Problems in the Implementation of Community Policing Strategies

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As Australian police forces move towards a more pronounced commitment to community policing, it is worth critically examining some of the impediments which prevent the realisation of such a project.

The issues raised in the following paper derive primarily from research which was conducted in association with the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's National Inquiry into Racist Violence. (The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Inquiry or Commission.) As such the primary focus of the paper is on the relationship between policing profiles in Aboriginal communities and the notion of community policing. However the implications of the research impact on the problems of implementing community policing strategies more generally.

Defining the Community

It is worth beginning with a point which has been raised often enough in general discussions about the 'community' and that is the definitional problems associated with the concept (for instance, Stenning 1984). Such problems are not purely of academic interest because the way in which particular geographical or social groups are designated as forming so-called communities has a direct impact on the implementation of policy. Several years ago Bryson and Mowbray (1981) wrote an article entitled 'Community: The Spray-on Solution'. The title itself is suggestive of the way notions of the 'community' are uncritically posed as solutions to various problems. More importantly community itself is based on a notion of social harmony, a view of the world which is seen as conflict free. 'Gross inequalities, rigid status groups . . . persecution, intolerance . . . are carefully forgotten, so that the real 'community' is seen only in terms of cooperation and harmony' (Bryson & Mowbray 1981, p. 256). Under the rubric of the community, contradictory social relations such as those of class, race and gender disappear. Relations between groups of people which may involve the exercise of power and exploitation are deemed non-existent if the definition imposed posits a single community.

Thus the application of the term community may have a powerful political effect of deeming conflict between groups as in some way extraordinary and therefore illegitimate. These issues have a particularly important role in looking at community policing in relation to Aboriginal people. It is said often enough by respectable whites in areas where there are
significant Aboriginal groupings that 'we're all part of the one community'. Such a statement is usually used for the purpose of criticising Aboriginal dissent, as if the expression of dissent is undermining an assumed consensus. The point here is that those who talk of 'the community' are those who by virtue of their social and economic power have the resources to enforce particular notions of moral or social behaviour. It is in their interest to define themselves as the 'community' or its representatives. For those who do not conform, their behaviour is defined as being against or outside community standards.

Over-policing and Community Policing

It is worth remembering that in New South Wales rural areas much of the 'law and order' push which defined Aboriginal people as law-breakers was done under the name of people who would define themselves as community leaders (Cunneen 1989). The impact of such a political program is still being felt in towns like Bourke, Brewarrina, Walgett, Wilcannia and Dubbo. One expression of the practical impact of such a political campaign is the allocation of police resources. The issue of an apparent disproportionate number of police stationed in Aboriginal areas has been raised on previous occasions (Anti-Discrimination Board 1982, and Cunneen & Robb 1987). One might seriously question then the relationship between community policing, political calls for more law and order, and the over-policing of Aboriginal Australians.

Table 1 below shows the number of police in several New South Wales towns with large Aboriginal populations.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bourke</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3,400</td>
<td>1:113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brewarrina</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1,600</td>
<td>1:145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walgett</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>1:96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilcannia</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>1:73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>10,743</td>
<td>12,427</td>
<td>5,701,500</td>
<td>1:459</td>
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Sources: NSW Police Department, ABS, Local Councils.

The empirical evidence strongly suggests that there are disproportionate numbers of police in the so-called 'Aboriginal' towns in New South Wales. All the towns shown in Table 1 have significantly greater numbers of police per head of population than the state average.

How would we explain such over-policing within the model of community policing? Community policing, we are told, is 'police work as a community endeavour' with a focus on preventive policing. It is a proactive approach to policing. Meanwhile the official explanation for the allocation of police numbers, at least in New South Wales, relies on a system of measuring workload and allocating resources accordingly. The Staff Deployment and Analysis Unit of the NSW Police Department has established a methodology to
measure police workload and to provide assistance in the allocation of resources. Workload analysis covers a number of different factors and includes the measurement of such workload categories as charges, intoxicated persons, telephone messages, occurrence pad entries, crime reports, motor vehicle accidents, stolen vehicles, coroners deaths and missing persons. While some of these categories may be taken to, at least partially, reflect the occurrence of crime, others such as charges, reported offences, intoxicated persons and occurrence pad entries will be influenced by the social dynamics of policing practices.

