCoy, 2004: 78). Through ingenuity desert people have always retained a degree of autonomy. The actions of various denominations never resulted in total domination or enlightenment (Palmer, 1999: 11). Trigger (1989: 530) found a mission ideology of authoritarian paternalism in one community where missionaries actively discouraged ceremony and ritual. Mission discouragement of opposition to cultural practices had a cumulative impact. Where Trigger (1989: 530) did his research *“The last time any kind of ceremony was held (a few kilometres west of the Settlement) was around 1953, and this is well-remembered by Aborigines and missionaries alike, for the then [Mission] Superintendent tried (apparently unsuccessfully) to have it stopped by the local ... Police Sergeant”*. Aboriginal residents nevertheless still found ways to maintain aspects of their own religious knowledge.

With the establishment of government funded incorporated Aboriginal Community Councils in the 1970's the missions ceased to have a community governance role. Churches nevertheless retain influence and may be active in areas such as aged care, youth work, health care and schooling. Former missions often maintain resident clergy active in spiritual and social life. The mission legacy is also evident in the religious affiliation of present day residents.

The most significant and enduring legacy of the missions has been the damage inflicted upon the bonds of walytia and kanyirninpa. The practice was to separate children from adults through use of a dormitory system (Brock, 1995: 109). Life for children raised in the dormitories was a prison-like existence, locked away from their families (McCoy, 2004: 74). Only on Christmas day, and for part of that day, were children allowed to visit their families in the camp. A physical and social barrier between parents and children was maintained. (McCoy, 2004: 73)

McCoy (2004, 81) argues the Church socialised desert people to believe they were not capable of being good parents. Generations grew up deprived of parental love and guidance, in turn

diminishing their own capacity to parent. According to Tonkinson (1982: 127): *“The insistence of the missionaries that they remove the school-age children from camp to dormitory carried with it the metamessage that they assumed responsibility for looking after the children.”*

The dormitory system disrupted the intergenerational flow of cultural knowledge previously achieved through *‘holding’* (Stanton, 1983: 163; McCoy, 2004: 139). Children experienced years of physical, social and emotional isolation with western schooling but no cultural education. McCoy, (2004: 231) notes: *“The dormitory system separated boys from a very early age from their fathers, uncles and grandfathers and, in some instances, missionaries used the same system to prevent the ceremonies that linked older and younger men.”*

Another practice that damaged family bonds in some missions was feeding people in communal dining rooms, rather than within their own *walytja*. The practice cut across the established and continuing custom that each extended family group keep its own camp and eat apart (Folds, 2001: 19).

In remote Aboriginal communities significant numbers have adopted Christian beliefs. Church provides a site where people are able to expand their social networks, as well as give expression to their sense of spirituality. In remote Australia church groups may still meet regularly. The church still ‘holds’ and gives solace to people when most needed in times of grief and loss. It may also provide supported pathways for those recovering from trauma, substance abuse, and the social isolation of jail. Austin-Broos (2011: 3-4) describes her experience taking a mother to visit her incarcerated son:

It had been his first time in the Big House and he was predictably sober, chastened as well as engaging in sobriety. Matthew told his mother and me that he would become a Lutheran pastor. He had even brought a Bible from the jail and was flicking through it. He said he wouldn't drink any more, would live on the outstation with his brothers ...

Missionary work does not have a unitary history (Palmer, 1999: 11). The church, like other institutions, can be understood as being simultaneously both corrosive of social capital and constructive of it. It has left a mixed legacy in remote Australia (Read, 1995: 275). Reflecting on the work of the Church in America, Putnam (1993: 60) writes: *“Historically, the black church has been the most bounteous treasure-house of social capital for African Americans.”* Religious practice plays a role in fostering forms of civic participation and action (Uslaner, 2002).

Vignette 5.2: Tjukurrpa Acculturates Christianity

Some missionaries actively promoted an accommodation between Christian and Aboriginal spiritual traditions. Neither they nor their congregations saw much contradiction in accepting certain Christian beliefs alongside the maintenance of more ancient Tjukurrpa spirituality.

There are aspects of Christianity that sit comfortably alongside desert law: a Jesus who ‘holds’ people; the emphasis placed on ceremony and ritual; collective singing; the ordaining of certain behaviours as acceptable or unacceptable; values of unselfishness, forgiveness, compassion and generosity; belief in supernatural creation and allegiance to an authority that resides outside of human relations. Desert people, accustomed to the social ordering of a skin group system, might also easily relate to social categories such as ‘believer’/‘non-believer’, ‘drinker’/‘non-drinker’, and ‘cattleman’/‘missionary’. These are elements that may resonate with Aboriginal religion.

It may be tempting to think of different faiths as a fault line that necessarily fuels social divisiveness, but Aboriginal people have a capacity to reconcile seemingly irreconcilable beliefs. McGrath (1987: 150) quotes a renowned elder stating that Jesus was born “in this country, out of the dirt” the same as his ancient ancestors that feature in Dreaming mythology. A parallel can be drawn with the common practice of desert people of making use of both mabann (traditional healers) and western health services when it suits. From a desert cultural perspective these are not opposed practices, just a form of ‘doctor shopping’.

5.6 Relations with Police

The first contact Aboriginal people had with representatives of government were the police. For decades punitive raids were all desert groups ever knew of the authority of the state.

In remote Australia the police essentially enforced the interests of pastoralists (McGrath, 1987: 119). From the early 1880s right through until the end of the 1950s, prisoners were routinely brought out of the desert and imprisoned (McCoy, 2004:198). Owen (2003: 109) writes:

The pastoral districts were policed by 'bush patrols'. Following complaints from pastoralists, police travelled often for hundreds of miles over several weeks to arrest offenders, who were then chained by the neck and marched back.

Police had a financial incentive to actively support the interests of pastoralists in suppressing desert people. An allowance was paid to individual officers for every Aboriginal person arrested. Smith (2000: 115) writes *"This made it profitable for the police to arrest as many as possible and it was those living outside the emerging authority of the pastoral industry that were arrested."*

Rhetoric in state capital cities sought to portray the police as an impartial protector of Aboriginal people, but it meant little out on the frontier (Owen, 2003; 111). According to Owen (2003: 109): *"Police were often beholden to the pastoralists, who they depended on for support for rations and shelter, so policing them was fraught with difficulty."* Under legislative provisions in Western Australia an Aboriginal person committed an offence if they moved from the station where they resided, a regulation still in force in the 1960s. The purpose was to guarantee pastoralists an ample supply of labour. Furthermore pastoralists often served as Justices of the Peace and as Magistrates, tilting the scales of justice (McGrath, 1995: 27).

According to McCoy (2004: 198) the past actions of police continue to impact on present relations: *"While police can be called for assistance and help, they are also remembered as the ones who regularly removed men from their families and communities for imprisonment."*

The work of one Royal Commission serves to remind that not all relational issues involving police and Aboriginal people are located in the distant past. Commissioner Johnston (Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, 1991: 195) wrote:

It is my opinion that far too much police intervention in the lives of Aboriginal people throughout Australia has been arbitrary, discriminatory, racist and violent. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that the antipathy which so many Aboriginal people feel towards police is based not just on historical conduct but upon the contemporary experience of contact with many police officers.

Vignette 5.3: Structure versus Agency in the Desert

Driving into a remote community in the late afternoon I saw a local police officer kicking a football with the kids on the dust bowl that passed for an oval. It occurred to me right then that there is more to the worldview of desert people that sees all relationships as personal rather than institutional than I had hitherto realised. 'Agency' had just kicked a 'goal' in its on-going match-up with 'structure', in my own mind at least. By agency I mean being able to influence the terms of a relationship in some way. Any understanding of remote communities that doesn't recognise the scope and ingenuity of individual action is flawed.

My experience has been that behaviour can never be fully reduced to a set of generalised stereotypes. There is always agency and, as a consequence, variance in the nature and quality of personal relationships. Not all European interactions with desert people have been oppressive, cruel, patronising, paternal, controlling, discriminatory, culturally corrosive, fleeting or entirely misdirected. Nor do all desert people hold negative suspicious attitudes towards members of the dominant society. A participant in this study (Interview 2) observed individuals interpret events and react to them in different ways: "People have a range of views about what colonisation did ... To me the person that gets chewed up is the one who dwells on it." Not all turn from engagement.

History consists of multiple individual experiences that cannot be conveniently lumped together to make a consistent whole. There was and is no universal pattern of interaction between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Instances of collaboration and confrontation existed side-by-side all along the colonial frontier (Reynolds, 1998). Each encounter has to be sifted to determine its nature and nuance. The reasons why particular relationships unfold as they do are varied. Individual personalities, friendships, religious beliefs, moral codes, prevailing philosophies, motivations, official policies and random events all play a part.

Felt connections, affinity and shared interests can cut right through social, cultural, economic and political divisions (Pettman, 1992: 126). In my life I have seen non-indigenous pastoralists held in high regard by desert people. I have known public officials able to build close life-long connections, irrespective of the policies they were responsible for. There have also been missionaries committed to learning and recording desert language and cultural practice (Heugel, 1981; Peile, 1997; McCoy, 2004). History has exceptions and it is perhaps in understanding these 'spaces in between' that one may hope to find the possibilities of reconciliation.

Individual action is not reducible to a set of generalised institutional behaviours. The actions of explorers, missionaries, pastoralists, officials and police cannot be conveniently understood as wholly supportive or destructive of social capital.

5.7 Relations with the Welfare Authorities

Missions were not the only institutions to adversely impact on family bonds. Government officials also took Aboriginal children away to distant institutions (Toussaint, 1995: 250-253; McGrath, 1987: 91-94). The set of policies and practices of forced separation have now come to be known by the collective term '*the stolen generations*'. The children were institutionalised in far away cities and adopted out in some cases. Children were forcibly separated from their families. The assimilationist policies of Australian governments assumed they would be better off raised by non-indigenous institutions and adoptive families, far away from what was seen as the corrosive cultural influence of their own families.

The term '*welfare*' as used in this section specifically refers to state institutions and agents involved in issues of Aboriginal child protection. The term '*welfare*' is not used in any broader sense to refer to the welfare state and the associated philosophy of '*welfarism*.' There is a separate and long running policy debate in the Aboriginal sector suggesting welfare payments are especially harmful to Aboriginal people. This is briefly discussed in Chapter 7.

The historic pattern of state intrusion into desert families has left an entrenched legacy of trauma and suspicion that is difficult to shift. Western Australia's Task Force on Aboriginal Social Justice (Daube 1994: 494-95) reported:

The consequences of historic policies of assimilation and widespread removal of children from their families are evident in contemporary family dislocation, parenting problems, and child abuse and neglect. These policies have also left a residue of massive distrust of authority and, in particular,

distrust of 'the welfare' ... Historically, Aboriginal people were subjected to massive welfare intervention on a scale not experienced by any other group in Australia.

A consequence is that contact with family, community, welfare and justice services is generally perceived as threatening by many Aboriginal people (Gordon et al, 2002; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1997: 458-59; Libesman (2007: 11). Blagg (2000: 7) found *"a profound mistrust of social work agencies who may take the children away from a violent home, and there is still considerable suspicion of police involvement in domestic disputes."*

The experience of forced removal means the issue of state control over children's services remains a particularly sensitive matter (Libesman, 2007: 33). Trust in government remains tenuous (Will & Anderson, 2007). One government report found:

There have been consistent calls for transferring responsibility and control for Aboriginal child welfare back to the Aboriginal community. This view is often linked to the belief that mainstream services have 'failed' to both stem the widespread abuse and stop the over-representation of children in the care system with its echoes of past removal policies. (Gordon et al, 2002: 82-83)

A participant in this study (Interview 3) commented: *"There is a terrible history there"*. Those taken away and institutionalised are *"never able to be a part of native title processes - they don't have their language, they don't have the stories - they have been removed from all of that"* (Interview 4). They may not even know to whom they are related or where their country is: *"We could be walking past each other on the street and not even knowing we're blood ... as families we're still trying to track our own stories, ... especially the ones that have been removed"* (Interview 4).

Yet amidst forced separation members of the stolen generation were still able to demonstrate agency, seeking out opportunities to forge new bonds. An unintended consequence of being taken was that some lifelong friendships and marriages directly connected Aboriginal people who would otherwise have been located at opposite ends of the continent. A participant in this study (Interview 4) observed some people *"wouldn't be connected if it weren't for the stolen generation"*.

The other distinguishing characteristic of those who were taken is their persistence in seeking to reconnect with their people and place of origin. Participant 3 in this study commented:

Some families have been removed and don't know much at all about where they come from. They have to come back here to learn it all. It's like a tree without roots ... A lot of families are on this journey, stolen generation families going back to their homes.

The process of reconnection and healing of families is not easy (Atkinson & Ober, 1995). A participant in this study (Interview 3) described it as a *"journey we are all taking"* and suggested *"some people are able to get past it and some can't"*. There can be unresolved tensions between those who were taken and those who were not. There can be a dearth of empathy for those who endured the consequences of intense white contact (McGrath, 1987: 162). These may divide *walytja* and wider social groupings in ways unimaginable in traditional society. A participant in this study (Interview 3) saw a need for Aboriginal people to reconcile with each other as well as with non-indigenous people. There are unresolved issues still being worked through. Not everyone understands the circumstances of their fellow countrymen's removal or the magnitude of what occurred. Participant 3 took the view: *"You can't resolve something unless you know about it first and some of it we are all finding out for the first time, both black and white."*

The ancient social imperative of the desert, of seeking out points of social connection, continues. The pull of *walytja* is a resilient generator of social capital, even amongst members of the stolen generation. A participant in this study (Interview 4) hammered home the point: *"You work your way back ... you come from this family."*

5.8 Relations with the State

For millennia desert society functioned as a sustainable low impact customary economy with little need for any form of hierarchic structure or external resource support. It was the destruction of the Aboriginal economy that created dependence on the state.

The notion that the state could be a provider of support services was slow to take root in some places. In the remotest parts of the continent pastoralists and missionaries might have preceded the arrival of most agencies of government by at least half a century. In Western Australia it wasn't until the mid-1940s that missions received their first visits from public officials, other than the police.

When the Berndt's (1969: 4) visited a remote school they found it lacked both trained teachers and funding. Their concerns about future social consequences were prophetic in the light of knowledge about the contemporary socio-economic status of desert people.

The school - and education remains the main hope for these people: it is only through education that they will be able to overcome the prejudice, indifference, occasional maltreatment, and almost general exploitation they are likely to encounter as they move lawfully into the 'white' community'. We must pin our faith quite definitely to this aspect, and support it as fully as possible ... In spite of the truly valiant efforts of the sister-in-charge of the ... school, the facilities are quite inadequate. Nearly 70 children are crowded into a small building, which should house only about 20 comfortably, the classes cannot be properly divided - and one teacher copes with this situation. How anything can be taught, let alone assimilated by pupils, is difficult to imagine. Yet, the children, who are among the brightest we've seen for some time, are gradually learning a little English, sing well, draw, are beginning to read, write and count, and are coping with fundamental hygiene ... Better facilities need to be provided immediately: larger buildings, more teachers (at least two). The hope of these people rests on this centre. If we neglect to provide these necessities, then we can expect a continuation of the situation as found in so many regions: that is, partially trained, virtually unemployable adults, who have been systematically divorced from their own way of life - while they remain unadjusted to what passes for the Australian way of life in these parts. We can expect to get out of our educational system only what we put into it. (Berndt & Berndt, 1969: 4)

Contact between government officialdom and desert communities increased substantially from the 1970s onwards, but the relationship has been troubled by an underlying entrenched historic distrust. It was not forgotten that the state failed in its duty to protect desert people from the worst excesses of pastoralists, missionaries, police and government welfare officials (Rowley, 1970). Relations between desert people and government officials have always been strained, Shimpo (1985: 1) describes them as a form of *"antagonistic cooperation."*

Building sound relations between desert people and the state is rendered problematic because of a power imbalance between the institutions of state and desert society. A participant in this study observed (Interview 8): *"The links historically have been very paternalistic with power held by government and pastoralists"*. Yet while the state is relatively powerful, an analytical insight gleaned from the work of Bourdieu (1986) is that social relations are never only a consequence of power wielded from above. Domination is never fully achieved.

Even amongst the poorest of the poor there is always some scope for autonomous decision and action, always space for the colonised to exercise some agency. In his exploration of social capital production in rural India Krishna (2002: 140) found villagers exercised considerable agency. They were strategic in meeting their own needs, demonstrating a capacity *"to engage with the state in some domains and to withdraw from its embrace in other domains."* Closer to home in an Australian indigenous context Martin (2011: 201) writes: *"Critical social analysis of the situations of Aboriginal people must never ignore ... the historical role of the state; but neither must it avoid the central role of Aboriginal agency."* There is debate around the extent to which Aboriginal lives are *'determining'* or *'determined'* (McGrath, 1995: 371).

According to Folds (2001) the stated purpose of government programs that are intended to serve the wider *'common good'* may be subverted to advance local values and priorities rather

than those of policy-makers. The same desert people who today *'adapt'* services to align with their own objectives are direct descendants of those who once re-forged horseshoes into axes and re-fashioned broken glass into spearheads. The capacity of the state to actually determine what happens at community level is reduced by fundamental language differences. Few non-Aboriginal people speak an Aboriginal language, limiting capacity for communication and understanding.

The perspective of desert people is that the state has accepted a responsibility to *'hold'* them but has been inconsistent in fulfilling the role (Folds, 2001). In their minds each program, each new initiative, every intervention, only serves to further reinforce and extend the ways in which they see government as accepting responsibility for holding them. When governments talk about winding back programs, reducing dependence and new directions the interpretation of desert people may well be that the state is just failing to live up to its commitments.

Finally the notion that purposely designed policies made by governments can be implemented to make a significant difference in the lives of desert people is a western cultural construct. As discussed in the previous chapter, the assumption that social improvement is the product of human endeavour is not necessarily shared by people who do not regard themselves as beings able to make much difference to the way things were laid down long ago in the Dreaming (Myers, 1980: 219; Merlan, 1998: 224; McGrath, 1987: 176).

5.9 Relations with Countrymen

Of all the changes desert people have experienced, the shift from a dispersed nomadic existence to a relatively sedentary life as a community resident has been amongst the most profound.

Social relations and total population numbers in pre-contact society were critically dependent on the availability of natural resources. Access to water, in particular, constrained group size and movement. Small group interaction in turn placed limits on the extent and nature of the social capital that could be produced. The concentration of a hunter-gatherer population for prolonged periods could not be sustained in a marginal environment. Thus physical circumstance shaped relations between neighbouring groups. Keen (2004: 103-104) elaborates:

[F]oragers living together even in modest numbers quickly reduce the food resources within a convenient range of their camp ... At some stage it is going to pay a group to move in order to exploit a fresh area. The size and mobility of groups depends in part on the density, distribution, mobility, and nutritional value of resources. Groups may split or some residents leave when stress on local resources and competition cause social tension.

Today there are far-reaching demographic changes occurring in the desert. The natural constraints on remote population growth have been entirely removed. The nexus that once existed between a fragile natural environment and the number of people it could support is broken. Daily physical survival now depends on the community store and transfer payments, not on hunting and gathering prowess. Remote communities are experiencing rapid population growth as a consequence (Austin-Broos, 2011: 5). The size of an extended family group may now easily exceed a hundred people, whereas in pre-contact society it may not have been more than a dozen.

Family composition has also changed. Early teenage pregnancy and parenthood has always been the norm for young Aboriginal women (Chisholm 1985; Cowlshaw, 1982; Malin et al, 1996). However, now there is significantly less infant mortality than in traditional society due to access to immunisation, health clinics and doctors. Tonkinson (1982: 125) observes the *"population explosion that followed sedentarization and acceptance of Western medical treatment has produced a youthful community that had no parallel in size or demographic composition traditionally."*

Rising remote population is problematic for service providers and the state that funds it. An increasingly youthful population places pressure on maternal health, education, sexual health, youth and parenting support services (McCoy, 2004: 248). Ever greater numbers of people reach working age with little prospect of employment in the absence of a sustainable remote economy. It translates into increased numbers in need of income support.

Desert people, however, may not regard the demographic profile of *walytja* as problematic. The

literature suggests they like having lots of children around and being in a position where they can spend time with extended family. From their perspective the sheer joy this brings, coupled with the larger social networks it enables them to access, outweigh any disadvantages.

The new demography of the desert is not without drawbacks. In traditional society it is estimated there might have only been one person for every 100-200 square kilometres of country (Keen, 2004: 381). Now hundreds, even thousands, of people from numerous *walytja* may live together in the same community, giving rise to unresolved tensions. Remote communities are home to increasingly disparate groups and individuals. Much of this *'mixing up'* of people is the result of the dislocation that occurred decades ago.

In-fighting between extended families is a feature of many remote communities comprising multiple social groups (Elkin 1951; Stanner, 1979; Myers, 1986: 35; Mantziaris & Martin, 2000: 282-283). A participant in this study (Interview 6) noted that remote communities can be *"plagued by internal conflict"*. Another (Interview 3) commented in this respect that *"Sometimes I think our own mob can be our worst enemies"*. Christie and Greatorex (2004: 45) describe a former mission community comprising a large number of people from faraway places residing *"unhappily"*, without trust and estranged from their ancestral country. McGrath (1987: 162) describes rivalries between language groups at one large community. Memmott and Meltzer (2005: 120) have observed social tensions elsewhere:

It is well recognised in the Australian anthropological literature that the movement of traditionally disparate social groups into geographically bounded missions and reserves under past assimilationist policies has resulted in many contemporary indigenous settlements in which there is an uncohesive and often fractured social field.

The expectation of desert people is that each *walytja* should respectfully mind its own business. Any perceived incursion on the autonomy and privacy of another group is certain to trigger conflict. Where multiple *walytja* reside together, there is always the risk of social tension (Myers, 1986: 111; Memmott & Meltzer, 2003: 112). Martin (1993: 115), for instance, found dispute might be sparked by a *"complaint that someone gave out information or commented on them or their close kin without the right to do so."* He describes a reciprocal *'tit for tat'* pattern of physical retaliation and retribution (Martin, 2011: 144 & 201).

In desert society anger and threats have always been an acceptable means of making feelings known, serving to put everyone on notice that someone feels badly done by and needs to be placated (Myers, 1980: 179). It is not the norm to repress emotions (Myers, 1986: 107). According to Keen (2004: 252) there was also an *"acceptance of violence as a way of expressing feelings."* In traditional society it was a violence restrained by the law, but this is no longer so where there is no law.

Furthermore when conflict occurs now its scale and frequency are on a far greater scale than could ever have been the case in a small-scale nomadic society where groups encountered each other only intermittently. As Memmott and Meltzer (2003: 121) observe:

[C]ustomary social networks are often strong and can provide the fertile soil for the growth of social capital. However, these networks can also be the source of conflict and factionalism.

In traditional society a favoured means of restoring harmony following conflict was physical social separation creating spatial distance between protagonists (Myers, 1980: 165). People would move back to their own country in the hope tensions might fade (Myers, 1980: 165). However, this method of restoring social harmony is not so easily implemented in a large community where people find it difficult to move because of reliance on health, welfare and other community services. Returning to country is not a practical option for people in these circumstances (Merlan, 1998: 110).

Ceremony can play a critical role in reconciling contending parties. The Warlpiri people, for example, use a fire ceremony to restore harmonious relations (Peterson, 1970: 200-215). However, ceremony is not universally practiced everywhere.

A participant in this study (Interview 11) saw a need to develop a repertoire of communication skills so that conflict might be managed verbally rather than physically. A capacity to listen and

respectfully question were seen as pre-conditions for social harmony. Participant 11 stated *“I think that a lot relationship stuff at community level gets blown up out of all proportion and ends up in conflict where it needn't have.”*

Participant 11 also believes a whole-of-community approach is required to address social tensions. Building quality trusting relationships takes time. Initially it may be necessary to work with different groups separately before bringing them together. But according to this participant, it is a mistake to work with only one social group to the exclusion of others. Decisions and actions risk being sabotaged and de-railed by those who feel excluded. Relationships get *“burned”* in the process and it comes back to *“bite”*.

Arguably the social structure and processes of traditional Aboriginal society were not designed to sustain a large permanent population. By social structure and processes I mean the institutionalized and informal relations between different groups of people. *Walytja* are still coming to terms with how to cope with the stresses of living permanently alongside each other. Those in disagreement may encounter each other every day. It is the *‘new demography’* - namely a larger, more sedentary and diverse *walytja* all living in one place that lies at the heart of understanding unresolved contemporary social divisions, and it is these that make broader forms of social capital production problematic for desert people.

Vignette 5.4: Social Divisions

In past work as part of a team undertaking a national evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy (Scougall 2008) a project worker in one community brought home to me the multi-faceted complexities inherent in building broader forms of social capital. The following is an extract from her report:

“The community is very impoverished. Across the surviving three-four generations there is a huge loss of cultural knowledge and identity and a breakdown of traditional social structures. There are generally low to very low levels of literacy and numeracy skills, poor school attendance/completion to year 10, high levels of unemployment that in some families includes up to three generations of no one having a job, poverty, high levels of juvenile crime and incarceration, learned welfare dependency, high levels of drug and alcohol abuse and family violence. There are limited community services and no public transport ... There is intense conflict between families in relation to a land claim. Each of the Aboriginal services tends to be dominated by one family and there is a common perception that whatever family dominates the service will only make decisions that are favourable or advantageous to their own family making access to the service difficult for other families ... At every meeting the issue about the land claim has been raised but we have managed to agree to put it aside and focus on family matters, however we believe that some women will not attend because they want to avoid any situation that may lead to conflict.”

5.10 Relations with Indigenous Institutions

In the 1970's desert people entered a new phase in their relationship with the state following the establishment of Aboriginal community organisations at a local level. The policy shift involved a transfer of former mission and government responsibilities to an emergent indigenous community controlled services sector (Smith, 1989). Indigenous affairs policy rhetoric shifted to being about enabling communities to collectively manage their own affairs and assume responsibility for aspects of their own service provision.

The Australian Government's Aboriginal Associations and Incorporations Act (1979) enabled the incorporation of Aboriginal communities and the establishment of elected governing councils. Incorporation was made a pre-requisite to applying for Aboriginal-specific program funding. Amongst other things, there was now direct access to grants for housing and essential service infrastructure.

The absence of stable remote community governance had been challenging for a state seeking some form of authoritative community leadership with which it might deal. The absence of any unifying structure that bridges different *walytja* together was problematic. Desert people have

no *'tribal chief'* to decide for them nor do they have a stable political structure with the authority to negotiate with the state. The establishment of *'western style'* corporate elected council structure was seen as providing a representative structure through which governments could channel resources. The underlying assumption was some unifying community of interest that could be adequately represented and served by a collective body.

The challenge from the outset was that this model of community governance cuts across the desert ideal of extended family (*walytja*) as the core unit of social organisation. The desert worldview is that one's greatest loyalty should always attach to family (Folds, 2001). The notion that *'community'* could be the core unit of social organisation, to which one's greatest loyalty should attach, was inconsistent with the desert perspective (Folds, 2001). Nevertheless over the past four decades the notion of *'community'* became entrenched as the primary organising principle in Aboriginal affairs policy and funding (Cowlshaw, 1998: 150).

Aboriginal community council structures reflect corporate models and institutional arrangements long entrenched in a mainstream western representative democratic tradition. Myers (1980: 257) observed:

Optimistic government advisers, administrators, and others seem to have expected that a local council of democratically elected representatives would come to express the 'collective will' of the Aboriginal community. Yet the very idea of a permanent corporate community as representing the welfare of its individual members conflicts with the view of Aboriginal control.

A cynical view of the state's model of community-based organisation is that it is actually a new means by which the state might exercise control over Aboriginal people, camouflaged as self-management. Government may decide budgets and the terms and conditions under which funding is provided. Using these indirect mechanisms the state may be able to manage Aboriginal people to a significant extent, while leaving an outward appearance of independence.

Organisations do not always operate as their constitutional framework and funding bodies intend. A participant in this study (Interview 6) noted that the establishment of any organisation does not in itself guarantee it actually functions for the benefit of all. Rather it is always necessary to consider *"whether it's working in a positive constructive or destructive way"*. At a superficial level the establishment of incorporated Aboriginal organisations within remote communities appears to create opportunities to generate bridging social capital by bringing dispirit *walytja* interests together under one *'umbrella'*. However, there are several reasons why this may not be the case in practice.

