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Aboriginal organisations, self-determination and the neoliberal age: A case study of how the ‘game has changed’ for Aboriginal organisations in Newcastle

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Introduction

Non-Indigenous bureaucratic structures have been forced upon different traditional organisational structures.

For example, when we talk to the housing service in a community, we need to understand that it may be controlled by one family group that doesn't necessarily speak with or for the others in the community.

Equally whoever runs it speaks with the self-interest that all service providers bring in discussions with governments. That problem is not particular to Indigenous Australia.

Large portions of communities weren't being heard; they weren't getting a chance to have their say ...

Where specialist Indigenous services are required, they must be the best possible services we can offer. This raises another contentious issue. The history of these services is that they've been provided through

Indigenous organisations. Some do a tremendous job but there has been waste, there has been corruption and that means service provision hasn't been what it should be. If we continue to regard these organisations as untouchable and unaccountable we are failing our Indigenous citizens yet again. The proposition I'm putting is simple. If you're funded to deliver a service, you should deliver it. If you don't, we'll get someone else to do it (Vanstone 2005).

On reading the above speech, what first caught my attention is how indicative it was of the discursive calculations and strategies used in the neoliberal age to justify intervention in the lives and affairs of Aboriginal people, Aboriginal organisations and Aboriginal communities in Australia (Howard-Wagner 2009, 2010). It smoothed the way for the imposition of a particular set of reforms to legislation and policy in relation to Aboriginal corporations, Aboriginal service delivery and Aboriginal political representation. One year earlier, the Australian Government had tried to mainstream Aboriginal legal services, which had been created in the early 1970s, putting this service out to tender among corporate law firms. One month later, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) was abolished. Four months later, the Australian federal government of the day introduced the Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Bill 2005 into federal parliament. The Bill was to replace the *Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976* (Cwth). It was designed to fix the so-called problems with Aboriginal organisations. Aboriginal organisations were progressively affected too by the further marketisation of a newly defined social service sector. Aboriginal organisations were no longer to be subsidised by the state. They were no longer to be given special treatment. This placed many existing urban Aboriginal organisations in funding competition with secular and religious non-government organisations. They were also subject to a whole new set of regulatory arrangements that dictated the way this newly defined social service sector did business with government. As Sanders notes, the new mainstreaming at a government department level has seen very different Indigenous-specific programs inherited from ATSIC turned into much more standardised versions of general government programs (Sanders 2014). This new mainstreaming has also entailed the standardisation of Indigenous-specific programs into one-size-fits-all programs and the standardisation of Aboriginal service delivery, so much so that specialised Aboriginal organisations become redundant and what becomes important is value for money. This is where mainstreaming meets a market rationality. The new mainstreaming differs in that it is not about mainstream services operating alongside Aboriginal

services, as a form of complementary service delivery, which was the case in the ATSIC years, but the new mainstreaming is an apparatus or a technology of neoliberal governance.

Further reforms were to come in the state of New South Wales (NSW), diminishing the capacity of many Aboriginal organisations. This would ultimately be followed with a new federal Indigenous affairs funding scheme in 2014, known as the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS), which would see 65 per cent of federal funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service delivery go to large, mainstream not-for-profit organisations and the commercial sector, and only 21 per cent go to community-based Aboriginal organisations. While in principle the IAS enables Aboriginal organisations to apply for grants for community need-based programs, it has proven problematic not only in this context but nationally. Its narrow mandate, its blanket competitive process, its failure to fund successful Aboriginal organisations despite evidence-based data demonstrating success in the area, and its failure to support community-based Aboriginal organisations to meet the needs of Aboriginal people on the ground, are just some of the local criticisms of the IAS in the greater Newcastle region. These further reforms saw some community-based Aboriginal organisations go into administration. Others stopped operating (e.g. the Hunter Aboriginal Children's Service) and their services were mainstreamed (e.g. the Aboriginal Medical Centre in Western Sydney). Others started to change the way they did business in order to diminish the new stranglehold governments had on them and to reclaim their autonomy and independence and capacity to continue on with their social and cultural development agendas.

