

## CONFIRMATION COLLOQUIUM

**Working Title: Between Rock and a Hard Place: Indigenous Music and Resistance**

### **THE RESEARCH PROJECT AND THE DISCIPLINARY/INTELLECTUAL CONTEXT IN WHICH IT WILL BE CONDUCTED**

Broadly speaking, my PhD research project aims to provide a critical analysis of the double involvement of individual agency and social structure in the production of a unique form of cultural resistance – contemporary Australian indigenous rock music. More specifically, it strives to:

- Elaborate and build upon a growing body of sociological knowledge concerned with cultural resistance and oppositional cultures
- Emphasise the significance of human agency in mediating progressive social change
- Analyse the innovative ways in which subordinated minority social groups, in this case indigenous Australians, negotiate ‘bi-culturality’, that is, the interface between indigenous cultures and dominant mainstream Anglo-Australian culture
- Provide a greater understanding of the significance of contemporary popular music to contemporary Australian indigenous cultures and identity

The objective is to present an in depth critical analysis of the innovative ways in which indigenous Australians negotiate and transform elements of mainstream popular culture in an attempt to both resist marginalisation within dominant Anglo-Australian culture and promote wider recognition of their own cultural, political and economic interests. This cultural resistance as practiced by indigenous musicians, it will be argued, personifies a ‘culture of resistance’ (Mitchell & Feagin, 1995), whereby the music they produce draws simultaneously upon their own time-honoured cultures and that of dominant Anglo-Australian culture to fight for greater social and cultural recognition and inclusion in mainstream Australian society. This is reflected in the blending of distinctly indigenous musical structures and cadences, with traditional percussive instruments such as clapsticks, boomerangs and didgeridoos combined with a contemporary rock music format consisting of amplified guitars and drums. Moreover, there is the persistence of certain themes within the lyrical content which, among other things, convey a profound connection to land, grapples with issues that adversely effect indigenous communities, strives to preserve a diversity of indigenous cultures and languages, and protests against historic and current injustices. The following are examples of these themes and the songs that are indicative of them:

Songs relating to land: love of country (*Heart of Kakadu*, Mimi Band), identification with country (*Our Home, Our Land*, various artists), land rights (*Land Rights*, Sunrize Band), loss of land (*We Shall Cry*, Warumpi Band), identification of important sites (*Yolngu Boy*, Yothu Yindi), and a longing to return to one’s country (*Mardaka Nyanu* (Keep it to yourself), North Tanami Band).

Community issues addressed include: alcohol (*Woma Wanti* (Drink Little Bit), Areyonga Desert Tigers), AIDS (*Inipanya AIDS Ngku* (The name is AIDS), Isaac Yamma and the Pitjantjatjara Country Band), taking care of the community (*Chairman Blues*, Bevan Young and Victor Tunkin), and keeping culture strong (*Tell Me Stories*, Lajamanu Teenage Band).

And protest songs that cover a range of topics: the stolen generations (*Took the Children Away*, Archie Roach), Aboriginal deaths in custody (*Justice Will Be Done*, Les Shillingsworth), destruction of culture (*Angerwuy* (Why We’re Angry), Raven), racial discrimination (*Genocide*, Us Mob), and environmental degradation (*Stricken Land*, Blackfire).

As indigenous artist Paul Ah Chee says:

They're singing about the land, singing about alcohol, and how it affects the community, singing about AIDS, singing about a whole wide range of different issues that only an Aboriginal person can sing about, really. We're dealing with authenticity' (cited in Oien, 2000, p.339).

The metaphor "between a rock and a hard place" is incorporated to convey briefly yet vividly the framework for my analysis and which functions simultaneously on three levels. Firstly, on an intellectual level it refers to the position I take between traditional and contemporary critical scholarship. Foucault has stated in relation to the nature of critical intellectual endeavour, that '[p]eople know what they do; the frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what what they do does' (1983, p.187). Social scientific endeavour obligated to traditional and accepted conventions does indeed do something. It actively participates in what Williams (1980, p.413) calls the 'selective tradition,' and thereby reproduces a 'dominant and effective' culture. For Williams, what is selected and how it is re-presented is significant, citing the processes of education as a compelling example:

The selective tradition at both a theoretical and practical level are forces that are involved in the reproduction of an effective dominant culture, and on them, as experienced by individuals and built into their social existence, the reproduction of its dominance depends (1980, p.415).

The way in which, from a vast body of past and present intellectual endeavours, only certain intellectual endeavours are chosen for inclusion and emphasis whilst certain intellectual endeavours deemed to be either lacking in scientific rigour or overly radical are overlooked and or excluded. Furthermore, what is chosen for inclusion is reinterpreted, diluted, or put into a form that supports or at least does not contradict other elements within the parameters of acceptable academic conventions. In this research project I take a position outside of the traditional function of academia by placing more emphasis on both alternative and oppositional ways of seeing the world, and strive for the inclusion of these "grassroots" perspectives into the traditional body of social scientific knowledge.

Secondly, on a theoretical level, the metaphor refers to the position I take between accepted neo-Marxist cultural theory that promotes the overarching influence of economic structure within the popular cultural realm, and alternative radical approaches that emphasise the revolutionary potential inherent in the very same cultural production processes. In the Frankfurt School's critique of mass culture, there is little if any consideration of oppositional and emancipatory uses of the media and cultural practices and products, and no strategy for or conceptualisation of cultural resistance. In an era of media saturation, such a withdrawal only further marginalises critical endeavours that, in the current climate of neo-conservatism, already find themselves in a "hard place". I challenge the elitist and pessimistic denunciations found in classical Critical Theory, and look to provide more complex methods of cultural interpretation and criticism, drawing attention to the contradictions, articulations of social conflict, oppositional moments and movements, and subversive tendencies evident in the popular cultural sphere. However, at the same time, I accept that while much of what constitutes popular music in contemporary capitalist societies lends itself to the Frankfurt School's 'culture industry' thesis, it cannot account for the genesis and increasing popularity of many forms of popular music concerned with the above intentions. It is my intention to show that popular musical forms can and do provide the social cement for a culture of resistance and political mobilisation and struggle.