Firstly, traditional social organisation did not require subordination to a higher level of organisation such as a community council. People in traditional society aspired to autonomy and rejected hierarchic control (Rowse, 1992: 44-58). The frequent assertion that *'nobody boss for me'* captures the prevailing sentiment (Merlan, 1998: 200). According to Myers (1980: 257) traditional society had no need of hierarchic structure: *"Society is not accomplished through an individual's duty to a corporation of which he or she is a part, but by obligations individuals have to each other."* There may, however, be challenges inherent in reaching any wider collective decisions in circumstances where individuals only ever claim to speak for themselves (Mantzariis & Martin, 2000: 39-41).

Secondly, the prevailing social norm for desert people is to privilege *walytja* interests over any wider notion of a communal *'common good'*. Writing in an indigenous Australian context Rowse (1992: 55) observes how relations of patronage are more easily established in a society where the notion of the *'common good'* is absent. In remote communities any suggestion that individuals, family groups and even organisations might serve such an ideal ahead of the interests of one's *'own mob'* struggles for traction. Martin (2011: 204) suggests a *"lack of a notion of the wider common good extending past local group and family boundaries."* Social capital theory posits that communities underpinned by a belief in the *'common good'* are more socially cohesive (Wilson, 2006, 350).

According to Martin (2003: 8), the risk of Aboriginal community organisational resources being appropriated to serve family interests is *"exacerbated and reinforced by particular values and practices which indigenous people bring to bear in their participation in the them."* He stresses the crucial nature of governance arrangements that limit the likelihood of individuals and cliques capturing organisational resources (Martin, 2003: 7). Noel Pearson (2012: 20) too writes of the

risks of *"nepotism and internecine conflict between families desperate to control the public structures of the community."*

Thirdly, the introduced model of community corporate bodies came with a requirement for processes of collective decision-making unfamiliar to desert people (Rowse, 1992: 44-58). European society notions has its own corporatist notions of collective decision-making. The process of electing office bearers, for instance, assumes a form of democratic vote that did not exist in traditional society (Holcombe, 2004: 10). Indeed there are many societies where representative democratic principles are not embedded.

Community members may conceptualise the role of chairperson and councillor in ways that are at odds with mainstream western understandings. In the desert these may not be regarded as leadership positions at all according to Myers (1980: 266).

The authority of a 'boss' does not include the right to create laws that impinge on other people's autonomy, but only to mediate determinations that are already accepted. No direct mechanism exists for objectifying political decisions into guiding principles.

The expectation of remote community residents is that councillors not tell their constituents what to do or restrict them in any way. Far from exercising authority and representing community views, office bearers are obligated to *'hold'* (nurture and protect) them. Tonkinson (1982: 128) observed that councillors *"automatically assume in Aboriginal eyes a responsibility to look after the people."* It is a responsibility desert people may shy away from because it brings incessant demands, impinges on their personal freedom and brings with it an expectation to *'hold'* (look after) too many people. One of the expectations placed on a councillor is that they serve as a buffer between the community on the one hand and *'whitefella business'* on the other (Holcombe, 2004: 10). Councillors can find themselves wedged between state and local expectations, a form of *"acute punishment"* according to Folds (2001: 147).

Whatever status attaches to the role of a councillor, it is sustained only so long as the occupant of the position generously shares organisational resources. They are in the unenviable position of being expected to grant benefits, such as access to corporate vehicles. Failure to do so may result in a loss of influence and support. As Myers (1980: 268) explains:

Councillors face the problem of convincing people to accept decisions, to gain legitimacy for them as public goals. When these are seen as contrary to the desires of individuals or groups, the leader is considered to be no longer looking after them: Hierarchy is exposed as non-nurturant and rejected. (Myers, 1980: 268)

Fourthly, desert people may be resistant to the very self-governing future the state envisages for them. Perhaps as a strategy for retaining agency, desert people tend to separate the realms of whitefella and blackfella decision-making and action. In effect they may rationalise two autonomous and distinctive manifestations of power according to Tonkinson (1982: 127). He found *"The Aborigines jealously guarded their prerogatives of power and control in the camp arena, while largely ignoring much of what happened a few hundred yards away in the mission"* (Tonkinson, 1982: 115). Desert people may have no difficulty with others exercising decision-making control in those areas where they feel responsibility would be an unwanted imposition and in which they have little interest (Tonkinson, 1982: 116).

Any attempt to make whitefella business their business was resisted by the desert people Tonkinson (1982: 128) researched. It is a strategy for preserving group solidarity, enabling blame to be shifted onto the shoulders of non-Aboriginal community employed staff if need be. Elsewhere Martin (1993: 294) found: *"By seeking to place the onus for enforcement onto outsiders, the Councillors were not simply attempting to avoid personal responsibility for their decisions ... but seeking to place the ultimate responsibility for certain classes of actions onto an external agent."*

Folds (2001: 150) describes his personal experience as a non-indigenous employee working with a desert community over an extended period. Residents would try to avoid direct disputation over sensitive issues. Rather than argue directly with each other, their strategy was to refer issues to him in the hope he might take up their concerns and arguments for them. Folds (2001: 149) observes:

A man who monopolises a settlement vehicle for his own walytja may be

called greedy by non-relatives, but direct confrontation with other claimants is rare. Complaints are usually made to the administrator, the 'boss', rather than the perpetrator, who will be exhorted to take the resource away from the man or provide the same for others.

Folds (2001: 149-150) further observed that when financial problems were encountered *"the store boss may be blamed, rather than the individuals who borrowed money for their own families or those who, out of compassion, agreed to the loans"* (Folds, 2001: 149). In the same vein Myers (1980: 265) describes how people could mobilise against an employee, accusing them of being *'too hard'* and *'not helping people'*. The expedient path was to sack *"an adviser whose 'actions' have angered people"* (Myers, 1980: 265; Mahood, 2012). The purpose always is to sustain internal group cohesion (bonding social capital).

On one occasion the women in the community where Folds (2001: 150) worked expected him to make the final decision about who could go on a trip and who would be left behind. The rationale was *"[t]here is no shame ... if the whitefella boss, rather than themselves, is denying a claim"* (Folds, 2001: 150). Folds (2001: 150) came to understand this as a strategy for ensuring any adverse social ramifications for the disappointment fell on the *'outsider'* and not on a fellow member of the *'mob'*. Bonding social capital was thus preserved. Folds (2001: 150) concludes that for desert people *"empowerment lies precisely in their ability to get bosses to make decisions and therefore to be accountable for them"*. Tonkinson (1982: 123) observed a remote community council reluctant to make decisions binding on others where it risked sparking internal social division.

And according to Myers (1986: 271) desert people reason that a *'white boss'* can more easily refuse a request because, unlike themselves, they are not bound up in social networks. He writes: *"Though advisers served at the council' behest and were without authority, council members used them as convenient representatives for an authority that stood outside [their] social world"* (Myers, 1986: 285). He gives the following example:

Occasionally, the wages of a lazy worker have been reduced, but this sanction causes so much anger and dispute that most councillors are seldom willing to use it ... Individual councillors with personal reasons for wanting to remove a worker may simply tell the adviser to do so. (Myers, 1980: 264-265)

In the desert seemingly every collective decision-making process is potentially fraught and divisive. In traditional society there were cultural mechanisms for maintaining bridges between social groups, but as discussed in the previous chapter these can be eroded. What remains is brittle, always threatening to fracture along extended family lines. The consequence may be on-going social tensions, frequent disputation and infighting between dispirit social groups. The introduction of an incorporated community council or other structure by itself does nothing to change any underlying pre-existing fault lines of fragmentation, long running family feuds, and heated disputes over issues such as native title and land affiliation. The demands of trying to institute democratic community structures over the top of such issues may only serve to expose and exacerbate existing strains in already fragile relations.

A participant in this study (Interview 5) described concepts of *'community'* and *'democratic representation'* as reflecting an alien western cultural tradition. *"The ways in which those structures are developed and the ways in which people are perhaps elected to represent their interests don't necessarily align with the cultural authority that influences social organisation in a particular cultural sense."* He argued community tensions are exacerbated where corporate structures overlay Aboriginal ones *"which grapple with notions of cultural authority, which grapple with notions of skin section, which grapple with notions of avoidance relationships at meetings"*.

The gendered nature of relationships in desert society may also pose challenges for western representative democratic process where Aboriginal men and women are expected to sit together as directors and committee members. These may be people constrained by the requirement to observe avoidance relationships. Traditionally men and women played complementary but different decision-making roles rather than all sitting at one table. Governance structures in desert society may be framed without reference to traditional gender considerations.

Finally organisations, including non-indigenous ones, can be short on access to the sometimes specialised knowledge, skills and understandings required to manage a community in a

challenging environment. Effective organisations go hand-in-hand with capacity building. According to Smith (1989: 18) *“If the responsibilities of functioning as a fully ‘socially organised community’ are thrust prematurely on a ‘geographic community’ it is likely that community will not be able to cope with the complex administrative responsibilities involved in managing the structure and services of the town or ‘geographic community.’”*

Smith (1989) was among the first to question the applicability of a ‘community’ policy and service delivery model in Aboriginal Australia on the grounds it implied a self-governing community of residents was a natural, universal and unproblematic norm of social organisation. He argued that use of the term ‘community’ can be a convenient label that papers over social division.

Typically there are now likely to be numerous incorporated Aboriginal service organisations operating at a local level. Examples might include a health service, art centre, community store, pastoral enterprise, housing association, garage and fuel outlet, youth centre, men’s group, and women’s group. In the post-native title era Prescribed Body Corporates have a land use and management decision-making role by virtue of the fact they hold native title on behalf of traditional owners.

Complex service delivery arrangements and multiple agencies may be interpreted as implying a need for better rationalisation and coordination. However Folds (2001: 146) posits that, were some form of coordination ever to be realised, *walytja* would not necessarily welcome it. Centralisation carries with it the risk of actually enabling one social group to have greater control over resources at the expense of another, thereby adding fuel to the fires of community division (Folds, 2001: 158-175). Decentralisation is valued locally precisely because it creates opportunities to spread resources around.

Where corporations are co-opted in the service of narrow sectional interests they become part of extended family ‘territory’, rather than serving the broader polity. They may become sites where old rivalries and suspicions between competing extended family groups are played out, making cooperation between services problematic (Smith, 1989: 20). Memmott and Meltzer (2005: 115-116) diplomatically describe their experience in one remote region:

[W]e suspect the unity necessary for these Aboriginal-controlled networks to operate successfully was still being explored and tested by the Aboriginal leaders within the new socio-spatial structures and social boundaries of post-contact settlements. There is always the possibility of fracturing along family and clan lines.

There are fundamental unresolved tensions between mainstream and desert values. The idea that publicly funded community organisations should serve the ‘common good’ is a fundamental tenet of mainstream society (Tonkinson, 1982: 128). Folds (2001: 169) notes: *“In western society it is illegitimate to seek resources for a particular purpose but use them for another, and it is considered especially outrageous when the official program is aimed at overcoming something as important as inequality in such areas as health, housing and education.”*

By contrast desert people may see little wrong with adapting (or distorting) program objectives determined by the state and re-directing public resources to serve their own purposes (Folds, 2001: 145-149, 169). In the desert objectives are always subject to political process, always in a state of flux, never fixed. The state may hope that all Aboriginal corporations serve the ‘common good’, but paradoxically the production of dense forms of bonding social capital can be the main by-product.

With the benefit of being able to now look back over four decades of operation of the community councils model, community organisations based on western corporate frameworks have not always served desert people well. Reports of division, instability and dysfunctional councils abound (Dillon & Westbury, 2007; Marks, 2008). Mustering sustained community commitment to implement any decision is challenging. There may be recurring governance issues and high turnover of personnel at both a committee and staff level. Few organisations display a strategic orientation. For the most part they struggle to cope in the face of great need and recurring friction.

In summary it cannot be assumed that so called community organisations will serve as representative democratic institutions responsive to the needs of residents. In this respect they may share something in common with the troubled regional governing institutions of

southern Italy described by Putnam (1994: 9). I do not wish to infer a false dichotomy that western societies do not also struggle with tensions between collective interests and individual autonomy.

There is, however, little evidence to suggest the community governance model can be effective or has resonance with desert people, in the absence of embedded norms derived from a representative democratic tradition. There are alternatives, but so far Aboriginal people have had limited opportunities to contribute to the design of structural arrangements that build on their stock of social capital and are capable of delivering stable and effective governance.

Arguable the '*communities incorporated*' era in Aboriginal affairs has failed to build internal relations within Aboriginal communities and not succeeded in building bridges to mainstream society.

New Institutionalism is a field concerned with the dynamics, rules and norms of institutions, how they interact with each other, and their impact on the behaviour and actions of individuals (Uslaner, et al, 1998). '*Old institutionalism*' narrowly focused on the actions of state and the application of various laws and practices on citizenry. By contrast '*new institutionalism*' is about citizens building their own structural arrangements that reflect their own agendas and values. They provide new means of expression of both cultural and political identity.

In rural India the existence of robust village councils was found to be a factor closely associated with achieving a high level of internal community harmony (Krishna, 2002: 125). Where community organisations are weak, Krishna (2002: 82) found villages struggled to convert their stocks of social capital into beneficial outcomes. Krishna (2002: 7) discovered the places that do well are those that have designed new forms of social organization that cut across caste and religious divisions to "*mobilize villagers to act collectively for economic development.*"

Krishna (2002: 169) found that possession of a stock of social capital by itself did not guarantee beneficial outcomes. The social capital must be accompanied by a set of institutions with the capacity to effectively deal with state and other stakeholders (Krishna, 2002: 168). Effective '*middle-level institutions*' have the capacity to rise above purely local interests. Krishna (2002: 170) writes that "*Weaknesses in middle-level institutions produce large gaps in information and access, and these gaps make it difficult for citizens to take full advantage of the opportunities for self-development that are made available by state organizations and market operations.*"

A challenge Krishna (2002: 139) found was that new forms of locally designed social institutions may struggle to achieve legitimacy in the eyes of government policy-makers:

Laws and systems of governance are devised in India (as in other developing countries) by people who live in cities. Systems at the grassroots that do not mesh with structures at the top - and which fit poorly with the image of a 'modernized' state - are likely to be viewed with extreme disfavour by city-based policymakers.

There are parallels with the body of work produced by the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development (Cornell & Kalt, 1988, 1995a & 1995b; Cornell 1993, 2002 & 2003; Begay et al, 1998). The Harvard Project was concerned, not with the production of social capital, but with shaping understandings of what makes for effective forms of indigenous governance. Nevertheless it found the existence of politically robust indigenous organisations an essential pre-requisite to improved wellbeing and economic development. The findings of the Harvard Project have been influential in an Australian context with issues of governance now firmly on the indigenous affairs policy agenda (Yunupingu, 2002), if not always uncritically (Sullivan, 2006).

The Harvard Project fuelled reflection on what kind of innovative institutional arrangements might be able to integrate Aboriginal norms and networks with corporate structural arrangements in Australia. The challenge, as in India and North America, is to evolve new arrangements that Aboriginal people see as legitimate, tailored to the particular social and cultural context of desert communities, and able to respond to collective community concerns by delivering good governance and service delivery outcomes.

Martin (2003: 9-12) advocated the development of "*hybrid*" organisational structures drawing their goals, form, operating principles, and ways of working from both Aboriginal and western values. He understands such structures as a response to the realities of life in an inter-cultural

world, *“important sites around which indigenous people’s values and practices are brought to bear, but where these values and practices are also contested, adapted and transformed.”* Previously Rowse (1992: 35) had also championed the desirability of what he termed *“culturally ambiguous”* institutions.

The hybrid organisations Martin (2003) envisions are not an attempt to re-create the traditional structures of the past, but rather a contemporary response to living in an inter-cultural world. They are possessed of the capacity to both act collectively and engage with the wider world: *“the challenge is to develop distinctively indigenous organisations which nonetheless facilitate effective engagement with the dominant society rather than limiting it”* (Martin, 2003: 11). Engagement, in this context, is understood as a process whereby Aboriginal people are able to make considered and informed choices about when and how they wish to interact with mainstream institutions.

In order to be effective the design of institutional arrangements may need to encompass safeguard mechanisms to protect against concentration of control and ensure accountability to members. Martin (2003: 12) writes:

It is often essential to build in representational mechanisms for encompassing the diversity of groups within the particular indigenous group, community, or region. Providing mechanisms to ensure that formal organisational elements, such as those of the Board, are broadly representative of diverse groupings within the relevant community or constituency can enhance the relevance of indigenous organisations.

Resource agencies, Aboriginal Medical Services and land councils might be seen as some early examples of hybrid organisations. They emerged as prominent regional advocates for Aboriginal people in the 1970s and 1980’s (Toussaint, 1995: 262). These were community driven structures, not government initiated. There have more recent innovative attempts to develop hybrid structures in Aboriginal Australia. They seek to integrate local norms with certain mainstream corporate structural arrangements. Examples might be considered to include the following:

- i. Thamarrurr is a peak regional umbrella organisation operating in the large Wadeye Community in the Northern Territory (Taylor, 2003; Memmott and Meltzer, 2005: 113 & 119). The structure seeks to ensure balanced representation of multiple clan groups;
- ii. The Family Responsibilities Commission operates across several Cape York communities. It has been purposely designed with the intent of re-establishing a form of localised Aboriginal authority operating under a set of guiding social behavioural norms that local people commit to upholding. Go to www.frcq.org.au; and,
- iii. The Myuma Group is a distinctive regional indigenous business structure operating in far western Queensland reporting successful economic development outcomes. Go to: www.nintione.com.au

It seems unlikely that traditional desert society ever envisaged one day needing to work with other people, institutions and societies quite different from their own. Neither could they anticipate this might require they evolve new structures that enable them to relate with mainstream institutions. A participant in this study (Interview 10) urged persistence in developing Aboriginal governance capacity:

With all its flaws the Aboriginal institutional sector ... is absolutely essential. Properly managed, properly understood, these are sites of socio-cultural, socio-economic transformation ... The best Aboriginal organisations are ones which are distinctively Aboriginal - there’s no doubt about that - but which also draw on wider repertoires for their philosophy and operating principles.

Participant 10 saw a role for the state in facilitating the development of capacity within the Aboriginal institutional sector. However, effective Aboriginal organisations should not seek to act as if they were somehow culturally distinct entities. Rather, according to Participant 10, they should aim for strategic engagement with the wider world and their constituents.

5.11 Relations with the Mainstream Society

Once it may have been possible for desert people to thrive in densely bonded isolated groups for much of the time. In a post-contact contemporary world of growing inter-dependence this may no longer be the case. Social groups that got by with minimal connections to the wider world in traditional society might now be disadvantaged by not having them.

Social capital theory understands disadvantage as a consequence of social isolation. It occurs where groups are cut off from the resources and support they require (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992; Cox, 1995, 1997; Cox & Caldwell, 2000; Stewart-Weeks, 2000; Murphy & Thomas, 2000; Huntoon, 2001; White, 2002; Knack, 2002; Lyons, 2000). The production of bridging social capital requires community, business and government input.

A level of external engagement more than ever before, may now be required, indeed unavoidable. The type of social capital necessary to maintain effective, efficient and harmonious social relations can shift over time in response to changed circumstances (Woolcock, 1998: 158). Commenting generally Stewart-Weeks (2000: 283) states: *“The fact is that if you are going to thrive in a complex, adaptive system capable of a high degree of self-transformation, you need to be exceptionally good at forming and sustaining significant relationships of trust and mutual support.”*

The challenge for people in remote communities is that they may be disengaged, both culturally and socially, from participation in the mainstream society and economy (Austin-Broos, 2011: 11). Typically they have few established networks that extend beyond family to distant individuals and institutions with the influence to shape resource allocation decisions (Moran Moran et al, 2009: 36). They may have few connections to business, the not-for-profit sector, philanthropy and the academy. Vertical links to political authority and external institutions such as service providers, officialdom and resource developers may be weak due to factors such as distance, language differences, and the impersonal hierarchic structures that need to be negotiated (Moran et al, 2009: 36). At present outward remote community engagement mainly occurs through a narrow neck of brokering intermediaries. Moran et al (2009: 23) calls them *“trusted outsiders”*, concluding that the *“relationships formed with these people are important bridges that facilitate the functioning of the system.”*

In post-contact desert society there are contemporary issues that can be more easily progressed by *walytja* groups working, with external support. Examples may include alcohol management, environmental health measures, housing allocation, essential services, land care, and native title. A capacity for social trust is required to underpin effective processes of collective decision and action.

Policy advocate Noel Pearson (2007) argues Aboriginal people require the capacity to work from the inside of mainstream institutions, as well as from the outside, in order to build inclusive outward looking communities. Exposure to a plurality of external influences may enable the absorption of new competencies and life principles. Pearson (2013: 22) understands Aboriginal community disadvantage as a consequence of social isolation writing:

By definition, socially disadvantaged people do not have networks of opportunity. While they interact with government service providers, they do not have networks in the private and professional sectors. The networks of opportunity advantaged people use every day, and that they take for granted, are not available to disadvantaged people. They live in a different closed world dominated by government and charitable services. Their access to information about where and how to pursue opportunities, or where a job, training or enterprise may be, is limited.

Austin-Broos (2011: 162) sees strategic engagement as a necessary part of a process of developing new competencies. She argues Aboriginal people do need to engage with the wider world in order to sustain their own value system: *“The defence of cultural difference as it is today requires the tools of citizenship - not least the ability to advocate for oneself in the political arena”* (Austin-Broos (2011: 162). Such tools are not available to people who live in closed communities. Perhaps the issue for desert people is not whether to, but how to build connections with strategically placed people, institutions and sources of resource support in order to enable them to sustain their lifestyle.

Martin (2003: 7) argues effective engagement is essential because some of the practices required for effective action now derive from sources external to Aboriginal society. The capacity he sees as required is a kind of *"cross-cultural education"* that would make it possible for Aboriginal people and organisations to build strategic bridges better connecting them with the broader mainstream society within which they are now located (Martin, 2003: 13).

*It is my view that developing the capacity to strategically engage with the social, cultural, economic and political dimensions of the wider Australian society is of fundamental importance in addressing the severe marginalisation and deprivation of many indigenous groups and communities.
(Martin, 2003: 9).*

Cross-cultural education is not without risk. There is concern incorporation into wider mainstream social networks might dilute cultural values rather than build them. Based on historic experience, the challenge is how to connect with mainstream society without it ultimately being another exploitative and ultimately disempowering experience. Aboriginal people have demonstrated a capacity to be selective in their purpose and strategic about how and when they choose to engage with the wider world (Biddle, 2011: 11).

Fear of enculturation is not just an issue for Aboriginal people. Minorities the world over need to be strategic about when and how they choose to engage cross-culturally, at times choosing to insulate themselves by relying on their stocks of bonding social capital (Galjart, 2002: 51).

There is nothing inherently contradictory about Aboriginal people fully participating in contemporary Australian social, political and economic life while also retaining their sense of localised identity. But taking up these opportunities does require a capacity to place trust in others and *'hard wiring'* oneself into networks that extend beyond ones immediate circle to also encompass non-indigenous people and institutions. A participant in this study (Interview 2) noted the social impact of fly-in-fly-out mining industry employment opportunities on remote community participants: *"People are doing things - people are travelling in and out - some people are going away and working, and then coming back"*. People can be part of the economy without losing their social bonds and cultural identity.

Social trust is an issue that compounds the achievement of broader engagement between Aboriginal people and mainstream society. A participant in this study (Interview 11) stated: *"I definitely think trust is part of the challenge that needs to be overcome."* Aboriginal people have had long exposure to discrimination, deprivation and confrontation with mainstream authority (Finlayson, 1995). It inhibits the formation of wider social networks. Burchill (2004: 6) is conscious of the historical legacy: *"Fear and lack of trust between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people have become embedded over the generations and today whatever faith we as Aboriginal people have in others is fragile and easily disturbed or destroyed."*

A participant in this study (Interview 8) expressed the view there are too many stories of misunderstanding and massacre in circulation to reasonably expect current and future links between remote Aboriginal and mainstream Australia to easily flourish:

What I'm saying is it's to me now totally understandable, although tragic, that Indigenous people - many of them - have lost interest in linking with the state or anyone else because there is no trust. The reason there is no trust is because the history tells them there's no point in trust because your trust will be betrayed ... There are individual exceptions to that and then magic happens, but en masse it doesn't happen.

Social capital theory argues that social trust is necessary to enable people to relate beyond immediate family and friends. However, achieving social trust is not only a matter of disadvantaged people learning to place faith in outsiders (Macionis & Gerber, 2011: 153-154). Empathy, rapport, information and a willingness to cooperate need to be displayed by all parties to the relationship (Macionis & Gerber, 2011: 153-154). The poor cannot build social connections alone. Disadvantaged people cannot dig themselves out by themselves. The difficulty is, as Portes (1998: 9) observes, the better-off may feel little incentive to connect with the poor. Relationships by definition must involve more than one party and require trust and reciprocity from all sides.

Another participant (Interview 10) extrapolated on the reasons why a remote region in which

they had first hand experience appeared to be fairing relatively better than Aboriginal people in other regions. It was posited the main difference was that it had achieved *“strategic engagement with the wider world”*, understood as a process of making considered and informed choices about when and how to interact rather than simply being passive or reactive.

Participant 10 described a region that knew centuries of contact with Macassan fishermen who came each year to harvest the shallow reefs for beech-de-mer (Read, 1995: 272). Thus unlike Aboriginal people in the interior, they were well accustomed to engaging and trading with another culture long before Europeans arrived (McGrath, 1987: 155). As a result they were able to incorporate innovations such as dugout canoes, iron axes, knives, fish hooks, clothing, tobacco and smoking pipes into their customary economy (Keen, 2004: 100). He also noted that this process of intermittent contact with temporary foreign visitors who camped on the beach before sailing home again was very different from the radical change most Aboriginal Australians experienced following the permanent arrival of Europeans in their country (Keen, 2004: 2).

This region continues to demonstrate *“far sighted leadership”* and an ability to confidently engage and negotiate with the wider world at both a local and national level, according to Participant 10. Relationships have been developed with the state, business and industry sectors, not-for-profit organisations, philanthropic bodies and academics. Furthermore the group has displayed resilience and a capacity to re-generate time and again. As Participant 10 understands it, their capacity to project outward strength is based on a foundation of secure land ownership and cultural identity. In other regions internalised authority structures may have collapsed under the weight of colonisation, but not here. Participant 10 commented:

I will say that the thing that marks them out so distinctively in my mind is that they are able to argue both for sovereignty and distinctiveness, and from that base to argue for partnership, for working together as equals with government ... For me that's the core of success, whether its organisations or individuals.

While the region still has a relatively intact internal authority structure in place, it should not necessarily be assumed to prevail. Given the on-going dynamic nature of social change processes, Participant 10 was cautious and tentative about future prospects.

The issue in remote Australia more generally is how to build social capital in the midst of cultural difference and social distrust. It is one part of a broader national challenge of building a multi-cultural society in which social networks encompass diverse people and institutions. According to Hughes and Black (2000: 227) *“trust needs to be built in such a way that people from all cultures and backgrounds feel accepted and included in Australian society.”*

A participant in this study (Interview 11) reflected on the strategic approach required to create two-way connections between remote communities and the broader non-Aboriginal society. They stressed networks are not built on a one-off experience such as cultural displays, art performance and dance: *“We need to be thinking multiple touches and in a structured way from that initial point of contact right through to ‘look, here’s a way in which you can help”*. Enduring connection requires greater continuity and follow-through. There needs to be clear and accessible pathways.

Effective engagement strategy was understood as being about identifying safe ways for the parties to engage with one another. A *“mud map”* offering a structuring of experiences was seen as required to guide people wishing to build enduring trust across cultures.

