

Research Thesis:

# The Road to Healing

Identity and the Over-Representation of Indigenous Men in the Australian Criminal Justice System.

*A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of a Bachelor of Social Science (Criminology) Degree.*

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## Abstract

The extreme rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander over-representation in the Australian criminal justice system are a glaring reminder that the Australian nation-state was founded on the dispossession and marginalisation of its Indigenous people. While mainstream criminology has addressed this problem by conceptualising Aboriginal crime as the product of poor socio-economic circumstances, this analysis fails to capture the complexity of the issue or provide relevant solutions.

I argue that over-representation must be addressed using a less conventional framework. I offer the post-colonialist framework as one that is better-suited to understand and address over-representation, and situate my own study within this paradigm.

This project explores the ongoing impact of colonisation on Indigenous men in the context of criminality and over-representation. It is my argument that the way colonisation has intentionally attacked Indigenous men's identity, roles and responsibilities is a significant contributor to over-representation. The extremely high level of Indigenous male involvement in the criminal justice system provides grounds for the focus of the present study. I examine an Indigenous designed and run program called Red Dust Healing which demonstrates how offending behaviour may be addressed within the broader context of colonisation, oppression and identity.

I use literature, secondary data and interviews to answer the following research questions:

1. How has colonisation impacted upon Aboriginal men's identity, particularly in the context of offending behaviour and over-representation in the criminal justice system?
2. What is the explanatory value of the theoretical paradigm underlying the program Red Dust Healing in terms of
  - a. The erosion of Aboriginal male identity under colonisation?
  - b. Assisting Aboriginal men in healing and restoration?

Red Dust Healing is a unique program that provides participants with an understanding of how specific factors that create and engender rejection in Indigenous communities are embedded in processes of ongoing colonisation. Furthermore, it aims to equip participants with the tools to break the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage. The directors of the program and four past-participants (including an Aboriginal mental health specialist) were interviewed about the program's suitability to assist Indigenous men with their unique needs in a post-colonialist society. The program's philosophy is examined for its potential to heal Indigenous men and provide a useful paradigm within which to address over-representation.

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## Introduction

The psychological impact of [our] experiences of dispossession, racism, exclusion, extermination, denigration and degradation are beyond description. They strike at the very core of our sense of being and identity. Many of our people assume any other identity than that of Aboriginal: the denial of self. Many say, as I have done for years, I shouldn't be here in this world, I don't belong. Yet we are of the most ancient people in the most ancient land on Earth. We question who we are, what we are doing, where we belong.

Pat O'Shane, 1995:27

The extreme rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander over-representation in the Australian criminal justice system are a glaring reminder that the Australian nation-state was founded on the dispossession and marginalisation of its Indigenous people. With the establishment of the Australian identity as the colonisers came the destabilisation of the Indigenous identity as the colonised. The impacts of this process have been pervasive and intergenerational, and manifest in the serious levels of disadvantage experienced by Indigenous people today. Over-representation is only one indicator of this disadvantage, but for criminal justice systems and Indigenous communities, it is one of the most alarming.

While mainstream criminology has addressed this problem by conceptualising Aboriginal crime as the product of poor socio-economic circumstances, this analysis fails to capture the complexity of the issue and provide relevant solutions. Since the release of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in 1991, Aboriginal over-representation has *increased* in almost all states and territories (Weatherburn, 2006)<sup>1</sup>. This suggests that policy derived from traditional approaches has not successfully reduced the problem. Over-representation must be addressed using a less conventional framework. I offer the post-colonialist framework as one that is better-suited to understand and address over-representation, and situate my own study within this paradigm.

There is a notable gap in the available research on how the historical, cultural and political processes that have stripped Indigenous men of their roles and responsibilities influence the factors that give rise to offending behaviour. In respect of males specifically, Pease (2001) highlights that there has been no analysis of the changing modes of masculinity among Aboriginal men from hunter-gatherers to members of an urban capitalist society. Nevertheless, criminalisation in Aboriginal communities is directly relevant to the destruction of Aboriginality under colonisation: 'Many Aboriginal people maintain that dispossession, loss of land and culture, the desecration of Aboriginal sites, the breakdown of kin and moyete systems (traditional rules for identifying appropriate marriage partners), the unwillingness of white authorities to acknowledge the jurisdiction of Aboriginal law have *direct and immediate* relevance to both criminal behaviour and to processes of criminalisation' (my emphasis, Blagg, 2008:16). This project aims to begin addressing the gap in the literature by demonstrating that there is an undeniable link between the degradation of Indigenous men's identity under colonisation and their over-representation in the criminal justice system.

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<sup>1</sup> In NSW the rate of Indigenous appearance in court on criminal charges is 13 times that of non-Indigenous Australians and the rate of Indigenous imprisonment is ten times that of non-Indigenous Australians. This trend is found to a greater or lesser extent in all Australian States and Territories (Weatherburn, 2006:1).

Furthermore, I argue that this link *must* be addressed alongside improvements to Indigenous communities' socio-economic conditions if we are to see lasting change in the levels of criminalisation experienced by the first peoples of this country.

### **Focus of the Present Study**

Colonisation has impacted men in specific ways that mean they are far more likely to come into contact with the punitive side of the justice system than their female counterparts (Cunneen and White, 2007:143). Ninety-two per cent of the Indigenous population in Australian prisons is male (SCRGSP, 2009). Indigenous men's rate of over-representation in prison and juvenile justice has increased significantly since 2001 (ABS, 2008). Astonishingly, fifty per cent of Indigenous males are charged with an offense at some point in their lives (Dodson and Hunter, 2006:36). This figure is 30 percentage points higher than the equivalent figure for Indigenous females. The extremely high level of Indigenous male involvement in the criminal justice system provides grounds for the focus of the present study.

This project explores the ongoing impact of colonisation on Indigenous men in the context of criminality and over-representation. It is my argument that the way colonisation has intentionally attacked Indigenous men's identity, roles and responsibilities is a significant contributor to over-representation. I examine the program Red Dust Healing to demonstrate how factors that give rise to offending behaviour may be addressed within the broader context of colonisation, oppression and identity to create lasting change in Indigenous men's lives. In light of this, the research questions for this project examine: the impact of colonisation on Aboriginal men's identity in the context of over-representation; and the explanatory value of the Red Dust Healing paradigm for conceptualising identity and healing (see Research Method below).

This paper revisits selected aspects of the literature and presents some new analysis of the relationship between over-representation and identity to highlight that the factors underpinning Indigenous over-representation need to be conceptualised more broadly. Socio-economic factors no doubt give rise to current levels of Indigenous offending and imprisonment, but I argue that the focus on these factors eclipses the fundamentally unique situation of Indigenous Australians as colonised people.

I first outline the theoretical and political background to understanding and addressing Indigenous over-representation in the Australian criminal justice system to situate the present study in a post-colonialist framework and highlight the gaps in the literature. In chapter two I outline the research design and methodology used in the present study. Chapter three examines the impact of colonisation on Indigenous men's identity and its relevance for understanding over-representation. Chapter four demonstrates how the philosophy underlying Red Dust Healing successfully integrates the broad contextual issues discussed in chapter three with an individualised and holistic approach to healing for Indigenous men. The conclusion of the paper revisits the research questions to demonstrate how the study has achieved its aims and to emphasise the significance of identity in addressing Indigenous men's over-representation.

## Chapter 1: Theoretical and Contextual Background

### Ideological Approaches to Over-Representation

There are few well-defined conceptual and methodological approaches used to understand and address Indigenous over-representation in Australia and those that exist are in sharp contrast with one another. Weatherburn, Walker, Lind, Fitzgerald and Hua represent the traditional, positivist criminological school of thought that understands over-representation as the result of individual factors (e.g. rates of offending, levels of education) that can be separated, quantified and measured. In contrast, the post-colonialist approach (which is a subset of the critical realist paradigm) put forward by Cunneen and Blagg understands such factors to be inextricably embedded in the historical experience of colonisation and dispossession. The post-colonialist approach emphasises the Indigenous perspective in understanding and responding to over-representation.

These two schools of thought are the most influential in the Australian context; there is a notable shortage of interpretivist or hermeneutical approaches to this issue in the available literature. However, even the post-colonialist approach is a relatively recent and underused paradigm in Australian criminology, as Cunneen explains: 'Little of the literature has concerned itself with theorising the relationship between the processes of colonisation and criminalisation... It has been the work of a few historians, rather than criminologists or sociolegal theorists, which has contributed most to our understandings in this area' (2001:3). Such approaches are generally more absent in contemporary Australian criminology because it has long been dominated by the positivist paradigm (Blagg, 2008, Cunneen, 2006). My thesis will build on the work of Cunneen and Blagg to address an aspect of Indigenous criminal justice that has not yet been directly examined: the relationship between colonisation, Indigenous identity and Indigenous men's over-representation in the criminal justice system.

Below, I outline the differences in how the positivist and critical realist schools conceptualise the problem of Aboriginal over-representation to show how differing epistemological approaches have resulted in differing understandings and responses to the issue. Furthermore, I situate my own study within the post-colonialist criminological framework.

#### Positivist School

For positivists, the social world is defined by regularities and absolute principles (Crotty, 1998:28). From this perspective, Weatherburn, Fitzgerald and Hua (2003) explain Aboriginal over-representation in terms of patterns of behaviour and consequence: Indigenous people are more likely to be repeat offenders, repeat offenders are less likely to be cautioned and more likely to be charged, they are also less likely to get bail and less likely to avoid a prison sentence if convicted (Weatherburn et al, 2003:68). Thus, at each point in the criminal justice system the higher offending rate and longer offending history of Aboriginal people increases their level of representation (2003:68). Therefore, Weatherburn et al conclude, to reduce rates of Aboriginal imprisonment we must reduce Aboriginal offending (2003:70). Walker and McDonald (1995) attribute Indigenous crime to a lack of employment, education and other opportunities. The Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) and the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR) (which is under the direction of Don Weatherburn) also approach research into over-representation from the positivist perspective.

The positivist perspective argues that factors which precipitate and sustain Indigenous involvement in crime such as alcohol use, early departure from school, unemployment and removal from one's natural family should be the main focus for Aboriginal crime prevention (Weatherburn et al, 2003). Therefore, Weatherburn et al identify patterns in factors underpinning Aboriginal offending and advocate policies that address those factors to reduce offending. This positivist approach is exemplified in their methodology: they examine arrest rates, re-offending rates and self-report data to draw conclusions about Aboriginal offending (Weatherburn et al, 2003; Weatherburn, Lind and Hua, 2003). Likewise, Weatherburn, Snowball and Hunter (2006) use the 2002 Australian Bureau of Statistics National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey to compare Indigenous offenders with non-offending Indigenous people to identify underlying factors that precipitate offending. In all these studies, statistical analysis forms the crux of the researchers' methodology without any consideration of conflicting perspectives, ascribed meaning or historical, cultural or political influences.

This is not to say that these positivist researchers deny the historical impact of colonisation. To the contrary, Weatherburn et al state that, 'the history of colonisation in Australia leaves no doubt about the prejudice and discrimination that Aboriginal people have suffered at the hands of police and agents within the criminal justice system' (Weatherburn et al, 2006:66). However, although Weatherburn et al attribute the current over-representation of Indigenous people to the processes of colonisation, their methodological approach to the problem does not consider how these factors are embedded in the processes of *ongoing* colonisation. The AIC exemplifies a similar criminological approach (see, for example, Carcach, Grant and Conroy, 1999).

This has important ramifications for policy, particularly because the positivist paradigm dominates government-funded institutes. For instance, in terms of diversionary policies, Weatherburn et al argue that they fail if they do not bring down levels of offending. Weatherburn et al advocate (2003) (2006) that Australian governments should stop focussing on diversionary options and instead tackle the underlying causes of high crime rates in Aboriginal communities (e.g. unemployment, substance abuse and leaving school early). This underlying approach reflects the State and Commonwealth Governments' responses to Indigenous disadvantage generally. The Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (SCRGSP) (2003, 2005, 2007, 2009) reports titled *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* emphasise the well-researched factors that amplify and perpetuate levels of Indigenous disadvantage. These reports use language of 'converging outcomes' for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians rather than considering the specific needs of Indigenous people as colonised people. On this point, the reports are entirely silent.

In terms of policy that addresses over-representation in prisons, the mainstreaming of Indigenous prisoners into rehabilitation programs persists as the dominant approach to reducing recidivism. Yet, Indigenous people are less likely to participate in mainstream programs and more likely to drop out than non-Indigenous participants (Gilbert and Wilson, 2009:4). The lack of Indigenous specific programs has been identified as a major barrier to Indigenous participation and successful reintegration from prison (Willis & Moore, 2008). Nevertheless, the policies promoted in NSW and WA Department of Corrections and NSW Department of Juvenile Justice Strategic Plans attempt to reduce over-representation through mainstream programs that fail to address the specific needs

and circumstances of Indigenous prisoners as colonised peoples.<sup>2</sup> The government's approach is again to change individual behaviour without acknowledging the centrality of the common cultural experience of colonisation and dispossession.

