
Difference or Disappearance: The Politics of Indigenous Inclusion in the Liberal State

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Abstract: The effects of neo-liberal economies have meant that effective social inclusion of marginalized groups is of increasing concern, yet it is arguable that economic marginalization as well as the marginalizing of difference are increasing. This paper questions the taken-for-granted view that liberal democratic states want and are able to include. It draws on recent experiences of an Aboriginal network in Australia to argue that liberal democracies are resistant to inclusion of certain kinds and that this is most evident in circumstances where Aboriginal people appear to be making successful headway in state-initiated entrepreneurship.

Keywords: Indigenous Australians, Wiradjuri people, social inclusion, liberal democracy, colonial subjectivity

Résumé : Les conséquences de l'économie libérale ont fait de l'inclusion sociale des groupes marginalisés une préoccupation de plus en plus pressante. Pourtant, on peut soutenir que la marginalisation économique ainsi que la marginalisation des différences augmentent elles aussi. Cet article remet en question l'idée, considérée comme allant de soi, selon laquelle les États prônant la démocratie libérale souhaitent l'inclusion et sont en mesure de l'atteindre. En se basant sur l'expérience récente d'un réseau d'Aborigènes d'Australie, l'article soutient que les démocraties libérales résistent à certains types d'inclusion et que cela est tangible notamment dans les cas où les aborigènes semblent faire des progrès significatifs dans le cadre de programmes mis sur pied par l'État et visant à encourager l'esprit d'entreprise.

Mots-clés : Aborigènes d'Australie, peuple Wiradjuri, inclusion sociale, démocratie libérale, subjectivité coloniale

There is a common assumption made in relation to liberal democracies such as Australia, Canada or New Zealand, that they are and should be incorporative. Access to social citizenship is the right of all; the state has a capacity to include even if it does not always have a willingness to do so. Inclusion implies the state will tackle and resolve problems of, for instance, inequality and access, particularly those impeded by the state's own structures and policies, but also those produced in public sentiment. Such views of the incorporative capacity of the state have sustained progressive social policy for decades. It could even be argued that the variety of forms the liberal state has taken in different parts of the world serve to bolster the popularity of the idea that incorporation is always possible, even the incorporation of radical alterities. Yet contradictions are also familiar: it might be common to hear condemnation of "racism" but it is not difficult to identify its pervasiveness or its mobilization when legitimating exclusion of certain categories of persons from full social and economic participation. When Povinelli (2002:11) notes that one "the great persuasions of liberalism [is] its seeming openness, its voracious encompassment," she cautions this is not true without reserve. She examines what it is about Aboriginality in Australia that produces a refusal on the part of the state to encompass that which is abhorrent to it. This paper takes a rather different approach to a similar question. While it is clear there are exclusions by the state that are a matter of political choice or expediency, I am interested in identifying characteristics of liberalism, its values and practices, which make acknowledgment or accommodation of difference difficult in that they seem to deny those of liberalism itself. In the indigenous context, this has implications for the inclusion of "differences" which challenge liberalism's apparent openness. This is particularly the case for indigenous peoples, whose very definition as "indigenous" challenges the legitimacy of the state. What, then, are the implications for the incorporation of indigenous difference?

Silverstein's (2002:147) contention that "continued ambivalence over the espousal and denial of cultural difference within the postcolonial period point[s] to the perduring character of coloniality within postcoloniality" is apt here: that difference is "avowed and disavowed, produced and erased" at different times is particularly evident in settler nations in relation to indigenous peoples. English-speaking settler nations have variously adopted policies of segregation, assimilation, integration and self-management, most of which are eventually deemed unsuccessful or inadequate. At the present time, the ambivalence of which Silverstein speaks is intensifying. The English-speaking settler nations have refused to support the International Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and neo-liberalism, by putting an end to the welfare state in favour of the "user pays" philosophy, is increasingly marginalizing those already defined as peripheral, even antithetical, to the interests of the nation and its economy. In response, concerns about social inclusion have become central in contemporary social policy debate. In this paper I take one example of an Australian Aboriginal society's failed attempt to incorporate (itself one of many such attempts) to ask what it means to incorporate *indigenous* peoples within the nation-state? I do so to examine the question as to whether a liberal democratic state is able to include and respect indigenous *difference*. While my case study is Australian, I anticipate it will resonate within other settler nations. It begs the question as to what incorporation means.

Anthropologists have developed various approaches to explain Aboriginal exclusion in Australia, including an Aboriginal cultural incapacity to change (Berndt 1977; Stanner 1979), a self-conscious Aboriginal resistance to change (Morris 1989); racism on the part of non-Aboriginal Australians (Cowlshaw 2004); culturally inappropriate policy development (Martin 2001; Rowse 2002); and Povinelli's (2002) work on the limits of recognition of what the state defines as "culturally repugnant" practice. It has been only since the late 1990s that anthropologists, Povinelli (1998, 1999) in particular, began to take the state more seriously in analyses of Aboriginal experiences of exclusion (but see Beckett 1988). An emphasis on a valorized Aboriginal *resistance* to incorporation is giving way to a greater appreciation of long efforts to incorporate more meaningfully, albeit often with mixed success. Povinelli shows there are resistances embodied within the state itself. I explore this from the perspective of liberalism's *capacity* to include, rather than from the notion that there are *particular* practices or persons whom the state "chooses" to reject. I argue there are ideological limits to liberalism's incorporation of difference and that these

stem not from inadequate or reactionary public policy, nor from incompetent, backward or corrupt indigenous peoples, but from the underlying cultural values of liberal democracy which set constraints on the possibilities of inclusion. These then support the variety of social and economic arguments relied on from time to time to justify state practices.

I develop my argument through an ethnographic lens, based on my observations of Wiradjuri Aboriginal people of New South Wales, among whom I have worked for over two decades. Over this time, and certainly predating it by a century, Wiradjuri people have sought—explicitly—to activate their desire for more meaningful incorporation in the rural economies of pastoralism and agriculture that transformed their hunter-gatherer economy, landscape and social world. There are different ways in which indigenous struggles over time might be understood. Groups may struggle *against* models of incorporation proposed by the state in an oppositional sense and, in other times or places, struggle to be *included* within the state. Aboriginality as resistance is often interpreted as a strategy of *disengagement*. Yet what Wiradjuri people have been attempting to do throughout their two centuries of colonization is *engage*, albeit on their own terms. In fact, it is often the struggle to be better incorporated within Australian social and economic life, but on terms which make sense to them, which becomes represented as their "failure" or as "resistance." The fact that incorporation is desired (and thought feasible and attainable) may be shared by Aborigines and policy makers alike, but this does not imply that the terms upon which it might be achieved, nor the desired outcomes, are shared. A lack of appreciation of the ways in which understandings and expectations differ—or indeed a deliberate mismatch of meanings at times—produces many difficulties and lays open a minority group to derision and condemnation. What they "fail" to do, in wanting to be who they are, is to transform themselves, ontologically, into the "persons" required of liberalism in pursuing its economic agendas.

Colonial Inclusions and Exclusions

The Wiradjuri region, over 50,000 square miles, encompasses the central west of New South Wales, the most developed State¹ in Australia. It is separated from the capital, Sydney, by the Blue Mountains and starts only 200 miles from the city. Its wide river plains and innumerable creeks make it one of the best watered areas on the continent. Once a path over the rugged Blue Mountains was eventually found, Australian historian, Blainey (1975:81) described the haste to establish sheep runs in the 1820s and 1830s as akin to a gold rush. This is the coun-

try within which the colony's wealth in wool was made: Australia was the nation "born on the sheep's back." Wiradjuri land was redefined as pastoral property and, after the waves of disease and frontier violence calmed, Wiradjuri people became pastoral workers. By the end of the 19th century, most were engaged as permanent or casual wage labourers on pastoral stations carved out of their own country, and on which they had formed semi-sedentary camps. Some operated kin-based contracting teams and a few ran their own farms. Federation in 1901 (from whose benefits Aboriginal people were explicitly excluded) and an increasing non-Aboriginal population competing for land and work put an end to these efforts towards a new economic and spatial autonomy. State-based legislation enacted in 1909 restricted Wiradjuri spatial and social opportunities, and segregated them on government-supervised residential reserves.