I think work needs to be done on both sides of the relationship equation in the sense Indigenous people also need some support to feel they can engage with non-indigenous people ... We can perhaps pick champions or find people who have high emotional IQ or who have worked through their baggage to the point where they are willing to share stories or embrace people from other cultures, irrespective of whether they are Indigenous or non-indigenous. So that might be a place to start. I think at the moment it's very hard to find easy way entry points into either community in a sense. Indigenous people are a minority group in a majority culture and tend to connect transactionally with non-indigenous people, by and large. For non-indigenous people it's not a transaction per se. I think it tends to be isolated and driven by media and

broader perceptions and stereotypes because they don't necessarily have a reference point personally ... I think that lack of relationship and that lack of reference points actually is problematic. And there's no easy way to establish that I don't think.

There are major mining, agricultural and infrastructure development initiatives occurring in regional areas that create unprecedented potential for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal interests to work together. However, a participant in this study (Interview 11) with experience in such projects felt that project sponsors generally do not give sufficient attention to building social networks: *"I think... major projects often times don't really think about relationships and I've certainly seen that."* Their experience was that relationship issues have a *"huge impact in terms of the viability and success of the project."* They advocated an approach focussed on building capacity to sustain relationships.

I think that ... investing in relationships is something that is actually a much more sustainable outcome for the community and will have immediate benefits. It might take time to train someone. It might take time for them to get a job. It might take time for them to actually get used to having more than just the dole coming in to their life and it will take time for them to learn how to manage that money. It will take time to build assets and build themselves up and not have family members take the handouts and all the things that go with it. Investing in people's relationships and their capacity to have better relationships is something that has an immediate payoff, an absolute immediate payoff, it's terrifically important.

Better future opportunity for desert people may require that they have connections that extend beyond their immediate circle of family and friends, also encompassing non-indigenous people and institutions. A participant in this study (Interview 8) noted: *"They really are going to need access to the resources of the modern world, and they are not going to get them unless they can find a way into that"*.

Australia's troubled contact history has made the current task of relationship building more challenging than it might otherwise have been. Experiences of discrimination and exploitation have left an indelible mark on the capacity of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to produce social capital, especially together within the same social networks. According to Winter (2000: 46) *"The colonisers fear resistance and anger; the colonised fear domination and destruction of their cultures and ways of life."* Merlan (1998: 30) describes a group she worked with that wished to accentuate separateness by keeping interactions with non-Aboriginal people to a minimum: *"By the time I got to know them, a pattern of life lived largely apart from whites and regular relations of employment had become established"* (Merlan (1998: 27).

The issue now is how to build social trust between desert people and mainstream society. In current circumstances consultations and negotiations over everything tend to be arduous. There are no social processes to facilitate easy dealings between desert people and mainstream institutions. It can take an inordinate amount of time before people put faith in service providers, public officials and resource developers. The colonial experience has not prepared non-Aboriginal or desert people to *'do business'* with each other easily.

5.12 Ideal Communities

Liyan and Wandang had different experiences of colonisation resulting in different impacts on the production of social capital.

In *Liyan's* history there has never been competition for water or other natural resources, with anyone, as there is plenty for everyone. The country is unsuited to any form of grazing so no significant population of outsiders has ever come to stay. No one has ever been shot, experienced family separation of any kind, or been forced off their country. Therefore ritual, ceremony, songs and other cultural knowledge continue to be passed from one generation to the next.

Liyan's population has thought long and hard about how to achieve sound and stable institutional arrangements encompassing all *walytja*. Aboriginal controlled organisations accord with an established set of governance standards. There is a sense of collective ownership over these organisations evident in priorities determined by local people. It is characteristic that corporate

structural design features and operating principles are informed by both *Liyan* and mainstream values and ways of working. There is a capacity to work inwards to enable *walytja* groups to cooperate, facilitated by enduring systems of ancient law and skin group classification that tie people together in loose federation. There are safeguards in place to ensure organisations are broadly representative of all *walytja* and remain accountable to members. Prevailing institutional arrangements at *Liyan* permit competing rights and interests to be reconciled, balanced and bridged.

There are organisational structures that unite different family groups. Local organisations recognise the value of investing in arrangements that foster complementary relationships between each other. All agencies participate in a peak institutional structure that is of their own design and making. Prevailing institutional arrangements at *Liyan* permit competing rights and interests to be reconciled, balanced and bridged. There are negotiated protocols in place that provide a framework for managing and mediating disputes. There are community conversations that enable various groups to collectively define for themselves what are acceptable norms of contemporary behaviour and how they want to govern themselves. Community governance is a still evolving notion at *Liyan* as people continue to explore what makes for an effective structure in this particular cultural setting.

Liyan promotes activities, such as music, that allow people with different interests, cultures and aspirations to come together to resolve their differences in a safe environment that builds on commonalities. There are also independent dispute mediation processes in place just in case.

In general the process of engagement with western society has been gentler, more gradual and controlled than has occurred elsewhere. *Liyan* people have a capacity to work outwards that they understand as a modern extension of the ancient *wunan* trading relations they have always enjoyed with others from far away. Visitors to *Liyan* country are frequently coming for commercial, public and recreational purposes, but there is never any misunderstanding about their status. It is *Liyan* people that decide who comes and what happens on *Liyan* country. They have negotiated economic development projects involving external business partners that create local education, training, and job opportunities.

The *Wandang* experience of colonisation I have constructed is in sharp contrast to that of *Liyan*. The arrival of white men and their grazing herds in *Wandang* country meant people endured decades of war, disease, unpaid labour, removal from ancestral country and institutionalisation in one form or another. The cumulative impact of state and mission intrusion was to erode connections to ancestral country, inter-generational bonds, cultural practice and trading, and other relations with neighbouring groups. Only *Walytja* bonds survived.

No one visits country anymore. The few surviving old people often say they would like to, but there are no reliable vehicles and no money for fuel. They feel they cannot fulfil their responsibilities as custodians of their country.

At *Wandang* there are no organisational structures or enduring mechanisms capable of producing a social order or of taking any form of collective action. There is no shared community position on any issue. Not the state, not the region, not any community organisation, nor any family group or individual is seen as ever being able to legitimately exercise authority. This is a social milieu where the mere semblance of unity, however temporary, counts as accomplishment. Community life is chaotic.

The many so-called community organisations at *Wandang* are actually sites where rivalries and suspicions between different extended family groups are played out. Whole organisations may exclusively serve an extended family agenda. They defend their own to the exclusion of others. Far from bridging various extended interests together, their main by-product is ever more dense bonding as groups compete for 'territory'. Power and control concentrated to the exclusion of other social groups. It is the norm for organisations to work in ways that exclude certain *walytja* in order to co-opt communal resources to serve narrow sectional interests. Organisations employ processes informed only by their own values and ways of working. They do not engage in-depth with any mainstream institution.

There is a Aboriginal Community Council meant to represent the interests of all, but it is totally reliant on state resources, utilises a western corporate structure, and is constrained by terms and conditions of government funding that limit the scope for any independent decision and action. The inclination is always to revert to, and only place enduring trust in relations.

Organisations defend their own to the exclusion of others. *Walytja* need to reconcile with each other before they can live together harmoniously. There has never been a structured community conversation that would enable various *walytja* to collectively define how they want to govern themselves.

At *Wandang* there is an enduring caution about engaging with the coloniser. Isolation equals security in *Wandang* minds. The state is the sole point of contact with the outside world and the only source of resources flowing into the community. Engagement with non-indigenous people and society is purely transactional and only occurs through the narrow prism of visiting state officials. There are no enduring relationships with the wider world. Government provides all of the financial resources and the terms and conditions under which they are provided to both individuals and corporations. The relationship is one-sided. *Wandang* knows only an interventionist state. Mainstream not-for-profit organisations and the business sector have no presence here.

There are no enduring effective mechanisms for achieving cooperation and coordination at a community level. The community is a fluid and complex maze of overlapping, diverse and competing land, language and political interests:

- i. There are numerous *walytja* with long running rivalries;
- ii. There are tensions between the rights and interests of traditional owners and other residents;
- iii. There are custodians with native title rights and interests, as well as residents living here without the approval of traditional owners and with no claims to country;
- iv. There are numerous corporate bodies including the community council, a store enterprise, an arts centre, and a women's group that have been '*captured*' by different family interests.;
- v. There are senior elders who hold no formal position of authority in any organisational structure;
- vi. There is no supreme overarching source of authority to arbitrate disputes;
- vii. There are '*spokesmen*' who, because of their western education and English language skills, act as cultural brokers with visiting officials but do not speak for the whole community and are not recognised internally as leaders.

5.13 Conclusion

McCoy (2004: 24) aptly describes social processes in remote Australia as being simultaneously *“wounded and resilient”*. Social networks may be operating under pressure, but they do operate nevertheless.

Colonisation impacted on the production of social capital on two levels. Firstly, within desert society, connections were severed by the sudden and widespread loss of life along the frontier and then subsequently by the mission dormitory system. It damaged the capacity of desert people to produce social capital through traditional means. Secondly opportunities to build relationships between desert people and colonising European society were damaged by zealous policing, the cruelty of some pastoralists and a state that has too often caused harm regardless of intent. Building networks across the space that separates desert people and the broader non-Aboriginal society is rendered a more tentative process as a result.

There is a tendency to think of colonisation as necessarily only a malevolent force. However, social impacts and influences can rarely be described as entirely adverse or beneficial. In his thesis Palmer (1999: 22) provides *“an alternative reading to those who insist that power is only ever exercised by the colonisers who force indigenes to take on alien cultural forms and social practices.”* He rejects accounts that imply Aboriginal people have only been *“ensnared by colonial power”*, noting their remarkable capacity to *“modify and transform”* their society in the face of it (Palmer, 1999: 20).

In traditional society people used natural resources to build and reinforce social ties. For example the excess proceeds of the hunt were redistributed through social networks, building social capital in the process. The grateful recipients would reciprocate in kind next time they enjoyed hunting success. This avenue of social capital production is diminished to the extent people no longer live in a subsistence economy. The social structures and norms productive of social capital in traditional society are weaker in the changed circumstances of post-contact society. A participant in this study (Interview 8) commented:

There is fairly good evidence now that indigenous social forms have been deliberately destroyed over the last century, deliberately by removing the children ... and turning them into good Christians and breaking down the internal law; ‘Your law doesn’t count anymore.’ What that meant was that the authority of the Elders didn’t count anymore.

However, I will argue that more contemporary factors of social capital production have emerged to take their place, as discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 6: SOCIAL CAPITAL AND SOCIAL CHANGE

6.1 Overview

The activities that generate social capital may have ancient roots, as outlined in the previous chapter, but not everything finds its precedent in custom and tradition. This chapter explores ways in which contemporary factors can give rise to new and innovative ways to build social ties.

Desert people demonstrate a remarkable capacity for adaptive response to changes in their social environment (Keen, 2004: 2). They have had decades of exposure to western values and material culture and not surprisingly it has left a mark on their social relations. Austin-Broos (2011: 11) notes: *“Aboriginal people have taken on new capabilities as they have lost old ones - in language, technology, practical knowledge, ritual, and ways of organising social, political and economic life.”*

In the rush to identify points of cultural difference between Aboriginal and mainstream society, it is possible to lose sight of the fact that not every aspect of social capital formation in remote Australia would be entirely unfamiliar to Putnam (1993 & 1994). Desert people do socialise through sporting teams, youth activities, art groups, mother and baby groups, at school, at church and at work. They may also befriend neighbours over the back fence. Failing to recognise these everyday universal social processes risks overstating the significance of cultural difference. Social networks may simply be a consequence of shared interests and people liking each other.

It would also be mistaken to assume that all external cultural influences are necessarily destructive of social capital. Vitebsky (1995: 184) argues in an African context that the intersection of different societies can actually enable the persistence of certain social practices. People may begin to produce social capital in unexpected ways that lend support to the reassertion of their own cultural values. In a remote Aboriginal Australian context Christie and Greatorex (2004: 38) suggest the intersection of cultures has *“sometimes been strengthened and sometimes weakened by post contact social development.”* Folds (2001: 123) also argues the incorporation of western cultural artefacts enables certain traditional values and practices to persist. Myers (1980: 262) too observed:

To some extent, settlement conditions have allowed people to elaborate the ties of relatedness that are valued in and of themselves. There has been an increase in social production.

Contemporary desert people can be understood as inhabiting an inter-cultural space in which their social networks and norms are shaped by an ancient past as well as more recent social influences and practices (Merlan, 1998: vii & 145). Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people have both common and separate pasts. A purely Aboriginal social field is no longer so in a *“socially and spatially interconnected world”*, according to Merlan (1998: 145-146). People might be traditional owners, but they might also have lived in the city and travelled overseas (Merlan, 1998: 106). A participant in this research (Interview 10) stated:

There is no feature of contemporary Aboriginal society that has not been impacted by and which does not draw in some way from the wider society ... Even in the remotest of places, people are drawing on repertoires of ideas whose origins in part lie in the broader society, and their subsistence is typically resourced through a welfare economy or an art economy etc.

For millennia desert society may have been able to function as a sustainable low impact customary economy with little need for external resources from any source, but in the inter-cultural world they now inhabit this may no longer be possible or desirable. Participant 2 was conscious of the space Aboriginal people now inhabit:

The more you get educated, the more you watch TV, the more other cultures influence the culture that was, the more life changes and the more people see opportunities and choices. Getting educated is a good example of how you have much more choices in life about your confidence and ability to do something. If your culture was quarantined and harmoniously evolving and doing its own thing, well that's good, but its impossible to do that now

because you've got these other cultures. You've got American hip-hop culture coming through the TV screen every day and on radio. You've got AFL. The real need is to be literate in western education, to be able to read and write and to do your banking, manage your money, to be financially literate. So it's impossible. The world changes.

Arguably *'traditionalist'* academic constructions of a largely autonomous desert society fail to reflect a more complex social reality of contemporary Aboriginal habitus within which everyday peoples lives intersect with aspects of mainstream society in many ways (McGrath, 1995: 366; Merlan, 1998: 4, 29 & 150). The issue is about trying to understand the Aboriginal world as it currently is, rather than always seeking to interpret it through a cultural lens of tradition (Merlan (1998: 237). A participant in this study (Interview 10) observed that social processes in remote communities are complex and *"can't be understood simply as either classical things or as the results of colonisation."* The story of social capital in the Australian desert is one of both cultural continuity and change (Merlan, 1998: 148).

The life purpose of desert people continues to revolve around extending their relatedness, with people using whatever means come to hand, including those borrowed, fashioned and adapted from western culture. Desert people are adept at converting just about anything into social capital. In post-contact society desert people still seek to maximise the social use of technologies. Furthermore it is a process that now occurs within a context where there is access to items of non-Aboriginal origin. In remote communities all manner of things are now reforged to better serve local social imperatives. Irrespective of intended purpose, the utility of goods and services for desert people lies in attracting, building, reinforcing and sustaining social relationships.

In this chapter I will argue that the cash economy, various forms of western technology, and art practice have all been pressed into the service of reinforcing and extending remote social capital. Exposure to *'the other'* has created opportunities to generate the resource in new and unexpected ways. No longer do remote communities produce forms of social capital that might be described as entirely culturally distinct.

When Emirbayer and Williams (2005) applied Bourdieu's theoretical insights in a homeless shelter they conceptualised the residents as having learnt to cultivate two separate social fields, one *"client-sanctioned"* and the other *"staff-sanctioned"*. Residents saw both as legitimate and beneficial. In a similar manner I argue that desert people now have the prospect of simultaneously cultivating social capital from dual *'blackfella'* and *'whitefella'* sources.

6.2 New Social Norms

6.2.1 Overview

In remote communities life purpose continues to revolve around extending one's relatedness, with people using whatever means come to hand, including those borrowed and fashioned from western culture. Some of the factors that generate social capital have ancient roots, as discussed in the previous chapter. However, it is also important to recognise the influence of more contemporary factors. New activities have been culturally incorporated enabling desert people to produce their distinctive form of social capital in new ways.

In this section I identify social processes of desert society that are producing social capital anew. People continue to find innovative ways to build social ties. Prominent generators of social capital in post-contact society include the pooling of cash, art practice and sports participation. Less obvious is how the trauma of funerals and the harsh experience of imprisonment might also be turned into social capital. I argue, nevertheless, desert people have culturally appropriated all of these factors to serve their own ends.

6.2.2 From Subsistence to Cash Economy

Residents in remote communities are adept at converting money (financial capital) into social capital, *'investing'* it in their social networks (Martin, 1995: 82). Folds (2001: 74) notes how desert people use any surplus *"to reinforce relatedness with walytja, rather than to improve living standards, and any mainstream ideal of increasing material prosperity is undermined in favour of their own imperative to create social capital."*

Traditional Aboriginal society had no financial currency and even when desert people worked in the pastoral economy they were paid mostly in-kind (McGrath, 1987: 138-139). The absence of wages impacted on social mobility and therefore the nature of their networks, for they had no buying power to expend in town (McGrath, 1987: 104). The effect was socially isolating, for a time shielding desert people from the capitalist economy (McGrath; 1987: 144).

Europeans introduced cash to desert people (eventually), but it was desert people who subverted its original purpose to serve their own ends (Folds, 2001: 32). In mainstream society money is used as an efficient medium of impersonal exchange. By contrast desert society values cash because they use it to reinforce personal bonds of social relatedness. Trigger (1988, 528) describes how cash is treated as a pooled resource within an extended family group, not as an asset accrued by any individual:

The fact that a wide range of relatives have typically (and successfully) made demands on individuals' personal incomes indicates that it would not normally be individuals who usually maintain significant cash surpluses; similarly, when amounts were invested in large material items (e.g. motor vehicles), it would commonly be at least several individuals who would benefit from the vehicle, and indeed often claim collective ownership of it.

The use of cash for gambling is a principal activity in some remote communities (Martin, 1995: 130). Big card games can run continuously for days and nights. It is a group activity enjoyed for its sheer sociability as much as the prospect of winning. Additionally hosting a gambling school in one's home is a way of building considerable kudos, strengthening social networks (Martin, 1995: 140).

Gambling is a primary mechanism for circulating and re-distributing cash (McGrath, 1987: 170). The eventual winner may amass enough to enable a substantial capital purchase that would otherwise be unattainable. Folds (2001: 76) explains how gambling enables desert people to pursue their own imperatives:

It operates as a legitimate means of accumulating enough cash to buy larger items, such as vehicles, in a society where saving is precluded by economic obligations to relatives. A win allows a major purchase, a loss reinforces access to the money or goods of other relatives, with neither outcome creating despair in the gambler.

Losers are seldom resentful of winners, for extended family and friends fully expect to share in the bounty in any case. Winnings could fund attendance at a cultural event or the bulk purchase of alcohol. Either way there are opportunities for the big spender to generate prestige by sharing and for family and friends to find out just how much they are valued. Folds (2001: 75) explains the cultural logic of sharing one's winnings: *"Satisfying kin brings immense joy, while selfishly spending money on yourself, or hoarding it, produces bitter conflict"*.

Past reliance of desert people on the gifts of nature, missionaries, feeding stations and pastoral bosses have now all given way to a dependence on Centrelink payments. The Commonwealth began to extend social security income support into the remotest parts of the continent in the 1960's, advancing by increments. Unemployment and some other benefits were not paid until the 1970's. It was the first experience most desert people ever had of the cash economy. They never experienced a nexus between labour and payment.

It may also be posited that Aboriginal people saw few of the benefits of a cash economy. Initially the system was open to abuse because it allowed payments to be directed through intermediaries. Unscrupulous people relieved a vulnerable population of their entitlements according to Berndt and Berndt (1969: 11):

Our guess would be that at least 50%, and perhaps more, of Social Service moneys is going directly into the pockets of Europeans, and the residue which does find its way to the legitimate Aboriginal recipient is again liable to at least partial misappropriation.

Income support in the form of social security entitlements has been a feature of remote economic life for several decades. Most adults receive benefits of one kind or another; Aged Pension, New Start Allowance, Single Parent Pension, Disability Support Pension and Family Tax Payments. Access to individual social security entitlements had unintended consequences for desert people. It contributed to a fundamental shift in gender relations, enabling women to achieve greater *'free agent'* social status (Martin, 1995: 75). The receipt of individual payments meant women were no longer tied to the productive capacity of men, as was the case in traditional hunter-gatherer society (McCoy, 2004: 139). Tonkinson and Howard (1990: 137-138) found young women saw benefit in their financial independence: *"When asked about their girriji (single unattached) status, most of the unmarried mothers say that they do not need husbands; they can look after themselves, they have plenty of relatives and friends, and if they want meat they can buy it in the store."*

A core theme in the policy advocacy of Noel Pearson (2003) is the adverse impact of *'passive welfare'* on personal motivation and responsibility, especially the incentive to work. Many desert people now have a life long history of welfare dependence. In one regional rural community (not remote) Daly and Smith (2003: 1) found *"every indication that the transmission of reliance on welfare and high levels of unemployment are inter-generational, placing some Indigenous children at risk of future economic marginalisation and poverty."* Merlan (1998: 30) worked with one group whose primary focus appeared to be alcohol: *"Pension day was always followed by several days of heavy drinking, sometimes fighting, then the thinner times until the next pension."*

From a western cultural perspective it is difficult to think of prolonged welfare dependence as anything other than damaging to the human spirit. However, the receipt of welfare payments is not necessarily disempowering. It may enable more time to be spent with family and friends than a commitment of full time work simply would ever allow. Folds (2001: 41-43) would question any portrayal of desert people as *'passive'*. All around he describes an intense sociality, a term which describes the tendency to associate with others in groups, that enables cultural values and responsibilities to be shared and upheld and social networks to be reinforced and strengthened.

6.2.3 From Country to Canvas

Fundamentally desert art is a form of spiritual religious communication between land and the people who belong to it, according to Watson (2003: 24).

Art practice in remote communities is thus more than a means of surface decoration or commercial activity. It presents opportunities to make a statement about relationships to country by depicting the images and symbols associated with it. Paintings often portray people's ceremonies and song cycles associated with dreaming tracks (Watson, 2003: 13-14). Art practice enables people to re-experience their country *"both perceptually and psychologically"*, according to Watson (2003: 15). In the process the artist also asserts their continuing customary rights and interests. Art has therefore come to play a central role in transmitting desert culture.

The networks built around art practice are a means of generating social capital. It is often practiced together in a process of meaningful group interaction, as Watson (2003: 17) vividly describes:

I went out with a group of senior women to a nearby site to record the story of the paintings. We travelled in the back of a truck through the beautiful desert landscape. All of a sudden, the women began to sing verses of a song cycle for the country they were passing through. These song cycles recount the deeds of Ancestral beings. The women continued to sing for some time until we reached the site, began unloading the truck and proceeded with the practicalities of the recording. I will never forget this experience ... For them, travelling through the land was far richer than the process of travel I experienced as a European. It was to travel through 'country' in the steps of the Ancestral women, not only tracing their steps along the earth, but singing

the songs celebrating the actions these women carried out alongside their route. How different the reality of the custodians of the paintings from the hygenicised, predominantly visual gallery environment in which I was used to operating.

Seen through the lens of social capital theory art practice can be understood as an elaborate process of transmuting capitals (Bourdieu, 1986). Cultural capital (i.e. spiritual knowledge and understandings of country) is made over into a physical artefact, then transformed yet again into financial capital in the form of cash, before finally being converted to social capital when, they all celebrate and reinforce their social bonds by sharing the proceeds. A successful artist with a lucrative sale has ample opportunity to strengthen and extend their social networks, as money is re-distributed amongst one's 'mob' in accordance with group norms of reciprocity.

The artist and their extended family are all acutely aware that while art serves religious purposes, it also provides economic and social benefits, hence its popularity (Folds, 2001: 161).

6.2.4 From Marngrook to Football

Putnum (2000: 411) was conscious of the social capital building potential of sports participation, a theme subsequently explored by Nicholson and Hoye (2008). Aboriginal people may have been ahead of this insight by thousands of years, for there is evidence they played numerous team sports. An example is Marngrook, from the *Gunditjmara* language in Victoria. Marngrook is a collective term that encompasses several traditional sports played by teams of up to fifty players according to Smyth (1878).

Introduced team sports, such as football and basketball, are now important means of generating social capital in post-contact remote Aboriginal communities. They are valued features of contemporary life (Folds, 2001: 50). Desert people voluntarily spend many hours organising carnivals and events involving multiple communities. The logistics required to get hundreds of people across great distances as depicted in the Walpiri film 'Australian Rules' (Bailey, 2003). An aptitude for management is demonstrated that may not always be so evident in other domains that foster less interest.

A reason for the popularity of sport in remote communities is that, like drinking and gambling circles, it offers the prospect of intense social interaction in a milieu where there are few recreational outlets. Right across the desert it provides a meaningful source of common connection for participants and spectators, irrespective of age and gender. McCoy (2004: 177) observes that women enjoy watching, as well as *"the company of other women and walyta that accompanies sporting carnivals."*

Football has a special attraction according to McCoy (2004: 177) who argues it *"can be seen to celebrate and promote important meanings for many Aboriginal men, their families and communities."* He likens football to a contemporary expression of holding (2004: 171) because like *kanyirrinpa* it involves mentoring and coaching relationships and gives expression to notions of masculinity that for previous generations might have found expression in the hunt or the saddle.

The older men accompany, guide and watch over those who are younger ... Both football and the Law are highly valued expressions of male sociality. (McCoy, 2004: 173-174).

A parallel might be drawn with the social networks that opened to Aboriginal members of tent boxing troupes, as described by Broome (1995: 176-178). He lays emphasis on the critical relationship they forged with the 'boss' trainer-manager who fulfilled multiple roles, including authority figure and emotional support anchor.

A challenge for desert people is maintaining culturally based respectful skin group relational protocols on the field during a hard physical game. They choose to manage this aspect by suspending cultural obligations on the sports field. The strategy is to recognise sport as an introduced *gudia* (non-Aboriginal) activity outside the sphere of *Tjukurrpa*. The construction of 'whitefella' and 'blackfella' domains is deliberate, effectively enabling cultural protocols to be temporarily suspended out on the field. McCoy (2004: 186) writes:

They have carefully demarcated football imperatives from their cultural obligations. They leave their cultural obligations at the boundary of the oval.

Long distance travel to sporting events creates many hours of opportunity to bond with teammates. However, sometimes it may impinge on family relationships in the home community, especially where it takes men away for extended periods to carnivals and the distractions of elsewhere delay their return (McCoy, 2004: 192). The traditional phenomenon of the transient young male continues in contemporary society in new form. It is the norm for the male population to *'float'*, constantly travelling between different towns, communities, households and camps (Folds, 2001: 52).

It cannot be assumed sports participation is necessarily productive of bridging social capital. While it may well build bonds between teammates in solidarity, it can also result in fights and arguments between opposing players from different communities, perhaps spilling over to encompass *'spectators'*. McCoy (2004: 188) reflects *"football brought men together with the advantages of male company and recreation, but it could also create divisions between the people of the different communities of the region"*. Bonds may be forged, but at the expense of bridges. Sport can be a valued means of producing social capital, but it can also be a catalyst for opening up social divisions.

6.2.5 From Cattle Spearing to the Big House

Desert people have had decades of interaction with the police and prison system from the time cattle and sheep were first speared. A term of imprisonment has become normalised. In the community where he worked McCoy (2004: 195) could find *"few older men who have not spent some time in prison or in the police lock-ups"*. Yet even within the confines of jail, the colloquial *'big house'*, an innovative people still find ways to use and extend their social networks.

Desert people have high levels of contact with the justice system, including incarceration, often commencing from an early age (Dodson, 1991; Cunneen & McDonald, 1997). Most offences are alcohol related. Break-ins to community staff homes and the community store are commonplace, sometimes due to boredom and sometimes committed by hungry people simply looking for food. Theft of a vehicle and the subsequent excitement of a bonding *'joy ride'* are popular youth diversions.

The isolating experience of jail is undoubtedly destructive of social capital because inmates are cut off from their people and place. The time spent is, for the most part, an emotionally and psychologically damaging experience. McCoy (2004: 214) writes: *"the distress that prison can cause, to men and families, further marginalises men as it reinforces their alienation from their communities, wives and their children."*

There are certain times when incarcerated Aboriginal people are particularly vulnerable and at risk of self-harm, such as when they are unable to fulfil their social obligations to *walytja*, especially funeral attendance. McCoy states (2004: 211): *"When a prisoner is not able to express his relationship and sorrow to the family of the deceased he can seek other, more risky ways, to publicly demonstrate the depth and significance of his feelings."* In a society where social relatedness is highly valued, indeed where it provides the essence of a happy and purposeful life, it is no surprise people are at greatest risk when they feel most alone (McCoy, 2004: 247).