And thirdly, on an empirical level the metaphor, "between a rock and a hard place", refers to the negotiation by indigenous musicians of the interface between indigenous cultures and

dominant Anglo-Australian culture. The role of indigenous musicians is thus conceptualised as one involved in the emergent cultural practice of drawing upon the residue of age-old indigenous cultures to establish oppositional stances conveyed via the appropriation and transformation of elements of mainstream Anglo-Australian culture. As I have already mentioned, time-honoured aspects of indigenous cultures, for example, profound connection to land and place, kinship systems and obligations and spirituality are accentuated and expressed through popular music and become vital elements within a viable form of oppositional culture. A further significant factor in this resistance, according to Mitchell and Feagin (1995), is a unique 'bi-cultural' perspective that is by necessity a characteristic trait of subordinated social groups and manifested in their critiques of the dominant culture. As such, the production of indigenous rock music, figuratively speaking, places Australia's indigenous musicians and peoples between the rock - their own time-honoured and unique cultures - and a hard place – dominant, mainstream culture - as they negotiate the interface between the two to fight for greater social, cultural and economic recognition and inclusion. As a critical analyst, at every turn I tend toward the "hard place" in order to create space for more enlightening and emancipatory discourses in relation to sociological analyses of popular music that is consistent with the material realities of contemporary cultural practices.

### THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Notwithstanding the role of highly creative individuals, it is social groups that produce music. It is a popular cultural form that refers to symbolic structures that are produced by human beings who work in and who are shaped by social structures and which involves social cooperation and conflict (Pratt, 1990). It is eminently suited to sociological analysis and a worthwhile area of interest because it draws attention to the institutions which define and constitute a public realm in contemporary societies. Consequently, popular cultural forms and artefacts can be seen to both contribute to and impede rational and critical participation in the social and political worlds. For this reason the popular cultural realm is conceptualised as a 'contested terrain' (Mukerji & Schudson, 1991; Hoover & Stokes, 1998) – an arena in which *ideological struggle*, the struggle over the power to define – takes place. Nevertheless, a sociological analysis of the popular cultural sphere as an ideological battlefield represents one of the discipline's most enduring dichotomies – that between individual agency and societal structure.

Traditionally, sociological conceptions of the sphere of cultural production and consumption have been predominantly couched in terms of its overarching influence in controlling individual consciousness where the profit motive is transferred on to cultural commodities. The principal neo-Marxist critical theorists of the Frankfurt School have offered a totalising account of how domination works in capitalist societies through the commodification of the cultural realm. Horkheimer and Adorno's (1972) 'culture industry' thesis describes a contrived and pre-packaged cultural realm which contributes to the accumulation of profits and the maintenance of the status quo as it pacifies individuals into a stupor that preserves the system against internal challenges. Adorno (1973) was particularly scathing of popular music, arguing that the 'commodity form' of capitalist culture standardises music reducing it to its lowest, predictable common denominator, thereby encouraging passivity rather than more active and intelligent appreciation. Theoretically this amounts to the construction of an increasingly impenetrable and terrifying machine. One is led to believe that any attempt toward affecting progressive social change would appear fruitless and hence doomed to fail from the outset. How, then, would such cultural pessimism explain contemporary Australian indigenous rock music, a particular genre of popular music that is often distinctly oppositional and which tends to negate the Frankfurt School theorists' categories by rebelling against standardisation and conformity?

A reformulation of this dichotomy as it relates to the sociological investigation of indigenous rock music is as follows: it could be viewed as either the complete dominance of corporate

commodification, or as a strategic incursion into mainstream culture and society in the form of a culture of resistance. I choose to emphasise the latter, approaching indigenous rock music as an articulation of alienation and oppression as a lived experience and which draws on fundamental elements of indigenous cultures to resist and subvert those ideologues that support and reproduce the continued marginalisation of indigenous Australians.

## THE RESEARCH QUESTION

My central research question falls within the field of the Sociology of Knowledge which asserts that, while the entire realm of mental products is socially “determined”, everything that human beings experience is selected, arranged, and valued by the intellectual and moral judgements and linguistic practices of a social world. It is only through language, categories of thought, social norms, and so forth that experiences take on a conscious and communicable shape. Mannheim’s groundbreaking work in the sociology of knowledge, *Ideology and Utopia* (1936), sought to uncover the active roots of thinking – how it ‘functions in public life and in politics as an instrument of collective action’ (p.73). He referred to this ‘pragmatic point of view’ as one which recognises that knowledges are part of concrete human actions and follow upon a group’s emerging interests, values, and ethos.

In the tradition of C. Wright Mills (1970), the sociology of knowledge inquires into the consequences that knowledges have in politics and in people’s public and private lives. To this end, the sociology of knowledge seeks to uncover the collective bases from which groups and institutions exercise and compete for authority. This research project strives to illuminate, at least in relation to the production of contemporary Australian indigenous music, that currents of thought are *strategic*; they originate in group existence and collective action. Strategy, in this context, refers to the process in which people, acting with and against each other in diverse social settings and groups, strive to change or maintain events in the world around them. It is within this collective process to change and to resist change that ideas are generated. Accordingly, these processes of reality construction, linked as they are to what people know and communicate to each other, are enacted in a public arena. It is in such a public arena that what people think and know emerges, arising out of people’s confrontations with their changing worlds (Crotty, 1998, p.3).

The proposition, that *knowledge is socially determined*, has dominated the sociology of knowledge since its inception. This is summarised in Marx’s famous formulation of thinking and consciousness as, from the very beginning, a social product: ‘It is not the consciousness of men<sup>1</sup> that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness’ (1904, p.67). That is, all human thought and consciousness develop out of real life, the actual social conditions that particular individuals share. The social determination of knowledge argues that, in the final analysis, knowledge (inclusive of people’s beliefs and systems of ideas) is profoundly influenced by the predominant forms of social organisation. All of human thought and knowledge is determined by the productive activities of society, conceived as its highly visible and material structures of work, its institutions of labour and governments, and its forms of technology. This proposition asserts that all of human knowledge develops out of and changes with social and material conditions, as stated by Marx in his preface to *Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy*:

[T]he guiding principle of my studies can be summarised as follows. In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations ... The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which

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<sup>1</sup> Marx rarely included the term “women” in any of his works. Whenever it appears here it should be taken as a generic term for “humans”.

correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life (1904, p.66).