Wiradjuri people, in other words, are a people significantly transformed by their harsh colonial experiences. They are speakers of English, educated to varying degrees, of mixed ancestry, now living in rural towns or still in the small reserves on the edges of those towns. Their population, by my informal estimate, is about 12,000, some of whom live outside the region in the metropolitan cities of Sydney and Canberra. There is now a significant non-Wiradjuri population living within Wiradjuri country as a result of government-initiated resettlement programs in the 1970s (from far western New South Wales). Wiradjuri and their neighbours are Aboriginal people who were long termed "part-Aborigines." The degrees of radical difference were dissipating and assimilation (understood as loss of Aboriginality) was inevitable on their inexorable path to modernity. In the mid-20th century they were considered by anthropologists to be "cultureless," in a "cultureless vacuum," unable to cope with modernity except in its pathological expressions (see Cowlshaw 1987; Macdonald 2001; Gray 2002): they were products of colonialism and racism, not actors within local political and cultural histories. Wiradjuri creolized cultural histories are more complex than such representations suggest (Macdonald 2001; see also Morris 1989; Keen 1994). In part, through policies of enforced separation, they have maintained an awareness of their cultural distinctiveness. Throughout this history they have sought civil rights, access to lands of their own to provide both security and opportunity, the right to work and protection of areas of importance to them.

Wiradjuri people have been and remain as concerned with their access to the resources of the colonizing and capitalizing new nation as they have been with maintaining the integrity of their own values and socialities,

albeit in situations which have constantly required processes of transformation. When we adequately historicize the Wiradjuri, they do not emerge in any simple way as either passive victims or resisting agents. It is clear that, as individuals and collectivities, they have wanted to engage with the state in various ways at various times, especially through work and on the basis of the value they place on persons, which respects each person regardless of distinctions in lifestyle or status. When they have engaged, it has been their own understandings and values they brought to the meanings they made of their practice. It cannot be assumed that "working for the whitefella" is a move towards the disappearance assumed of the notion of assimilation. But it is their desire to be who they are that appears to be both the condition of and the impediment to their incorporation. In this they do not differ from the more valorized Aboriginal peoples of "remote" Australia. However, unlike them, Wiradjuri people are confronted with wanting to re-make their cultural presences in an environment in which they have long been defined as having no cultural distinctiveness at all.

After a decade of continent-wide demands for "land rights," legislation was passed in New South Wales in 1983 which seemed to offer a new form of incorporation that many Wiradjuri people enthusiastically embraced. Wiradjuri efforts over the following decade ended dismally but through events not of their own making. This Wiradjuri story is representative of a significant number of Aboriginal initiatives nation-wide. It shows many efforts to become better incorporated within Australian social and economic life, on terms which make sense to them but which, because they are dependent on government funding, are vulnerable to political change. The difficulty Aboriginal people are having finding meaningful modes of inclusion is partly but not solely explained in terms of the intersection of class and race in Australia. Watching their efforts and setbacks, I have found myself asking, what does "successful" incorporation even look like? What does it mean for Wiradjuri people to become incorporated *as Wiradjuri*? Is there room in this nation-state for *Wiradjuri* difference, except when it has been reduced to a set of objectified cultural symbols (flags, costumes, dancing, music, exotic foods) to be celebrated on National Aborigines Day or during international festivals? Wiradjuri difference is no longer radical, and is all the more complex for being only a few degrees of difference. Nevertheless, as their story demonstrates, there are discordant features of Wiradjuri lifestyles and values, including their demand to be treated as indigenous, which make the incorporation of even their difference unpalatable.

Since Australian federation in 1901, Aboriginal people have been categorized as *apart from* all other Australians, with their rights as citizens significantly curtailed by state legislation, including where they lived, who they married, what they ate and how much soap they needed. When they did not “die out” as anticipated, assimilation became the policy priority from the 1940s on, administered in practice by segregation and control. Civil rights activism eventually led to the end of this regime through the 1960s, and a change in the Australian Constitution in 1967 enabled, for the first time, the federal government to legislate on behalf of Aboriginal peoples. However, structural separateness was reinforced through a new need to identify a “community” through which federal funding initiatives could be channelled. “Community” became synonymous with a plethora of Aboriginal organizations that were established along bureaucratic lines to administer housing programs, health services, legal aid and so on. Aboriginal people may have been better serviced but they were not better included through these “progressive” moves. They were being better funded to remain apart. They could be “a part” only by leaving this world of difference and assimilating; by becoming part of an emerging national elite whose role it was to confer with government; or by commodifying and commercializing their cultural practices of design, music and dance (an option not available to many creolized peoples). These politics have, if anything, seemed to further exclude Wiradjuri people. Not different enough, not same enough, they have struggled to understand who they are in this changing scene—and, of course, approximately 12,000 people living across a vast region, and networked well beyond it, have a range of ways in which they can and do position themselves to make the most of their own opportunities. Many fault lines have emerged in the competition for much needed but inadequate resources.

Material conditions for Aboriginal people throughout Australia in recent years have improved, with federal funding enabling better housing in particular. Grants for artistic enterprise and tourist ventures have seemed, at least on the surface, to have brought a new social value to “being Aboriginal.” But government largesse has not been able to stem increasing unemployment (up to 90% in some areas), falling literacy rates, and significant increases in substance abuse and domestic violence (including child abuse). Increases in “life-style diseases” such as Type 2 diabetes continue to defy health practitioners. These pressures have been building up over the past two to three decades and few Aboriginal people are immune to them. To avoid the downward spiral in rural communities suffering from long-term economic recession, some Wirad-

juri people move to the cities—Sydney and Canberra are close and there are small rural cities within the Wiradjuri region that attract them. But even in the cities they do not necessarily fare much better, although they do have access to better resources. Rural economic pressures have certainly played a large part in an economy which is in the midst of significant change under neo-liberal policy. But Wiradjuri people might have been better able to withstand these pressures and take advantage of certain new opportunities the economy opens up had they been able to attain the greater economic and administrative autonomy they sought in the 1980s. How they tried, and why their efforts failed, is the story that follows.

A Case Study: The Wiradjuri Regional Aboriginal Land Council

My fieldwork since 1981 has focused on particular communities within the Wiradjuri region. This involved me in the events leading to the establishment of the Wiradjuri Regional Aboriginal Land Council (Wiradjuri RALC) in 1982 in anticipation of the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act (NSW)* passed in 1983. The Act, passed under the Wran Labor Government, provided funding over 15 years to develop enterprises on a land base to be acquired by grant (if unalienated Crown land) or purchased on the open market. Fifty percent of funding received each year was to be invested to provide an ongoing fund after the 15 years. The legislation initially set up a three-tiered structure of land councils: approximately 115 Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs), comprised of all Aboriginal local residents, elected two members to 13 regions (RALCs), who in turn elected a 13-member State council (NSWALC). With 17 LALCs, the Wiradjuri RALC was large by choice: they did not want Wiradjuri communities split between regions (although two did opt to join other regions because of historical connections). The Wiradjuri RALC was a creation of legislation but it was also a grassroots movement of Wiradjuri people who were responding to land rights and civil rights movements in which they had long been involved. The 1980s represents “an episode” in their colonial history, in their story of cultural processes unfolding in specific time and place, as a vast network of close and distant kin took on this new organizational task.

The Wiradjuri RALC was widely recognized as successful in terms of the aims of the legislation, which were to enable local and regional councils to acquire land through grant and purchase, and develop businesses. They were proud of their successes, and explicitly concerned to use these to strengthen and reproduce *Aboriginal* social values and cultural knowledge. In its short but successful history as an Aboriginal organization, Wiradjuri RALC

gave tangible substance to the idea of “Wiradjuri” as a social and geographic region which had endured through time. As a regional organization, and within Wiradjuri LALCs, much activity saw office and commercial buildings purchased for city/town-based enterprises such as a motel, a bullbar, engineering business, craft centres, community halls and tourist enterprises. Rural properties acquired included pastoral properties, market gardens, and a drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre. Much needed Aboriginal housing was also a priority. This Regional Land Council was making the Land Rights Act work for them. It consistently produced clear audits and developed a team of staff who provided tangible research, administrative and financial support to its LALCs (see Macdonald 2004).

