



**HOUSING
and COMMUNITY
RESEARCH UNIT**

**The urban and regional
segregation of indigenous
Australians: Out of sight,
out of mind?**

Paper No. 12

**Housing and Community
Research Unit**

Rowland Atkinson,
School of Sociology and Social Work,
University of Tasmania

Elizabeth Taylor,
RMIT University, Melbourne

Maggie Walter,
School of Sociology and Social Work,
University of Tasmania



Housing and
Community Research Unit
School of Sociology and Social Work

University of Tasmania
Private Bag 17, Hobart,
Tas 7001, Australia

T: 00 61 3 6226 7604

F: 00 61 3 6226 2279

W: <http://www.utas.edu.au/sociology/HACRU/>

Burying Indigeneity: The Spatial Construction of Reality and Aboriginal Australia

1. Introduction

That Indigenous Australians occupy the continent's more remote spaces appears as something of a self-evident fact. In many ways this social and spatial disconnection has become an increasingly important in explanations for the dramatic gaps in life-chances and disadvantage of Aboriginal Australians. Yet it also underlies common-sense understandings of Indigeneity where it is seen as intransigent and its problems self-inflicted as the result of not joining mainstream white culture and market-oriented ways of being. Such perspectives lags a knowledge of the real spatial distribution of Indigenous Australians across its inner regional and urban areas. Life, for the majority of the Australian Indigenous population is, in fact, urban, and the lived experience of socio-economic disparities is particularly acute between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in urban locations. Yet such proximity is not generally matched by daily social contact or the entwining of white and black institutional contexts. Our analysis in this paper highlights how it is that socio-economic exclusion and political marginalisation for Indigenous Australians continues in large part because it is out of the sight of white Australians even while residing side by side.

Ian Thorpe¹ recently expressed his astonishment and disgust at the appalling condition of living conditions in an Indigenous community (NIT, 2007). Thorpe joins the ranks of numerous public officials, policymakers and other key figures that have been publicly surprised by the material poverty, housing, health and education outcomes of Australia's original peoples. Our contention is that we should also be surprised at such surprise – how is it that the abject condition and marginality of Indigenous Australians should be periodically (re)discovered in this way? We argue that such serial epiphanies are a deeper reflection of the spatial and social separation of non-Indigenous Australia from the actualities of Indigenous lives. For much of the Australian population, Aboriginal peoples exist primarily as

a concept outside of their lived social reality. This separation of parallel lives extends to and shapes the actions, and inactions, of government and policy makers on Indigenous issues. This contention is supported by evidence of a decade of neglect, demonstrable underspending by State and Federal governments during a period of fiscal bounty and a continuation of truly remarkable gaps between the socio-economic outcomes of white and black Australians.

In advancing this position we pay close attention to the spatial distribution of Indigenous Australians across political jurisdictions. We also consider the social and institutional circuits that are built upon these distributions. In short, we are proposing that a spatially ingrained patterning of Indigenous residential life is diminished in its contact with white Australian social and institutional life by its numerical slightness and by the projects of administrations to discount a culture which has often been under-enumerated. The spatial patterning and daily trajectories of white and black Australians under these conditions of numerical asymmetry and segregation reveal a mutual hermetic boundedness that generates senses of social reality that are informed by this spatial constitution of social relations. This has led to the production of a broadly sheltered, affluent and separate Australian political class that is spatially distant and socially disengaged from the lives of black Australians.

Taken as social, political, economic and cultural totalities these socio-spatial relations and practices highlight the partition of black and white Australia. Thus the burying of indigeneity refers both to the ignorance that tends to be produced by these circuits, and to social arrangements and the active pursuit of modes of public intervention that exoticise and distance the cultural alienness of Aboriginal life in the public imagination. In both urban and remote areas Indigenous life is cast as intransigent to state aid, incommensurably different and hopeless. We acknowledge the very deep complexities and multiple positions of white and black commentators on these issues. Our claim in this paper is that such ideologies and comfortable ways of Australian whiteness are bolstered by the everyday concealment of black lives across the residential and institutional landscape.

The paper is structured as follows. We begin by elaborating our theoretical position with regard to the social and spatial construction of reality and the potential for applying these

¹ Thorpe is a former Australian Olympic swimmer and well-loved sports personality. Similar examples can be found: 'David de Krester visited the remote Indigenous community of Wadeye in January. It was the first time the Governor of Victoria has visited such a place. And it opened his eyes. "I found it fascinating," he says. "I was surprised that there were four or five languages spoken, that there were certain clans where only 50 per cent of the population spoke English or had a good understanding of English." Visit opens Governors eyes to complexity of sensitive health problems, *The Age*, June 27th.

Burying Indigeneity: The Spatial Construction of Reality and Aboriginal Australia

frameworks for policymaking and implementation at the Australian State and Federal scales. Second, we report data that maps the distribution of Aboriginal households in relation to degrees of remoteness and urbanisation and corollary data that explores levels of social interaction. These data highlight the disjunction and concentration of Aboriginal households in these spaces, its relative urbanisation contrary to policymaking frameworks and the extended cleavage between Aboriginal and affluent residential spaces. Finally, we provide a commentary on the recent 'intervention' in the Northern Territory, as an example of how sporadic policy forays under these socio-spatial conditions has produced aggressive, socially cathartic and paternalistic responses in the face of counter-evidence and the marginalised voices of black Australians. We conclude by discussing the contribution of a socio-spatial understanding of policymaking and its implications for the 'burying' of Indigenous life in white mainstream Australia.

2. The social and spatial construction of reality

Two key strands of social theory inform the analysis we present in this paper. The first of these is the sense of social and spatial distance provided by the segregation literature, predominantly in urban studies, and the implications of this for the understanding of political empathy, life-chances and concealment. The second comes from sociological examinations of the distribution of knowledge and received senses of the layout and constitution of social reality. Our concerns are, then, particularly with the way in which social lives can be lived separately by particular ethnic and social groups and by the application of this spatialised understanding of social life for the kinds of senses of social reality that spring from these connected issues. As with many previous researchers we aim to reflect on how it is that adjacent lives come to resemble cellular and mutually exclusive social spaces, lacking knowledge of each other.

These concerns are important in later highlighting two distinct features of Indigenous life in Australia. First, that it is both urban, regional and remote in its distribution. Second, that its slightness in numbers prevents spatial proximity from impinging on the lived social reality of white Australians, particularly those from affluent households and neighbourhoods. Earlier examples of

deep segregation and the kinds of racialised and otherwise socially insensitive and ignorant policy interventions litter the literature.

Massey and Duncan's work on American apartheid (1993), Pred's treatment of the Swedish concealment of minority populations and the sustenance of myths of progressive social life (2000) and recently Wacquant's (2008) work on the advanced marginality and incarceration of black Americans in the US penal and housing system are all concerned with the way that spatial apartness yields ignorance and a dual spatial character to residential life. Segregation can then be interpreted as a mark of racism, institutional discrimination, the absence of social integration between groups, the breeding of enmity, the withdrawal of the affluent and the cementing of these socio-spatial arrangements as they become more embedded in the urban landscape.