The sociology of knowledge asks: What kinds of symbols and knowledges are used and by whom? How are they produced and disseminated? What do they teach? How are they linked to strategies of action and opportunity? Attention is given to the *production* of knowledge, in turn giving rise to studies of the observable properties of knowledges and symbols as manifested in texts, modes of communication, and forms of speech linked to specific institutional frameworks. "Culture", then, can be seen as the *signifying system* through which, along with other means, a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced and explored. We come to inhabit this pre-existing system and to be inhabited by it. In describing culture as 'a system of significant symbols,' Geertz emphasises that, from the point of view of any particular individual, 'such symbols are largely given' (1973, p.45). We inherit a system of significant symbols. For each of us, when we first interact with the world in any meaningful fashion, we are inevitably seeing it through lenses bestowed upon us by our culture. And just as our culture brings things into view for us and endows them with meaning, by the same token it leads us to ignore other things (Crotty, 1998, p.54).

Returning now to the larger question at hand and in particular indigenous rock music. If this cultural phenomenon can be established as empirical evidence of a coherent form of resistance that draws upon, hence motivated by, a *distinct consciousness*, does its existence call into question Marx's (1904, pp 67) original contention – '*it is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness*' – or merely the Frankfurt School critical theorists' interpretation of it? A *distinct consciousness*, in this case, refers to a diversity of indigenous cultural practices, values and beliefs yet which all share an inexorably linked to the land and which informs a unique cosmology that predates Anglo-Australian capitalism and culture by many thousands of years.

Contemporary indigenous cultures retain a fundamental connectedness to the land, for it is the inherited relationship with the land that defines indigenous Australians. Indeed, land is the foundation of traditional indigenous cultures in Australia. Indigenous people do not say the land belongs to them but that they belong to the land. Culture is everything that flows from that relationship – moving across the land and finding food, as well as the more traditionally defined aspects of culture such as songs, dances and ceremonies. This ritualistic linking of culture and the land is the basis of spiritual life through the Dreamings, the source of all creativity, both the beginning of everything and an ongoing source of inspiration for indigenous peoples. As Gunditjmarra elder Banjo Clarke has stated, '[t]here is no past – everything is still happening' (cited in Chance, 2003, p.xiii).

However, this profound connection to land stands in direct opposition to a central tenet of Anglo-Australian capitalist culture and for this reason motivates expressions of intense resistance. In fact, many indigenous Australians now argue that the solution to problems of environmental degradation and social isolation lies in recognising the legitimacy and indeed superiority of indigenous cultural values, that promote an abiding respect for the environment and a strong sense of community. It is not surprising, then, to find the persistence of these two key elements of indigenous cultures within the lyrical content of contemporary indigenous music and which clash with two equally important capitalist imperatives: stewardship over rather than private ownership and exploitation of land, and the promotion of kinship systems and obligations as opposed to the atomised nature of liberalist Anglo-Australian culture which tends to alienate individuals from a sense of community.

## **RATIONALE FOR AND SIGNIFICANCE OF PROPOSED RESEARCH**

This research project is significant because it strives to present the production of contemporary indigenous music in a positive light, as vital to the survival of indigenous cultures and a constructive contribution to a more representative, inclusive Australian cultural identity. By approaching the production of indigenous music as dynamic and innovative, this project represents a relatively new direction in academic research in relation to indigenous Australians and indigenous culture. All too often these have portrayed, albeit inadvertently in many cases, indigenous Australians and their communities as passive victims of what are seen to be intractable social problems. Issues such as domestic violence and alcohol abuse, for example, are understood predominantly in terms of an inability on behalf of indigenous Australians, as individuals and as an homogenous social group, to cope with the pressures and influences of mainstream culture. Such pessimistic and ill-conceived conclusions are rarely set in a genuine historical and cultural perspective therefore perpetuating commonsense views of indigenous Australians as socially and culturally inferior. Rather than focus upon indigenous Australians as passive victims of the system, this research project views the production and dissemination of indigenous popular music as empowering for all indigenous Australians, and which reflects resilient and active agency on behalf of both the talented individuals who produce the music and the participative social networks that inform and support them. Whereas in many aspects of everyday social life indigenous Australians experience cultural, political and economic marginalisation, contemporary indigenous music is approached here as providing a vehicle for the expression of both particular and collective cultural pride that is effectively reiterated and restored rather than marginalised and or ignored. Indeed, the creative manipulation of new technologies and media by indigenous artists today is testament to the adaptive nature and survival instincts of indigenous peoples. These rely on both the innate creativity of the individuals involved and the strong bonds of a community, forged from a united sense of struggle and battle to retain a sense of identity when forcefully separated from their lands, culture and family.

Finally, there is a paucity of sociological literature dedicated to cultural resistance as practiced by indigenous Australians in the face of overwhelming cultural decimation and domination. There are exceptions, notably anthropologist, Barry Morris' (1989, 1997) historical and cultural analyses of Dhan-Gadi resistance to assimilation in Western New South Wales, Robinson and York's (1977) documentation of the history of widespread indigenous resistance to British colonialism, and Burgmann's (1993, 2003) political studies into the historical development of indigenous social movements in Australia. And whilst there is a growing body of Australian literature (see below) from geo-political and cultural studies perspectives concerned with indigenous rock music, these tend to focus predominantly upon its products within northern and central Australian contexts at the expense of a broader analysis of the wider and deeper social processes that are active at the site of its production. In relation to contemporary indigenous music in Victoria, Ryan's (1994) analysis of contemporary Koori music in Melbourne stands alone. Therefore, this PhD research project presents an opportunity to draw together existing knowledge and to contribute further to this with the inclusion of a distinctly sociological analysis of indigenous music as it relates to both Australia generally and, of particular significance, regional Victoria.