Despite what might appear to be objective criteria in allocating resources, the discretionary nature of policing will itself directly affect any model for workload measurement. It has long been established that particular policing strategies such as targeting of particular offence categories or groups will have amplificatory effects. Certainly, as Grabosky (1989, p. 165) and others have noted, proactive policing will generate much of its own workload. In towns with large Aboriginal populations, proactive policing, given the nature of Aboriginal/police interaction, is likely to amplify conflict between the groups and thus justify further police intervention. Such intervention may in itself lead to the conclusion that more authoritarian reactive styles of policing (such as the use of tactical response police) are the most appropriate.

The Fitzgerald Report advocates the use of the Eric St Johnston ratio for determining the ratio of police to population (Fitzgerald 1989, p. 225). The Eric St Johnston ratio is shown below in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population Size</th>
<th>Ratio</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population under 5,000</td>
<td>1 : 1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From 5,000 to 20,000</td>
<td>1 : 530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 20,000</td>
<td>1 : 350</td>
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Source: Fitzgerald 1989, p. 225

According to the use of this formula Fitzgerald estimated that one police district, Charleville, had 225 per cent of the required police numbers (Fitzgerald 1989, p. 226). If the Eric St Johnston formula were applied to Wilcannia we would expect a police presence of 1 officer rather than 11, in Brewarrina we could expect 1-2 officers instead of 11, in Walgett 2-3 officers instead of 26 and in Bourke 3-4 officers instead of 30.

It should also be noted that where a police station operates on a 24 hour basis there will be requirements for additional staffing levels. However the decision to operate a 24 hour service is not necessarily based on workload considerations. For example the introduction of a 24 hour police station in Bourke, and the increase in police numbers which that entailed, was the result of political lobbying by the Local Shire and Chamber of Commerce. The lobbying itself was based on claims of a breakdown in law and order which was attributed to Aboriginal people (Cunneen & Robb 1987, p. 210, and Cunneen 1989). Indeed the continual political lobbying around law and order issues between the mid-1970s and mid-1980s meant that the number of police in Bourke doubled from 13 to
26 between 1976 and 1986 while the town's population remained stable at a little of 3,000 persons (Cunneen & Robb 1987, p. 211). In 1990 the town's population is still a little over 3,000 and there are now 30 police officers.

The number of police stationed in towns with significant Aboriginal populations directly affects the way in which Aboriginal people perceive their relations with police. In interviews conducted with Aboriginal community leaders in Wilcannia, Bourke and Walgett the issue of police numbers was raised with the researcher. Those interviewed saw the large scale police presence as part of the mechanism of control over Aboriginal people. In other words, the question of police numbers was not simply an abstract question of the ratio of police per head of population, but one which was embedded in the wider political relations between Aborigines and white society. Far from a feeling of participating in the establishment and control of the policing priorities, the local Aboriginal communities felt that they were the subjects of control.

**Community Policing and Local Politics**

A key area of implementation of community policing strategies has been the use of community crime committees or consultative committees to give effect to the principles of community involvement (Fitzgerald 1989, pp. 230-3). The composition and maintenance of such groups clearly poses problems in areas where there is social polarisation. In addition they may simply provide a forum for co-opting sections of minority groups to an apparent consensus. In some townships in north west New South Wales the community consultative committees are made-up of equal numbers of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members. Such a composition appears on the surface as an adequate recognition to the reality of two communities. Yet the relevant positions of power mean that Aboriginal participants are often bludgeoned into positions they later, on reflection, regret. The non-Aboriginal members represent the interests of Local Council and the Chamber of Commerce and the meetings are held in Council Chambers—that is the 'traditional' opponents of Aboriginal people on the opponents' territory. Such committees become a forum, not for 'democratic' decision-making, but rather the exercise of political power by one group over another. The forum in reality may mask the implementation of policy which serves sectional interests and instead present such a policy as 'community' policy.

NSW Police Instructions at Section 38.26 (dealing with Aborigines) call on the Patrol Commander to keep open lines of communication to Aboriginal people for the purpose of preventing misunderstandings. Yet one can only wonder at the efficacy of this proposal when decisions are made daily about how to police Aboriginal people which exclude their presence but include other powerful and interested parties. Examples of this type of policing profile can be found in north-west New South Wales, in the use of local government ordinances for the purpose of prohibiting public drinking. These ordinances are used almost exclusively against Aboriginal people (Cunneen 1990, pp. 42). There are other 'voluntary' decisions between publicans and police in relation to serving alcohol in glass containers. Again this agreement is apparently applied selectively to Aboriginal people (Cunneen 1990a, pp. 42-4).