The social and spatial construction of reality

This conceptual armoury, while having resonance, is not grounded in the kind of spatial, cultural and political contexts within which Indigenous problems might be most effectively understood in Australia. The vastness of the continent, its urban primacy and Federalism and the small numbers of Aboriginal people across these spaces has created a devastating dynamic rending Indigenous peoples who are insignificant to political representation and commercial interests. The dominant, out of step with reality, impression of the spatial and social location of black Australia is reflected in the policy maker focus on remote communities and spatial and cultural alignment with modern (i.e. white) ways of living as a key policy direction.

Berger and Luckmann (1966) define the social construction of reality as first, the concern with what passes for knowledge and second, the way that this is unevenly socially distributed and third, how it informs constructs of how society is constituted for individuals and groups of social actors. These insights are powerful in highlighting how social influences and power structures shape the constructs by which institutional and social life are lived out. The sociality of our existence means that we do not just see reality in relation to our individual apprehensions of this world, rather knowledge is mediated, inherited and adjusted through mechanisms of primary and secondary socialisation, through institutions and is variously affected by different forms of social power and media transmission. We are not dupes yet we are deeply influenced in complex

Burying Indigeneity: The Spatial Construction of Reality and Aboriginal Australia

ways by the sense of this social reality and we are granted partial and affecting viewpoints by virtue of the spaces and social positions we occupy. As Berger and Luckmann argue:

Man [sic] is biologically predestined to construct and to inhabit a world with others. This world becomes for him the dominant and definitive reality. Its limits are set by nature...man produces reality and thereby produces himself (Berger and Luckmann, 1966: 183).

Such an account becomes more persuasive if we add a concern with the *spatial* distribution of power relations and social positions. Society is an objective reality experienced social participants located in particular spaces and vantage points. How then does insularity, remoteness, cultural and other power asymmetries play out in relation to well-worn themes of Indigenous disadvantage? Here we are concerned to develop an understanding of how policymaking and the relative disconnection of white and black senses of reality and knowledge go to make-up complex boundaries for groups that lack access to political and economic resources.

The occasional encounters between white and black Australia as per the examples given at the outset of the paper highlight the insularity, boundedness and mutual exclusivity of white and black lives, even insofar as these are lived out in close proximity as well as remoteness.

Mahood pinpoint this disjuncture, noting that:

‘One of the results of moving on a regular basis between predominantly white urban Australia and predominantly black remote Australia is an awareness of the gulf of perception between those people for whom Aboriginal Australia is a reality and those for whom it is an idea’ (Mahood, 2007: 1)

Research misdirections, or (Not) Seeing Like a State

This disjunction is evident across geographic place. In work by Long et al (2007) it is clear that the existing terrain of Indigenous housing research has been overly focused on remote Australia to the detriment of more urban populations, what they describe as an ‘urban gap’. The PriceWaterhouseCoopers review² (2007) of Commonwealth provision for Indigenous housing is criticised by Long and his colleagues for seeing movement up the settlement hierarchy as the solution to problems, the commodification

of land rights hard won and the disciplining of remote lives into becoming more akin to white ways of living. Concerns with ‘sustainability’ provide the legitimisation of these policy ambitions, without recognition of a significant literature on the underspending of State and Federal dollars on Indigenous health, education and housing.

A compounding issue is the institutional disengagement and misunderstanding of Indigenous populations and communities. A key example is institutional information failure whereby the ABS³ census is unable to effectively enumerate remote Aboriginal populations. In 2007 the National Indigenous Times revealed massive undercounting of the Indigenous population in the 2006 census. A Post Enumeration Survey (PES), used to make estimates more accurate, highlighted differences between the official count and PES estimate of 19,852,973 and 20,402,459 for the total Australian population i.e. 2.7 per cent. However, the Indigenous undercount was estimated as being between 9 and 14 per cent but might be as high as 29.6 per cent⁴. In remote Australia it appears that these problems were more acute. In 2003 population estimates were required of ABS on Wadeye, a remote community in the Northern Territory that is often isolated by flood waters in the rain season due to poor road and bridge infrastructure. The ABS claimed that the town had a population of 1,660 people, but when the town conducted estimates with Australian National University, they came up with an estimate of 2,150, 30% higher than the official estimate. Such problems, however are not confined to remote areas. In regional Dubbo, the same criticism was made by Aboriginal groups after the 2001 census. Low census data on public tenancies and CDEP participation led community groups to claim that the census count of around 3,000 people actually should be doubled. Of course such figures affect social infrastructure provision such as hospitals, schools and housing.

As the NIT put it, State, Territory and Federal governments had not only been under-spending their under-funding of Indigenous affairs, they had also been under-spending the under-funding they had been *undercounting*. Such under-funding was estimated at around \$600m for 2006 alone. Policymakers and the States rely on this kind of

3 ABS: Australian Bureau of Statistics. In fact the Australian census has only officially sought to count the Aboriginal population since 1971.

4 The state undercounts were reported as follows: WA 24%; NT 19-22% or up to 15,000 people; QLD between 9 and 16% (as high as 24,000 people); NSW <1% - 12% (18,000); SA up to 11%; overall an undercount of 59,178 Indigenous people (based on average) but could be as high as 72,500. The revised Indigenous population estimate for 2006 was revised to 517,000, approximately 2% of the nation's population.

2 The report is prefaced with a suitable quote from the community: “No government can justify keeping on building houses in the middle of nowhere where there is no school, no healthcare, no law and order, unreliable power and water, no jobs...and no hope for another generation of our people” (PriceWaterhouseCoopers, 2007: 2). Yet as the report shows, only around 10% of CHIP funding has been spent on remote areas.

Burying Indigeneity: The Spatial Construction of Reality and Aboriginal Australia

intelligence and flows of information to reflect the needs of specific groups. There is little doubt that the Indigenous population in remote areas is in a double-bind whereby existing funding is widely held to be inadequate while public service infrastructures and statistical collection services are inadequate to inform central State and Federal administrations of the extent of such need. Importantly we can see that flows of information that allows the state to 'see' (Scott, 1998) are damaged in a country with both the scale, socio-political history and institutional legacies of Australia.

The kind of growing partition and segregation of urban space in Australian cities is further reinforcing boundaries and the possibilities of withdrawal and partiality of reality constructs. As de Caüter has argued:

'Our daily life can be exactly described as a movement from one enclave or capsule (home for instance) to another (campus, office, airport, all-in hotel, mall and so on)...neoliberal individualism plus suburbanization of daily life equals capsularization.' (de Caüter, 2003: 96)

We now move to ground these comments in an analysis of the statistical distribution of the Australian Indigenous population.

3. The spatial disconnect between Indigenous lives and white Australia

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) estimates that at 30 June 2006 the Indigenous population surpassed half a million, reaching 517,174 or 2.5 per cent of the total Australian population (ABS 4705.0). Indigenous people in Australia live lives that are different and separated from those of the non-Indigenous population. When British colonists arrived on Australian shores in 1788, the continent was already populated by an estimated 300,000 Indigenous inhabitants. Divided into about 500 clans, each with their own culture, dialect and territory, these Indigenous peoples lived a nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyle, dependent on their local climate and topography (Broome 2001). The British interpreted the hunter-gatherer lifestyle of the Aboriginal peoples to mean that no recognisable rule of law existed in Australia and, therefore, under the doctrine of *Terra Nullius* (empty land), no customary right to land existed. This manoeuvring eliminated the legal requirement for treaties or settlements with the existing inhabitants, a

fiction not overturned in Australia until 1992 (McGlade 2003).