#### **RELEVANT THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES/THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

My theoretical framework aims to elaborate and build upon sociological interest in cultural resistance pioneered by neo-Marxist theorist Raymond Williams' (1980) analysis of 'residual and emergent oppositional cultures', and the more recent contribution from radical multiculturalists, Mitchell and Feagin (1995) concerning 'cultures of resistance.' Both strive to illuminate subversive practices within popular cultural processes, and are dedicated to advancing a greater understanding of the double involvement of individual agency and social structure in the production and containment of counter-hegemonic cultural artefacts. Initially, I elaborate upon the dynamic of dominant hegemonic cultures from both classical Marxist and neo-Marxist perspectives. My concern here is to critically analyse the latter's interpretation

of the former in relation to popular culture, and in so doing reconcile the pessimistic legacy of traditional understandings of popular cultural production and consumption as overarching and oppressive. Moreover, I aim to provide a more rigorous theoretical understanding of the motivation behind the production of contemporary indigenous music, hitherto a conspicuous shortcoming within the Australian literature.

Subsequently, I hope to be in a position to lay the platform from which a more enlightened theoretical conception of cultural resistance can be launched because, to my mind, Frankfurt School cultural theory is unable to account for empirical evidence of its increasing proliferation. I choose rather to emphasise Walter Benjamin's radical notion of 'functioning transformation', to be found at the margins of the Frankfurt School and which is incorporated to illuminate the revolutionary potentials inherent in the very same cultural production process in the hands of cultural producers committed to progressive social change. Hence, the role of certain indigenous musicians is conceptualised as one involved in the emergent cultural practice of drawing upon the residue of age-old indigenous cultures to establish oppositional stances conveyed via the appropriation and transformation of mainstream cultural production processes.

### **The Marxist Tradition**

It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness.

Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*

Ideology, according to Marx, is not an idiosyncratic complex of beliefs and attitudes caused by a unique set of experiences. It is a figure of thought shared by many people and caused by whatever is common in their situation. When he refers to a view as an instance of *false consciousness*, he does not simply label it as an error or misconception, a thought that is false to the facts. He suggests that it is falsified and distorted in a systematic way. Unlike an accidental mistake, which offers little resistance to correction, ideologies are shaped by deep-seated tendencies that enable them to survive criticism and refutation for a long time. But what are the forces that shape and maintain ideological thinking? The answer, according to Marx, is *interest*; more specifically, the interest of the ruling or dominant class. In this context, 'ideology' refers to a whole system of ideas that represent only a *partial* view of social reality. Such a partial or selective view of social reality, then, can be seen to derive from a complex and elusive *process* wherein the values and ideas that constitute it are decoupled from the social relations that produce them. This decoupling process Marx refers to as reification, wherein the distinctly social relationship between people and the values and ideals they hold takes on the appearance of a relation between "things."

As outlined in his original analysis of commodity fetishism in *Capital I* (1954), Marx viewed capitalist commodification as involving both surplus value and the reification of social relations, arguing that the reification of the human relationships buttresses the cohesion of capitalist society and is tantamount to its reproduction (Bottomore 1983; Held 1980; Slater 1977). According to Marx, in capitalist societies products are manufactured primarily for their realisation as value or profit, and not necessarily for their capacity to satisfy human wants and desires. Furthermore, the commodity character of products is not simply determined by their exchange, but by them being *abstractly* exchanged. In the process the products of human labour are reified – viewed as independent, as having a life of their own and a natural value (Slater 1977; Held 1980; Bottomore 1983). For Marx, 'it is simply a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things (Marx, 1954, p.78).

Later Antonio Gramsci (1971) succinctly circumscribed this process as the cultural dynamic of ‘hegemony’, by which a ruling or dominant group claims and sustains a leading position in social life. Gramsci claimed that those seeking to hold dominant positions did not constitute a single coherent group or class. Instead, a specific alliance of class fractions, a “bloc” in Gramscian terms, must already have significant power, and must continually fight to maintain its dominant position (Connell, 1977). This “bloc”, ‘by virtue of its dominant position and function in the world of production’ (Gramsci, 1971, p.12), is thereby afforded the power to organise and manage the social and cultural landscape, and by extension their position in it. Consequently, hegemony cannot be approached in purely ideological terms. It involves an attempt to rearticulate the complex relations between the state, the economy and culture. It is through the existing ideological and cultural forms, that the dominant class is able to “universalise” its “direction” for society, and to hold together disparate and even opposition groups on the basis of consensus (Gramsci, 1971, pp.327, 333). Gramsci was the first to stress the material nature of ideology, its existence as necessary to all levels of all social formations, its inscription in cultural processes and practices and its materialisation into cultural apparatus (Mouffe, 1979). In sum, hegemony can be viewed as a *process* that produces a *situation*, a moment in history in which control is effectively exercised, and therefore, according to Connell (1977, p.202), can be ‘distinguished from the *mechanisms of control* that operate in it’ (emphasis in original).

### **Frankfurt School Critical Theory: burying Marx in material culture**

Subsequent to Gramsci’s emphasis on the significance of the cultural realm to the dissemination of dominant ideologies, those within the Frankfurt School advocated the critique of ideology as a vital component of the critique of capitalist domination and applied it to material cultural apparatuses and practices (Laing 1978; Agger 1992). Their ‘culture industry’ thesis incorporates Marx’s concept of reification to argue for the social forces of mass culture and communications as supporting capitalist imperatives. The main function of the culture industries (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972) is to shape the needs, attitudes and behaviour of individuals toward integrating them ‘from above’ into the consumer society. Furthermore, certain false, or manipulated, needs are propagated by mass culture in order to both reproduce capital and distract people from recognising their own objective interest in total social transformation (Marcuse, 1964). Adorno was particularly scathing of popular music, arguing that the ‘commodity form’ of capitalist culture standardised culture reducing it to its lowest common denominator, producing music that emphasised recognition of the familiar rather than more active and intelligent appreciation. The uninformed consumer, therefore, fails to recognise the fact that this thing called “culture” comes from somewhere else, that they are mesmerised by it, and that culture could be different, especially their relationship to it.