The relative success of the Wiradjuri Regional Aboriginal Land Council was due primarily to its founding by people who had always had regional networks (through regional ritual cults and later through the regional round of pastoral work). They had known each other throughout their lives and most members could trace some form of kinship or had worked alongside each other. This knowledge extended beyond the individual delegates from LALCs who sat around the Wiradjuri RALC meeting table. The positioning of these people in their various networks was known: their parents’ positioning, their histories, and their local and regional politics. When one local member started “standing over” people in a Local Land Council, people knew it was her usual style but they knew how to deal with her and asked senior kin to pull her into line. The reputation of the RALC depended on its success in reigning in the excesses of its Local Aboriginal Land Councils as much as in its own performance. The RALC became a body that could demand accountability, could withhold funds, but could also “look after,” along well-established cultural lines, and whose members individually or collectively could deal with people in culturally-familiar terms, knowing when to be tough, when to nurture, and when to despair—and when to call in the police.

Other RALCs had also been successful, notably the Western Region and the Far North Coast, but a number were not and, like many LALCs, were subject to accusations of mismanagement and misappropriation as people struggled to work with a very different set of social and legal demands. Problems were rife in the early years. At the local level there was little experience of business or organizational management. This was the first money Aboriginal people had ever had the opportunity to manage collectively. Even though it was a small sum (the first allocation was less than the annual average wage, and subsequent ones were about twice that wage), it looked

huge. This prompted competition and conflict over its use. Inexperience left people open, both to unscrupulous white business people and to misappropriation (sometimes inadvertent, sometimes blatantly corrupt) on the part of Aboriginal people themselves. Amendments to the legislation in 1986 helped sort out most of the financial problems but the damage was done. Negative media coverage had played into the hands of the conservative Liberal-National Opposition, who vehemently opposed land rights. When the Greiner Liberal-National Coalition Government came to power in 1988, it did so with an explicit mandate to rescind the Act. Significant lobbying by RALCs such as Wiradjuri, by NGOs and churches helped to prevent this as the Government did not control the Legislative Council (the upper house). It took Nick Greiner three years but he eventually managed to pass amendments in 1990. These were radical but designed to appear as if they were only efficient and cosmetic. Public pressure would still not support the dismantling of the Land Council system, so the RALCs were kept within the structure—but stripped of their roles and functions. All property and money held by RALCs was transferred to the State body (LALCs were able to keep their property). The members of NSWALC, once accountable directly to the RALCs who in turn were accountable to the LALCs, were now elected on a region-wide franchise and were no longer answerable “down the system.” The Land Council system had become the centralized, conventionally bureaucratized—and government-controlled body—the original design was meant to avoid. RALCs, including Wiradjuri, continued to exist only in symbolic form.

After the energetic years of lobbying to avert this axing of their accomplishments, the mood among Wiradjuri people through the 1990s was angry and defiant. They could access money only for meetings and for ten years this anger kept them lobbying for changes to the Act to reinstate their functions and have Wiradjuri properties transferred back to them. By the end of the 1990s they were resigned to their losses but not forgiving. But the energy had almost dissipated, New members of the token organization, elected at the local level to do they know not what, do not know this history or what the RALC has lost in economic, political and social terms. The transformation to a new era is almost complete and it is not toward the greater self-determination they were promised. People involved in the Wiradjuri RALC express this more eloquently than myself:

Well, the whole thing’s changed a lot now—for the worse. Terrible. Ah, well! We’ve lost a lot. We lost the Locals making decisions, that’s what we’ve lost—and

the Region, taking the Region away. We used to make some ripper decisions! And the “get togethers,” like at Dallows [restaurant and dance hall]! It’s all gone, all that? All we’ve got is just these meetings and they’re not the same.

How would I change it? You’d have to sit down and think, think back to what happened then—right back. Work it all out again. Try and do it again? But you can’t! Can’t go back. There’s no substitute, see. You can’t take it back because, well, you’ve got no freedom at all, like we had before. The government won’t let the Region come back and have a say with the Locals again. Kooris’ll never be able to run their own affairs with the State [NSWALC] having a different autonomy to the Locals, and the Locals? and this here Region? “statutory bodies”! If you want anything now, you got to ask the State—it’s just like any Government thing, just like it. It could even be getting worse. Maybe DAA (Department of Aboriginal Affairs) will come in and take over the lot. [Noel Stanley, foundation member and office bearer in Wiradjuri RALC, talking to the author in 1995, Macdonald 2004:119]

In April 2004, nine years after Stanley’s comments, the NSW State government sacked the NSW State Land Council and appointed an administrator. Early in 2006, the Government announced it would not be reconstituted until 2007 “at the earliest.” This equated “to taking the lot” as Stanley predicted a decade earlier. When it was reformed in late 2007, it was with an amended Act which dissolved all pre-existing Regions, Wiradjuri included, in favour of four large zones, strengthening the top-down structure the original legislation had worked to avoid.

The following comments of Agnes Coe, a highly respected Wiradjuri woman who was elected annually as Chair of the Wiradjuri RALC for twenty years, convey some of what the Wiradjuri RALC and the return of property it enabled meant to Wiradjuri people. It was more than an organizational success. It was a recognition of their distinctive history, and a step towards justice.

Back in the 80s, and even after the amendments, I thought it was worth it because it created such unity amongst the Aboriginal people of NSW, and particularly among the people of the Wiradjuri country... Even with all the trouble with the Local Land Councils... That’s where I think a lot of people went wrong. They thought it was like a welfare thing. One woman said to me, “I don’t care about Land Rights, all I want is a house.” And of course the government—and a lot of Kooris—it suited them for things to go that way...

I used to honestly think, “Land Rights—what does it mean to Aboriginal people”? That we get all our land

back? Is that ever going to happen? And then I would think to myself that, when the people came out here, the squatters and the powers that be, if Aboriginal people had been treated fairly then and they were given their share of the land to hunt and gather and live off the land and do what they wanted to do, and just let them adapt to white man’s way whenever they wanted, not having it forced on them, I don’t think we would have had near the problems, social problems that we’ve got today.

We were never given the opportunity to do things the way we wanted. If they’d left our forefathers with our land or given them their fair share of our land, I don’t think they would have sold it because they would have handed it down to their children, and their children would have been taught to live off the land and to have an association with the land. But when they took all that away and just locked them away on missions, they were more or less just like prisoners...

For a long time they wouldn’t allow Aboriginal people to get a decent education. I used to think to myself then, now why wouldn’t they let us? And then when they did get an education and they started to learn what their rights were and that, then they were classified as black radicals! So I started thinking to myself, what the hell do these white politicians and white society want from us as Aborigines? Do they really want us to fit in? Do they want us to be a part of things, or do they just want us to be depending on them all the time?...

But I do think the region was worth while. We achieved so much... One thing that I was very moved by—in fact, I just went away on my own and cried tears of joy—was when we were able to purchase Ingleburn [a river frontage property of 35 hectares]. All my men, my family, like Leslie’s father, they all worked down there. I got away on my own and I thought to myself, I wonder if they know that we finally own a bit of this dirt that they worked on all those years for white men. [Agnes Coe, Chair of Wiradjuri RALC for two decades, talking to the author in February 2003, Macdonald 2004:132-137]

Coe’s questions strike at the core of the issues raised in this paper: “What the hell do these white politicians and white society want from us as Aborigines? Do they really want us to fit in? Do they want us to be a part of things, or do they just want us to be depending on them all the time?” In RALC meetings, people who were involved in the achievements of the 1980s, and the subsequent struggles through the 1990s to have their assets and their voice returned, would comment that “as soon as we get the ball, they change the goalposts.” Another frequent comment, “it’s always two steps forward, three steps back,” became

the title for my ethnography of the Land Council (Macdonald 2004) which Wiradjuri people involved found particularly apt.

Wiradjuri RALC was one response in a history of responses to the constraints and opportunities presented by the larger social worlds of which Aboriginal people in this area have been a part. Its success was possible because it drew on and transformed former regionalized patterns of Aboriginal sociality, organizing them according to new agendas. It was one response in a history of responses to the constraints and opportunities presented by the larger social worlds of which Aboriginal people in rural NSW have been a part. But in that its activities were also short-lived, it was another reminder that their colonial—postcolonial if you will—worlds are not under their own control. Aboriginal people in this region are well aware that the spaces they continually try and carve out for themselves may open up only transitory experiences of self-positioning. The operations of Wiradjuri RALC played themselves out in a political environment in which there was much opposition to introducing land rights in NSW. But once introduced, how should we understand the dismantling of successful regional programs which seemed to be achieving all that was expected of them? Why was the lowest common denominator—LALCs and RALCs in trouble—the only criterion for evaluation? Why was the Wiradjuri region, commended by the State's Auditor-General, not used as a model to get others on track? Without wanting to deny the force of a history of racism, I argue that this is an inadequate explanatory paradigm. We need to go further to understand the structures of constraint of which racism is an expression.