While this chapter discusses briefly the regulatory technologies governing Aboriginal organisations in the neoliberal age, it does not give detailed consideration to the political moment described above. Instead, it situates this political moment historically, returning to the moment urban Aboriginal organisations were formed in the Australian city of Newcastle. Aboriginal activists who formed Aboriginal organisations in Newcastle were not only 'very active in the pursuit of government support' but also became 'skilled grant-getters and grant-users' (Sullivan 2015: 7). This shows how they 'understood the rules of the game as it played out in their local areas and became adept at using them' (Sullivan 2015: 7). They were highly effective in leveraging grants from NSW government departments and the federal Department of Aboriginal Affairs, and later ATSIC, to freely pursue Aboriginal social and cultural

development locally, which also led to positive economic outcomes through the creation of important Aboriginal social infrastructure. This led to the creation of various Aboriginal services and programs. This too significantly contributed to addressing the socio-economic disadvantage local Aboriginal people experience. Aboriginal people in Newcastle had found a mechanism for exercising their rights to self-determination and autonomy in matters relating to their internal and local affairs through the creation of autonomous Aboriginal organisations. Urban Aboriginal organisations have thus gone on to play a distinctive role in society in relation to urban Aboriginal peoples and their rights to self-determination and community development in Newcastle. They have proven essential to advocacy, the maintenance of community development and the creation of new social infrastructure, with their success resulting in both economic and social outcomes. Government grants provided a means for financing their autonomous functions.

Game changes

The political moment I describe at the beginning of this paper is when the ‘rules of the game suddenly changed’ (Sullivan 2015: 7). This chapter provides insights into how the regulatory technologies of neoliberal governance weakened Aboriginal autonomy and self-determination. That is, how changes to funding arrangements severely restricted the means for financing their autonomous functions, reducing the capacity of community-based Aboriginal organisations to meet the needs of local Aboriginal people. It also explains that, while all grasp the rules of the neoliberal game and adapt, it is not about adapting to the new rules of the game. It is about finding strategies to respond to this invasive system, which attempts to colonise the Aboriginal domain, as well as to its racialised effects and its undermining of Indigenous rights (Howard-Wagner 2006, 2016, 2017a). I argue elsewhere that there has been a transformation in state governance wherein neoliberal rationalities and technologies have been applied to the governance of Indigenous affairs (Howard-Wagner 2006). Via an analysis of the neoliberal rationalities and technologies governing Indigenous affairs, certain points are established (Foucault & Ewald 2003: 140–1). These are the systems of differentiations; the types of objectives; instrumental modes; forms of institutionalisation; and the degrees of political rationalities (*ibid.*). The subjective processes, ethical projects and moral logics of neoliberalism in relation to the governing

of Indigenous affairs are also considered in this body of work. However, I argue that it is also important to acknowledge the sites of agency and resistance that come from such responses. For example, how the reactions and strategies of those who manage Aboriginal organisations evidence the critical or reflexive vigilance of Aboriginal agency and resistance in the neoliberal age (Howard-Wagner 2006, 2016). Aboriginal agency and resistance is, for example, expressed as endeavours to pursue innovative funding solutions that will change the funding dynamic with the state, subsidise organisational initiatives, or lead to funding self-sufficiency, which are adopted creatively to bring about social change. So, in this chapter, I suggest the issue is not that Aboriginal organisations in Newcastle embody the economic agenda of the neoliberal state, which arguably they do not (a point Bargh also makes in Chapter 16), but rather that while all are highly successful organisations, there are Aboriginal organisations that have greater capacity than others to acquire assets and pursue an economic development agenda to subsidise social and cultural development.

The disciplinary turn and its deeply racialised effects

Also, while the rationalities and technologies governing Aboriginal organisations in the neoliberal age are not unique to Aboriginal organisations, or not-for-profit organisations in Australia (Dean 2004, Howard-Wagner 2006, Sullivan 2009, 2015), the insidious racialised effects and how this new regime undermines the rights of Indigenous people is troubling (Howard-Wagner 2006, 2009, 2017a). Maria Bargh makes this point too in Chapter 16. Elsewhere, I examine how the disciplinary turn embodied in the processes and practices of governing through neoliberal paternalism has deeply racialised effects (Howard-Wagner 2006, 2010, 2017a). I show the convergence between neoliberalism and what Lawrence Mead (1997) first termed the ‘new paternalism’ as a form of public administration with a directive and supervisory approach to disadvantaged populations in the neoliberal age, which are considered as lacking self-discipline and personal responsibility (Mead 1997, Howard-Wagner 2006, 2010). This form of conditionality that governs social service contracts and the way the not-for-profit sector does business with the state in the neoliberal age, like welfare conditionality, has the fundamental aim of not only changing social behaviour (e.g. the ‘the