Such 'informal' mechanisms of control in the name of community policing may operate with open disregard to the formal separation of powers within state institutions. Another example, although not dealt with in this paper, is the use made of the Community Aid Panels where police in effect become part of the sentencing mechanism. For example a meeting was held in Bourke between members of the Shire Council, the police (including the police inspector and the police prosecutor) and the visiting magistrate. The meeting was called by
the Shire to discuss 'community conduct' (19 September 1989). Given that 87 per cent of persons arrested for public order offences in Bourke are Aboriginal (Cunneen & Robb 1987, p. 91), then what is coyly referred to as 'community conduct' clearly means Aboriginal conduct. It is clear in such circumstances that notions of the 'community' are being used as a way enforcing criminal sanctions against Aboriginal people. What is important is not so much what was discussed at the meeting, but that a meeting should have occurred at all between those who were present. In any formal sense of the system of justice such a meeting between the Shire, the police and the judiciary was totally inappropriate. The independence of the respective arms of the state, and indeed the supposed sanctity of the rule of law, was shown to be a mockery.

**Tactical Response Policing and Community Policing**

Public disquiet in relation to the policing methods and operational tasks of the New South Wales Tactical Response Group (TRG) has been raised during the last twelve months because of a number of incidents including the raid on Redfern in February 1990 and the shooting of Darren Brennan in Glebe in June 1990. In this paper the author is concerned specifically with the use of the TRG in relation to Aboriginal communities in New South Wales. Complaints about TRG-style policing have also emerged in relation to Aboriginal communities in other states including Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia.

In New South Wales, TRG personnel have been used on many occasions in the policing of rural and urban Aboriginal communities, including Bourke, Brewarrina, Walgett, Dubbo, Wilcannia, Cobar and Redfern. In Bourke the TRG was flown into the town to police a demonstration by Aboriginal people. The demonstration was concerned with perceived discrimination by the criminal justice system against Aboriginal people (Cunneen & Robb 1987). In Brewarrina the TRG was flown in to conduct street patrols after an Aboriginal man, Lloyd Boney, was found hanged in the police cells. The TRG has visited other country towns (such as Dubbo) as a result of complaints about the breakdown in law and order.

The use of the TRG in the policing of Aboriginal communities has, from the outset, been the subject of controversy. Shortly after the TRG was established, the NSW Police Association requested that the Police Department form TRG units in Moree and other north-western towns. Moree was itself the site of intense conflict between Aborigines and police during the early 1980s. In rejecting the Association's request, Assistant Commissioner Graham, on behalf of the Police Department, stated:

> The attendance of Tactical Response Group personnel at Moree or other country centres where racial problems exist could lead to feelings of provocation on the part of some people and lead to unnecessary confrontations (*NSW Police News*, vol. 64, no. 4, October 1983).

By the mid-eighties police thinking had changed to the extent that it became acceptable to fly in TRG police specifically to control Aboriginal people in rural areas. We have also witnessed their increasing use in Redfern during the late 1980s. The change indicated an important reversal in policing policy which now legitimised the reliance on pro-active, paramilitary police squads to maintain order—even in the face of overseas evidence that such policing methods could polarise resistance to state intervention (Scarman 1981). More importantly the change occurred at the very time of an officially endorsed and promoted
emphasis on community policing strategies. One can question how the increased use of the TRG fits with the following statement:

The fundamental strategy [of the NSW Police] for the future will be built around the professional community-based police officer working with the particular community of his/her beat to solve . . . local problems (Nixon 1990, p. 232).

It is worth noting then that the TRG is structurally removed from the process of community policing. The TRG is divided into four regional groups. However when involved in patrol functions, TRG operatives are not under the normal patrol command. They are responsible to the next most senior TRG officer, through to the regional chief inspector. Their structural position appears as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line of Command</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Normal Regional Command</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asst. Commissioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional TRG (responsible to)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region (Chief Inspector Operations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Senior Sergeant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Sergeants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Constables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrol</td>
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(see Cunneen & Findlay 1990).

