

Who has the floor? Media discourse, Australia's First Nations peoples and the Northern Territory Intervention

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Warning

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are warned that this
thesis may contain names of deceased people.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

AAP	Australian Associated Press
ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
AMSANT	Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CDA	Critical discourse analysis
CDEP	Community Development Employment Projects
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
LCS	The Little Children Are Sacred report
NAAJA	North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency
NAIDOC	National Aborigines and Islander Day Observance Committee
NITV	National Indigenous Television
NTER	Northern Territory Emergency Response (that is, the Intervention)
PC	Productivity Commission
PSB	Public service broadcaster
RDA	Racial Discrimination Act 1975
SBS	Special Broadcasting Service
UN	The United Nations

Abstract

In June 2007, John Howard, then Prime Minister of Australia, declared a ‘national emergency’ in the remote Indigenous communities of the Northern Territory. The announcement followed a report from an official inquiry into child sexual abuse in Indigenous communities in the Territory. The federal government subsequently launched a number of controversial measures across prescribed communities to combat what it called a ‘crisis’. This policy approach, the Northern Territory Emergency Response, soon became known as the Intervention.

Exploring mainstream news media coverage of the Intervention through a mixed methodology, this thesis integrates textual analysis of newspaper and television stories about the policy with industry interviews. Media representation of Indigenous affairs and peoples in Australia has been widely researched in past decades; yet previous studies have tended to concentrate on textual analysis despite calls for further exploration of media practitioners’ accounts on the topic. This project contributes to bridging that gap.

Sampling coverage across a three-year timeframe and drawing on established frameworks for discourse analysis, this thesis asks: what discourses are present in news media coverage about the Intervention and how have the discursive practices of different social actors, including journalists and non-media individuals and institutions, impacted on these discourses? Investigating the constraints of media practice and the idea(l)s of professional journalism the thesis reflects on the complex relationship between Indigenous communities and journalists, who are generally non-Indigenous, and how Indigenous perspectives might be better represented.

Statement of Authorship

Except where reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma. No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis. This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

All research procedures reported in this thesis were approved by the La Trobe University Human Ethics Committee, application number 11-015.

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7 April 2014

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

In her discussion about what it means to be Aboriginal in today's Australia and who defines Aboriginality, Indigenous academic and author Anita Heiss remarks:

These kinds of complexities have existed since the point of invasion in 1788, and since then the 'concept of Aboriginality' and what 'an Aborigine is' has been an ongoing construction of the colonisers, an imposed definition. It is also a political issue for Australia's First Nations peoples, who have been forced to live by legislation created around these constructions, answering to variations of it, while at the same time trying to explain to our 'other' (that is, non-Aboriginal Australians) what it actually means to be Aboriginal from our perspectives and based on our lives in the twenty-first century (2012, p. 5).

Certainly, the history of relations between Australia's First Nations peoples and European colonisers has been one of official control and interference in Indigenous lives, with government imposing policies and practices on Indigenous peoples and defining their identities (Anderson 2003b, p. 19; Roberts 1998, p. 263), regardless of resistance by First Nations peoples since colonisation. The policy approaches taken by the settler state towards the Indigenous population have changed from protectionism to assimilation and self-determination, with a turn to 'renewed conservatism' in the 1990s (Anderson 2003b). While these policy approaches are discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, it is important to note here that this 'renewed conservatism' culminated in 2007 in the federal government policy of the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER), which soon became known as the Intervention.

After the Northern Territory government released a report into child sexual abuse in remote Indigenous communities in the Territory, the federal government, led by Prime Minister John Howard, launched the 'Emergency Response' in these communities, intervening in the Northern Territory government's Indigenous policy. The suite of policies, described as 'the most extraordinary' federal takeover in Australia's history and 'the most decisive' change in Indigenous policy since the emergence of land rights in the 1970s (Langton 2008b, p. 145; Povinelli 2010, p. 18), consisted of a number of controversial measures, such as compulsory quarantining of welfare, blanket bans on alcohol and pornography, and compulsory acquisition of communally owned Indigenous land by the government. Moreover, Howard's Liberal-National Coalition government enabled the application of the Intervention policies by suspending the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (RDA).

While the Howard government argued it launched the Intervention in order to protect children (Howard 2007), others raised questions about the motives of a government that had not acted on previous reports on social dysfunction but had throughout its two terms in office been driving a conservative agenda regarding Indigenous affairs (Altman and Hinkson 2007). This added to the controversial nature of the policy approach. The Intervention was continued by successive Labor governments, led by Prime Ministers Kevin Rudd and Julia Gillard.

1.2 Research approach and questions

Exploring Australian mainstream news media coverage of the Intervention over a three-year timeframe, this thesis adopts a critical approach which John Muncie (2006a, p. 51) defines as one that ‘attempts to reveal the socio-historical specificity of knowledge and to shed light on how particular knowledges reproduce structural relations of inequality and oppression’. While there are a number of methodologies that can be described as ‘critical’, I chose discourse analysis as the methodological framework for the current research project. This is because of the usefulness of the concept of discourse, and discourse analysis, for examination of media and power relations in society.

Discourse is not a neutral transmitter or a purely individual activity but a form of social practice in itself that both constitutes and is constituted by social phenomena (Carvalho 2010, p. 11; Fairclough 1995, p. 54; Macdonell 1986, p. 1; Wetherell and Potter 1988, p. 168). The concept of discourse was made popular by Michel Foucault (1972, p. 117), who described discourse as a group of statements limited by their rules of formation and conditions of existence. To Foucault (1991, p. 63), discourse is constituted by the difference between what could be said and what is actually said. While Foucault’s definition of discourse is rather abstract, in studies of media content ‘discourse’ is often used with a reference to concrete meaning producing activity, such as spoken or written language and visual images or non-verbal communication (e.g. gestures) that take place within sociocultural practice and have effects within society (Fairclough 1995, p. 54). The mediator between texts and sociocultural practice is discourse practice which involves various aspects of the processes of text production and text consumption (Fairclough 1995, pp. 59–60). The current research project takes both definitions into consideration, studying news and current affairs media texts and interviews with media professionals as a form of construction of social reality while drawing on the Foucauldian ideas of what can be said within a particular domain and who can have access to a particular kind of discourse (Chapter 4).

Media discourse analysts have identified media as having a remarkable role in sociocultural change, and that this power of the media to influence issue agendas and public discourse is primarily discursive (Fairclough 1995, 51; Richardson 2007, p. 13; van Dijk 2000, p. 36). In other words, for many, social and political knowledge and the sense of what is happening in the society beyond their immediate experience derives from media texts (Allan 1999, p. 83; van Dijk 1991, p. 110). Discourse analyst Teun van Dijk (2000, pp. 36–37) notes that in a society it is often the mainstream media that influence the dominant group's knowledge of and attitudes towards minority groups. Today, Australia's Indigenous peoples, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, are a minority group, making 2.5 percent of the country's population (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2009, 2011). Certainly, in the Australian context, the media are often the only source of information about Indigenous issues, or the only 'contact' with Indigenous peoples, for most non-Indigenous Australians (Bullimore 1999, p. 72; Meadows 2001a, p. 23; 2005, pp. 38–39). The media thus potentially reinforce the stereotypes and representations of Indigenous Australians held by the non-Indigenous population (Meadows and Ewart 2001, pp. 121–122).

Critical discourse analysis allows one to discover unequal power relations that underlie ways of thinking in a society (Garrett and Bell 1998, p. 6). It also enables analysis of both what is present and what could have been (in a text) but is absent (Richardson 2007, p. 38), as opposed to content analysis which can only be used to examine things that manifest in texts. This thesis explores and discusses power relations constructed in news media discourse in the context of the Intervention. The approach to discourse analysis applied here is three-dimensional, combining analysis of texts, discursive practices, and the society within which a text is produced (Fairclough 1992, p. 4; 1998, p. 144).

The thesis is a response to several research questions: What discourses emerge from news media coverage on the Intervention – and what are absent? What is the relationship between these discourses and the discursive practices of different social actors, including journalists and non-media individuals and institutions? In other words, why do some discourses appear in media texts and others do not? Further, how are things said and how might this influence social relations and social change? Investigation of discourse 'moments' through the lens of the three-dimensional discourse analysis allows me to examine how journalistic practices, and the various strategies adopted by non-media social actors to influence journalistic discourse, enable some people to speak and others to be excluded from the process of constructing knowledges.

It is important to note here that I also approach the current research project as a form of discourse. As discourse analysts Margaret Wetherell and Jonathan Potter (1992, p. 66) explain, ‘the social scientist’s account of events (including [their] own) is equally a discursive construction’.

1.3 Researcher’s position

As a newcomer to Australia, I became interested in Indigenous affairs in 2008 when the Rudd Labor government apologised to the Stolen Generations for past injustices (Stolen Generations are discussed further in Chapter 2). It was a significant event, also in the media, and I began to wonder why I had not heard much about Indigenous Australians via mainstream media at other times. I realised I did not know much about the First Australians, and as I then decided to pursue doctoral studies in journalism, I wanted to learn more about media representations of Indigenous peoples and affairs.

Due to the colonial history of Australia it is important to describe the position from which I am writing this dissertation. I am a non-Indigenous non-Australian doctoral researcher working within a traditionally ‘Western’ institution. It is a position similar to that described by Banerjee and Osuri (2000) who studied newspaper coverage of an event that involved Indigenous Australians. They point out their location as ‘non-Indigenous academics working within a First World institution on issues concerned with colonial relations of power in Australia’ (Banerjee and Osuri 2000, p. 263). According to them, even if one’s study is not directly of Indigenous peoples or cultures, this kind of positioning is important because academic institutions have historically been and may still be complicit with colonial conditions by participating in the knowledge/power nexus through representations of Indigenous people. Certainly, Kincheloe and Steinberg (2008, p. 141) explain that even if ‘Western’ scholars are dedicated to the best interests of Indigenous people, they often unwittingly participate in the ‘Western’ hegemonic process. It is therefore important to acknowledge one’s position within the institutional modes even if one’s purpose is to participate in the transformation of colonialism (Banerjee and Osuri 2000, p. 263).

This dissertation is not ‘about’ Indigenous Australians or cultures but about mainstream news media discourse of issues concerned with the country’s Indigenous population. Referring to other writers, Indigenous academic Ian Anderson (2003b) notes that not all things can be ‘known’, no matter how much one might try with tools provided by ‘Western’ thinking, and thus ‘some things about Aboriginal people and life-ways will always remain unintelligible’ for non-Aboriginal people. Discussion of Indigenous culture and knowledge is of course a part of this thesis, since it examines news media coverage of Indigenous policy,

but by no means do I claim to 'know' Indigenous ways of life. In addition, Hartley and McKee (2000, p. 38), who also studied mainstream media representations of Indigenous Australians, note that their background as 'New Australian' migrants is not in Aboriginal studies but in the 'interdisciplinary field of communication, media, film and cultural studies'. Again, this applies to my position; my background is in the interdisciplinary field of journalism, and I have worked as a newspaper journalist in Finland. My aim is to contribute to the knowledge on power relations constructed in media discourse regarding Indigenous affairs.

1.4 Outline of chapters

Earlier I referred to the history of relations between Indigenous Australians and European settlers as one of government control and interference in Indigenous lives, notwithstanding Indigenous resistance. Drawing on a few key policies since colonisation, I discuss these relations in more detail in Chapter 2 and position the Northern Territory Emergency Response in context. The aim here is to provide background to the focus of the current research project – investigation of power relations constructed in news media coverage about the Intervention.

Chapter 3 continues to provide context by introducing the concepts of the public sphere (Habermas 1991 [1962]) and 'imagined community' (Anderson 2006 [1983]) and their significance in regards to public discourse on the Intervention. Media scholars have suggested that Indigenous Australians have traditionally been excluded from the 'imagined community' which the mainstream media construct (Hartley 1992, p. 207), which has impacted on problematic representations of Indigenous Australians in mainstream media. 'Problematic' here refers to the absence of Indigenous agendas and voices in mainstream media stories, even when these stories concern Indigenous affairs, and a focus on conflict, difference and deviance (Johnston 1991a; Meadows 2001b; Mickler 1998). There is a large body of research on mainstream media representations of Indigenous Australians (Budarick and King 2008; Dunne Breen and McCallum 2013; Ewart 1997, 2002; Hartley and McKee 2000; McCallum 2010; McCallum et al. 2012; McCallum and Reid 2012; Meadows 2001b; Meadows, Hippocrates, and van Vuuren 1997; Mickler 1998), from which a few examples are raised in Chapter 3.

In addition, scholars suggest that traditional journalistic practices play a central role in the way Indigenous peoples are represented in mainstream news media (Meadows 2001b, p. 202). Michael Meadows and Jacqui Ewart (2001) have identified key areas of journalistic

practices that impact on media coverage of Indigenous affairs. These are also discussed in Chapter 3.

As noted above, the current research project explores and discusses power relations constructed in news media discourse that concerns the Northern Territory Intervention. This is done through a mixed methodology integrating content analysis and discourse analysis of Australian mainstream news media coverage of the Intervention over a three-year timeframe with discourse analysis of interviews with journalists. I referred to the significance of the concept of discourse and usefulness of discourse analysis for a critical research project, such as this dissertation, above but discuss the meaningfulness of the mixed methodology in detail in Chapter 4. The three different data-sets collected in the course of the current project – metropolitan newspaper articles (including the national paper, *The Australian*), free-to-air television stories, and interviews with journalists who have produced stories about Indigenous affairs, particularly the Intervention – are also described in Chapter 4.

Chapter 5 provides a detailed discussion on the process on content analysis in the current research project. The purpose of the content analysis is to study the overall picture of news media coverage of the Intervention from the start of the policy approach in June 2007 to the federal election in August 2010 in selected news outlets. The analysis is used to discuss how media coverage of the Intervention developed in terms of number, size and prominence of stories. I also draw on the interview data to discuss explanations for the development of the coverage. Further, the content analysis helps to identify the three ‘critical discourse moments’ (Carvalho 2010) which are analysed in detail in Chapters 6 and 7.

Chapter 6 looks at the first key discourse moment, the first anniversary of the Intervention in June 2008. The other two discourse moments – the release of the Productivity Commission’s report on Indigenous disadvantage in July 2009, and the federal government’s announcement in November 2009 to apply compulsory welfare quarantining to the wider community – are discussed in Chapter 7. Using discourse analyst Anabela Carvalho’s (2010) work on discursive strategies of framing, positioning, legitimation and politicisation as an analytical tool, I explore what discourses emerge as dominant from news media coverage of the three ‘moments’ examined, what discourses are marginal or absent, and how discursive practices of both journalists and non-media social actors influence these discourses.

Chapter 8 discusses research findings in the context of the key questions of the current research project: what knowledges can be constructed in the context of the Intervention, and who has the power to construct these knowledges? I also contemplate the meaning of the

findings in the context of social change within Australian society and canvas some directions for future research.

Chapter 2: The Northern Territory Intervention in context

2.1 Introduction

On 21 June 2007 the federal government of Australia announced that there was a ‘national emergency confronting the welfare of Aboriginal children’ in the Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory and that it would respond to the situation by ‘immediate, broad ranging measures to stabilise and protect communities in the crisis area’ (Brough 2007). This ‘national emergency’ the government wished to address was child abuse, particularly sexual abuse (Howard 2007; Ring and Wenitong 2007, p. 204). These measures, discussed in more detail below, constituted a program which the government named the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) (Department of Families 2008a; Magarey et al. 2007). However, the program quickly became known as the ‘Intervention’ in both scholarly and media texts.

In fact, the then Prime Minister John Howard (2007) himself remarked that the measures represented ‘very dramatic and significant’ federal intervention in the Northern Territory and would involve amendments to the self-government legislation of the Territory. Therefore the action taken by the federal government, officially called NTER, is in this thesis regularly referred to as the Intervention.¹

The ‘emergency measures’ announced by the Howard government in June 2007 included: restrictions on alcohol and pornography on Aboriginal land in the Northern Territory; compulsory quarantining of welfare payments; compulsory child health checks to identify and treat health problems and any effects of abuse; compulsory acquisition of Aboriginal land by the federal government through five year leases; and abolition of the permit system on Aboriginal land (Brough 2007). Shortly after this the Howard government was compelled to make the health checks voluntary and to scrap examinations for sexual abuse following questions by medical professionals regarding these mandatory checks and the forensic nature of them. In addition, the government said it would improve housing in remote Indigenous communities and deployed extra police and government business managers into these communities (Brough 2007).

The scale of these measures was unprecedented, and it has been argued that the Intervention program was ‘the most extraordinary’ federal takeover in Australia’s history and ‘the most decisive’ change in Indigenous policy in the country since the emergence of Aboriginal land

¹ A capital ‘I’ is used in order to distinguish the federal government’s policy from other uses of the word ‘intervention’. Distinguishing the policy with a capital ‘I’ is particularly useful later in the content analysis chapter in which it is explained which media texts are included in data-sets examined in this study and which are excluded from it.

rights in the 1970s (Langton 2008b, p. 145; Povinelli 2010, p. 18). Yet it has also been noted that the Intervention introduced the ‘most significant’ injection of funds into Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory in recent times (Calma 2009, pp. 14–15). A number of issues involved with the Intervention – such as the notion that the measures were targeted at Indigenous Australians in prescribed Northern Territory communities only, enabled by the suspension of the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (RDA) (Vivian and Schokman 2009, pp. 78, 83), and the lack of consultation with these communities regarding the action taken by the government (Behrendt 2007, p. 15) – resulted in the Intervention being immersed in controversy from the start.