The Australian state has incorporated many "others," from every continent and of every colour and creed. But it remains resistant to the incorporation of the "indigenous other" as a part of its "self"—it is not alone in this, Giroux's (2004) analysis of Canada being but one other example. Indigenous difference produces a resistance to inclusion on the part of the state which is distinctive and cannot be reduced to racism (although it clearly includes it). It is more akin to the fear of "reds under the beds" in the years of McCarthyism, or the contemporary fear of Islamic fundamentalism, both of which directly challenge the state. By state here I refer to both governments, national, State and local, as well as the more slippery notion of a hegemonic ideology of "being Australian" within which such governments govern. It is hard to justify placing the experience of the Wiradjuri RALC in such a category but what I do want to explore below is why this Wiradjuri appropriation of a new identity and positioning—which from their perspective promised but did

not deliver a space for Wiradjuri autonomy but within an effective form of incorporation—was opposed. The Land Council system, glossed as a step towards "self-determination" (it was, rather, merely a form of self-management in line with neo-liberal efficiencies), sought not separatism but engagement. The development of economic enterprise would free them from the accountability which was the condition of their receipt of government-funded services. Such attempts to incorporate which "fail" are most often laid at the doorstep of indigenous peoples themselves: LALCs and RALCs did get themselves into trouble in the early years. While even the government acknowledged this was attributable to poorly designed legislation and lack of training, the media focus, promoted by the Opposition party was that they could not "manage their own affairs" and were "wasting tax-payers' money." Blaming the victim (the one who is "different") also subtly dehistoricizes, the inference being that incompetence or inability is due to "backwardness." The refusal is, rather, as Gledhill (2000:190) has put it, a refusal to recognize "that flesh and blood actors have to cope with structures of inequality, impoverishment and repression and make complicated choices."

The processes I describe for Wiradjuri RALC are being repeated in various parts of Australia, including in federal organizations. The peak indigenously-elected body, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), was disbanded by the federal government in 2004 on the grounds that it was "a failure of self-management." The ostensibly progressive *Native Title Act* of 1994, recognizing indigenous rights to land for the first time in Australia, has been progressively undermined by both amendments and political rhetoric. In this wider context, we begin to see the demise of the Land Council structure in NSW as inevitable, regardless of its successes. One federal structure after another has gone the same way. Within a settler nation-state, to understand these contradictions is to understand the limits of incorporation, and also the politics of producing and managing difference at one remove, as in separatist policies (such as the former reserves, or what is now called the "indigenous sector" (see Rowse 2002)). Even as indigenous difference appears to gain legitimacy in the everyday identity discourses of Australian society, the limits subtly, almost imperceptibly emerge to render indigenous people failures once again.

The nation-state as a political model has proved itself capable of withstanding the emergence of contested domains within it. The problems seem to arise when domains are set up which demand, or are seen to demand alternative forms of allegiance. The limits of incorporation

can be discerned in the state's rejection of ideologies and practices which deny its own legitimacy or challenge its right to the primary allegiance of its citizens. These limits need to be much better understood in the politics of producing and containing what Rowse (2002) calls, but problematically I believe, the "indigenous sector." Then I believe we can begin to understand why the Land Council structure in NSW had to be amended, regardless of its success, why ATSIC is now undergoing a similar process, following on from the deconstitution of two other national Aboriginal bodies before it, and why the *Native Title Act* has also been progressively dismantled and undermined.

The Limits of Incorporation in the Liberal Democratic State

Let me step back from the Wiradjuri RALC story and the contexts in which it played out to examine characteristics of the Australian liberal democratic state which make incorporation less desirable than is so commonly assumed. The nation-state as a political model has clearly proved itself capable of withstanding the emergence of contested domains, and some indigenous initiatives do not pose a threat while others do. Disjunctures arise in those spaces indigenous people seek to carve out for themselves which, implicitly or explicitly, seem to demand oppositional forms of *allegiance*. The limits of inclusion lie in the state's rejection of ideologies and practices which deny its own legitimacy, challenge its right to the primary allegiance of its citizens, and which impact on its control of resources: in other words, in *particular* practices or claims of "difference." Liberalism is realized through the shaping of a particular kind of citizen. It demands a form of "personhood" which requires that Aboriginal people relinquish their own. This is a far greater demand than is normally recognized in the exasperated responses to Aboriginal people who simply seem unwilling to "do the right thing." To do so may mean ceasing to be who they are and have been. Perhaps, in the long term, this change is as inevitable as it was in Europe centuries ago, but capitalism and liberalism's battle to colonize the hearts and minds of Aboriginal people is far from over and it will continue to be wrenching in its effects.

Formal Equality

The notion of democracy is enshrined in Australia in the notion of formal equality: one person, one vote. A political leader—Prime Minister or State Premier—is a first among equals, elected by a majority of those equals. Aboriginal authority systems, however, are more akin to the

hierarchy of the judicial system, in which Supreme and High Court judges gain their positions from training, long experience and, significantly, from the fact that they are held in high regard. The respect that is attained by Aboriginal leaders, male and female, is specific to context and does not transfer to other contexts. It is hard won and easily lost, and is based on a lifetime during which one has "done the right thing" by one's own kin and one's people more generally. It requires that someone have access to resources—economic, political, sacred knowledge, health knowledge—which they distribute in culturally acceptable ways so as to "look after" their own. This is their "allocative power" (Macdonald 2000; cf. Austin-Broos 2003). Status in the white world does not count towards such respect—it can even work against one if a person tries to use it to claim authority locally. The social imperative binding people comes from the attractiveness, indeed necessity, of sharing economic and social resources, which mitigates against "independence" but encourages personal autonomy as the taking of responsibility for oneself and one's own. This balancing of autonomy and relatedness is well-known as a pivotal dynamic of Aboriginal personhood and sociality (Myers 1986; Martin 1995). This is not just a value or social difference, it is an ontological difference. Everyday life is and was organized along principles very different and at times in opposition to those associated with both liberal individualism and popular sovereignty.

The vast majority of Aboriginal organizations, including local and regional land councils, have been legislatively constituted on democratic lines, acknowledging no hierarchical system of authority other than that constituted by the legislation governing such organizations. One Wiradjuri woman reflecting on the land council system explained to me, "it's just a numbers game now." It does not follow that, because people have to vote for office bearers of a land council, that they respect this as a system of authority over them personally. It is a procedural necessity, often keenly fought over when perceived to have some "clout" or money attached to it, but it does not confer respect or deference on people who attain roles as a result unless that person was previously highly regarded (as in the case of Agnes Coe, cited above). When government agents negotiate with the Chair of a Land Council on the assumption that they "represent" the community in a democratic fashion, the agents may simply be compounding the contradictions (and often the internal conflicts) rather than, as they assume, deferring to people of influence. Many decisions go nowhere. Within the community, people know why. Beyond it, there is a perception of incompetence or of a lack of responsibility.

The notion of popular sovereignty does not admit of inherited or acquired elitism. Aboriginal hierarchies do not see all people equally nor accord them all equal rights when it comes to decision making (any more than liberal ones do in practice). Kin and country, seniority and sometimes gender all play a part in deciding who can speak for what and when. The historical realities of colonization have left some people removed from what would once have been their country, others have migrated in search of advantages. Not to be in one's own country is to implicitly be rendered a kind of second-class person vis-à-vis traditional owners. Migrants appeal to democratic values, pitching them against systems of authority, when it suits them. The hierarchical nature of Aboriginal authority systems are accorded some recognition by agents of the state in the "remote" ("traditional") areas of Australia but rarely in central New South Wales, where both "Aboriginality" and the continuing existence of "Aboriginal traditions" are contested by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike and where recognition of elders is non-democratic. This is compounded by recent popularizing of the notion of "elders" such that any one over 50 can call themselves an elder and attain a status among non-Aboriginal people which is not recognized by Aboriginal people. Colonial relations are complex.