### Critical Realist and Post-Colonialist Schools

The critical realist paradigm rejects positivism and hermeneutics in favour of a layered approach to understanding reality and the social world. It rejects the positivist notion that as humans we can discover purely objective truths (Bhaskar, 1975). For instance, while Weatherburn takes offending rates at face value and draws inferences from them, Cunneen argues that those same offending rates are not 'knowable' apart from the agencies which identify and process crime (2006:340). Therefore, Cunneen argues, when examining overrepresentation, we cannot discount the contribution of institutional practices and legal frameworks within which criminalisation and the use of imprisonment is embedded (2006:340). Likewise, Blagg takes a critical approach in arguing that white society's decision to name actions as 'criminal' silences the kind of dissent possible when these actions are named another way – political for example: 'the criminalisation of Aboriginal people's resistance to colonisation played a role in silencing criticism of the mass dispossession of Indigenous people and through this the theft of their land' (2008:2). Blagg does not simply examine Indigenous offending levels, but also shows how processes of colonisation change what actions the State considers to be 'criminal'.

Cunneen criticises the positivist approach taken by Weatherburn et al as being too simplistic in conceptualising Aboriginal over-representation through single causal explanations (2006:334). Cunneen argues that criminologists must examine Indigenous over-representation through an 'analysis of interconnecting issues including historical and structural conditions of colonisation, of social and economic marginalisation, and institutional racism' combined with an analysis of 'specific (and sometimes quite localized) practices of criminal justice and related agencies' (2006:334). Similarly, Blagg argues that: '[understanding] the extraordinary levels of Aboriginal over-representation in the criminal justice system... requires a highly nuanced and variegated analysis that situates these phenomenon within an historical framework formed by processes of colonial dispossession, genocide and assimilation, and forms of resistance to these processes' (Blagg, 2008:2; see also the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, 1991:10.1.1). The collective Indigenous experience of marginalisation elucidates Aboriginal people's current economic, social, residential status and their attitudes to non-Aboriginal Australians and the nation whose foundation was premised on their dispossession (RCIADIC, 1991:10.1.1).

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<sup>2</sup> The NSW Department of Juvenile Justice Aboriginal Over-Representation Strategic Plan found that 'the factors identified as contributing to disadvantage were the history and legacy of ongoing colonisation, dispossession and displacement, poor parenting resulting from the removal of the "parent generation" from their own parents, institutional racism, the absence of employment opportunities and infrastructure in the rural and regional areas where many Aboriginal communities are located, and a lack of culturally appropriate service provision in welfare, education, training, health and juvenile justice' (2001:17). However, an evaluation of the Strategic Plan found that an inter-generational violence prevention group program for Indigenous young men called *Journey to Respect* was the only widely used Aboriginal-specific program and that its success was hampered by staff and funding restraints. Furthermore, the evaluation found that mainstream programs were not engaging enough with Indigenous youth and that the Aboriginal Strategic Plan needed to emphasise specific needs and learning styles (Cunneen, Luke and Ralph, 2006:55-56). See also NSW Department of Corrective Services Aboriginal Offenders Strategic Plan (2003) and the WA Department of Corrective Services Strategic Plan (2008).

Cunneen and Blagg's methodology reflects their epistemological approach. Like most critical researchers, Cunneen does not reject empirical studies; indeed many of Weatherburn et al's findings use previous empirical studies by Cunneen to support their argument (2003:65). Unlike Weatherburn et al, however, Cunneen does not present such data at face value. In his critique of Weatherburn et al's 2003 study, Cunneen argues that the researchers omit any discussion of the problems associated with self-report data and the unique limitations of the data with minority groups (2006:339). Furthermore, Cunneen (2006) opposes the authors' conclusions that differences in arrest rates 'are reflective of real differences and patterns of involvement in crime among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people' (Weatherburn et al, 2003:69) because it is a simplistic proposition that fails to grasp the complex relationship between Indigenous offending and levels of over-representation in prison. For example, Cunneen asks, how can Weatherburn et al's analyses explain why the imprisonment rate of Indigenous people in New South Wales is roughly double that of Victoria when arrest rates are similar (2006:341)?

Blagg's attack on positivism is a reaction to what he perceives as the approach by positivist criminologists to 'tick the Aboriginal box' when researching Indigenous justice issues such as over-representation, without ever attempting to understand Indigenous perspectives (Blagg, 2008). What they would see if they did try to understand this perspective, Blagg argues, is that it is precisely Indigenous people's Aboriginal identity and attempts by the state to eliminate, restructure and re-constitute this identity that is the core issue (2008:3).

Blagg's contempt for traditional criminological approaches in respect of this issue is indicative of the strained relationships between researchers of the old order (positivism) and the new (critical realism): 'if we envisage the problem as exclusively, or even mainly, a problem of crime, deterrence and punishment, we need look no further than the suite of What Works doctrine... If we adopt Cunneen's suggestion, however, we are faced with having to engage with a broad range of concerns that occasionally take us beyond the domain of criminology – often because mainstream criminology refuses to acknowledge them' (Blagg, 2008:11). Blagg's argument is convincing because the 'What Works' doctrine (i.e. whatever reduces offending is what works) is clearly *not* working. To neglect the way that the state has coercively re-constituted Aboriginal identity when considering why Aboriginal people are over-represented in the criminal justice system is a harmful deficiency in criminological research. It is the state that lays down the laws which cause Aboriginal people to be classified as 'offenders' 'criminal' and 'over-represented'. Surely, then, it follows that the relationship between the state and those people, as established through colonisation, should be at the heart of any analysis of Indigenous criminal justice issues.

Blagg, Morgan, Cunneen and Ferrante (2005) also argue for a human rights approach to Indigenous justice issues. The human rights approach emphasises the importance of understanding the human rights abuses committed against Indigenous Australians when developing public policy around these issues: 'It is now widely accepted that forms of intervention which do not work in an "Indigenous Way" can themselves damage the social fabric of Indigenous communities and compound the very conditions they seek to ameliorate. There is an imperative, therefore, to ensure that the project is run *by* as well as *for* Indigenous people' (Blagg et al, 2005:53). Likewise, Cornell (2008) suggest that we should not simply focus on individual outcomes (such as reducing levels of offending) but rather seek to engage Aboriginal communities and bring them into the process of change so that *their* aspirations shape how we move forward (Cornell, 2008; see also Harris, 2004:39). Research in

Australia and overseas has shown that strategies which empower local Aboriginal communities with self-determination have the greatest potential for immediate and long-term success in reducing Aboriginal crime (NSW Aboriginal Justice Advisory Council, 2003:7). A critical strength of the human rights perspective is that it can bring together the problems associated with three distinct but inter-related issues: individual discrimination on the basis of race, the underlying issues of socio-economic disadvantage of Indigenous people and Indigenous claims to autonomy and rights (Blagg 2005:53). I wish to adopt Blagg and Cunneen's approach to mould my conceptual and methodological framework because it brings Indigenous perspectives to the forefront of any discussion concerning Indigenous over-representation and encourages full participation of Indigenous people in addressing this issue.

The post-colonialist literature highlights many interconnected immediate and inter-generational effects of the colonial project on Indigenous Australians, including their criminal offending and contact with criminal justice mechanisms and institutions. The literature highlights how criminal behaviour of Indigenous men can result from the ongoing cycle of oppression (CCYP & ATSIAB, 2001; Ross, 2009). The impact of the process of colonisation, including the facets of dispossession, imposition of white law, protectionist and assimilationist policies, the forced removal of children and the intergenerational effects of marginalisation will be examined using the literature in chapter three in the context of the interview material. Identity is identified as a key theme running through the literature that is a core concept underpinning over-representation.

## **Conclusion**

The post-colonialist literature establishes a convincing connection between individual factors that give rise to Indigenous offending and the historical, social and political realities of white/Aboriginal relations in Australia. In this context, the present study focuses on the shaping of Indigenous men's identity. While the literature discusses the significance of identity as a reason for the over-representation of Indigenous Australians, no studies deal specifically with this issue. This study aims to explore and emphasise the role of the erosion of Indigenous men's identity under colonisation in precipitating offending and over-representation. In doing so, I wish to demonstrate the strengths of the post-colonialist approach to over-representation over the dominant positivist paradigm; in particular, its potential to advocate policies and programs that enact real and lasting healing for Indigenous men and their families. The following chapter outlines the methodology used in this study.

## Chapter 2: Methodology

This chapter outlines the design and methodology of the research. It first justifies the qualitative approach taken in this study using the literature on qualitative research, in-depth interviewing and qualitative data analysis. Second, it describes the overall design and conceptual orientation of the research, followed by the sources of data, data collection procedures and data analysis. Ethical considerations pertaining to the research and a description of the pilot study are also included. The chapter concludes with an assessment of the limitations of the study.

### Qualitative Research Methods:

Qualitative methodologies are particularly suited to vulnerable groups because they allow individuals to have *their voices* heard when they might often otherwise be silenced (Liamputtong, 2008, Neuman, 2006). Since my research involves Indigenous Australians - a deeply disadvantaged and marginalised group in Australia, particularly in the criminal realm, - this insight is pertinent to my research methodology. The post-colonialist and human rights approaches outlined above emphasise the importance of Indigenous autonomy in research and policy development: thus any consideration of the interaction between colonisation, identity and over-representation must be shaped by the voices of Indigenous Australians. The National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families (NISATSIC) (1997) is an important example of research that demonstrates how the testimony of Indigenous peoples may be used to explore and document a highly sensitive issue related to colonisation. To bring marginalised voices to the forefront, it is important to construct a fine-tuned and culturally sensitive interview schedule as well as give consideration to how to establish genuine rapport with subjects from a different cultural or social background to the researcher (Minichiello, Aroni and Hays, 2008:78).

Furthermore, qualitative methods have been used with success by researchers exploring roles and meanings attached to the concept of masculinity. Coles (2008) used qualitative methods (namely interviews) to investigate meaning and understanding in the lives of men and such methods allowed him to understand of how men make sense of and negotiate masculinities. Coles found that engaging subjects through the action of speech allowed him an insight into their subjectivity and motives for action 'as they experienced them in the everyday world' (2008:236). In her study of two cancer patients' daughters, Susan Bell (1999) highlighted how in-depth interviews allow researchers to explore the way individual biographies are connected to the structural conditions in which they originate. This exploration of the relationship between individual biography and cultural, historical and social structures is highly pertinent as a methodological approach to my research which seeks to map broad conceptual theories to the lived experience of Indigenous men. Furthermore, this methodology reflects Blagg and Cunneen's approach since it highlights the interaction and relationships between individuals and the deeper cultural and social processes in which they are embedded.

### Research Design:

As noted in the introduction, I wish to address colonisation's impact on identity as an underlying factor in the over-representation of Indigenous males in the criminal justice system. I use literature, secondary data and interviews to explore the impact of colonisation on Indigenous men's identity and the role this plays in their over-representation. Specifically, the research questions for this project are:

3. How has colonisation impacted upon Aboriginal men's identity, particularly in the context of offending behaviour and over-representation in the criminal justice system?
4. What is the explanatory value of the theoretical paradigm underlying the program Red Dust Healing in terms of
  - a. The erosion of Aboriginal male identity under colonisation?
  - b. Assisting Aboriginal men in healing and restoration?

The program Red Dust Healing was selected as a source of interviewees because it is a unique example of an Indigenous-run initiative that aims to equip Indigenous men with the skills to reassert their Aboriginal identity, responsibilities and roles in the context of their relationships in a post-colonial society. However, it should be noted that this study is not an evaluation of the Red Dust Healing program.

This research attempts to map broad conceptual theories onto the lived experience of Indigenous men; thus in-depth interviewing helped me explore the way individuals are situated in and influenced by their surrounding cultural, historical and social structures. The sampling size for the interviews was small because of the aims outlined and is not intended to provide data for a comparative study.

Multiple data sources including secondary data and Red Dust program materials were drawn upon in order to provide triangulation of data to strengthen the construct validity of the research.

### **Research Method:**

Multiple qualitative research methodologies were used to address the research questions. Research question 1 was answered primarily using existing literature including methodological studies and secondary data as well as the interview material.

Research question 2 was answered primarily using the interview material, and also relevant literature. Interviews with the directors of Red Dust Healing explored how the theoretical paradigm itself underpins the program. Interviews with past-participants of Red Dust Healing were used to situate the lived experience of Aboriginal men in the broader conceptual landscape of colonisation, identity and over-representation. An interview with a mental health professional who works in a local Indigenous community provided a professional critique of the program's impact on participants. Existing literature was used to assess the theoretical basis for the paradigm and assist in the analysis of the interview material.