making of parenting payments conditional on school attendance and regular health checks', Howard-Wagner 2006, 2010), but also changes the conditions under which the state provides and manages social service delivery. In this collection, Shelley Bielefeld explains 'conditionality' in more depth in the context of the cashless welfare card (see Chapter 8). Elsewhere, too, I define the neoliberal age and discuss how these new regulatory arrangements constrain the capacity of community-based Aboriginal organisations, requiring them to meet new accreditation standards and attend leadership and governance workshops, while their performance is regulated and monitored through a new contractualism (Howard-Wagner 2016). Patrick Sullivan also describes the effect of the new public management (NPM), or neoliberal public management, on Indigenous corporations in the neoliberal age (see Chapter 10).

Methodology

This chapter is informed by the findings of a recent four-year study in the Australian city of Newcastle of Aboriginal success in addressing Aboriginal disadvantage and improving Aboriginal wellbeing.¹ The study builds on a three-year sociological ethnography of the progressing of Indigenous rights in the neoliberal age conducted from 2000 to 2003. This research was designed to develop a collaborative approach between Aboriginal organisations in Newcastle, government program managers and administrators, and the researcher, and to promote research that meets community-based, policy and scholarly concerns. The research aim was to not only provide an account of an urban Aboriginal community's success in addressing Aboriginal disadvantage and improving Aboriginal wellbeing, but also to tell the story behind this success. Those contributing to this research included 14 Aboriginal organisations, seven government departments and eight mainstream non-government organisations in the greater Newcastle region. The findings come from lengthy discussions with local Aboriginal people in the design phase of the study; 71 in-depth interviews (some group interviews and some repeated) conducted with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people working in Aboriginal service delivery and policy positions in local,

1 This chapter is generated from research undertaken by the author as part of an Australian Research Council Early Career Research project titled 'Indigenous societies, governance and wellbeing: A study of Indigenous community success in addressing disadvantage and promoting wellbeing' (DE120100798).

state and federal government organisations, Aboriginal organisations and mainstream not-for-profit organisations in Newcastle; historical documents and oral histories; a discussion circle with Aboriginal elders; several informal in-depth discussions; successive follow-up interviews; observations; two community forums to discuss the findings of the research; and collaborator and participant feedback on a lengthy report of the research findings. Triangulated, the texts, interview narratives and life histories tell a story of multidimensional Aboriginal success (individual, organisational and community) in Newcastle—time and again. They also provide important knowledge about the current challenges facing the local Aboriginal community and people.²

Indigenous policy in the recognition and social development era

The adoption of the federal policy of self-determination and decentralised governance by the Whitlam Government in the 1970s, and the Aboriginal development approach of the day was directed at supporting the creation of ‘autonomous de-colonised self-governing [Aboriginal] entities’ so that Aboriginal people could manage ‘their lives in culturally appropriate ways’ (Moran 2012: 1). While dropping self-determination as a federal policy agenda, the Fraser Government continued with a broad policy of Indigenous self-management and self-sufficiency. Its passing of the *Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976* (Cwth) furthered this policy agenda, allowing for the formal establishment of Aboriginal governance and autonomous self-governing community organisations. The original intent of the Act was to ‘enable Aboriginal communities to develop legally recognisable bodies that reflect their own culture and do not require them to subjugate this culture to overriding Western European legal concepts’ (Viner 1976). Arguably, too, the state was responding to the agency, activism and agenda set by Aboriginal people. Statutory recognition

2 I wish to thank those who gave their voice to the argument presented in this chapter, as well as their comment and feedback on the research findings, its argument and its situating of the research. Many involved in this research have been de-identified, even though they agreed to being identified, and the data has been coded thematically in terms of looking for patterns and themes. Furthermore, while based on comprehensive in-depth interviews with Aboriginal people who were generous and willingly engaged and assisted with this study, by way of respect, I wish to note that this chapter does not ‘speak for’ nor does it represent an Aboriginal voice or claim an Indigenous authority. The writing of this chapter involves a non-Indigenous researcher imposing their theoretical and analytical understanding onto data that was collected from in-depth interviews with Aboriginal people.