Dependent on the accessibility and arability of land, the colonisation process began and proceeded at different times and paces throughout the Australian continent. But although the timing varied the pattern was similar. Initial Indigenous contact with European settlers quickly led to confrontation over the usurpation of traditional lands, followed by the forcible eviction of Aboriginal peoples to confinement in native reserves or cast-off as marginalised fringe dwellers. These violent clashes, combined with the devastating toll of introduced diseases, decimated Indigenous populations in newly colonised areas. Two hundred years on, the legacy of colonisation remains tangible in the disparate demographic patterns and embedded socio-economic and health inequalities.

3.i. Social separation and Indigenous Identification

The current Australian definition of Indigeneity states that an Indigenous person is one who:

- i. has Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent
- ii. identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person
- iii. is accepted as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander by the community in which he or she lives.

This definition is widely accepted within Government departments, statutory bodies and institutions, but sometimes contested as imposed by Aboriginal groups. Based around this definition, in 1995, the ABS adopted a standard question for Indigenous status,⁵ providing greater consistency over time and over data collections and allowing valid ratio and rates to be produced (Barnes 1996).

Socio-Economic Separation

The differential and mostly disadvantageous position of Indigenous people in Australian society is most obvious around socio-economic indicators. Indigenous Australians remain intractably poor and despite well over a decade of economic growth the life circumstances of Indigenous Australians show not even marginal improvement. The

⁵ In 1995 the ABS formally adopted the following question as the standard for identifying persons as members of the Indigenous population: Are you of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin? For persons of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin please mark both 'Yes' boxes. Response options are: No; Yes, Aboriginal; and Yes, Torres Strait Islander

Burying Indigeneity: The Spatial Construction of Reality and Aboriginal Australia

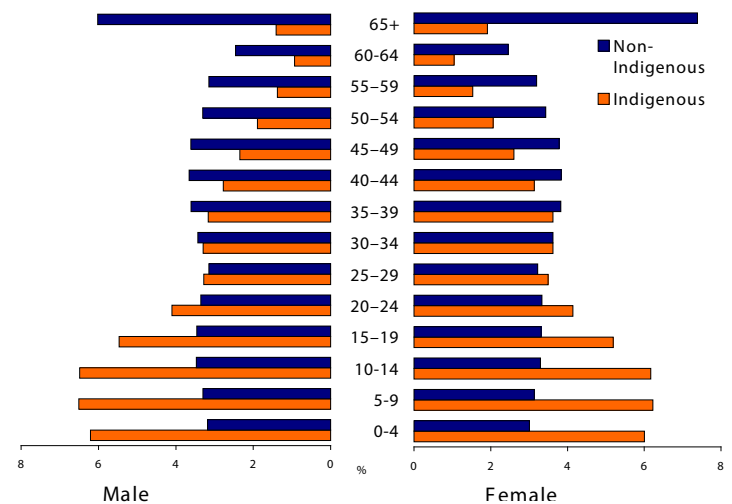
depressing comparative data bears witness to Indigenous socio-economic separation from other Australians. These include: the 17 year gap in life expectancy; the high rates of suicide; the high rates of infant mortality and low birth weights; the high rates of household overcrowding; the lower and non-improving levels of education and educational achievement; the more than 50 per cent of Aboriginal people reliant on Centrelink⁶ payments as their main source of income; an Indigenous unemployment rate that remains more than triple the national average regardless of the dubious practice of counting CDEP⁷ workers as employed; aggregate household income levels that stay stubbornly at only around 60 percent of those of Australians and low levels of home ownership and high levels of public housing tenancies. If a consistently shared socio-economic position can be considered the basis of social class, then Indigenous Australians form their own class, firmly wedged at the bottom of Australian society (Walter 2007a).

Separation by Age Structure

Indigenous people in Australia differ significantly in relation to population and age structure. Although currently forming only a small fraction of the total, the Indigenous population is growing at a faster rate than the non-Indigenous population. In the census period 2001 - 2006 the Indigenous population increased by around 14 per cent and this followed substantial rises in the previous census periods. Around three quarters of this intercensal increase is explained by demographic factors (such as higher fertility rates and younger age structure), with the ABS (2005) linking the remainder of the rise to better recording methods and a greater willingness for respondents to identify as Indigenous. A high level of out-partnering among Indigenous people also contributes to the rising population, with the children of mixed Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents tending to identify themselves as Indigenous.

Clearly identifiable demographic differences also exist between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in Australia. As shown in the age pyramids in Figure 1 below, the age structure of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations differs quite dramatically. While the non-Indigenous population is ageing, as indicated by the declining proportion of youth, the Indigenous population is trending in almost the exact opposite direction. In 2006 the Indigenous median age is 20 years and more than 38 per cent of the Indigenous population is below 15 years. In comparison the median non-Indigenous age is 37 years and only 20 per cent of the non-Indigenous population are aged under 15 years. In contrast, only three per cent of the Indigenous population is aged 65 years or over compared to more than 13 per cent of the non-Indigenous population.

Figure 1:
Australian population distribution, by age and sex, 30 June 2006



Source: DEST derived: ABS, 2006

Census of Population and Housing, 2068.0 2007

These contrasting statistics reflect higher fertility among the Indigenous population on the one hand and the lower life expectancy of Indigenous people on the other. Australian Indigenous women have more children and have them at a younger age than non-Indigenous women. The current total fertility rate for Indigenous women is 2.15 compared to the national rate of 1.76. The other factor impacting on the Australian Indigenous population profile is the entrenched low life expectancy of Indigenous people. While data are compromised by incomplete records, an approximate 20 year life expectancy difference exists between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians (ABS 2003). In the states

⁶ Australia's social security payment system

⁷ CDEP

Burying Indigeneity: The Spatial Construction of Reality and Aboriginal Australia

where records on Indigenous mortality are most reliable, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, three quarters of Indigenous men and 60 per cent of Indigenous women have died before they reach the age of 65 years compared to only a quarter of non-Indigenous men and 16 per cent of non-Indigenous women. The gap has also increased in recent years (Jackson 2005).

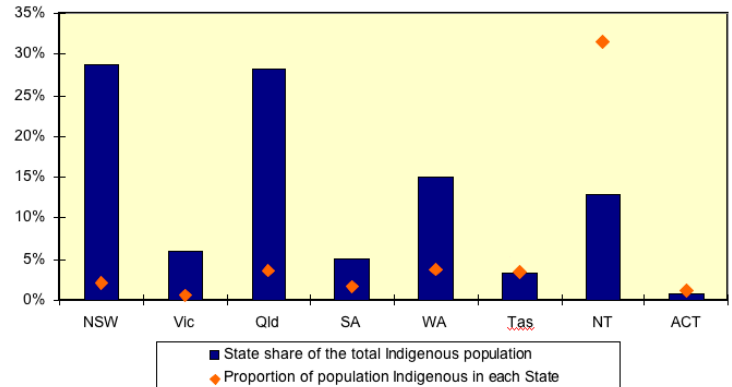
The Contemporary Indigenous Population

The proportion of Indigenous population and areas of residency vary across the six Australian states and two territories. Those regions with a higher proportion of Indigenous residents and also where Indigenous people still live in largely Indigenous communities are also those that were colonised later or had significant parts of their land mass remain relatively unsettled. For example, in the Northern Territory, which drew few settlers due to its remoteness and harshness of country (its population is approximately 215,000 and covers half a million square miles), nearly 50 per cent of the population is Indigenous and around 80 per cent of this Indigenous population continue to reside in remote areas. In contrast, in Victoria, where the colonisation of Aboriginal lands began in the early 1820s and where the fertile soils supported a large settler population, less than one per cent of the population is Aboriginal, none of whom reside in remote areas (ABS 2005).