Austin-Broos (2011: 167-168) provides some sense of the cultural loss experienced by one young man she met in prison.

His family has suffered many tragedies, including the premature death of his father and four of his brothers. While his father died of a diabetes-related heart attack, all these brothers died of alcohol-related causes. There were many more such deaths among his brothers who were the sons of his father's brothers. Some of these deaths have been very traumatic.

Yet even a term of imprisonment is not wholly associated with negative social consequences (McCoy, 2004: 204). The justice system sometimes succeeds in locating prisoners in more positive networks necessary to sustain them within family and other relationships following their release (McCoy, 2004: 203 & 208). *"Prison can be a place of nurturance, where men can make new friends, extend their family network, learn new skills and can have a break away from pressures and conflicts within relationships and communities,"* according to McCoy (2004: 216-217).

Certain aspects of Aboriginal male sociability may be replicated within the prison system, albeit in distorted form. *"Prison can provide a 'space' where desert men experience some of the holding*

qualities that are important for them" says McCoy (2004: 216-217). Younger men may experience the protection, security and counsel of older men within the system. Such supportive relationships are most often forged with other prisoners, but can also extend to jail staff. According to McCoy (2004: 167 & 204) *"While prisoners will distinguish the officers they prefer over others, prison officers are generally considered to be looking after and caring for them."* A view is that some inmates might now be dead if it weren't for prison where they receive daily nutrition and get a break from grog (Austin-Broos, 2011: 3-4).

Males may use a term of imprisonment to construct their notion of masculine identity, drawing on it to gain the respect of others (McCoy, 2004: 203). However, this does not mean the bonding is necessarily an entirely positive experience. Martin (1995: 257) found: *"The wild rides and occasional accidents, the consequent court-cases and even confinement for some in State institutions served only to reinforce their prestige and generate emulation by more and more ... youths and even comparatively young children."*

My point is this: *'holding'*, irrespective of the circumstances in which it occurs, is a resilient value for desert people. Even recreated within the jail system it is still capable of generating social bonds that help inmates survive the experience in one way or another.

6.2.6 From Birth to Death

Death and funerals (*'sorry business'*) have always presented opportunities for *waltyja* to come together to restate their ties with one another. In contemporary society funerals have greater significance in the production of social capital than ever before.

In remote society the social practice is that death be accompanied by expressions of relatedness, both to the deceased and the living (Trigger, 1989: 530; Glaskin et al, 2009). Communal wailing signifies connection. Amidst death people demonstrate their social bonds through *"a vast outpouring of grief shared with other relatives"* (Folds, 2001: 135). Cultural practices, such as self-inflicted injury, symbolise the emotional pain and loss felt (Glaskin, et al 2009). The norm is that bereft relatives beat their heads and upper back with green branches or cut their bodies with sharp stones until they bleed. Out of respect the deceased person's name is not used for a considerable time and the places they inhabited are vacated and *'smoked'* prior to re-occupation.

The social norm is to demonstrate generosity of spirit and compassion at a time of loss. Not to attend, not to express sympathy, not to give food or money, are all behaviours that risk being seen as a devaluing of relationship (Martin, 1993: 150). The cultural expectation is that one should make strenuous efforts to attend the funeral of a relative. Folds (2001: 150) recounts that *"a man may ask for the loan of an institutional vehicle to attend 'sorry business' for a distant relative, if only to demonstrate there really was no way to get there, thereby avoiding the accusation that he did not care for the deceased."*

In contemporary society there are more funerals to attend than in traditional society. One reason for greater prominence is that in an era of modern communications people are quickly informed about the death of those within their social network, even those far away. Access to planes and vehicles makes it easier to get to funerals than was the case in traditional society. More people are able to travel greater distances making the events larger and more important to social capital formation than could have been the case in traditional society.

The other reason for the high incidence of funerals is that Aboriginal people are prone to experience an underweight birth, malnutrition, a life of ill health, followed by a pre-mature death (SCRGSP 2014). Average life expectancy is around 50 years. About two-thirds of all deaths still occur before the age of 65 years and fully one third of the population die before they reach 45 years. The main causes of death are *'lifestyle diseases'* - circulatory system, respiratory system and cancer - related to smoking, substance abuse, poor diet and poor environmental health.

'Sorry business' is seemingly never ending in the desert (Folds, 2001: 23). Brian McCoy (2004: 4), a former Catholic priest, ethnographer and health researcher, estimates he attended about one hundred funerals between 1992-2001. Many involved the death of young people and an unusually high number were due to violence, a factor not ordinarily prominent in Australian mortality statistics. There is also the recurring trauma of road accidents, often alcohol related. McCoy (2004: 87) estimates that fully twenty five percent of all deaths he was personally aware of over that period were motor vehicle related. Even more distressing are the recurring

spates of youth suicide. Only two decades ago they were an entirely unknown phenomenon in this society. Now they are symptomatic of the growing issues of social and emotional wellbeing (McCoy, 2004: 88).

A participant in this research (Interview 2) commented:

If that social fabric becomes broken and torn, then you start to get individuals in the family starting to lose their own identity and sense of purpose and place in life as to why they are existing on Earth or in this country ... That sense of identity is a strength that prevents a lot of things and one of the key crises in the country is youth suicide and a lot of that is around the strength of the individual. Creating self harm and killing themselves is based around a loss of identity in a lot of cases.

Desert communities are seemingly locked in eternal anguish. But even in the saddest moments there is sociability and solidarity. A close bond may have been broken, but new localised social capital is being produced anew in the same instant. Death involves loss of relationship, but paradoxically the gathering also provides opportunities to re-affirm connections. Somehow desert people cope by re-expressing and reinforcing their bonds with each other. That is my sense.

Vignette 6.1: Competing Belief Systems

I well remember my first funeral attendance in the Central Kimberley in the early 1980's. It was that of a senior man conducted out in the bush, laid to rest on his country. The congregation was large and mainly black, but presided over by a 'fire and brimstone' white preacher mainly intent on promising the sinners and unbelievers present a space in burning hell without redemption.

The awkward tensions that can exist between belief systems - Tjukurrpa, mainstream denominations and fundamentalist - were, at least for me, palpably close on that particularly hot day.

6.3 New Material Culture

6.3.1 Overview

In nomadic society material possessions were an encumbrance because everything had to be carried on foot. There was constant movement.

To the extent there is any material accumulation in the desert, it is driven by cultural values that have little in common with European notions of overcoming disadvantage. Desert people quickly consume any surplus by dispersing it through *walytja* networks (Folds (2001: 75). Folds (2011: 79) observed it is considered deeply shameful behaviour amongst desert people *"to prioritise the material over relationships"*. According to Dockery (2010: 10) Aboriginal people may place *"a low emphasis on individual ownership of possessions relative to obligations and contributions to the other members of the family and community."*

The expectation is that anyone in possession or control of goods maximise social use. The utility of vehicles, televisions, air conditioners, refrigerators, stereo systems and DVD's is measured by the extent to which they can reinforce and extend social bonds with family and friends. In the hands of desert people material possessions serve primarily social purposes quite unimagined by their makers. Desert people are constantly adopting and adapting western technology where they see its potential to contribute to their sociability. Folds (2011: 79) found *"the possibilities of material improvement are constantly overridden by social considerations of walytja."*

While desert people build social capital by sharing possessions, equally jealousy and arguments over them can damage bonds. Martin (1995: 148) observed:

Any perceived imbalances in transactions or attempts by others at personal accumulation or display were taken as threats to their own or their kindred's relative status and autonomy. Open and often bitter conflict frequently erupted between groups ... over access to and control of resources such as houses, vehicles, and boats.

A culturally distinctive way to manage such disputes is to destroy the object people are fighting over (Folds, 2011: 107). People reason that breaking a stereo is certain to stop any argument over who can use it. Social harmony is restored.

The social capital literature tends to draw attention to the socially isolating tendencies of technology (Pruijt, 2002; Sullivan et al, 2002; Wellman et al, 2001). Yet the lesson from the Australian desert may well be that no technology is wholly corrosive or constructive of social capital. It always carries both socially productive opportunity and threat.

6.3.2 From Foot to Vehicle

Traditional society, in the absence of any means of rapid transport and communication, was socially constrained by distance. There were no vehicles or aeroplanes. As a consequence regular close contact occurred mainly within ones own group and with neighbouring groups.

In contrast a participant in this study (Interview 4) commented on how technology had increased mobility, observing that *"now people are everywhere"*. This wider zone of social interaction is made possible entirely by enhanced communications. In an age of modern transport it is now possible for desert people separated by hundreds of kilometres to speak and come together more easily and to sustain their social networks further afield than ever before (Myers 1980: 268).

Sharing the use of a vehicle has become a highly significant means of generating social capital amongst desert people, at least for those who control access to them (Biddle, 2011: 24). Folds (2011: 32) writes that in effect desert people have *'colonised cars'* for their own purposes. What these purposes might be is highly variable. Modern transport makes possible large ceremonial meetings encompassing many hundreds of people (Myers, 1986: 45). Four-wheel drive vehicles enable heritage clearance and native title related work to be undertaken. Thus they have become instrumental in sustaining law and culture.

Viewed from a white western material cultural perspective the harsh manner in which a vehicle may be driven seems inexplicable (Folds, 2011: 49-50). However, in circumstances where many people make use of an asset there is little incentive for any one individual to maintain it, the *'tragedy of the commons'* (Hardin, 1968). Folds (2001: 70) deciphers the cultural logic: *"The lifespan of a vehicle is usually measured in weeks and if there is an attempt, real or imagined, to withhold it from walytja it may be vandalised, to shame the person who withheld it, or destroyed to re-establish relationships upset by the constant conflict."*

Viewed from a desert perspective *'driving alone'* with no passengers, as *gudia* often do, must seem inexplicable. The *'desert mob'* always travel as a group, re-experiencing their country together on each occasion. Vehicles are also central to sustaining social connections. They enable attendance at social events that include live music, football carnivals, rodeos, bush race meetings and hotel bars.

6.3.3 From Hearth to Housing

Desert people value housing because, and only so long as, it creates opportunities for residents to accumulate social capital by living amongst extended family and friends. For desert people one of the advantages of possessing a house is that it makes it possible to display generosity by sharing with ones extended family and friends. It remains a society where status is linked to demonstrations of generosity and compassion rather than materialism.

The maintenance of relationships has always been a primary consideration influencing where desert people choose to live. McGrath (1987: 123), for example, recounts historical instances where they declined better station accommodation in order to stick with *"a familiar employer who respected and communicated with them but could only provide humble conditions."*

Households of ten or more residents are not uncommon in some remote communities (SCRGSP, 2003: 10.1-10.2). Numbers are highly variable due to the periodic influx of fellow *walytja* from other communities. There are several contributing factors. It is difficult to say *'no'* to visitors in a milieu where demanding can be acceptable behaviour and refusal equates to a denial of relationship (Folds, 2001: 79). It is also the custom to vacate a home for substantial periods of time following a death, with former residents doubling up in other occupied homes

with their relations and friends. Impoverished people are naturally keen to minimise and spread through sharing the financial burden of rent and service charges. The cultural norm can be for multiple family members to prefer to all 'camp' in one room (Folds, 2001: 81). Also it is not unusual for people to sleep outside on a veranda, a lifestyle feasible for much of the year in northern Australia. Under this pattern of social usage of houses Martin (1995: 231) found tenants "quite unable to control the constant movement of people through them."

Extended family groups might actually feel their social capital enhanced by living in what others might regard as crowded conditions. According to Folds (2001: 80) desert people never complain that too many of their family and friends are living with them, often preferring to live in close relationship because they have a deeply felt obligation to look after one another. Several generations of one extended family group may actually prefer to live together in close proximity with each other.

Desert habitus runs entirely counter to deeply ingrained mainstream values and logic, thereby posing a policy conundrum for the government. Provision of Aboriginal housing infrastructure is regarded as a critical social equity and health initiative by the state. The objective is to 'close the gap' in standards with mainstream Australia (Austin-Broos, 2011: 1-4). From this value perspective the main issue is occupancy rates and the assumption they need to be reduced by providing more housing.

Overcrowding in housing can have negative consequences not only for health, but also for education and family relationships ... many Indigenous people spoke of the effect that overcrowding has on children's education and how it can lead to family violence. Overcrowded houses are harder to keep clean and may suffer more wear and tear. With large numbers of people in a house, bathroom, kitchen and laundry facilities may be inadequate for people to wash themselves, their food and kitchen utensils, and clothes and bedding as often as they would like. (SCRGSP, 2003: 10.1-10.2)

Despite best intentions the evidence suggests remote housing policy has not been particularly effective in achieving substantive equity or health outcomes (Folds, 2001: 80 & Austin-Broos, 2011: 143). State funded housing construction and maintenance programs are locked in a seemingly losing struggle to keep pace with a rapidly rising population propelled by a high birth rate and housing stock with a short shelf life. At any one time a high proportion of the existing housing stock may be uninhabitable due to a lack of critical repair and maintenance work.

It is not suggested desert people don't have a need for housing. What is being suggested is that socially responsive policy, influenced by social capital theory, can have a broader focus than just increasing the housing supply. Arguably the core focus ought not to be the number of houses constructed, but understanding and then establishing the social conditions that make *walytja* happy to live in them. A sensitive approach to housing builds social capital just as surely as an insensitive approach can destroy the resource.

Vignette 6.2: The Fragility of Social Capital

After decades of work in remote areas I confess I can still find the physical state of particular remote communities a shock to my western ascetic sensibilities. I have seen places where every home is damaged, the plumbing clogged and sewerage overflowing. Abandoned car bodies lie in front yards and rubbish and dust blow down the street. Graffiti is everywhere. On windy days the desert oaks 'wave' with an assortment of plastic bags. Austin-Broos (2011: 7) noted: "Central Australia begins to look a little like a version of ghetto life in the United States, where burgeoning poverty and distress also bring criminalisation of the population."

Although less common now, unsealed forty-four gallon drums once served as domestic bins. The advantage of robustness is counteracted by the access they give to scavenging dogs and broader public health ramifications. The most acrobatic of the hungry canines have trained themselves to leap into and manoeuvre around in the tight confines in search of scraps.

Care is, however, required in interpreting outward appearances through an alien cultural lens. While a facade of remote communities may suggest abject poverty to western eyes, the Aboriginal residents may not necessarily see themselves this way (Folds, 2001). The state of housing infrastructure is not necessarily indicative of low stocks of social capital. Housing estates, whatever their condition, may be sites of considerable social cohesion and solidarity (Scougall & Osborne, 1998). Indeed social capital

can be inadvertently destroyed as an unintended consequence of slum clearance intended to improve conditions (Putnam, 2000: 281). The state of the infrastructure is not necessarily a guide to the state of the norms of trust and reciprocity. Changing the social mix of tenants risks disturbing whatever fragile resources of social capital have been built up over years.

As someone once involved in its provision, I do understand the management of housing is challenging work in remote communities. Essential services may be subject to periodic disruption. Contributing factors include a shortage of rental income to repair or replace plant and equipment. There are recurring staff shortages and administrative delays. There is also the tension of being squeezed between different community and government expectations. There are no easy options.

However, I do feel there is an opportunity to be more mindful of nurturing the very forms of social capital remote tenants value most. The physical condition of the built environment is not the only indicator of disadvantage. Another is the extent to which the values of residents are upheld, and these may be more nuanced and multi-faceted than those of policymakers. There are circumstances in which efforts by the state to move people into less crowded conditions may actually put much valued bonding social capital at risk.

The Australian state places a priority on achieving equity with other Australians, but it is a goal not necessarily shared by Aboriginal people (Dockery, 2009 & 2010). A benevolent state regards overcrowding as a universal 'bad' and the provision of more houses as a critical means of 'closing the gap', but well-being is more complicated than that.

6.3.4 From Ritual to Television

Putnam (2000) regards television as the technology that most likely contributed to a significant decline in the level of civic participation in America, eroding stocks of social capital ever since its introduction in the 1950's. He posits that TV watching has come at the expense of group membership and social activities. *"Nothing - not low education, not full-time work, not long commutes in urban agglomeration, not poverty or financial distress - is more broadly associated with civic disengagement and social disconnection than is dependence on television for entertainment"* (Putnam 2000: 231).

Putnam's (1996, 2000) underlying premise that social capital is on long-term trend decline in the USA has not, however, gone unquestioned (McLean et al, 2002: 8). In India, and in contrast to Putnam, Krishna (2002: 176) credits the media with promoting positive values such as equality.

In desert communities the media, including TV, is a site of major collision between vastly different culturally based education and information sharing systems. By freely sharing information about all manner of things TV programs confront traditional desert values. In particular it may usurp the monopoly elders traditionally held in respect of knowledge and who is ready to acquire it. Programs can also unintentionally challenge localized knowledge and beliefs that underpin *Tjukurrpa* by depicting entirely different values and behaviours in other societies. It might also violate cultural taboos by using names and photographs of the deceased and showing cultural objects meant for restricted viewing.

A participant in this study (Interview 4) had been witness to the introduction of television into remote communities in the 1980's. They regarded it as a turning point, fundamentally changing the way in which desert people spent nights and days. In their view it impacted adversely on forms of social participation, such as bush trips and participation in ceremony.

I reckon TV is the one that pulled young people away from their cultural activities because I know when TV and video movies were first introduced. Before that people had nothing and they didn't worry about new technology.

Arguably the pattern of TV viewing displayed by desert people is more collective than is the case with a typical white western nuclear family. The desert norm, I observe, is for a group of people to watch together, congregating outside on the veranda in warmer months. Just like those who run gambling houses, those who possess a functioning TV and DVD player may be well positioned to generate a little social capital. Martin (1995: 120) observed *"The purchase of a video recorder meant that for most owners, their house would be full of children and young adults watching movies."*

TV should not be approached as only having a socially corrosive influence. In Australia the remote media movement, especially the establishment of the Imparja television network and more recently National Indigenous Television, is widely credited as being both a positive source of identity for Aboriginal people and a bridge to enhance cultural understanding of mainstream society.

6.3.5 From Waterhole to Drinking Hole

Drinking is a highly social activity. A participant in this research (Interview 11) observed *“Very few people drink alcohol on their own in Aboriginal communities unless they are addicted to it.”* There is a substantial literature describing the pattern of social drinking prevailing in some (but not all) remote Aboriginal communities (Brady 1990, 1995 a & b, 1998; Alexander 1990; McKnight, 2002; Lyon, 1990; Phillips, 2003; Sackett, 1988).

The intensity of social relationships exacerbates binge drinking (Austin-Broos, 2011: 6). Myers (1980: 269) observed desert people exposed to peer pressure to join family and friends in drinking circles. It occurs within a social context where *“refusal to share or indeed to receive it ran the risk of being seen as a denial of relatedness”* (Martin, 1995: 198). Relatives can be pressured to purchase alcohol for others, even those who are officially banned from drinking (Martin, 1995: 78). Folds (2001: 170) observed *“just as relatives must always provide money for food they can equally sustain an endless supply of alcohol.”*

While desert people don't condone substance abuse, they nevertheless regard others as having an autonomous right to make such choices for themselves Folds (2001: 109). McCoy's (2004: 159) experience is that *“Family members find it difficult to constrain another's right to their autonomy, even when they risk hurting themselves.”* Family members rationalise and excuse drunken behaviour on the basis no one can be responsible for themselves in such a state (McCoy, 2004: 500). Myers (1986: 108) explains the cultural logic: *“one who is unable to ‘think’ in this way is, like a child, not held accountable for his or her actions.”*

When access to alcohol is introduced into a sharing cultural framework it may be socially destructive. What makes it so is the reproduction of ancient established social modalities in radically changed social circumstances (Merlan 1998: 205). The gift of alcohol is readily incorporated into a pre-existing social system accustomed to exchange relations (Merlan, 1998: 202). Pearson (2007) believes substance abuse is incompatible with cultural continuity, arguing Aboriginal society needs to face up to the destructive nature of substance abuse by determining new social norms instead of hoping to *“have our cake and eat it too”* (Pearson, 2007: 21).

In a remote community setting the resource of social bonds makes possible drinking in groups, but the more noteworthy point is that people do it because, when alcohol is consumed in drinking circles, it produces a great deal of social capital (see Martin, 1993: 196 & Merlan, 1998: 205). Drinking in a group is valued because it creates an opportunity for intense and animated sociality. A participant in this study (Interview 11) observed:

Things like binge drinking are socialised activities. There is probably some relationship resource there in terms of people connecting, it's just that the behaviour that connects them is perverse.

6.3.6 From Family to Gang

The social structure of a gang holds particular appeal for youth from deeply fractured families where conventional bonding opportunities have been closed off to them (Bell & Heathcote, 1999). Johnson (et al, 2003: 41) describe family circumstances that predispose youth to gang membership:

In trying to understand teenage vandalism and violence, sociologists from the 1920s onwards have pointed to the increased influence of macho, peer group influence in localities where adults are relatively anomic, do not exert effective influence and certainly do not join organisations. In these localities youths tend to drop out of school, or leave as soon as it is legal, and may hang around in gangs.

White (2007) stresses the association between involvement in gang culture and particular aspects of family life. Belonging to a broader social group can take young people outside dysfunctional family dynamics (White, 2007: 19). According to White (2007: 21) the absence of male adult role models in family life predisposes youth to gang membership. White (2007: 19 & 23) argues stable family relationships are crucial to the development of young people.

McCoy's (2008: 127) experience with desert people is that it is Aboriginal youth in poor quality family relationships that are most likely attracted to petrol sniffing, giving rise to a marginalised sub-culture:

There has been a lack of parental care in some families that has caused some young people to seek support in the company of peer groups. And there has been the opportunity provided in petrol sniffing for young people to choose a 'passage' in life to assist them move between childhood and young adulthood.

Several motivations make the social dynamics of gangs attractive to some young people. A fundamental human need for affinity may be met through gang membership, providing a valued source of attachment for otherwise disengaged and alienated youth (White, 2007: 36; Cunningham et al, 2013: 2). Peer networks are important in the lives of young people, and a gang may provide the sense of connectedness not found elsewhere (White, 2007: 15). In this respect gang membership can be likened to any club affiliation. A gang can provide nurturance and succour. As White (2007: 15) observes the issue is not gangs of youth, but rather what they do.

A gang may provide physical protection in a threatening social environment where sources of security are otherwise not available (White, 2007: 30; Cunningham et al, 2013: 2). The gang offers mutual defence where members are obligated to *'look after'* each other. Even *'bad'* social capital can have some positive consequences for some people. White (2007: 15) writes:

Gangs can provide support and security for vulnerable groups of young people. They can provide opportunities for status, group identity and excitement. They provide a mechanism for young people to cope with oppressive environments, and represent one response or option to chronic marginalisation and social exclusion.

Youth may find the support and recognition they crave through negative behaviour, if they cannot find it through constructive forms (Winter, 2000: 35; Cunningham et al, 2013). According to White (2007: 40) *"A 'bad' community reputation may occasionally translate into a gang mentality based upon defensiveness and re-assertion of worth in the face of a hostile 'outside' world."* Cunningham et al (2013) stress the value of enabling youth to connect with adult mentors able to provide guidance.

In contemporary remote communities the sense of what it means to be a man can be constructed and fostered in destructive ways (Martin, 1993: 196). According to McCoy (2004: 162) the *'bad blackfella'* image provides a valued source of esteem. Similarly in the community where he worked Martin, 1993: 172) found male youth now *"created their own worlds of meaning and significant practices, such as fighting, drinking, and damage to staff or community property."* Austin-Broos (2011: 6) posits that for young men such behaviour is an assertion of their autonomy.

A participant in this study (Interview 11) saw the attraction of gang culture amongst remote youth as reflecting a longing for nurturance.

Maybe it's testimony to the growing popularity of an American pop culture and Rap music, and all of the kind of things that go along with that, because it's an affiliation thing and reflects themes that resonate with young people's culture and there's no vehicle that's easily accessible from within their own families and community where they can get that sense of belonging.

In the public mind gang culture is generally associated with *'bad'* social capital: manifest in patterns of behaviour such as vandalism, substance abuse, violence and vehicle theft. It is, however, important to note there are also conventional relational gains for members. So-called *'bad social capital'* is not always *'bad'*, at least not for everyone. While overall social consequences might be adverse for the wider community, gang members themselves may reap both social and (ill gotten) material advantage. As Putnam (1993: 8) observes the same

networks and norms that serve some obstruct others, particularly if they are socially segregated and discriminatory.

6.3.7 From Fishing Net to Internet

When first introduced to computer technology in the 1980's, a participant in this study (Interview 5) recollected joking with a friend *"if you touch that button it will blow us all up!"* Their forebears had used dense brush as a net dragged through waterholes to catch small fish. Now they use the internet at work everyday. Remote workplaces, schools and adult learning centres all offer computer access (Austin-Broos, 2011: 168).

A participant in this study (Interview 4) commented on the power of internet technology to enable members of the stolen generation to *"hook up"* with their own families, a process rendered much more difficult in the absence of digital technology. They shared a personal experience of finding a *'lost'* sister through Facebook (Interview 3). People are more easily located, archived welfare records more easily accessed, and old photographs more easily viewed than ever before.

The social capital building possibilities of the internet are only just beginning to be explored (Chao-Min et al, 2007). As yet few desert people have access to a computer at home. However mobile telephone reception is increasingly available in the remoter parts of the continent, and as one participant in this study (Interview 3) noted *"Every kid's got a phone with Facebook now, technology makes a big difference"*.

Desert people continue to find new ways to generate social capital through the use of western technology. Where it enhances communication and makes possible frequent interpersonal contact it sustains social networks. Technology can be socially isolating, but it is also enabling social capital to be produced through the use of GarageBand, iMovie and animation Apps that bring youth together. Furthermore participatory research suggests otherwise under-schooled Aboriginal youth can expand their oral and written language skills when they embrace digital communication opportunities in a community-based learning environment (Kral, 2010a & 2010b; Kral & Schwab, 2012). Exploration of the educational implications has only just begun.

There is a new capacity to generate substantial social capital in myriad and innovative ways. Desert people sustain their networks of association in person, on the telephone, and on the internet; anyway they can.

6.4 Ideal Communities

Superficially *Liyan* and *Wandang* appear similar, but in fact they differ in respect of social norms and attitudes.

Members of the *Liyan* Community are everyday exposed to a plurality of values. The habitus of *Liyan* people reflects multiple influences. They are eclectic and adaptive people, everyday seamlessly drawing on many influences depending on what suits their strategic purpose. They draw their life skills and guiding principles from all over and attach their own interpretations and meanings to all they see and hear.

Theirs is a life lived within an inter-cultural space where they recognise new opportunities to construct social capital. People have many social networks - personal, professional, cultural and emotional - drawn from all over. From this the people at *Liyan* have been able to construct a multi-layered identity for themselves that simultaneously enables them to maintain a localised sense of who they are and where they come from while, at the same time taking up strategic opportunities to connect with the wider world.

At *Liyan* sound inter-group relations are understood as a pre-condition to community wellbeing. It is not just that the risk of social tensions associated with population concentration are recognised. The significance is that priority is given to values, communication processes and skills that aid the resolution of differences without conflict. Should social tensions ever arise people separate by visiting remote outstations on country to *'cool off'* for a while. Such spatial strategies are understood as playing a part in the settlement of any inter-group disputes. Any still unresolved tensions are the first item of business to be addressed at ceremonies and big meetings that bring numerous *walytja* together. Such strategies are all embedded features in

the community development approach. *Liyan* promotes values of inclusiveness and tolerance in order to lay a foundation of mutual respect between *walytja*.

Residents of *Liyan* like to spend their money on activities that make family happy and demonstrate their affection and compassion. The pooling of cash resources enables capital purchases. However, the established social norm is that shared resources not be used for bulk alcohol purchases. People do like to play social card games and gamble with each other, but only on weekends when it does not impact on school or work attendance. In other words the pooling of funds occurs within a particular normative behavioural framework.