Notwithstanding the popularity and effectiveness of the Frankfurt School’s fundamental critique of capitalist society, according to Williams (1980) this amounts to a misinterpretation of Marx’s initial intention implicit in his statement, “social being determines consciousness”. Marx explicitly opposes an ideology that is insistent on the power of certain forces outside of man, or as Williams puts it, ‘on an abstract determining consciousness’ (pp.407-408). Marx places the origin of determination in men’s own activities. Williams challenges the conventional Marxist metaphor that the “base” of economic structure determines the “superstructure” of politics, law, religion, and – of central concern here – culture. He asserts that culture is more variable in its meaning and significance than Marxist theory has usually allowed, denying that culture is properly understood as superstructure at all. This view, according to Williams, gives the incorrect impression that culture is a set of symbols or objects when it can more properly be understood as a set of social practices – that base and superstructure coexist within cultural practices. And rather than taking ‘determines’, as the Frankfurt School theorists did, to refer to an external cause which predicts, indeed controls, a

subsequent activity, like Gramsci, Williams sees 'determination' rather as setting limits and exerting pressures.

Returning to Gramsci, we are reminded that hegemony is never a static process. Its internal structures are highly complex, and have continually to be renewed, recreated and defended. And by the same token, they can be continually challenged and in certain respects modified. And if hegemony is something far more substantial and flexible than any abstract imposed ideology, then we have also to accommodate and recognise both alternative and oppositional cultural practices. Cultural practices that can be seen to be alternative or oppositional to the dominant culture are much underemphasized in traditional conceptualisations of the culture industry. Hence, vital to any Marxist theory of culture is an adequate explanation of the sources of these practices and meanings. For Williams, the challenge lies in better understanding the process of persistence of residual cultural practices.

### **Counteraction: residual and emergent oppositional cultures**

Williams defines a residual culture as one 'based on the practices or residue of some previous social formation' (1980, p.418); there is a reaching back to meanings and values created in real societies in the past, and which represent areas of human experience, aspiration and achievement, which the dominant culture under-values or opposes. Hence, a residual culture is usually positioned outside of and at some distance from an effective dominant culture. If, however, some version or part of it is deemed by the dominant culture to form practices and experiences that influence people's behaviour outside of its own, then, in order for the dominant culture to both understand the extent of this influence and protect and maintain its own dominant position, it must necessarily absorb the residual culture into its cultural apparatuses so that its influence can be managed and controlled. Emergent cultural practices Williams defines as those in which new meanings and values, and new practices are being created. Emergent social practices include, for example, alternative perceptions of others, or new perceptions and uses of cultural processes. Emergent cultural practices may display distinct features but they cannot be separated from wider social processes as a great deal of emergent cultural practices are residual in nature. According to Williams, their fundamental meanings and values draw upon and therefore belong to, the cultural achievements of previous stages in the development of society. Included in this, of course, is music – with its capacity to embody, enact and convey certain meanings and values – and which also expresses emergent practices and meanings.

And as a significant majority of neo-Marxist critical theory focuses on *consumption*, the social conditions of *production* are overlooked. According to Williams, this is a major shortcoming of Marxist cultural theory - the view of the work of art as object as opposed to art as a practice. Hence, traditional methods of ideological criticism cannot account for empirical evidence of heterogeneity within popular culture nor its contradictory effects, much less the intent of its authors and the social conditions and practices that produced it. The task now, Williams contends, involves attending to the reality of the practice and the conditions in which it is executed, marking the point of departure in practical and theoretical work within an evolving Marxist cultural tradition to one that is minimally deterministic, promoting instead an active process-orientated version sensitive to empirical complexities.

### **Radical Neo-Marxist Cultural Theory: popular culture as a contestable terrain**

... it is not a question of introducing out of nowhere a science of everyone's individual life, but of innovating and rendering critical an already existing practice  
Antonio Gramsci (1971, p.11)

If the collective position taken by the principal Frankfurt School theorists can be simplified to that of 'culture industry as mass deception', then Walter Benjamin, Bertolt Brecht and Hans

Magnus Enzensberger's belief that the new forces of mass communications are capable of revolutionising the capitalist relations of production, stands in direct opposition. Walter Benjamin, at the margins of the Frankfurt School, believed that in newly configured capitalist societies, an era marked by 'mechanical reproduction,' art appeared in the form of commodities like other mass-produced products thereby losing its special power as a transcendent object. In *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1970), he argued that the technology of mass reproduction was a progressive force and the means by which the traditional authority and "aura" of art was broken. He concluded that, '[t]he rigid isolated object of art ... is of no use whatsoever', insisting that it 'be inserted into the context of living social relations' (p.52). In championing new technology, Benjamin provides the means to overcome the traditional boundaries that hitherto had separated the artist from both the audience and prosaic social relations, and claims that it is here, in this space, that art can change itself.

Bertolt Brecht maintained that 'to write off the new media as "rubbish" only ensured that rubbish would be produced by them' (quoted in Slater, 1977, p.138). He believed that art should belong to the people, and that this art must be developed as an agitational weapon. Brecht was convinced that "revolutionary art" should direct itself to the working class in order to carry out the vital task of strengthening their will and clarifying their consciousness (Benjamin, 1977, pp.91-2). Fellow Frankfurt School theorist Enzensberger agreed with both Brecht and Benjamin's observations, proposing that the potential inherent in new communication technology – participation, decentralisation, mobilisation and education – ought to be fully realised. Enzensberger's slogan, '[e]very receiver is also a transmitter!' spoke directly to ways of transforming the cultural production process (1974, p.99).

Largely due to the influence of Brecht, Benjamin stressed the potential for the *functioning transformation* of aspects of mass culture. He refused to be passively critical and maintained that the new media should not just be dispassionately produced and supplied, but rather 'functionally transformed' or 'subverted' in the service of communicating with the proletariat. Benjamin (1977) championed the transformation of forms and instruments of production by a progressive intelligentsia, an intelligentsia interested in liberating the means of production. In direct opposition to the principal Frankfurt School theorists, he rejected the primacy of form or style in favour of enlisting both form and content into the direct service of the revolutionary forces. Benjamin (1977, p.102) contended that 'the writer/producer must transform their role from a supplier of the production apparatus into an engineer who sees his task in adapting that apparatus to the ends of the proletariat revolution.'