The States and Territories with the largest share of the Indigenous population are New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory. The Indigenous population is less than 5 per cent of the entire population in all States and Territories except the Northern Territory, where it is just over 30, as indicated in Figure 2.

Figure 2:

Indigenous people as a proportion of the Australian population, 2006, by State/Territory



Source: ABS Population Distribution, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 4705.0 2007*

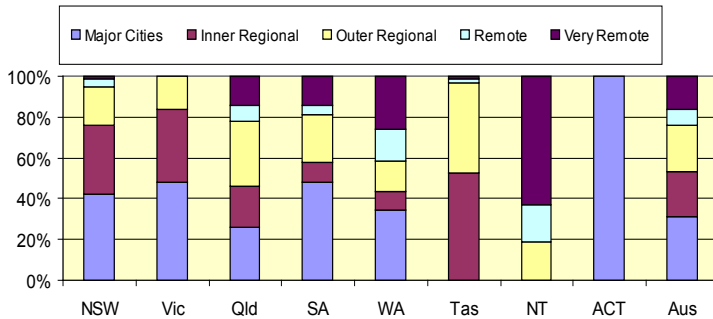
3.ii. Spatial Separation

The public and political discourse around Indigenous circumstances invariably concentrates on remote Australia. Yet, geographically three quarters of the Indigenous population is regional or urban. In 2006, some 31% of Indigenous Australians lived in major cities. The rest of the Indigenous population was distributed across inner regional (22%), outer regional (23%) and remote/very remote areas of Australia (24%). Indeed, population trends indicate an ongoing Indigenous drift to the larger urban areas (Saunders 2002 *The Australian*) and many Indigenous Australians have been resident in urban areas for generations. Sydney has the largest Indigenous population in Australia and the areas currently experiencing the highest rates of Indigenous population increase are Brisbane, Broome and Coffs Harbour - rather than remote Aboriginal communities.

Again this distribution varies by state, with those states colonised later having different dispersions to those colonised earlier. As illustrated in Figure 3, more than 75 per cent of the Indigenous population in NSW and more than 80 per cent in Victoria live in either major cities or inner regional areas. In contrast over 80% of Indigenous people in the Northern Territory live in remote/very remote areas.

Burying Indigeneity: The Spatial Construction of Reality and Aboriginal Australia

Figure 3: Indigenous population across geographic regions, 2006, by State/Territory



Source: ABS Population Distribution, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 4705.0 2007*

Within these cities and towns, however, the Indigenous community is still economically, spatially and socially separated. As Hunter (1996) established, Aboriginal people are concentrated in the suburbs that have fared badly from structural economic change, and concentrated in disadvantaged and poorly serviced enclaves within regional towns and urban locations. Critically the locational inequality of urban Indigenous people is rendered less visible by current statistical reporting which tends to present aggregate national or state figures.

Our further analysis of census data reveals further important socio-spatial relationships. We profile here the relative urbanisation and wider distribution of Indigenous households at the smallest geographical level for Census data, the Census Collection District (CCD) level. We highlighted those CCDs with sizeable Indigenous populations, using for capital cities the ranges of 20 or more, and 40 or more, Indigenous persons. The results were mapped and contrasted against the distribution of areas of higher educational and occupational advantage. The latter component of the analysis refers to the SEIFA (socio-economic indexes for Australia) index of relative educational and occupation advantage. In this respect we took the top 25%⁸ of educationally and occupationally advantaged CCDs within each city/centre.

This analysis shows that, in capital cities with low Indigenous populations such as Melbourne and Canberra, the only areas housing Indigenous populations are in

distant and distinct parts of the city, chiefly in more isolated pockets of public housing. In capital cities with a larger Indigenous population (including Brisbane, Perth, and Sydney) the Indigenous population is concentrated in particular suburban corridors (for example, the south west of Sydney). It is important to draw attention to the way in which these areas are particularly separated from more advantaged areas, as captured by the SEIFA ranking. We argue that this physical distance between the poor, city fringe locations most of the Aboriginal populations and the more affluent non-Indigenous areas compounds the social and spatial separation. These patterns also closely reflect the disparate housing tenure and market effects of differential socio-economic indicators.

Being socially 'concentrated' in this way is not necessarily an issue in itself and may be desirable for Indigenous people in some respects. What Peach (1996) has called the good ghetto may be reflected here in the way that such concentration is reflective of a, perhaps unfortunate, need to stick together in ways that offers mutual support in a potentially hostile context. However, the extent to which the more advantaged parts of Australian cities are so unlikely to interact with Indigenous areas is significant. Cities like Sydney are where the country's more educationally and occupationally advantaged people, and also where a large (13% of the total) share of the State's Indigenous population, live. However, despite the shared greater urban location, the social and spatial realities of Sydney are also of greater extremes of advantage and disadvantage, and social separation, and thus perhaps less likelihood of spatial interaction.

In Sydney, 53% of the total population in 2006 were located in CCD areas of low to middle relative educational and occupational advantage, whereas 80.1% of the city's Indigenous population were. Only 6.5% of the city's Indigenous population lived in areas of high relative advantage. Similarly, in Brisbane and Melbourne, 74.9% and 73.4% (respectively) of the Indigenous population lived in areas of lower relative advantage, and 9.6% and 11% in areas of the highest relative advantage using the SEIFA index for education and occupation. This trend illustrates both the differential educational attainment rates of the Indigenous population, as well as clear spatial distinctions.