Privileging "traditional owners" of country is also elitist. Kin and land are modes of value distribution not under state control and are inappropriate to the reproduction of responsible citizens. They can only be countenanced if they can be spatially and socially contained, for instance, in remote Australia. And even there they pose difficult "problems of articulation" (Austin-Broos 2003)—how much more so in central NSW, the premier agricultural heartland of Australia. People with authority based on country distinguish themselves from long-term residents or "blow-ins" and have traditionally been understood in a host to guest relationship. This does not mean that long-term residents cannot exercise authority or acquire respect: they often do. But it does mean that, when occasion demands, they are expected to defer to those whose country they are in. One would not expect them, for instance, to plan a trip to see local rock art sites, or to be making decisions about land use at the level of local government planning. Until recently a clear pecking order has been informally recognized and, in general, rigorously respected. It was such "grassroots people," or "wayback people" who got the Wiradjuri local land councils going. But in time, non-local people were elected, cutting across these cultural distinctions. New waves of conflict, disdain and disillusionment saw the burden of colonial subjectivity grow ever heavier.

"A fair go for all" is an Australian colloquialism designed to capture the notion of formal equality. When the current Liberal Prime Minister, John Howard, came into office in 1996 promising "to govern for all Australians," this was implicitly a *rejection* of difference in favour of the Liberal Party's more individualistic and conservative form of liberalism. As noted above, his government "mainstreamed" various Aboriginal-specific services, disbanded ATSIC, watered down rights under "native title," attempted to enforce the evacuation of Aboriginal communities suffering high degrees of violence on the grounds that it is the reproduction of "their culture" which is creating these problems and, in 2007, suspended the *Racial Discrimination Act* in order to exercise controls over land and incomes in the Northern Territory. Most of this is being done in the name of formal equality, a powerful argument, difficult for indigenous peoples to challenge, especially when waves of resentment against their "special treatment" come from poorer whites. Assimilation (by various names) is based on a requirement to formal equality which, as Neizen (2003:18) has pointed out for indigenous peoples more widely, contravenes their principal goal which "is rather the recognition of distinct collective rights...the ability to exercise self-determination, to develop culturally distinct forms of education, spirituality, economic development, justice and governance." Wiradjuri people have often demanded "justice and recognition" but, as Neizen's comments suggest, they want opportunities to share in the wealth of Australia on their own terms rather than those imposed by a conventional and homogenizing notion of citizenship. This is a desire for incorporation but not assimilation. Wiradjuri people are aware that "success" seems elusive because it also breeds resentment. Wiradjuri RALC fieldworker and later coordinator, Roley Williams, believes that Aborigines as "forces to be reckoned with" are not what governments desire:

The Region really did bring people together before... They were all good meetings! You didn't mind the travelling to go to them, 'cos everyone was really friends in those days! After the fiery meetings, people got together and had a drink and a talk and that, they didn't carry it on after the meetings. They might all go in fightin' but then they'd go and have a beer after! People were really strong then. I think that's why the government put those amendments in, because they realized the Regions were getting strong and they were a voice for the local people out there.

Well, I think they reckoned Wiradjuri was getting too big—too powerful! I think that's one of the reasons why those amendments, those changes to the Act were

made—to stop Regional Land Councils like the Wiradjuri. Even a lot of the other Regional Land Councils were jealous of Wiradjuri...because of all the things that Wiradjuri were doing—more positive things than any of them.

Wiradjuri really stuck together. They had a lot of really smart people on the Council itself. They were so strong—one people, really committed. All traditional Wiradjuri people they were...the “Old Guard” as I call them...the mob that was in there in the first two or three years, the ones that really set the foundations. They were there from the start, from Day One, and they’re still there...The 1990 amendments have really turned the Act around. Whereas the local people did make up the Region and told the State [NSWALC] what to do, now it’s the reverse. The State are telling the Locals what to do. And the Region’s really there to...well, just tokenism again! They can’t make any decisions. All they can do is meet and find out what’s been happening. They’ve really got no authority to authorize people to do anything. It’s just for people to see one another every now and then, to find out what’s happening around the place. [Roley Williams, Wiradjuri RALC staff member, talking to the author in 1995, Macdonald 2004:121]

Significant in Williams’ comments is his observation that governments do not want strong indigenous organizations which, even if only symbolically, might threaten government control, and also, as I discuss below, the cultural hegemony that is rural white Australia.

Representation

Formal equality is practiced as representative democracy, the basis of government in Australia. This is the usual structure imposed on Aboriginal organizations and to which they are required to adhere in order to receive funding. Annually elected officials and members of boards run these organizations but if the value of representation is not recognized, the decisions of such a body may not carry weight within a community regardless of its weight in the wider society and even when respected people lead it. Aboriginal people value their personal autonomy highly but asserting the right not to be “stood over” in their own cultural terms often leads to them being defined by government officials as “difficult” or “obstructive.”

The contradictions of a colonial history do provide new scope for political manoeuvring. It might be expected that people without the kudos that country brings would draw on alternative means of acquiring power, such as activating “whitefella” law or procedure in their own interests. Using majority rule, without the prior community consultation which might make it justifiable, and claiming this

as democratic, or calling the police when things are not going one’s own way, are common strategies to both maintain and acquire power. These were common ways that conflict arose within LALCs, which Wiradjuri RALC members, at one remove, were better positioned to help deal with (although they are no longer able to). Ultimately, however, people know that any form of Aboriginal authority is accountable to a white system which does not legitimize Aboriginal cultural understandings. Even in the most cohesive of communities, authority based on respect has been worn down to the extent that it is now almost non-existent. This then plays into the hands of politicians who say Aboriginal people cannot manage their own affairs. The federal government has attributed the difficulties of self-management and escalation of violence in recent years within Aboriginal communities to the persistence of “culture” and has proposed that this be systematically discarded in favour of “Australian values.” There is little mention of the high unemployment and lack of economic opportunity confronting a majority of Aboriginal communities experiencing the violence of “social sickness.”

Individuals or Autonomous Persons

Linked to the idea of liberal democracy and exacerbating the tensions already mentioned is the notion of the individual. One might expect that the notion of equal value placed on individuals would mesh better with the value Aboriginal people place on each person as being of equal worth. But here, too, is a slippage—and perhaps a paradox. The significant contrast is not between individual and communal rights, as is often assumed in policy making (as in community-owned land under land rights legislation), but between the cultural notion of the individual which must be distinguished from the high value placed by Aboriginal people on personal autonomy. The intrinsic worth of an Aboriginal person is embedded in the notion of autonomy, and a person’s right to be themselves, to take responsibility for themselves, not to have to conform to others’ expectations, and to speak for themselves. It does not allow others to “stand over,” or to represent them without that person’s express consent or direction. Autonomy is defined in relation to the social (a specific kind defined not generalized social) not in contrast to it. Someone who cannot take responsibility for themselves is *narrabung*, the former meaning of which was an infant’s carrying basket. It refers to the state of being dependent, as with the very old or very young. Even very young children can seem to have a remarkable degree of autonomy (see, for example, Bell 1983). No one has a right to tell others what to do or to make decisions of their behalf without their express consent.

While there is no pressure to conform, in real terms one does or one cannot remain a part of the social, which is where the responsibility for oneself as part of that social comes in. No one should expect others to take care of them unless in infancy. Even the aged may find themselves neglected if they can no longer command respect or allocate valued resources. This is simultaneously a close and caring world and an apparently ruthless one. For countless centuries, the autonomy-relatedness tension has worked well. It is now seriously out of kilter (Macdonald 2000; Sutton 2001; Austin-Broos 2003). This value placed on each person's right to be different (even if this choice means "messing up" their lives) is undermined by the requirement in a representative democracy that one respect the majority, and accept the notion of representation, even being represented by people who are completely unknown. The majority vote is supposed to carry with it a mandate by which a representative may act or speak on behalf of others. While Aboriginal people participate in this system, sometimes it looks more like a game, going through the motions, because the values under-girding the system are not respected. The resultant conflicts tell us that Aboriginal values are alive and well—and that they do not necessarily translate "democratically."

