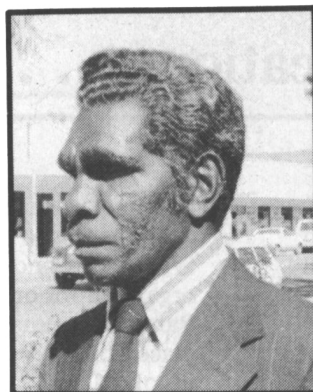
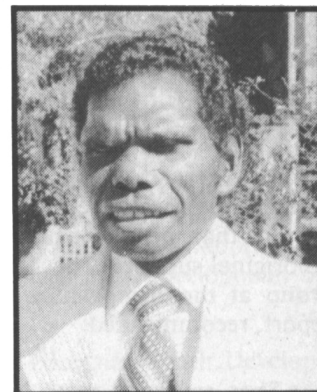


PRESSURES ON CHILD DEVELOPMENT IN TRADITIONAL AND URBAN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

— AN ABORIGINAL PERSPECTIVE



Alan Lalara



Kevin Lalara

Some Comments from Alan Lalara

Before Missionaries came to Groote Eylandt in 1921, people used to stay in family groups. They followed the pattern set by our laws set for marriages, but the strong men took most wives, and others were left without a wife. There were many murders for this reason and because of raids from other mainland tribes.

There was plenty of food from the sea and the bush. When the water dried up in smaller creeks there were four rivers where people could get fresh water. They moved around in their own areas on Groote.

Then when the Missionaries came there were still many fights and some men died. Their children went to school and were catching up with European ways. The Missionaries were busy with half-caste children. They worked together there and they got to know each other bit by bit. They wanted the children to learn in school and not act like their father and mother. They lived at the mission and only at special times they went for holidays with their parents.

First Nandjiwarra's father and my father began to use Missionaries. These men of my colour talked to their own people, to know the Missionaries better and be friends, because the Missionaries were telling them about the Bible. That made them change a bit too — they were a great help. They became used to each other, and more people began to send their kids to school. The older people began to work at Emerald River helping the Missionaries to set up the mission. That time they worked the hardest way. They were given rations of flour and rice only, to begin with.

They built houses for the staff and they built their humpies too. They had a place to stay, some settled, some came and went.

Murders were then handed over to the police for investigation, and

At the "New Horizons in Child Care" seminar in Alice Springs in July 1978, two community leaders from Groote Eylandt spoke on the clash between European and traditional aboriginal influences on their community and its children.

Alan Lalara is a patrol officer on Groote Eylandt, and Kevin Lalara a project officer.

they went to Darwin gaol after Court, which no-one knew about.

By the time they moved to a new station, the Missionaries and aborigines were well known to each other — aborigines hadn't trusted them first. The Air Force took over the old mission. The aborigines didn't want to leave the Missionaries because their children were going to school regularly. The old people realised then they wanted their children to have good conditions. The missionary way seemed better, they saw a picture of life without killing each other. When fights were on, Missionaries used to stop the fights and take away the spears.

After the war people wanted to settle, the air force had moved away. Emerald River was not much

good for gardens — the present mission had better soil. The new Missionary was a gardener and instead of hunting, we helped him clearing the jungle, everyone worked. The children were in school and they had gardens — they grew plenty of fruit and vegetables.

The men who had three or four wives were asked to give one or two wives to the younger men, to stop stealing and quarrelling. The young men had their dormitory and the girls had theirs.

At first at this mission everybody used to go to Church because people learn real different — they heard from Missionaries and people were good. In '59 to '60 girls moved out from the dormitory.

A different company came to the island, and that's the time the mining changed the people, not from other reasons; that time Missionaries were a great help to aborigines. G.E.M. Co. people spoiled our people by bringing in liquor.

Now young people want to follow pictures and T.V. — rebels. They want to follow hippies and they don't follow our customs. They don't really understand aboriginal way of living, because they don't come to older people to ask questions about the olden days. Young boys and young girls are drinking and it ruins their life, they join not at the club, but at bush clubs. There are some who follow two ways, they can see the picture of new ways and old time ways — there are some old people there to help young people.

When I visited Western Australia in 1975 the Urban Aboriginal people were good to me . . .

Outside a mining town we went and picked up a boy and girl, because their mother did not really look after them. She had re-married. We took them to their grandmother.

There were still hostels for girls and boys, and they didn't know their parents. The parents were living on grog. They came later and told the children who they were. The children thought their parents were dead but they were not. I think the children went back, if the parents made up their mind.