One of the most controversial measures was welfare reform. The government decided to quarantine 50 percent of the welfare payments of people living in the communities that were affected by the Intervention in order to prevent spending on alcohol, drugs and gambling (cf. Brough 2007; Howard 2007). This management of income was mandatory (Vivian and Schokman 2009, p. 89). Further, compulsory acquisition of the land of the prescribed communities and the abolition of the permit system that prevented outsiders from entering Aboriginal land raised questions about how such measures would protect children, resulting ultimately in suggestions that the Intervention was a land grab by the government (Brown and Brown 2007, p. 622; McMullen 2008, p. 15; Watson 2009a). The police, armed forces, government administrators and medical professionals were mobilised to implement the range of measures in 73 Indigenous communities across the Northern Territory (Thill 2009, p. 537). The measures, together with older people’s stories about memories of the Stolen Generations, scared parents, and it has been argued that the large influx of police and the involvement of the army exacerbated this fear (Dodson 2007, p. 85; Tait 2007, p. 619; Vivian and Schokman 2009, p. 80). ‘Stolen Generations’ is widely used to describe an official policy of the removal of Indigenous children from their parents. The practice started in the early 1800s, lasted until the mid-1900s and is discussed in more detail in section 2.2.

The federal government that launched the Intervention was a conservative Coalition government, led by Prime Minister John Howard from the Liberal party. Kevin Rudd, the leader of the Labor party which at the time was in opposition, offered ‘bi-partisan in-principle’ support for the Intervention (Department of Families 2008b). This was surprising, given the Intervention was a notable departure from the policy of ‘self-determination’, which was launched in 1972 by Gough Whitlam’s Labor government, and had played a central role in Indigenous affairs ever since (cf. Roberts 1998, p. 259).

This chapter investigates the historical and cultural context of the Northern Territory Intervention by tracking the relationship between Australian officialdom and Indigenous Australians. Drawing on descriptions of Indigenous policy since the European settlement I explore the continuing issues and how these were addressed in the Intervention policy approach. The chapter thus provides background for the key focus of this research project – discourse analysis of a corpus of news media texts reporting on the Intervention. The relationship between Indigenous Australians and the Australian nation as well as Indigenous policies prior to that of the NTER are examined first, followed by discussion on the Intervention itself.

2.2 A brief history of Indigenous policies in Australia

In order to understand different viewpoints that emerge from literature and commentary about the Intervention one has to look at previous Indigenous policies in place in Australia. This section discusses some major policy frameworks that preceded the Intervention and argues that the history of Indigenous policy in Australia is one of government control and interference in Indigenous lives. As Roberts (1998, p. 263) notes, government policies and practices regarding Indigenous Australians have been imposed on these peoples and have been characterised by a lack of consultation with the Indigenous population throughout most of the history of Aboriginal–European relations.

2.2.1 Dispossession of Indigenous peoples

My discussion begins by looking at the way Australia was colonised by the British in 1788 as it can be argued that the ideas in place during the early stages of colonisation influenced many of the earlier Indigenous policies. Moreton-Robinson (2003, p. 24) remarks that the British immigrants colonised the land now known as Australia under the legal fiction of ‘terra nullius’ (a legal fiction meaning ‘land belonging to no one’), as opposed to the usual doctrines of conquest or cession. In other words, from the British colonisers’ point of view, because they saw Australia as a land without any settled laws or structures of government there was no need to conquer land owners. Thus, despite resistance by Indigenous peoples, they declared themselves the sovereign rulers of Australia, (Bourke and Cox 1998, p. 59; Broome 2010, pp. 18, 36–51). The British government did not sign a treaty with the Indigenous peoples of Australia, which had been the case with Native American tribes in North America and was to happen with the Maori in New Zealand (Broome 2010, p. 18). As a result, Eleanor Bourke (1998c, p. 1) suggests that what non-Indigenous people regarded as settlement amounts to invasion for Indigenous Australians. Colonisation started the Australian state’s control of Indigenous peoples’ lives (Hemming 1998, p. 31).

Like many Indigenous peoples, First Australians have a special relationship with the land. In Australian Indigenous culture this stems from the Indigenous creative epoch, *The Dreaming* (Edwards 1998, p. 79). Watson (2009b, p. 40) describes this relationship as follows:

... while land is our home, it is our home because it is who we are; it is home to our songs and laws that lie in the land; it is our relative; it is our grandmother and grandfather. Our ancestors are alive in the land, and this is in accord with saying that to sell the land is akin to selling one's own mother.

This connection to the land was disrupted as a result of colonisation – in other words, Indigenous peoples were dispossessed from their land (Bourke 1998b, p. 39; Moreton-Robinson 2003). On one level this happened through renaming of the land by the British keen to commemorate their own places, officials and politicians back home (Broome 2010, p. 26). On another level, Indigenous peoples were literally removed from their land; traditional hunting grounds and sacred sites were taken for the purpose of pastoralism as settlement expanded, and Indigenous peoples were often relocated on missions and reserves in which traditional ceremonies and languages were forbidden (Bourke 1998b, p. 39; Burden 1998, p. 195), making it difficult to maintain their relationship with the land.

Groome (1998, p. 171) suggests that Indigenous missions and reserves offered sanctuary for dispossessed Indigenous families but stresses that it happened at a price. This is discussed in more detail next, but it is useful to note here that some commentators of Indigenous policy suggest that the dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their land is the ultimate, although not the only, historical reason for the disadvantage and dysfunction faced by many Indigenous communities today (cf. Pearson 2000a). This disadvantage and dysfunction as well as debate on what caused them are discussed further in the following parts of section 2.2.

2.2.2 The rise of ‘protectionism’ and ideas about race

Christian missions were established in the early 1800s with their purpose being to ‘civilise’ Indigenous peoples who were seen as ‘savages’ by the early settlers (Broome 2010, pp. 19, 29–31). Aboriginal reserves, which were often managed by missionaries, followed in the latter half of the 1800s (Broome 2010, pp. 82, 84). The purpose of the reserves was to segregate people of full Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent (who were expected to die out under colonisation) for their ‘protection’ from the worst effects of the settler society (Groome 1998, p. 174). People of mixed descent, in turn, were to be assimilated into the dominant non-Indigenous society (Groome 1998, p. 174; Wilson 1997, p. 250). Indigenous

people of mixed descent were often referred to as 'half-castes', 'quadroons', etc. as opposed to 'full bloods'. Today, these terms are derogatory.

Indeed, ideas about racial purity and superiority determined Indigenous policy in the latter half of the 1800s (Broome 2010, p. 107). During this period, race became the dominant explanation of human difference in Western thinking, and Charles Darwin's ideas regarding evolution and natural selection were applied to human societies by European colonisers – in other words, the believers of the superiority of the white race used this Social Darwinism to explain why the black races were vanishing in the face of European colonisation (Broome 2010, pp. 102–103). In Australia, Indigenous peoples were 'expected to die out in the fullness of time', and missionary work was supposed to 'smooth the pillow of a dying race' (Broome 2010, p. 149; Day 2000, p. 37).

The reserves were established under and controlled by various Aborigines Protection Boards and Aborigines Protection Acts, first established in the state of Victoria in the 1860s and by 1900 in place across most of Australia (Bourke 1998b, p. 40; Broome 2010, pp. 82, 91, 118–120). The Boards were burgeoning government institutions; they were run by public servants who had great power over Indigenous Australians (Broome 2010, p. 173). The Protection Acts were based on belief in the racial superiority of the British and that Indigenous peoples were uncivilised and, consequently, treated the Indigenous population as different and inferior (Bourke 1998b, p. 40; Broome 2010, p. 120). These Acts made the Protectors of Aborigines the legal guardians of the Indigenous population and maintained rigid control over them: under the rhetoric of protection, Indigenous peoples' rights to marry, control one's property, vote and even consume alcohol were limited, freedom of movement restricted and employment regulated by special laws (Bourke and Cox 1998, p. 60; Broome 2010, pp. 136, 195–196). In addition, Indigenous children, particularly those of mixed descent, were removed from parents in the name of protection (Bourke and Cox 1998, p. 60; Broome 2010, p. 197). This particular policy is discussed in more detail shortly.

2.2.3 Protectionism and assimilation within the young federation

When Australia became a federation in 1901, the newly formed Australian government took a racially restrictive approach to who was allowed in the country through the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901* (Jordens 1995, p. 2). This was brought on by a will to 'exclude the inferior races by law' (Jupp 2002, p. 8). There were restrictions in place even before the federation was born: the arrival of thousands of Chinese to Australia during the 1850s gold rush was seen as a threat which had led to the 'White Australia' policy, which emerged in 1880s with the aim to 'bleach' Australia white and particularly keep Asian people out of the country (Day

2000, p. 35; Jupp 2002, p. 7). Through the *Immigration Restriction Act* the government also restricted entry to people from southern Europe who were ‘regarded as not being quite ‘white’” (Jordens 1995, p. 2), and Jupp (2002, p. 15) suggests that the White Australia policy was ‘enshrined’ in the *Immigration Restriction Act*. As a result, Anderson (2003a, p. 45) notes that the constitutional arrangement of the time, the Commonwealth of Australia, ‘defined a nation of white Australian citizens’, excluding Indigenous peoples, amongst others. Part of the ‘White Australia’ policy was to deport non-Europeans already within Australia which, of course, could not be done to the Indigenous peoples of the land (Day 2000, p. 37). However, as discussed above, colonisers expected Indigenous Australians to eventually die out as a result of perceived effects of Social Darwinism.

The ‘White Australia’ policy had implications for other policies that impacted on Australia’s Indigenous population. According to Anderson (2003a, pp. 45–46), two forms of social relations dominating the life of Indigenous Australians were in place in the first half of the twentieth century: segregation and assimilation colonialism. The first period was that of segregation, or ‘protectionism’, which was practised in all states (Anderson 2003a, p. 46; Wilson 1997, p. 250). The view that Indigenous peoples were going to die out due to colonial contact, already in place in the 1800s when protectionism began, continued during the early federation period (cf. Anderson 2003a, p. 46). Some Indigenous people continued to live on reserves where free movement was restricted, and those who lived off the reserves faced unofficial discrimination based on their skin colour – for instance, they were not allowed to purchase alcohol and were excluded from many shops, churches, community organisations and social or sports clubs (Broome 2010, pp. 172–173, 178–179).

However, Indigenous peoples did not die out but survived ‘the increased controls placed on them by petty managers and burgeoning government departments, supposedly in the name of protection’, as Broome (2010, p. 99) explains. The period of segregation was replaced by a more assimilationist approach in 1937 as governments decided that Indigenous peoples had a future, and this was done by adopting the policy of assimilation nationally (Anderson 2003a, p. 46; Broome 2010, pp. 210–211; Wilson 1997, p. 250). Assimilation, which meant the absorption of Indigenous Australians into the non-Indigenous population, was seen as the only path to a unified Australia (Broome 2010, pp. 211, 213). During this era, it was expected that Indigenous peoples would gradually assimilate into the wider society, become lighter skinned through intermarriage with Europeans and adopt the dominant culture (Hemming 1998, p. 25). In the assimilation era, the Protection Boards were renamed as Welfare Boards, but they continued to control Indigenous lives in most parts of the country (Broome 2010,

pp. 217, 219). The period of assimilation lasted until the late 1960s (Anderson 2003a, pp. 43–44).

One of the official policies of the ‘protection’ era as well as that of assimilation was the removal of Indigenous children from their parents (Bourke and Edwards 1998, p. 101; Wilson 1997, p. 250). This policy was established by missionaries in the early 1800s to ‘instil Christian virtues of obedience, punctuality and religious observance’ (Bourke and Edwards 1998, p. 101). Moreover, it was later thought that Indigenous peoples of mixed descent had abilities above of those of ‘full blood’ and needed rescuing from the conditions of ‘primitive’ culture (Broome 2010, p. 197). According to Bourke and Edwards (1998, p. 101), the Aborigines Protection Boards argued that Indigenous children could be turned into ‘useful citizens’ by taking them from their families and socialising them as Europeans. The shift from segregation to assimilation, particularly in the post-war Australia, did not bring relief to Indigenous families regarding this matter but in fact saw a more intense wave of removals of Indigenous children of mixed descent as it was thought that Aboriginality had to be eradicated from the nation (Broome 2010, p. 215). This policy of removal of Indigenous children lasted until the early 1960s, although some were taken away from their families as late as in the 1970s (Wilson 1997, p. 250). The policy had devastating effects: traditional Indigenous cultures were eroded, languages were lost, and many people were left with no sense of identity (Bourke and Edwards 1998; Broome 2010, p. 103; Wilson 1997).

In 1995, an inquiry into the policy of forcible removals was established as a response to Indigenous agency and community concerns that the general public’s ignorance of this history was ‘hindering the recognition of the needs of its victims and their families’ (Wilson 1997, p. 18). The children who were forcibly removed from their families over decades today often identify as and are talked about as the Stolen Generations. However, some conservative commentators have questioned the term: for example, in 2008, Tony Abbott, then a member of the Liberal–National Coalition opposition, argued that many of the children removed were helped or rescued (Davis 2008).

In summarising the situation until the 1960s, it can be said that Indigenous peoples were controlled in two ways: through formal control exercised by the Aboriginal Protection Boards acting under special legislation; and through unofficial discrimination (Broome 2010, p. 172). According to Broome (2010, p. 179), the unofficial discrimination, or segregation, remained entrenched long after governments adopted assimilation policies in the 1940s. Indeed, Anderson (2003a, p. 46) argues that the eras of segregation and assimilation are in fact the ‘flip sides of the same coin’ because the ‘policy of assimilation presumed the

continuing exclusion of groups of Aboriginal people who were seen as less able to be assimilated than others'. While Indigenous Australians were subject to the Australian law, they had no legitimate input into the content of the laws or choice of parliamentary representative and therefore had no access to power within society until the 1960s (Bourke and Cox 1998, p. 62; Hemming 1998, p. 31).

2.2.4 Activism for civil rights in the 1960s

Approaches to Indigenous policy started changing in the 1960s due to a number of events. Firstly, assimilation policy was challenged internationally as the United Nations (UN), after passing the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* in the 1948, was overseeing decolonisation of colonial empires (Broome 2010, p. 217). Further, the *Immigration Restriction Act* was replaced by the *Migration Act* in 1958, resulting in post-war migration which shifted the ethnic complexion of Australia (Broome 2010, p. 217; Jupp 2002, p. 8). Finally, the era saw the emergence of an activist movement for civil rights for First Australians, led by Indigenous individuals and comprising bodies including both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. This eventually led to the dismantling of most discriminatory legislation (Broome 2010, pp. 219–221). It should be noted that Indigenous political activism was not restricted to the 1960s but took place in earlier periods as well (Hemming 1998, p. 23). However, the earlier political struggles were constrained by the commonly held beliefs of authorities that Indigenous people were a 'primitive' race, 'destined to die out' (Hemming 1998, p. 24).

As a result of the action by a number of individuals and organisations, particularly the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI), Indigenous Australians gained some access to civil rights in 1967 through a referendum which included them in the census and, according to some, recognised these peoples as 'equal' citizens (Bourke and Cox 1998, p. 62; Broome 2010, pp. 221–222; Hemming 1998, p. 31). Others suggest that the referendum did not provide equal citizenship to Indigenous Australians but merely removed two discriminatory clauses from the constitution (O'Dowd 2009, pp. 809–810). However, even if the referendum did not lead to equal citizenship it carried the potential for redefinition of what it is to be Australian (O'Dowd 2009, p. 810).

Australia also signed the 1965 *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* ('Race Convention'), but the conservative governments in power in the 1960s did not implement it (Broome 2010, p. 225). This happened in the following decade.

2.2.5 Self-determination era and land rights

The change of federal government in 1972 from a conservative to a Labor one, led by Gough Whitlam, brought about significant changes to Indigenous policy. This was the first

Labor government after over two decades in opposition, and the Labor party had a radical social reform agenda.

The Whitlam government moved to introduce multiculturalism as a policy by establishing 'ground rules for the human rights of new Australians from non-English speaking backgrounds' (Debrett 2010, p. 111). As part of its approach to multiculturalism, the Whitlam government implemented the UN's *Race Convention* in 1975 by passing the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Broome 2010, p. 225; O'Dowd 2009, p. 811). This Act was a significant step away from the idea of a 'white Australia': it recognised the diversity of the population in the country and that discrimination against Indigenous Australians was wrong (O'Dowd 2009, p. 811). It is useful, however, to note that old attitudes about Indigenous people as an 'unworthy, primitive and doomed race' did not necessarily change along with the legislation (Broome 2010, p. 225).

Multiculturalism continued as an official policy under Fraser Coalition government, successive to the Whitlam government. The Whitlam and the Fraser eras saw a rise of multicultural institutions, such as Australia's multicultural public service broadcaster, Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) (Debrett 2010, p. 109; Jupp 2002, pp. 85–89).

Moreover, the Whitlam government adopted the policy of self-determination as a central approach to Indigenous affairs (Roberts 1998, p. 259). This policy approach was a reaction to the assimilation era which had sought to absorb the Indigenous population into 'mainstream' society (Kowal 2008, p. 339). The Whitlam government stated its intention to restore Indigenous Australians' lost power of self-determination in economic, social and political affairs (Broome 2010, p. 230). As a result, there were various attempts to establish structures and processes that would facilitate Indigenous self-determination and self-management within the Australian state, such as plans for Aboriginal-elected policy advisory committee, programs to revitalise Indigenous social welfare, and an inquiry into land rights (Broome 2010, p. 230; Roberts 1998, p. 259). Consequently, a number of advisory bodies remained in place from the Whitlam era until 1985, although none of them had actual power in the decision-making process (Broome 2010, p. 230).

The Whitlam government also instigated an inquiry into land rights in the Northern Territory in order to recognise the traditional land rights of Indigenous peoples (Broome 2010, p. 231). Land rights emerged as a significant aspect of self-determination for Indigenous Australians because of their special relationship with land (Bourke and Cox 1998, p. 65; Turner and Watson 2007, pp. 206–207). As a result of the inquiry and its final report, the Whitlam government presented a bill on land rights which, however, lapsed as the government was

dismissed in a constitutional crisis towards the end of 1975 (Broome 2010, p. 235). The succeeding conservative government, led by Malcolm Fraser from the Liberal party, passed its own *Aboriginal Land Rights (N.T.) Act* in 1976 which was based on the same report as the Whitlam government's suggested legislation but was weaker and provided a mechanism for granting land rights to Indigenous peoples only in the Northern Territory (Broome 2010, p.235). The success of land rights in other states and territories was mixed; in South Australia, Indigenous Australians owned 20 percent of land by the early 1980s whereas the Queensland and Western Australian governments still refused to recognise Indigenous claims to land (Broome 2010, pp. 238–240). In the states of Victoria and New South Wales as well as in the Australian Capital Territory Indigenous people owned a very small percentage of the land (Broome 2010, pp. 238–240).