Alternative radical cultural criticism accepts that while much of what constitutes popular music lends itself to the Frankfurt School's 'culture industry' thesis, it cannot account for the genesis and increasing popularity of many forms of popular music that are distinctly oppositional, for example, blues, jazz, rock, reggae and punk. These are increasingly popular musical forms that can and do provide the social cement for cultural resistance and political mobilisation and struggle, and resist the Frankfurt School theorists' categories by rebelling against standardisation and conformity. Historically this has often emanated from oppressed groups, like peoples of colour, working class whites or marginalised youth (Garofalo 1992, Kellner 1989, Pratt 1990). Consequently, there is no one monolithic, dominant ideology that the culture industry promotes. Indeed, the conflicting ideologies evident in contemporary culture industry artefacts point to continuing and intensifying social conflict within capitalist societies and which is played out in the contested terrains of the popular cultural sphere. Rather than viewing cultural artefacts as supporters of and vehicles for dominant hegemonic interests, I believe it more accurate to approach popular cultural production as consisting not only of celebrations of the status quo, but also of movements of opposition and rebellion. Accordingly, I highlight the unique and complex array of strategic manoeuvres involved in the creation of the relatively new cultural phenomenon of indigenous rock music. To my mind, indigenous rock music not only provides compelling empirical evidence of the

‘functioning transformation’ (Benjamin, 1977) of the apparatus of cultural production, it also personifies a lively ‘culture of resistance’ (Mitchell and Feagin, 1995).

### **Australian Indigenous Rock Music as the Art of Resistance**

In spite of the purported richness and diversity of cultures within contemporary Australian society, social science theorising assumes inevitable assimilation of indigenous peoples to the so-called core culture. As Gutman (1987, pp. 357-358) has noted, this mode of analysis is ‘incomplete, misleading, reductionist, and overdetermined.’ There is a serious problem inherent in focusing exclusively on the history of oppression of indigenous peoples in Australia. Furthermore, when we examine only the structural inequalities between non-indigenous and indigenous Australians it is easy to make helpless victims out of the latter. Aptheker (1978) correctly asserts that to take this approach is to dilute and co-opt the past and present realities of both the oppression and the resistance efforts of these peoples (p.144). Australia’s indigenous peoples have been forced to remain in a subordinate position politically and economically but have assimilated much less to Anglo-Australian culture than is widely assumed. While agreeing that Anglo-Australian culture predominates, a more radical conflict perspective accentuates both persisting inequality and the conflicting features of the pressured adaptation process for indigenous Australians who have not been allowed equal participation in the dominant economy and polity.

A more productive analysis of cultural resistance must therefore take into account the simultaneous pressures on indigenous Australians to assimilate to dominant Anglo-Australian ideals and to preserve and protect their distinct cultural identities. This process results in both accommodation and opposition, in varying degrees under varying conditions (Wolf, 1974). According to Janeway (1980), on a micro level, individuals who are denied access to forms of formal power, such as decision-making positions in economic, political and cultural spheres, will usually become adept at forms of informal power by using inter-personal strategies such as humour, persuasion, manipulation, and other means of influencing those with the real power. On a macro level, they argue that groups denied access to formal power have responded by developing an informal arena in which they are powerful. These abilities, according to Mitchell and Feagin (1995, p.68), can be termed an oppositional culture or a culture of resistance, ‘embodying a coherent set of values, beliefs, and practices which mitigates the effects of oppression and reaffirms that which is distinct from the majority culture.’

Mitchell and Feagin (1995) have argued that while the minority social groups of African Americans, Native Americans and Mexican Americans in the United States have been assimilated into the dominant culture, the end product has not been the total loss of their unique ethnic cultures. They found that racial prejudice and discrimination have been actively resisted by each of these groups who draw on their own cultures to resist oppression under dominant ideologies and, in turn, influence the dominant culture. Abiding elements of their cultures such as profound connection to land, kinship systems and obligations, spirituality and music are accentuated to form viable oppositional cultures. For Mitchell and Feagin, a significant factor in this resistance concerns the ways in which each group has selectively appropriated and transformed aspects of dominant culture thus affording a unique ‘bi-cultural’ perspective manifested in their critiques of dominant cultures. Over time new elements of oppositional culture develop and become interwoven with the traditional beliefs and practices of these oppressed peoples and can be seen as manifestations of emergent oppositional cultures as Williams (1980) defines them. Mitchell and Feagin argue that subordinated social groups emphasise worldviews and behaviours that contradict or *redirect* those of the prevailing culture:

Elements of oppositional culture ... operate to preserve dignity and autonomy, to provide an alternative construction of identity (one not based entirely on deprivation),

and to give members of the dominant group an insightful critique of their own culture. From this perspective, members of oppressed subordinate groups are not powerless pawns that merely react to circumstances beyond their control, but rather are reflective, creative agents that construct a separate reality in which to survive (1995, p.69).

Hence, subordinated social groups are necessarily bicultural, contrasting greatly with the dominant group, which mostly knows only its own culture (and that not very well, due to a lack of comparative perspective). Biculturalism is thus a key aspect of the greater knowledge that indigenous peoples have about Australian society: '[t]he dominating need only know their own culture; the dominated need to know both their own and that of their oppressors in order to survive' (Mitchell and Feagin, 1995, p.71). From this biculturalism flows an ability to see issues from multiple perspectives and to have insights that only marginalised peoples can provide. Intimate acquaintance with, and often rejection of, aspects of Anglo-Australian culture is thus reflected in many of the elements of the oppositional cultures of indigenous groups and particularly within their musical expression.