generally was by no means perfect. It did see the rise of urban Aboriginal corporations, which relied heavily on government grants as not-for-profit organisations, but used government grants to create Aboriginal social infrastructure to support urban Aboriginal people in localities around NSW, for example. As Fletcher notes, the ‘importance of developments flowing from this period should not be underestimated’ (Fletcher 1994: 7). This concerned:

the impetus given to Aboriginal communities to incorporate as community organisations for the conduct of their own affairs ... [and] it is largely through the growth of [Indigenous] autonomous community organisations and the pressure they have exerted for change that [Indigenous] aspirations for self-determination continued to be advanced (Fletcher 1994: 7).

This era had its critiques. For example, Perkins argued that Aboriginal organisations ‘became preoccupied with following the agendas established by others’ (Perkins 1994: 34).

Rowse, and many others (Page this volume, Chapter 10), have argued that this saw the rise of an ‘Indigenous sector’, which Rowse argues was an important product of the self-determination era (Rowse 2005). The Indigenous sector is a shorthand term not only for the Aboriginal incorporated councils, employers and job placement agencies, Indigenous health services, legal services, housing associations and schools and sporting clubs, but also for this ‘sector’s’ relationship to government (Rowse 2005). Arguably, the formation of Aboriginal organisations was something far more complex, and Rowse gets at this in terms of his analysis of the dual political and service delivery function of Aboriginal organisations. Much too has been written about the function of Aboriginal organisations (e.g. Smith 2002, 2008, Martin 2003, Sullivan 2015), and even their risk to informal Indigenous social practices through the juridification of social relations (Martin 2003).

The passing of the *Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act* did not suddenly see Aboriginal councils and associations form. Aboriginal activism in urban areas in NSW had already led to the establishment of an Aboriginal legal service in Redfern (1970) and Newcastle (1974), an Aboriginal medical service in Redfern (1971), and the establishment of the Awabakal Newcastle Aboriginal Co-operative (the Awabakal Co-op) in Newcastle (1975), for example. There was also the Aboriginal Christian Co-operative Movement, which led to the establishment of various

cooperatives on missions in NSW and Queensland, as well as the Tranby Aboriginal Cooperative College in Glebe in 1958 (Loos & Keast 1992). There were also the political Aboriginal associations formed earlier to progress the rights of Aboriginal people, such as the Aborigines Protection Association, an all-Aboriginal body formed in 1937 with the three aims of full citizenship rights for Aboriginal Australians, Aboriginal representation in parliament and abolition of the NSW Aborigines' Protection Board.

Consistent with Fletcher's argument, I argue here and elsewhere that urban community-based Aboriginal organisations in particular have been essential to urban Aboriginal self-determination in Newcastle, and elsewhere, in terms of Aboriginal community development, including the building and maintenance of Aboriginal social infrastructure and the taking of service delivery into urban Aboriginal peoples' own hands (Howard-Wagner 2017b). Importantly then, urban community-based Aboriginal organisations in Newcastle are not simply a sector or a service provider. Rather, they symbolise autonomy and control and are at the heart of, and central to, urban Aboriginal community building and development in this city. As one local Aboriginal person notes, it is about 'being equal to the white people and running [Aboriginal country, organisations, programs and services] the way we want to' (interview 64).

Aboriginal people were not establishing enterprises, but rather Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal activists were engaged in establishing new forms of community-controlled cooperatives, associations and services in the urban areas of NSW, for example. These initial Aboriginal organisations were not established from government funding, but from donations. The incorporation of the Awabakal Co-op reflects its emergence from the endeavours of local activism and its communal intent. It was established in 1975 from donations from local Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, replacing the Newcastle Aboriginal Advancement Society, and first registered as a Community Advancement Cooperative Society in 1977 under the *Charitable Collections Act 1934* (NSW) (Heath 1998: 66). The term cooperative was used to reflect the fact that the organisation was a cooperative or an autonomous association of Aboriginal people united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled community collective. As Heath notes:

The decision to register under the Cooperative Societies Act was based on the feeling that the spirit of cooperative societies better reflected philosophies of traditional [Aboriginal] societies than that of other incorporated bodies which basically reflect competition (Heath 1998: 66).