Sports participation is highly valued because it creates opportunities for inter-generational bonding relationships through which youth can be nurtured, culturally educated, and connected with distant people. Pride of place in the community is reserved for the trophies local teams have won at numerous regional sporting carnivals. Art practice is also highly valued because of the possibilities it creates for cultural resurgence on country. By way of example, artists have a trust fund that enables the proceeds of sales to be used towards activities such as visits to country. The artist determines the use of the money, enabling them to demonstrate generosity and compassion and achieve social status in recognition of their philanthropy.

Incarceration and funerals are relatively less significant factors in generating social capital here. It is because the population of *Liyan* has rising life expectancy due to multiple factors; appropriate housing that contributes to environmental health, low alcohol consumption, and a low incidence of resort to violence. Funerals are not the most prominent social event.

The residents of *Liyan* take a nuanced and balanced view of technology. The cultural heritage, communication, education and social capital building potentiality are all recognised, as well as downside risks. People see themselves as drivers and re-shapers of technology so that it might serve their own imperatives, rather than being passive recipients of it. There are, for example, norms and consequences around what are and what are not acceptable uses of vehicles.

Where people live and with whom they live is also understood as having social consequences. Residents take opportunities to input into infrastructure planning, demonstrating awareness of the ways in which layout plans and designs might be better calibrated to fit with local cultural considerations and spatial requirements. For instance the community layout plan follows a '*satellite*' model that provides for the separation of different *walytja* into household clusters, sometimes several kilometres apart.

In contrast to *Liyan*, the *Wandang* Community is internally differentiated and factionalised along *walytja* lines. Social tensions between *walytja* arise because residents are '*visitors*' who feel insecure as this is not their country, a fact that fuels on-going disputation. This is not the ancestral land of their forefathers and yet residents have been concentrated at the *Wandang* Community for several generations.

Infighting between different family groups is never ending. Conflict is easily inflamed. Matters that routinely provoke infighting might include discussing what another family may regard as its business, chastising someone else's children, or visiting someone else's country without permission. At best there is an uneasy co-existence between different *walytja* living amidst one another. A successful social interaction here is one that succeeds in papering together a fragile temporary truce. Any alliances that form are fragile and forever shifting.

The *Wandang* Community may be in the desert, but the housing its people live in is high density, deliberately concentrated by social housing authorities keen to keep essential service infrastructure costs to a minimum. Housing allocation policies result in people from rival *walytja* living side-by-side, adding fuel to pre-existing tensions and making spatial management of conflict impossible. Sport here also ignites tensions associated with '*partying*' and '*fighting*'. Like alcohol it is a catalyst that leads men to be absent from their home communities and families for extended stretches.

People seem to only mobilise and pool resources for the purpose of substance abuse. There is no set of restraining norms around the use of cash. Every night a gambling school operates, every morning the school complains the late nights keep kids away, and every afternoon a group of '*winners*' heads off to town in a vehicle. Most men wear the experience of prison as a badge of prestige, for this is how male identity is constructed here.

Introduced social processes and technologies are often blamed for the woes of *Wandang*,

residents seeing themselves as its passive victims. If there were no vehicles, no TV and no internet, all manner of social ills might disappear with them. At *Wandang* people also see themselves as having no control over their homes and who comes and goes.

At *Wandang*, no matter how sensitively community issues are approached, there is always the potential of fuelling contentious argument. Disputation and conflict always escalate, negating any aspiration for the achievement of broader scale social cohesion. Disputation between *walytja* is the primary factor inhibiting the production of social capital. There is no supreme overarching source of authority to arbitrate disputes. There are no protocols for co-existence between different social groups. There are no strategies for conflict management.

6.5 The Capacity to Transform Capital

Bourdieu (1986) argued that essentially social capital is transmuted into financial capital. However, the evidence from remote Aboriginal Australia, a place where non-material values prevail, seems to all point in the opposite direction.

Desert people are creative in producing social capital out of other forms of capital. The cultural capital embodied in art works is quickly transformed into social capital by redistributing the income from a sale amongst *walytja*. Similarly financial capital derived from welfare, work or gambling is used collectively to enable social activities. The physical capital embodied in western technology, such as computers and vehicles, is culturally assimilated and transformed to bolster social networks. These are new tools for producing social capital absorbed and adapted from mainstream society. The issue explored in the following chapter is the content of the social capital produced.

CHAPTER 7: SOCIAL CAPITAL, AND REMOTE DISADVANTAGE

7.1 Overview

The final objective of this thesis is to examine the contribution of social capital theory to understanding remote community disadvantage. This chapter explores the notion of disadvantage, frameworks for understanding it, the nature of it in a remote Aboriginal community context, and the ways in which *'bad'* social capital is produced under particular conditions.

'Bad' social capital is shorthand for circumstances that permit excessive demands to be made on the most vulnerable, insular attitudes to prevail, powerful *'gatekeepers'* to exercise social control and a process of downward levelling of social norms to sap aspiration and hope. The literature of both social capital and Aboriginal Studies abound with instances of such behaviour blooming in closed community environments. Participation in social networks always generates social capital, but it is not always *'good'*. Certain networks, such as gangs, tend to produce this resource in a *'bad'* or toxic form associated with outcomes such as violence.

A critique of the social capital literature is that it tends to over emphasise positive (*'good'*) effects, while understating possible negative (*'bad'*) consequences (Portes, 1998: 15). The point is that it cannot be assumed that social capital will always contribute to the *'public good'* (Putzel, 1997). Unfortunately a desire to idealise social connections can obscure its *'bad'* side according to Brough (et al, 2008: 192). Social capital is not *"a totally positive phenomenon"* (Mowbray, 2004: 2).

In Section 7.5 the social conditions under which *'good'* and *'bad'* social capital might be produced are elaborated upon using the models of *Liyan* and *Wandang*. The former produces only *'good'* social capital and the latter only *'bad'*.

7.2 Understanding Disadvantage

7.2.1 Defining Disadvantage

Disadvantage is a relative notion that refers to unfavourable circumstances that reduce the life chances and well-being of individuals and communities (Wolfe & Shalit: 2007). It refers to people in circumstances where they are less likely to be successful than others.

This chapter explores the relationship between social capital and disadvantage, at a theoretical level. In practice both variables are broad and ill defined and it would only be possible to explore the relationship between them by specifying their measurement in a concrete way (Johnson et al, 2005). Such empirical research falls outside the scope of this thesis.

7.2.2 Different Frameworks for Understanding Disadvantage

Social capital theory provides one possible explanation of remote community disadvantage. However, in this section I explain how disadvantage can be understood in a variety of ways using different frameworks (Wolff & De-Shalit, 2007).

Firstly I go to the social capital perspective on disadvantage. In chapter 2 I explained that social capital theory understands disadvantage as a consequence of relational deprivation. Communities are not resilient if they lack social trust and shared norms of respectful and orderly behaviour are not practiced (Gittell & Vidal, 1998: 40). In such places people do not protect and look out for each other and some are left to struggle alone (Price-Robertson, 2011).

The total stock of social capital is not, however, all that matters. The distinction between types of social capital is also critical to understanding a social capital theoretical perspective on disadvantage. It is about having the right mix of bonding and bridging social capital (Interview 9). Aboriginal communities may have high stocks of social capital as some suggest, however most of the resource might be of the localised bonding kind found in the intricate webs of connectedness that constitute Aboriginal extended family networks. The problem, as networks social capital theory sees it, is not a lack of social capital per se, but rather that the stocks of bonding and bridging social capital are out of balance. According to social capital theory,

disadvantaged people suffer the effects of material and social deprivation where there is insufficient bridging social capital.

A different understanding of disadvantage is to narrowly define it as economic poverty, occurring when people fall below some pre-determined income benchmark. This perspective reflects a value position prominent in the business community and the economics and commerce professions. The general policy response is to reduce income disparities via redistribution measures utilising the welfare and taxation systems. Price-Robertson (2011) writes:

Traditionally, advantage and disadvantage have been equated almost solely with economic factors such as income and levels of unemployment. In this conception, a disadvantaged community is usually seen as one in which a comparatively large proportion of the population falls below the poverty line.

Price-Robertson (2011) challenges a narrow focus on financial resources, arguing there is more to disadvantage than low incomes. Writing in an Indigenous Australian context Hunter (2001: 2) states categorically that providing greater financial resources to the poor will not fix *“their particular form of poverty.”*

Increasingly disadvantage is understood as a multi-faceted concept to be measured using a broad range of socio-economic indicators. Vinson’s (2007) model of disadvantage conceptualises five domains: economics, education, health, community safety and social distress. The *‘Close the Gap’* policy framework in indigenous affairs reflects this kind of approach, measuring changes over time using numerous indicators (SCRGSP: 2007, 2011 & 2014). In 2002, the Council of Australian Governments commissioned the Productivity Commission to regularly report against key indicators of Indigenous disadvantage. A series of *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* reports provide information about strategic areas including early childhood development, education and training, health, economic participation, and housing. These reports examine whether policies and programs are contributing to positive outcomes.

Another approach is to regard disadvantage as a consequence of social exclusion (Australian Social Inclusion Board, 2009; Flora, 1998; Hunter and Jordan, 2010: 260). The socially excluded are those with restricted life opportunities (Hayes et al, 2008). For example, desert people may find mainstream services and resources difficult to access due to factors such as limited education, language differences, and racism. Thus social exclusion causes disadvantage by creating social and economic boundaries. Whole communities may be excluded if service providers do not succeed in accommodating their cultural values and practices (Price-Robertson, 2011). The standard policy response is to seek to enhance the accessibility of services such as health, housing and employment.

Hunter (2004) wonders if the notion of social exclusion might provide greater analytic sophistication than a social capital framework when it comes to understanding Aboriginal disadvantage, suggesting it better lends itself to discussion of the ways in which exclusionary practices of mainstream society contribute to inequality and marginalisation. However, the content of ideas about social capital and social exclusion are not always clearly distinguishable. Price-Robertson (2011) sees the notions of social capital and social exclusion as closely related and overlapping, both recognising that the absence of positive social connections contributes to disadvantage.

Yet another conceptualization is the *‘capabilities’* approach influential in international development circles (Sen, 1999: 74). Human capability in areas such as health, land reform, education, and training is seen as the key contributor to economic development and quality of life. Disadvantage means having little control over one’s own life. Development is understood as a process of extending human freedom to choose and act for oneself by enhancing capabilities. To have capability is to be able to participate in a range of life defining decisions in areas that possibly include nourishment, shelter, safety, health and education (Nussbaum, 1997: 41-42). The role of the state is to ensure freedom from neglect and abuse, and freedom of expression and movement. Sen (1999) is claimed as a philosophical influence on Noel Pearson’s (2007) contribution to public policy debate. Policy pronouncements in indigenous affairs may increasingly reference the capabilities approach, although Klein (2015) questions the depth at which it is fully grasped.

A contrasting approach is to understand disadvantage as a consequence of societal implosion, a legacy of the cumulative negative effects of inter-generational trauma (Atkinson, 2002).

Communities may be regarded as incapable of governing themselves where internal authority structures collapse. Root causes may include war, dispossession, colonization, discrimination and neglect (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997). This kind of disadvantage is not unique to Aboriginal Australia as war ravaged nations the world over can testify (Price-Robertson, 2011). The policy response to implosion can involve healing and psychological counselling, and can also extend to paternal forms of state intervention. The *'Stronger Futures'* Program, formerly known as the Northern Territory Intervention, might be seen as an example of the latter.

Disadvantage can also be understood as the result of cultural rather than historical factors. There may be unintended consequences where persistent social practices are *"reproduced in quite radically different objective circumstances"* (Martin, 1993: 290). Adverse impacts are not only a consequence of oppressive colonial intent, or reflective of a desire to extinguish remote cultural values and practices. Disadvantage may also be the result of two very different cultures encountering each other. The products in the remote community store may contribute to poor diet, but this is not a result of any deliberate intent. Unrestricted access to alcohol practiced within a culture that celebrates sharing of resources can be harmful, but it was not purposely designed to be so. A participant in this study (Interview 10) stated: *"simply an exposure to the modern western world is the strongest poison of all"*.

There are three strands to the argument that cultural values contribute to disadvantage. One focuses on the erosion of protective cultural practices such as *kanyirninpa* as discussed earlier. Another is to regard mainstream institutions and services as poorly adapted to the values of Aboriginal Australia, struggling to develop the necessary cultural competence to work across different value systems (Scougall, 2008). A high degree of professional capacity, mixed with a very sophisticated knowledge of contemporary Aboriginal systems and ways of working is required to work effectively in this space (Hunt, 2013).

A third strand is more contentious. Disadvantage is seen as a consequence of out-dated cultural values and practices, such as sharing norms, regarded as no longer functional in the vastly changed context of contemporary society, serving as a disincentive to work, save, invest and create wealth (Johns, 2008: 68). The problem is conceptualised as being a poor fit between the persistent values of traditional society and the prerequisites for a happy and prosperous life in modernity. The argument is that a felt obligation to always respond generously to the needs of others prevents people from *'getting on'* in life. According to this view the social norms of desert society have not yet evolved to cope with life in a western society.

In traditional society sharing, for example, was a social norm mainly confined within extended family. Sharing was used to redistribute food when there was an over supply, display cultural ties during ritual and ceremony, and express love and compassion for those to whom one is most closely bonded. Sharing behaviour may have intensified following the movement of desert people into large sedentary communities comprising hundreds of related people.

In the Aboriginal studies literature there has been debate about the extent to which sharing norms might operate in ways counter-productive to Aboriginal economic development (Altman, 2011a). Demonstrating generosity through sharing is still part of what it means to identify as a member of *walytja* and to be accepted as such. It can be socially beneficial in building connections, but it might also be detrimental where it makes possible behaviour such as sharing alcohol and cigarettes.

The inference is that Aboriginal people will only escape from disadvantage through intervention that works on modifying aspects of their belief system. Cultural norms are interpreted as deficiency. The policy response may lead towards punitive behavioural change strategies such as compulsory income management. Writing in an international context Woolcock (1998: 153) fears such arguments feed disdain of traditional societies because they carry the implication that *"only the systematic adoption of values, practices, and resources of the West can overcome pervasive distrust and other 'backward' behaviours, and thereby establish material prosperity."*

In summary there are multiple frameworks that might be applied to *'explain'* remote Aboriginal community disadvantage. The significance of social capital theory is that it provides a different perspective on disadvantage, namely one that looks to the structure and quality of social relationships. The fundamental tenet is that the achievement of prosperity and wellbeing is mostly about social connections (Putnam, 1993: 4). Yet while social capital theory is an additional analytical lens, it is not the only one. No theory can claim to provide a complete explanation of any phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Proponents of social capital need to be cautious not to imply it does.

7.2.3 Aboriginal Disadvantage

Aboriginal community disadvantage is an especially complex phenomenon because it is of a different and culturally specific kind, with particular characteristics that differentiate it from mainstream understandings (Austin-Broos, 2011: 89; Altman 2009; Lahn, 2012; Hunter & Biddle, 2012; Hunter and Stephenson, 2013: 5). Understandings of what constitutes disadvantage are culturally determined, not universal. Stanner (1979: 43) observed of Aboriginal people: *"Their struggle is for a different set of things, differently arranged from those which most European interests want them to receive."*

Certain explanatory factors associated with Aboriginal disadvantage - like discrimination, marginalisation, trauma, social alienation and isolation - have greater significance than in other contexts (Hunter and Biddle, 2012: 1-4; Hunter, 2007a & 2007b). It follows that disadvantage cannot be measured by any universally applicable set of indicators (Saunders et al, 2007). Dockery (2010: 14) writes that *"policy formulation needs to be prepared to accept that Indigenous people have a right to value their culture, and that the associated differences in values and preferences may result in 'legitimate' difference in mainstream indicators of socio-economic outcomes."*

Hunter and Stephenson (2013: 5) advocate the development of more sophisticated and explicit theoretical explanations of Aboriginal disadvantage recognising a wide raft of contributing cultural, social, political and economic factors. Any model that is developed then needs to be interrogated through the collection and analysis of hard evidence to test its efficacy in the real world (Hunter & Stephenson, 2013: 5).

Aboriginal disadvantage is an example of what policy analysts term a *'wicked problem'* (Rittel & Webber, 1973; Australian Public Services Commission; 2007). Typically such problems are difficult to define, measure or reach agreement about. Potential underlying causes and consequences are contested and almost overwhelmingly large in dimension. The phenomenon may be constantly evolving and changing. Solutions are uncertain and agreed knowledge about 'what works' is limited. Hunter (2009: 59) observes in respect of Aboriginal Australia *"stakeholders have radically different world views and different frames for understanding the problem"*.

The causes of Aboriginal disadvantage are neither simple nor linear (Hunter, 2009; Hunter & Biddle, 2012). Multiple factors appear to be implicated including a breakdown in cultural authority and unintended consequences stemming from exposure to aspects of western society such as alcohol. Researchers such as Martin (1993) and Sutton (2001) have paid witness to destructive alcohol consumption and endemic violence in remote communities, especially amongst disaffected youth.

Aboriginal disadvantage is associated with multiple, iterative, self-reinforcing and unintended behavioural responses. Young people roaming remote communities at night may escape problems at home, only to leave themselves vulnerable in other ways (Gordon et al, 2002: 61-62). Substance abuse is both a contributor to family and community dysfunction and a consequence of it. Furthermore it intersects with other social elements such as family violence that serve to perpetuate the cycle (Sam, 1991; Blagg, 2000). Zubrick et al (2010) consider the determinants of Aboriginal wellbeing.

The Council of Australian Governments *'close the gap'* Aboriginal affairs policy framework uses the language of overcoming disadvantage (SCRGSP, 2007, 2011 & 2014). The emphasis is on working towards the achievement of statistical equality benchmarks with mainstream Australia in identified key areas such as life expectancy, early childhood development, literacy and numeracy, schooling attainment, and employment. Disparities in many areas such as nutrition, health, and economic participation are identified. The focus is broad. Aboriginal people are considered to be disadvantaged, not just because they have relatively low income and wealth, but also because of factors such as the quality of housing, physical and mental health, life expectancy, and exposure to violence.

The policy premise is that disadvantage will be overcome once statistically equivalent socio-economic outcomes for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations have been attained. The framework does not accommodate the possibility that the aspirations of people in remote communities might differ in crucial respects from those of mainstream society. Desert people may have their own notions of what constitutes disadvantage (Austin-Broos, 2011: 89; Dockery, 2010; Martin, 2006).

According to Austin-Broos (2011: 116) it is in remote Australia that issues of substantive equality and cultural difference sharply intersect: *“What was disadvantage in a non-aboriginal world might be advantage in an Aboriginal one.”* Although rarely acknowledged by policy-makers, the achievement of material prosperity they envisage might require a fundamental change in the value system of desert society (Austin-Broos, 2011: 88; Folds, 2001: 126). Specifically the relative priority attached to the maintenance of social networks may differ from mainstream society.

In traditional Aboriginal society most aspects of a persons' wellbeing were sustained through social networks. Indeed intense localised bonds of solidarity and alliances with neighbouring groups were both critical to survival. It was the extent and nature of the support people were able to call upon that determined wellbeing. The essence of a good life is maintaining connections to country and extended family: *“To be among kin, to be shown affection and concern and to show it: these are the things that should make one happy”* (Myers, 1986: 111). Conversely a poor quality (disadvantaged) life is associated with living away from country, away from those to whom one feels most connected, and feeling trapped in situations where ones autonomy is impinged upon by being constantly told what to do. Lahn (2012: 9) ponders whether, for Aboriginal people, *‘disadvantage’* might mean having *“no familial networks to call upon.”*

Trigger (1989: 529 - 531) explains that in remote Aboriginal Australia wealth comprises more than economic goods because it encompasses the possession of cultural knowledge about country, ceremony, language and extended family heritage. It is important to also note that in Aboriginal society these things can only be attained through social connection. This is not to suggest desert people see material income and wealth as unimportant, only that material acquisition may be instrumental to the achievement of their own *‘higher order’* Aboriginal social and cultural aspirations.

If desert people place great store on social relatedness, any framework of disadvantage that fails to lay emphasis on the quality and nature of their social networks seems inappropriate. It is those without support who may be seen as truly impoverished (Lahn, 2012: 8-9). From this perspective it is impoverished networks that render people disadvantaged and arguably desert people are entitled to have their own disadvantage understood on their terms.

7.3 ‘Bad’ Social Capital

7.3.1 Typology of ‘Bad’ Social Capital

Remote disadvantage can be understood as a consequence of the production of *‘bad’* social capital. Although he did not explore it in any depth, Putnam (1993: 8) understood that social capital, like any capital, is not always put to *‘good’* effect.

Recognizing the importance of social capital in sustaining community life does not exempt us from the need to worry about how that community is defined - who is inside and thus benefits from social capital and who is outside and does not ... Before toting up the balance sheet for social capital in its various forms, we need to weigh costs as well as benefits. This challenge still awaits.

This section considers issues of remote disadvantage using a typology of *‘bad’* social capital developed by Portes (1998). *‘Bad’* social capital refers to the negative consequences of social capital. According to (Putzul, 1997) it is produced in segregated social environments that overly rely on particularly dense forms of bonding that exclude participation in broader social networks that extend beyond ones most immediate trusted circle.

TABLE 7.1 below summarises four ways in which social capital theory might account for the phenomenon of remote community disadvantage. Where groups are closed to external influence, insular attitudes prevail such as low levels of tolerance and resistance to change. The solidarity of the group may be such that some members are able to make excessive claims on the resources of the most vulnerable without restraint. There is a process of *‘downward levelling’* of norms, understood as the tendency of a disadvantaged group to adopt social practices that perpetuate their disadvantage. The dense bonds work as a form of social control, inhibiting the scope of free association with the wider world and restricting social mobility. The social universe of members is confined to the group. People in these circumstances belong to impoverished networks that do not connect them to opportunities.

TABLE 7.1: 'BAD' SOCIAL CAPITAL, AS AN EXPLANATION OF REMOTE DISADVANTAGE

1. Excessive Demands ('humberging')	2. 'Closed' Communities	3. Constrained Freedom of Association	4. Downward Levelling of Norms
<p><i>'Humberging'</i> is the behaviour of preying on vulnerable community members.</p> <p><i>'Humberging'</i> intensified following the movement of desert people into large sedentary communities.</p> <p><i>'Humberging'</i> behaviour may be incessant in remote communities.</p> <p><i>'Humberging'</i> of the most vulnerable causes stress in remote communities.</p> <p><i>'Humberging'</i> is socially corrosive when used as a strategy to acquire alcohol.</p> <p><i>'Humberging'</i> can undermine motivation and capacity to work, save & invest.</p> <p>Social capital literature describes sharing & reciprocity as fundamental means by which social capital is produced. However, <i>'bad'</i> social capital is produced in circumstances where demands are excessive.</p>	<p>Overly dense bonds can make for socially isolated (closed) communities impenetrable to outside influence.</p> <p>Insular attitudes inhibit the formation of bridging social capital.</p> <p>Inward looking communities are closed to external resources & support, having bonding but no bridging social capital to call upon.</p> <p>The norm is unconditional defence of ones' own group in the face of any perceived threat, regardless of behaviour.</p> <p>Outward engagement may be discouraged in remote communities from within the group.</p> <p>Those seeking to engage may be accused of <i>'leaving'</i> their own mob & giving up their Aboriginal identity.</p> <p>Social capital theory states that outward looking communities tend to be stronger because they are able to draw resources & ideas from all over. They have both bonds & bridges to call upon.</p>	<p>Freedom of association means the felt freedom to engage across multiple & broad social networks.</p> <p>Deep suspicion & cultural reticence towards <i>'outsiders'</i> may constrain freedom of association.</p> <p>Freedom of association is constrained in circumstances where people feel inhibited from joining social networks.</p> <p>Outward engagement may be interpreted as an attempt to <i>'leave'</i> & as a denial of one's localised identity.</p> <p>Small powerful cliques in enclave communities may exercise social control as <i>'gatekeepers'</i> to restrict social networks.</p> <p>There is vigilant policing of a localised worldview & the means of internal social control are harsh.</p> <p>Social capital theory describes liberal democratic values as facilitative of social capital production because people enjoy freedom of association.</p>	<p>Downward levelling norms are a set of fatalistic beliefs that cast upward social mobility as an impossibility.</p> <p>Downward levelling norms are devoid of aspiration and hope, rendering behaviours such as school and work attendance a waste of time.</p> <p>Downward levelling of norms occurs in communities where internal authority structures & social norms have been eroded.</p> <p>Stable governance & social order require norms of civic participation & some system of agreed behavioural rules.</p> <p>Social capital theory regards shared community values and standards as necessary to the achievement of social order.</p>

7.3.2 Excessive Demands

Sharing and reciprocity are behaviours that the literature identifies as positive generators of stocks of social capital. However, situations where excessive demands are used to extract resources produce *'bad'* social capital. The social capital literature identifies circumstances where social bonds are so dense individuals may position themselves to make excessive claims on the resources of others that are difficult to refuse because of peer pressure (Portes, 1998: 16; Cullen & Whiteford, 2001: 38). Such self-serving behaviour, known as *'demand sharing'*, allows freeloaders to exploit trusting motives without ever intending to fulfil any expectation of reciprocation. It can be a disincentive to work, save and invest. Instead of wealth creation it enables behaviours such as substance abuse.

In traditional desert society bush food and other items could be requested as a matter of right within *walytja*. Myers (1986: 110) writes that those with a right to ask may *"include those with whom one grows up, those with whom one is familiar, those who have fed and cared for one, and those with whom one camps frequently"*. A generous response sustains valued social connections, indeed it is part of what it means to be accepted as *walytja*. Austin-Broos (2011: 131) states that the process of asking a relative for resources is a way of testing the strength of a relationship. Refusal amounts to a denial of close connection and is therefore guaranteed to bring disharmony, something best avoided amongst *walytja*. Asking directly for goods and favours from an affiliate carries no negative connotations in the desert value system (McGrath 1987: 154). Shame and humiliation do attach, however, to a failure to reciprocate an obligation (McGrath, 1987: 155).

In large contemporary communities everyday many people encounter others to whom they are culturally obligated. The difficulty can be that *"too many claims are made on one's relatedness"* (Myers, 1980: 260). The concentration of population increases the likelihood of being waylaid by those claiming relationship. Demands were more easily managed in smaller scale nomadic society where physical distance between clan groups created social boundaries.

The availability of a broad range of desired material goods means there is so much more to demand than in traditional society. Almost anything can be demanded including alcohol and vehicles (Lyon, 1990; McKnight, 2002). In the region he researched Martin (1995: 24) observed much *"personal interaction involved demanding of others - various services, food, tobacco or money"*. In traditional society the absence of a broad range of substantial material possessions restricted the scope of what might be asked for. However, the availability of a broader range of desired goods now means there is more that might be demanded, extending to items such as vehicles and bank account pin numbers.

'Humbugging' is a term used by desert people to describe a social practice of harassment involving incessant unwanted demands made on the personal resources of another in order to siphon them off (Merlan, 1998: 195; Austin-Broos, 2011: 14). A scenario of persistent pleading and even intimidation may be played out, with kinship obligations invoked in support of demands (Daly & Smith, 2003: 16). Drinkers, gamblers, smokers and people wanting transport may routinely engage in the practice of *humbugging*. In the worst situations the most vulnerable - the elderly, the disabled and women - run the gauntlet every time they go to the store or receive payments. What makes such *'humbugging'* possible are overly dense bonds that make it socially acceptable to ask, and peer pressure that makes it very hard to say *'no'*, particularly in the absence of social sanction or consequence for the *'humbuggers'*.

The degree of closeness of a relationship, and thus the right to ask, is open to interpretation and manipulation. Some might claim to be *'walytja'* in the hope of opening up access to resources. Life in large communities comprising hundreds of people means that many may claim relationship through one means or another. Demands may be impossible to meet when large numbers are able to claim relatedness. People of limited means may only give full expression to their generosity with those to whom they feel most closely bonded. The difficulty is that in desert society refusal can be taken as tantamount to a denial of relatedness and therefore a certain guarantee of social disharmony. Once people might have managed excessive demands spatially by withdrawal back to country to create social distance (Merlan, 1998: 199). In contemporary circumstances this is not a realistic long-term proposition for most people.