While the restructuring emphasised line management (and the accountability that entailed) down to the patrol level, the TRG was essentially outside this structure being responsible to the Chief Inspector of Operations at Regional level. Again the TRG was outside the structure provided for to initiate community policing which was centred at the patrol level.

Perhaps the most important implication with the establishment and use of the TRG, is the admission that ‘relations between the normal civil policing agencies and certain sections of the public have deteriorated to such an extent so as to necessitate a paramilitary response’ (Cunneen, Findlay, Lynch & Tupper 1989, p. 121). It has been noted that the very nature of the TRG means that:

It is not required to construct localised relationships or networks but to be ready to respond to situations judged in advance to be problematic and as likely to warrant special tactics and usually force . . . Such squads are also equipped with the weaponry and technology which permits, and perhaps even encourages, them to [resort to force] (Hogg 1984, p. 50).

Of fundamental importance to the questions of Aboriginal/police relations and notions of community policing is the fact that the TRG is the very antithesis to any notion of a relationship between police and community. There is a predetermined absence of any relationship to a local community in all aspects of tactical response policing (for example
training, command structure, location, equipment and operational duties). One consequence of tactical response policing is that there is no requirement to consider the long term effects of particular methods of control. In addition, because of the nature and duties of the squad, the style of intervention is likely to revolve around the routine use of force. The consequence of such policing methods is the further antagonism, alienation and resistance from those groups the subject of control. Indeed the result is the further removal of such groups from any possibility of community policing.

The TRG was formed along similar lines to the Special Patrol Group (SPG) in London. Lord Scarman (1981) in his report on the Brixton disorders paid particular attention to the use of the SPG and was critical of the use of pro-active specialist squads into local communities. Scarman argued that such tactics challenged the authority and effectiveness of local police, and jeopardised accountability, consultation and community policing strategies. This type of intervention was particularly dangerous where there were local racial tensions. However in the decade since Scarman wrote his report, the trend has been to institutionalise the role of tactical response police. As other research on the TRG has concluded:

The style of tactical response policing moves from reactive or ‘fire-brigade’ policing to pro-active, pre-emptive policing. Tactical response policing has developed as the principal police response to social ‘menaces’ so diverse as vandalism, industrial disputation, racial unrest and so on (Cunneen, Findlay, Lynch & Tupper 1989, p. 123).

The use of the TRG in Aboriginal communities has had the effect of galvanising Aboriginal opposition to particular forms of policing and of increasing feelings of harassment. Goodall (1990) has outlined the effects of the use of the TRG in Brewarrina. The effect in Bourke has also been to reinforce a perception of excessive policing (Cunneen & Robb 1987, p. 186). Perhaps the most telling example of the way such police methods can be absorbed into a consciousness of police harassment was the case of the 67 year old Aboriginal woman who was a victim of the Redfern ‘raid’. She was unaware of the correct title of the TRG, she knew enough however to be able to refer to the police officers as the ‘tactical group of police’. In the same statement she states that she challenged the police while they were searching her house, and after they had broken in her front door with a sledgehammer, as behaving like ‘German Gestapos’ (Cunneen 1990b, p. 30).

It is not possible in this paper to analyse fully the Redfern raid by TRG personnel and other police on the Redfern Aboriginal community around Everleigh St on 8 February 1990. A more comprehensive report has been produced elsewhere (Cunneen 1990b). However two points in particular are of some importance in relation to community policing strategies. Firstly there are the official justifications of raid by police staff and their Minister, and secondly the recommendation which came from the Report commissioned by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.

The most detailed justification for the raid came from the NSW Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Mr Ted Pickering and was based on a report of the raid from Chief Inspector Allan Peek, the Patrol Commander of Redfern, to Executive Chief Superintendent Alf Peate. The Minister quoted Peek as stating that:

The main reason for the operation was the despairing cry for help from the Aboriginal community. The Aboriginal community expressed a grave concern with the upsurge of criminal activity, which they feel is directly attributable to the increase in the usage of hard drugs.