It was established:

to provide empowerment to the Aboriginal communities of the Hunter through the delivery of health and social services, in a practice consistent with and relevant to community needs, while maintaining respect for our cultural diversity (interview 59).

As such, the community development activities of the Awabakal Co-op were mostly cultural and social economy activities.

Like Aboriginal Friendship Centres in Canada and Indian Centres in the United States, the Awabakal Co-op was set up by a group of local Aboriginal activists, who had migrated to Newcastle in the 1950s and 1960s, with the assistance of non-Aboriginal people from the Newcastle Trades Hall Council, to support the increasing number of Aboriginal people migrating to Newcastle in the 1970s from rural areas in western and north-western NSW. Its formal incorporation and governance structures not only reflected the fact that it was formed out of Aboriginal activism but was also a communal entity, rather than serving the purposes of a select few Indigenous family groups. It was a cooperative owned and operated by local Aboriginal people and, as such, was membership-based. It also put in place the formalised Western structures of incorporated associations, including a separation of powers between the elected board of directors and the chairperson, and annual general meetings. Initially, the Awabakal Co-op was a 'hub' (Jonas 1991) or 'incubator' (Smith 2008) for other Aboriginal organisations, such as Yarnteen, because governments would only invest in new programs if they were under the umbrella of the Awabakal Co-op (Jonas 1991). It went on to become 'a leading example of Aboriginal community power in Australia' (Awabakal Ltd 2016). Aboriginal people in Newcastle did not have statutory property rights, and their revenue-raising capacity for community social and cultural development was highly restricted (Dodson & Smith 2003). The only viable funding option was to seek out government support.

Aboriginal organisation building in Newcastle was not economically driven, but rather served a civil society function. It was about Aboriginal control, autonomy and self-determination. Yarnteen's vision, for example,

was to become a 'full free agent in our own development' (Jonas 1991: 12). Organisation building offered a mechanism for achieving a separate Indigenous domain in that it offered a way of circumventing mainstream social, educational, employment, housing and health services, building Aboriginal social infrastructure, providing culturally centred programs and services, and 'doing business the Aboriginal way' (interview 53). It was also a means for revitalising local Aboriginal culture, knowledge and language, as well as improving the wellbeing of local Aboriginal people. Local Aboriginal people created 'a really good base here ... a social base within our community. There are some very big, dominant, longstanding organisations that the community respond to and have very significant cultural processes' (interview 58).

Over the next 30 years, Aboriginal people went on to create what Arthur (1994) terms a 'loose confederation' of culturally centred community-based Aboriginal organisations in Newcastle. They were a loose confederation not primarily because of the association between programs or services, but because of the association between key Aboriginal people who played a role in the setting up and development of Aboriginal organisations, like Awabakal Co-op, Yarnteen Ltd, Wandiyali Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation, Miromaa Aboriginal Language and Technology Centre and the Awabakal Local Aboriginal Land Council. While a key group of Aboriginal people started these organisations, and they and their families are associated with Aboriginal organisations locally, they have not (contra Vanstone 2005) historically been the antithesis of accountability, transparency and equity (Smith 2008: 206). Nor have select local Aboriginal families been employed by these organisations or been the only ones to have access the Aboriginal social infrastructure, programs and services they provide. Contrary to Perkins' argument, despite their dependency on government funding and its coercive effects in other contexts, community-based Aboriginal organisations in Newcastle maintained their creativeness and innovation from the 1970s through to the early 21st century (Perkins 1994: 35).

By the early 21st century, Aboriginal organisations offered medical and dental services, transport services for elders, services for the disabled, childcare services, preschools, social and public housing programs, youth and family programs, language and cultural programs, and employment and training services. They were closing the gap through the establishment of much-needed culturally centred Aboriginal social infrastructure for Aboriginal people living in the region as far north as Karuah to the north of

Maitland and as far west as Toronto on the western side of Lake Macquarie. The creation of urban Aboriginal social infrastructure in Newcastle has been a pathway to economic empowerment for local Aboriginal people. It has created jobs, encouraged social inclusion, improved access to facilities, services and programs, improved socio-economic outcomes and health and wellbeing, and increased social mobility.