In the discourse there is a tendency to conflate Aboriginal sharing norms generally with humbugging behaviour, as if it were sharing that is problematic (Johns, 2008). In desert society

sharing remains as an important part of the social fabric, ensuring mutual protection and support. Sharing is founded on close relations of inter-personal trust between those to whom one is most closely bonded.

What distinguishes *humberging* from sharing practice is that only the latter is voluntary, reciprocal and founded on cultural obligation (Altman, 2011: 3). *Humberging* involves persistent unwelcome demands being made on the resources of the most vulnerable (Austin-Broos, 2011: 14; Altman, 2011). Acts of giving may go unreciprocated because the recipients seemingly never have any resources of their own to draw upon. Traditional society recognised a right to ask, not demand.

7.3.3 Closed Groups

Overly dense bonds make for closed remote communities that are socially isolated and impenetrable to external influence.

Social capital theory predicts problems where bonds become so dense they close communities off to external influence and foster insular attitudes. Putnum et al (1993) attributed differences between regions in the north and south of Italy to different norms of civic participation. The south was insular and closed, where as the north was participatory and outward looking.

Closure contributes to disadvantage to the extent it inhibits access to network-mediated benefits that may flow from broader engagement. People are denied wider opportunities because of it, such as access to social, business, professional, academic, philanthropic, not-for-profit, and other networks.

Onyx and Bullen (2000: 130) state:

When under perceived threat, families and communities will turn inward and cease to trust those outside the boundaries. Under these conditions, what was healthy debate and contestation in the broader arena ... now becomes overt conflict, distrust and hate.

Overly dense internal group bonds may produce a form of localised social capital characterised by deep distrust. Insular attitudes bind groups to accepted beliefs that create resistance to change and suspicion of those outside the group (Bankston & Zhou, 2002: 290). A participant in this study (Interview 11) observed:

Our way of looking at the world tends to be confirmatory of our beliefs. We'll sort for evidence which supports what we believe and if we believe someone's out to get us, even though that may be quite unintended, it can be interpreted in a particular kind of way.

Once established a practice of demonising '*the other*' continues to fuel a atmospheric of distrust. The general problem everywhere, according to a participant in this study (Interview 9), is that *"If you attach deep suspicion to everybody except those you have strong blood ties to ... your chances of problem solving when things go wrong are zilch because people are hostile to authority, hostile to outsiders, everything like that."*

In desert society dense bonds once worked as a protective factor. The norm was an expectation of unconditional defence of ones' own extended family in the face of any perceived threat. All relationships were personal, never institutional. A rejection of hierarchy worked against institutional relationships. There were no mechanisms to facilitate quick and easy dealings between people who didn't know one another. Arguably adverse experience at the hands of some pastoralists, missionaries, police and officials may have further exacerbated such already reticent attitudes.

The persistence of caution in the face of strangers is not necessarily beneficial when transplanted into contemporary context. There may be a widespread absence of trust in services such as the school, police, health clinic, housing authority, and children's services, culminating in a reluctance to use them. Insularity becomes problematic if people are denied support, resources, and life opportunities because of it.

The unconditional solidarity of *walytja* in remote communities also enables behaviours such as

substance abuse, vandalism, truancy, and family violence to go unrestrained. The social norm is to unconditionally defend family, regardless of behaviour. Atkinson (1990: 13-14) writes of the shame felt by women caught in a cycle of violence. They may see little option but to accept it where family are the perpetrators. Embedded social values of *walytja* solidarity, and respect for personal autonomy, may inhibit others from intervening, thereby further heightening the scale, severity and consequences.

A family member who harms another may be absolved on the basis that something deeper and external must have motivated them. Martin (1995: 258) found it a *"common response ... to wrong doings by close kin - such as breaking into the store, or behaving indefensibly while drunk"*. Such a rationalisation has the advantage of not challenging family group solidarity. Martin (1995: 258) writes the usual defensive response is to *"assert that they had been coaxed into doing it by others, thus externalizing the causes beyond the bounds of the particular grouping."*

Taking up external opportunities beyond family and community requires a degree of social trust that encompasses more distant people, including non-indigenous people and institutions. The difficulty is that community connections with the wider world are typically weak (Austin-Broos, 2011: 11). Residents of remote communities may have few established networks extending beyond the local level (Moran et al, 2009: 36). The bonds of localised attachment may also be so strong that people are unwilling to leave home.

The social capital literature identifies social trust as critical to the development of *'outward looking'* communities (Tendler & Freedheim, 1994; Hughes and Black, 2000; Glaeser et al, 2000; Welsh & Pringle, 2001; Halpern, 1999; Newton, 2001; Uslaner, 1998 & 2002; Veenstra, 2002; Anheier & Kendall, 2002). The international literature suggests many societies have evolved means of facilitating quick and easy dealings between people and institutions, even when they don't know each other.

In traditional society there was a collective apprehension in the face of *'strangers'* whose motives might be suspect. Dense localised bonds manifested in a social norm of unconditional defence of ones own mob. The inclination of desert people is to keep a safe distance. Caution served as a protective factor in the face of any perceived external threat. Myers (1980: 167) illuminates the issue:

Strangers are considered dangerous because one does not know how to predict their behaviour. This suspicion ultimately restricts population movement, confining people to some extent.

The classic features of traditional Aboriginal society, such as connections to country, the skin group system, ceremony, and song cycles all worked to build a broader social trust extending beyond *walytja*, as described earlier in chapter 4. These mechanisms bridged constellations of neighbouring groups together. Such alliances generally held, notwithstanding that they were made possible only after delicate negotiation and a careful balancing of reciprocal group interests. Sustaining social trust beyond *walytja* became more challenging in post-contact society where ancient bridging mechanisms - *Tjukuurpa*, *gurrutu* and *wunan* - were adversely impacted by colonisation.

The social capital literature states that, before people will engage, they need to feel they will be treated fairly. Aboriginal oral accounts of adverse experiences during the colonial era continue to circulate in remote communities further reinforcing a pre-existing cultural reticence towards external engagement. The experience of colonisation may have left desert people less inclined to place trust in others beyond *walytja*. The broader society came to be generally considered untrustworthy.

Desert people may have high stocks of social capital on account of their extensive extended family networks. However, it is mostly of the localised bonding kind. People still lean on family in times of need, but there are limits to what can be attained with this resource alone. A participant in this study (Interview 10) commented: *"The worst situations are ... where the group has become involuted ... looking in on themselves, and in those situations there's a high risk, usually fulfilled, of social disintegration and so forth."*

7.3.4 Freedom of Association

Individual freedom may be diminished where bonds are so dense they constitute a form of social control. Group members can be held so tightly together it becomes almost impossible to break free (Portes, 1998: 15). Speaking generally a participant in this study (Interview 9) commented on the social control that can be exercised in densely bonded communities:

If your own identity is tied too tightly and there's a level of control ... built into that identity, then it becomes very difficult for you to go out and make contact with strangers ... Bonding always has that capacity. You know there is a level of controlling stuff in every society, because the bonds are so powerful in those sorts of communities.

Practices such as ostracism and intimidation may restrict the scope of free association and social mobility, inhibiting broader engagement (Cox & Caldwell, 2000: 59; Wilson, 2006: 348-350). Individuals may feel only ever able to connect with the wider world at the expense of sacrificing their existing bonds. (McLean et al, 2002: 7) writes that in these circumstances *"the flowering of the 'good aspects' of liberal democracy"* is constrained.

Informal internal sources of power tend to thrive in circumstances where authority structures and normative rules governing the operation of an orderly society have collapsed or are peripheral (Putzul, 1997). Portes (1998: 15) writes the *"capacity of authorities to enforce rules (social control) can ... be jeopardized by the existence of tight networks whose function is precisely to facilitate violation of those rules for private benefit."*

Small cliques able to exercise social control in enclave communities may be beneficiaries of exclusionary practices such as intolerance towards outsiders. In a case study in a Puerto Rican migrant enclave community Portes (1988) discovered that a clique of aggressive drug dealers ruled. Portes (1988: 17) found a community closed to upward mobility and an environment favourably predisposed towards maleficence. The whole neighbourhood was wedged, unable to connect with the wider world out of fear. The mafia, motorcycle gangs and the Ku Klux Klan provide other examples where *'gatekeepers'* are able to restrict the scope of engagement by controlling the social networks within which group members are permitted to mix.

Remote communities may also be exposed to the power and influence of *'gatekeepers'*, so-called *'big men'* (Langton, 2008) who thrive in an environment where they are able to restrict access to resources, preventing services and benefits reaching those for whom they are intended. Community access to external resources hinges on a handful of people with instrumental ties to external institutional agents (Langton 2008). In effect they are brokers positioned between the community and institutions in the broader society. The *'big man'* tends to be politically ambitious, has a capacity for dominant public oratory and an affiliation with a prominent land holding clan. Western education and English language skills may also set them apart. *'Big men'* with *'bad'* intent (which should never be assumed) may seek to appropriate social capital by channelling public and communal resources to their own extended family. They are able to influence the inward flow of resources and the distribution of benefits within a community (Martin, 1995: 252).

A *'big man'* may appear to be a spokesman and cultural broker to visiting officials keen to find someone able to represent *'the community'*, but internally people may not share this view (Martin, 1995: 262). While *'big men'* may be influential in non-indigenous structures, they also tend to be disconnected from *"seemingly mundane but important local activities"*, at least in the rural communities Davis (1994: 39) studied. Their ascension to positions of higher authority might be attributable to greater spatial mobility than that available to women who have family responsibilities. Rowse (1992: 55) too has observed men who *"find room for their manoeuvrings in the spaces and competition between government agencies."*

Where particularly dense forms of bonding hold sway in remote Aboriginal communities a false dichotomy can be constructed where *'cultural identity'* and broader *'prosperity'* are perceived as necessarily opposite aspirations. According to Austin-Broos (2011: 129) it is as if Aboriginal people are sometimes expected to eschew the pursuit of all forms of external economic, social and cultural participation in order to be accepted as Aboriginal.

A participant in this study (Interview 10) stated that when Aboriginal people take up education, employment, or other opportunities in the wider society, it can give rise to a concern that close

localised relations will never be the same again. Those seeking to *'leave'* risk the perception they are seeking to break their bonds. According to Interviewee 10, the community attitude may be: *"You leave us and you've disowned us."*

While some social networks and norms tend to be more productive of *'good'* social capital than *'bad'*, all are capable of producing adverse consequences. The family unit, for instance, might generally be considered a source of physical and emotional support for members. Yet even family can produce *'bad'* social capital (Winter, 2000: 32). Excessive *'familism'*, by which he means *"the elevation of family and kinship ties above other types of social obligations"* (Winter, 2000: 3), is not productive of social capital.

There is a substantial literature documenting the incidence of family violence in remote communities (Sam, 1991; Robertson, 2000). The same bonds that solidify family can also create closed social spaces where abusive behaviours might flourish unseen, unreported and unchecked. Victims may feel entrapped, unable to leave or speak out against perpetrators. Dense internal family bonding that results in the unconditional defence of ones *'own mob'* is problematic as previously discussed in sub-section 5.3.1. When practiced in post-contact society the social norm of unconditional family support may enable other behaviours, such as humbugging and substance abuse, to go also unadmonished and unrestrained.

Sharing norms too may be thought a generally positive phenomenon, but they too can give rise to community disharmony. Bauman (2006: 8) notes that conflict can be sparked where it is perceived that kinship obligations and responsibilities are not fulfilled. Martin (1993: 32) describes life in a community where the egalitarian expectation was everyone should receive the same. To check there was a more or less equal distribution of resources, people would *"watchfully monitor and appraise the flows of material and symbolic items"*. Circumstances where someone receives more than another give rise to disharmony.

Vigilant internal policing to ensure people don't stray may be *"cruel and hard"* (Interview 10). This may take the form of ridicule, public tongue lashings, swearing, punishment and violence which all tend to occur in a social space with a *"jural public"* present to validate the consequences (Interview 10). Participant 11 saw a need for *"getting back to basics about how people relate to and communicate with each other."*

Participant 10 observed someone perceived as *'leaving'* can be subjected to derogatory attacks on their identity, such as being referred to as a *"lamington"* or a *"coconut"* (i.e. an Aboriginal person who is depicted *'white on the inside'*). According to Interviewee 11, Aboriginal people can feel pressured to choose between their localised identity and opportunities to participate in broader networks:

You can be an Aboriginal person with your family and cultural life or it's a non-indigenous life, and I think it's a binary opposition. It's 'either/or' rather than 'Well actually you can be in both'. You can be both in an indigenous world and still be strong culturally, but get all the benefits of a non-indigenous world in terms of travel, employment and wealth.

It would be a mistake, however, to interpret constraints on freedom of association as an outback version of the *'tall poppy'* syndrome. According to Participant 8: *"It's not that they reject anyone who does better than them, I don't think that's it."* Generally renowned Aboriginal artists are a celebrated source of group pride, not envy (Interview 8). The crucial difference is that art practice does not involve any sense of breaking from one's *'mob'*; physically, psychologically or culturally. Indeed, an artist sharing the proceeds shores up their bonds and builds social capital.

A participant in this study (Interview 9) stressed that the production of social capital need not be perceived as *"a zero-sum game,"* noting *"obligations to family and culture can be sustained while also building trust on the outside so that people don't feel abandoned"*.

Another participant (Interview 11) stated that, while *'them or us'* attitudes may appear to be a manifestation of irrational jealousy or active sabotaging, *"I think what's behind that is they don't want them to go."* The concern is that those who take up opportunities outside their social group genuinely do risk disconnection from people and place, losing touch with their lifestyle and roots. Interviewee 11 placed the issue in historical context.

I think it's been an issue going right back to Bennelong, this sense of leaving one's own family and this place where you do belong and trying to go into unknown territory and trying to belong there. Right through to Albert Namatjira, right through to contemporary young people going to private schooling. I think it's a huge thing, a huge thing that's pulling them back. How do we overcome it? I think it's a case of working with the young person who's going to have to make that journey, as well as the people affected by that leaving. There is literally a sense of grief and loss there, even if it's an imagined loss, because the person isn't necessarily lost forever and they're not dying, it is just this sense of being left behind and that the relationship will be less than it is now. So fear is a big thing.

A case study by Daly and Smith (2003) concluded that a closed community environment is conducive neither to material improvement nor cultural continuity. Similarly according to Austin-Broos (2011: 64), rather than being seen as somehow undermining culture, prosperity might actually create new opportunities to sustain and practice it. Austin-Broos (2011: 157) argues there is no fixed or inverse relationship between Aboriginal cultural identity and impoverishment:

First nation peoples, in the main, are keen to retain their identities. On the other hand, the poor by and large, would rather not be poor. Therefore these politics seem to pull in opposite directions. One draws away from the mainstream world while the other draws towards it.

7.3.5 Downward Levelling Norms

Portes (1998: 16-17) argues too much dense bonding leads to a downward levelling of group norms. In the absence of social standards, patterns of behaviour such as substance abuse, truancy, vehicle theft, gang culture, vandalism, violence and incarceration may go unremarked and unchecked. Behaviour is personalised rather than being shaped by social benchmarks of acceptability.

Where downward-levelling norms predominate, citizens display little aspiration. There is evidence that a lack of optimism about the future is characteristic of communities where social networks are weak (Johnson et al, 2003: 38). In such places the prevailing view is that striving for achievement - at school, in training, at work, in business or, indeed any field, is futile. Portes (1998: 17) explains why:

[[Individual success stories undermine group cohesion because the latter is precisely grounded on the alleged impossibility of such occurrences. The result is downward levelling norms that operate to keep members of a downtrodden group in place and force the more ambitious to escape from it.

Disadvantaged people tend to regard their life circumstances as unfair and inequitable and, accordingly, they are less likely to see the point of civic engagement, believing little will ever come of it (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). Uslaner (2002) used cross sectional and time series data to argue that there has been a decline in trust over several decades in the USA, a trend attributed to growing economic inequality. According to Uslaner (2002), all sense of hope and optimism drains away from communities that believe they are treated unfairly.

Participant 9 regards a sense of social equality and fairness as a crucial pre-requisite to the production of social capital. People need to feel they will be treated reasonably before they are likely to cooperate with others. A feeling that actions can make a difference is necessary to drive a sense of agency.

I think fairness and trust are part of the same process because if you think the system is fair then you trust it ... Fair makes you feel good, it gives you a sense of autonomy because if it's fair you are going to be treated reasonably if you need to raise your voice. You don't feel unequal.

The members of closed communities have few economic opportunities because residents are poorly connected to education, training and labour markets. Where this is the case some may reason the best economic option open to them is to engage in illegal economic

activities. Martin (1993: 172) describes life in a remote Aboriginal community where breaking into the school, the shop, the administration building, the workshop, and staff housing were commonplace. He found that youth *“created their own worlds of meaning and significant practices, such as fighting, drinking, and damage to staff or community’ property”* (Martin, 1993: 172). Gang culture and related patterns of behaviour such as substance abuse had become acceptable normalised behaviour (Martin, 1993: 196).

There is also a substantial body of research documenting petrol sniffing amongst youth in remote communities (Morice et al, 1981; Burns et al, 1995; D’Abbs & MacLean, 2000; Mosey, 2000). Brady (1988 & 1989) found such behaviour tends to go un-reproached because individuals are seen as having an autonomous right to exercise personal choice. McCoy (2004: 165) understands petrol sniffing as a way in which some young people seek to attract the attention of older men.

Contemporary social circumstances can be contrasted with traditional desert society where *Tjukurrpa* provided the internal authority structure that guided and restrained behaviour. A sense of responsibility was grown over time as the initiated became increasingly steeped in the law (McCoy, 2004: 28). Social order was achieved without any hierarchy or top-down system of state directed command and control.

A participant in this study (Interview 8) regarded traditional institutional arrangements (*‘the rules of the game’*) as fractured in places, and some communities in need of shared guiding principles for working together:

So now you’ve got this situation where the rules required to maintain the social capital have been partially destroyed, not totally because the bonding is still happening, but the rules about how that is to be used have been broken at the same time as these destructive elements have been introduced ... What I’ve come to realise, somewhat reluctantly, is that you actually have to have those rules for social control or other negative events will dominate.

Another participant in this study (Interview 11) also noted the institutional arrangements that allow people to deal with their differences can become dissipated:

Protocols around learning and enforcement of protocols have broken down, rights of passage have broken down ... I feel there’s no clear pathway for people, whether it’s young people or elders, to enhance their sense of belonging. In places where culture and law are still intact I suspect there is still scope for those who choose to go down that path.

Participant 2 described generally peaceable relations amongst different language groups in one region. Notwithstanding a *“few little tiffs and arguments”*, there are no serious long running disputes. *“The only feuding I’ve seen is generally alcohol induced, but there’s no form of on-going tensions that people can’t work together like in a lot of other communities”*.

On-going friction has been avoided by adhering to cultural protocols that permit neighbouring groups to co-exist. In the 1970’s when various groups were compelled to move off their own country traditional owners had allocated different areas in the town precinct for their residential use as living areas. There were places where each group could feel secure. Participant 2 commented:

The basic framework that’s been set down and structured through a complex law and culture system across four language groups has ensured we don’t have too much conflict ... If we call ourselves Aboriginal people, we have a responsibility to maintain the system that was given to us ... We still have people alive that were part of the old protocols.

The achievement of relative social harmony here, when it has so conspicuously not been achieved elsewhere in similar circumstances, is attributed to the foresight of elders and recognition by following generations that sustaining the cooperative foundation established across language groups does require that they continue to respect and maintain the *‘visitor’* protocols. Participant 2 saw these as effectively having bridged the language groups to create a platform for cooperation in economic and social spheres:

I think because there’s a working relationship and respectful relationship

between Aboriginal people ... we've been able to at least continue a coordinated effort to create change, even though sometimes things are incremental or sometimes just basically stagnant, but at least people ... are working together to try and do something. There's a lot of Aboriginal ownership, both from a traditional owners point of view and an economic point of view, ... so you're able to have some say over what happens, being the majority of the population.

A new pan-Aboriginal identity may be emerging. Over time the co-location of different Aboriginal people has resulted in inter-marriage across groups, helping to bridge people together (Participant 2). Co-location of different groups has also fed the emergence of a common creole that combines aspects of several Aboriginal languages including English. *"Language is now becoming so intertwined that you are now getting a very strong identity around the use of creole"*.

One of the critical features required of any set of replacement institutional arrangements is, not necessarily agreement on a unified set of values, but mechanisms capable of resolving conflict and dissent when it occurs. Traditional society had its share of religious doctrinal differences and fierce disputes over women, but it also had ways to put society back together again. It is the communal exercising of a complex set of cultural protocols and relationships that matters. Participant 2 stressed that communities can *"actually all live together"* given the right social conditions.

7.4 Ideal Communities

One of the many contrasts between the ideal-type communities of *Liyan* and *Wandang* is that the former produces only *'good'* social capital, the latter only *'bad'*.

At *Liyan* *'good'* social capital is produced through participation in networks centred on activities such as sport, youth activities and men's groups. The benefits of social capital are evident in broader areas of life such as health and emotional wellbeing, aspirations and economic development.

The prevailing attitude at *Liyan* can be summarised as *'us and them'*. Citizens are encouraged to engage in multiple networks. By virtue of doing so they exclude the possibility of any one clique ever being able to exercise social control. There are just too many open *'gates'* leading into this community for anyone to ever shut them all. Residents see no contradiction in maintaining both a strong localised identity and broader engagement, the former being perceived as laying the foundation for the latter. The end result is that *Liyan* is strategically networked with the wider world.

Those who seek education, employment and training opportunities are perceived as having feet in two *'camps'*, not as seeking to *'leave'* their community behind in any sense, culturally or physically. But the proviso is that everyone *'gift'* back skills, networks and resources that enable their people to strengthen governance, management and socio-economic circumstance. The principle of reciprocity still reigns at *Liyan*.

Liyan promotes community conversations about which values and behaviours people wish to retain and which they might wish to modify in response to changed social circumstances. *Humbugging* behaviour is rejected out of hand, and is regarded as at odds with fundamental life principles of respecting elders and *'holding'* (caring for) the most vulnerable. Personal material possessions and income are regarded as off limits to demands. The norm is that such behaviour is only considered permissible in the cultural realm, such as during ceremony or the distribution of food following a successful bush hunting trip.

Aboriginal law may have been modified by colonisation, but *Tjukurrpa* ceremonies are widely practiced together with other neighbouring groups across a wide region that extends well beyond *Liyan*. Young people are active participants, experiencing the restraint of elders. But young people are also members of sporting teams and youth groups where the guidance of mature people is also evident. The *Liyan* model is not just some idealised recreation of a romanticised past. Social order is achieved as much through consensus about acceptable behavioural norms in responses to contemporary community issues, such as alcohol, as it is by adherence to ancient norms.

At *Liyan* people see nothing inherently contradictory between retaining a strong cultural identity inclusive of localised bonds and a modernity that embraces broader bridging connections. There is both willingness and capacity to strategically engage outwards. The ideas and resources of other communities, the academy, business and philanthropists are all valued and harnessed in support of locally driven initiatives. Younger residents routinely travel away to attend boarding school, train or work; but return home when they can, bringing skills and experiences with them to share. The residents of *Liyan* have multiple entry points into the wider world.

While it is early days, there are positive signs of a new remote economy emerging that builds on identifiable cultural strengths. *Liyan* has a developing a vibrant '*hybrid economy*' that promises to fill the vacuum left by the collapse of the earlier customary and pastoral economies. There are growing opportunities for people in diverse areas such as heritage protection, bush tucker, the carbon economy, land care, music recording, art, design, sports, service delivery, management, cultural tourism and other enterprise. These economic development opportunities work in partnership with external parties that bring relevant expertise and experience to bear alongside Aboriginal knowledge and capacities. The residents of *Liyan* are connected into wider networks that foster broader co-operation, even with people and institutions they don't know well.

Wandang is, as in all things, positioned at the other end of the spectrum to *Liyan*. It is only at *Wandang* that '*bad*' social capital is produced. Associated social outcomes include violence, trauma, low life expectancy and frequent funerals. Much of the youth population experiences detention. Seen through a social capital analytical lens, the woes of *Wandang* can be understood as being those of a network impoverished community.

A period of incarceration is the established norm for males. *Wandang* is devoid of any mechanisms of community authority capable of delivering a semblance of social order. It is not just that residents do not practice the Aboriginal law of *Tjukurrpa*. They do not participate in any activity where older males are present. Since the men have been '*gone*', youth gang sub-culture has become the most prominent feature of community life. Their '*tribal*' tag identifiers are seemingly sprayed on every available surface.

At *Wandang* children do not have stability, routine and structure in their lives. Those who find it too noisy to sleep at home due to overcrowding or partying roam the streets in groups. They are involved in activities such as vandalism, graffiti, petrol sniffing, breaking and entering public buildings, vehicle theft, and joy riding.

It is not the norm for children to regularly attend school, as education is not valued. Those who do well at school and those who secure jobs all risk disparagement. The prevailing ethos is one of '*downward egalitarianism*', an expectation no individual or family should ever receive more than another.

The community is closed to all external influence. Interaction occurs only within. In sharp contrast to *Liyan*, the behavioural norms and networks of *Wandang* people are shaped internally. There are no external influences because there is no broader engagement. *Wandang* identity and behaviour operates entirely, and only, within localised networks. People are closed off to both the opportunities (and the risks) of seeking to effectively function in the wider world. Residents feel that they are compelled to choose between their commitment to their own cultural identity and their full participation in the contemporary social, political and economic life.

Community attitudes towards the wider world are closed and insular. There is conflict between various localised social groups. There are regularly suspicions about '*the other*', indigenous or otherwise. Each extended family group fashions an adversarial stance towards '*outsiders*' of all kinds. People are not free to engage with the wider world because a small clique exercises control over who has access to external resources and support. The prevailing attitude is '*us or them*'. People feel pressured to choose the values and lifestyle of their own '*mob*' over any form of outward engagement. Regardless of whatever social or material improvements might be forsaken, residents reason the costs of '*leaving*' outweigh the benefits of '*staying put*'.

Vulnerable people are continuously exposed to unwanted aggressive demands at *Wandang*. Nor is there any social sanction against violence. It is commonplace. Both victims and perpetrators carry its physical and psychological scars. Here the victims of violence and crime do not seek help from police or other services because the authorities are not trusted and group solidarity is placed at risk by doing so. Whatever assistance institutions might be able to provide, it is

simply not sought.

Despite having similar resource endowments the two communities have very different local economies. At *Wandang* there is no economic participation or commercial activity. No one has completed high school, no one has post-school qualifications and no one is in business. The few employment opportunities that arise tend to be short-lived. *Wandang* is a *'welfare economy'*. Watching television is the predominant activity for most people.

7.5 In Between 'Good' and 'Bad'

It is not any particular social structure per se that gives shape and meaning to social capital, but rather its normative content by which I mean the principles of *'right action'* accepted by the members of a social group as a guide to acceptable behaviour. A participant in this research (Interview 2) felt there is a need for Aboriginal society to continually reassess its position: *"What are the values people want to maintain, core values? How are these core values accommodated within the ever changing environment of a society that's rapidly changing?"*

While terms such as *'good'* and *'bad'* social capital may be conceptually useful *'shorthand'*, in practice there is no clear-cut distinction. All capital can produce *'public goods'* and *'public bads'*. A steel plant, for example, can churn out tractors or guns. What it produced is determined by prevailing social conditions. A participant in this study (Interview 7) nailed the critical point, that while *"social relationships can be helpful, they can also be challenging and problematic all at the same time."*

Just as television channels can broadcast material of varying quality, so too are social units such as a football team or family capable of transmitting *'good'* and *'bad'* norms. The same social network that disseminates information about how to improve health and wellbeing is also potentially capable of promoting acceptance of violence. According to Falk (2000):

Shared values are the crystals around which networks grow. They can make the difference between good and bad networks. Anti-social, aggressive or embittered values by themselves will lead to unproductive, negative networks and interactions. Shared values based on individual worth and collective endeavour will be more likely to be productive, positive and lead to wellbeing.