### **Field procedures: In-Depth Semi-Structured Interviews**

Purposive sampling was used to recruit interview participants. Five Indigenous men were interviewed for this research project based on either their position as directors of the Red Dust program or experience as past-participants. In addition, a non-Indigenous mental health professional was interviewed based on his experience of the program and its impact in a community setting. The men that were interviewed are:

- Tom Powell – Managing Director of Red Dust Healing
- Randal Ross – Co-Director of Red Dust Healing

- Barry Toohey – Grade III Clinical Nurse specialising in Indigenous mental health
- Three anonymous past-participants of the Red Dust Healing program recruited via Tom and Randal.

Past-participants were selected because they were Aboriginal men who had completed Red Dust Healing. Tom and Randal approached potential interviewees to ensure the anonymity of those who declined to be interviewed and to allow me access to past-participants in a non-threatening manner. Both the directors and past-participants were interviewed using a semi-structured format for a period of about 45 minutes each. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed or, where this was not possible, conducted over the phone. The interviews took place in early August, 2009.

During the course of the interviews, informants were encouraged to talk freely about their experience of Red Dust in response to interview questions. Probing questions were asked where gaps emerged or statements were unclear or incomplete. An interview schedule (see Appendix A) was used to direct the flow of the interviews. The process of how the schedule was constructed is discussed in the Pilot Study section below.

Past-participants spoke about their experiences of Red Dust, how their participation had impacted on their life, and more broadly, were able to share their life experiences around identity, Aboriginality and colonisation. Tom and Randal also shared their personal experiences as Aboriginal men from communities impacted by colonisation. However, in response to most questions they spoke from a professional perspective having worked with Indigenous communities and offenders for a number of years. Barry Toohey spoke about his personal experience as a Red Dust participant but answered most questions from the perspective of a professional working with a particular Indigenous community in which the program was run.

The high level of satisfaction with the program experienced by past-participants meant they were eager to share their experience of Red Dust and discuss how it had changed their lives. It proved important for rapport and mutual understanding that I had participated in the program and could speak the Red Dust 'language' (see Pilot Study below). Past-participants felt comfortable sharing with me as a fellow-participant and were able to explain their experience using familiar and culturally appropriate terms that I could understand. It was also very important for my rapport with participants that we were connected through Tom Powell, in whom all participants expressed great trust in and respect.

### **Secondary Data Collection:**

Theoretical sampling was used to select relevant sources of secondary data on Indigenous over-representation. The latest statistics were gathered from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the Australian Institute of Criminology and the bi-annual reports on overcoming Indigenous disadvantage conducted by the Steering Committee for Review of Government Service Provision.

### **Data analysis methods:**

The interviews aimed to elicit information on the experience of completing Red Dust Healing and beliefs around identity within a particular historical, social and political context: the colonisation of Indigenous Australia. For this reason, the interview material was analysed for concepts around identity, roles and responsibilities, the impacts of colonisation and the potential for healing using the

Red Dust tools. Coding was used to generate concepts emerging from the data which were then organised and analysed according to the research questions. The interview material was examined in conjunction with the relevant literature to inform the structure and content of the results chapters that answer the research questions.

## **Pilot Study**

A pilot study was conducted to develop an interview schedule for past-participants of Red Dust. The purpose of the pilot study was to develop an ethically and culturally sound interview schedule. Insight was gained through a literature review of in-depth and narrative interviewing techniques and the ethical issues involved in interviewing marginalised and vulnerable populations. Furthermore, the schedule was constructed in light of my meeting with Red Dust director, Tom Powell and a review of Red Dust program materials. During this meeting, Tom ran me through the Red Dust program as a participant, equipping me with the knowledge and language of Red Dust that I was then able to use to shape my interview schedule. This experience helped me feel 'qualified' to discuss Red Dust with the past-participant interviewees because we could share a common language to express complex and personal experiences with a certain level of shared understanding.

My final interview schedule, which was reviewed again in light of my first two interviews with Randal and Tom, was constructed using a mixture of questions that aim to elicit reflections on personal growth and development during and since participation in the Red Dust program. Collaboration with Tom Powell enabled me to construct a culturally sensitive interview schedule using interview techniques that are suited to the research of marginalised and vulnerable populations. The literature on ethical research developed my thinking around how and when I should ask probing questions, what type of language I should use and how to ensure that the participant's voice is heard in the context of a program evaluation. The *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies* (AIATSIS, 2000) and my time with Tom taught me the necessity and value of collaborating with Indigenous people when conducting research on Indigenous issues.

As a result of this pilot study I was able to formulate a research instrument for my interviews with past-participants that was successful in drawing out meaningful data in an ethically sound manner.

## **Ethical Considerations**

Ethics approval for this research project was sought and obtained from the University of New South Wales' Arts, Humanities and Law Human Research Ethics Advisory (HREA) Panel (Approval No. 09 2 075). All participants involved in the study received an Information Sheet explaining the aims and purposes of the study and information on how to withdraw from the study after the interview had been completed. Informed consent was also collected from all participants and the directors of Red Dust also signed a confidentiality waiver that allowed them to be identified in the research findings. Quotations from the anonymous interviewees have been presented in the findings in such a way that respondents cannot be identified to ensure their confidentiality and anonymity.

Research on interviewing and researching marginalised and vulnerable populations was conducted for the purpose of ensuring ethical integrity in this project (see Pilot Study above). This research shaped the manner in which the interviews were conducted and information was exchanged between the researcher and the researched. Ongoing consultations with the directors of Red Dust

throughout the project have helped ensure that Indigenous people have had meaningful input into the collection, analysis and presentation of the data.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Qualitative methods were important in drawing out past-participants' understanding of their experience of the Red Dust program, particularly since, as Indigenous men, they belong to a group whose experiences have been oppressed and repressed by dominant policies and research methods (Ezzy, 2002:45). However, the subjectivity of the informants' responses and my interpretation of the data as the researcher is a limitation on the reliability and validity of this research. Pe-Pua suggests using a multi-method approach in cross-cultural research to address concerns about reliability and validity (1989:159). In the present study, the different roles of interviewees ensures that a variety of perspectives on the Red Dust program have been included. The directors provide background and clearly outline the underlying philosophy and aims; past-participants give their personal responses to the program; and Barry Toohey is able to provide a clinical perspective on the structure and impact of the program in a community setting. While a strength of this study is its capacity to break new ground, the unavailability of any secondary data on the Red Dust Healing program is a limitation of the research that hindered triangulation.

Furthermore, while the aim of the in-depth interviews in this study is to bring Indigenous perspectives to the fore of the research, my worldview as the researcher also plays a significant role in the presentation of the data. My political and theoretical perspective is made explicit in the background to the study, but should nonetheless be taken into consideration when interpreting the research results.

Access to resources was a significant limitation in this study. Participants of the Red Dust program are mostly in remote communities or from states other than New South Wales. While a broader geographical cross-section of past-participants would have been preferable, it was not possible to access those participants given the time and cost restraints on the research.

Lastly, the aims of the research meant that the limited number of interviewees was not a significant limitation in this study since enough data was collected to enable an examination of the philosophical underpinnings of the program. However, future research will hopefully include a full-scale evaluation of Red Dust using a larger pool of interviewees to provide deeper insight into the explanative and healing potential of the program for Indigenous men and their communities.

### Chapter 3: the Impact of Colonisation on Aboriginal Men's Identity

This chapter uses the literature and interview material to identify the ways colonisation, as an ongoing process, has impacted and shaped perceptions of Aboriginal identity. It demonstrates how the effects of this manifest in Indigenous communities today in the context of Indigenous men's offending behaviour and over-representation. This chapter lays the contextual foundation for chapter four, which examines the way Red Dust Healing addresses these issues with Indigenous men.

#### Defining Colonisation: An evolving process

Indigenous researcher Lorraine Muller suggests that Australia's history is conceptualised through dichotomous viewpoints where 'colonialist narratives and cultural hegemony dominate... and have served to justify colonial mastery' (2007:2). Muller highlights that colonisation necessarily incorporates 'an internalised process of valorisation of the coloniser's culture and the denigration of the colonised culture' (2007:1). The conceptualisation of colonisation as an *ongoing process* has the potential to reorient perceptions of the Australian nation-state's relationship with Indigenous Australia. It counters the colonialist narratives that Muller highlights with a discourse about the ongoing effects of cultural hegemony on the first people of this country. Colonisation is 'the *process* of subjecting a particular cultural or territorial group of people to the control of another group' (Cunneen, 2001:6) and therefore constitutes far more than the moment in time when white people arrived on Australian shores. It is an ongoing series of practices (reflective of and reflected in the attitudes of the colonisers) that result in the dispossession of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from their land and rights.

Muller outlines five stages of colonisation which reflect its development as an ongoing process: *denial and withdrawal*, where the culture, moral values and humanity of Indigenous peoples are denied; *destruction/eradication*, which includes the destruction of culture, social systems and people (through murder, massacres, eugenic breeding programs aimed at absorption, forced removal etc.); *denigration/belittlement/insult*, where Indigenous culture, languages, practices, knowledge and beliefs are denigrated, outlawed and replaced by the coloniser's model; *surface accommodation/tokenism*, when remnants of the surviving Indigenous culture are given token regard – ideas about what constitutes a 'real' Indigenous person are promoted; and *transformation/exploitation*, where the remnant culture is transformed by the dominating society e.g. the way Indigenous art has been promoted and exploited by the colonising society (2007:3-4). These five stages are not chronological – they overlap and interact. Together, they produce a climate in which Indigenous identity has been dramatically altered (see also Ross (2009) for a five stage model of oppression). Cunneen notes that the processes involved in these stages have disrupted Indigenous people's economies, political and religious institutions and cultures and the modes of governance through which they lived (2001:6; see also Miller, 1991).

Colonisation is also a process that occurs within the minds and attitudes of the colonisers. 'Truths' about Aboriginal Australians' inferiority and worthlessness were accepted (wittingly and unwittingly) by people in the colonising community (Muller, 2007). This acceptance allowed the destruction, eradication, denigration and belittlement of Indigenous peoples and their culture to go largely unopposed (Muller, 2007:2; see also Blagg, 2008; NISATSIC, 1997, RCIADIC, 1991). Furthermore, Muller (2007) and O'Shane (1995) assert that the current plight of Indigenous Australians points to the internalisation and subliminal perpetuation of the colonisation process. Non-Indigenous

Australians remain relatively ambivalent about the fact that many Indigenous people live in third-world circumstances in their own country (NISATSIC, 1997:193).

The ongoing nature of colonisation is also evidenced in current government policy. Muller (2007) and Ross (2009) argue that the Northern Territory intervention is an example of the way policy continues to set Aboriginal people apart, class them as deviant, and encourage them to change through discriminatory legislation. Muller notes how the language of government around the time of the intervention emphasised words like 'mainstreaming' and 'normalising' and implied that moving into more centralised living is the way for Aboriginal people to move forward (2007:5). Dodson draws attention to the portrayal of Aboriginal men in the media during this period as 'sexual deviants and sociopathic automatons', arguing that such depictions rekindle assimilation policies through the recurring denigration of Aboriginal culture (2007:22). Randal Ross explained how the government and media response to the problems identified in the Northern Territory communities marginalised Indigenous men and continued the cycle of denigration:

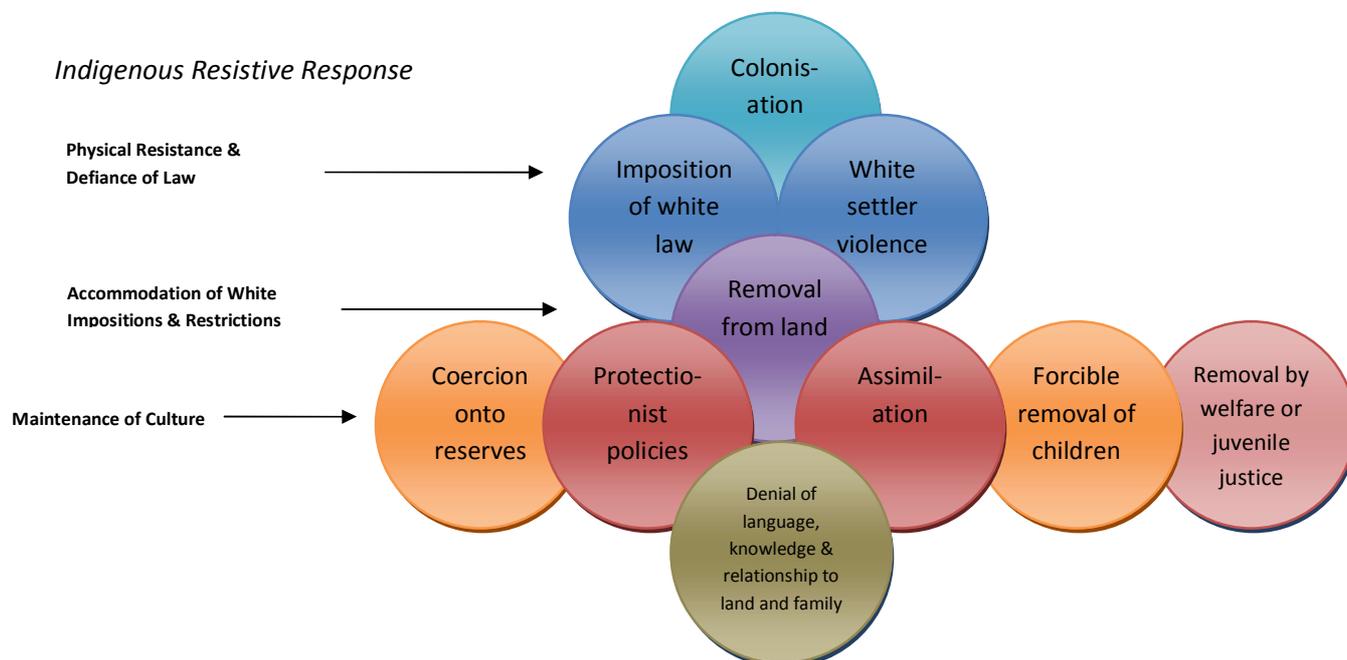
When you look at the Northern Territory Intervention, who was it that they were blaming? Aboriginal men. Aboriginal men again were the focus. Some of the stuff [involved in the Intervention] had to happen but the proper way to do it was by dealing with men, working with the men to take control of that situation - not coming in and trying to take over and then destroying men at the same time, you know? Taking away those responsibilities and those roles. And again, by them coming in and then the media writing about men that way gave them the right to distort again their identity. And you know that's why many of the Indigenous men around the nation felt that they were being targeted as perpetrators because of the way that they orchestrated this whole Northern Territory Intervention.