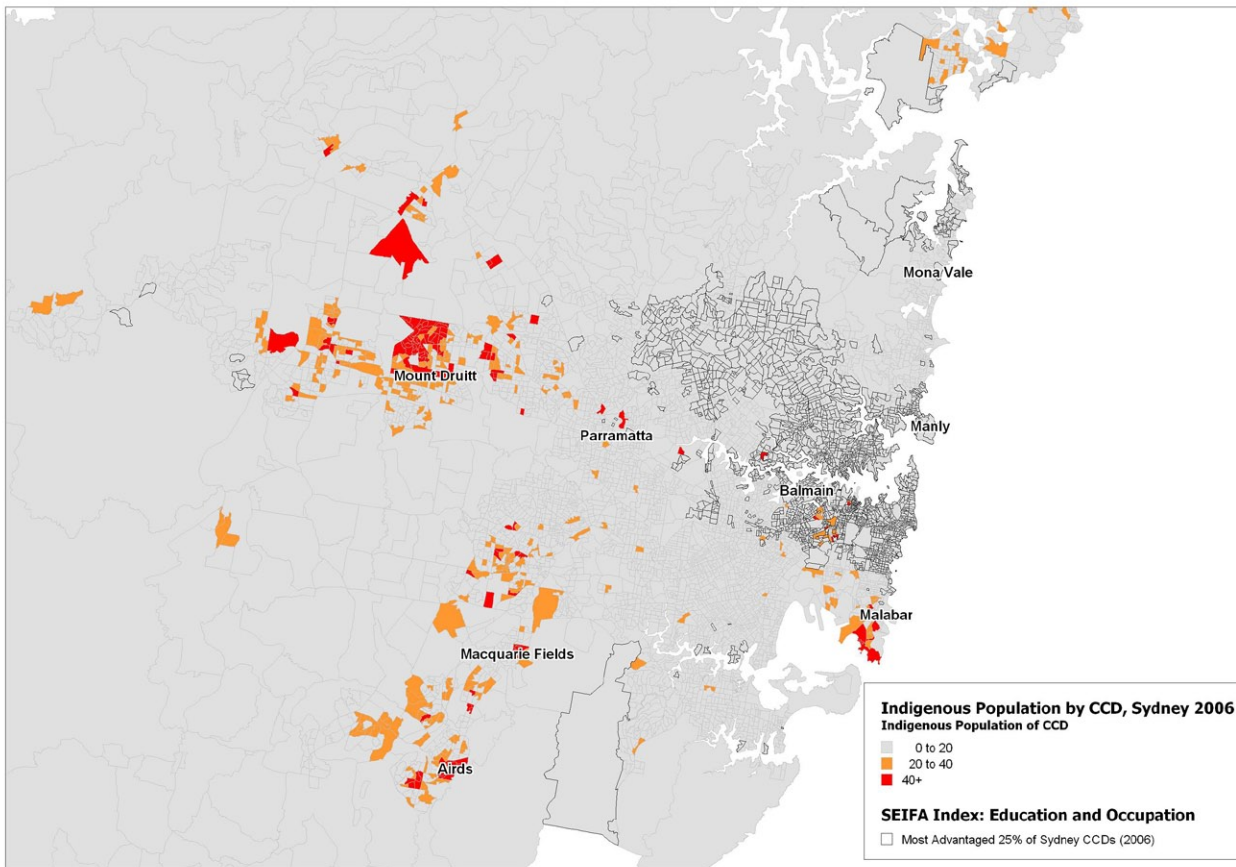
⁸ Being in the top quartile of advantage within each city measures advantage relative to other CCDs in that city only. It is worth noting those centres with an overall lower level of advantage such as Dubbo, Shepparton, Townsville, Hobart) and centres with an overall higher level of advantage include: Canberra, Melbourne.

Burying Indigeneity: The Spatial Construction of Reality and Aboriginal Australia

Table 2: Indigenous population distribution by SEIFA index of education and occupation (CCD level), selected Australian Capital Cities, 2006 Census

	Sydney (NSW)		Melbourne (VIC)		Brisbane (QLD)	
	% of Population that is Indigenous	Share (%) of City's Indigenous Population	% of Population that is Indigenous	Share (%) of City's Indigenous Population	% of Population that is Indigenous	Share (%) of City's Indigenous Population
25% Most Advantaged CCDs	0.31%	6.55%	0.20%	11.04%	0.72%	9.57%
Mid-High Advantaged	0.54%	13.37%	0.24%	15.55%	1.04%	15.49%
Low-Mid Advantaged	0.96%	24.61%	0.38%	26.49%	1.68%	25.93%
25% Least Advantaged CCDs	2.18%	55.47%	0.69%	46.93%	3.31%	49.01%

Figure 4: Areas of Indigenous concentration in Sydney and areas of relative affluence



Burying Indigeneity: The Spatial Construction of Reality and Aboriginal Australia

Figure 5: Areas of Indigenous concentration in Melbourne and areas of relative affluence

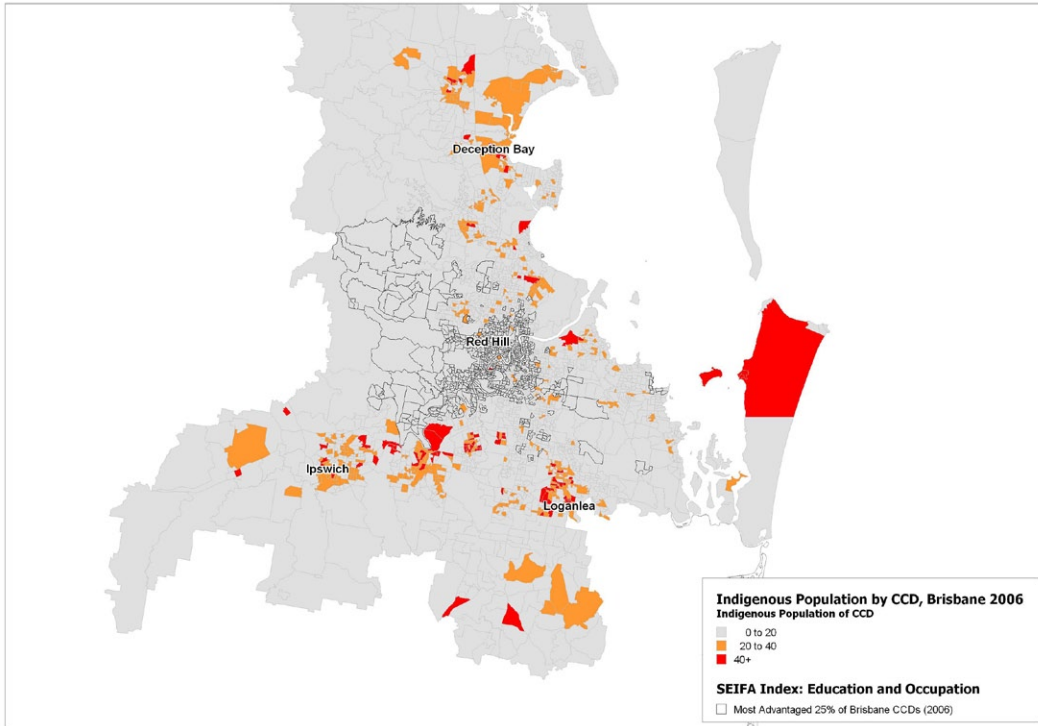
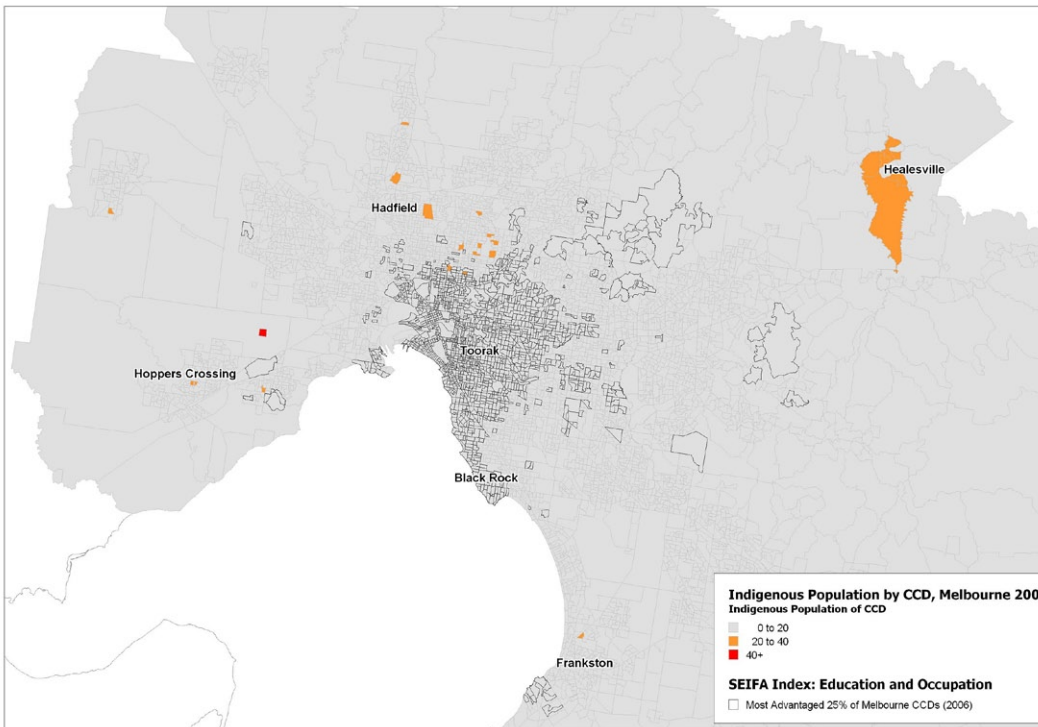