The *Land Rights Act* in the Northern Territory as well as the hope of land rights in other parts of the country prompted some traditionally oriented Indigenous Australians to return to the land to live in small, isolated outstations (Broome 2010, p. 247). This homelands movement provided Indigenous people with opportunities for cultural revival as well as a refuge from the mainstream social and economic system (Bourke 1998a, p. 230; Broome 2010, p. 247). The outstations enabled people to live on land with which they were culturally and emotionally associated, following their cultural traditions (Bourke 1998a, p. 230).

In the early 1980s, the newly elected Hawke Labor government announced a bold program for uniform land rights which failed due to a public fear campaign by conservatives and the mining industry (Broome 2010, pp. 241–244). The High Court's decision in the so called *Mabo* case in 1992 brought about new hope for land rights as the High Court declared Australia was not 'terra nullius' at the time of colonisation (Bourke and Cox 1998, p. 66; Broome 2010, p. 284). The case had started a decade earlier when Eddie Mabo and a few other Torres Strait Islanders challenged the Queensland government over land, finally arguing in High Court that their title to land had never been extinguished (Broome 2010, pp. 283–284). The High Court's decision on native title, which rejected the doctrine of terra nullius and recognised that Indigenous peoples were prior custodians of the land, provided a new basis upon which Indigenous Australians could claim land rights and compensation (O'Dowd 2009, p. 811; Roberts 1998, p. 277). However, the High Court's decision came with restrictions: Indigenous people could only claim vacant Crown land to which they could prove a continuous relationship (Bourke and Cox 1998). The Mabo decision was pushed into a political reality by the Keating Labor government late in 1993 as the *Native Title Act* was passed in the federal senate (Broome 2010, p. 289). It is worth noting here that the

sovereignty of the Australian state has not been questioned in court cases regarding land rights (Bourke and Cox 1998, p. 72).

Some have suggested that the key to Indigenous autonomy is not only land rights but also economic self-sufficiency (Broome 2010, p. 258). This was, however, difficult to achieve since remote areas had insufficient employment opportunities (Broome 2010, pp. 258–260). In late 1970s, the Fraser government developed the Community Development Employment Project (CDEP), a work-for-the-dole scheme, as a response to Indigenous communities' request for such an opportunity (Broome 2010, p. 260). CDEP organisations, along with other Indigenous institutions such as land councils, are said to have been the key players in delivering development on Indigenous land. Nevertheless, the Howard government abolished the CDEP scheme as part of the Intervention (Altman 2007, pp. 311, 315). In the context of economic self-sufficiency, it has also been argued that the homelands movement, discussed above, provided 'economic salvation' to residents of outstations through utilisation of bush tucker for food as well as sales of crafts (Broome 2010, pp. 259–260).

Some commentators note that there has not been a commonly agreed definition of, or mutual understanding about the meaning of, self-determination ever since the policy framework was introduced (Pearson 2000a, pp. 95–96; Roberts 1998, p. 259). However, Roberts (1998, p. 259) suggests that it is generally agreed that central to self-determination is the right of Indigenous Australians to make decisions on and manage their own affairs. He also notes that self-determination 'recognised the demands of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders for social justice and equality' (Roberts 1998, p. 259). Kowal (2008, p. 339) suggests that one of the ideas included in the self-determination approach was that Australian legal and administrative structures should accommodate Indigenous forms of social life, instead of Indigenous people assimilating to Western values. Given these accounts, it is clear that self-determination was a significant departure from previous government policies regarding Australia's Indigenous population.

2.2.6 Debate on success of self-determination

If the meaning of self-determination has been debated, so has the success of the self-determination policy framework. Some commentators have argued that there are aspects of the self-determination era that have played a role in the disadvantage and dysfunction in some Indigenous communities today (Johns 2008; Langton 2010; Pearson 2000a; Skelton 2010). Conservative commentator Gary Johns (2008, p. 72), for instance, argues that poor policy during the self-determination era has caused 'bad behaviour' within Indigenous communities and that this behaviour can be changed by changing policies. He argues that

‘[t]oo much faith has been placed in traditional values and ways of life and the attachment to land as both a means of economic and spiritual sustenance’ (Johns 2008, p. 66). According to Johns (2008, p. 67) , the policy of self-determination, in place since the 1970s, has been ‘formulated on the impossible dream that Aborigines could accommodate the new world to suit themselves and that any shortfall in terms of economics or poor behaviour would be picked up or forgiven by the state’.

Russell Skelton (2010, p. 155), who, as a journalist, has regularly written about remote communities in Central Australia, suggests that the policy of self-management became an ‘excuse for a hands-off approach’ for successive federal governments. He criticises both governments and bureaucrats as well as Indigenous leaders for failing to deliver on the expectations of self-management and suggests that governments had in fact been aware ever since the 1970s that the self-management model established was ‘unworkable’ and ‘unsustainable’ (Skelton 2010, pp. 155, 170). Since 1990, funds to Indigenous communities were distributed through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), a body with elected Indigenous members (Broome 2010, p. 295; O’Dowd 2009, p. 806). ATSIC for instance managed community development planning which allowed communities to plan for integrated frameworks of development and coordination of government services provision (Bourke 1998a, p. 239). Some commentators, however, have questioned ATSIC’s ability to foster self-determination, given that it was a semi-government body subject to government policy and funded by as well as accountable to the government (Roberts 1998, p. 276). The fate of ATSIC is discussed further in section 2.2.7.

Drawing upon former Northern Territory minister Elliott McAdlam’s words, Skelton (2010, p. 215) describes the policy of self-management as ‘leaving a bag of money at the front gate [of a community] with the disclaimer attached: your community, your problem; you fix it’. Some commentators argue that disadvantage, poverty and marginalisation of Indigenous Australians got normalised as the state of affairs in the Aboriginal world as a result of the self-determination era (Langton 2010, pp. 99–101).

Others suggest it was government control and oppressive policies such as the forcible removal of Indigenous children from their families that disrupted and distorted social life in Indigenous communities (Bourke and Edwards 1998, p. 101; Broome 2010, p. 255; Lattas and Morris 2010, pp. 68–69). Burden (1998, p. 196), for instance, notes that such policies left Indigenous Australians with a ‘severe emotional handicap and a debilitating identity crisis’ which led to alcohol abuse. Similarly, Broome (2010, p. 255) suggests that the control by

governments as well as the removal of children left many Indigenous people 'ill-equipped' to manage their own affairs.

One of the well-known contemporary commentators on the issue of disadvantage and dysfunction is Noel Pearson, an Indigenous lawyer from the community of Cape York in Queensland. In his now famous essay *Our right to take responsibility*, Pearson (2000a, pp. 32, 61), voiced an argument that contemporary Indigenous communities were overcome by alcohol and drug abuse which, in turn, led to neglect of children, and that it was passive welfare dependency that caused this breakdown of Indigenous society. Interestingly, the idea of welfare as an instrument forcing Indigenous Australians into dependency was in fact introduced well before Pearson's essay by Charles Perkins, Indigenous activist and the first Aboriginal public servant (Roberts 1998, p. 268).

According to Pearson (2000a, p. 35; 2000b, p. 140), the problems in Indigenous communities are 'inextricably' linked with the arrival of European settlers and the dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their land and that this colonial dispossession was the 'ultimate historical cause' of welfare dependency in Indigenous communities. However, he also argues that more recent events played a role in Indigenous communities becoming welfare dependent. According to Pearson (2000b, pp. 140–141), the 1967 referendum brought about this dependency as it shifted Indigenous communities away from the (colonial) market economy to a welfare-based economy. He criticises the idea of passive welfare as a 'fundamental indigenous right' which followed the recognition of the citizenship of Indigenous peoples in 1967 and advocates a 'right to an economy' (Pearson 2000a, p. 94).

For Pearson (2000a, p. 96), the right to self-determination is in fact the right to take responsibility. In other words, he argues that the 'irrational' basis of their economy after the 1967 referendum has turned Indigenous peoples into a 'wasteful, aimless people' (Pearson 2000b, p. 144). He argues that it is a structural issue that they themselves can do something about, even if they cannot change the history of dispossession and trauma that followed (Pearson 2000b, p. 149). According to Indigenous academic Marcia Langton (2010, p. 107) Pearson's 'major policy reform document' – the essay discussed above – 'exposed the disability and dysfunction' that welfare dependency had caused in Indigenous society. She also suggests that Pearson has been seen as a key architect of the Northern Territory Intervention by many, but Langton rejects such a claim. Instead, she argues that Pearson's ideas were recruited 'in a piecemeal fashion to a rapidly evolving conservative policy response' from 2000 to 2007, which is when the Intervention started (Langton 2010, p. 108). She writes:

‘After an initial hateful and distinctly ignorant response to Pearson, the previous conservative Prime Minister John Howard began to understand the arguments – especially in relation to the proposition that Aboriginal people would not prosper under the policy framework labelled, misleadingly, ‘self-determination’, but that their futures depended on taking responsibility, as Pearson had put it, for taking advantage of opportunities in the Australian economy rather than remain in the ‘welfare sector’ (Langton 2010, pp. 108–109).

The following section discusses the conservative policy response to self-determination.

2.2.7 Neoliberalism and the rise of ‘renewed conservatism’ in Australia

The election of John Howard’s conservative Liberal–National Coalition government in 1996 marked the rise of a ‘renewed conservatism’ in the country (Anderson 2003b, p. 20). Broome (2010, p. 294) notes that Howard had previously promised to empower Indigenous people to be self-reliant and to escape paternalism but that, once in power, reversed much of what had been achieved in Indigenous affairs and rights. The Howard government cut resources allocated for Indigenous affairs, curbed land rights, closed down Indigenous initiatives and reintroduced the mainstreaming of services to Indigenous people (Broome 2010, p. 294; Roberts 1998, pp. 282–284; Watson 2009a, p. 52).

On the list of abolished initiatives was ATSIC, the national body established in 1990 as part of the federal government’s attempts to address disadvantage faced by Indigenous Australians (O’Dowd 2009, p. 806). The Howard government first cut ATSIC’s power in Indigenous service delivery in 2003 and finally closed the representative body down in 2004 due to accusations of lack of accountability (Broome 2010, p. 335; O’Dowd 2009, p. 806). According to these accusations, ATSIC was corrupt, with cronyism and nepotism directing the distribution of government funds (Broome 2010, pp. 295–296). However, an external audit of ATSIC’s grants to various Indigenous organisations found that most bodies were guilty of lack of skills and training rather than fraud (Broome 2010, pp. 295–296). The idea of ‘practical reconciliation’ also affected the Howard government’s decision to close down ATSIC – instead of symbolic gestures such as apologies, Howard focused on improvements in material life which were to be delivered through mainstream services rather than through Indigenous agencies (Broome 2010, pp. 334–335).

Further, the Howard government watered down Indigenous land rights by amending the *Native Title Act* in 1998 with a ‘ten-point plan’ which set limitations on the rights to make native title claims (Broome 2010, pp. 298–302). Howard also refused to formally apologise to the Stolen Generations (O’Dowd 2009, p. 806), regardless of a report which recognised the harm caused by the policy of forcible removals of children from their parents, released

during his first term (Wilson 1997). Howard and other ‘hardliners’ of his party claimed the report was ‘flawed’ and rejected the idea that Indigenous children were stolen from their families (Broome 2010, pp. 310–311, 314–315). As noted earlier in section 2.2, some conservatives argued the ‘stolen’ children were ‘rescued’ (see also Broome 2010, p. 311). Howard also believed the current generation should not be held responsible for the actions of past governments (Dunne Breen and McCallum 2013).

This ‘renewed conservatism’ invokes discussion of neoliberalism which is a term that often emerges from commentary about the Intervention. Neoliberalism, as described by Harvey (2005, p. 2), is a ‘theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade’. The role of the neoliberal state, according to Harvey (2005, p. 2), is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to the described practices but not venture beyond this task. Neoliberal economic philosophy which emerged as the leading economic ideology in 1978–1980 as a result of a number of political events around the world, involves the idea that the social good is best realised by maximising the reach and frequency of market transactions (Harvey 2005, pp. 1, 3). Therefore it seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market (Harvey 2005, p. 3).

However, according to Povinelli (2010, p. 20), the Hawke and Keating Labor governments that preceded the Howard conservative government had already instituted key pillars of neoliberalism via privatisation of state corporations, floating the currency and dropping trade barriers. Moreover, she argues that the ‘liberal consensus’ on Indigenous affairs – the recognition of traditional cultures – in place from mid to late 1970s occurred ‘at the beginning of neoliberal ascendancy’ (Povinelli 2010, p. 29). In other words, cultures different to the dominant (Western) one and their values were viewed through the lens of the prevailing culture, regardless of the idea of multiculturalism in place within Australian society at the time (cf. Povinelli 2010, pp. 24–25). However, Povinelli (2010, pp. 25, 28) does suggest that there is a difference between how Indigenous traditional culture was approached in the early days of multiculturalism – and self-determination – and how it is approached today: according to her, Indigenous culture was seen as ‘an agent for care’ during the ‘liberal consensus’, whereas the Intervention ‘invert[ed] the relationship between culture as an agency of care and a cause of crisis’. Indeed, Macoun’s (2011) study on discourses of the architects and supporters of the Intervention reveals that the nature and future of Aboriginality and Indigenous culture are represented as problematic and in need of settler-imposed control.

Lattas and Morris (2010) also refer to neoliberalism in the context of Indigenous affairs and the Intervention. According to them, the public debate about the politics of difference is changing due to a 'shift to neoliberal frames of reference' (Lattas and Morris 2010, p. 65). This means that 'questions of Indigenous rights have been increasingly replaced by arguments about overcoming race-based marginalisation through equal rights providing the basis for individual initiative' (Lattas and Morris 2010, p. 65). In other words, the struggles for the 'recognition of difference' that characterised the 1970s and early 1980s – the era Povinelli (2010, p. 29) talks about as the 'recognition of traditional cultures' – are critiqued within the neoliberal framework (Lattas and Morris 2010, p. 65). Lattas and Morris suggest that at present, 'those struggles are accused of being an empty symbolic politics that diverted government resources so as to make the disadvantage of Aboriginal people worse' (Lattas and Morris 2010, p. 65). The viewpoints by Povinelli and Lattas & Morris are in stark contrast to those critiques of the policy of self-determination, discussed earlier (see for example Johns 2008).

Whether one believes that the Northern Territory Intervention was mostly influenced by the failure of the self-determination policy or by the neoliberal economic framework now in place within Australian society, one cannot deny that its measures were a significant departure from the policy framework of self-determination that preceded it. Certainly, a recently completed research project about the media and Indigenous policy-making in Australia found that the Howard era, particularly, 'saw Indigenous policy shift from a self-determinist philosophy of community control towards neo-liberal policies emphasising individual responsibility and the 'mainstreaming' of services' (McCallum and Waller 2013, p. 142). Policy actors interviewed in the course of the project recognised the Intervention as 'the culmination of the Howard government's political and policy aims for Indigenous affairs' – a government that was described as having ideological opposition to the self-determination project (McCallum and Waller 2013, pp. 140, 142). The conflicting opinions regarding the Intervention policy that perhaps arise from different views on the success of self-determination are discussed further in the following sections as well as in the conclusion of this chapter. Before looking at a number of issues raised in literature about the Intervention, reflection on Broome's (2010, p. 320) observation that the approach to Indigenous policy taken through the Intervention program is not 'new', offers insights; in the beginning of section 2.2 I suggested that the history of Indigenous policies in Australia is a history of government intervention in and control over Indigenous lives, and it is argued that the Intervention was yet another attempt by the government to manage the Indigenous peoples of Australia (cf. Broome 2010, p. 320). The suggested triggers of the Intervention,

child sexual abuse and the *Little Children Are Sacred* report, are discussed next, followed by a number of issues that emerge from commentary about the Intervention.

2.3 Child sex abuse – the suggested catalyst of the Intervention

In 2006, certain media events raised the issue of child sexual abuse in Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory on the public arena (Brown and Brown 2007, p. 621; Magarey et al. 2007, p. 9; Merlan 2010, p. 116). Appearing on the Commonwealth funded Australian Broadcasting Corporation's (ABC) *Lateline* program in May 2006, Nanette Rogers, a Central Australian Crown Prosecutor, spoke about numerous cases of Indigenous child sexual abuse in Central Australia she had handled in the course of her career (Jones 2006a). Some newspaper coverage as well as further reports on *Lateline* followed (see for example Jones 2006b; Kearney and Wilson 2006).

These public accounts of child sexual abuse, particularly the one by Nanette Rogers, led to the Northern Territory government initiating an investigation into the issue (Brown and Brown 2007, p. 621; Hinkson 2010, p. 231). On August 8 2006, then Chief Minister of the Northern Territory government, Clare Martin, appointed a Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse to find 'better' ways to protect Indigenous children from sexual abuse (Langton 2008b, pp. 150–151). The inquiry resulted in the *Little Children Are Sacred* (LCS) report (Hinkson 2010, p. 231) which was presented to the Northern Territory government on 30 April 2007 and released nationwide a few weeks later, on 15 June (Wild 2007, p. 117).

Neither the *Little Children Are Sacred* report nor the media stories that led to it being commissioned were the first accounts on the issue of child abuse in Indigenous communities in Australia; a number of reports that discussed the matter had come from other enquiries that had been conducted some years earlier (see for example Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Task Force on Violence 1999; Gordon, Hallahan, and Henry 2002). There had also been a few media reports on Indigenous family violence in the early 2000s, and ATSIC had in 2003 created a plan to tackle sexual abuse in Indigenous communities which faded as the body was closed down (Broome 2010, pp. 334, 339). Moreover, the authors of the LCS report emphasised that social problems facing Indigenous children were acknowledged as early as thirty years before their report (Wild 2007, p. 114). However, a parliamentary document regarding the Intervention legislation suggests that prior to the media events discussed above, the issue of child abuse had not been discussed publicly at length, notwithstanding it being reported in the context of 'general Indigenous family violence' (Magarey et al. 2007, pp. 6–9). Similar accounts were found in the media: the day

after Nanette Rogers' revelations of child abuse in 2006, *Lateline* journalist Tony Jones (2006b) suggested that Rogers' comments 'seem to have opened the floodgates'.