The Wiradjuri RALC worked more effectively than many of the local land councils within the region. Conflicts emerging at a local level were often mediated by the region. Why the difference? First, the region was a step removed from the intimacy of kin relatedness and accountability but, in addition, others around the regional table did not and could not contest the right of delegates around the table to speak for their local communities. It could be assumed they had been accorded this right. However, at the local level this was harder to manage, except in those communities where people of long-standing local authority were elected to LALC positions. In the early years, this was often the case, as it was "grassroots" people who had got the system off the ground. But, as Valerie Simpson, a Wiradjuri woman from Cowra remarked to me, once the money started flowing "blacks started coming out of the woodwork." It was an apt description. Not only were those who had previously chosen not to involve themselves coming to the fore in the hopes of largesse, but so too were people who, for many years, had not identified themselves as being of Aboriginal descent. They were people who could and had attributed their somewhat different appearance to being of, for instance, Indian, Melanesian or Polynesian ancestry. This enhanced their status in the context of Australian racism. But these "born again" people, as they were called, had removed them-

selves from the cut and thrust of daily life, the demands of kinship and demand sharing, and the ever-present tension between autonomy and relatedness. They were more often attuned to the "whitefella way." Ambivalence and often bitterness emerged as the grassroots people saw the opportunities they had worked for being taken over by "other mobs" who had not wanted to be around "when it might have meant being kicked in the guts" in land rights marches and scuffles with police.

The current Liberal federal government, and the Liberal parties at federal and State levels, have consistently opposed "special rights" or collectively-oriented programs for Aboriginal people. Inclusion means self-reliant *individuals* (see examples in Watson 2004:577). "One Australia," "one nation," "governing for all Australians" are statements countering claims to both indigenous rights and special needs. The pressure is assimilationist, the methods are increasingly authoritarian. The Labor-Liberal political divide in Australia is better understood as one between socially-oriented liberalism and individually-oriented and more conservative liberalism. A State Labor government introduced the New South Wales land rights legislation, a Liberal government emptied it of content. But while the Labor Party has been more prepared to acknowledge indigenous rights and needs, it does so cautiously. It has not found a rationale for indigenous rights which the populace has been prepared to support (except, perhaps, for a short period in the late 1990s). Indigenous affairs is governed with a heavy hand because it requires a commitment to the maintenance of a set of contradictions ("difference") within the state. Both major parties shy away from its demands when they can.

Citizen or Kin

The notion of the individual as citizen raises the issue of kin-based socialities. For Wiradjuri people, doing things "our way" often means using accustomed pathways of kinship in accessing and distributing resources and opportunities. In a kin-based world, every autonomous person is also a social self, inseparable from rights, responsibilities and obligations to particular others. It is to be expected that a market society would have difficulty with a kin-oriented world. Austin-Broos (1996) has written of the disjunctures of morality which stem from the incompatibility of these very different social worlds as they interact and why it would take any fewer generations to change indigenous ontology and social values than it did in the tumultuous centuries it took Europe to become liberal and democratic. Aboriginal kin-oriented worlds have proven resilient to state-modification, in part because they were shielded by their spatial segregation, but also

because Aboriginal people often do not find the individualizing socialities of modernity attractive. While in parts of Australia which are more intensely occupied, like Wiradjuri country, Aboriginal people have been subjected to enforced change, most, in some way or another, still straddle different worlds as their daily experience. Negotiating such conflicting demands can be extremely stressful (see, for instance, Austin-Broos 2003).

Stanley Diamond's (1974) model of the state as concerned to impose its modalities of being on resistant kin-based communities is applicable here (cf. Gledhill 2000: 23ff.). Even kinship, reduced to its simplest form as nuclear family, potentially remains a contested domain because of its power to reproduce persons and identities irrespective of the state, and Diamond pointed out the state's attempts, through civil structures such as education, to control the possible resistance which might emerge from this private domain. In the case of whole kin-communities, this problem is writ large. In the highly individualized forms of liberalism evident in Australia, the Anglo-Australian kin-community has effectively been reduced to a nuclear family, a small unit which does not pose a challenge like that of whole communities organized on the basis of kinship. As Gledhill (2000) reminds us, kin-communities are based on consensual authority embodied in custom rather than power relations embodied in law. This is not to argue that Aboriginal kin-communities had more humane or egalitarian forms of social control. Rather, it is a recognition that their continued existence, and the apparent value placed on the maintenance of "Aboriginal culture," challenges the power of the state to intervene in people's lives, to transform moral orders and to command primary allegiance. As Austin-Broos (2005) has argued, difference is transformed into moral deficit.

Wiradjuri kin-networks are not equivalent to "extended families" or "local communities." They incorporate hundreds of people across regions that are spatially and socially extensive. This is in large part what contributed to the relative success of the Wiradjuri RALC, but it contravenes the roles and relationships defined by legislative requirements, by the notion of representative government, and by the formal equality of all. State resistance to the moral order established within a kin-based society is to be expected: the imperatives to look after kin become nepotism and to distribute one's earnings with kin who do not work is irresponsible. Aboriginal modes of kin-based "demand sharing" (Peterson 1993; Macdonald 2000) are modes of distribution not under state control and inappropriate to the reproduction of responsible, independent and individualized citizens and wage earners.

The Aboriginal domestic economy is rapidly changing so that interdependence does not have the pull it once had. Individualized social benefit payments, the notion of a role that can be acquired (by democratic election) rather than achieved (through a lifetime of effort), and the ability to move to cities and absolve oneself of kin demands—all such practices erode the former imperatives of sociality and can result in autonomy "run riot," each person for themselves. Often referred to by Wiradjuri people as an increasing "greed," this unhappy convergence of the liberal ideal of individual rights with the value placed on personal autonomy and distinctiveness within the social tears apart the capacity of Aboriginal persons and socialities to reproduce themselves in coherent ways—with few people sensing why relationships are becoming exploitative, uncaring, as well as psychologically and physically abusive.

Equality as Sameness

This discussion brings me back to the issue of difference and specifically the relationship between the worth of any person and his or her right to be different. Liberalism does not cope well with difference. In defining people as individuals, there is nevertheless a sameness about these individuals, and a common social standard by which their worth will be gauged, summed up in such notions as "civilized" or "the good citizen." Occupation, intelligence, education, appearance, ability, all these and more create their own hierarchy of distinctions (Bourdieu 1998). One's worth in a secular society is more problematic to negotiate than in a spiritually-defined world, in which it is pre-ordained by the fact that any person is already, from their conception, an expression of a creative ancestral life force (one's Dreaming). Wiradjuri people have not been able to reproduce their spiritual understandings through the 20th century. Nevertheless, two essential components of their transformed world remain constant: kin and country. People are constituted as persons within specific places and among a network of kin which will constitute their meaningful—for many their only—social relations throughout their lives. They do not have to achieve personal worth, they are born with it. They do have to achieve their full complement of rights, including the respect that will see them acknowledged as leaders, who are accorded a right to speak for specific significant others by those others. A Wiradjuri person is not going to be cast out because she is "on the grog" or a "no hoper" either. One's worth is intrinsic to "being kin," within intersecting communities of kin, within all of which one becomes a unique person.

Liberalism has an ambivalent approach to difference and conformity: it requires conformity at the same time that it extols tolerance and diversity, but the diversity it

espouses is more symbolic than actual. Australia has been generous in its migration policy in recent decades (with the exception of those arriving by boat) but the often heard refrain, that people are welcome “as long as they become like us” and “fit in with us,” reflects an intolerance of different ways of life when these might seem to intrude or demand changes on the part of the “true blue” Australian, who is still of Anglo origin. Various social pressures are laid at the foot of newcomers including reasons for why people cannot get jobs, for why prices are rising or for why there is more crime. It is not difficult for politicians to use fear tactics to delegitimize the notion of “special treatment.”

The Place of Property

While individual rights in property (of all kinds) is the cornerstone of the Australian legal system, and thus its socio-economic system, the state asserts a valid jurisdiction over all its territory, including that owned by individuals (single or corporate). It has the right, if not always the temerity, to override individual rights. It is to be expected in a settler state, in particular one with no history of treaties, whether honoured or not, that indigenous claims to prior possession, calls for land rights, and the recognition of native title would call forth political and economic concern. The Australian High Court’s determination of 1993, which became known as the “Mabo decision” after its instigator, Eddie Mabo, was the first legal recognition that indigenous rights pre-existed British sovereignty. As such, it clearly threatened the notion of “property” and thus the entire national legal and political edifice. The hastily enacted *Native Title Act* (Cwth) 1994 responded to what became known as “Mabo madness”: near hysteria from Australians talking about losing their “backyards” to Aborigines. This Act protected non-indigenous interests in land, leaving a restricted allowance for indigenous claims. Aboriginal political activity, aimed at self-determination, land rights or native title, political or economic autonomy, or the creation of a treaty (a current demand of many indigenous Australians to better guarantee their rights), is often represented as “against the national interest,” resulting in a “loss of land to Australia,” or as not in the “interests of all Australians.” *Indigenous* interests are not equated with *Australian* interests and are implicitly or explicitly cast as oppositional or antagonistic. Whether or not the threats are real, voicing them publicly is enough to create an impression of illegitimate “special treatment” or a pending economic collapse, both of which contravene Australian democracy’s “fair go.” Although Wiradjuri people worked in the 19th century as members of an emerging working class, it was never

intended that they become new landholders or part of a landed social elite.