### **Review of Australian Literature concerned with Indigenous Rock Music**

Contemporary indigenous music does indeed closely mirror a 'culture of resistance' as defined by Mitchell and Feagin, amounting to a defiant and innovative social practice that, figuratively speaking, places indigenous musicians between the rock – their traditional cultures – and a hard place – dominant, mainstream culture. It represents a distinctly social process in which a popular cultural form is re-engineered to reflect the changing contours of contemporary Australian society and, of particular interest here, fights for greater cultural, political and economic inclusion.

The use of popular music by Australia's indigenous peoples as a vehicle for protest is widely recognised in the Australian literature and is seen as a consistent characteristic of indigenous rock music (Breen 1994; Castles 1992; Ryan 1994). Comparisons have been made of the roles of music in traditional indigenous cultures with those of contemporary indigenous rock songs to reveal a continuing understanding of the power of music both on a general level as a didactic medium, and to raise matters of concern to particular communities (Dunbar-Hall, 1996, 1997a, 1997b). Indigenous rock music is diffuse, and proves difficult to discuss as an entity. Like any music it is multifaceted, and reflects the diversity of the cultures in which it originates. However, to view indigenous rock as predominantly political ignores other uses of music by indigenous rock musicians, among them, educating the broader listening public about indigenous cultures, needs and agendas (Yunupingu, 1994), and as an expression of national and localised indigenities (Stubington & Dunbar-Hall, 1994). In addition to these, cultural studies perspectives have focused predominantly on the incorporation of indigenous music as 'world music' into global markets, and issues of authenticity and essentialism (Castles 1992; Hayward 1993; Lawe-Davis 1993; Mitchell 1993; Ryan 1994). However, as Ginsberg (1993, p.575) reminds us, this reflects the dominant cultural model that privileges the media text over the activities of the production and reception of indigenous rock. Indigenous rock music should be viewed as a possible tool of empowerment and the focus of a participative social network, rather than as static texts.

Breen (1992) places the roots of contemporary indigenous rock in the 1979 visit to Australia by reggae artist Bob Marley, where indigenous musicians began to see music as a form of black celebration and resistance. Popular music (particularly the electric band format) took on a new meaning, becoming an overt vehicle for political use. Furthermore, a number of indigenous rock groups were formed at that time (for example, Us Mob, Coloured Stone, Warumpi Band and No Fixed Address), taking advantage of the opening of a series of state funded institutions and facilities specifically for indigenous musicians as part of official self-determination policies. In particular, the establishment in 1971 of the University of Adelaide's Centre for Aboriginal Studies in Music (CASM), and in 1980 the foundation of

the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA) provided new legitimacy and levels of quality production facilities. Concomitant to this was the growth of indigenous radio stations and programmes in remote areas, major cities, and towns which meant that performers had new means to communicate with their own people, and access to new, wider indigenous and non-indigenous audiences. Both these institutions and networks of dissemination have been crucial to the expansion and viability of contemporary indigenous music in Australia, particularly given the persistent reluctance of most commercially orientated radio stations to broadcast the work of indigenous musicians not aligned with major record companies (Dunbar-Hall & Gibson, 2000).

From a geo-political perspective, Dunbar-Hall & Gibson (2000) state that contemporary indigenous music is increasingly becoming a means of mediating indigenous viewpoints and agendas into the Australian national consciousness. They identify themes and issues on both a national level (pan-Aboriginality) and expressions of local identities and contexts. Numerous political and protest songs address specific topics which affect all indigenous Australians and in this way assume the role of mediating statements of and for pan-Aboriginality (Dunbar-Hall & Gibson, 2000, pp.48-52). The three most significant topics identified are land rights, black deaths in custody, and the removal of indigenous children from their parents. In this way, according to Dunbar-Hall and Gibson, indigenous music is re-writing Australian national identity through popular culture. Elsewhere, Gibson (1997) conceptualises indigenous rock as 'a physical site central to the process of an indigenous (re)construction of post-colonial space' (p.161). In this context, popular indigenous music, as with other media such as art, dance and literature, can be seen to form sites of expression and empowerment more effective than conventional political arenas. Gibson's (1998, p.164) penetrating analysis conceptualises contemporary indigenous music as 'cultural apparatus', effectively constructing 'arenas of empowerment' within which genuine spaces of Aboriginal self-determination and self-expression can exist expressed in terms of popular culture.

### **Indigenous Rock Music as "Grassroots" Social Theory**

Lipsitz (1997) argues that indigenous rock band Yothu Yindi's emphasis of the Yolngu concept of *ganma* – referring to the estuarine mix of fresh and salt waters – functions as grassroots social theory, stating further that, as a community-based coalition that emphasises democratic participation and addresses issues of culture, identity, and the environment, Yothu Yindi exemplify new forms of social movement. These social movements, according to Lipsitz, are manifested in sophisticated strategic interventions in the popular cultural sphere, appropriating media technologies and channels of discourse for their own purposes (1997, p.235). Lipsitz contends that this new form of social movement emerges from and within particular social contexts that need to be recognised and understood by cultural scholars, as does the important social theory being generated by cultural creators such as Yothu Yindi. Again, this demonstrates the complexities and contradictions of contemporary cultural production where indigenous rock music can be seen to be grounded in the history, politics, and aesthetics of indigenous life in Australia whilst simultaneously engaging with commercialised commodities.

Singer-songwriter of Yothu Yindi, Mandawuy Yunupingu (1994) explains that the traditional Yolngu concept of *ganma* also offers a model for contemporary social relations. He emphasises that for Yolngu people brackish water contains a complex and dynamic balance that metaphorically refers to relations between black and white Australians:

Ganma is a metaphor ... we are talking about natural processes but meaning at another level. Ganma is social theory. It is our traditional, profound, and detailed model of how what Europeans call 'society' works (p.117).