According to data from the first three Australian Bureau of Statistics census periods in the 21st century (2001, 2006 and 2011), the Indigenous population in Newcastle has fared better than the Indigenous populations in NSW, more generally, in comparison to 23 urban NSW localities with populations of 2,000 or more. It also fares better than the national Indigenous population across a range of indicators. The Newcastle Indigenous population has the second-lowest unemployment rate in 2011 at 13.4 per cent, and the second smallest gap (10 per cent) in unemployment rates between Indigenous (13.4 per cent) and non-Indigenous populations (3.4 per cent) compared with the other 23 urban localities. The Newcastle Indigenous population has the second-highest median personal income at AU\$411 per week. It also has the second-highest median household income at AU\$1,044 per week. The Newcastle Indigenous population has the third-highest rate of year 12 completions at 31.6 per cent. It also has the second-highest rate of tertiary (university or other) completion at 13.7 per cent. The socio-economic outcome is an Aboriginal community that 'sits at the top of the bottom of the socio-economic pile' (interview 58). What the interviewee means by this is that Newcastle stands out as a locality that is successfully reducing Indigenous unemployment and additionally closing the unemployment and education gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

Other events too played a critical role in the development of Aboriginal organisations in Newcastle. As Will Sanders notes in Chapter 6, ATSIC and the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) program played a critical function in this regard (see below). ATSIC had a significant effect on the formation and development of Yarnteen Ltd. What is more, from 1994 to 2002, Yarnteen CDEP was the largest CDEP program in NSW with over 250 participants. Yarnteen has not only contributed to improved social wellbeing among local Aboriginal people, but also has a successful track record in enterprise development.

One of the best projects that ever came about was CDEP. Initially Yarnteen wasn't interested because a section of our board felt that it was just another prop. Not really in it, but once we investigated it and Yarnteen took it on because we could see that there was so much flexibility, there was capital input. There was money towards each—for participants to just work two days for the goal.

My role back then was employment manager. I could have a young person come in say I'd like to be a florist. So, I can take that two-day incentive or that two day's work for dole, I'd use that as incentive to an employer. I'd say to that employer, let's build a training plan, you've got to add at least a third day and a training plan and it's got to be a pathway with an outcome for this person. We'd be like—we'd be the employer. We'd pay their wages, we'd bill the employers. So, we had programs like that happening everywhere. We had projects with John Hunter Hospital, maintenance with parks, Housing Commission, cleaning out of the houses. We had a landscape company, building company. We had over 240 participants at any one time. We didn't ignore our other organisations in the area. We would have agreements and partnerships with land councils where they might take six people from their community to be on a project.

The CDEP also gave capital expenditure so we were able to go, well this is what equipment is needed for that particular business opportunity so we'll invest in that. I guess it was really a great—used correctly CDEP was an excellent program and it was the thing that made the difference for Yarnteen in going forward and being wise about, from there, having opportunity to be a part of the normal business opportunities available. Banking loans to purchase premises, to house these programs and building up an asset base ... Yamuloong was built and people got their trades so started to do first year trades, do landscaping and seeding of indigenous plants.

We ran kitchens where they were doing hospitality, catering and product—we had business ... [a] practice firm. ... one of the practice firm ideas was all around bush tucker. So, the participants would come in and learn about business plans and how do you establish a business ...

We're always seeing new governments, new policy, new ... When the CDEP closed it was disappointing because we could see the great success and the opportunity. ... We were particularly, I guess ... smart in the good times so we were quite well established and we were able to continue to operate ... (interview former CEO Yarnteen).

Yet, the game slowly changed at the turn of the 21st century. A notable change came around 2005, when ATSIC was abolished followed by CDEP.

What's happened in the last ten years is we lost ATSIC, CDEP as well ...
(interview 53).

The idea of NPM as a neoliberal project is important to understanding this game change. There has been a change in the relationship between the state and Aboriginal peoples and a rethinking of Indigenous rights (Howard-Wagner 2017a). Mainstreaming can be understood in the context of its rationale, which contends that the social service delivery needs of Aboriginal peoples are easily met by mainstream not-for-profits or the corporate sector. NPM has been accompanied by new paternalistic top-down Indigenous policies and approaches, facilitating pathways to individual development and individual entrepreneurship at the federal level, focusing on Indigenous jobs, land and economy, and increasing business and employment opportunities for the individual, obscuring the diverse approaches of participatory or Indigenous-driven development (Hunt 2013, Howard-Wagner 2016, 2017b).