Since the early 1980s, Aboriginal calls for recognition of their sovereignty through the enactment of a treaty or, at least, constitutional change, challenge the legal legitimacy of the state, as illustrated in two court cases (*Coe vs Commonwealth* 1976, 1994, both brought by Wiradjuri people). Such demands need to be domesticated and rendered ineffectual by the state—as indeed they have been. Demonizing, sacking or sidelining radical or critical national Aboriginal leaders is a common strategy: they are represented as divisive of Aboriginal people. When the federal and State governments are the major employer of all Aboriginal people through an elaborate system of welfare-oriented “self-management” (what Rowse 2002 calls the “indigenous sector”), it should be of no surprise that governments have spent more money opposing Aboriginal demands for recognition of rights to land than it has spent allocating land, alleviating poverty or educational inequality, or developing sustainable economic opportunities. One has to conclude that what is defined as Aboriginal “oppositional” movements are, on the one hand, attempts to incorporate in distinctive ways, or, on the other, frustration at the lack of recognition that persists. In a nation-state with a strong historical commitment to a homogenized national identity—with the exception of two decades celebrating “multiculturalism” in the late 20th century—the recognition of legitimate difference in Australia remains elusive. Medal-winning Aboriginal athlete, Cathy Freeman, running a victory lap with an Aboriginal as well as a national flag at the Commonwealth Games was accused of denying her Australian-ness. On the other hand, this is the nation which refused to recognize Aboriginal service in both World Wars or admit Aboriginal service personnel into the Returned Services League (RSL) until the mid-1980s. Some might think there was no finer demonstration of the desire to incorporate than to volunteer (there has been no conscription for Aboriginal people but many have volunteered from the 1914-18 war on). Can this be attributed to “racism” when Australians of many non-indigenous colours and creeds were recognized?

Strategies of Denial

There is a slippage between “peoples and their rights” and “states and their advantages” (Maybury-Lewis 1997:136) which allows for indigenous Australians to be represented as working “against the national interest” even when this is irrelevant or untrue. So, is it the case that indigenous people, by definition, can be assumed to differ from other citizens in that their primary loyalty is

not to the state? Are indigenous peoples a “threat” to the modern settler nation? There is no doubt that they are at least a festering sore for various reasons, not the least of which is the increasing marginalization that is now following decades of ambivalence about their inclusion (and there are ample signs that neo-liberalism is exacerbating this to an extreme extent). It is made more difficult by the common assumption in Australia that nation-building and a strong state are one and the same. The presence of the indigenous colonial subject poses a particular problem for the homogenizing project of nation-building.

Two different strategies are evident in the history of dealing with colonial subjects in English-speaking settler states. The first involves a denial of difference through its erasure—accomplished quite literally through extinction or programs of eugenics, or socially through either spatial segregation or assimilation. All have been tried in Australia. The civil and indigenous rights movements have put an end to legislated exclusions but the indigenous subject is now othered in a different way, called upon to “perform an authentic difference in exchange for the good feelings of the nation and the reparative legislation of the state” (Povinelli 2002:6). An oppositional identity is legitimized but extended only to a symbolic other, rendering it external to the operations of the state. It is in this context that we can understand the contradictory government focus on, on the one hand, the Aboriginal person’s “failure” to attain modernity epitomized in welfare-dependence, sickness and criminality, and, on the other hand, the celebration of Aboriginal arts and tourism, and the discourse of cultural authenticity. In either case, Aboriginal people are positioned outside the state. Given that an enduring theme of Australian mono-nationalism is the depiction of Aboriginal peoples as lacking the civilization or cultural characteristics taken to be those definitional of the hegemonic nation (cf. Handler and Segal 1993:5, who note that the hegemonic majority is dependent for its assessment of itself on the minority it denigrates), this lends weight to Povinelli’s (1998, 1999) argument that this understanding of the Australian national self requires that Aborigines continue to fail, except as tourist drawcards or, notably, in sport which can, in any case, be understood in terms of racialized characteristics.

The politics of indignity in the nation-state are struggles between the right of soil (based on a liberal universalism in which primordial individuals are united into an enlightened society based on rights and duties), and the right of blood (which divides the world into particularistic “ethnic” groups). It is here that we can begin to locate the limits of the liberal democratic state to deal with difference. Aboriginal movements of any kind have as their

goal a political community alternate to that offered to them by the state at the time (cf. Breuilly 1994 on colonial nationalism). Local or uncoordinated movements pose little threat but regional movements have the capacity to turn into effective instruments of power which, in their agenda of difference and desire for at least less accountability to the liberal state, cannot be legitimized within it. The objectification and institutional containment of Aboriginal difference is a necessary exercise of power by a state that needs to enframe and secularize Aboriginality—indeed, as with other forms of difference which emerge, for instance, in migrant groups.

In the homogenizing project of the nation, people who “do not fit” are displaced and marginalized. This may take place on the basis of, for instance, ethnicity, gender, class and sexuality. In ethnic terms, “blacks” are easier to marginalize, the people referred to in Australia as “real Aborigines.” As Mary Douglas (1984:67) said, “holiness requires that different classes of thing shall not be confused.” But if blood provides the fiction of “race” and race, based on blood, binds the nation, settler nations have a dilemma. Whose blood, black or white, defines the nation? Thanksgiving Day in the United States of America is a remarkable coming together of indigenous and colonizer in a powerful nation myth, but there is no similar example in other settler nations. In Australia it has clearly been white blood that has been important and that is celebrated on Australia Day commemorating white settlement. Black blood was not only located on the periphery but its presence was seldom in the historical record at all until relatively recently. And how much more problematic has been mixed blood: the creole, the métis, the part-aborigine? In Australia, as elsewhere, there has been a history of attempts to limit coitus between racially defined categories of citizens, illustrating the conjuncture between race, nation and sexuality (Carnegie 1996:497). A threat is posed by those, such as Wiradjuri people, who jeopardize the continuity of nation as “race” because they are evidence of an inappropriate placement of procreative substances (the offspring of both consensual and enforced sex destabilize theories of race). Wiradjuri people are rarely dark-skinned, not fully of Aboriginal descent, and have lived with Anglo-Australians over a long period of time. They are no longer radically different and they cannot perform authentic difference even though many make efforts to respond to this agenda. Rather, their efforts are made in terms of their understanding of themselves as colonial subjects which challenges not only “race” but also the ways in which Australia has told its national history. The challenge to the state posed by them beginning to amass political strength

and economic power is not the kind of Aboriginal success story the state wants to celebrate.

Because Anglo-Australian whiteness is still the standard by which achievements and civilization are measured, Wiradjuri people find it harder to achieve—they are put on the defensive if they want to achieve in Aboriginal terms. The kind of disparaging comments the Wiradjuri RALC and other land councils experienced through the 1980s stem from the common set of fictions within the state's cultural conceptual system in which "pure essences" are affirmed and assigned a hierarchical order. This threatens the boundaries of whiteness. The difference constructed by the colonizer between "black other" and "white us" is uncomfortably unsettled by their presence. The white Aborigine is uncontainable, even more so now there are waves of people re-identifying and newly identifying as Aboriginal, people who previously defined themselves or were defined as white.