Johns (2008, p. 70) notes that Mal Brough, then federal Minister for Indigenous Affairs, managed to get the states of Australia to agree to work on child sexual abuse after Rogers' revelations on TV but argues that 'nothing happened' until the release of the *Little Children Are Sacred* report. This may be because the policy package Brough introduced to the states in 2006 was criticised for its concentration on law and order issues while neglecting issues that underlie dysfunction, such as overcrowded housing and education (Broome 2010, p. 339).

A common view – as well as the Howard government's argument – is that the federal government's announcement of the Intervention was based predominantly on the *Little Children Are Sacred* report (Brough 2007; Hinkson 2007, p. 1; Howard 2007; Merlan 2010, p. 116). Indeed, in his media release, Mal Brough (2007) stated that the federal government's response to the situation it called 'national emergency' reflected the 'very first' recommendation of the LCS report. The first recommendation of the report suggests

That Aboriginal child sexual abuse in the Northern Territory be designated as an issue of urgent national significance by both the Australian and Northern Territory Governments, and both governments immediately establish a collaborative partnership with a Memorandum of Understanding to specifically address the protection of Aboriginal children from sexual abuse. It is critical that both governments commit to genuine consultation with Aboriginal people in designing initiatives for Aboriginal communities (Wild and Anderson 2007, p. 7).

However, the federal government did not cite the whole recommendation in its announcement of emergency measures to protect children, noting only the first half that called for child sexual abuse to be designated as an issue of urgent national significance by governments (cf. Brough 2007). Consequently, Thill (2009, p. 537) remarks that while many commentators have framed the Northern Territory Intervention as a response to the *Little Children Are Sacred* report, they have at the same time pointed out that the government's strategy has been characterised by an absence of the recommended 'genuine consultation'. Among those commenting on the federal government missing the central point of the report – that no solution should be imposed from above – was the co-author of the document, Rex Wild (2007, p. 119).

This lack of consultation, along with a number of other aspects of the federal government's emergency response discussed in more detail below, has resulted in intense debate about the policy approach. As outlined, the issue of child abuse was not new, and some commentators have pointed out that no federal government initiated national action took place prior to the

Intervention, regardless of the previous reports and a few media reports on the issue (Broome 2010, p. 334; O'Dowd 2009, p. 812). In addition, it has been noted that the government had for years ignored calls for help from Indigenous communities, health services and community organisations regarding a number of issues, such as policing, educational opportunities, primary health care, counselling, preventative programs, infrastructure and community safety (Brown and Brown 2007, pp. 621–622; McMullen 2008, p. 14). Perhaps arising from such notions, some commentators have suggested that the Intervention was initially part of the Howard government's strategy to win the approaching federal election or to gain greater control of Indigenous land, given this government had been ignoring Indigenous disadvantage during its 11 years in the office (Johnstone 2007; Lattas and Morris 2010, p. 81; Watson 2009a). Other commentators reject such claims and argue that the rollout of the Intervention program was not a surprise, given the failure of successive Northern Territory governments to allocate funds for Indigenous affairs in the Territory (Langton 2008b, p. 146).

The suspension of the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (RDA) created controversy as well: even though both Coalition and Labor federal governments argued that the Intervention measures could be seen as 'special measures' – as outlined in the United Nations' *Race Convention*, thereby permitting the suspension of the RDA – Vivian and Schokman (2009) suggest that this is not the case. They, along with other commentators, argue that the Intervention measures do not meet the conditions of the *Race Convention*'s special measures (Calma 2009, p. 24; Vivian and Schokman 2009). These special measures as well as their relationship with the Intervention measures are discussed in more detail in the section about the suspension of the RDA below. The absence of consultation and the suggested political agendas behind the Intervention are also discussed further in the following sections.

2.4 The Intervention and lack of consultation

As discussed, absence of the community consultation which was a key recommendation of the *Little Children Are Sacred* report, has been identified as a problematic issue with the federal government's Intervention in Indigenous affairs in the Northern Territory. The importance of consultation with the communities over how to address child sexual abuse was referred to in the first recommendation of the LCS report as well on the following pages (Wild and Anderson 2007, pp. 7, 22, 50). The report stated the need for a 'radical change in the way government and non-government organisations consult, engage with and support Aboriginal people' and emphasised the importance of involving these peoples in decision making (Wild and Anderson 2007, p. 50).

However, the Howard government held no consultation with communities prior to launching its response to the *Little Children Are Sacred* report, announcing the Intervention only one week after the national release of the report. Some supporters of the Intervention framework have questioned the need for consultation. For instance, Langton (2008b, p. 160) argues that it is ‘an indulgent fantasy to require ‘consultation’ before intervening to prevent crimes being committed.’

An interesting account on how the Intervention program was established is found in Johns (2008, pp. 69–70), according to whom Prime Minister Howard had in a Cabinet meeting suggested setting alcohol bans in Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory but that Indigenous Affairs Minister Brough had opposed the bans as a standalone measure. Hence Brough had been asked to create a package of measures and present it to Cabinet later that same week (Johns 2008, p. 70). If the announcement of the ‘emergency measures’ was hasty, so was the way the Intervention laws were passed: as Vivian and Schokman (2009, p. 80) explain, the ‘comprehensive suite of measures’ with approximately 500 pages of legislation was made into laws within seven weeks of the announcement of the Intervention. The legislative package of five Bills was passed ten days after it was introduced to Parliament on 7 August 2007 (Magarey et al. 2007, p. 5; Vivian and Schokman 2009, p. 80).

Some commentators have acknowledged the need for interventions in disadvantaged Indigenous communities but have simultaneously remarked that the way the Intervention was launched was ineffective (Merlan 2010, p. 130). This is because the Intervention has been based on ‘notions of deficits or negatives in Aboriginal living situations ... rather than on a fuller understanding of the social processes and relationships to which they relate’ (Merlan 2010, p. 130) and has been ‘in direct contrast to the recommendations of [the *Little Children Are Sacred*] report, in both content and philosophy’ (Ring and Wenitong 2007, p. 204). Shortly after the Intervention started, for instance, Ring and Wenitong (2007, p. 205) expressed their concern about the path the initiative was taking. They argued that the Intervention was following earlier initiatives taken up in Australia which they described as largely driven by the non-Indigenous community without full Indigenous partnership. This kind of approach, they argue, has led to disempowerment of Indigenous Australians which, in turn, plays a role in the complex set of problems faced by Indigenous communities (Ring and Wenitong 2007, p. 205). As the Intervention was being rolled out – hastily without consultation – they argued that the measures had ‘doubtful’ prospects because they led to further disempowerment of Indigenous peoples (Ring and Wenitong 2007, p. 205).

Similarly, Tait (2007, p. 619) criticised the lack of consultation a few months after the Intervention was launched, saying the program had not taken a ‘respectful, tolerant, partnership approach’ in its quest to improve Indigenous children’s situation in the Northern Territory – an approach that was highlighted in the *Little Children Are Sacred* report. The Rudd Labor government, elected in November 2007, continued the Intervention, establishing an advisory group of 25 Indigenous leaders from the Northern Territory in December 2007, with the purpose of discussing the implementation of the Intervention (Department of Families 2008b, p. 15; Vivian and Schokman 2009, pp. 87–88). However, it has been suggested that the role of this group was unclear (Vivian and Schokman 2009, pp. 87–88). In addition, the federal government organised further consultations in 2009 regarding the government’s position on the Intervention, but these occasions were seen as problematic as well – for instance, community members remarked that they had not been adequately informed about the meetings (Vivian and Schokman 2009, p. 88).

Some accounts by Indigenous Australians living in the selected communities agree with the viewpoints above, indicating many people have felt stigmatised by the blanket policies that ‘brand all Aboriginal people as alcoholics, irresponsible parents and child molesters’ (Intervention Rollback Action Group 2011). Indeed, an overall critique of the Intervention has concerned the ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach of it: it has been pointed out that the communities on which the measures were imposed are very different to each other and that the application of such ‘heavy-handed social engineering’ to Indigenous peoples has not succeeded in other countries such as Canada or the United States (McMullen 2008, p. 16).

In addition to the lack of consultation, it has also been argued that the Intervention did not implement any of the recommendations of the *Little Children Are Sacred* report (Tait 2007, p. 619). Some commentators have suggested that even though the report worked as a catalyst for the Intervention it was never the intention of the Howard government to implement its recommendations (Johns 2008, pp. 70, 73). According to Johns (2008, p. 73), the purpose of the Howard government’s Intervention was to change the long-term policy goal in Indigenous affairs in Australia after ‘the realisation that the previous policy settings did more harm than good’. These ‘previous policy settings’ mean the policy of self-determination (cf. Johns 2008; Langton 2010, p. 108-109), the history of which was discussed in section 2.2.

2.5 Suggested political agendas behind the Intervention

Although the Howard government argued that it launched the Intervention to protect the children in remote Indigenous communities, as noted above, some suggested the government had other, political reasons to roll out such unprecedented measures. Such

arguments arise from the Howard government's earlier handling of Indigenous affairs. As discussed in section 2.3, the Howard government had for years ignored various pleas for better services and programs for Indigenous communities (cf. Brown and Brown 2007; Johnstone 2007; McMullen 2008). It is therefore not surprising that the motives behind the 'emergency response' have been questioned. Two matters regarding the Howard government's motives were raised.

2.5.1 An election ploy?

In 2007, polls were moving against John Howard with the next federal election looming at the end of the year, and, as a result, the Intervention has been described as the Howard government's attempt to create an election-winning moral panic (Broome 2010, p. 341; Lattas and Morris 2010, p. 81). Some commentators compare the Intervention to the 'Tampa crisis' which before the 2001 federal election provoked populist demonstrations of Australian nationalism with calls for the state to protect its citizens from 'a threat' from the outside – asylum seekers arriving in Australia unauthorised by boat (Lattas and Morris 2010, p. 81). In August 2001, the Howard government refused to let Tampa, a foreign freighter, leave asylum seekers it had rescued in international waters on Australia's Christmas Island. After the incident, the government introduced stricter boarder protection measures which had public support, and the Howard government was re-elected in November 2001.

In the case of the Intervention, however, the moral panic was raised around domestic issues – that is, around 'the state's need to secure the base existence of Indigenous people from their own self-harming actions' (Lattas and Morris 2010, p. 81). To put it simply, it is argued that the Intervention enabled the Howard government to 'seize the political agenda' at a time when the election was getting closer and the federal opposition was doing better in polls (Johnstone 2007). The announcement of the unprecedented policy framework only a few months away from the federal election has also been described as Howard's 'personal attempt at redemption' – an attempt to correct his successive governments' as well as his personal neglect of Indigenous issues, in particular his refusal to say 'sorry' to the Stolen Generations (McMullen 2008, pp. 14-15).

Others reject claims that electoral aspiration drove the Intervention. Langton (2008a, p. 28), for instance, dismisses the idea that the Intervention was an election strategy, although she does note that the 'plight of Aboriginal children' was 'perfect material' for Howard's 'propaganda strategy' according to which ideologically powerful ideas work if they are neither too simple nor too complicated. According to Langton (2008a, p. 28; 2008b, p. 146; 2010, pp. 93-94), there was mounting evidence of the extent of child abuse and neglect, and that

people who did not see the Intervention coming were deluding themselves. As already outlined in section 2.3, she sees that it was the decades long failure of Northern Territory governments to adequately invest money to eliminate Indigenous disadvantage in education, health and basic services that led to the federal Intervention (Langton 2008b, p. 146). Bongiorno (2008), in turn, acknowledges that the Intervention played a role in the 2007 federal election campaign but does not give much weight to it, emphasising issues such as rising interest rates, industrial relations and environmental issues instead. He does suggest, though, that the Howard government might have hoped to gain some political advantage from the Intervention but this was attenuated by the fact that the policy approach had bipartisan support (Bongiorno 2008, pp. 600–601).

2.5.2 A land grab?

Inaction on Indigenous disadvantage by the Howard government, prior to the Intervention, also underlies suggestions that the ‘emergency response’ was the government’s attempt to gain greater control of Indigenous land (see, for example, Turner and Watson 2007; Watson 2009a). For instance, Watson (2009a, p. 48) notes that the Howard government ‘held power to intervene in Aboriginal community endemic poverty, alienation, disadvantage and community violence’ for all its time in the office ‘but chose instead to do nothing, ... and to swoop in upon communities at the point of implosion’. Further, Turner and Watson (2007, p. 205) point out that the Howard government had been ‘waging war on Indigenous self-determination’ for all the eleven years it held power. Indeed, as discussed in section 2.1.7, the Howard government had during its terms weakened the *Native Title Act* and abolished Indigenous initiatives such as ATSIC.

As a result, these commentators argue that the Intervention, started by the conservative Coalition government and continued by the Labor government, was a land grab rather than about protecting children (Turner and Watson 2007; Watson 2009a). Turner and Watson (2007), comparing the Intervention to the Trojan horse of Greek mythology, argue that that the Howard government used the Intervention to further water down Indigenous land rights. The advocates of the land grab viewpoint also suggest no clear connection has been made between land tenure and child abuse, and hence question the relevance of the abolition of the permit system to the purpose of protecting children (Turner and Watson 2007, p. 205; Watson 2009a, pp. 52–55). What makes these commentators further suspicious of government motives for launching and continuing a policy framework such as the Intervention is that Indigenous land in the Northern Territory is rich in natural resources and therefore suitable for mining (cf. Watson 2009b, p. 34). There is no space to discuss these points further here, but detailed analysis of the particular Intervention measures and their

relationship to the aim of protecting children on the one hand and to mining on the other hand can be found in Watson (2009a, 2009b).

To conclude this section, it is important to point out that the media, and public debate generally, has been criticised for focusing on child sexual abuse, at the expense of land rights and mining in the context of the Intervention legislation (Watson 2009a, p. 46). This observation by Watson underlies the relevance of the current research project; a study that will for its part shed light on what discourses emerge from news media stories about the Intervention, whose voices are heard in these discourses, and what factors contribute to the presence of some discourses in the media and in the absence of others.

2.6 Suspension of the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*

One of the key decisions that made the Intervention a controversial policy approach was the suspension of the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (RDA). The Howard government had to suspend the RDA in the Northern Territory in order to be able to introduce the planned measures in selected Indigenous communities (cf. Magarey et al. 2007, p. 22; Vivian and Schokman 2009, p. 78). In fact, Tom Calma (2009, p. 24), former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, calls the suspension of the RDA ‘the most concerning aspect’ of the Intervention because it allowed for legislation and measures that treat Indigenous Australians differently to other Australians on the basis of their race. Indeed, reports and studies have shown that the suspension of the RDA engendered a sense of humiliation and shame to people in the Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory (Vivian and Schokman 2009, p. 79).

The federal government argued that the Intervention measures could be seen as ‘special measures’ which, under the United Nation’s *Race Convention*, are ‘forms of favourable or preferential treatment, necessary to advance substantive equality for particular groups or individuals facing persistent disparities’ (Vivian and Schokman 2009, p. 78). The subsequent Rudd government agreed with the Howard government’s categorisation of the Intervention measures as ‘special measures’, arguing that the Intervention measures were beneficial to Indigenous Australians living in prescribed communities and could therefore be seen as ‘special measures’ (Macklin 2008b). However, the Rudd government acknowledged that the Intervention would not ‘achieve robust long-term outcomes if measures d[id] not conform with the RDA’ and moved to reinstate the Act (Macklin 2008b).

As discussed previously, others have argued that the Intervention measures cannot be classified as ‘special measures’ (Calma 2009, p. 24; Vivian and Schokman 2009). Lawyers Vivian and Schokman (2009, pp. 85–86) assert that while the Intervention legislation

identified the broad aim of ‘improving the well-being of certain communities in the Northern Territory’ as the primary objective of the policy framework, it is unclear whether the measures introduced as part of the Intervention are necessary to achieve this objective. Again, there is not sufficient space to discuss the relationship between different Intervention measures and ‘special measures’ here, but Vivian and Schokman (2009) provide a detailed discussion on a few measures, including compulsory income quarantining and compulsory acquisition of Indigenous land, and whether these can be classified as ‘special measures’ as defined under the UN’s *Race Convention*. Their conclusion is that the Intervention ‘fails when considered against the criteria by which government action can be characterised as a special measure’ (Vivian and Schokman 2009, p. 97).

2.7 Chapter conclusion

The Howard government, which launched the controversial policy approach, lost power five months after the Intervention was rolled out, with the Labor party elected to govern. The federal election in November 2007 generated anxiety on the future of Indigenous Australia amongst both critics and supporters of the Intervention. Some were hopeful that the change of government might result in less disrespectful Indigenous policy, allowing for Indigenous leadership (Tait 2007, p. 620). Others worried that the victory of the Labor party would lead to the recurrence of the ‘old-left thinking’ – that is, the ‘rights agenda’ – at the expense of the Intervention (Langton 2008b, p. 152).

The election of the Rudd Labor government did lead to some changes regarding Indigenous policy: the newly elected Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd (2008) formally apologised to the Stolen Generations in February 2008, which the previous Prime Minister, John Howard, had persistently refused to do during his years in the office, as discussed in section 2.2.7. Media stories published and broadcast at the time indicate that many Indigenous Australians considered the apology an important symbolic gesture. The Labor government, however, continued the Intervention which it had supported since the introduction of the policy framework in June 2007.

The Rudd Labor government did, however, modify its approach to the Intervention. It argued that it ‘wanted to place a stronger emphasis on consultation and engagement with communities and on identifying opportunities for economic development’ and named the reinstatement of the CDEP program and the permit system as well as the *Racial Discrimination Act* as the main areas of difference to the policy framework in place in the Northern Territory (Department of Families 2008b, pp. 15–16). It also established some consultation

rounds in the Northern Territory, although these have since been described as inadequate, as discussed in section 2.4.