Figure 6: Areas of Indigenous concentration in Brisbane and areas of relative affluence



Burying Indigeneity: The Spatial Construction of Reality and Aboriginal Australia

Conclusions about spatial segregations are further supported by index of dissimilarity calculations using the population distributions in census collection districts in each of Australia's capital cities. As shown in the table below, the index figures are most pronounced in Melbourne, where nearly 60 percent of the Indigenous population would need to move for the two populations to be evenly distributed throughout the city. Darwin has the lowest index of residential dissimilarity, but even here nearly a third of the population would need to change their area of residence to provide locational parity.

Table 2: Indigenous and non-Indigenous Residential Dissimilarity - Australian Capital Cities: 2006 Census

Capital Cities	IoD 2006
Melbourne(VIC)	58.4
Sydney (NSW)	49.3
Perth (WA)	48.5
Adelaide (SA)	45.2
Brisbane (QLD)	38.1
Hobart (TAS)	33.3
Canberra (ACT)	32.4
Darwin (NT)	31.3

In Darwin and in regional cities (Townsville, Shepparton, Dubbo) with more significant Indigenous populations, the areas with higher Indigenous residents are also spatially distinct from the more educationally and occupationally advantaged areas. Housing tenure, and historical institutional arrangements such as town camps⁹, are potentially significant in the spatial segregation patterns of Indigenous populations in regional centres.

Social attitudes to separation: Indigenous Invisibility

A cluster of absences marks the Indigenous invisibility in both Australia's view of itself and from the arenas of importance and influence. Most pivotal is the lack of Indigenous power demonstrated in the absence, both physically and figuratively, of Indigenous Australia/ns from the political scene and spheres of influence at all levels. Second, Indigenous people are both spatially and socially absent and separated from non-Indigenous Australia. While over two thirds of Aboriginal people live in regional and metropolitan urban areas Indigenous lives are separated in almost all spheres from those of non-Indigenous people residing, even where this occurs in the same geographic location. The reasons for these spatial separations are predominantly to be found in the social distance between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia. The vast majority of Australians live in an Indigenous free zone - they do not interact with any Aboriginal people on a regular basis. Indigenous people are invisible, as people, in conceptions of everyday Australian life except as stereotypes.

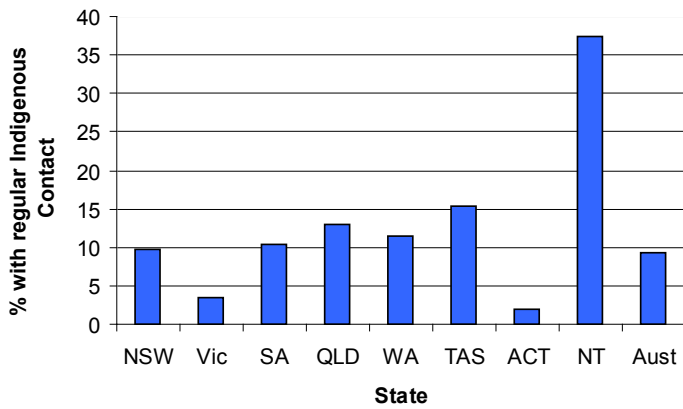
The spatial separation of Indigenous/non-Indigenous population is supported by recent data from the 2007 AuSSA (Australian Social Survey of Social attitudes) where respondents were asked to rate their level of interaction with Indigenous people. These revealed that regular social or physical interaction is relatively rare for the majority of the Australian population. Overall, only nine percent of the population reported that they mixed regularly with Aboriginal people around 50 percent reported that they did not know any Aboriginal people personally.

Those states where the Indigenous population is largely urban are also where the least interaction between the populations is reported. As shown in figure in response to an item on their level of interaction with Aboriginal people, only three percent of respondents from Victoria and 10 percent of those from New South Wales reported mixing regularly with Aboriginal people.

⁹ A town camp is an area of informal housing administered by an aboriginal housing organisation.

Burying Indigeneity: The Spatial Construction of Reality and Aboriginal Australia

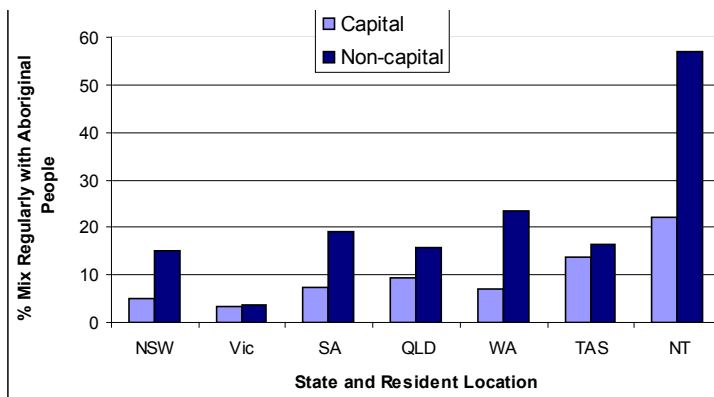
Figure 6: Interact Daily with Aboriginal people by State



Source: Derived from AuSSA 2007 Data

Within the States, those living in capital cities we found that the majority of the population in nearly all states, are significantly less likely to mix regularly with Aboriginal people. As shown in Figure 7 below, with the exception of Victoria, where interaction is very low regardless of location, population interaction among those living in capitals is very low. Even in the Northern Territory where nearly one in three of the population are Aboriginal less than 25 percent of those who live in Darwin say they interact regularly with Aboriginal people.

Figure 7: Interaction with Aboriginal People by Location of Residence



Source: Derived from AuSSA 2007 Data

Social separation varied significantly by class. Only around seven percent of those who nominated themselves as either upper or middle class reported regular interaction with Aboriginal people, compared to 12-13 percent of those classifying themselves as working class, or not belonging to a class at all (not shown here).