NPM's consequent sociological effect is that its modalities have reduced the function of Aboriginal organisations to service delivery organisations. Aboriginal organisations, which formerly operated like community cooperatives and had a far more societal function in relation to community development and self-determination, now operate in a competitive social service market, competing with mainstream not-for-profits, and each other, for funding. A market that is nonetheless false and does not attribute a true economic, social or public value to the social service that is provided.

Many interviewees talked about the various policy and regulatory changes since the *Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006* (CATSI Act), which promoted good corporate governance and management, and the establishment of Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations (2007 – present), through to the IAS (2014 – present).

They talked about how the new regulations now unnecessarily govern the way they do business, as well as how policies and funding arrangements constrain their capacity to act autonomously in meeting the needs of local Aboriginal people as defined by local Aboriginal people.

I know when they did mainstream, the Aboriginal programs and asked for tenders across the community that diluted ownership of our own programs. I think we've got to be letting Aboriginal people have that, I guess, place where they're able to bring the services to their own people and not dilute it across a whole range of different service providers who may not have the connection to community or the real understanding of the needs. So, it's really important that Aboriginal community based organisations have those programs (interview 50).

Many noted how this, coupled with the demands of new contractual and funding arrangements, is changing and limiting the way Aboriginal organisations operate.

Huge personal pressure. Huge organisational pressure to be still doing that and the stresses, which of course come with it. It actually makes our time really hard to be involved with or to go out and keep those relationships or whatever they are, strong and to even grow them. Right at this moment I have zero time as an example, to be able to go out there and be knocking on the Land Council's door and sitting down and having meetings with them and giving them an overview of what we're up to. How can we support your work or support your members as such and your role you're playing with your community? I don't have the time to go down to Awabakal Co-op where it's a staff member here to talk with the preschool to try and build up that relationship with the teachers there, with the kids. It could be introducing language into their programs or talk to the medical staff within their programs, about using language and identity as a means of mental healing and so forth there and strengthening identity and self-esteem.

... They're the things that we like to do. They're the things which we also do see [as] part of our wider service and agenda. But we'd love to be able to do that. But it's as hard ... Not just us, but other organisations, for them to be able to do that. The climate politically, and the funding, which is also attached to that. It's just really hard ... (interview 53).

Interviewees talked about the courses senior position holders are sent on to ensure they engage in 'good governance' practices, manage risk and improve standards and efficiency, and the processes their organisations have to go through to meet new forms of accreditation required to deliver housing, child wellbeing and family services, for example.

While their accounts detail the effects of the marketisation of social services, they also reveal how the new forms of contractualism, the new paternalism and conditionality impact on their capacity to 'do business the Aboriginal way' (interview 53). They talked about how this game changed in terms of, for example:

Advocacy's been lost through changes to contracts ... every time recently there's been critical [issues] in the Aboriginal space ... It's eerily silent and that really bothers me (interview 58)

... one-size-fits-all programs, which don't work (interview 55)

... chasing the resources and doing the paperwork, which doesn't leave time for the important stuff (interview 58)

... hindering their capacity for innovation and entrepreneurship (interview 56)

... limit[ing] the time we have for collaborating with other organisations (interview 61)

... stopping our momentum in addressing Aboriginal disadvantage (interview 58).

Those who had been sent to mandatory governance training as part of their contractual arrangements with funding bodies accepted that this was part of the way 'governments now do business' (interview 66), but also noted that governments often failed to recognise the importance of Aboriginal culture and obligations to community as central to the governance and success of local Aboriginal organisations (see Howard-Wagner 2016). Many also commented to the effect that 'good [Aboriginal] governance is also being inclusive of community and being—ensuring service provision to the community ... That shared vision ...' (interview 55).

This is coupled with the fact that Aboriginal organisations are accountable not to just one funding body, but several.