Certainly, the Rudd government continued one of the most controversial measures – the compulsory management of welfare payments (Macklin 2008b). As discussed in section 2.6, the Rudd government argued, via Indigenous Affairs Minister, Jenny Macklin, that compulsory income management had proven to be beneficial to Indigenous people living under the scheme. They also extended income management to other parts of Australia (see for example Macklin 2008d). The Gillard Labor government, which succeeded the Rudd government, passed legislation continuing some of the Intervention measures for another ten years in 2012 (Gardiner-Garden and Magarey 2012; Macklin 2012). This ‘Stronger Futures’ legislation falls outside the scope of this research project which concentrates on mapping news media discourse on the Intervention from the start of the policy framework until the federal election in 2010.

This chapter set out to portray the complexity of the Intervention and the debate it has generated by outlining a number of issues that emerge from the literature about this policy approach as well as from Indigenous policy in the past. It is evident that different viewpoints on the Intervention are often in stark contrast.

Some argue that the weakening of traditional cultural values and norms of social behaviour has led to lawlessness in many Indigenous communities, making poverty and dysfunction in these communities even worse (Langton 2010, p. 103). It has even been suggested that Indigenous people have brought dysfunction upon themselves by their own ‘bad behaviour’ (Johns 2008). The supporters of such views have welcomed the Intervention (Johns 2008; Langton 2008a, 2008b).

Others argue that the Intervention merely revived a moral language of authorisation for ‘helping professionals’ who align themselves with government projects and their discourses (Lattas and Morris 2010, p. 71). According to this view, true caring for Indigenous women and children means that one has to give priority to intervening government measures over civil rights. Further, some commentators suggest that the dominant discourse regarding the Intervention claims that the solution to the problems in Indigenous communities is assimilation of Aboriginal people to the mainstream – or the ‘(re)enactment of settler state sovereignty’ (Macoun 2011; McMullen 2008, p. 15).

The aim of this thesis is to identify and explore different viewpoints in mainstream news media stories that report on the complex and controversial policy framework of the

Intervention. A primary question is why do some issues and voices appear in the news media while others remain absent. The different analyses conducted as part of this study and their results are presented after discussion of earlier media representation of Indigenous affairs (Chapter 3) and an outline of research methodology for this project (Chapter 4).

Chapter 3: Representation of Indigenous affairs in the Australian media

3.1 Introduction

The media, being cultural institutions, serve as arenas for numerous ideas and assumptions of the world which compete for acceptance (Molnar and Meadows 2001, p. 196). Views alternative to those dominant in society tend to be marginalised or ignored at this arena (Molnar and Meadows 2001, p. 196). One way of describing this arena of competing ideas is to call it a public sphere. A well-known theory of the bourgeois public sphere comes from Habermas (1991 [1962]),² who describes the bourgeois public sphere as a ‘sphere of private people com[ing] together as a public’ (p. 27). Habermas’ (1991 [1962], pp. 30–31) account outlines how the bourgeois public sphere emerged in the 18th century, replacing court as a space for circulation of ideas and functioning as a mediator between the private realm and the sphere of public authority. Indeed, Habermas (1991 [1962], p. 176) notes that the role of the bourgeois public sphere was to ‘articulat[e] the needs of society with the state’. At the same time the press evolved into an instrument through which political decisions could be brought before the new forum of the public – it became an organ of a public engaged in critical debate, the ‘fourth estate’ (Habermas 1991 [1962], pp. 58, 60).

However, as the state began to transform so did the public sphere. Towards the end of the 19th century the state started to adopt the tasks of civil society and vice versa (Habermas 1991 [1962], pp. 141–142). According to Habermas (1991 [1962], p. 142), this development gradually destroyed the basis – the separation of state and society – of the bourgeois public sphere. A ‘repoliticized social sphere in which state and societal institutions fused into a single functional complex that could no longer be differentiated according to criteria of public and private’ was formed (Habermas 1991 [1962], p. 148). This integration of the public and private realms led to changes in the public sphere regarding its mediating role between state and society: this mediating function was passed from the public to institutions that had arisen out of both the private and the public sphere – that is, special interest associations as well as parties (Habermas 1991 [1962], p. 177). The ‘exercise and equilibration of power’ was now divided between these institutions and the state (Habermas 1991 [1962], p. 177).

The media and their role changed along with the transformation of state and the public sphere. The press changed from an arena that took ideological sides to a commercial

² Habermas’ theory of the public sphere was first published in German in 1962 and translated into English in 1989.

business and, consequently, transformed the public sphere into a sphere of culture consumption (Habermas 1991 [1962], pp. 162, 184). Publishers started appointing editors who were expected to work according to the interest of the newspaper, now a profit-oriented enterprise (Habermas 1991 [1962], p. 186). As a result, the press was no longer an institution of the public but an institution of ‘certain participants in the public sphere’ and, further, became a gate for private interests to access the public sphere (Habermas 1991 [1962], p. 185). Indeed, Habermas (1991 [1962], pp. 164, 227) suggests that the conversation in today’s public sphere is administered by mass media as they can either grant a privileged status to private interests within the public sphere, or boycott them. In light of existing research on the public sphere, this ability of mass media plays a significant role in the coverage of Indigenous affairs: as is discussed in more detail below, many studies have found that Indigenous voices tend to be neglected or ignored in mainstream media stories, even when these stories concern Indigenous affairs (Johnston 1991a; Meadows 2001b).

Since the publication of the English translation, Habermas’ theory of the public sphere has been criticised from a variety of perspectives including not giving due consideration to the development of alternative public spheres or multiple ‘sphericules’ (Cunningham 2001; Ewart 2002). Although theories of the public sphere are not the dominant framework of this thesis it is useful to make a couple of remarks about the mainstream and Indigenous public spheres in order to position this thesis in relation to prior research. The view adopted in this project is that multiple public spheres function within a society.

3.1.1 Indigenous topics in the mainstream public sphere

When it comes to the public sphere mediated by Australian mainstream media, there has been both an absence of stories dealing with the concerns of the country’s Indigenous population, and an absence of Indigenous voices and ways of telling stories concerned with these peoples and their affairs (Meadows 2001b, p. 58). Further, framing of Indigenous Australians has often been negative in one way or another; the mainstream representations have been described as ‘racist, distorted and often offensive’ (Langton 1993, p. 24), presenting Indigenous peoples as an ‘underclass’ or a ‘problem’ to be addressed and commented upon via discourses of anomaly, correction, and protection’ (Hartley and McKee 2000, pp. 339–340), with a focus on ‘conflict and difference’ (Meadows 2001b, p. 19). The problematic representation of Indigenous Australians in the media has significant implications, because, as van Dijk (2000, p. 36–37) explains, the mainstream media inform the dominant group’s knowledge of, and attitudes towards, minority groups within society.

Scholars suggest this is true of Australian society: for non-Indigenous Australians, the media are often the only source of information about, or the only ‘contact’ with, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and affairs (Bullimore 1999, p. 72; Meadows 2001a, p. 23; 2005, pp. 38–39). In addition, the media function as agenda setters, influencing what issues people form opinions on and perhaps even shaping those opinions (Richardson 2007, p. 13). Jennett (1983, p. 29) suggests that the media’s ability to set agendas is particularly significant when it comes to ‘remote’ issues of which most Australians do not have firsthand experience. Indigenous affairs can be seen as one such remote issue. Certainly, a government inquiry completed in the early 1990s, the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (discussed further in section 3.2), found that media treatment of Indigenous affairs and people had had a significant influence on community attitudes and institutional behaviour toward Indigenous Australians (Mickler 1998, p. 58). Thus studying how Indigenous people and affairs have been represented in mainstream media has potential implications for social justice and is an important field of research.

Molnar and Meadows (2001, pp. 196–197) call the negative representations and absence of Indigenous voices in non-Indigenous community representations of Indigenous people a ‘pattern of indifference’. This pattern of indifference emerged from records of the earliest contact and has continued to present day through the mainstream media (Molnar and Meadows 2001, pp. 196–197). According to Meadows (2001b, p. 35; 2004, p. 280), modern Australian journalism and the news media system emerged in the late 18th century, influenced by the imperial power, Britain, and spread across the continent in the first half of the 19th century in varied forms in different parts of the new colony, depending on factors of governance and geography. He also suggests that, at the same time, a framework for ‘imagining’ Australia was born (Meadows 2001b, p. 35; 2004, p. 280). This framework failed to acknowledge the variety that existed within Indigenous Australia and, instead, grouped Indigenous peoples as a homogeneous unit, even ‘savages’, which from the settlers’ viewpoint justified the taking of their land and destruction of their culture (Meadows 2001b, p. 39).

The early descriptions of Indigenous Australians were formed in terms of the colonisers’ own existence and ideologies (Meadows 2001b, p. 37). While making remarks on the birth of the Australian media, Meadows (2004, p. 280) refers to an article by an Australian anthropologist W.E.H Stanner (1977), according to whom Indigenous Australians have been framed within a ‘history of indifference’ from the start of the colonisation. Meadows (2004, p. 280) argues that his own examination of the media shows there has not been a significant

shift in the representations of Indigenous people after the observations of indifference put forward by Stanner.

This viewpoint can be linked with the concept of the 'imagined community' to further explain the mainstream media's approach to Indigenous peoples and issues in Australia. The concept derives from Benedict Anderson who defines a nation as an 'imagined political community' whose members 'will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them' – hence the term 'imagined' (Anderson 2006 [1983]). According to Hartley (1992, p. 207), the audiences of various media constitute an 'imagined community' in modern fragmented societies in which one cannot know all the other members of the community directly. The media function to create a sense of belonging for those who are part of this imagined community. This domain of 'wedom' is constructed by the strategies of inclusion and exclusion, with some values, types of action or classes of persons within society treated as 'foreign', as part of the domain of 'theydom' (Hartley 1992, p. 207).

Although Anderson's concept of 'imagined community' referred to a nation, it is worth noting that the boundaries of 'wedom' and 'theydom' are not bound to national boundaries, hence not all values, types of actions and people in Australia, for instance, are included in the imagined 'we' community (Hartley 1992, p. 207). Indeed, Hartley (1992, p. 207) argues that Indigenous Australians are not part of 'wedom' in Australia, but rather are part of the domain of 'theydom', and that news media categorise Indigenous people and their actions as 'outside' the community. Similarly, Jennett (1983, p. 28) argues that media representations of Indigenous Australians are constructed by non-Indigenous people operating within the dominant Anglo-European cultural framework resultant from colonisation. These representations constructed within the dominant framework are aimed for consumption by those who share this same framework (Jennett 1983, p. 28). To summarise these remarks made above, one could say that if the media, particularly news media, contribute to the formation of the 'we' community and if Indigenous Australians are not seen as part of this imagined community, Indigenous views and voices can be easily ignored in mainstream media coverage. As Meadows (2001b, p. 74) explains, by omitting a particular perspective the media make others privileged which, in turn, makes the negotiation of preferred ideas easier.

3.1.2 Indigenous public sphere(s)

Highlighting this exclusion is the concept of the Indigenous public sphere(s), a term that has itself drawn debate about the structure and to what extent Indigenous people have access to it. As Burrows (2009, p. 54) points out in her doctoral thesis, some scholars have argued that the Indigenous public sphere has hardly been under the control of Indigenous people

themselves (Hartley and McKee 2000, p. 3), while others have suggested that Indigenous people do have access to the Indigenous public sphere and ability to shape it (Avison and Meadows 2000, p. 348). These different understandings of control over the public sphere are a result of differing views as to what actually constitutes the Indigenous public sphere.

The first view I present here is that of Hartley and McKee (2000, p. 210), who suggest that the public sphere is encompassed by the 'mediasphere' which in turn is situated within a wider cultural 'semiosphere', with the mediasphere being what connects the world of political and public dialogue to the larger universe of culture. Curiously, they did not include Indigenous media in their study on the Indigenous public sphere in Australia but concentrated on examining stories that were published in mainstream media during NAIDOC³ week in 1994–1996 (Hartley and McKee 2000, pp. 210–211). Consequently, Burrows (2009, p. 53) suggests that Hartley and McKee's research project was not about the Indigenous public sphere but about the way Indigenous people are portrayed in Australian mainstream media (see also Avison and Meadows 2000, p. 352). In other words, the public sphere their study described was in fact an Australian mainstream one. While Hartley and McKee's findings are of interest to this thesis, and I will come back to them later in this chapter, I discuss the concept of both the Indigenous and the mainstream public spheres here a little further.

The other view of the Indigenous public sphere briefly discussed here is by Avison and Meadows (2000, pp. 348, 352), who suggest that it consists of a series of overlapping spheres which are spaces where participants with similar cultural background engage in activities important to them, such as deliberating issues together, developing their own counter-discourses and interpreting their own identities and experiences (see also Meadows 2005, pp. 37–38). According to these scholars, the Indigenous public sphere is not a non-dominant variant of the wider public sphere but is in fact constituted by multiple, uniquely developed spaces which are formed to provide opportunities for people who are regularly ignored by mainstream public sphere processes (Avison and Meadows 2000, p. 352). Burrows (2009, p. 65), whose more recent study on the Indigenous public sphere in Australia understands the public sphere in the way Avison and Meadows describe it, suggests that both alternative (Indigenous) and mainstream spheres of media are important in creating democratic debate in the political public sphere. However, she also acknowledges that it is the sphere formed by dominant news media in which public opinion and policy are shaped (Burrows 2009, p. 34). Further, Ewart (2002, p. 65) argues that even though the rise of infotainment is changing

³ National Aborigines and Islander Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) is a yearly celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in Australia.

journalism the media still play a crucial role in mediating information for the public. According to her, the media are 'places where public debate occurs, where power is contested, won, or lost' (Ewart 2002, p. 65).

Given this commentary about the importance of dominant news media as a facilitator of public debate, and because existing research has identified access to this mainstream public sphere by Indigenous Australians as problematic (even when reporting concerns Indigenous affairs) (Meadows 2001b), the focus of this study is on investigating the mainstream public sphere mediated by the mainstream media. While Indigenous Australians have sought to take control of the representations of themselves and of setting agendas important to them through Indigenous media (Meadows 2001b, p. 8), studies on Australian mass media show that little change has taken place in the way they are represented within the mainstream public sphere (Meadows 2004, p. 280). This thesis aims to contribute to knowledge about contemporary mainstream news media coverage of Indigenous affairs. It is concerned with the discourses that emerge from the news and why it is these particular discourses and not others that emerge from media coverage of Indigenous matters. As discussed in chapter 2, the case explored in this thesis, the Northern Territory Intervention, is a vigorously debated government policy affecting the lives of many Indigenous Australians living in the remote communities in the Northern Territory. It is also an issue that potentially influences the dominant group's attitudes towards Indigenous people through news media representation, and hence a significant social issue that warrants close analysis.

This chapter provides an overview of previous research on the mainstream media coverage of Indigenous affairs, discusses the role everyday practices of the news media play in the construction of representations referred to above, and defines the slot that this study aims to fill.

3.2 Common issues with mainstream media representations

In 1991, the national report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody suggested that the media, along with other institutions within the Australian society, are a place where Indigenous people experience discrimination in access and presentation (Johnston 1991a). The Royal Commission was set up in 1987 to investigate the causes of deaths of Indigenous people held in custody since, according to public concern, these deaths were too common and poorly explained (National Archives of Australia 2008). The Commission investigated many factors which may have had an influence on these deaths (National Archives of Australia 2008), including the media. Sections 12.6.9 and 12.6.10 of the Commission's national report present two common approaches by the mainstream media to

Aboriginal issues: firstly, Indigenous interests are often ignored in the media, making them invisible to the broader community; and secondly, Indigenous people are constructed as a 'problem', particularly in stories about law and order issues in which Indigenous people are represented as a dissident, disruptive or criminal element (Johnston 1991a). In other words, the investigations by the Commission acknowledged the need for improvement in the way the Australian mainstream media portrayed Indigenous people and affairs.

The Royal Commission came up with a number of recommendations, mostly regarding procedures for individuals in custody, liaison with Indigenous groups, police education and improved accessibility to information (National Archives of Australia 2008). Some recommendations were concerned with the media: in the recommendations number 205 and 208 of the national report, the Royal Commission suggested that all media organisations should develop codes regarding the coverage of Indigenous issues, that training programs for Indigenous employees be put into place, and that the media industry should encourage contact with Indigenous organisations in order to create better understanding of issues regarding media coverage of Indigenous affairs (Johnston 1991b). Indeed, the Royal Commission stressed that one of the problems with media representations of Indigenous affairs is that the media workers producing these stories are often non-Indigenous (see section 12.6 in Johnston 1991a). Section 12.6.19 of the national report of the Royal Commission notes that the involvement of Indigenous people in the processes of producing stories is crucial if any real change is to be reached (Johnston 1991a). The involvement of Indigenous people is important not only as media workers in the production process but also as potential audiences and sources used in stories, because such involvement can influence agendas and discourses available in the public arena mediated by the media and, essentially, power relations within society. These matters are discussed further in section 3.3 and in Chapter 4.

The remarks and recommendations of the Royal Commission can be seen as an important event in the field of research on media coverage of Indigenous affairs as they prompted further research on mainstream media portrayal of Indigenous affairs. Hartley and McKee (2000, p. 97), for instance, note that the Royal Commission's report acted as a catalyst for their study on the representation of Indigeneity in mainstream media. Mickler's (1992, 1998) investigations of the representations of Indigenous affairs in the Western Australian media also stem from the Royal Commission – he was one of the researchers who examined media representation for the Commission. His task was to study the portrayal of Indigenous people and issues by Western Australian news media and to discuss the role that these

representations play in the ‘reproduction of the web of hostile and exclusionary social relationships in which Aboriginal people find themselves’ (Mickler 1992, p. 324).

In line with the criticisms of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, academic studies conducted since show that the track record of mainstream media coverage of Indigenous affairs in Australia is often problematic. I will not discuss the entire history of Australian mainstream media portrayal of Indigenous affairs here as I do not have sufficient space but will concentrate on more contemporary research conducted on the issue. As noted above, the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody can be seen as a significant event in research on media coverage of Indigenous affairs as it acknowledged that the media play a significant role in the existence of discrimination that Indigenous Australians may experience within Australian society. Hence the following review into mainstream media representations of Indigenous people and issues will concentrate mainly on research published simultaneously with, or after, the reports by the Royal Commission.