Extract 3.1 Randal Ross  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

Lastly, this negative conceptualisation of remote Indigenous communities also masks an uncomfortable truth: that the current position of Aboriginal people living in inner-city Sydney suggests that the movement of Indigenous people into 'mainstream' Australia does not improve outcomes for their well-being (Dodson, 2007:22 cited in Blagg, 2008:6). The disadvantage that Indigenous Australians experience today is pervasive – in rural and urban settings alike. In terms of criminalisation, arrest and incarceration rates are equally high for Indigenous people in both remote and non-remote areas (Dodson and Hunter, 2006:35).

The way that different colonialist processes have developed is outlined in the diagram below, along with the way Indigenous Australia has resisted those processes. Both of these are discussed in further detail in the following sections of this chapter.

**Diagram 3.1: Development of Colonisation Process**



Using this understanding of colonisation as an ongoing process that shapes the relationship between Indigenous people and the Australian nation-state today, I now turn to the specific ways colonisation has attacked Aboriginality.

### **The Colonialist Attack on Aboriginality**

Historically, the state attempted to re-constitute the identity of Aboriginal people by denigrating Aboriginality. The State (and white society) carried out this attack forcefully: from the violence and mass-slaughter of Aboriginal people by white colonisers, to the appropriation of the land by white settlers and the consequent requisition of economic resources, to the concentration of differing kinship groups on reserves, to the policies of protection, assimilation and forced removal of children. These physical and cultural attacks told Aboriginal people that their Aboriginality was worthless and burdensome. Furthermore, since only a small number of Aboriginal people survived the first century of the colonial assault on their communities, the remaining number were initially regarded as a diminishing 'problem' (Moran, 2005:172).

They characterised Indigenous peoples in the terms of the blackest aspects of their own nature... as being sly, no-good, dishonest, untrustworthy and lazy... Very often, on that basis, they felt justified in hastening the demise of Aborigines. For all sorts of ills, real and imagined, missions of extermination were carried out.

O'Shane, 1995:26

The 'doomed race' thesis which dominated the white mentality well into the 1960s asserted that Aboriginal people were headed for extinction, reinforcing the attitudes and actions of white people who treated Aboriginal people as lesser human beings (Blagg, 2008; Moran, 2005, Read, 2006).

### Imposition of White Law

The colonisers' law has always discriminated against Aboriginal peoples in Australia. From the latter half of the nineteenth century, governments across Australia had established an elaborate network of special legislation and administration to deal with Indigenous Australians (Behrendt, Cunneen and Libesman, 2009, Moran, 2005). The law is a key way by which colonisers are able to introduce and maintain control mechanisms over Indigenous people (Ross, 2009).

When you teach the people you're colonising your literature and your language, you also teach them your law... The difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous law is the white man's law changes all the time. And we still have one lore today that we maintain on the land and that lore hasn't changed for over sixty-thousand years.

Extract 3.2 Randal Ross  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

The law has been used to control Indigenous people and their relationship to the land. Ross (2009) points to Section 1:51 of Part V of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Australia which gave parliament the power to make laws for the 'peace, order, and good government of the Commonwealth with respect to: the people of any race, *other than the aboriginal race in any State*, for whom it is deemed necessary to make *special laws*'. Ross asserts that the implementation of special laws has been used as a mechanism of control of Indigenous Australians:

If they can define you, they can control you. You can see today that through policies they still seek to define Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Extract 3.3 Randal Ross  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

The treatment of Aboriginal people as a special case continued until the 1967 referendum, when the people decided that federal parliament should have the power to make laws governing Indigenous people (Behrendt et al, 2009:261). After the referendum, many expected that the discriminatory treatment of Indigenous people by state governments would abate. Unfortunately, any supposed reduction in state-level discrimination was counterbalanced by federal discrimination. Behrendt et al demonstrate that the federal government has implemented laws that continue to discriminate against Indigenous Australia (2009:262).

Moran points out how white law disregarded Indigenous customary law and failed to give Aboriginal people rights to their land, thus making dispossession possible and legitimate in the eyes of the colonisers (2005:192). Dispossession was justified on the belief that Aboriginal people should learn how to cultivate the land in the 'civilised' way. Whites established reserves for their 'protection'. Pat O'Shane documents how the legislation 'quaintly termed as being for the protection of Aborigines' meant that the people could be moved onto and off of reserves at the will of the authorities (1995:25). A past-participant of Red Dust reflected on the stories of his own family:

I've listened to the stories from my grandparents about the old days with all the restrictions on how they could go to and from things... you might be restricted from going into town or not allowed off the missions or reserves because you were Aboriginal. Being Aboriginal

would restrict you from your wages and things like that... I couldn't have more respect for those guys to actually go through what they did to make our lives a little better to live as an Australian in our own country.

Extract 3.4 Past-participant #2  
Personal Interview, 7 August 2009

Moran notes how legislators made efforts to slowly remove all references to race in legislation and other regulations dealing with Aboriginal people (2005: 178). But this does not mean the law has not continued to be used to enact colonial processes in this country. Randal Ross highlighted mandatory sentencing as an example of the way Indigenous people been discriminated against by the law in recent times:

Mandatory sentencing wasn't a process to engage with our people, but to lock them up at the drop of a hat, even if they looked at you wrong. And that's where you know they abuse those laws towards our people.

Extract 3.5 Randal Ross  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

Special laws for Aboriginal people were a key mechanism by which the policies of assimilation were implemented during the majority of the twentieth century. Whites attempted to remove the 'Aboriginal problem' through various methods of biological and cultural absorption.

### **Assimilation**

The policy of assimilation was one of the most damaging and explicit methods by which white colonisers attacked the Aboriginality of Indigenous Australians. Indeed, the denial of Aboriginal culture was the foundation of the assimilation policy (Read, 2006). Read explains that this policy was aimed at 'solving the Aboriginal problem.' Indeed, a 1926 Report of the Board stated that the standard of life in white homes that took in Aboriginal children would 'pave the way for the absorption of these people into the general population' (2006:3). Moran notes that the actual practices of assimilation varied from state to state, but included the progressive breaking up of stations and reserves, schemes for education, training and employment, and efforts to house Aboriginal families in predominantly white neighbourhoods (2005:178). O'Shane demonstrates how Indigenous people were forced into a world order that excluded them from work and education (1995:27). A past-participant of Red Dust reflected on the variety of deprivations brought about through such assimilation policies:

Even with my mum being taken from family and stuff, that was all through colonialism, their policies that they brought out, the assimilation policy trying to make black people white. That destroyed a lot of our cultural ways, our traditional ways, our language - all that was taken.

Extract 3.6 Past-participant #1  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

Moran outlines the shifts that took place within settler nationalist discourse from biological notions of race and nation to culturalist notions of national belonging in relation to the assimilation of Aboriginal people (2005:177). Even when governments moved to include Aboriginal people in society through absorption and assimilation policies, the basis of that inclusion was the negation of Aboriginality (Moran, 2005:171-172).

You know one of the easiest ways in the world (and the British are very good at it, they've done it for thousands of years) to dominate people is to take people's culture away. And the easiest way to take their culture away is to stop them speaking their language and make them do what *you* do; not what is naturally inherent in them to do.

Extract 3.7 Barry Toohey  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

The colonisers undermined Aboriginal people's connection to their language, lore and land and thus, their identity:

If they can stop us from talking our particular language, that all comes back to identity because it's part of our connection to our land.

Extract 3.8 Randal Ross  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

These processes of assimilation and deprecation were continued in the policy of removing Indigenous children from their families.

### **Forcible Removal**

The government policy of forcibly removing Aboriginal children from their parents and communities was a key tool of assimilation that aimed to annihilate Aboriginal identity and culture. Aboriginal people were denigrated through the attack on their names, personal histories, language and familial relationships (NISATSIC, 1997; Ross, 1999).

Missionaries, teachers and government officials believed that the best way to make Indigenous people behave like white people was to 'get hold of the children who had not yet learned Aboriginal lifeways' (Read, 2006:3). O'Shane notes that by reason of their race alone, Aboriginal families were considered to be 'incompetent parents, neglectful of their children, from whom the children had to be removed if they were to become worthwhile adults' (1995:26). The policy of forced removal fundamentally degraded the value of Aboriginal lifeways and parental roles.

For the removed children, Aboriginality was considered a blight on their character that needed to be weeded out. Removed children were often denied any knowledge about their Aboriginality: 'They changed our names, they changed our religion, they changed our date of birth... That's why today, a lot of [Aboriginal people] don't know who they are, where they're from' (Witness, NISATSIC, 1997:156). Randal Ross also communicated the significance of this loss in terms of identity and connection to the land:

They took our names away from us. Many of our traditional names had that connection back to our land, and we had purpose in that actual language name, it was our responsibility in

that name, when it was given to us. But by giving us no names, it comes back to that image or that identity being distorted - by giving us no names, we have no connection. That's why when you look at the Stolen Generation they were given new names and sent to the other side of Australia so that they wouldn't know what their connection was.

Extract 3.9 Randal Ross  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

The NISATSIC report highlights how, for removed children, there was no positive affirmation of Aboriginal identity, 'nor indeed personal identity' (NISATSIC, 1997:188). The Inquiry shows that the undermining of identity reflected a broader government policy that sought to absorb Aboriginal children into white society (NISATSIC, 1997; also Read, 2006). Read notes that the 'racial intention was obvious enough for all prepared to see, and some managers cut a long story short when they came to that part of the committal notice, "Reasons for Board taking control of the child": they simply wrote, "for being Aboriginal"' (2006:8).

Generation after generation of Aboriginal children have grown up with a lack of personal identity, personal worth and trust in others (NISATSIC, 1997:189). A psychologist reporting to the Inquiry explained how the effect of removal was to fragment the identity of the removed child and also their family:

That has an impact on people's sense of who they are, how you fit into the world and where you're going... It also destroyed the sense of worth of being Aboriginal... and this is something which happened not just to the people who were taken away but it also happened to the families who were left behind.

NISATSIC, 1997:199

One witness actually described this experience as an identity crisis (NISATSIC, 1997:202). Thus, the denigration of Aboriginal identity was not simply rote-learned by removed children, it was internalised by them and the families they were forced to leave behind, and fundamentally changed how many Indigenous people understood themselves and their place in the world.

The intergenerational effects of the forcible removal cannot be overstated. The transmission of social disruption to the children's generation is alarming: they were more than three times as likely to have been taken away from their natural family by the state if one of their parents had been taken (Dodson and Hunter, 2006:37). By the early 1980's, not one Aboriginal family in New South Wales had escaped the experience of having their children taken from them and placed into institutions (O'Shane, 1995:26). The abuse and trauma experienced by the Stolen Generations continues to have profound effects for subsequent generations (NISATSIC, 1997:177). These will be discussed with specific reference to criminality later.