Social capital theory will only be useful if policy makers and practitioners are able to predict if an investment in a social network is likely to produce *'good'* or *'bad'* social capital. Will the sports carnival produce fun or a fight? In the previous section I described contrasting qualitative differences in the normative content of the social capital produced by the hypothetical *Liyan* and *Wandang* communities. The challenge for policymakers and practitioners is to implement strategies capable of tilting the balance in favour of producing *'good'* rather than *'bad'* social capital. In order to do this, it is necessary to understand the particular social conditions under which a social unit functions. It is the issue to which I turn in the final chapter.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter I revisit the study objectives from chapter 1 and sum up what has been learnt about each one. I consider the possible direction of further research beyond this thesis, proposing conclusions that might be tested through empirical work. I then consider implications of the thesis for policy and practice. I conclude with a brief reflection on my own research journey.

8.2 Revisiting Study Objectives

8.2.1 Overview

The objectives of this study, as outlined in chapter 1, are in summary:

- i. to identify the strengths and limitations of applying a social capital analytical framework;
- ii. to describe how social capital was produced in traditional society;
- iii. to analyse the impact of colonisation on social capital production;
- iv. to describe the production of social capital in contemporary remote communities; and,
- v. to consider how *'social capital theory'* might account for Aboriginal disadvantage.

8.2.2 Strengths and Limitations

In chapter 3 I argued that social capital theory had two potential strengths and several limitations when applied in a remote Australian Aboriginal context.

The first strength is that it provides a different way of thinking about remote Aboriginal community disadvantage (Lahn, 2012). It is important to be specific about the ways in which social capital theory is an aid to thinking:

- i. Social capital theory is a conceptual framework that can be used to frame useful relational questions about communities such as:
 - a. What social networks operate?
 - b. What social processes produce them?
 - c. What are the prevailing norms of trust and reciprocity?
 - d. In what ways has social change impacted on the production of social capital?
 - e. What *'good'* social capital is being produced?
 - f. What *'bad'* social capital is being produced?
 - g. What are the particular social conditions that might account for the production of *'good'* and *'bad'* outcomes?
- ii. The conceptual distinction between bonding and bridging social capital is useful in explaining how it is that communities may have stocks of social capital, but nonetheless remain impoverished. Social capital theory suggests it may be due to insufficient bridging social capital. Bonds between similarly disadvantaged people may serve important social purposes, such as mutual support and protection, but enabling them to rise out of poverty is not one of them. In theory bridging social capital is required for that.

- iii. Another aid to thinking is the conceptual insight that capital can be transmuted from one form into another. Perhaps nowhere is the extent of this more on display than with desert people. In traditional society the natural capital embodied in land solidified the connections between people as they conducted ritual and ceremony, and hunted and gathered together in groups. In post-contact society there are more opportunities to construct social capital than in traditional society. Vehicles, stereos, sport, houses, gambling, drinking, funerals, a term of imprisonment, government programs, corporations, the telephone and the internet can all be strategically turned into social capital as described in chapter 6. No longer are desert people limited to the traditional means of social production. Now they have access to '*blackfella*' and '*whitefella*' sources of social capital. Desert society has demonstrated a capacity to produce this resource in new and innovative ways when older avenues have been closed off.

The second strength is that examination of processes of social capital production, in a vastly different context to that within which the theory was developed, provides opportunities to refine theory:

- i. My study makes it clear that different societies may produce social capital in culturally distinctive ways. The social structures and processes that generate the resource are grounded in a particular place, people and habitus. Social capital theory has tended to attach significance to '*western*' social structures such as the nuclear family and club membership. The evidence from this study is that the relevance of social structures needs to be discovered, not assumed.
- ii. A social structure, such as a family or a gang or a corporation, is neither '*good*' nor '*bad*' of itself. It is what its members' value and do that determines the normative content of social capital. Furthermore social norms morph over time, perhaps in response to exposure to new cultural influences. The structural unit remains, but it functions in a different way.
- iii. Bourdieu (1986) elaborates ways in which forms of capital can work ultimately in the service of financial capital. It may be so in capitalist societies, but cannot be assumed in a non-material culture where the value system may be more concerned with using business and money for social ends (rather than the other way around).

I now revisit the limitations of social capital theory to consider how they might be overcome:

- i. Firstly the language of '*capital*' may be a barrier to the use of ideas related to social capital. The term '*social capital*' does not have currency amongst desert people nor amongst many people who work with them. Desert people have their own culturally distinctive language and symbols to describe and represent their connections. There is reluctance in the academy to employ '*social capital*' because it risks a reductionist conflation of a complex Aboriginal sociability. There is a fear that cultural distinctiveness and complexity will be compressed into a narrow and over-simplified conceptual frame. Those in the academy may prefer to utilise theories other than social capital to analyse relational issues. Social capital has never been, and is never likely to be, the pre-dominant framework for analysis in the Aboriginal sector. Arguably in order to progress dialogue about relational issues in communities it is first necessary to render ideas about social capital into readily accessible and acceptable language.
- ii. The foundational ideas about social capital were initially produced in a mono-cultural white western context. Putnam (1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1999, 2000 & 2002) did not '*stress test*' his theory by examining its production amidst conditions of cultural difference and diversity. Since his initial work, however, many others have done so internationally (Brown & Ashman, 1996; Heller, 1996; Fox, 1996 & 1997; Woolcock, 1998; Chhibber, 1999; Mondal, 2000; Isham & Kahkonen, 2002; Isham et al, 2002; Daniere et al, 2002; Hitt et al, 2002). Applying the concept in this way is a means of honing and universalising theory over time. Using the concept in ever more diverse cultural milieu enables it to overcome ethnocentric origins.

- iii. There is the tendency to overstate the explanatory power of social capital. The theory purports to '*explain*' too much at times, inadequately distinguishing between plausible hypothesis and empirical evidence. It is not that social capital theory is of no analytical use, but rather that not all issues of community disadvantage are issues of relationship. Caution is especially required in respect of desert people as policy is littered with unfulfilled promises of social transformation (Martin, 2006). Social capital theory also risks fuelling false expectations to the extent it overstates the potential benefits of this resource. Beneficial effects need to be demonstrated through empirical research built upon evidence collected in remote community context.
- iv. Power relations impact on the production of social capital, and in post contact society these have been asymmetric for desert people. Studies of the social networks between people can be usefully informed by a deep understanding of power as Bourdieu (1986) demonstrates. Social capital theory risks inferring disadvantaged people bring about their own circumstance by failing to develop the right kind of networks. The implication is that disadvantage is due to localised rather than structural factors. Both structural and relational factors are implicated in remote disadvantage. Laying stress on community level relations alone risks deflecting attention away from other factors such as state or market failures. Social capital theory can only provide a partial explanation of remote disadvantage if it is devoid of any analysis of the impact of colonisation, exclusionary practices, and minority status. Power relations with missionaries, pastoralists, and the state were marked by deep inequalities, injustice, and entrenched distrust. By understanding how desert people have demonstrated agency in the face of power, by conceptualising separate '*whitfella*' and '*blackfella*' domains, it becomes possible to understand how they have managed to retain and regain some of their capital. It is not possible to account for the current socio-economic status of Aboriginal people without analysing power relations.
- v. Processes of social capital production are gendered as demonstrated in many aspects of the social organisation of desert people. In traditional society men and women had co-dependent relations, both playing significant but nevertheless separate roles in the customary economy and in religious life. Men had more authority than women, although the latter always had agency. Now I argue the role of men is much diminished. It is not possible to understand what has happened to the reserves of social capital in remote communities without analysing how the role of men has fundamentally changed. It is not asserted that gender is necessarily a key explanatory factor in all contexts, only that analysis is incomplete if it does not explore the possibility that it may be.

Social capital is theory in need of further development (Edwards & Foley, 1998; Hofferth et al, 1999). There is an opportunity to further extend understandings by learning lessons from its application in remote Aboriginal communities. The greatest limitation of social capital theory in a remote Aboriginal community context is that disadvantaged people are depicted as '*lacking*' in social capital, thereby further contributing to a discourse of deficit focussed on social dysfunction and pathology. It is conceivable that desert people perceive themselves as culturally different, rather than disadvantaged.

8.2.3 Traditional Mode of Social Capital Production

The second objective of this study was to describe how social capital was produced in traditional society. Examination of social capital in this cultural context broadens understanding of the myriad ways in which the resource may be produced. The general principle underlying social capital theory, the notion that it is a resource to be found wherever norms of trust and reciprocity operate, may be universal. However, the social structures and processes involved in its production are not generic. Social capital is generated in different ways by different societies to serve their own imperatives.

Pre-contact society was a highly evolved social system that enabled people to function collectively and socially reproduce in a harsh natural environment. By drawing on the classical work of anthropologists like Myers (1991), and then re-interpreting their work through a social

capital analytic lens, I have sought to reveal the traditional mode of social capital production. While the social structures and norms of desert society have long been known to anthropology, they have seldom found their way into the social capital literature.

Desert people had their own way of establishing a platform of social cooperation. In traditional society bonds were forged through socialisation within an extended family network (*walytja*), by accentuation of common ties to ancestral country (*ngurra*) and through inter-generational processes of cultural education (*kanyirninpa*). Bridges to more distant people were cemented through ceremonial and religious ties (*Tjukurrpa*), the operation of a complex social classification system (*gurrutu*), and through trade (*wunan*). All of these relationships involve forms of reciprocal co-dependence in a culture that has always placed a premium on relatedness. Across vast swathes of remote Australia elaborate systems of bonding and bridging have operated for millennia to construct and extend social networks.

As previously discussed, under the cultural education system called *kanyirninpa*, it was senior people who carried responsibility for the cultural education of each younger generation coming through. These relationships built networks across generations. *'Holding'* is a core value in many remote communities. The practice maintained connections between generations. Examination of social capital production in a remote community context illuminates the potential contribution inter-generational bonds can make to the process. While the value of such bonds is recognised in the mainstream literature (Granville & Hatton-Yeo: 2002), it is not prominent in social capital theory.

I argue that desert people's notion that they are in relationship with country potentially informs social capital theory. A strong sense of belonging to the land is fundamental to the traditional mode of social capital production. Aboriginal people regard country as a source of spiritual strength and rejuvenation, especially in times of stress (Merlan, 1989: 69). It also furnishes a means of establishing lifelong connection between fellow countrymen based on shared identity and, furthermore, provides a solid foundation from which desert people can confidently engage outwards with the wider world from a position of felt inner strength and cultural security. Connections to country are, I suggest, a primary source of social capital in desert society, although the manner of its production may adapt over time (Merlan, 1998: 121-122).

Theorizing about social capital assumes a fundamental human need for social connection and affiliation (Levitas, 1998; Fukuyama, 1992). It rejects a narrow classical economic model that positions self-interest as the sole driver of human endeavour. The connection of people to each other that can arise from common ties to land and environment does not feature prominently in the social capital literature, although there are exceptions (Compton & Beeton, 2012; Halstead & Deller, 2015).

Arguably belonging to country can be an important source of social capital in any society, although suppressed as it currently may be in some. Merlan, (1998: 174) notes that belonging is a notion of variable intensity rather than an absolute. While ontological underpinnings vary, the idea that connections between people may stem from the natural world is not a phenomenon unique to Aboriginal culture (Flora, 1998; Naess, 1989; Taylor & Zimmerman, 2005; Kheel, 1990). People in many societies may experience themselves as part of a living Earth that nurtures and provides a stable mental and emotional foundation for life.

If *'belonging'* were to gain recognition as a universal form of social capital it might provide one avenue by which social capital theory could demonstrate its capacity to transcend its narrow ethnocentric conceptual origins. Desert people certainly illustrate that social capital can be generated out of a shared sense of belonging to country. In effect the process involves a leveraging of the natural capital embodied in land and environment and its transmutation into social connections and solidarity between people.

In summary social capital theorising ought to account for the intrinsic relationship between people and place as much as it accounts for the relationship between people and people. Doing so might contribute to a reconfiguration of ideas about the linkage between social and natural capital by drawing in the ideas of scholars who emphasise the importance of place and the global commons (Milun, 2010).

8.2.4 Impact of Colonisation

The third objective of this study was to consider the impact of colonisation on social processes in remote communities. Colonising forces impacted adversely on traditional bridging social capital production (eroding *Tjukkrpa*, *gurrutu* and *wunan*). They are also implicated in the destruction of bonding resources of *ngurra* and *kanyirninpa* in places. The extended family structure of *walytja* still remains, but its normative content can be hollowed out.

Relations between Aboriginal and mainstream society are vexed. According to Onyx and Bullen (2000) an expectation of fair treatment is a necessary precondition to the development of social trust. In the case of desert society, unfair treatment added to a pre-existing cultural reticence about broader engagement. The experience of colonisation left many desert people disinclined to place trust in mainstream society. Social trust can be a scarce commodity in the desert.

Social trust is also an issue between desert people. Chapter 4 described classical features of traditional society that built a broader social unity between neighbouring groups. There was an internal authority structure and broadly accepted rules of civic participation necessary for effective societal functioning. These features furnished a spirituality and code of acceptable behaviour that made it possible to build social networks across extended family groups.

According to social capital theory, communities need social trust in order to function effectively. It is what enables different groups to cooperate together. In traditional society alliances between neighbouring groups were forever subject to sensitive negotiation. Sustaining trust beyond extended family and friends has always been a strategic challenge for desert society where the norm is to regard outsiders cautiously. When disputation occurred it was strategic for people to move apart for a time to keep the peace until enduring harmony could be restored. Ceremonial practices and physical punishment were also used to mediate conflict. It may have been fragile at times, but there was bridging social capital.

There are communities where the ancient bridging mechanisms are diminished or no longer operable and people have only reserves of bonding social capital to fall back upon. Rapid de-population due to massacre and disease resulted in decreased cultural practices in many regions. However, colonisation had variable impacts in different places. The bridging capacity of *Tjukurrpa*, *gurrutu* and *wunan* was not entirely lost.

Traditional bridging mechanisms were disrupted when people were permanently dislocated from their ancestral land onto country belonging to others. It occurred without the prior permission of traditional owners being sought or granted and therefore was not anticipated, planned or negotiated. The legacy is unresolved tensions between social groups. In desert culture dislocated people never rise above secondary status of 'visitor' (Merlan, 1998: 59). They do not enjoy the self-assurance and connection of those who belong and who can rightfully walk around assertively on their country. The 'mixing up' of people from all over continues as a source of social tension. Where agreed protocols once provided a framework for managing disputes, conflicting parties might now struggle to reconcile.

While stocks of bridging social capital may have eroded away, reserves of bonding social capital continue to exist in large measure in many communities. In traditional society small and healthy extended family groups sustained themselves right across the continent, even in the harshest environment. Today *walytja* remains a primary unit producing bonds in desert communities, the source of much physical and emotional support.

However *walytja* may not be all it once was. Chapter 5 discussed family separation as a consequence of actions by church and state and how gender relations have been fundamentally altered. In post-contact society it became possible for Aboriginal women to live apart from Aboriginal men, as domestic workers or partners of non-Aboriginal men. Receipt of individual welfare entitlements also enabled women and men to live independently, breaking from previously co-dependent relations. Women still play key roles, but more than once men have lost their role as providers.

A pre-condition to the production of social capital is a sense that life is meaningful and worth living (Onyx & Bullen, 2000). That Aboriginal men generally still have this sense can no longer be taken for granted. Those who enjoyed a strong and positive masculine identity as hunters and lawmen in the customary economy, and as stockmen in the pastoral economy, may now try to find identity as a 'community' of fighters, drinkers or prisoners. Men seem to be struggling

to find a new and positive sense of themselves. The impact is inter-generational, for processes of cultural education for boys cannot operate in circumstances where men are not able to fulfil their *'holding'* responsibilities.

Traditional society attached great importance to giving people a clear sense of their place in the world. Knowing one's *ngurra* and the stories associated with it was an essential aspect of Aboriginality. There were mutual and reinforcing ties to both people and place. The pastoral economy could be a cruel experience, but generally it did enable people to continue to live in proximity to their ancestral country and maintain their relationships with it and, consequently, with each other. As discussed in chapter 5, it was the collapse in demand for station labour that dislocated most people.

In those communities where the bonding derived from *ngurra* and *kanyirrinpa* have been weakened, arguably there is a greater reliance placed on *walytja* to sustain close ties than ever before. Merlan (1998: 81) describes one place where the *ngurra-walytja* connection was under pressure: *"only a few people still have the sense of inheritance of clan in place and the knowledge of connection between clans and particular places; in some cases, such information is diffuse or vague; in others, completely obscure."* *Walytja* identification with particular places and the storying of country is attenuated in circumstances where the ability to traverse the country has been diminished (Merlan, 1998: 96).

Social capital theory understands disadvantage as a consequence of stocks of bonding and bridging social capital being out of balance. The hypothesis is that too much intense bonding crowds out bridging social capital. However, I have uncovered little to support this hypothesis in remote Australia. The evidence presented in this thesis is that it is those whose bonds remain culturally and socially strong and intact who are best placed to produce bridging social capital. It is those whose bonding social capital has been hollowed out that are least able to build bridges.

8.2.5 Contemporary Social Capital

Desert society continues to morph. The story of social capital production is one of both continuity and change, with factors of ancient and more recent origin both at work. In contemporary communities new means of social production are available as a result of exposure to other cultural influences that cannot be understood neatly as being wholly destructive or constructive of social capital.

Aspects of western material culture have been culturally assimilated into post-contact society. The expectation of desert people, as always, is that the social use of all things should be maximised, regardless of source or original purpose. In chapter 6 I described how desert people have harnessed and re-shaped the cash economy and various western technologies as collective goods. Their utility lies in attracting, building, reinforcing and sustaining social networks with others. Sport, art and funerals are now prime means of reinforcing social bonds. Bonds might also be forged through participation in drinking and gambling circles and a shared experience of imprisonment.

Desert people have a relational identity in the sense that it is participation in social networks that gives meaning to their lives and people are always understood as socially obligated and accountable to each other. From an early age children are socialised to share generously and reciprocate. People invest substantial time in sustaining and seeking to extend networks. Social interaction is frequent and emotionally intense. There is a persistent drive to build and sustain widespread connection, achieved as in the past by demonstrating generosity, compassion and reciprocity towards others. Over a lifetime people grow their networks outwards, ever seeking to expand the range of their relations.

There is creativity in transforming any form of capital into social capital. In traditional society the norm of routinely sharing natural resources, such as bush tucker and ochre, built relatedness. Any excess resource was redistributed to others. In contemporary society opportunities to transmute capital from one form into another have expanded. The physical capital embodied in vehicles and other western technologies is converted to social capital by pooling their usage. The cultural capital embodied in artwork is transformed into social capital by redistributing income derived from sale back through *walytja*. Cash (financial capital) generates social capital by funding collective activities such as visits to family and friends, funeral attendance, or bouts of social binge drinking. Irrespective of whether the income source is welfare, work or gambling this is the case. Even the purposes of government funding programs, intended to serve the

wider community, can be subverted to build localised forms of social capital, regardless of what policy-makers may have intended (Folds, 2001).

Desert people, I argue, invest in sustaining and seeking to further extend their social networks. Bourdieu (1986), as explained in chapter 2, understood social capital as essentially an instrumental resource in the service of financial capital. However, in a non-material culture, this process can function in reverse. All manner of capitals, sourced from all over, are daily reformed into social capital. In desert society it is not what a person earns or owns that matters so much as the extent of their webs of connection.

Norms spread through networks, but the speed at which they do so depends on the size and nature of social networks. Traditional Aboriginal society was nomadic and low density. The transmission of information was achieved through mechanisms such as trade and ceremonial gatherings, but it is unlikely to have been rapid writes Keen (2004: 89), at least in arid regions:

The wider dissemination of information relied on travel by foot and watercraft in conjunction with memory and speech. Its speed of diffusion depended in part on the number of hearers at any one time, on population density, the structure of social networks, and the control of information flow between social networks. In the arid zone, with a population density 1% of that of the tropical coasts, the flow of information would have been very slow.

Changes in population concentration can accelerate the transmission of information and behaviour, and thus the production of social capital. Contact amongst desert people became more intense once people moved from a low-density nomadic existence into large communities where many people interact regularly. In contemporary society, as described in chapter 4, people from many family groups live together in larger communities.

Technology such as telephones and the internet, also enable hundreds of people to have regular social interaction. Norms of interpersonal behaviour are transmitted quickly, irrespective of whether they are *'good'* or *'bad'*. Desert people can now drive into town or head back to country. As Cullen and Whiteford (2001: 12) note:

Social interaction can have negative as well as positive effects - as good behaviour spreads, so does bad ... Networks can just as easily influence and reinforce bad choices as they can good.

It is not suggested ease of communication necessarily produces *'bad'* social capital, only that where *'bad'* norms exist they spread more easily. An analogy might be drawn with a rapid transport network, or alternatively the speed of infection, where population is concentrated. If there was trouble in traditional society it was isolated and people simply moved away from each other until it could be resolved. Now when conflict occurs it stays and spreads quickly leaving an enduring legacy of tension from which there may be little escape.

8.2.6 Social Capital and Remote Disadvantage

The term *'bad'* social capital refers to social networks that are inward-focused and restrictive (Falk, 2000). The knowledge and information they draw upon are limited and social networks narrow. The social capital produced under these circumstances takes a *'bad'* or toxic form that permits excessive demands to be made on the most vulnerable, insular attitudes to prevail, powerful *'gatekeepers'* to exercise social control, and a process of downward levelling of social norms to sap aspiration and hope (Portes, 1998). Onyx and Bullen (2000: 130) write that, where communities operate under duress, feelings of low esteem, despair, pessimism and a widespread sense of fatalism tend to predominate. I have argued that these patterns of behaviour, originally described by Portes (1998) in a Puerto Rican enclave community in New York, can also be found in remote Aboriginal communities.

While some social networks and norms tend to be more productive of *'good'* social capital than *'bad'*, all are capable of producing adverse consequences. The family unit, for instance, might generally be considered a source of physical and emotional support for members, yet even family can produce *'bad'* social capital (Winter, 2000: 32). The same bonds that solidify family can also create closed social spaces where abusive behaviours flourish. There is a substantial literature documenting the incidence of family violence in remote communities.

Dense family bonding that results in the unconditional defence of ones *'own mob'* may be problematic. Writing from a general social capital perspective Winter (2000: 3) suggests that excessive *'familism'*, is not helpful. Putnam (et al 1993) argue that too much interpersonal bonding makes for overly dense bonding relationships that close off the possibilities of broader social capital production (Putnam et al 1993). He posits an inverse relationship between dense bonds with one's immediate circle of family and friends and weak ties with the wider world (Granovetter, 1973; Cullen & Whiteford, 2001: 9). In these circumstances, so the argument goes, the strong ties that enable people to act together also exclude non-members (Cullen & Whiteford: 2001: 12). On this basis social capital theorists argue that localised bonds ought to be counter-balanced by looser bridging ties that open groups to external influence, opportunity and resource support beyond family and friends.

An alternative view is that levels of interpersonal and social trust are actually positively correlated. High levels of interpersonal trust that enable people to bond can also be understood as actually laying a solid foundation for confident broader engagement (Brehm & Rahn, 1997). A trusting outlook originally develops through socialisation within the family (Hogan & Owen, 2000: 91-93; Onyx & Bullen, 2000: 124). Once developed social trust tends to remain stable throughout the life course. Interaction with groups outside the family may be less important to the development of a trusting outlook than the sense of trust ingrained within the family (Uslaner, 2002). According to this perspective trust in one domain engenders trust in others. Conversely in communities without localised trust, not only do groups tend not to trust each other, they also tend to profoundly distrust the state and everyone else as well (Cullen & Whiteford, 2001: 19).

While there are contested views about how social trust is built, either way the problem is the same: disadvantaged people need more outward looking connections to escape their socio-economic circumstance. For the social capital perspective is that where insular attitudes prevail, the flow of resources, services, benefits and opportunities to those for whom they are intended are inhibited. A participant in this study (Interview 10) stated *"The most successful Aboriginal people I've met have a highly strategic way of maintaining their distinct identity"* which draws strength from a sense of their distinctiveness, providing a basis from which to engage with the wider world rather than dividing off from it.

8.3 Towards Social Capital Inspired Policy and Practice?

8.3.1 Overview

This section is about the renewal of Aboriginal policy required to put the theory of social capital into the practice of the Third Way, as discussed in chapter 2. It considers how relationships between remote communities, the state and other sectors might change and the challenges involved in doing so. It also provides some brief project examples.

Social capital theory purports to provide insights into the causes, consequences and possible ways of addressing disadvantage. If social capital really is key to ameliorating remote community disadvantage, there are profound implications for policy and practice (Easterly, 2000).

The tendency of current policy approaches is to regard remote community disadvantage as an almost intractable problem, a field within which much has been tried and, where arguably, outcomes have too often ultimately proved disappointing (Austin-Broos, 2011; Head, 2008; Altman, 2014; Martin, 2006). Limited progress has been made towards eliminating disparities in most areas (SCRGSP, 2014).

Social capital might provide an alternative way forward. Biddle (2011: 4) writes that more than *"an explanation for Indigenous disadvantage, social capital is a potential lever through which governments can improve outcomes."* Austin-Broos (2011: 162) argues engagement with the wider world is a necessary aspect of a strategic approach in order that Aboriginal people might have opportunities to develop new competencies including civic participation.

8.3.2 A New State

Aboriginal communities have been likened to failed states (Dillon & Westbury: 2007), but the state may also have its failings. The state is currently the primary source of financial resources in many remote Aboriginal communities, although not all. Outward community engagement still tends to occur through the narrow prism of visiting officials.

A participant in this research (Interview 2) advocated “*a community development approach based on what Australia does internationally*”, suggesting it was “*weird*” that Australia delivered international aid through agencies like AUSAID, while not practicing a similar community development approach with Aboriginal people. They described their experience:

What we are finding is that government initiatives are inflexible to accommodate the aspirations of the community ... It [the system] needs to have much more ‘freeing of the reins’ from government agencies to give some trust to the communities to be able to manage resources ... The future relies on governments realising they have to provide resources [because Aboriginal people] are Australian citizens. But at the same time they’ve got to give some ownership to the ... community to take ownership of a perceived problem.

Another participant in this study (Interview 6) observed that “*one size fits all*” short-sighted policy changes can destroy working relationships painstakingly built under previous arrangements. The example cited involved changes to government funding processes that undermined trusting relationships built under previous regimes.

Participant 8 cautioned that a state driven approach ultimately inhibits social capital formation.

This is something I’ve pushed from the beginning, that governments of all persuasions really want to push social capital; except for one of its pillars, ‘social agency’. And there is quite a lot of indirect evidence to suggest that this horizontal social capital stuff works really well, and probably only works really well, when the initiative comes from the people themselves. I have urged governments to accept the fact that social capital is not something you can manufacture, but that is precisely what they want to do. It’s more organic. You can provide the right ingredients to grow ‘social capital’, but you can’t force feed it. You just kill it. As long as they try to maintain command and control, and that’s what governments do, the more it’s going to get worse. Which I think is the single greatest reason why policy, after policy, after policy, after policy has failed in Indigenous communities. Not because the policy was wrong, but because they wanted command and control and that’s not how it works.

Participant 10 was despondent about the capacity of the state to contribute towards improving Aboriginal futures, seeing little prospect of government working in true partnership. The internal workings of the state were seen as essentially driven by hierarchic competition for position between governments, agencies, branches and individuals. Inflexibility, risk aversion, and a lack of understanding of remote communities were identified as obstacles. An entrenched bureaucratic culture is anti-ethical to the formation of relationships of true equality.

There is a lot of rhetoric around ‘whole-of-government’ approaches, ‘breaking down the silos’, this kind of thing. But when you actually look at what happens, and the cultural logic of what happens, what you see is that there is control over policy and resources and competition ... Its got worse and worse and I think it will continue to get worse and worse. Any positive changes that happen will be despite government. The big thing government can provide is, maybe, resources ... It doesn’t understand that world out there.

It was suggested the state might do better to focus on fulfilling its core general responsibilities to provide general population level services like schooling, rather than attempting to deal with particulars of people, place and circumstance (Interview 10). They were especially critical of competence:

When you look at the logic of how bureaucracy interacts with Aboriginal people it is clear to me that they’re largely denuded of any content

knowledge, they are staffed by people increasingly from urban suburbia without any life experience, let alone experience of the Aboriginal world, and their own cultural logic is based around extraordinarily high levels of competition, at every level.