3.2.1 Absence of Indigenous voices

One aspect of the problematic mainstream media representations of Indigenous Australians is that their voices are largely absent in the columns of newspapers and broadcasts of electronic media. This absence occurs in two ways: firstly, Indigenous interests are often ignored by the media (Johnston 1991a, section 12.6.9), and secondly, Indigenous voices are often absent from stories concerning their affairs, or not portrayed as authoritative, leaving the power of representing Indigeneity to non-Indigenous people (Goodall et al. 1994, p. 85; Meadows 2001b, pp. 58, 196; 2004, p. 281). An example of this kind of power is a column by a conservative non-Indigenous writer Andrew Bolt (2009), who questioned a few well-known Indigenous Australians’ self-identification as Aboriginal as a means to advance their careers. The people included in Bolt’s column took him to court, and one of them, academic Anita Heiss (2012), has since written a book about the case and what it means to be Aboriginal in Australia today.

There are several other examples as well. Meadows (2001b, p. 7), for instance, found that the dominant theme in his case studies of mainstream and community media was ‘the silencing of Indigenous voices on a vast range of issues canvassed on a daily basis’. One of these case studies, an examination of media stories concerning Australia’s bicentenary celebrations in 1988 and related protest marches by Indigenous people, suggests the mainstream television and print media did not discuss the event from the Indigenous point of view – that is, that for Indigenous Australians 1988 marked the survival of 200 years of white oppression (Meadows 2001b, pp. 71–72). Further, the case study found that while some current affairs

programs did allow Indigenous spokespeople some time to express their views on what the marches were about, television news limited these views to tightly edited sound bites of only ten seconds or less (Meadows 2001b, p. 73). Sound bites on TV news tend to generally be relatively short, and Meadows does not provide information about how long the sound bites from non-Indigenous sources were. However, he also found that in one-quarter of the 41 occasions Indigenous Australians were given air time on television in the context of the bicentenary the interviewees were not named which, according to him, suggests that their accounts were not seen as important as comments by people who were named (Meadows 2001b, pp. 77–80). In comparison, only two of the 19 non-Indigenous people interviewed remained unnamed (Meadows 2001b, p. 80). In summary, the meaning of the bicentenary for Indigenous Australians was largely omitted, Indigenous views were generally restricted to short sound bites, and Indigenous sources remained unnamed more often than non-Indigenous ones. The way the event was sourced and covered, Meadows (2001b, pp. 80, 87) argues, reinforced the prevailing bicentennial discourse – that Australia Day in 1988 marked the celebration of the 200th birthday of the country – suppressing alternative discourses.

Similarly, in her study of three media events in *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Australian* newspapers, Bullimore (1999, p. 75) discovered a ‘considerable lack of Aboriginal voices’ in stories that focused on Indigenous affairs. Moreover, she found that when Indigenous voices did occur, they were often ‘outnumbered by the voices of elite actors’ or ‘mediated by white voices’ (Bullimore 1999, p. 75).

Another research project by Meadows, Hippocrates and van Vuuren (1997) offers a similar example of the absence of Indigenous voices in mainstream news media. They studied coverage of Indigenous protest rallies in *The Courier-Mail* newspaper and news bulletins of two television channels, the commercial network Nine and the public service broadcaster, the ABC, in 1996 (Meadows, Hippocrates, and van Vuuren 1997, p. 74). They found that an Indigenous source was quoted directly in only nine stories of the 28 stories under examination, and indirectly in three stories (Meadows, Hippocrates, and van Vuuren 1997, pp. 76–77). The newspaper used Indigenous sources somewhat more frequently than its electronic counterparts: while the number of Indigenous sources in the newspaper stories was 30–40 percent, only three stories of the total number of 15 run by the TV networks presented an Indigenous voice (Meadows, Hippocrates, and van Vuuren 1997, pp. 77–78). In addition to the lack of Indigenous sources, the television news coverage provided little context for the events – that is, that the public rallies were organised in order to place important issues such as Indigenous deaths in custody and the failure of the *Native Title Act* back onto the public agenda – concentrating on confrontation instead (Meadows,

Hippocrates, and van Vuuren 1997, pp. 78, 84). As a result, Indigenous perspectives were under-represented in the TV news stories (Meadows, Hippocrates, and van Vuuren 1997, p. 84). The researchers also found that while the newspaper provided contextual information for its audiences better than television news – even in stories comparatively the same length as a two minute TV story – its stories were also framed around the news value of confrontation (Meadows, Hippocrates, and van Vuuren 1997, p. 85). News values and a news media focus on confrontation are discussed in more detail below, following further discussion of the issues underlying the absence of Indigenous voices in media stories.

Mickler's (1998, p. 56) investigation of talkback radio in Perth in the early 1990s provides another example of the exclusion of Indigenous interests in mainstream media stories: the program he examined, *The Sattler File*, in which the usual theme was 'uncontrolled ... teenagers roaming the streets' ignored the murder of an Aboriginal teenage boy who was killed by non-Indigenous youth. He argues that the murder did not fit the then prevailing 'news agenda of innocent non-Aboriginal victims of Aboriginal lawlessness' (Mickler 1998, pp. 55–56). In other words, Mickler suggests that the murder did not become a topic of the talkback radio show, regardless of it being about 'uncontrolled teenagers roaming the streets', because the victim was an Indigenous Australian and the perpetrators were non-Indigenous Australians, thereby setting it outside the interest of the mainstream audience.

A somewhat different example of the absence of Indigenous voices in mainstream media comes from Hartley and McKee (2000) whose research project was described earlier in the discussion about the public sphere(s). Their study on Indigenous issues in a selection of Australian media during NAIDOC week in three consecutive years indicates that while the 'Aboriginal public sphere', or mainstream media portrayal of Indigenous affairs as discussed above, was 'well developed in terms of culture, arts, and sports', it had 'no public infrastructure in party political or financial terms' (Hartley and McKee 2000, p. 221). In other words, many of the stories included in Hartley and McKee's sample were about arts or culture whereas stories about politics or employment were under-represented (Hartley and McKee 2000, p. 228).

I believe that Hartley's (1992, p. 207) observations about news audiences as an 'imagined community' and the social domains of 'wedom' and 'theydom', discussed in section 3.1.1, provide one explanation for this absence of Indigenous interests and voices. Thus one of the questions of interest put forward in this thesis is whether the Australian mainstream news media in their coverage of the Northern Territory Intervention have changed the boundaries of 'wedom' and 'theydom' in their own part to include Indigenous Australians in the 'we'

community and whether they are working to enhance social justice or to reinforce the prevailing ideology. Given that the media do not simply reflect reality but also shape it, as noted in the thesis Introduction and discussed further in Chapter 4, I suggest that by changing their strategies of inclusion and exclusion journalists could potentially influence the boundaries of 'wedom' and 'theydom' and help build acceptance of Indigenous interests and viewpoints as part of the 'we' community.

There are, of course, also other reasons for the absence of Indigenous voices in the mainstream media stories. As Habermas (1991 [1962]) observes of the public sphere, today's media organisations are profit-oriented enterprises. They have to make a profit in order to survive. Therefore, as Richardson (2007, p. 77) explains, news has become a product that has to be made attractive or appealing to a market of consumers. Meadows (2001b, p. 169) notes that this commercially competitive environment may lead to media workers neglecting minority voices in their attempt to fulfil professional and institutional obligations. In addition, in their attempt to attract the same audiences the products of different media organisations tend to become homogenous at the expense of diversity (Jennett 1983, p. 28).

It is said that everyday journalistic practices play a significant role in the way Indigenous people and affairs are represented in the news media (Meadows 2001b, p. 202; Meadows and Ewart 2001, p. 116). These everyday practices are integrally linked to the media's construction of the imagined 'we' community and to creating a sense of belonging for the members of this community as well as to the idea of the media as representing for-profit enterprise (with the last of these excepted in the case of public service media). Everyday practices have developed over time to help carry out these functions – as Shoemaker and Reese (1996, pp. 108–109) remark, these routines are practical responses to the needs of news outlets and their workers to produce a product that satisfies the consumer in the most efficient manner. For instance, in order to construct the 'we' community, the media exclude 'different' voices, therefore particular sources are used while others are ignored. Further, the use of sources who can be reached in a cost effective way, within the boundaries determined by deadlines, help media organisations function as profitable businesses. This, of course, also influences which voices are mediated to the public. I will explore news media practices and the way they shape media content in more detail below, but before doing so I will provide an overview of other aspects of problematic mainstream media representations of Indigenous topics, identified in prior research.

3.2.2 Indigenous people portrayed as a problem

Another aspect of the problematic media representation of Indigenous Australians is the portrayal of these peoples as a problem, in one way or another. Mickler (1992, p. 324), for instance, found that newspapers in Perth visualised Indigenous youth as ‘criminals’ or ‘major instigators of disorder’ in the early 1990s. According to him, Aboriginal youth were made the objects of sensational page one stories in the Western Australian press in the first half of 1990 without any factual basis for the sensationalist stories (Mickler 1998, pp. 22, 26–27). For example, the headline of one story Mickler examined described Indigenous youth as ‘Aboriginal gangs’ which ‘terrorise suburbs’, but an investigation into the reporting of the issue in question – crime figures from a local police station and the researcher’s interviews with suburban police – suggested the headline was groundless (Mickler 1992, pp. 322, 326–327). The sources with most authority in the story were senior police officers based at police headquarters, not the suburban police in whose area the alleged gang terror occurred, which left many of the reports without first hand evidence (Mickler 1992, pp. 326, 328). The story might have been different if reporters had talked to the suburban police instead, or in addition to senior police officers at the headquarters. In the stories published in the Western Australian press in the early 1990s, Aboriginal youth was framed as ‘the greatest single threat to public safety, with police cast as embattled and under-resourced public defenders’ (Mickler 1992, p. 334; 1998, p. 49). According to Mickler (1992, p. 334; 1998, p. 49), this was quite a shift from the late 1980s at the time of the start of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, when Indigenous youth were represented as victims of police harassment and violence.

In her study on an unnamed regional newspaper’s representation of Indigenous affairs, Ewart (1997, p. 115) also found that conflict was a significant determinant of newsworthiness in the paper’s stories regarding Indigenous issues. According to her findings, stories about Indigenous Australians were generally avoided in the newspaper because editorial staff believed such stories did not interest the ‘general population’ (Ewart 1997, p. 112). However, the newspaper did cover a story about police serving outstanding fine warrants on Indigenous mourners who had gathered at a funeral (Ewart 1997, pp. 112–113). The reason for the incident being reported, according to the editorial staff, was the large number of warrants served at once, but the issue of the operation taking place at a funeral was not discussed as the editorial staff viewpoint was that they would not gain anything by ‘healing the rift’ between the Indigenous community and the police (Ewart 1997, pp. 113, 115). Ewart (1997, p. 115) argues that this shows a level of self-interest in the practices of this paper when it comes to the representation of Indigenous Australians. In addition, in the

crime stories of the newspaper studied, the race of perpetrators was more likely to be mentioned if they were of Aboriginal or other non-Anglo background (Ewart 1997, p. 114) which also suggests, together with the fact that the particular paper would not generally cover Indigenous affairs, that emphasis of stories involving Indigenous people in the paper in question was on conflict and crime.

Budarick and King's (2008) comparative study on coverage of the Redfern riots in one Indigenous newspaper, *The Koori Mail*, and two mainstream newspapers, *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Daily Telegraph*, provides another example of how mainstream news media tends to portray Indigenous Australians as a problem. While *The Koori Mail* framed the riots as an issue stemming from social injustice and poor policy, *The Daily Telegraph's* coverage of the event emphasised violence, framing the riots as an 'inexcusable violation of the law' caused by a 'criminal mob' without providing any deeper social context for the riots (Budarick and King 2008, pp. 361–362). Similar emphasis on violence and confrontation was found in Meadows, Hippocrates and van Vuuren's (1997) study of mainstream media coverage of protest marches organised by Indigenous organisations in Brisbane in 1996, discussed earlier in this chapter. They found that television news particularly explained the rallies as news through the framework of violence without providing a context for why the marches were taking place (Meadows, Hippocrates, and van Vuuren 1997, p. 84). The newspaper examined in their study provided contextual information for its readers but, similarly to TV news, tended to frame the events as a confrontation (Meadows, Hippocrates, and van Vuuren 1997, p. 85).

Budarick and King (2008, p. 366) argue that the 'law-and-order' frame used in *The Daily Telegraph* constructed racial identity as a 'taken-for-granted' identity that explains criminal behaviour. The other mainstream paper analysed in their study, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, framed race relations as a possible cause for the confrontation. Although this frame included the call for better race relations between police and the Indigenous community in Redfern, it also stressed the enforcement of law and order in the context of cleaning up the drug trade in the area (Budarick and King 2008, pp. 361, 363). Indeed, Budarick and King (2008, pp. 364–365) argue that the coverage of the riots in *The Sydney Morning Herald* framed racial elements in a way that 'positioned racial tension, cultural differences and a natural antagonism between communities as fundamental in explaining the riots'.

3.2.3 Focus on difference and deviance

The last aspect of the problematic representations of Indigenous Australians by mainstream media discussed in this chapter is the focus on difference and deviance in stories. This aspect

is intertwined with the other aspects described above; in a sense, exclusion of Indigenous voices or representations of Indigenous people as a 'problem' can be traced to the views of them as 'different'. Accepting that society is divided into the domains of 'wedom' and 'theydom', as described by Hartley (1992), and that Indigenous Australians are often seen as part of 'them' by the people and institutions participating in the construction of the imagined dominant 'we' community, it is perhaps self-evident for the mainstream media as one of the institutions shaping the 'we' community to articulate Indigenous people as different, as outsiders or 'others'. This may, in turn, lead to exclusion of 'different' voices or to attempts to stand apart from those who are 'different' by representing them as a problem, criminals, an underclass or as something that needs to be protected. As discussed in Chapter 2, the European settlers thought they had to protect the Indigenous population that was going to die out as a result of colonial contact (Anderson 2003a, p. 46). Moreover, discourses about the need for protection of Indigenous peoples from their own bad behaviour have emerged more recently amongst conservative commentators (Johns 2008).

One example of the representation of Indigenous Australians as being different is Meadows' (2001b, pp. 91–114) case study of the coverage of a proposed space port in Cape York in Queensland newspapers between 1986 and 1992. The Indigenous people in the region opposed the proposed space port as it was to be built on their traditional lands (Meadows 2001b, pp. 95–96). Meadows (2001b, p. 101) found that the media stories examined 'associat[ed] Indigenous people with 'nature' and 'mysticism', placing them 'outside the framework that informed 'space-age development'. Further, Indigenous people were not mentioned in the reporting on the issue until land rights became a part of the political agenda in the early 1990s (Meadows 2001b, p. 110). The issue of land rights was represented as a 'threat to the existing order' and Indigenous people, consequently, as a threat to the space port – in other words, as a problem (Meadows 2001b, p. 110). Meadows' findings show the connection between portraying Indigenous people as different from the (imagined) 'we' community and excluding them from mainstream media stories, or portraying them as a problem when they are included.

Mickler (1992, p. 325; 1998, p. 27), drawing upon Ericson, Baranek and Chan (1987, pp. 4–5) suggests that 'deviance, its control and its opposite, normality' are 'the primary discursive objects of news making'. According to him, journalists are predisposed to seeking out ways to highlight deviance – perhaps, I suggest, because of the role media play in the shaping of the imagined 'we' community. Mickler (1992, p. 325) argues that the sensational coverage of Indigenous youth in Perth in 1990, already discussed above, is a good example of deviance in news. According to him, the news media are dependent on 'police and courts as a daily

source of visualizable deviance' particularly when it comes to reporting on crime (Mickler 1992, p. 328). Journalists tend to have at least some level of contact with police, and the police, in turn, supply information to the news media via media releases and media conferences (Mickler 1998, p. 28). This dependence was evident in the stories about youth crime that Mickler (1992, p. 328) examined as the most authoritative sources in the stories were senior police officers. Mickler (1992, p. 334) argues that West Australian news discourses about youth crime became racialised at that time because of the 'almost symbiotic relationship between the news media and the police' and because the police were 'under intense scrutiny ... by three high-level government and judicial inquiries that were focusing on their treatment of Aboriginal people'. Again, as with Meadows' case study discussed above, Mickler's study shows that tendencies to highlight deviance in media content and representations of Indigenous people as a problem are connected.

3.3 The role of everyday media practices in the construction of content

As already outlined, previous research on mainstream media representations of Indigenous affairs suggests that these representations have thus far been problematic in one way or another. Meadows (2001b, p. 202) argues that the central reason for this misrepresentation of Indigenous people is journalistic practices. Meadows and Ewart (2001) have identified some key areas of journalistic practices which constrain the coverage of Indigenous affairs. These key areas are the (imagined) readership, sources used in stories, news policies of media organisations, and daily routines (Meadows and Ewart 2001, pp. 117–121), which together with media laws, industry regulation, available resources, plus certain shared professional values adhered to by journalists, determine the practices in use in news and current affairs production.

In fact, the central role of journalistic newsgathering and production practices in the construction of representations of Indigenous Australians has been discussed in many research projects conducted over the past few decades. It is commonly acknowledged that various media practices influence the construction of these representations, regardless of whether they are positive or negative (Ewart 1997, 2002; Forde 1999; Meadows 2005, pp. 36–37; Meadows and Ewart 2001; Mickler 1992, 1998). Several frameworks for critical discourse analysis support this view, stressing that discursive practices of media workers and other social actors have an impact on discourses that emerge from the media (see for example Carvalho 2010; Fairclough 1995; Richardson 2007).

The following sections discuss the way everyday workplace practices influence media content with a focus on the key areas of these practices identified by Meadows and Ewart (2001).

However, it is useful to bear in mind that not all media work in the same way and that everyday practices vary between news outlets.