It's crazy. It is crazy and then you've got all your accreditations on top. So, you're not just reporting to funding bodies, every service has an accrediting body so you have to be compliant with all of that. So, we have four different bodies that we have to be accredited to so, yeah, it's mad. It is mad! (interview 10)

The present moment underscores the precarity community-based Aboriginal organisations face while remaining in a relationship of funding dependency with governments. This is reflected in the following statements:

The problem that we've had to date with social development is we have a strong dependency on government to deliver the social services ... (interview 66)

I think while we still have that reliance, or that prevalence to focus on funding, to determine our affairs, so we're going to consistently have an issue where we will have that dictated to us (interview former CEO Awabakal Ltd).

It is a relationship in which the state holds the power, and it can change the game at any moment.

Today, too, interviewees no longer talk about self-determination in terms of autonomous self-governing entities, but also 'self-determination is about being financially sustainable and viable' (interview 61) and 'economic development is just a means to an end ... that will allow us to do what we want to do culturally, and do what we want to do socially' (interview 66). Yet, there are Aboriginal organisations that will remain dependent on government funding because of the types of social services they provide. And, while others already have soundly managed income-generating assets and/or social enterprises and subsidise social programs through income generated from these assets and enterprises, such as Miromaa selling its language database nationally and internationally, they are far from achieving funding sustainability. They face the challenge of getting 'governments to see some value in what you do' (interview 60) or 'moving away from a government funded model to a purchasing model and insisting that the government is then purchasing these services off you' (interview CEO Awabakal).

For others like Yarnteen Ltd and Awabakal Co-op, this is not about creating social and economic enterprises or acquiring assets, as that has been very much a part of their business operations for decades, but about moving towards greater self-sufficiency. Awabakal Co-op is no longer a cooperative. In 2014, it became Awabakal Limited and registered as a not-for-profit public company limited by guarantee. It has a new constitution and its principal purposes have broadened to reflect its new economic development agenda, which sits alongside its original

objectives to provide services to Aboriginal people in the Newcastle area as well as strengthen and foster the development of Aboriginal identity and culture in the Newcastle area (Section 6, Awabakal Ltd Constitution).

Conclusion

In conclusion, in their efforts to end this new relationship of dependency with the state in the neoliberal age, do Aboriginal organisations in Newcastle create the very model that governments ultimately encourage—entrepreneurial, autonomous organisations with increased participation in the mainstream economy? Arguably, the answer is no. The development of social and economic enterprises and acquisition of assets among Aboriginal organisations in Newcastle is not new nor is their participation in the mainstream economy. This is demonstrated in the case study of how Yarnteen leveraged CDEP to create capital, social enterprises and build its business—the ‘good times’ allowed it to keep going in the ‘hard times’. Also, while Aboriginal organisations in Newcastle have adapted to this new regime, their core business, the way Aboriginal organisations do business culturally, and the types of services Aboriginal organisations deliver, has not changed. Aboriginal autonomy remains their core objective. What has changed is the rules of the game, their relationship with the state and the means by which Aboriginal organisations in Newcastle are funded. If urban Aboriginal organisations have the capacity to not only acquire land but also to use it for development, carry out agricultural, pastoral, fishing, forestry, mining and other primary producing activities, process, manufacture or distribute products, increase their assets, create more enterprises and get governments to purchase the services they provide to local Aboriginal people, the ground shifts in terms of their dependency on the state. Self-sufficiency improves the capacity of Aboriginal organisations in Newcastle to achieve what they originally set out to achieve. This may be seen as co-opting or embodying the very economic agenda that many critique is associated with the neoliberal game change, but a more complex reading of the situation reveals how it involves resisting the rules of the game, modifying them to one’s own end, and finding new ways to pursue urban Aboriginal self-determination. It is too early to determine success. Whether the new regime provides Aboriginal organisations in Newcastle a new means for achieving recognition from below and access to the decision-making power they once had is yet to be seen; Maria Bargh (Chapter 16) argues that it has for Māori tribal (*iwi*) enterprises.

Also, as Dominic O’Sullivan argues in Chapter 13, is it ‘more instructive to consider what [Indigenous peoples] want from economic and political activity and the ways in which [Indigenous peoples] are agents in managing neoliberalism’s constraints and pursuing its possibilities’? What’s more, as Will Sanders argues in Chapter 6, ‘[f]raming and labelling are important, and it may be that insisting that this is still the age of decolonisation, as well as neoliberalism, is a way to keep alive ideas about the recognition of Indigenous rights’.

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