Participant 10 tempered their general remarks, pointing to the dangers of “*essentialising the state*” as if it were necessarily a monolithic entity when in fact it contains elements within it that do not fit the mould. Just as there are risks associated with depicting Aboriginal culture as if it were frozen in a distant past, there are also risks in assuming that all government is bureaucracy. Interviewee 8 similarly qualified her remarks:

I shouldn't over generalise. It depends on the particular worker, community and context and so on. If you have a bureaucrat who really isn't into power and control, and really is working with the community, empathetic, have strong groups of people (e.g. elder women), strong enough to take initiative for themselves, then you can develop the [right] kind of partnerships. But what generally happens is you pay a manager a great deal of money to go and be 'the person'. That's a recipe for absolute failure.

In Aboriginal affairs policy the current rhetoric is about building partnerships, making enduring mutual commitments, working together and acting jointly with Aboriginal people and other sectors of society. It is, on occasion, the language of a “*facilitating*” state committed to the Third Way. Yet the face government shows in remote communities can also be that of an intrusive “*command and control*” state. Arguably it is the latter that is mostly on display in the Northern Territory Intervention. It encompasses the administration of community affairs by “*Business Managers*” and policies such as compulsory income management. Arguably governments have become increasingly interventionist in remote Aboriginal communities, not less so.

However a participant in this study (Interview 5) felt the state had demonstrated it could be enabling in certain areas and was “*no longer perceived as the enemy*” by desert people necessarily. They pointed to initiatives such as Indigenous Protected Areas (IPA's) and ranger programs that align with the aspirations of native title-holders and create opportunities to work on country. For participant 10 “*The rhetoric of the Third Way, the enabling state, if that framework were possible, I think it's the ideal one*”.

8.3.3 New Partners

The logic of the Third Way (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992; Giddens, 1999) is that overcoming pockets of disadvantage requires widespread connections beyond the state. Participant 10 was optimistic about the prospects of NGO's and the private business sector building effective relationships with remote communities. “*I think there are some outstanding things going on ... I've seen more things working now*” (Interview 10). Jawun provides a high profile example of a structure that seeks to bring the resources of all sectors together in support of community led initiatives (<http://jawun.org.au/>)

Another participant (Interview 2) felt NGO's may bring with them a better understanding of bottom-up community development that fosters community-based planning and a sense of ownership. However they nevertheless questioned the contribution of some players:

There is no real philanthropy in Australia. When you want to see philanthropy go to America and go to Europe where you see proper philanthropy of people handing over resources for a community to do something with it. In Australia ... the philanthropist is generally a company or individual that wants their name over everything. And doesn't hand over too much cash or resources to do things ... They themselves are no better than governments.

One participant (Interview 8) suggested that the strategic placement of certain mediating bodies - such as an NGO or a university - “*in-between*” Aboriginal people and the state may, perhaps, be a useful strategy for ameliorating power imbalances, adding access, influence and clout which enables Aboriginal people to negotiate from a position of greater relative strength. They wondered if this kind of arrangement might be less complicit and more acceptable to Aboriginal people. Participant 4 thought community services worked best when locally based and co-located “*under one roof*” thereby making it easier for Aboriginal people to navigate the system. They regarded a pattern of fly-in day visits as problematic. It was stressed “*They've got*

to be based here". Another participant (Interview 3) commented:

A lot of these big non-profit organisations, even though they come with a lot of clout and resources from elsewhere, they can be detrimental to the whole idea of community-based organisations and their development. They can come with all of that might and clout from somewhere else, but they'll never have networks ... They still require some local person to lead them in and network them in.

When disadvantage is understood in terms of relational deprivation and network impoverishment a new and different set of responses is inferred. The focus shifts from issues of infrastructure and service delivery towards less tangible aspects of social life, such as networks and the prevailing norms of trust and reciprocity. To know what is already working well and to support it is to identify what might usefully be leveraged to seed the growth of social capital.

Participant 11 wants services to leave a different '*footprint*' in communities by investing more in the '*softer side of things*'. They stressed the value of looking for the possibilities of working with people within the context of their primary relationships, as distinct from an individual treatment frame that seeks to extract individuals from ties to which they will most likely return in any case. They observed:

I think if people demonstrate through the things they are interested in, the things they are good at, I think that's a really good place to start ... It could be anything.

Vignette 8.1: State versus Community Sector

To focus on service provision as a binary choice between the state on one side and the community sector on the other is to miss the critical point, which is that it is the way of working that needs to change. To imply the state can be ignored and that one should strive to only work locally from the 'bottom up' is akin to suggesting there needs to be a total commitment to producing either bonding or bridging social capital. A more nuanced approach is to suggest a need to work from 'above' and 'below' in a more sophisticated manner.¹

I have had the opportunity to work with Aboriginal people in the public, private and academic sectors. It is far from certain that NGO's or universities or business necessarily do any better than the state. As discussed in section 2.6 the non-government sector may be little different from government; working in isolation, at great distance, using abstract language, financially dependent, and proposing 'template solutions'. The issue is the approach, regardless of institution.

The other 'elephant in the room' is the preparation of people to work in the broader space generally called 'Indigenous affairs'. Organisations of all kinds may not be investing significant time and resources in this area. My thesis is that demonstrating the skills, processes and knowledge necessary to facilitate 'building social capital' requires more than straightforward common sense. It is highly complex and demands detailed knowledge and skills such as conceptual language, dialogue, planning, an understanding of 'holding', organisational management, cross-cultural education and anthropological and sociological sophistication.

Arguably the simplistic 'government versus community' argument in indigenous affairs, to which I have been witness for four decades from both sides, has been nothing more than an unfortunate distraction.

8.3.4 New Place

Participant 3 stated that Aboriginal society places a premium on "*giving people a place*". Another participant (Interview 4) observed that young people don't always know their family connections suggesting "*we need to sort that thing out ... build that relationship.*" Just as members of the stolen generation have been welcomed back, so too it is necessary to be '*welcoming back*' youth by engaging them with their people and place.

They are part of the community but they're not. It's like the stolen generation. How do you bring them back into the fold?

¹ I am grateful to my supervisor Dr David Palmer for his insights in this respect.

The Yiriman Project (Palmer et al, 2006), an initiative coordinated through the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre (KALACC), is an example of what might be seen as social capital in practice. Yiriman works on re-establishing inter-generational bonds by re-connecting youth with elders out on country. Significantly it occurs in an environment close to rejuvenating places of cultural significance.

Yiriman camps operate under the care and guidance of older men (Palmer et al, 2006). The intent is to respond to complex social, spiritual, cultural and emotional issues. Loss of cultural identity, self-harm, drug and alcohol abuse, health issues, early parenthood, and frequent contact with the justice system are all issues for participating youth. Yiriman seeks to find the enablers for change within extended family, language groups, broader cultural blocs and in Aboriginal ways of healing. Participants learn their skin group and stories associated with their country. Yiriman has been recognised with a Reconciliation Australia 2012 Indigenous Governance Award.

There is evidence indicating that involvement in cultural transmission contributes to health and wellbeing (Burgess et al, 2009).

8.3.5 New Thinking

Mostly social capital is a helpful conceptual tool to shape thinking around practice. Participant 8 felt an understanding of social capital was essential to sound practice.

Social capital may be less important as a guide to the content of policy than it is the quality of the social processes surrounding its formulation and delivery.

It's not a cookbook recipe book and it can't be. But sometimes there are clear pathways anyway. If you are concerned with relationships there are certain things you should do and certain things you should not do, and quite often we do the things we definitely should not do. So it's not whether, for example, the intervention policies are wrong, but whether you can get an example where it works really well in one community, but in another its appalling. So it's not so much about the policy itself, but how it's implemented. Who does what with whom under what circumstances? Who talks to one another? Who makes decisions? (Interview 8)

Participant 8 felt that higher level policy makers mostly “do actually get” social capital and its implications for ways of working. Unfortunately they are “not responsible for implementation down the line.” Those in middle management may have less understanding and “carry out the new orders within the old framework, the old culture.” They suggested part of the reason “why a lot of policies fail is that they leave it out of the equation” (Interview 8). Another participant in this study (Interview 11) stated: “I think... major projects often times don't really think about relationships and I've certainly seen that.”

Another participant (interview 2) described the current approach as a deficit model:

We always attack the problem. We always measure how much money we are going to put in by the number of young people hanging themselves or by the amount of alcoholism ... We don't actually look at always identifying the strengths of the community and investing in the potential strengths of the community and what that community can do to the economy.

There is a fundamental difference between implementing an approach that looks for relational strengths and an approach that directs funding and other resources towards what is perceived as not working well in a community. A participant in this study (Interview 11) understood the current approach as mostly about “plugging gaps or holes” by directing resources towards identified ‘high needs’ communities. One commented: “I think in the way resources are used they tend to fund the acute spectrum after something has fallen over or gone wrong, so they'll throw some money to try to fix it.”

Social capital, is a general conceptual tool that can shape the approach one takes to working with Aboriginal and other people. It only works, however, when supported by a team of talented and masterful practitioners capable of implementing it. It is not a detailed programme of fixed practical prescriptions for how to make it happen. A way to think about ‘social capital’ is

to use the analogy of football. One cannot win without highly trained and skilled players. Having a team by itself provides only a structure and does not ensure good performance, as is also the case with any structure such as a family or an organisation.

Arguably the daily practice of indigenous affairs is being played not only with *'teams'* of varying quality, but also as if rugby, soccer, Australian Rules and *'social capital'* were all happening on the same paddock at once. It is important to have both accomplished players and to be playing the same game. Practitioners in indigenous affairs have not had much coaching. Somehow they are all on the field together nevertheless.

8.4 Conclusions About Remote Disadvantage

8.4.1 Social Conditions Associated with Disadvantage

Social outcomes can be understood as the product of a particular set of social conditions that brings them into existence. I now seek to draw some conclusions about the production of social capital in a remote community context. These provide a possible starting point for empirical research.

The evidence is that disadvantaged socio-economic status is found in remote Aboriginal communities (and perhaps all communities) where the following social conditions exist:

- i. there are limited bridges to social groups that do have connections and resources;
- ii. the positive normative content of social bonds is hollowed out;
- iii. there is a shared minority experience of colonisation;
- iv. authority structures have collapsed; and,
- v. opportunities for economic participation are limited or non-existent, and connections are mainly with similarly impoverished people.

I argue that where these particular conditions exist communities are predisposed to being socially isolated, impoverished and disconnected from life opportunities.

8.4.2 All Bonds and No Bridges

Social capital theory suggests that communities are disadvantaged if they are unable to produce bridging social capital. The strong and resilient communities are those that have both bonding and bridging resources to call upon from all over. Bonding social capital is necessary for protection, but bridging social capital is necessary for prosperity. Communities without bridging mechanisms cannot thrive according to this view.

The factors that produced bridging social capital in traditional society, while still actively practiced in some communities, are significantly diminished in others. Communities may have neither ancient nor new means of generating bridging social capital at their disposal. Desert people have been adept at finding new means of producing social capital. However, these may promote behaviours such as drinking and imprisonment that are prone to generating ever more dense forms of bonding, not bridges.

It is not implied that desert society is incapable of building bridging mechanisms. The set of distinctly indigenous *'middle level'* structures described in chapter 4 can all be understood as institutions that succeed in connecting people beyond family and community. The proviso is that careful attention is paid to institutional design and governance to reduce the risk of *'capture'* by purely localised interests. Sport is another means to bridge neighbours (McCoy, 2004) and there is enormous potential in internet technology (Prujit 2002).

For millennia desert society functioned as a sustainable low impact customary economy with little need for external resources from any source, but in the inter-cultural world we all now inhabit this may no longer be possible or desirable. Closed communities with overly

dense forms of social capital limit cultural, social and economic opportunities. Arguably those living in communities with little education, training and jobs have nothing to gain materially from extending their social networks with one another because everyone is in the same disadvantaged position. Impoverished people require targeted and strategic connections with social groups who are not limited by their connections to others and who are positioned to help them access resources.

One of the challenges for desert people is how to develop networks of trust that extend beyond one's immediate circle of family and friends. Because of their generally marginalised position desert people may be unable to fire *"the social networks necessary to generate social action"* (Interview 8). Bridging with similarly disadvantaged groups may be comforting and familiar, but it will not be transformative.

Bridging needs to be strategic. A participant in this study (Interview 8) observed that broader forms of outward engagement are required *"when, and only when, the bonded group needs something else they don't have"*. Another (Interview 6) observed that the extent to which people want to bridge out *"depends on what you want to use the social capital for"*.

8.4.3 Hollowed Out Bonds

'Bad' social capital is produced where the positive normative content of bonds is hollowed out. The family unit, like any social structure, is, capable of playing host to both *'good'* and *'bad'* social capital. Factors such as institutionalisation, loss of child rearing knowledge, and separation leave an enduring legacy of emotional damage. There is a tendency to associate the family structure only with positive social outcomes, but this is deceptive where the positive norms and relations within the structure have changed and diminished.

Endemic levels of substance abuse, violence and incarceration can leave families functioning under stress (Atkinson, 1990; Sam, 1991; Bolger 1991; Burbank, 1994; Robertson, 2000; Blagg, 2000; Cunneen, 2002). Furthermore people in need of healing from grief and trauma are tentative about any form of wider engagement because they do not feel psychologically secure (Scougall, 2007). Participant 11 commented:

If we're taking this notion of social capital to represent relationships and the quality of them, they are circles that go wider and wider. I think if you start to piece together the connections people have, I'd suggest that probably the majority of community members are disconnected. They don't have a lot of relationships in their lives that they can rely on ... They might have a small number that they tend to draw on for support, but then again that is kind of impacted by some of the other things that are playing as well like general turmoil, alcohol and other factors; ... that tends to be a pretty sad reality actually for a lot of people.

Especially problematic has been the disruption of inter-generational processes of cultural education due to the mission dormitory system and state institutionalisation. These *kanyirninpa* relationships cease to function effectively in communities where the male population is impacted by factors such as ill health, substance abuse, and pre-mature death. Where men are not an active presence in the development of boys, holding is no longer practiced. A participant in this research (Interview 3) commented on a lost sense of self-worth amongst youth: *"You see a lot of people walking with their heads down ... 'the walking dead', but they're alive"*. They added *"Sometimes I think they feel alone, feel on their own"*.

8.4.4 Unfair Treatment

The experience of unfair treatment works to intensify and solidify internal bonds. Those who have endured colonisation and discrimination have a well-founded fear of domination and betrayal based on experience and reinforced by the retelling. Insular, even antagonistic, attitudes towards *'the other'* are easily fostered in these circumstances. Those within the group do not believe they will be treated fairly.

Anger can also be turned inwards as described in chapter 5. Participant 5 described *"lateral violence"*, a form of displaced and internalised oppression where vitriol and anger are directed against one's peers rather than one's real adversaries.

Historians have documented the exposure of Aboriginal people to colonisation. For much of their post-contact history others exercised power and authority over them. Arguably the experience left them hesitant to deal with mainstream society. Generally poor past relations have not fostered attitudes supportive of wider engagement. A participant in this study (Interview 7) observed:

People's sense of who they are in the world is clearly different. If you are part of a colonised people you have a certain experience of the relationship with the dominant culture you live in and that's always going to be fundamental.

Participant 7 took the view Aboriginal people need to decide for themselves what kind of relationships they might wish to establish with mainstream society. It would be inappropriate to be *“expecting Aboriginal people to reconcile themselves with the very people who have marginalised and oppressed them, where you are asking people who have been marginalised by another group to kind of work out how to have a better relationship with their oppressors, kind of thing.”* It was stressed relationship building is a broad *‘two-way street’* of issues that need to be worked at from both sides.

Participant 5 expressed the challenge in terms of *“fathoming a new relationship”* (Interview 5). They believe that increasingly non-indigenous Australians are acquiring a sound knowledge of what has happened to Aboriginal Australians, so there is an improving foundation for enduring and equal relationship now.

8.4.5 Weak Internal Authority

A weak internal authority structure makes the achievement of social order problematic. The social capital literature suggests that stable governance requires acceptance of a system of agreed rules and institutional arrangements, and some basic norms of civic participation. In some societies it may be sustained by legislation, policy and military force, or simply widespread acceptance amongst a compliant population. In desert society order was achieved, not from the top-down, but as a consequence of a moral code.

In pre-contact desert society stability was attained through adherence to *Tjukurrpa*. It provided the foundation for regional social networks between numerous neighbouring groups. The law, practiced together with other groups, broadly delineated what was socially acceptable behaviour, and what was not, across vast swathes of remote Australia. A shared spirituality could connect neighbouring social groups.

Colonisation destroys internal authority structures. Massacres, diseases, institutionalisation, removal from country, and generations of policy neglect contributed to a significant loss of knowledge in desert society. Furthermore the state and missions actively discouraged the practice of *Tjukurrpa* that made possible bridging relationships between *walytja*. In contemporary communities, however, there are varying degrees of acceptance and adherence. Behaviour becomes purely personalised where the mechanism of social control has been removed or collapses in response to a catastrophic event, such as invasion or rapid de-population. *‘Bad’* behaviour goes without sanction because there are no *‘lines in the sand’*.

Missionaries and officials sought to exercise formal authority over desert people, restricting opportunities for them to develop their own capacity for community governance. Re-establishing social order is challenging in a culture that rejects hierarchy; for this is a society where no one dare claim to represent, decide, or act on behalf of another. Introduced corporate community council structures have not filled the vacuum (Dillon & Westbury, 2007: 39). They are weak to the extent that desert people may not accept them as legitimate institutions with any authority to speak for them.

8.4.6 Economic Collapse

The absence of a functioning economy, including a customary economy, may contribute to the formation of *‘bad’* social capital.

Prosperity requires broader forms of engagement where people can access the resources of mainstream society where a viable economy operates. I have argued there are two difficulties disadvantaged people experience in seeking to do so. The first is that they may perceive,

correctly or otherwise, they can only engage in the mainstream at the expense of their existing bonding relationships and cultural values. The second is that those in mainstream society may see little to be gained from extending their social networks to encompass disadvantaged people. In these circumstances social exclusion entrenches dependence and forces people to seek access to resources outside the mainstream economy.

For millennia desert society functioned sustainably as a customary economy with little need for any external resources. As discussed in chapter 4 the destruction of the customary economy and the subsequent collapse in demand for their labour in the pastoral economy brought about dependence. Remote communities generally became places without economic opportunity. A participant in this study (Interview 2) commented:

What's the economic plan for the next say 50 years? How do we create an economy here being able to create jobs and intergenerational wealth? How do you create a housing market? How do you create the ability to become entrepreneurial ...? It's basically a combination of resources, but it's also about the will of a community to want to do that.

A sustainable future requires the development of a new economy inclusive of Aboriginal people in remote Australia; one that succeeds in giving a renewed sense of purpose by reconnecting people to their cultural values and country (Altman, 2003, 2006 & 2011; Altman & Finlayson, 1992; Altman et al, 2007). Altman (2005) has advocated a kind of new '*hybrid economy*' in which aspects of customary, welfare, and market economies operate side-by-side. If social capital is an imperative for desert people, as I have argued, then whatever forms of work are on offer need to fit with it, as was the case in the customary and pastoral economies. A participant in this study (Interview 2) commented:

The challenge is to create an economy so people feel a sense of purpose, of wanting to do something with their lives... There's no doubt that if you give someone a job, or give someone the ability to earn income on their own steam, to be able to do something for themselves, to be able to buy things, to take their family on holidays or to buy cars or whatever, you give someone a sense of purpose, identity or pride in what they are doing.

A participant in this study (Interview 5) felt the establishment of Indigenous Protected Areas, ranger programs, and the work of organisations such as the North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance Ltd (NAILSMA) were already diversifying the Aboriginal economy and providing new entry points into the capitalist system for Aboriginal people. Examples of activities include the provision of eco-system services such as the tagging of fauna, horticultural production of bush foods, fire management, and carbon capture. Participant 5 stated:

In the eyes of the traditional owner economy they're actually bridging that interface between cultural management practice and commercial potential. Therein lies the opportunity.

There is evidence that indicates that engagement with forms of cultural practice, on-country activity, and language regeneration support greater prosperity, including more active participation in the market, education and training.

8.5 Further Research

The five conclusions developed in section 8.3.1 provide a frame for empirically exploring why some remote Aboriginal communities enjoy greater wellbeing than others.

While the notion of social capital may have heuristic value, it is important to note that its practical contribution to overcoming remote community disadvantage is yet to be demonstrated. The social capital literature has a tendency to state the theoretical effects of social capital ahead of producing empirical evidence for them. Whatever promise the theory might show, whatever insights it might provide, it is yet to show it is an approach capable of delivering outcomes for Aboriginal people superior to other approaches. As discussed in chapter 3 it would be premature to proclaim social capital as '*cure*', especially in a context where so much has been promised but not delivered. It is also important to recall that remote disadvantage is a multi-faceted '*wicked problem*' (Rittel & Webber, 1973) that cannot

be fully accounted for by any single theory. Social capital alone can never provide a complete explanation of remote community disadvantage, but it can furnish insights.

Three participants in this study (Interviews 6, 9 & 10) observed that little practical work has been done on social capital within a remote community context. All saw value in conducting targeted empirical case studies. A case study is a systematic longitudinal examination of a single instance or event, conducted in depth in a real life context, that draws together multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2003; Stake, 1995). The conclusions drawn about the social conditions that inhibit the production of social capital in the previous section could be tested precisely in this manner.

A participant in this study (Interview 6) saw particular value in exploring the production of social capital in a community that has succeeded in enhancing its wellbeing and prosperity. They felt a study illustrating *“how it can work”* might be *“more productive”* than the theoretical research path I chose. A counter view is that empirical case study research is more focussed and productive if informed by deductive reasoning drawing on the existing body of evidence.

Participant 10 highlighted relational differences between one remote community that was clearly struggling with the full gamut of issues of community dysfunction and another that appeared to be fairing much better. They posited that the latter still had social order achieved through its own social norms, something that had all but disappeared in the former.

What struck me was a still operating authority structure. This is authority based on knowledge of country, of ritual, on seniority, within the religious and land tenure systems. It's not one exercised through command and control.

Secondly people in the more successful place still had *“very strong connections based on kinship”* and these are *“still given high recognition”* within the community (Interview 10). Elsewhere these kinds of relationships may have broken down under the destructive weight of alcohol and a welfare system that cuts across pre-existing relational ties by enabling people to independently support themselves without the need for reciprocity.

Thirdly the place doing relatively better exercised *“strategic engagement with the wider world”*. This region had centuries of contact with Macassan fishermen. It had also escaped the worst impacts of early colonisation due to late contact with European society, few known massacres, no pastoralists appropriating their lands and waters, and a freedom achieved through remoteness from the worst aspects of discriminatory legislation. People here have enjoyed relative isolation compared to others and have had more positive exposure to commerce and the wider world. According to Participant 10 *“They have been able to develop a strategic response to the wider society before they've been overwhelmed by it.”*

Another explanatory factor has been a history of *“far sighted leadership”* (Interview 10) emerging time and again from within the group and apparent at both a regional and national level. Participant 10 believes it is a style of leadership that values interaction with the wider world and is possessed of the confidence to do so from a position of strongly felt equality. They stated:

I will say that the thing that marks them out so distinctively in my mind is that they are able to argue both for sovereignty and distinctiveness, and from that base to argue for partnership, for working together as equals with government ... For me that's the core of success, whether its organisations or individuals. (Interview 10)

There is a rich case study tradition in the field of social capital research (Zhou & Bankston, 1996; Pantoja, 1999; Zhao, 2002; Meredyth & Ewing, 2003; Wilson, 2005). There might be value in a comparative case analysis directed towards explaining variance in stocks of social capital in different communities, following the example set by Putnam et al (1993) in Italy.

8.6 Ideal Communities

The hypothetical communities of *Liyán* and *Wandang* have different policy and practice frames and fundamentally different relationships with the nation state and wider world.

Liyán produces substantial stocks of bonding and bridging social capital by traditional and other means. The people of *Liyán* have never experienced colonisation and the core values of

walytja have never been hollowed out. There never were missions or pastoral stations, and the limits of the most draconian state measures never reached this far into the interior. Child rearing values have sustained and children are raised with the active support of extended family, including a mother and a father. The community, with the assistance of local people and external parties, invests in social networks that are working well such as its youth group, women's group, and men's group. It also invests in the design of its own governing institutions tailored to its priorities, widely touted as exemplars of sound practice.

The state presents only a soft facilitative face at *Liyan*, reflecting an underlying '*Third Way*' philosophical outlook. Rather than seeking to lead change, the state lends its support to local initiatives and partnerships that bring families, communities, government, business and the NGO sector together. Mainstream not-for-profit, business and government agencies work together in joint ventures that support the community in achieving its priorities. Expressed in terms of social capital, *Liyan* has achieved a balanced equilibrium between state, market and community.

Liyan is in the process of establishing a diverse and vibrant hybrid economy. There are local work opportunities of a conventional nature in areas such as the store, roadhouse, garage, earth moving, road building, pastoral lease, building construction, home maintenance, and visitor accommodation. Residents are also employed by community services in areas such as administration, essential services, schooling, training, health, police, and emergency services.

There is in addition a substantial hybrid economy with people involved in a range of culturally-based activities such as land care, carbon farming, rehabilitation, a ranger program, bush tucker, art centre, cultural heritage, eco-tourism, and language maintenance. Participation in education and training is valued, as are all forms of modern communication - vehicle, aircraft, telephone, internet and television - seen as spreading only '*good*' norms.

Economic participation is limited only by imagination and the partnerships that can be formed. The local economy even extends to a '*drive-in drive-out*' and a '*fly-in fly-out*' workforce engaged in the resource sector away from the community, but always eager to return home. Currently *Liyan* is partnered with a university undertaking a case study exploring the production of social capital in remote community context. All of this activity is underpinned by a belief that both cultural maintenance and strategic engagement are necessary for prosperity and wellbeing. Social processes capable of building a wider relatedness are regarded as critical to the future functioning of desert society.

At *Wandang* very different attitudes to policy and practice prevail. It is a '*welfare economy*'. People are not engaged in any form of economic activity. There is no paid work, children do not attend school, and no one has gone away for education, training or work. There are no businesses. *Wandang* is perceived, both internally and externally, as a place where local people cannot be meaningfully involved. Residents are excluded from economic participation.

Wandang knows only an interventionist command and control state. Government is the community's sole point of contact with the outside world and the only source of resource support. Engagement with non-indigenous people and agencies in mainstream society only occurs through the narrow prism of visiting officials.

There are no other relationships with the wider world. It is government that provides and controls all of the financial resources and the terms and conditions under which local organisations and services are funded. The relationship is one sided and purely transactional. The Aboriginal Community Council is totally reliant on the state for funding. Councillors are constrained both by the terms and conditions of funding and internal divisions between local interests that limit scope for any independent action. Residents regard all governing institutions as corrupt and unrepresentative.

Seen through a social capital analytical lens, the woes of *Wandang* can be understood as those of a network impoverished community. There is an oppressive history here where people suffered successively at the interventionist hands of missionaries, pastoralists, police and welfare officials. There are widespread feelings of untreated grief and trauma as a consequence. The positive norms once associated with bonding have been completely hollowed out; stripped bare of positive parenting practice and intergenerational educative mechanisms. The increasing ease of modern communications serves to only spread '*bad*' norms of behaviour - destructive drinking circles, family violence, humbugging and incarceration

- further than ever before.

Attitudes towards the wider world are closed and insular. There is always suspicion about motives. The prevailing belief is that no good can ever come from strategic engagement. External not-for-profits, businesses and researchers from the tertiary sector have no presence here. No bridging social capital is produced.

8.7 Final Reflection

My thesis is that social capital theory has value and weaknesses when used as a conceptual framework in a remote Aboriginal context. My position is that it may provide useful insights that contribute to better understanding and response to the phenomena of remote Aboriginal community disadvantage, if its limitations are addressed. I have argued that the application of social capital theory in a remote Aboriginal community context actually provides an important avenue to improve the theory by critically enabling it to outgrow its ethnocentric origins. If social capital is to have claims on being a truly universal theory, arguably it does need to be informed by cultural diversity.

I commenced this research contemplating how social capital theory might inform understandings of remote Aboriginal communities. I end with an appreciation of how a deep understanding of desert society might contribute to social capital theory.

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