4. Aggressive paternalism: Burying indigeneity

In this final section of the paper we develop the preceding analysis and theoretical framework through a grounded analysis of policymaking in relation to the ‘intervention’ in the Northern Territory by the previous Federal government. We do this as a means of highlighting the kind of problems with central policymaking that appear to spring from the information problems, ‘white habitus’ (Bonilla-Silva and Embrick, 2007) and paternalism that has developed under the conditions of black invisibility from daily life and policymaking itself. This intervention involved the following key measures among the broader declaration by the then Prime Minister that this was a national emergency:

- Introducing alcohol restrictions on Northern Territory Aboriginal land for six months
- Medical examinations of all Indigenous children in the Northern Territory under the age of 16
- Welfare reforms with 50 per cent of welfare payments to parents quarantined (in the affected areas) for food and other essentials
- Enforcing school attendance by linking children’s attendance to income support and family assistance payments for all families living on Aboriginal land
- Assuming control, by the Australian government, of Aboriginal townships through five-year leases to ensure improvements in property and public housing
- Scrapping the permit system on Aboriginal lands
- Banning possession of x-rated pornography in proscribed areas

The Government’s basis for this intervention was a sensitively written report (Wild and Anderson, 2007) that had made 97 recommendations to create more effective grounds for community safety. Little or none of these recommendations were implemented. The spirit of the report was further diminished by political manoeuvrings in which the Federal Government used the army to enter the Northern Territory Aboriginal communities; a measure that itself created panic and some families to leave fearing that children might again be taken.

Burying Indigeneity: The Spatial Construction of Reality and Aboriginal Australia

In the case of the intervention the apparent intransigence of Aboriginal difference and exoticised horror of child abuse reported in the media was met with a mode of cathartic policymaking (Atkinson, 2006). Frustration and anger at Indigenous child abuse was channelled into a programme of *de facto* dispossession concealed by the veneer of a right-minded battle against liberal negligence. Blame was thereby apportioned to an ineffective Northern Territory government and to the Indigenous communities themselves for being unable to check violence and abuse. As *The Australian* put it:

‘With rapier speed and devastating force, the federal Government seized control yesterday of the Aboriginal heart of Australia, sweeping away a generation’s worth of political assumptions and imposing a completely new pattern of surveillance and control over the remote Indigenous communities of the centre and the north... Canberra tore up the long-established political compact in remote Australia: the unspoken deal whereby Indigenous communities have broad freedom, a tithe of welfare, and substandard social services, almost imposed by their sheer remoteness from mainstream society... The aim is to establish *normal*, well-educated, well-governed communities in the bush – to end the second-tier status of the Aboriginal world and its *strangeness* and psychic distance from *modern Australia*’ (Rothwell, 2007, italics added)

This militarisation of social policy offered to paternalistic and, indeed, racist whites the sense that an internally chaotic and primitive society could at one moment be righted, made to conform and its deviant elements done away with. The Australian newspaper ran with banners like “Crusade to save Aboriginal kids”, “Children ‘traded for alcohol” and “Agony that was ignored”. These actions produced an Australasian variation on North American approaches to public space in what Mitchell (2001) has described as the annihilation of space by law. In townships like Alice Springs discretionary lawmaking endorsed by the Federal government has been applied to make town camps dry. In Port Augusta long grassers (Aboriginal people who camp on the edge of town) are forcibly repatriated rather than being allowed to occupy public spaces.

The horror of reports of child abuse led some commentators to suggest that aboriginal people renounce violence and

aggression, as though these problems were not already condemned by existing community members and as though such problems were not part of a broader breakdown of services. Certainly such reports confirmed in the mind of many Australians debased stereotypes of Indigenous people, themselves derived from the kind of spatial and social isolation we have described. Cultural ‘insiders’, like the Indigenous leader, Noel Pearson, have worked hard to see significant action on these issues but largely in the terms put forward by the Howard government:

‘The first step is that you have to know what happens in these communities week in, week out. Urban-based critics simply do not know the realities. Neither did 90 per cent of Australia until recently’ (Pearson, 2007)

Among this generally confusing context it was worth harking back to the cornerstones of the report that started the NT intervention, critically that:

‘There is nothing new or extraordinary in the allegations of sexual abuse of Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory. What is new, perhaps, is the publicity given to them and the raising of awareness of the wider community of the issue. The underlying problems identified in this inquest are:

- (a) alcohol abuse across the community
- (b) marijuana abuse
- (c) violence, especially domestic violence
- (d) family breakdown
- (e) a weakening of the traditional and cultural values in modern Australian society
- (f) lack of employment, opportunity and other advantages enjoyed by many in non-Aboriginal Australia
- (g) a clash of culture, occasioned by various means, which can lead to a sense of hopelessness and low self-esteem, especially among young men’ (Wild and Anderson, 2007).

Yet instead of consultation and contact the Federal government embarked on aggressive actions that were at odds with the report they claimed legitimacy from. Plans to force the learning of English provided further evidence of apparent ignorance and the abuse itself evidence of a failure of working with Indigenous communities and self-determination. It is ironic that the existing permit

Burying Indigeneity: The Spatial Construction of Reality and Aboriginal Australia

system, which allows Indigenous communities to exert some discretion over visitors and public surveillance, has been criticised as helping to further the spatial isolation of communities and the concealment of social problems – an *Australian* editorial of June 22nd 2007 arguing that ‘the extent of the crisis is being kept hidden from the public by a permit system that restricts access to community land’. Similarly Mal Brough, the then minister for Indigenous affairs, argued that remote communities had been “isolated for too long from interactions with mainstream Australia”. While elements of the permit system have been discussed it was feared that abolition would bring predatory paedophiles, drug tourists and alcohol that have been the primary motivation for their retention by communities often vulnerable to these problems.

The NT intervention highlights a number of features of policymaking under the spatial and social conditions of dislocation and dissociation in Australian society we have charted in this paper. In the past decade the two primary policy modalities have shifted between dismantling, defunding and neglect, on the one hand, and an aggressive, conditional and even militarised operation on the other. The effects of these modes has, in both cases, been either to diminish the political power and presence of Indigenous communities and provide a powerful realisation of the more debased stereotypes of aboriginal life. It would seem that while the core to these programmes lay in the ideological affiliation of the then government, that broader systemic forces are also important in shaping our understanding of the emergence of such policies. Under the spatial conditions of Australian settlement distributions the key reference points in the literature on segregation appear largely incapable of acting as heuristics for this kind of context. For Sennett the importance of desegregation and social difference could be focused on the deeper needs of civil society:

‘The extent to which people can learn to pursue aggressively their interests in society is the extent to which they learn to act impersonally. The city ought to be the teacher of that action, the forum in which it becomes meaningful to join with other persons without the compulsion to know them as persons.’ (Sennett, 1974: 340)

Yet the Australian city does not appear to offer this capacity with regard to the fundamental social and political conditions of Aboriginal Australians. Difference is, in fact, *not* observed in everyday and institutional encounters, it

is primarily mediated through a media system that lingers on portrayals of the worst or more unusual events, absent either of the contexts that tend to produce these problems or the broader socio-historical context of this abjection. Newspapers like *The Australian* have disingenuously suggested that it is liberal, ‘Marxist’ and other ‘progressives’ that have largely been responsible for this casting-off of Indigenous society, by the support of land rights and permit systems that have enabled abuse and other problems to become invisible. In fact local Indigenous organisations, local authorities, education and health sector practitioners, reports, and enquiries have systematically warned about the effects of lack of access to health and education and of child protection issues. The perception of Indigenous communities as culturally exotic (things that only happen to and by Indigenous people because of the ways they have chosen to live) and spatially distant (played out largely outside the key urban centres) appears effective in nullifying the requests and evidence of these groups.