3.3.1 Imagined audience

According to Meadows and Ewart (2001, p.118), journalists often claim that they are reflecting society as they are writing for the reader. However, the authors argue that readership and society are, in fact, imagined (Meadows and Ewart 2001, p. 118). Indeed, in her classic study on how reality is constructed in newsrooms, Tuchman (1978, p. 25) also suggests that media organisations form assumptions about their audiences. She lists three assumptions: that readers are interested in occurrences at specific locations, that they are interested in the activities of specific organisations, and that they wish to know about specific topics (Tuchman 1978, p. 25). Assumptions made of the audiences and their tastes influence which stories are covered and from what angle. Meadows and Ewart (2001, p. 118) suggest that the ideas of the audience come from both journalists' immediate supervisors or colleagues and their sources, and that due to this imagining of audience media workers end up reflecting the world of the limited group from which they draw their concepts of readership. Further, as discussed above, Hartley (1992) argues that Indigenous Australians have been excluded from the 'we' community in the construction of which mainstream media play a significant role. Hence it seems unlikely that Indigenous people and their interests are included in the ideas media organisations form about their audiences and those audiences' tastes. The introduction of new technologies and the online platform have exacerbated audience fragmentation (Webster 2010, p. 608), hence it may be more complicated than before for media organisations and workers to form ideas of their audiences. However, there is reason to believe media organisations do keep on reforming ideas of their audiences (Fulton 2012), thus the imagining of audiences as described by Meadows and Ewart (2001) is considered here as one of the key areas of journalistic practices that influence media content concerning Indigenous Australians and affairs.

3.3.2 Sources

Another example of everyday media practices that may lead to problematic representations of Indigenous Australians is the use of sources. Media content, particularly news stories, tend to rely on government and corporate 'expert' sources which provide journalists with a steady flow of 'raw material' (Allan 1999, p. 58). The use of such official sources allows, as Shoemaker and Reese (1996, pp. 108–109) explain, media outlets to 'deliver, within time and space limitations, the most acceptable product to the consumer in the most efficient manner'. This is particularly true of today's news media climate of 'non-stop news cycle' in which

journalists have 'less time to investigate' which 'encourages a reliance on official sources ... that can provide information quickly' (North 2009, pp. 506–507). It is also perceived that the relative authority of these expert sources helps to enhance the credibility of the media reports (Allan 1999, p. 58), hence these sources are preferred by news workers over 'ordinary' people.

Sometimes, however, sources with the most authority may not be the most appropriate ones: in his study on representation of Indigenous peoples in Western Australia, Mickler (1992, pp. 326, 328) found that the use of senior police officers based at police headquarters as sources in stories about gang terror, instead of suburban police in whose area the alleged terror occurred, resulted in groundless reporting.

Other reasons for some sources being more commonly used than others are the daily routines, such as information gathering practices and deadlines, of a newsroom together with the imagining of audiences and organisational policies regarding newsworthiness. As Shoemaker and Reese (1996, p. 109) note, in their everyday work media professionals have to consider questions such as what stories are available, which ones would appeal to an audience, and which satisfy the needs of the organisation. I discuss the factors of daily routines and organisational policies and how they influence sourcing in more detail below.

3.3.3 News policies of media organisations

Organisational policies regarding newsworthiness also influence news media representations of Indigenous Australians and affairs. News values – which change over time and may differ from one newsroom to another – help media workers determine which events are newsworthy (Allan 1999, p. 63). A well-known set of 12 news values comes from Galtung and Ruge (1973) who first developed these values from their analysis of international media war coverage in 1965. These values are: 1. frequency (the better an event conforms to the deadlines of a news outlet, the more likely it is to be recorded as news); 2. threshold (the scale or intensity of the news); 3. unambiguity (whether the event can be easily described); 4. meaningfulness (cultural proximity); 5. consonance (events people expect to happen); 6. unexpectedness (the more unexpected or rare an event is, the more likely it is to become news); 7. continuity (follow-up stories); 8. composition (a balance of stories across one newspaper or electronic media program); 9. reference to élite nations; 10. reference to élite people; 11. personification (stories about people or events that happen to/influence people); and 12. negativity (the more negative the consequences of an event are, the more likely it is to become a news item) (Galtung and Ruge 1973; Richardson 2007, pp. 91–92).

However, Brighton and Foy (2007, p. 29) suggest that this set of news values no longer applies in today's media landscape. According to them, there is '[n]o room for the corruption that comes from a publisher's or broadcaster's reliance on advertising revenue' which 'could be compromised by an adverse piece of editorial work' in Galtung and Ruge's set of values (Brighton and Foy 2007, pp. 7–8). Further, Brighton and Foy (2007, pp. 14–15, 24–25) note that due to real-time reporting, changed nature of deadlines and 'rolling news', the news values of frequency and continuity have become entirely different matters in today's media climate. In other words, because of the 24-hour news cycle, an event no longer has time to 'unfold itself' the way it had at the time when Galtung and Ruge developed their news values, and journalists need to constantly seek new angles for their stories about events with rolling nature (Brighton and Foy 2007, pp. 14–15, 24–25). They offer a list of seven news values which draw partly on those of Galtung and Ruge. Their news values are: 1. relevance (the significance of a news item to the audience); 2. topicality (new, current and immediately relevant stories); 3. composition (how a news item fits with the other ones that surround it); 4. expectation (consumers' expectations regarding what stories are told); 5. unusualness (something that sets a news item apart from other events which are not reported); 6. worth (the justification for an item to appear in the news); and 7. external influences (whether a news item is influenced by pressure from outside, such as proprietor, an advertiser or politician) (Brighton and Foy 2007, pp. 25–29).

Interestingly, Brighton and Foy (2007, p. 28) believe that even though the media landscape has changed since Galtung and Ruge's study on news values, the 'élite theory' – that is, mainstream media's concentration on 'higher-profile' stories – still prevails. According to them, the higher the profile of the person, place or event, the more likely it is to be of interest to the audience (Brighton and Foy 2007, p. 28). As noted above, news values are likely to change over time and to vary between different media organisations, but what is significant about them, according to Meadows and Ewart (2001, p. 119), is that generally speaking news workers are 'continuously socialised by their colleagues and editorial management into knowing what issues they should and should not cover'. Further, an individual journalist may not have much say in what is covered as it is editorial managers who often make these decisions (Meadows and Ewart 2001, p. 120). In other words, individual journalists interested in Indigenous affairs may not find an avenue for stories on the topic in their everyday job.

3.3.4 Daily routines

One of the most important elements influencing news media representations of Indigenous people and affairs, as observed by Meadows and Ewart (2001, p.120), is the daily routines in use in newsrooms. These daily routines include newsgathering practices, the deadline, the routine nature of news, and factors of style and presentation (Meadows and Ewart 2001, p. 120). Firstly, when it comes to information gathering, the telephone plays an important role in the everyday work of journalists, however, Indigenous organisations, often community-based by nature, may not have official offices with telephones (Meadows and Ewart 2001, p. 120). There is the same concern with the internet: while there are relatively few internet sites for Indigenous organisations, journalists can easily access government and business views online (Meadows and Ewart 2001, p. 121). There is also a lack of telephones and computers with internet access in remote Indigenous communities (Rennie 2011) which can make it difficult to contact residents in these communities. Further, many official social actors within society, particularly political ones, have become more dependent upon the media and have adapted to the way the media work (Strömbäck and Van Aelst 2013, p. 354). This phenomenon, known as ‘mediatisation’, is also likely to accelerate the use of official sources. Hence information about Indigenous affairs is often obtained from non-Indigenous people and this, in turn, may lead to culturally inappropriate news and current affairs stories (Meadows and Ewart 2001, p. 120).

Secondly, the practice of the deadline, together with information gathering practices, may lead to problematic representations of Indigenous peoples and affairs: according to Meadows and Ewart (2001, pp. 120–121), journalists have argued that because of tight deadlines and because it is difficult to contact many Indigenous people by phone the Indigenous perspective is often left out from stories. Thirdly, the routine nature of newsgathering also influences whether or not and how Indigenous affairs are covered (Meadows and Ewart 2001, p. 121) – much of the raw material of news comes from official sources via press conferences, media releases and other such routine channels (Shoemaker and Reese 1996, pp. 128–129), hence the daily news agenda may often be relatively predefined. As a consequence, it may be difficult for events that are not part of the predefined agenda to make it to the news.

The last aspect of daily routines discussed by Meadows and Ewart (2001, pp. 120–121) is style and presentation. Both journalists and their regular sources are aware of the house rules of media organisations and work accordingly (Meadows and Ewart 2001, p. 121). For example, media workers quickly learn what phrases or facts not to include in their stories if

they face 'editorial blue-pencilling' or if parts of their stories are cut by their managers (Shoemaker and Reese 1996, p. 171). Further, those who are regularly approached by the news media are aware of the house rules and work to them, whereas those who are not regular sources may be unaware of these rules and may therefore not be contacted again for information (Meadows and Ewart 2001, p. 121).

3.3.5 Intertwined practices and media discourse analysis

This brief review into everyday routines of the news and current affairs media shows that different practices are intertwined and together influence media content and representations emerging from this content. For instance, the imagining of audience as well as news policies of media organisations and the 'raw material' available each day, influence which events are covered and which are not. The practice of information gathering together with news values, deadlines and the imagining of audiences influence who become sources, and decisions regarding sources in turn play a significant role in whose voice and viewpoints are mediated to the public sphere via media texts. It seems the daily routines of news media coupled with the media savvy discursive practices of social actors perceived as 'official' or 'expert' by media workers form a 'vicious cycle' of two-way dependence which is hard to break into for less official potential sources, such as representatives of Indigenous communities.

The remark that media practices play a key role in the often problematic representations of Indigenous people and affairs in Australia is linked to the concept of the media as not simply reflecting the social world but actually constructing knowledge of it. This concept is put forward in numerous frameworks for media discourse analysis (and will be discussed more fully in Chapter 4). Many previous studies on media coverage of Indigenous affairs also stress the importance of the media's role in shaping public opinion, and suggest that the media have power to reproduce or challenge prevailing ideology (for example Brough 1999; Budarick and King 2008; Hartley and McKee 1996; Meadows 2000, 2001a, 2001b). Whether the issue under investigation has been the media representation of race relations and native title (Meadows 2000, 2001a) or that of Indigenous health (Brough 1999), the common factor is that the media are understood to shape people's understanding of these issues. Given that media practices and the relationship between these practices and media texts are of interest to this study, I have chosen critical discourse analysis as the main methodology because it provides an effective means for analysing the construction of meaning and power relations within society. Critical discourse analysis and the way it is applied in this research project are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4. However, before moving onto methodology I discuss calls for changes in reporting to better consider Indigenous perspectives.

3.3.6 Calls for changes in mainstream media practices

There have been many calls and suggestions for changing the practices of mainstream news media to make representations of Indigenous Australians and affairs more accurate (Hartley and McKee 1996; Meadows 2001b, 2005; Meadows and Ewart 2001; Sheridan Burns and McKee 1999). Meadows and Ewart (2001, p. 127), for instance, argue that addressing the issue of sourcing alone would be a huge step towards enabling a more accurate representation of Indigenous affairs. Further, Sheridan Burns and McKee (1999) have listed a set of practical suggestions for mainstream journalists to make coverage of Indigenous affairs more accurate. These suggestions cover different stages of the construction of media texts from selection of stories to presenting them (Sheridan Burns and McKee 1999). In addition, mainstream news media organisations and regulatory bodies have created their own ethical codes regarding reporting on Indigenous peoples and other minorities (see for example Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2011; Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance 2011; Special Broadcasting Service 1991). Yet studies show that the practices of the mainstream news media in the context of reporting on Indigenous affairs have changed only little, despite the push for change by research, reports, and media forums.

For instance, Burrows' (2004, p. 185) comparative study on mainstream and Indigenous newspapers' coverage of the Corroboree 2000 ceremony found that Indigenous voices were present in two-thirds of mainstream stories. However, while this study suggests that mainstream news media's usage of Indigenous sources had improved compared to some earlier studies, it also notes that these media continued to concentrate on official sources which provided a limited view of the events (Burrows 2004, p. 186). Similarly, a more recent study by McCallum, Waller and Meadows (2012) found that although mainstream media do present viewpoints of a selected group of Indigenous leaders, the issue of limited selection of voices prevails. In addition, the mainstream media studied by Burrows (2004, p. 186) failed to provide contextual information of the events and continued to focus on conflict rather than on providing understanding on what reconciliation means to ordinary citizens. Further, Budarick and King's (2008, pp. 364–365) study of the coverage of the Redfern riots in one Indigenous newspaper and in two mainstream newspapers, already discussed above, found that even though the motive of one of the mainstream papers to frame the riots as a 'race' issue was partly 'a desire to bridge a perceived cultural divide in the educational and social standards' between Indigenous community and 'white majority', racial elements were framed in a way that positioned racial tension as the cause of the riots. Moreover, it was the Indigenous community that was 'racialised' whereas white majority remained 'un-racialised' (Budarick and King 2008, p. 365). In comparison, the Indigenous paper examined in their

study rarely used the constructions of racial identity to explain the riots but placed racial identifiers within a social injustice frame and utilised racial identity as a marker for criticism of poor policy, not as an explanatory label for deviance (Budarick and King 2008, pp. 363–364). These studies show that even though some practices of Australian mainstream news media have improved, more changes need to take place in order for media texts to better consider Indigenous perspectives. However, the quest for change in the practices of mainstream media has been ongoing for at least two decades, and yet not much has changed.

Nearly two decades ago, Ewart (1997, p. 115) argued that much more work should be done in examining journalists' self-described practices in relation to the coverage of Indigenous affairs. Most of the previous research on media representation of Indigenous peoples and affairs discussed above has, however, concentrated on textual analysis. For example, Meadows (1996, 2000, 2001a, 2001b) has repeatedly argued that Indigenous Australians have been excluded from the practices of the mainstream media or have been represented inaccurately but has come to this conclusion by examining texts rather than by talking to media practitioners. Apart from one recent research project on Indigenous policy making in Australia (McCallum et al. 2012), which included interviews with journalists and non-media social actors, most contemporary studies on representations of Indigenous peoples and affairs in mainstream media have focused on media texts rather than on media workers' descriptions of their workplace practices and conditions that influenced the texts that appeared in the media (for example Burrows 2004; King 2009; McKee and Birnie 2008, pp. 104–105).

Ewart (1997, 2002) talked to news media practitioners about their practices in the context of media coverage of Indigenous affairs. She looked at the way journalists of one regional newspaper perceived their practices in representing Indigenous Australians, interviewed twelve staff members of the paper and found that there were discrepancies between journalists' ideologies and practices (Ewart 1997, p. 111). As part of a public journalism project, Ewart (2002) also conducted a comparative study on stories published in Queensland's leading newspaper, *The Courier-Mail*, and journalists' self-described practices related to these stories. Ewart's study, however, concentrated on investigating a special project of public journalism, whereas the current research project looks at 'regular' coverage of an Indigenous issue in a wider selection of news and current affairs media over a three-year period, and everyday media practices related to this coverage.

This thesis maps the relatively little studied workplace practices of mainstream news media as described by media workers themselves in the context of the Northern Territory

Intervention. The study undertakes to understand how and why particular discourses are included in media texts while others are excluded. However, it is important to remember that a media text is not simply an outcome of an individual media practitioner's ideals and practices but an outcome of a complex web of factors, both internal and external to the media. As section 12.6.7 of the national report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody explains, representations in the media are a result of institutional, not individual, practices (Johnston 1991a). Hence this thesis does not seek to assign blame but to canvas insights on reporting on a complex issue.

3.4 Alternative representations

As discussed above, Indigenous Australians' interests are often ignored and voices seldom heard in mainstream media stories (Meadows 2001b, p. 163). According to scholars concerned with research on Indigenous affairs in the media (Avison and Meadows 2000, p. 349; Meadows 2001b, p. 199; Meadows and Molnar 2002, p. 10), this together with Indigenous peoples' continuing negative perception of mainstream media has led to the emergence of various forms of Indigenous media and to the development of alternative public spheres. The Indigenous public sphere is a space in which non-mainstream discursive styles and non-traditional perspectives can be used – it is a space which accommodates communicative styles important to Indigenous peoples, such as storytelling, art, music, and even silence (Avison and Meadows 2000, p. 353). Bourke (1998c, p. 12–13) notes that this kind of Indigenous media activity projects fresh and unique Australian images which are close to the contemporary Indigenous realities. Considering all that has been discussed above, perhaps it is no wonder, as Meadows (2001b, p. 205) suggests, that due to the mainstream media's narrow perspective, audiences will have to rely on the Indigenous media sector to 'fill the enormous information gaps'.

How well, however, do alternative or niche media – in this case, Indigenous media – reach mainstream audiences? The National Indigenous Television (NITV) service moved from pay television to the free-to-air platform in December 2012 and can therefore potentially reach most Australians. In addition, there are a number of community radio stations and print publications available across Australia. However, to explore this question in detail would be a topic for another research project. For reasons described above, this study concentrates on Australian mainstream news media. One of the questions of interest to this study, however, is whether today's mainstream news and current affairs media, and the mainstream public sphere, can accommodate alternative discursive styles and non-traditional perspectives regarding Indigenous topics.

Media scholar Lisa Waller (2010) suggests mainstream media could utilise Indigenous research methodologies, used in academic research, in the context of reporting on Indigenous topics. According to Waller (2010, p. 24), Indigenous research methodologies 'call for research projects that are designed to reflect Indigenous peoples' values, respect cultures, histories, communities and individuals by serving their purposes and needs first and foremost, and are designed to advance their self-defined struggles for self-determination'. This would lead to improved presence of Indigenous perspectives and representations of Indigenous Australians. While Waller (2010, p. 27) notes that academics are particularly well positioned to use Indigenous research methodologies in the production of journalistic texts, she also argues that this approach can also be applied to mainstream journalism. Waller's approach is revisited in Chapter 8.