### **The Identity of Resistance**

Aboriginal people certainly did not accept their treatment or the re-working of their identity by white Australia. On the contrary, Aboriginal people have been able to 'oppose and disrupt the process of colonisation' by maintaining their own Aboriginality (Blagg, 2008:30). Blagg (2008), Cunneen (2001) and the NISATSIC (1997) each document the existence of what I will term the

'identity of resistance' among Aboriginal peoples: an identity that is set in defiance of white hegemony. This identity is tied to the formation of a culture of resistance to authority and the law. It is expressed in numerous circumstances and relationships. For removed Indigenous children, the disruption to processes of attachment in early life has resulted in resistance to the authority of caregivers – evidenced by removed children's resistance to learning from teachers at school and their subsequent learning difficulties (NISATSIC, 1997:183). Barry Toohey recounted an example of how the ignorance of white people continues to perpetuate Indigenous young people's lack of respect for those in 'white' authority today:

You know I got a young kid, young Aboriginal kid, twelve years old, was in school last term and the teacher asked the kids, 'what's the first language spoken in Australia?' He sticks his hand up and he says 'Aboriginal, Miss'. She says, 'Wrong. English.' The kid comes home to me and he says, 'Uncle Baz. That teacher's stupid!' He says, 'She's stupid!' Now, then, he's lost respect for that woman, you know. Because she was ignorant. *He* was right, *she* was wrong. And that stuff, those little things happen all the time and it impacts on people.

Extract 3.10 Barry Toohey  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

Likewise, D'Souza (1990) and Cunneen (2008) argue that juvenile delinquency can be understood as individual acts of defiance by young Indigenous people resulting from the historical circumstances of oppression under colonisation. Randal Ross explains how the historically violent relationship between Indigenous people and police has created a mentality of resistance in young Indigenous people today:

A young man may grow up, not being in trouble but just from the simple fact of being harassed, with that perception that 'police are nothing but...' and will take on that mentality 'all police are dogs'. We've certainly noticed that working with our young ones.

Extract 3.11 Randal Ross  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

Many Aboriginal communities 'where the resident Aboriginal population constitutes the public' have also asserted and maintained their Aboriginality in spite of the constant attack of ongoing processes of colonisation (Blagg, 2008:35). Though this identity of resistance may compound the disadvantage experienced by Indigenous people, particularly the young, it is also an important mechanism by which Aboriginal people have been able to maintain a sense of self-worth and dignity in the face of oppression and denigration (Blagg, 2008:36). Therefore, when evaluating the impact of colonisation on Aboriginal people's identities, it is important to note that many Aboriginal people have resisted it through a variety of means.

Nevertheless, it is undisputed how dramatic the effects of colonisation have been on Aboriginal people's identity as the first people of this country. It has wrought scars that might never heal and which white society continues to overlook (Read 2006: 25-26).

I now turn to the ways that colonisation has specifically impacted Indigenous men's identity.

## The Colonialist Attack on Indigenous Men's Identity

Prior to the arrival of white colonisers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples had distinct and interconnected roles in their communities. Gender and age determined social activity and communication between people (CCYP & ATSIAB, 2001:6). The CCYP & ATSIAB report on the incarceration of Indigenous fathers is one of the few reports that attempt to document the traditional roles and responsibilities of Indigenous men and their families in the context of criminalisation. It explains that familial structures were very different from white families – older siblings were expected to perform many of the primary duties and responsibilities of the parents, such as training for cultural ceremonies, initiation into adulthood and education in morality (CCYP & ATSIAB, 2001:6). Storytelling and performance were central modes of communication (CCYP & ATSIAB, 2001:6).

Indigenous men held a number of roles in traditional Aboriginal communities. Ross (2009) explains that their role was to 'instruct, teach, train, nurture, shape their character and culture, control, rule and most importantly to love'. Indigenous men were initiated into each stage of life through ritual and ceremony; at each point in a young man's life his role changed through a series of stages that were accompanied by the passing on of knowledge and skills (CCYP & ATSIAB, 2001:6). This knowledge equipped men to serve and care for their family and community and shaped and strengthened their identity (CCYP & ATSIAB, 2001:6). By enacting their roles, Indigenous men fulfilled their responsibilities to their communities and in turn, earned their communities' respect (CCYP & ATSIAB, 2001:6).

The impact of colonisation on Aboriginal men's roles has been devastating. The European devaluation of the Indigenous male role has deprived Aboriginal men of their purpose and their ability to serve and protect their communities.

In the old days the men were the protectors and carers and the knowledge holders of language, culture; and protective of their families. When colonialism came in their roles were taken from them and our people became dependent on the hand-out system from the government. Employment opportunities were taken away as well ... And their traditional ways as providers, hunters and gatherers for their families was destroyed.

Extract 3.12 Past-participant #1  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

Ross (2009) identifies three core values of Indigenous men that were undermined by colonisation: identity, responsibility (which is related to purpose) and relationships. Ross (2009) argues that identity was destabilised through the policies of assimilation, as already outlined above. Secondly, Indigenous men were stripped of their responsibilities. The government's protectionist policies meant Aboriginal men were no longer able to hunt for their family's food, perform critical ceremonial rites or speak and pass on their language (CCYP & ATSIAB, 2001:7). Barry Toohey explained how the loss of traditional roles under these policies has contributed to the destabilisation of identity:

There's no sense of self. You don't *have* a particular role within the community. Okay the women look after the children and do all that, but the men used to bring the food and do all that sort of stuff. Well how can you do that now?

Extract 3.13 Barry Toohey  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

The killing off and removal of older men during the earlier periods of white settler violence was the initial way in which families were destabilised and identity was distorted:

A lot of the old men carry the knowledge and the lore, and our knowledge and our lore connects us back to where our land is and our purpose and that's where colonisation has totally taken that away... Men have never been shown their roles because those old people were taken away from them.

Extract 3.14 Randal Ross  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

We talk about colonialism [during the Red Dust program] and about a lot of our men being taken and the younger people not having the knowledge of the elders around in that community. They were no longer there either coz they moved on or were killed off.

Extract 3.15 Past-participant #1  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

Third, the state broke relationships between Indigenous men and their families and communities through policies that forced disconnection from kin, community and country (Ross, 2009). Ross explains that Indigenous men today are still reeling from the effects of having these three central core values undermined. One past-participant of Red Dust expressed his sadness at realising how he had failed to understand or fulfil his role as the eldest brother in the family when his mother passed away:

Well I didn't realise how bad they [his family] needed me until they rang me up about mum, and they said you have to get up here. So I dropped everything. And you realise how bad they need you, being the eldest in the family they look up to you to do this and do that, for guidance. I need to apologise for things I didn't do, what I should have done and what I want to do.

Extract 3.16 Past-participant #3  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

In particular, the undermining of the Indigenous paternal role has left Aboriginal men feeling alienated and redundant (Blagg, 2008; Hunter, 1993). Ross (2009) explains that one of Indigenous men's key roles is to link a child back to his past in order to shape his future. Removal from kin and country meant this role could not be fulfilled and fathers have been left feeling useless and incompetent (Ross, 2009).

Their traditional ways as providers, hunters and gatherers for their families was destroyed... That definitely impacted on our men. And um, unfortunately a lot of that was a generational thing then. You know, it was passed on from children to children sort of thing because their whole roles were changed. Colonialism definitely had a huge impact on the roles of men in our communities, our countries.

Extract 3.17 Past-participant #1  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

These feelings of worthlessness and redundancy are reinforced by the sense of communal despair experienced by Aboriginal men.

A lot of that role, that responsibility and identity have been distorted. That's why many of our men don't know how to think that they're good men and they can do things. They've always got that mentality 'I'm not good enough' or 'look at him, big-noting himself' and they pull each other down.

Extract 3.18 Randal Ross  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

Criminal behaviour is only one potential outcome resulting from the erosion of Aboriginal men's identity under colonisation. Furthermore, it is an outcome that is inextricably linked with other indicators of social and cultural disadvantage. The post-colonialist literature stresses that such indicators are reflective of ongoing process of colonisation, rejecting the positivist conceptualisation that such factors are quantifiable apart from this process (Cunneen, 2006). I now turn to how the attack on Aboriginality and Indigenous men's identity is linked to the current levels of offending and over-representation of Aboriginal men in Australia's criminal justice system.

## **Identity and Criminalisation**

There is very little literature available that examines how the reshaping of identity under colonisation impacts Indigenous people's patterns of criminalisation and over-representation. The research which does address issues around identity does so in the course of wider arguments about juvenile delinquency or family violence (see Blagg, 1999 and Cunneen, 2008). That is why the present study is important in shedding light on the dramatic consequences of the destabilisation of Indigenous men's identity in the context of over-representation.

Many interrelated factors such as family violence, alcohol and drug use, the breakdown of traditional family structures – and underneath all these, the core issue of rejection – have resulted in the current status of Indigenous men as one of the most over-represented groups in prison in the world. Drawing on the contextual factors outlined above, this section demonstrates that socio-economic factors alone do not adequately account for this deeply rooted criminal justice problem. Rather, the unique position of Indigenous men and the reworking of their identity is crucial to patterns of Indigenous offending and over-representation.

## **Rejection: a core issue**

Tom Powell and Randal Ross, directors of Red Dust Healing, understand the concept of rejection to underlie and drive all destructive behaviour experienced by and perpetrated against people. All people have experienced rejection and pass that rejection on to others unless they recognise it in their lives and learn how to overcome it (Ross, 2009).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Pat O'Shane (1995) supports this notion in her recount of her cousin Fred's suicide, which she attributes to his experience of rejection as an Aboriginal child.

Tom Powell shared a story about a young man he worked with in Queensland who came to understand how rejection had impacted on his life and behaviour in a very significant way:

I remember one kid, up when I got to the part where we talk about rejection, who had been affected by foetal alcohol syndrome. He said, "Tom, that rejection, that's like when my mum, when I was 9, packed my port and threw it off the edge of the balcony and said 'f- off! I never want to see you again.' That's rejection, eh Tom." And I burst out bawling. That's rejection alright. So what he started doing was drinking, drugging, selling himself, these sorts of things. Got locked up. And he kept going back there [to detention]...They ended up diagnosing him with some mental health issues. But that rejection stuff, once he dealt with that then some of the other stuff resolved itself.

Extract 3.19 Tom Powell  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

So relentlessly has colonisation undermined Indigenous males' identity, responsibilities and relationships that almost all Indigenous men have been unable to escape an overwhelming and disabling feeling of rejection. This manifests in behaviour and relationships and so impacts the next generation:

That rejection has been passed on generationally from them old men whom had their dignity and integrity stripped from them because of identity being taken away, roles and responsibility being taken away, [removal from] that land; I'm talking about before, just after the impacts of colonialism. They were taken away then, families were split up and taken, they weren't allowed to speak their language, not allowed to hunt on the land, not allowed to provide. So that man, his dignity and integrity has been stripped from him. You can choose to give it up, no one can take it from you, but when the spirit's broken then you're more likely to give it up.

Extract 3.20 Tom Powell  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

Ross (2009) explains that many Indigenous men have suppressed the pain of rejection they feel which makes it difficult for them to build relationships and show emotion with loved ones, families, and in their communities. A past-participant explained how this was true in his family:

Even with um, my father, not being able to show his true love towards his children. I can only imagine that that was passed on from his father to him and no doubt he felt a lot of that rejection because his father left him. His father left him and his mother and went back to Sydney. I never had an opportunity to be able to ask Dad about those things.

Extract 3.21 Past-participant #1  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

Since Aboriginal men are traditionally the head of the family and the leaders in their communities, their rejection by white Australia has proved a mechanism by which Indigenous communities in their entirety remain oppressed (Ross, 2009).

The ultimate truth is – if you can keep families oppressed by not having the strong men at home, the source at home, you can have those people defined and maintain control over those families.

Extract 3.22 Randal Ross  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

The consequence of this ongoing cycle is that the rejection and associated destructive behaviours in Indigenous communities are passed on and perpetuated – evidenced by the alarming state of Indigenous over-representation in prison:

That's what you see today when you look around: the alarming statistics of our men between 17-25 being incarcerated at a rate of 31% and growing and then you look at the 25-29 group and it is 41% and it's growing. You've got to think if we continue on this path we're not going to have any fathers in the home. What we're heading towards is a fatherless nation.

Extract 3.23 Randal Ross  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

An undeniable effect of the over-representation phenomenon is the breakdown in family structures and support systems that nourish young people. The result is that individuals, households and entire communities are deeply wounded with little capacity to move forward.

### **Breakdown of Family Structure**

The inter-generational effects of colonisation's erosion of the male Aboriginal identity have been significant and disabling. Young Aboriginal boys have lost knowledge and role models, which deprives them of the opportunity to understand and claim their male Aboriginal identity for themselves (Hunter, 1993:231). Dodson and Hunter assert that the disruption to Indigenous families today through the forced removal of family members by welfare and justice agencies is 'obviously correlated with arrests and incarceration in the last five years' (2006:37).

Incarceration is one of the most common reasons for the absence of Indigenous fathers. Their absence has fragmented the cultural and social dimensions of their children's lives (CCYP & ATSIAB, 2001:4). Moreover, the absence of role models or the role modelling of self-destructive behaviour has left Aboriginal boys to emulate their fathers in being over-represented at all stages of the criminal justice system (Cunneen and White, 2007).