The Minister went on to state that the operation ‘was mounted to protect the law-abiding citizens of that area who are, of course, the vast majority.’ The implication of this statement was that those who criticised the raid were somehow not part of the ‘law-abiding’ majority in the Aboriginal community. Indeed this point was specifically raised later in the
Minister's speech where he juxtaposed the views of those who complained about the police raid to:

the perspective of those who could no longer tolerate what was happening in their neighbourhood and who demanded that police take immediate action. These people will not be complaining about the police raids as damaging to relations between the Aboriginal community and police.

Such a simple polarisation of views of course deflects criticism of the nature of the police operation. It is possible that members of the Aboriginal community were both concerned about the use of drugs in the community and were critical of police operations. Indeed a perusal of the transcript from the community hearing in Redfern held by the Royal Commission Into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody on the 6th February 1990 shows that many people were critical of police tactics and the use of drugs in the community. The notion of 'community' was used to justify the raid despite the fact that many Aboriginal people attended a protest meeting complaining about the raid on the morning which it occurred.

The Report on the Redfern Raid to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission forwarded a number of recommendations which are important in relation to community policing (Cunneen 1990b, pp. 33-36). Recommendation 1 stated that:

It is open to conclude that over-policing of the Redfern Aboriginal community occurs.

Recommendation 3 stated that:

In the context of the National Inquiry into Racist Violence, it would be appropriate to seek a Departmental Review of the role of the Tactical Response Group in Aboriginal Communities, in particular their apparent reliance on excessive force.

There have been several complaints in the late 1980s which relate specifically to the use of the TRG. There has also been an increased use of the TRG in policing operations in Redfern during the late 1980s. The apparently routine use of the TRG in Redfern needs to be seriously questioned. Such a use of the group undermines any commitment to community policing. The nature of the TRG, as a fast response tactical police unit without ties to any locality, is the antithesis of community policing. In addition the nature of the group (both in training and operational duties) predisposes it towards an excessive reliance on force. There is evidence from Redfern and elsewhere in NSW, that the use of the TRG in policing Aboriginal communities has functioned to increase polarisation between Aboriginal people and the police.

Recommendation 6 stated that:

It is open to the National Inquiry into Racist Violence to find that the Redfern raid constituted an act of racist violence within its terms of reference. Justification for the raid was based on the perceived racial characteristics of Aboriginal people. Sydney District Commander Peate was reported as referring to the Redfern Aboriginal community as 'one breed' where normal surveillance and policing activities do not operate. Thus a notion of 'race' was used as a prediction of particular social characteristics. Those social characteristics implied a social abnormality. The community itself was defined in a particular manner rather than any alleged criminals within the community.

At an operational level, particular policing practices were legitimised on the basis of 'race'... the policing operation was, from its inception, designed as an operation in relation to a particular community rather than a series of individuals. It is appropriate therefore to consider these policing practices as constituting institutional racism.
where the perceived difference of the Aboriginal community was used to legitimise an exceptional use of State force.

Aboriginal Police Liaison Schemes

The report on the Redfern Raid also contained a recommendation in relation to Aboriginal/Police Liaison Officers. The recommendation called for a Departmental review of the role, status and authority of Aboriginal-Police Liaison Officers. The report stated that:

There is evidence . . . that Aboriginal Police Liaison officers in Redfern had their advice ignored (in the Alexandria Park incident) and were not informed of major policing operations involving the Redfern Aboriginal community (as in the raid of 8th February 1990). Clearly the role of the liaison officers needs careful evaluation. It would appear that particular police operations and practices constantly undermine the positive functions which such positions could fulfil. Rather than serving to facilitate any improvement in Aboriginal/police relations, the undermining of the functions of the liaison officers serves to discredit the authority of such officers and to create the impression that these officers have little influence over policing policies in Aboriginal communities (Cunneen 1990b, p. 33-4).

More generally it can be argued that the development of a system of Aboriginal/police liaison officers, during the last decade, has had important consequences. During research which was conducted for the National Inquiry into Racist Violence many Aboriginal communities in New South Wales have complained about specific deficiencies with the system, including the recruitment methods by police, the lack of training, the location of the officers within police stations, the lack of clear (or in some cases any) statement of duties, and the lack of accountability to the Aboriginal communities with which the officers are expected to liaise. In addition the employment conditions of Aboriginal-police Liaison officers as temporary Ministerial appointments outside normal public service conditions is clearly unacceptable. The epithet often applied to the officers is that of 'police pimp'. This should not be seen as necessarily a comment on the individuals which fulfil these functions but on the contradictory positions in which they are inevitably placed.