Status and the Proper Person

Indigenous incorporation also challenges entrenched systems of statuses and civility. Wiradjuri people, historically and now, have not just been engaged in shaping their identities. They were, from their perspective, engaged in shaping their status vis-à-vis other Australians, challenging and changing notions of privilege, ranking and prestige (cf. Handler and Segal 1993:6). They wanted what Ann Weldon, Wiradjuri leader, referred to in 1985 as "justice and recognition" (personal communication). The recognition was not to come that easily. In 1986 the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act (NSW)* was amended to, among other things, restrict claims to residential property. White land owners had complained that the value of their houses would decline with Aboriginal neighbours. Wiradjuri people often encountered negative, even aggressive, reactions to their "successful" purchases of land and property. Challenging a system of status is far more destabilizing than bland assertions of Aboriginal identity or cultural resurgence. In translating a government concept into practice, the Wiradjuri RALC was engaged in producing a new set of relations of power. They were not recreating either dependence or a new form of rural labourer. Rather, they saw themselves as emergent land owners and entrepreneurs. They managed this only in a small way—but the message was clear enough. They wanted the tables turned.

Returning to the Wiradjuri RALC

Wiradjuri people have not simply been reproducing themselves as persons throughout their colonial history. They have also been being produced according to other, and

shifting, categories—as labourers, sexual objects, racialized others, an expense on the state, as inconsequential, cultureless, a nuisance or a threat. Even as "part-Aborigines" (never part-white), they were able to be excluded as a lesser other, but not being "real Aborigines" were not even worthy of the essentialized and primitivized identity that "real" Aborigines could claim as *legitimately* other. Axel (2002) is right when he maintains the state does not perceive the threat of the indigenous presence as being in terms of an enemy or even a different culture but as continually making visible "the tenuousness of the colonial state and its futures." The containment of Wiradjuri people illustrates what Axel refers to as "one of the basic ironies of colonial rule: that it produced the possibility of its own demise while setting the ground for the emergence of national and ethnic identities, those seemingly contagious hallmarks of modernity" (2002:18). The objectification and institutional containment of Aboriginal difference, even difference of a few degrees as in the Wiradjuri case, is a necessary exercise of power by a state needing to enframe, secularize and, hopefully, to commodify Aboriginality so as to ensure its own continuity. The state must measure its success by its ability to either fix difference outside itself or assimilate it into itself: there is little room to be "successful" as *Wiradjuri* people.

The "Aboriginal problem" which the state in Australia has deliberated over for more than a century is that they continue to exist. That brings me back to Agnes Coe's question, "what the hell do these white politicians and white society want from us as Aborigines? Do they really want us to fit in? Do they want us to be a part of things, or do they just want us to be depending on them all the time?" The answer is that they want you "as Aborigines" to disappear, to become like any other citizen of the nation-state, to eliminate the threat of a tenuous legitimation. There are always "others" on the margins of any socio-cultural-political world and imperialism and the reach of global capital have ensured that all states have "others" within as well as beyond. However, liberal-democracies espouse humanism, and there is the rub. Colonialism awkwardly required that the colonized other be made part of the political self. A new "scientific" theory of humanness developed to meet the need for a principle of exclusion: evolution, quickly followed by "race." Racializing theories allowed for exploitation, inequality and exclusion *within* a state, allowing liberal democracies to camouflage the contradictions on which they were based. Race theories sustained systems of power and reinforced class relations. In the 20th century, as these scientific theories were debunked, Aboriginality became defined in temporal terms, as the "traditional" and allochronistic (Fabian 1983)

other, but still in “the savage slot” (Trouillot 1991; Austin-Broos 1998): a kind of difference that could be contained.

Yet I am implying that racism, pervasive as it is and inextricably part of the liberal state’s construction of itself, is an insufficient explanation of why and what liberalism excludes. That it does so, and uses “race” and “traditionality” as key strategies, does not explain *why* it excludes, and this can only bring us back to the hegemonic system of capitalist power that liberal democracy has so skillfully continued to disguise—which is the perduring character of capitalism which will always be “colonial” in its effects. Liberalism, as capitalism’s moral order, needs moral legitimacy for its exclusions. This not only explains the continued efficacy and persistence of racializing models but also the ongoing discomfort of the settler nation. As Stanner (1979) once pointed out, the destruction of Aboriginal society was not the consequence of the development of the Australian nation but its price.

Liberalism maintains its currently extraordinary, even attractive force in world politics through institutions which recognize—but in such a way as to exclude—the process Povinelli (2002) calls “the cunning of recognition” (cf. Litzinger 2003). What she calls the “celebratory rhetoric of liberal multiculturalism” is undoubtedly unique and desirable, giving democracy, as Povinelli puts it, “its unique social vitality.” But she also recognized that “that liberalism is harmful not only when it fails to live up to its ideals, but when it approaches them” (2002:11). Liberalism has its limits. There are intractable incommensurabilities which, when encountered, mark the boundary of possibility for inclusion. They are not based on culture or race but on hegemonic economic power. Where movements arise which might challenge this hegemony, even if only in symbolic ways, they must be suppressed. Cultural difference or waves of unpleasant racism are manageable, even desirable ways of explaining and dealing with unrest because they, by default as it were, legitimize the status quo of who can represent themselves as genuinely concerned for the other experiencing cultural violence.

For Wiradjuri people to claim Aboriginality is to be rendered a double failure: they are neither what the state legitimizes as “real Aboriginal” nor are they the “good citizen.” If distinctive Aboriginal ways of being in the world are incompatible with the state, then indigenous social policy can do no more than alleviate the distress caused by the destruction of one by the other. The price is still being paid. Thus the “ambivalence” of Silverstein’s (2002) “enduring colonialism” lies in the refusal of the adherents of liberalism to acknowledge the limits of liberal democracy’s incorporative willingness, because, in doing so, they would have to acknowledge its ongoing his-

tory of destruction and suppression. This leads Povinelli to speak of the state’s issue with “repugnance” (2002:6ff) but it is more a matter of the state being unable to incorporate that which challenges its very self.

The conceptual unity of the nation is based on its imagined sharing of history, language and culture. The homogenizing this involves supports pressures for conformity at the same time that it encourages oppositional movements (Gledhill 2000:17-18). The almost complete lack of any economic autonomy on the part of indigenous Australians gives governments an extraordinary degree of control because all programs to benefit indigenous individuals or communities are channelled through state bureaucracies. The state even pays for indigenous legal challenges against itself, for instance, contested land claims and native title cases, and compensation for child removal. When an Aboriginal organization gets too political or outspoken, it is simply defunded or restructured, as in the case of the Aboriginal Legal Service in Sydney—commenced by Wiradjuri people in 1972 and the first indigenous organization in Australia to gain NGO status at the United Nations. Indigenous rights and sovereignty were central to its platform alongside its concern about a racist legal system and the over-representation of Aboriginal people in jails.

Maybury-Lewis (1997:136), reviewing the French tradition of liberalism within which, as a state develops, its citizens are expected to be “more reasonable and rational” and to “abandon their traditional ethnic attachments,” points out that ethnicity was expected to vanish (1997:132). This is the path to the destruction of cultural difference: liberalism has always had its “despotic” side (Valverde 1996) evidenced in policies of enforced assimilation. Nevertheless, Maybury-Lewis seems optimistic when he says “the world has woken up to the fact that ignoring or denying ethnicity will not work.” However, he underestimates the move to neo-liberalism and its redefinition of the citizen, a move that sidelines cultural and social difference and diminishes democracy. Neo-liberalism redefines the citizen as client or consumer, moving from a social-political definition to an economic one. It supports an economic policy which is socially exclusionary. While it is already provoking resistance in some parts of the world, its destabilizing of industrial relations enforces conformity because people worry about their economic futures (see Bourdieu 1998). At present, Australia’s welfare system is still sufficiently robust to camouflage the extent of increasing Aboriginal economic marginalization, and the recent tolerance of racism (in the name of keeping out refugees who are described as “illegals”) makes it politically palatable to blame Aboriginal

ghettoization on Aboriginal people themselves. However, it is evident that this is the tip of a much bigger iceberg: hegemonic categories of race, class and gender are re-emerging and will make more visible the structures of (colonial) power which persist within liberal democracies. The evidence to date is that neo-liberalism will more conspicuously use its power to contain ethnic difference, demands or dissent, as the treatment of refugees and Aboriginal political movements indicates. In fact, it is liberalism's history of using coercive means of controlling certain populations that highlights both the limits of inclusion but also the success of its rhetoric over time. It is not difficult for liberalism to create a fearful or lesser "other" when occasion demands, which is precisely why racism is so integral to it.

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Note

- 1 Australia is a federated system of States and where this level of government is referred to, State is capitalized. When state is used in its wider reference to governance it is not capitalized.

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