Many of our men today don't know how to be a source, they don't know how to be a father... Many of our young men are still living proof of those [assimilation] policies.

Extract 3.24 Randal Ross  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

Indigenous boys continue to be raised in circumstances where trauma, violence, substance abuse and role confusion shape their identity (CCYP & ATSIAB, 2001:8). Hunter attributes the very high rates of self-harm including suicide and domestic violence among young Aboriginal men to the 'inappropriate construction of male identity in Indigenous families due to the fact that male role

models were either absent or had been undermined' (1993:10). For boys in particular, alienation from white culture and the erosion of their Aboriginal identity underlies their high rates of criminal offending (NISATSIC, 1997:182). The report documents statements by witnesses to the inquiry that suggest that both the removed children and their families (including their children in later generations) have experienced ongoing and compounding psychological and emotional damage that has led many to perpetrate violence, self-harm, substance abuse and anti-social behaviour (1997:178, 195). The disruption to the process of attachment in infancy has resulted in anti-social activity and crime in later years for removed children (NISATSIC, 1997:182).

You see the fruits of colonisation when many of our men today end up in prison. You know it's always been the men's role to set boundaries at home, to set those boundaries in the family, and if the father's not there to set those boundaries, that's why many of our men are ending up in prison.

Extract 3.25 Randal Ross  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

O'Shane reflects on the dysfunctional reality of many Indigenous communities that results from colonisation's impact, noting how relationships are 'often marked by anger, depression and despair, dissension and divisiveness. The effects are generational' (1995:27). An Indigenous father who participated in Red Dust reflected on how this reality was borne out in his own life:

What I didn't realise was the negative things that I'd have in my life that I'd pass on to my kids. Things like fights with the misses in front of them, swearing and the little things... I've seen that passed onto my kids.

Extract 3.26 Past-participant #2  
Personal Interview, 7 August 2009

The breakdown of family structures and removal of men's traditional roles is directly related to the high levels of family violence in Indigenous communities, as discussed below.

### **Family Violence**

It is well understood that violent behaviour involving Indigenous people (including homicide and serious assaults) is directed towards intimates rather than strangers more often than in non-Indigenous communities (Ferrante, Morgan, Indermaur and Harding, 1996). Blagg argues that the social construction of gender, particularly the way specific values and ideals of masculinity are embedded, are central to understanding violence (1999:7). He suggests that the redundancy of the Indigenous male role is an integral factor in explaining why Indigenous communities experience such high rates of interpersonal violence. Men may compensate for redundancy with an aggressive assertion of male rights over women and children (Blagg, 1999:10). The destructive effects of the colonisation process have set this in motion and the European belief that men are the head of the household has justified it (Blagg, 1999). Increased male power over women has also been legitimised by 'selective references to so-called "traditional culture" by males eager to claim privileges over women in their communities' (Blagg, 1999:11). A past-participant of Red Dust identified this in his own behaviour which he learnt from other men in his life:

I think that the role that was taken away really affected the male role model that we had set up in our families... I realised what I was actually doing with the power and control stuff and realised that what I've seen done before either with my father or other uncles and relatives and even cousins was what I was doing.

Extract 3.27 Past-participant #2  
Personal Interview, 7 August 2009

The inter-generational cycle of interpersonal violence may be understood as the cultural transmission of destructive patterns of self abusive and violent behaviours in Indigenous communities (Blagg, 1999:11). This concept can be used to enhance our understanding of the particular ways in which the cycle of violence is perpetuated in the Indigenous context – separate and different from the non-Indigenous context due to the unique experience of colonisation (Blagg, 1999:11).

A significant contributing factor to criminal behaviour in Indigenous communities is alcohol and drug abuse. Again, this factor is inextricably linked to Indigenous people's experience of colonisation.

### **Alcohol and Drug Use**

The use of alcohol, a substance introduced through colonisation, has proved a significant coping mechanism for Indigenous men whose identity has been shaped by feelings of redundancy and loss of control. Alcohol relieves the stress associated with the breakdown of community structures and masks feelings associated with the extensive grief and loss Indigenous people have experienced under colonisation. Tom Powell explains how the root cause of rejection underlies alcohol dependency for many Indigenous people:

On the drink, after grief and loss, it's just hard, you know... And that's the only way you think you deal with it but the rejection's still there, the hurt's still there.

Extract 3.28 Tom Powell  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

Aboriginal men's roles and responsibilities have been whittled away and watered down to nothing. And that's a lot of the reason why Aboriginal men drink or don't do anything: because they've had that responsibility taken right away from them. They've got no standing within their own community anymore because it's been whittled away.

Extract 3.29 Barry Toohey  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

Alcohol also lowers inhibitions so that men find it easier to speak about the difficulties and hurts they experience, as a past-participant of Red Dust explains:

I can talk with people now about the losses in my life. Before I couldn't. I'd sit down and have a beer and maybe then it would come out. But now I can talk about it without drinking. Before it would take a beer or something...

Extract 3.30 Past-participant #3

Personal Interview, 7 August 2009

Alcohol perpetuates existing problems since it often induces negative behaviours that engender guilt, and consequently more anxiety, more drinking and more negative (and sometimes criminal) behaviour (Miller, 1991:139). Randal Ross explains how this, again, is an inter-generational issue:

I realise now exactly why our men are in the state they are in, and many of them never had father figures at home. When you look at the particular word 'father' in the Greek, that word means 'source' – and if you don't have any source in the family, what are our children being connected through? They look to the drugs, a source, the alcohol, another source - and most of the time they take that wrong path and that path usually ends up being destruction for them.

Extract 3.31 Randal Ross  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

Participation in the 'alcohol culture' in some Indigenous communities is a means by which the young socialise and gain acceptance. Furthermore, this culture encourages heavy drinking which, coupled with other disadvantages, creates conditions that provoke violent behaviour (Miller 1991:139).

Alcohol has been used in Indigenous communities as a form of passive resistance to white authority. Drinking together provides a means to experience group solidarity and identity (Miller, 1991:139). Thus alcohol use is not only a symptom of underlying problems stemming from identity confusion, but also a means by which identity may be forged. Likewise, criminal behaviour can provide a sense of identity through resistance to white authority and law for Indigenous people.

### Resistance to White Law and the 'Criminal' Identity

For some Indigenous men, criminal offending enables them to 'get back at society' in one of the only ways available to them (NISATSIC 1997:190). Many young Indigenous men do not have the tools to process their people's history or overcome the forces of oppression in any other way than to rail against white authority:

At the moment I don't think a lot of them [young men] do understand what actually happened. They think they do but they're only taking other people's word for it. They say 'those white cunts they took our land' and stuff like that, but having a better understanding would hopefully empower those guys.

Extract 3.32 Past-participant #2  
Personal Interview, 7 August 2009

Miller highlights how the process of imprisonment is itself conflict-inducing since Indigenous Australians feel they are being gaoled by the discriminatory laws of a racist society (1991:140). Blagg further explains how the Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspective of prison can be entirely different: 'For many Aboriginal people, prison is a source of *pain*, but not necessarily of *shame*. It does not carry the same stigma within the Aboriginal domain to be incarcerated in a white jail' (Blagg, 2008:46).

Ogilvie and Van Zyl suggest that criminal acts can express distinctively male forms of action through activities like drinking, gambling in public spaces and interpersonal physical and moral challenges. Tom Powell suggested that for young boys, experiencing detention may be seen as a crucial factor in the construction of male identity:

Unfortunately there were some of those kids in juvenile justice there who saw their path from the juvenile to the adult gaol as a rite of passage. I heard some of them say, not all, but some of the men say – ‘oh you know you’re not a man til you go there’.

Extract 3.33 Tom Powell  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

Thus, while some Indigenous men attempt to resist forces of oppression through rebellious (and sometimes criminal) behaviour, the destructive consequences of this behaviour often only reinforce that oppression rather than free them from it.

## Conclusion

The relationship between colonisation and the over-representation of Indigenous men is mediated by a number of factors that are precipitated and perpetuated by the colonial attack on Indigenous identity. Indigenous men’s over-representation is symptomatic of the breakdown in Indigenous lifeways and community structures under colonisation, and underneath this, the rejection of Aboriginality. This layered understanding of over-representation may threaten to overwhelm governments who already struggle to canvass the variety of issues that contribute to Indigenous disadvantage. However, often they only need support what Indigenous people are already doing in their communities to create meaningful, long-term change such as in the work of Red Dust Healing.

The program Red Dust Healing has been developed and implemented across the country by two Indigenous men who, through their own journeys of self-discovery, have come to understand the importance of peeling back the surface layers of men’s lives to address what lies at the heart of their problems. This program provides an example of how a holistic and informed approach can affect lasting change in the lives of Indigenous men to the benefit of their families and communities.

## Chapter 4: The Road to Healing

Red Dust Healing aims to restore the role of Indigenous men in their families and communities by providing an understanding of rejection and an avenue for healing. It is examined here for its suitability as a program to assist Indigenous men with their unique needs in a post-colonialist society. The program's philosophy is examined for its potential to heal Indigenous men. Red Dust is a unique program because it provides participants with an understanding of how specific factors that create and engender rejection in Indigenous communities are embedded in processes of ongoing colonisation, and equips participants with the tools to break the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage.

### Origins of the Program

Tom Powell, a Wiradjuri man who designed the program, grew up in Narromine where he experienced the love and support from family and community that motivated him to create Red Dust and show a new way forward for healing:

For me, Red Dust starts back there. Growing up in Narromine, how we all grew up there together, there was no segregation, there was no missions... and the love and respect that Mum and Dad instilled in us was really special, really special... You look after the people and the rest will start to look after itself, Bub. People do more for you out of love and respect when they're treated with dignity and integrity, than they do out of authority. Some people just haven't learnt that yet.

Extract 4.1 Tom Powell  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

Likewise, Randal Ross, a Bindal, Juru and Erub descendant from Queensland who further developed the program through his work on the model of oppression, drew inspiration from his own family and experiences:

I grew up in a domestic violence situation with my own family... I guess my Dad was on and off at home and then by the age of 17 everything got blown up with my Dad actually going to prison. And it's always been a journey of mine to look at why was he always angry, why he was always wild. And I've realised by talking to family members that my grandfather came back from World War I still totally angry from what had happened and what he'd seen and been part of, and my father was the oldest son in his family and was the key man coming through, and my grandfather took it out on him and punished him for everything. So that had been passed on to him and he has passed it on through us ... and me being the second eldest, and my brother the eldest - we both bore the brunt of any kind of incident at home. So from here it was a journey for myself ten years on to look at, well why is the next generation following in the same footsteps? Why is the same pain still there? Why are the young ones still on drugs and the alcohol and so forth? And then it hit me that I couldn't see any fathers at home. Many of our families are growing up without father figures.

Extract 4.2 Randal Ross  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

## Purpose of the Program

The aim of the program is to give Aboriginal men an understanding of identity, to equip them with self evaluation skills, to develop future role models and fathers, and to restore family relationships. The program examines the intergenerational effects of colonialism on the mental, physical and spiritual wellbeing of Indigenous families and gives men an understanding of their hurt which may come from *rejection or grief and loss*. It aims to equip men with the tools to confront the problems that are relevant to their own lives and address any ongoing patterns of negative behaviour.

### Session topics include:

- identity
- Aboriginal culture and traditions
- family structure and roles
- relationships, power and control
- grievance and loss
- rejection
- stress and mental health issues
- anger management
- drugs and alcohol
- education and employment
- housing issues and budgets
- community contribution
- governance
- community resource mapping and case plans

## How it Works

The program incorporates traditional practices and cultural symbolism to engage participants and help them understand the roles and responsibilities of Indigenous men in their families and communities. Barry Toohey relates the importance of the program's cultural relevance using the example of the tree drawing exercise which is used to understand family and upbringing:

From a clinical perspective, I think the tree really is a great avenue to get Indigenous people to explore their families because they relate to the symbolism of the tree. When Tom puts that tree up there and turns it sideways it blows people away and it gets people within ten minutes. Then using the tree to create a geneagram, he uses those aspects of the tree – the root system, what's going to hold you up as a person; I think it's a really... If you're going to do a straight up 'tell me about your family' it's not going to work; it doesn't hit people at that cultural level.

Extract 4.3 Barry Toohey  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

The program uses simple but effective tools that 'target the heart, not the head' – and this is its strength, according to the directors of the program and past-participants:

They [participants] really understand it in a cultural way, not in a white way. Not on paper. The heart over the head.

Extract 4.4 Barry Toohey  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

The concepts are so simple. You don't need to be a greatly educated person to get what the program's about because the concepts are so easy to understand. People think from the heart and not from the head.