Kevin Lalara

answers

questions

from the

audience

Thinking of your own community at present, what are the forces shaping your own children's lives?

My wife and I tell the children to get themselves ready for school in the morning — I tell them to stay away from other children who may lead them to do the wrong thing. The three children have to come home straight, and not go wandering around. They can go and visit their grandmother and grandfather without permission — they have to ask if they want to visit other families. If they want to go to town, I would take them, not let them go with others, to buy things they want.

Which children are affected most by change?

The children most affected are those without a father, their mother may not have enough money to support her family, or some children suffer when father goes out drinking, and does not leave enough money for the children's food. Where the father is thinking of himself and not thinking of his children. Also there is a mother who spends her money on cards and doesn't think of spending the money on children and clothing. So the mother's relations have to give money to the hungry children.

Who or what controls your community?

Each clan has a leader — there are 14 clans living at Angurugu. If a clan member gets into trouble, the clan leader will have to deal with him. Also Council has control over the community — Council has two men picked from each clan. If any of the community wants something they tell their clan representative and the clan leader has to discuss it at the Council meeting.

Has the control system, the pattern of keeping laws, changed?

In Angurugu Community I can't see any point of change — but we keep two laws, European laws and our own cultural laws. If we throw away one and keep the other one only, that will make the people like nothing. We don't want that to happen. We want to keep our own law — that hasn't changed. If we let our children learn only one way, like

modern way, that will lead them nowhere, and they will have difficulty, finding it hard when they get married and have children. They would have nothing of the dream-time stories and history to tell them.

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What place does fear of breaking ceremonies have in the training of children?

In all the Northern Territory, the aboriginal people have a fear of breaking ceremonial laws. In the olden days when one person broke the laws he would get speared that same day. Or if any woman walked near the ceremony area, she had to die too. In these days people are getting modernised, so if a young man or a young girl breaks ceremonial laws, that takes them one year to die. They would not be speared, but secretly these days — otherwise they might pay a fine to save their lives.

Has the way of training children changed?

Yes, children are learning more on the western European side — and besides that they are learning our ways. At Groote they are learning from a ceremony going on now — they are learning their skin group. Mandaya and Mandirridja are the two sides in Nungubuwu, and they will learn where they belong, and where their future wife belongs. This way they learn identity.

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What do you want for your children?

In the European way first I want all the children living in a good house. I want them to have High School training in our own community. If we let them mix with other children they learn bad habits. It is better to send them



away to big cities where they have better education than at Dhupuma or Kormilda.

We also want our children to learn hunting — to make spears and learn to make womeras, to catch turtle, to dig yams, cut sugar bag or any other wild food. They are to learn to look after their mother and father. They are to learn the places to find water, where to dig for water, where to find wallabies, goannas . . . where are the good spots for fishing for the boys and yams for the girls. We want them to

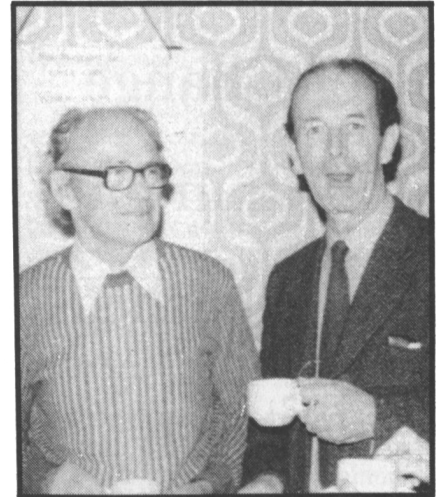
• *Molly Dyer, Director of Aboriginal Child Care Agency Melbourne and Senator N. Bonner who chaired one day's session at the Conference.*

learn to paint bark or carving, and to cut canoes. They need to know where ceremony places are and burial grounds. They have to know our dreamtime stories, which totem one tribe comes from and which totem their clan comes from.

ALICE SPRINGS 1978



• Rev. Jim Downing, Director Institute of Aboriginal Development Alice Springs leads a discussion group.



Guest speaker, Richard Balbernie, Principal, Cotswold Community, Ashton Keynes, U.K. (right) with Canon Neale Molloy, now President of the Children's Welfare Association of Vic.

• Rev. Paul Albrecht, Field Superintendant Finke River Mission N.T. interprets Aboriginal Kinship Systems.



• Kevin and Alan Lalara in discussion.