Some of the criticisms of the New South Wales scheme in relation to training, employment conditions, authority and status could also be applied to other schemes such as Queensland Aboriginal community police. It could be concluded that they are placed in a structural position which virtually guarantees their high turnover rate and limited success.

More generally however, it is possible to locate the development of the scheme within the trend towards the 'indigenization of social control' (Havemann 1988). Havemann argues that the recruitment of indigenous people to enforce the laws of the colonial state masks the coercive nature of the state, relies essentially on a model of integration into colonial legal relations, and is likely to impede the processes of self-determination (Havemann 1988, pp. 71-100). In addition one can see an emphasis on such liaison schemes as complimenting, rather than contradicting, the more 'iron fisted' approach of increased police numbers in Aboriginal communities and the use of specialist riot police. Indeed the use of both paramilitary-style policing and a focus on community relations operate hand-in-hand, with the latter providing an important legitimating function for the hard edge of state intervention.

Police Violence and Community Policing

The issue of police violence is one area which has received increasing attention, and is an issue more than others which raises the question of commitment to community policing in a
stark form. The National Inquiry into Racist Violence has commissioned a report on the issue of police violence and Aboriginal juveniles as a result of widespread concern about the issue amongst Aboriginal people from a number of states. That research has been completed and will be released shortly (provisionally entitled Cunneen C. (1990) A Study of Aboriginal Juveniles and Police Violence, A Report to National Inquiry into Racist Violence, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission).

While it is not possible to substantially relate the findings of the research at present, some general comments can be made. The research found that allegations of police violence against juveniles were widespread and serious in the three states which were surveyed. There were allegations which related violence occurring in public places and at police stations and lockups. In addition to allegations of violence there were many complaints concerning the use by police of racist language. In the majority of cases there was no formal complaint made to a recognised body.

The results of the research are also confirmed in issues which were raised in public hearings that have been conducted by both the National Inquiry into Racist Violence and the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in a number of states.

The research confirms a number of Australian studies which have raised the issue as one deserving serious attention. Other studies which have raised the question of the extent of police violence in relation to Aboriginal people include the Western Australian Equal Opportunity Commission (1990), Burger (1988) and White, Underwood and Omelczuk (1990). Other studies which have looked at police violence in relation to juveniles generally include Bacon and Irwin (1990), Youth Justice Project (1990), Alder (1989), O'Connor and Sweetapple (1988), and Rayner (1988).

While it is not possible in the context of this paper to review this literature, it is important to note that these studies generally (which cover NSW, Victoria, Queensland, and WA separately, and Burger (1988) nationally) refer to the inability of formal complaints mechanisms to deal with the problem of police violence adequately. Indeed as one example, in the research conducted for the National Inquiry into Racist Violence, it was found that in one state, of the 50 complaints put forward by the Aboriginal Legal Service only one was found to be sustained. It is little wonder that a profound sense of cynicism pervades those whose responsibility it would be to mount such complaints.

**Conclusion**

At the local level 'community' policing strategies may disguise nothing more than a commitment to the enforcement of particular policing strategies which derive from, and serve the interests of, sectional interests. This outcome is not necessarily a criticism of police motivations in relation to community policing per se, but rather a realistic assessment that policing is itself part of the political processes which involve the exercise of decision-making in the interests of the powerful.

Over-policing of Aboriginal people still occurs despite commitments to community policing. The litmus test for community policing would be to see a substantial reduction of police numbers in such areas.

The evidence strongly suggests an over-reliance on para-military police with their associated use of more extreme force levels in Aboriginal areas. Such a use blatantly contradicts the model of community policing.

There is also an apparent need to take seriously the role of Aboriginal-police liaison schemes if they are to fulfil a key function in community policing strategies. A prerequisite should be some form of Aboriginal control over such schemes and an adequate allocation of the necessary resources.

Finally the question of police violence needs to be openly confronted. Community policing strategies will continue to be viewed as little more than public relations rhetoric if
violence on the part of state officials continues to go unchecked and, for all intents and purposes, unreviewed and unaccountable.

References


Youth Justice Project 1990, Kids In Justice: A Blueprint for the 90s, Youth Justice Coalition, Sydney.