Extract 4.5 Past-participant #1  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

Another crucial aspect of the Red Dust Healing philosophy is the commitment to providing a holistic and individualised response to Indigenous men's issues. The program not only covers a wide variety of issues, but also ties them all together through the concept of rejection. Red Dust emphasises that rejection is at the root of all patterns of negative behaviour e.g. alcoholism:

They haven't got a drinking problem, they haven't got a drug problem, they've got a rejection problem. And we gotta tell them they have a rejection problem, help them understand that rejection, why that hurts there... the drinking numbs it, they drink because that's what they know.

Extract 4.6 Tom Powell  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

Though rejection and grief and loss initially enter a person's life through circumstances outside their control, the program focuses on equipping men to take personal responsibility for their own decisions and behaviour:

We personalise it and individualise it so they see it themselves, they know then that it's a choice and a choice that they must make, we can't make it for them. But if they're ready to step up as men, then that choice is theirs. So it makes them start to realise, they can think with their heart.

Extract 4.7 Randal Ross  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

In all sessions, the tools employed by participants are individualised to allow for their specific issues to be discovered, explored and shared. For instance, when covering the topic of households and budgets, participants are asked to draw their house. In each of the rooms they write the names of the people who live there and then talk about what each person does –what roles each one has for the house to function properly. If participants identify people living in the house who are taking advantage of others, they can think about how to ensure that that person starts to pull their weight. Likewise, if they identify someone who has had to take on more responsibility than they should, then they can consider how to share the load with that person. The exercise's effectiveness lies in its ability to get participants to stop and think about their own situation to understand what works and what needs to change.

Another important aspect of Red Dust is the directors' commitment to follow up with all past-participants and connect them with local agencies that provide ongoing support. In the final session, individual case-plans are developed and participants are linked up with local mainstream and Indigenous agencies. The case-plans follow on from the specific issues identified by participants during the workshops and set out goals for participants for when they return to their families and

communities. Participants are matched up with a buddy from their area to assist in case-plan completion and the directors of the program then follow-up with participants via phone and also face-to-face meetings where possible.

Red Dust is underpinned by four major concepts that are conveyed through a series of pictorial diagrams that enable participants to understand and internalise the program's key messages (see Appendix B). The following section outlines how the directors and past-participants understand and utilise these four key concepts in order to examine the program's potential for healing.

### **Past-Participants' Program Experiences**

Below, the key concepts that underpin Red Dust's philosophy are briefly explained and analysed for their potential to help participants heal and overcome the devastating impacts of ongoing colonisation. Randal Ross explains that these concepts are tools which participants can internalise and take away to assist them in continuing the process of healing in their daily lives:

It's important that we try to teach them the tools through Red Dust Healing so they learn to take care of themselves first, to heal themselves. The tools are simply just to help them maintain their own dignity, their own integrity, their own power and also their freedom. And help them to try to control only what they can.

Extract 4.8 Randal Ross  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

One past-participant mentioned that he uses the Red Dust 'toolkit' often since he has completed the program and has shown it to his family:

I pulled out the tool kit and had a look. I've done it a few times since the program. My kids see me sit down and they say 'what are you doing pop?' and I say 'you can come and have a look and work it out for yourself'.

Extract 4.9 Past-participant #3  
Personal Interview, 7 August 2009

The tools are first about helping participants understand how rejection has impacted their life and decisions, and then to help them think about what to do with that understanding; how to create positive changes in their everyday life:

We look at each person's own personal lives and the issues that are relevant to them. That's why it makes an impact, coz it's about *their* life and they get to tell *their* story and they get to understand the tools and understand the hurt and understand the rejection.

Extract 4.10 Tom Powell  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

The directors' hope is that once the men are able to deal with that rejection in a positive way, they will be able to reassume their roles and spark the healing process for entire families:

My ideal thing for Red Dust is: work with the man, fix him. If you can fix him, I believe you can fix the family. It's about looking at getting to our men, have it passed back on, reinstate that role back in that family.

Extract 4.11 Tom Powell  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

The four Red Dust concepts and a fifth exercise that ties them together are outlined below, along with participants' communications about their experiences with the program.

### The Tree

Participants are asked to draw a tree with roots and branches. Along each root, participants write a family name – their actual name, not just 'mum', for example – to acknowledge each family member that has contributed to their upbringing. Participants write their own name on the trunk of the tree. Then the group discusses what good nutrients and bad nutrients have filtered into the 'root system' of that person's life. The branches signify the choices we make: if we make choices based on love and respect then we pass those things on; if we make choices based on rejection then we pass that on too. If the branch falls off the tree, it leaves a scar. Participants draw branches that have broken off and label them with the names of people they have lost or tragedies that have struck them. The scar symbolises the hole that is left in our life when these things occur. Participants then draw saplings beside their tree. They label them with the names of younger people who look up to them, such as children or nieces and nephews. These are the people who receive either love or rejection from us based on the kinds of choices we make.

The program has given me a better outlook as a father. The responsibilities I have as a father, as a grandfather... the program has shown me how to love my kids and my grandkids better. I've realised that my kids maybe didn't have... I couldn't demonstrate my love for them, even though I had it. And I got that from my Dad, he loved us but he wasn't able to demonstrate his love for us. He couldn't demonstrate it to us, and my young ones, I shouldn't say are victims, but they weren't able to receive that same love from me.

Extract 4.12 Past-participant #1  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

What I didn't realise was the negative things that I'd have in my life that I'd pass on to my kids, my saplings.

Extract 4.13 Past-participant #2  
Personal Interview, 7 August 2009

Randal Ross explained that for many of the participants, drawing their tree might be the first time they have considered how their behaviour impacts on their children:

And that little tree is always looking up and this is where we highlight how it's been passed on from generation to generation. It's a prime example where men, by seeing for the first time exactly how it's been passed on, have been made to think not with their heads but with their heart – 'I don't want my son to turn out like me, or my daughter to turn out like me',

and this is where many of the men have stepped up and said no more drinking, I won't have it in my household.

Extract 4.14 Randal Ross  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

Mental health specialist Barry Toohey explained why this exercise is so effective from a cultural perspective:

If you're going to do a straight up 'tell me about your family' it's not going to work; it doesn't hit people at that cultural level. [But with the tree] people can see how they have been doing in their life and how they feed that back into their family and whether that's a positive thing or not and that's where the good nutrients and the bad nutrients come into it.

Extract 4.15 Barry Toohey  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

### **Bird and the Fish**

The *bird and the fish* tool helps participants realise the futility of trying to control things that are beyond their capacity to control, as well as how to deal with grief and loss. It uses the scenario of a bird and a fish that fall in love, one living in the air and the other in the sea. Even though there are differences and boundaries between them that they cannot overcome, they can still connect through their heart. Likewise, when you lose someone, you cannot see them or touch them, but you can feel them in your heart and they are always with you. The picture also demonstrates that you can only control what you can do in your environment: the bird cannot swim and the fish cannot fly, but they still work with what they have.

The bird and the fish helped me understand the things I wanted to control I just simply couldn't. I'm the type of guy that usually likes to stay on top of things but has recently in the last few years tried to control things that I really couldn't. For me personally, I suffered mild depression from trying to control stuff that I really couldn't. And after seeing the doctors and stuff like that and getting myself through that, the Red Dust program helped strengthen my outlook and taught me to stop stressing about things I can't control.

Extract 4.16 Past-participant #2  
Personal Interview, 7 August 2009

It's also to do with grief and loss stuff – you can lose somebody but they're always there with you. In your heart, you still have your memories. I think of mum and dad quite often and even my foster parents. They were good people and they gave me a lot. I'd never forget those people, they've given me so much.

Extract 4.17 Past-participant #1  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

One of the lads that went through the program – I've seen how he would get caught up with things that had nothing to do with him... he would get caught up with the whole business of

what's going on in the mission and who's fighting with who. But [since doing the program] he's backed right off. He says, well that's not my business. The first day of Red Dust he was going down the mission and he was going to belt the Christ out of somebody and you know, this has saved him. He hasn't done any of that stuff anymore.

Extract 4.18 Barry Toohey  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

### Law and Lore

The difference between the L-A-W (Legalities, Attorney General, Westminster system) and the L-O-R-E (Land, Origin, Respect, Elders) is explained to participants. The LORE is the lore maintained by Indigenous communities and is about where you come from, knowing who you are, maintaining respect and becoming a responsible leader in your community. Randal Ross explains the significance of the LORE vs the LAW and how knowing the difference has saved one young man's life:

That lore represents again who we are, that dignity that integrity, why we are who we are and it's also about that power: that power to model and guide our families through safe waters. And the last part of it is freedom. We're free already but the moment we abuse that then we come into contact with the l-a-w and we don't realise just how free we are until we see that freedom disintegrate in front of our very own eyes. So by just using this simple concept it gives [participants] the understanding that they still have that power, that integrity, that dignity in who they are, where they come from, the people they represent and they have their freedom.

I'll give you a good example of using those two laws... A gentleman came into the office two weeks ago in Townsville and he was highly distressed. A young Aboriginal brother who was just totally lost. He'd just split up from a relationship, he was broke, had no money and he wanted to get back to Cairns and he had no way to get back there and he was telling the counsellor that he was ready to do an armed robbery just to get money so he could travel back home... The counsellor knew that this man had to come and see me... So I sat him down and walked him through the concepts from Red Dust Healing and as soon as I touched on the two laws, telling him if we maintain our lore we'll make the other law redundant, he changed his mind. He said "oh man, I was ready to go do an armed robbery [to get money to get home] but just to come out and see this, now I realise, I was ready to give my lore up so the other law could take control of me". He made it home, but the good thing is he didn't commit an offence to get the money. So by just being shown that concept, it stopped him committing an armed robbery. That's one less brother who had to be locked up for having no money. And all he wanted was to get home, back to where his roots were, to feel safe again.

Extract 4.19 Randal Ross  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

Past-participants agreed that this concept is particularly pertinent to Indigenous men who experience a dramatically high level of involvement with the criminal justice system:

It was explained well by Tommy that if you uphold the l-o-r-e it will take the l-a-w away. Which ultimately is one of the things we really want, men especially, not to experience the gaol system so we can have more role models and better role models for our families.

Extract 4.20 Past-participant #2  
Personal Interview, 7 August 2009

A lot of our people are in gaol. A lot of our young people are in detention for relatively minor offences... If you abide by your own lore and make the right choices, you don't get caught up in the l-a-w. You don't want to give your freedom and power away to the law because if you do, they will make your choices for you.

Extract 4.21 Past-participant #1  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

From a clinical perspective, Barry Toohey explains that the cultural relevance of the concept is what gives it its power and potential to enact change:

That's one of the very powerful parts of this program – how he draws that distinction between law and lore. And I've actually used it a little bit in my clinical practise at the moment just yarning with fellas. I get a lot of fellas sent to me by probation and parole and they're always in trouble with the law. And I said, 'there's this law and then there's the other lore' and they say 'what law are you talking about' and I say 'l-o-r-e lore' and they went 'oh, I see. I can see how that fits. You keep this one then that one goes out the window'... So that really hits home with people and gives people a sense of cultural responsibility.

It's like they don't realise there's two laws, just one – white fella law. And there's no respect for white fella law.

Extract 4.22 Barry Toohey  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

## POUCH

POUCH is a decision-making tool that Tom Powell adopted from the NSW Juvenile Justice *Journey to Respect* program. The acronym stands for Problems, Options, Choices and How and the U stands for how *you* make a decision. In the picture, the acronym is sitting in a kangaroo's pouch to give the tool a visual context. Tom explained how the U personalises the tool:

The U wraps around all the others there. What problems *you* have, what options *you* have, what choices *you* have and how *you're* going to make it happen. So it puts that responsibility back on them.

Extract 4.23 Tom Powell  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

Past-participant #2 has incorporated POUCH into his everyday decision-making process in a way that has benefited his children and assisted in family dispute resolution:

I use that [POUCH] everyday. Going back to my own family; a couple of the kids were blueing over something so I sat them down and explained it to them. I say, so what's the problem here? And get them talking about the problem that they had. Then I explain, so what are the options? Because they're only young they need a bit of jogging, pushing along to get the answers. It helps me to manage it [the situation] better but also shows my kids that there's better ways to resolve problems than having blues. So we get to the choices and then the how. Before I used to - either I'd give a deaf ear to them and let them fight until it gets too much, then when it gets too much I'd become this adult that raises their voice at their kids and disciplines them. But I haven't had to discipline my kids since I've done the program. It wasn't easier to go through that process, it was easier for me just to give them a smack, but going through this process with my kids, I'm hoping they will expect me to step in and go through that process with them all the time now.

Extract 4.24 Past-participant #2  
Personal Interview, 7 August 2009

Barry Toohey related how effective the tool's simplicity is for reminding past-participants to stop and think about how to make good decisions:

For people who've gone through this you can just say 'pouch' and it's like a light goes 'ding!' and they say 'oh yeah! That's a way I can do it!' and again, coz he uses the old man kangaroo there with that pouch, the symbolism he uses is spot on.