Neuenfeldt (1998, pp.200-201) sees Yothu Yindi as operating simultaneously as a product and a process through the multiple use of media – a product in the international music market and on the Internet, and a process in the evolution of Yolngu, pan-Aboriginal and mainstream Australian societies and cultures. Consequently, the interconnection of the business of culture and the business of music places Yothu Yindi at the interface between popular music and contemporary indigenous identity. In this respect, they can be seen to be fluently *bi-cultural*. Yunupingu stresses the need to overcome racism and discrimination in contemporary Australian society and which requires that indigenous people become a part of the white system. He sees the interface of indigenous and Anglo-Australian culture as, ‘like the meeting of salt water and fresh water in the river estuaries, the coming together and amalgamation of two forces’ (cited in Neuenfeldt, 1993, p.303). By using a metaphor from its own cultural experience and way of knowing, Yothu Yindi are re-engineering the very processes and criteria by which an indigenous art form (in this instance, popular music) and people (Yolngu) can come to be known.

Viewed in this way, the production of contemporary indigenous music provides a sphere in which wider issues of social and political change can be understood. The socio-political concerns of these songwriters and performers are articulated in ways which symbolically reclaim space; inscribe markers of indigeneity upon a popular cultural landscape, as well as conveying material empowerment strategies (Dunbar-Hall, 1996, p.163). Contemporary indigenous music, then, can also be understood as providing a platform for the expression of localised voices that in political and economic spheres commonly remain marginal. Furthermore, because it offers indigenous Australians a language and medium which is often more easily received by mainstream Australian society than formal political discourse, popular music is crucial in promoting strategies for self-determination.

#### **PROPOSED METHODOLOGY AND ITS APPROPRIATENESS FOR THE RESEARCH TOPIC**

The central tenets of my qualitative methodology are derived from a symbolic interactionist perspective, which holds that individual values are social values and that they are socially and historically dynamic and therefore in a constant state of flux, affected by and through social interaction over time and space. My interpretivist approach looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social world by indigenous musicians. Their subjective perspectives are in large part expected to be strategic. Strategy, in this context, refers to the process in which indigenous musicians are acting with and against elements of mainstream Anglo-Australian culture in diverse social settings and who are striving to change the way indigenous culture and peoples are understood.

More specifically, my research design involves a narrative content analysis that is limited to the manifest content of the cultural production of ten to fifteen contemporary indigenous songwriters of the Gunditjmarra region of southwest Victoria who tell the stories of their relationship with the land and each other through the lyrics of their songs. My research includes an analysis of their music cds, album covers and liner notes and associated Internet site “[www.loreoftheland.com.au](http://www.loreoftheland.com.au)”. The first stage of my research will analyse only the literal meaning of words and images as they develop thematically in order to establish the importance placed upon their function within the overall text. The second, or interview, stage intends to elicit from these indigenous musicians an interpretation of the latent content of their cultural production as well as the motivation and symbolism that inform their music. The overall intention being to identify and emphasise persistent themes, and to gain a greater understanding of their motivation to use popular music to promote wider recognition of contemporary indigenous culture and identity within mainstream, Anglo-Australian culture.

To gain a wider understanding of the context in which these indigenous musicians and producers operate, I have completed an extensive search of national music journals and popular press, and where possible, other empirical data pertaining to this topic and these

performers. This, in conjunction with a review of the relevant literature, has provided the foundation from which interview questions have been generated. The format of the interviews will be semi-structured in that each participant will be asked a series of open-ended questions about their involvement in and commitment to indigenous music.

Participant's opinions will be sought on:

- the significance of music to indigenous culture and identity both now and in the past;
- personal goals and aspirations in relation to promoting progressive social change through music;
- mainstream non-indigenous culture from an indigenous perspective;
- their experience of the interchange between indigenous and non-indigenous cultures;
- the challenges they face in their path towards achieving greater recognition and inclusion within non-indigenous culture;
- how music may contribute to a more progressive relationship between indigenous cultures and non-indigenous culture.

Participants will also be given the opportunity to raise any issues that he/she sees as being of particular relevance to his/her circumstances and to those of the wider Indigenous community. Each interview will then be transcribed for a qualitative analysis of the interview data, returned to the participant for confirmation, before being analysed and assessed against the established literature concerned with cultural resistance in the form of Mitchell and Feagin's (1995) 'cultures of resistance', Williams' (1980) 'residual' and 'emergent' oppositional cultures, as well as Australian intellectual endeavours dedicated to indigenous rock music.

#### PHASE-BY-PHASE WORK SCHEDULE UP TO SUBMISSION OF PHD THESIS

Full-time PhD Candidate, Commencement Date dd/mm/yy

<b>Task</b>	<b>Completed</b>
Preliminary literature review Develop theoretical framework/research question Construct chapter outlines/structures Compile empirical data on indigenous music/musicians Select and define survey population	dd/mm/yy
Obtain DUHEC approval Define research question, submit with literature review to supervisor Deliver paper at Creating Spaces postgraduate conference (ANU) Construct research design Develop interview questions Organise interviews	dd/mm/yy
Submit draft chapter on theoretical framework and phase-by-phase work schedule for colloquium to supervisor Commence preliminary chapter on Indigenous culture, identity and music Commence interviews	dd/mm/yy
<b>Task</b>	<b>Intended Completion Date</b>

Complete/transcribe interviews Submit prelim. chapter to supervisor Refine methodology for data analysis, submit to Dr. Kevin Brown Conduct interviews/transcribe	dd/mm/yy
Conduct interviews/transcribe Data analysis Commence analysis of interview data	dd/mm/yy
Complete interviews Continue analysis of interview data Complete methodology and analysis chapters, submit to supervisors	dd/mm/yy
Rewrite/edit data analysis chapter, Commence discussion chapter, submit to supervisors Review overall structure/layout of thesis with supervisors	dd/mm/yy
Complete discussion chapter Write conclusion, submit to supervisors	dd/mm/yy
Write introduction, submit to supervisors Organise submission of thesis Rewrite/edit manuscript	dd/mm/yy
Submit manuscript to supervisors Final rewrite/editing of thesis Submit thesis for examination	dd/mm/yy

**DEAKIN UNIVERSITY HUMAN ETHICS COMMITTEE (DU-HREC) CLEARANCE HAS BEEN GRANTED FOR THIS RESEARCH PROJECT**

(NOTE: DOCUMENTATION NOT ATTACHED TO THIS WEBSITE VERSION)

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