Regardless of the ability of the press to relay and inform the nation and the polity of such problems it is clear that the aboriginal domain (Walter, 2008) is both a space and set of practices lived outside the daily habitus of white lives. The time-space trajectories of the urban centres, central policymaking infrastructures and institutional nodes of education and socialisation take place outside these detached spheres. As our data highlights, the residential contexts of Indigenous Australians lies across the range of remote-urban spaces yet, even when they are co-located in the larger state capitals we do not find seem to find greater connections between these spaces and groups. To bring emphasis to this we would again make the point again that the collective white consciousness and its apprehension of Indigenous problems as intransigent, distant and foreign are bolstered by not only the specificities of socio-cultural relations between white and black Australia, but also by this spatial patterning, ordering and the boundaries that lie between these two groups.

This spatial disjunction between white and black Australia acts as a *de facto* apartheid and within which it has been possible to point to the horrifying abuses in neglected and under-served remote communities without any sense of irony or reflective commentary on the concealed domestic and other forms of victimisation and deficiency in white communities.

Burying Indigeneity: The Spatial Construction of Reality and Aboriginal Australia

5. Conclusion

The boundaries between black and white society in Australia occupy a banal and pervasive position in the relationships between these groups. Such boundaries can be characterised both spatially and socially, yet both form part of a wider gulf between these societies - that the heartlands and numerical core of Indigenous Australia lies in remote areas, far beyond the effective delivery of mainstream services and outside a benign paternal influence that might soften the kinds of crises that are periodically revealed. As we have shown in this paper, this basic position is at odds with the spatial location and clustering of Indigenous Australians which, numerically small, is located at least as much in regional and urban centres as bush or outback communities. The first conclusion we take from this observation is that perceptions of spatial distance are not reflected in the reality of proximity, yet such proximity has neither yielded significant social contact, understanding or effective policy responses. There is a certain resonance between our work and that of Bonilla-Silva and Embrick (2007) in their discussion of a 'white habitus' which they define as:

'a racialized uninterrupted socialization process that conditions and creates whites' racial taste, perceptions, feelings, emotions, and views on racial matters' (p. 325).

'Race' is thereby often seen as something that only racial minorities 'have' and they have argued that this sense of reality is powerful in later years if social difference is not experienced early in life. Critically, they argue that 'greater interracial associations with blacks is not likely to lead to significant increases in their personal associations with blacks' (p. 341). Yet, as we have argued throughout, this essentially *social* conceptualisation of boundary maintenance and difference is given further weight if it is informed by impressions of the degree of spatial separation. The social circuits operated within and by white and black Australians are suggestive of complex time-space geographies that are both structuring and structured by individual social pathways, residential spaces and institutional contexts (by groups such as families, political representation and secondary socialisation). Boundedness is not fully revealed or informed by attention only to the spatial or social proximity or distance between black and white society - the daily lifeworlds of these groups also

lie significantly apart. We have argued that the combining force of these social and spatial boundaries have produced a more fully isolating force that has, at times, come together with particular ideological strains that have made the condition of Indigenous Australians more abject. Numerical insignificance, spatial partitioning, residential separation and the socially constructed reality of a gulf between black and white (spatially, culturally or expressed regularly as 'gaps' in life-chances, age expectancy and so on) reinforce this spatially informed sense of reality.

We would suggest that understanding the frames of policymaking and public action are informed in important ways by the addition of space to these societies. Since aboriginal life is seen as 'other', neglected, different and, indeed, deviant from the market rhythms and aspirations of 'normal' Australians, the prospect for breaking-down or finding institutional spaces for contact and co-operation appear all the more difficult. Under the spatial conditions and social practices we have outlined, any particular predisposition to 'do good' remains beset by these powerful socio-spatial forces. If Wacquant's (2008) sense of advanced marginality lies in the ghettoisation of black Americans what can we make of the nation within a nation (indeed *beside* a nation, in the case of its towns and cities) represented by Indigenous Australians? Such problems and problem people are largely out of the sight and social contact of white Australians.

A critical result of the burial of Indigenous ways has been the general ability of a prosperous, white and urban community to live its life in ways that prevent the consequences of underinvestment, exclusion and absolute poverty being witnessed. Yet it is not only into remote communities that Aboriginal lives are out of sight and out of mind of policymakers and white communities. As we have shown, the empirical profiling of the location of the Indigenous population highlights its relative urbanisation and co-existence in urban centres. Yet this proximity is neither matched in political representation or time-space trajectories that cross or provide contact between white and black Australians. A central challenge to future government action thereby lies in how to cross these social and spatial boundaries in ways that raises the visibility and importance of Indigenous problems.

Burying Indigeneity: The Spatial Construction of Reality and Aboriginal Australia

References

- Atkinson, R. (2006) *Policy as Catharsis: Venting urban frustration and anger through revenge*, Paper presented at: Revanchist Urbanism, University of Newcastle, September.
- Berger, P. and Luckmann, T. (1966) *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise on the Sociology of Knowledge*, New York: Anchor Books.
- Bonilla-Silva and Embrick (2007) "Every Place Has its Ghetto..." The Significance of Whites' Social and Residential Segregation, *Symbolic Interaction*, 30, 3, pp. 323-345.
- Cowlshaw, G. (2004) *Blackfellas, Whitefellas and the Hidden Injuries of Race*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Kothari, M. (2007) *Report of the Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing as a Component of the Right to an Adequate Standard of Living [Australia]*, New York: United Nations General Assembly.
- Long, S., Memmott, P., and T. Seelig (2007) *The sunburnt country or the big smoke? Reshaping Indigenous housing*, Paper presented at the Australian Housing Researchers Conference, University of Queensland, Brisbane, 20-22nd June.
- Mahood, K. (2007) Cold Wind in the Desert, *Australian Financial Review: Re: View*, 9th March, pp. 1-4.
- Massey and Duncan (1996) *American Apartheid*, London: Routledge.
- Mitchell, D. (2001) The Annihilation of Space by Law: The Roots and Implications of Anti-Homeless Laws in the United States, *Antipode*, 29, 3, pp. 303-335.
- Peach, C. (1996) Good Segregation, Bad Segregation, *Planning Perspectives*, 11, 4, pp. 379-398.
- Pearson, N. (2007) Action only way forward, *The Australian*, July 7-8th.
- Pred, A. (2000) *Even in Sweden*, University of California Press.
- Price Waterhouse Coopers (2007) *Living in the Sunburnt Country: Findings of the Review of the Community Housing and Infrastructure Programme*, Canberra: Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.
- Rothwell, N. (2007) Nothing less than a new social order, *The Australian*, June 22nd.
- Scott, J. C. (1998) *Seeing Like a State*, Yale University Press.
- Sennett, R. (1974) *The Fall of Public Man*, New York: Norton.
- Wacquant, L. (2008) *Urban Outcasts*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Wild, R. and Anderson, P. (2007). *Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle "Little Children are Sacred"*, Report of the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse, Darwin: Northern Territory Government.