Extract 4.25 Barry Toohey  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

### **The Mats**

The mats are an important exercise that ties all the above concepts together by providing an understanding of rejection's inter-generational dimensions. The 'power and control' mat is placed on the floor. On it is painted a wheel with different coloured spokes. Each spoke represents a different form of power and control such as physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, greed, jealousy etc. Participants stand on a spoke that reflects a form of power and control that they have suffered under in their lives (perhaps the behaviour of a parent or family member). Participants are invited to reflect on how it made them feel as the victim of that kind of behaviour or attitude. Then participants are asked to stand on the spoke that represents a form of power and control that they exert over their own loved ones. Tom noted in his interview that often the individuals stand on the same spoke in both instances. The effect is to demonstrate how learnt behaviours and actions are often repeated and passed down from one generation to the next. Participants gain an understanding of how rejection is passed on.

Next the 'love and respect' mat is laid over the top of the 'power and control' mat, and participants are encouraged by a discussion about how they can give and maintain different forms of love and respect in their interpersonal relationships instead of using power and control to get what they want. Past-participant #2 explained the dramatic effect the mats had on his ability to understand and let go of the rejection that he had experienced and passed on:

I can remember, after I left, and done that exercise, I can remember just leaving all that stuff there, the power and control, once that love and respect mat came over the top of it. And when I walked out and finished and walked off and gave [the facilitator] a big hug, I walked away feeling, I can't explain it, my head was clear, my chest was clear, there was nothing hanging over me, nothing was stopping me. I realised what I was actually doing with the power and control stuff and realised that what I've seen done before either with my father or other uncles and relatives and even cousins was what I was doing. So yeah to have that love and respect mat just come over, its like it covered it and took it away and replaced it with some positive stuff. It opened my eyes up to actually really start thinking about the different types of negative stuff. The stuff you don't really sit down and think about even though you know you do it... putting it into words and into context really helped me a lot.

Extract 4.26 Past-participant #2  
Personal Interview, 7 August 2009

### Potential for Lasting Change

Red Dust Healing's philosophy provides an unique and useful example of an Indigenous run program that satisfies what the literature shows is necessary for the healing and rehabilitation of Indigenous offenders and those at risk of offending. In a recent evaluation of prison programs aimed at Indigenous offender rehabilitation, Gilbert and Wilson found that a holistic approach is crucial for a program's success: 'holistic healing programs are an appropriate response to this multifaceted disadvantage [of Indigenous people]... Unless non-criminogenic needs such as grief, depression, spiritual healing, loss of culture and educational deficits are addressed, it may be impossible to address needs directly related to criminal offending' (Gilbert and Wilson, 2009:4). Gilbert and Wilson identified grief and loss, which is experienced by Indigenous Australians at a much higher frequency and much younger age than non-Indigenous Australians, as a core issue that such programs need to address rather than focussing on 'more obviously criminogenic needs' (2009:4).

As demonstrated above, Red Dust Healing takes just this approach, recognising the significance of underlying and inter-generational issues of rejection and loss (which have been instigated and perpetuated by ongoing colonisation) that affect Indigenous men. The difference between mainstream drug and alcohol programs versus the way Red Dust conceptualises alcohol dependencies provides an example of how Red Dust's holistic and culturally relevant philosophy leaves the 'mainstream' approach behind:

Sometimes [the mainstream programs] get at [the men's] heads, and not at their hearts. It's a rejection problem, not a drinking problem. But they target it at their heads. So [they might] tell them 'you'll have bad kidneys if you keep drinking like that there' and they say 'well, so what?' Whereas we might be like, you know, 'it must have been hard growing up without a father... it's not your fault that he wasn't there for you. It's not your fault. How could you do anything? You were powerless...' You know, they get that *there* [points to the heart].

Extract 4.27 Tom Powell  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

Past-participants of the program explained how coming to understand the workings of rejection and loss in their lives has provided them with the capacity to accept, heal and change:

I didn't give them [my kids] a cuddle or a kiss, that wasn't me. But now that I've done this program it's opened my eyes to see what my kids have missed out on. Now I tell my kids I love them and give them a kiss, and my grandkids know I love them to death. I make sure that, you know, they receive that love and they hear it every day. I give them cuddles and kisses all the time, you know. So yeah I've changed heaps. I think I've got a lot more understanding, of what our kids go through, not knowing the love of a mum or a dad, or a grandparent.

Extract 4.28 Past-participant #1  
Personal Interview, 6 August 2009

I've been through a bit of problems and it [the program] sort of opened my eyes up to what I've been through and helped me understand. Things will probably never be perfect. But you can't help that or change it... Some of the bad things were my own fault and some weren't. I've been in gaol and I've got myself out of that now but it sort of gave me some perspective about how to get off the bad track and get on the good track.

Extract 4.29 Past-participant #3  
Personal Interview, 7 August 2009

All three interviewed past-participants mentioned that they have shown some or all of the Red Dust concepts to their families and that healing has extended to the whole family as a result. One past-participant explained how just by explaining the tree to his family, he was able to break down barriers between himself and his children in a profound and lasting way:

As soon as I did it [the tree] and it was finished I actually went home and drew the tree with all my family members. We had a chat altogether about it and I brought up the fact that me and my partner were fighting in front of the kids, that we fight too much and that can lead to rejection and we pass that onto our kids. And my youngest fella who's only 6 or 7 - he got up and he started tearing up a bit and he came and sat on my lap and I gave him a cuddle. And I did that with all my kids. Just to go through that tree, that's all I did with them. I can't remember how long I actually gave my eldest boy a big cuddle. To have him stand in front of me and look me in the eyes like that - it made me tear up... Now every time we see him at boarding school I give him that hug. We used to shake hands like brothers but now we give each other cuddles.

Extract 4.30 Past-participant #2  
Personal Interview, 7 August 2009

The aspirations of the men interviewed further reflect the lasting impact Red Dust has made on their lives. One of the men has already been trained as a facilitator of the program and runs Red Dust seminars with Tom in his local area on a regular basis. Another mentioned at the end of his interview

that he hopes to also become a Red Dust facilitator and assist his own community and other communities all around Australia. When asked if they would like to say anything else about the program at the conclusion of the interview, all past-participants including mental health specialist Barry Toohey expressed their desire to see Red Dust rolled out nationally, incorporated into the rehabilitation strategies in prison and community corrections, and extended to all Indigenous communities in Australia. The overall impression from these interviews was that past-participants did not simply benefit from the program, but had come to *believe in* its capacity to equip Indigenous men and their families with the tools to reassume their roles and responsibilities as proud Aboriginal people.

## Conclusion

I have attempted to show here that the extreme rates of Indigenous men's over-representation is, in major part, a result of the denigration of Aboriginality under two-hundred and twenty years of colonisation. The first research question asked what impact colonisation has had on Indigenous men in the context of over-representation. To address this question, I showed the ways colonisation has undermined Indigenous men's identity and thereby contributed to over-representation. This study has demonstrated that the effect of colonisation on Aboriginality and the subsequent destabilisation of Indigenous men's roles and responsibilities have created a debilitating climate of disadvantage, anger and despair for Indigenous men. In this environment, criminal offending may be a means by which Indigenous men respond to and cope with the losses of family, relationships and autonomy. These losses cannot be compensated for by improvements to the socio-economic status of Indigenous people alone.

The positivist criminological approach, which addresses criminogenic factors that purportedly give rise to offending behaviour, has proven to be inadequate. Its failure to recognise the way Indigenous people's socio-economic circumstances are underpinned by ongoing processes of colonisation has resulted in the formulation of policies that overlook the deeper complexities of Indigenous disadvantage. A multifaceted analysis that takes into account the social, political and historical position of Indigenous men in Australian society is required to reduce Indigenous men's overrepresentation. Red Dust Healing exemplifies how the concept of rejection is fundamental to address the alienation experienced by many Indigenous men in our post-colonialist society.

The second research question asked what the explanatory value of the Red Dust paradigm is for understanding the erosion of Aboriginal men's identity; and what potential it has for generating healing. Red Dust's 'toolkit' equips Indigenous men with the skills and understanding to deal with rejection at the personal level. Participants reported being empowered to process their own experiences of rejection and create avenues for lasting change. The program's philosophy has been presented here as an alternative to the overriding government approaches of mainstreaming and reducing socio-economic disparities. The paradigm's potential for reducing over-representation lies in the way it equips participants with the tools to maintain *their own* lore. Indigenous men have a compelling reason to be the providers and role-models that their traditional role dictates when they value adherence to their lore rather than white law. The interview material suggests that as past-participants of Red Dust resume and find purpose in their responsibilities, destructive behaviour is seen as a hindrance to the fulfilment of their roles. Maintaining the respect of their community becomes paramount. In this context, white law takes on a far less central or threatening role in their lives.

Nevertheless, the vast majority of Australia's Indigenous people do not currently have the opportunities that Red Dust participants have had to analyse and move beyond their experiences as colonised people. Even today, Indigenous people are still 'denied their own identity, denied their entitlement to be treated as human beings who happen to be Aboriginal Australians' through ongoing processes of colonisation (O'Shane, 1995:29). The interviewees in this study have demonstrated that many Indigenous men have the desire and the capacity to fulfil their roles and responsibilities when they are provided with the relevant skills and support structures to do so.

Sadly, those who have no such opportunity must combat the intergenerational effects of colonisation alone with little hope of support or relief.

It is the goal of this paper to encourage government researchers and policy-makers to explore more creative and culturally relevant avenues to reducing Indigenous men's over-representation. A partnership between government and Indigenous communities is required to effectively combat Indigenous over-representation. Philosophies like that used by Red Dust should be integrated in policy and program development which seeks to reduce criminalisation. With mutual understanding and desire for lasting change, there is certainly hope that the over-representation of Indigenous men can be diminished. Nevertheless, it is imperative that governments and criminologists enter a new era in their thinking on Indigenous justice issues that incorporates an understanding of the continuing effects of colonisation. If not, we can only expect an ongoing deterioration in the social, economic and political standing of Indigenous people and the rate at which they are over-represented in the criminal justice system.

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## Appendix A: Interview Schedules

### Directors

1. Can you tell me about your personal history and background?
2. Can you tell me about your experience working with Indigenous people and in what capacity you have done so?
3. At what point did you start thinking about Red Dust as a concept?
4. Can you tell me about the process you went through, working with Randal/Tom, to come up with the philosophy of Red Dust?
  - a. What is the underlying philosophy of Red Dust?
  - b. What makes Red Dust a unique program?
5. Do you still see processes of colonisation impacting on Aboriginal communities today? If so, how?
6. You say in Red Dust that the man is the head of the family, and once you fix the man you'll begin to fix the family. How do you see the history of colonisation contributing to the 'broken' state of many Aboriginal men in Australia today?
  - a. Speaking from your own experience working with Indigenous people, can you talk about the connection between colonisation and crime in Indigenous communities?
  - b. Aboriginal men are highly over-represented in the criminal justice system. In your experience working with both Indigenous boys in juvenile justice and with Indigenous men with criminal histories, how what role does poor understanding of identity play in this?
7. How are Aboriginal men recruited into the Red Dust program?
8. What do you hope Red Dust will give Aboriginal men who participate in the program and their families?
9. In what ways do you see Red Dust working in the lives of participants and their communities?
10. What is it about Red Dust that makes it unique amongst other programs aimed at Indigenous communities?

### Past-Participants

1. How did you end up doing the Red Dust program?
2. Can you tell me about your Red Dust experience?
3. Tell me about the tree picture that you were asked to draw about your own life. What did it help you understand?
4. Who are the saplings in your life?
5. How did it make you feel when you named the sad and difficult things in your life on the broken branches that lay under the tree?
6. What did the bird and the fish help you understand?
7. Have you used the bird and the fish in your everyday life since Red Dust? Can you tell me an example?
8. I want to talk about your LORE (Land Origin Respect Elders). What does it mean to you?
9. What role did LAW (Legalities, Attorney Generals, Westminster) play in your life before you did Red Dust?
10. Can you tell me about a situation involving conflict that has happened since you completed Red Dust when knowing your LORE has shaped your response to the situation?
11. Lastly, do you use POUCH (Problem, Options, Choices, How) in everyday life?

12. Pretend you are confronting a problem in your life. Tell me how you think it through using POUCH.
13. What did the Mats exercise show you?
14. Part of the program is that participants try to make at least one change in their life in between the first and second seminar. Can you tell me about something in your life that you worked on during this time?
15. When the 'saplings' in your life look up at your tree, what differences do you think they would say they have seen between your tree before Red Dust and your tree now?
16. Can you tell me about any differences you see personally when you look at your life before you did Red Dust and your life now?
17. What did you learn about yourself through Red Dust as an Aboriginal man?
18. Do you have goals for the future? What are your short-term goals and what are your long-term goals?
19. Would you recommend Red Dust to anybody? If so, who?
20. Is there anything else you would like to add?

# Appendix B: Red Dust Concept Diagram

\*This diagram is the property of Spread Out and Stick Together Consultancy.