There are some examples of positive representations of Indigenous peoples and affairs within the mainstream media (Meadows and Molnar 2002, p. 9), but existing research suggests that they are often tied to 'softer' genres of the mainstream. In their study on the media coverage of Indigenous affairs during NAIDOC week, Hartley and McKee (2000, pp. 249–250, 272), for instance, argue that in stories published in magazines and in stories concerning sport Indigenous people were shown as attractive and as a part of the 'we' community rather than as 'they'. However, as discussed above, research has suggested that in the 'hard' media genres, Indigenous Australians have been portrayed through the lens of deviance (Mickler 1992, p. 325) – that is, as 'them' – and that their views have been neglected or ignored in stories concerning politics and financial issues (Hartley and McKee 2000, pp. 221, 228).

Similarly to Hartley and McKee's findings regarding magazines and sport stories, King's (2009, p. 18) article about the portrayal of Indigenous families in Australian lifestyle media suggests that the representations of Indigenous lives in the 'softer' mainstream media genres have started to move into a positive direction within the last decade. In lifestyle media, Indigenous celebrities are being represented as 'ordinary citizens' in a similar way to their non-Indigenous counterparts and have started possessing 'mundane appeal' (King 2009, p. 30). This 'mundane appeal' enables Indigenous celebrities to communicate previously unacknowledged family histories to non-Indigenous Australians (King 2009, p. 30). Indeed, King (2009, p. 19) argues that a proliferation of these kinds of 'ordinary' family narratives is necessary in order to make reconciliation and the federal government's apology to the Stolen Generations more meaningful. One of the questions of interest to this thesis, thus, is whether mainstream news and current affairs media have started framing Indigenous Australians as 'ordinary' as well, or if they continue to portray them as the 'other'.

Further, research conducted as part of a project on the relations between the media and Indigenous policy-making in Australia, with a focus on years 1988–2008, found that Indigenous policy advocates do actively engage with mainstream media and that some ‘established’ Indigenous leaders have considerable influence in public debate on policy (McCallum, Waller, and Meadows 2012, pp. 104, 106). However, researchers also found that a lack of diversity of Indigenous voices in the mainstream media still exists, resulting in conservative Indigenous spokespeople playing a key role in articulating and defining problems and solutions (McCallum and Waller 2013, p. 140; McCallum, Waller, and Meadows 2012, p. 106).

3.5 Chapter conclusion

As discussed above, some studies conducted within the past decade suggest that some improvement in mainstream media has occurred regarding the representation of Indigenous peoples and affairs (Burrows 2004; King 2009). However, there are still issues related to media practices, such as selection of sources or providing context, that need to be improved (Burrows 2004; McCallum, Waller, and Meadows 2012). In addition, some of the positive changes concern ‘softer’ media rather than news and current affairs (King 2009, p. 18), and it has indeed been noted that problems with mainstream media coverage of Indigenous affairs remain (Meadows 2004, p. 276). Hence my focus in this thesis is to undertake further study of media representations of Indigenous matters in mainstream news and current affairs. While most previous research has tended to focus on textual analysis, the current study integrates media discourse analysis with discourse analysis of industry interviews. Focusing on discursive practices as the ‘mediator’ between media texts and sociocultural practice (Fairclough 1995, pp. 59–60), I am seeking to understand who gets to speak and what can be said about how the Intervention is constructed in media discourse in the context of unequal power relations.

Examining mainstream news media portrayal of Indigenous affairs is also vital because they are often the only source of information about Indigenous issues to non-Indigenous people (Meadows 2001a, p. 23; 2005, pp. 38–39). Budarick and King (2008, p. 368) note that niche media, such as Indigenous media, make contributions to public debate and social change and should not be underestimated. I acknowledge the importance of Indigenous media in public debate but will look at the workings of Australian mainstream news media because they reach the mainstream audience and the alternative media do not.

Thus it is judged important to examine the kind of representations the mainstream news media coverage of the Northern Territory Intervention provides to audiences because this

coverage will likely shape Australians' understanding of these events and of the country's Indigenous population. If mainstream news and current affairs media portray Indigenous people in a problematic way in the context of the Northern Territory Intervention, given these media are likely the only source of information about Indigenous affairs for most non-Indigenous Australians, the chances for social change decline. However, if there are traces of discourses that challenge rather than reproduce sociopolitical dominance, the media may facilitate the entrance of Indigenous perspectives into the dominant public sphere and hence accelerate social change.

Chapter 4: Mixing methodologies

4.1 Introduction

The norms and conventions applied by the media are shaped by wider society, as discussed in the previous chapter, but the media also have power to shape issue agendas and public discourse, thus they have a remarkable role in sociocultural change (Fairclough 1995, p. 51; Richardson 2007, p. 13; Shoemaker and Reese 1996, pp. 7, 59). This power of the media to influence issue agendas and public discourse is primarily discursive – that is, text and talk about social issues function as a source of beliefs about these issues for people in society (van Dijk 2000, pp. 36, 48). These remarks are the key claim of this thesis and the reason why critical discourse analysis (CDA) has been chosen as the main methodological framework of this study. The key concept of the framework of critical discourse analysis is, of course, discourse, which will be discussed in more detail below in section 4.4.1. However, it is helpful to give a brief definition of the concept of discourse at this early stage of the chapter: it is a type of social practice which both constitutes and is constituted by social phenomena (Carvalho 2010, p. 11).

According to renowned media discourse analyst, Norman Fairclough (1995, p. 52), media texts are a sensitive barometer of sociocultural change as adjustments in society manifest themselves in the heterogeneous and shifting practices of the media. The current research project is concerned with news media texts about the Australian federal government's Indigenous policy known as the Northern Territory Intervention which have been published or broadcast in the country's mainstream news media and what these texts suggest about power relations and sociocultural change in today's Australian society. To be precise, this project will concentrate on identifying and examining *discourses* about the Northern Territory Intervention that emerge from the news media. The study is also interested in the role discursive practices of the media, and of other social actors, play in the construction of these discourses. By adopting a critical approach, the current project differs from empiricist or positivist research that claims to take an objective stance outside the research setting. As discourse analysts Margaret Wetherell and Jonathan Potter (1992, p. 66) explain, academic research is also a form of constructed discourse.

It is important to explore these issues because, as discussed in Chapter 3, prior studies on representations of Indigenous affairs in the media have found that these representations are often problematic and neglect Indigenous voices. Further, existing research has found that everyday media practices play a significant role in the often problematic representations of Indigenous Australians and their affairs that appear in the mainstream media (see Chapter 3).

These issues will be explored using critical discourse analysis as a tool. According to Garrett and Bell (1998, p. 6), a key concern of critical discourse analysis is to discover and bear witness to unequal relations of power that underlie ways of thinking in a society. It critiques social power in revealing the role of discourse in reproducing or challenging sociopolitical dominance (Garrett and Bell 1998, p. 6; Richardson 2007, p. 29). Given the key claim of this thesis – that the media are involved in the construction of social reality, and this construction can be traced in the discursive patterns in use – and Garrett and Bell's (1998, p. 6) remark that critical discourse analysis is 'a natural tool for those who wish to make their research socially activist', I elected to apply critical discourse analysis because it offers an approach that will help to elucidate power relations underlying media discourse.

As noted earlier, this study concentrates on the news media coverage of the federal government's Intervention in the Northern Territory which was rolled out in June 2007 and is ongoing at the time of writing. More specifically, I look at mainstream news media coverage from the start of the Intervention in June 2007 to the federal election in 2010. The significance of the Intervention for Indigenous policy was discussed in detail in Chapter 2. The federal election in 2010 offers an appropriate end point as Indigenous affairs were scarcely mentioned in the campaigns of the two major parties, the Australian Labor Party and the Liberal Party of Australia, for the election on 21st August 2010. The Intervention policy and this timeframe provide an opportunity to explore news media coverage of a single topic at different times and during two different regimes, the Howard Liberal and the Rudd (later Gillard) Labor governments.

In formulating a framework for critical discourse analysis, Carvalho (2010, p. 12) argues that one of the most fundamental characteristics of discourse is its historical nature, which means that texts build on previous ones, either repeating or challenging prior discourses. Hence the three-year timeframe elected for study, as described above, enables the examination of whether former discourses of the selected social issue are repeated or challenged across time. Because discourse analysis is a particularly time consuming and laborious methodology (Wetherell and Potter 1988, p. 177), it was judged not practicable to examine all the media texts published or broadcast within the three-year timeframe. The chosen approach was thus to undertake quantitative content analysis of the selected news media for the three year time span to gain an overview of news media coverage of the Intervention, and to inform the selection of media texts for critical discourse analysis. Hesmondhalgh (2006, p. 151) remarks that combining content analysis and discourse analysis can be a fruitful way of studying media. One such way of combining the two methodologies is to use discourse analysis first to generate claims which would then be tested using content analysis (Hesmondhalgh 2006,

p. 151). Another approach is to use discourse analysis to complement content analysis since discourse analysis facilitates the exposure of latent meanings whereas content analysis can only focus on manifest meanings (Hesmondhalgh 2006, p. 151). The combination of the two methodologies in this study is closer to the latter of Hesmondhalgh's suggestions. Both methods of analysis are discussed in more detail below.

This study also contains an analysis of interviews with news media professionals. Interviews are included as another set of data to be examined in addition to the data of media texts because, as noted in Chapter 3 regarding existing research on media representations of Indigenous affairs, few studies map media practitioners' perspectives on the everyday practices that influence media content (Ewart 1997, p. 115). Further, it has been argued that the more methods used in studying the complexity of humans and their lives, the better understanding one can gain of how these lives are constructed (Fontana and Frey 2008, p. 152), therefore I suggest that exploring both media texts and interviews with media practitioners will help to elucidate the relationship between discursive practices of different social actors (both media and non-media individuals and institutions) and mainstream news media content which is one of the aims of this study. The interviews, too, are analysed through discourse analytical framework (Wetherell and Potter 1988, 1992).

In this chapter I first describe the data under examination in this research project, then continue with a description of the methodology that is used to analyse these data, along with an explanation of how these different methods are applied in this study.

4.2 The three data-sets

Definitions of media texts have moved away from the traditional view of text as printed words to a broader definition to include speech, music, sound effects, image etc. (Garrett and Bell 1998, p. 3). Representations are produced in the media by these various kinds of texts (Hughes 2007, p. 250). In this thesis the texts to be analysed are newspaper articles, television news, and television current affairs. It is worth emphasising that when I, later, discuss (media) texts it is in the broad context which includes not only writing but speech, sounds, image, etc. The texts to be studied represent different mainstream news media and work processes and values can differ between companies and across platforms. One of the objectives of this study is to find out whether discourses emerging from different news outlets about the Northern Territory Intervention differ and to consider the role of professional practices in any variation of representations.

As stated in the chapter on previous research into media representations of Indigenous affairs, the focus of this study is on Australian mainstream news media. This is because

firstly, previous research has suggested that the mainstream media representations of Indigenous Australians are problematic, with Indigenous perspectives often ignored in the dominant public sphere mediated by the media (see chapter 3), and secondly, because mainstream media reach the widest audience and therefore potentially influence public opinion (Hartley and McKee 1996, p. 7). It is therefore important to continue studying the mainstream news media to investigate how they construct reality on a complex issue such as the Northern Territory Intervention.

The newspaper data includes stories from metropolitan dailies from across all Australian states and territories. The ownership of the press in Australia has become quite concentrated, and all but two – Melbourne and Sydney – of the capital cities have local monopolies for daily newspapers (Tiffen 2006, p. 98). Hence, only one daily newspaper per city is under examination, with the exception of Melbourne and Sydney in which two papers are published. All the papers included in this study are *Northern Territory News* (Darwin), *The Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Sydney Morning Herald* (Sydney), *The Canberra Times* (Canberra), *The Herald Sun* and *The Age* (Melbourne), *The Mercury* (Hobart), *The Advertiser* (Adelaide), *The West Australian* (Perth), and the *Sunday Times* (published in Perth on Sundays only, by a different organisation than the one publishing *The West Australian*). In addition, the national newspaper, *The Australian*, is included in the data. With the exception of *The Age*, *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The West Australian*, all newspapers are published by Rupert Murdoch's News Limited, controlling close to 70 percent of capital city newspaper circulation (Simons 2007, p. 339). *The Age* and *The Sydney Morning Herald* are owned by Fairfax Media, while the owner of *The West Australian* is West Australian Newspapers.

Terry Flew and Ben Goldsmith (2013) suggest that the capital city and national daily newspapers are by far the most influential in setting the news agenda in Australia, making these publications an interesting and important subject of research. Furthermore, as discussed above, the market is controlled by two publishers – predominantly News Limited, followed by Fairfax Media, which together account for more than 90 percent of daily metropolitan circulation (Tiffen 2014). Recent weekday circulation figures are presented in Table 4.1, with the exception of the *Sunday Times* in Perth which is published on Sundays only (Knott 2013).

Newspaper	Publisher	Format*	Circulation
The Advertiser	News Limited	Tabloid	148,430
The Age	Fairfax Media	Broadsheet*	133,981
The Australian	News Limited	Broadsheet	116,854
The Canberra Times	Fairfax Media	Broadsheet	25,228
The Courier-Mail	News Limited	Tabloid	172,816
The Daily Telegraph	News Limited	Tabloid	289,839
The Herald Sun	News Limited	Tabloid	399,638
The Mercury	News Limited	Tabloid	35,821
Northern Territory News	News Limited	Tabloid	17,802**
The Sunday Times (Perth)	News Limited	Tabloid	218,112**
The Sydney Morning Herald	Fairfax Media	Broadsheet	136,623
The West Australian	West Australian Newspapers	Tabloid	172,188

Table 4.1 – Average daily circulation figures from July to September 2013. *) Format within the examined timeframe, that is, from June 2007 to August 2010. *The Age* has since changed its format to a tabloid size. **) This figure is from 2012. Source: *Crikey* (Dyer 2012; Knott 2013).

Circulation figures of newspapers in Australia have dropped dramatically in recent years. Since early 1990s, the papers examined have lost tens of thousands of readers (Tiffen 2014, p. 98). It is important to note that although the circulation of *The Australian* is a lot lower than that of many of the metropolitan tabloid papers, particularly *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Herald Sun*, the national paper has an influential readership. This includes the top of Australian demographic as well as politicians and others involved in policy-making, making *The Australian* politically highly influential (Manne 2011, p. 5; Robin 2014). The implications of the concentrated ownership of Australia's newspapers, as well as their political affiliations, on discourses available in the mediated public sphere are discussed further in section 5.4.2 in Chapter 5.

The television news and current affairs data includes stories broadcast by the two public service broadcasters, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) as well as the commercial networks Seven, Nine and Ten. While the ABC is entirely publicly funded, SBS is a hybrid of public funding and advertising revenue and is often compared to the BBC's Channel 4. The companies behind the commercial TV networks own also other types of media, such as radio, magazines or billboards, however only Seven Media, the owner of channel Seven, has a link to the newspapers above, being part owner of West Australian Newspapers (Simons 2007, pp. 373–374).

The current network channel share is presented in Table 4.2 (Dyer 2014).

Network	Type	Channel share (%)
ABC	Public service broadcaster	15.3
Nine	Commercial network	30.2
SBS	Public service broadcaster*	4.8
Seven	Commercial network	28.5
Ten	Commercial network	21.2
Total		100

Table 4.2 – Network channel share in October 2014. *) Hybrid of public funding and advertising revenue. Source: *Crikey* (Dyer 2014).

These figures show that the commercial networks are much more popular than their publicly funded counterparts. The implications of the market share of free-to-air TV channels on available discourses are also discussed further in section 5.4.2 in Chapter 5.

Carvalho (2010, pp. 20–21) stresses the importance of cross-referencing news outlets because it helps researchers to form a more complete image of reality than the investigation of individual media representation. Further, the cross-referencing of numerous media outlets enables researchers to better assess the role of journalists in the reality constructed through media texts and the way journalists reconstruct the discursive strategies of other social actors (Carvalho 2010, pp. 20–21). Therefore a relatively large number of media outlets is included in this study.

In addition to the analysis of media texts published or broadcast in the chosen news media, as noted earlier, I chose to interview media professionals who participate in creating media texts about Indigenous affairs. Media discourse is a site of complex and often contradictory processes, including ideological processes (Fairclough 1995, p. 47), and I believe that interviews can help to reveal some processes that the exploration of media texts alone cannot show. Indeed, Carvalho (2010, p. 17) remarks that journalists hold a significant power of discursive construction of social issues as they are in the position to either yield or deny other social actors framing power of these issues. Therefore talking to media professionals about their everyday practices would be an important contribution to the knowledge about the different factors that influence the birth of a contemporary media text. Further, according to Potter (1996, p. 289), the best set of evidence in a qualitative research project contains both primary and secondary evidence as this helps one to build a stronger case. He gives an investigation of a media organisation as an example and suggests that it would be best to examine both the memos and reports written by members in that organisation, and observe their behaviour (Potter 1996, p. 289). In the case of the current research project, the ‘reports written by members’ of the different media organisations are the media texts published and

broadcast about the Northern Territory Intervention. Further, instead of observing the members I interviewed them and consider the interviews as discourses of the production of the media texts about the Northern Territory Intervention.

For the interview data, twelve journalists identified as suitable interview subjects either through their stories about the Intervention or by other participants were interviewed in the course of this project. The recruitment of participants was challenging – 32 journalists around Australia were approached by a letter and a follow-up email between March 2012 and April 2013, and twelve agreed to be interviewed (Appendix 1). These interviews were conducted in tandem with textual analysis of news stories. Eleven of the media workers approached did not respond at all, seven declined or did not respond after initial contact, and two of them I could not reach as correspondence bounced back. The most common reason journalists gave for not participating was that they were not the right person to talk to or did not have authority to talk about the topic due to not having produced many stories about the Intervention.

Six of the participants were female, six male; eight were print journalists while four worked in TV. Two participants were Indigenous people who at the time of the interviews were working in Indigenous media, as was one of the non-Indigenous participants. The majority of the participants held senior positions in their respective news outlets and had prior experience in covering Indigenous issues due to either an interest in these issues or their position in a state or territory with a relatively large Indigenous population. Some, however, ended up reporting on the Intervention as a result of the demand for more journalists to cover the policy in certain newsrooms during the beginning of the policy.

Most participants did not request anonymity. However, those who did seek confidentiality are de-identified in any excerpts used from their interview – their name and other possible factors of identification, such as the name of their employer or the city/state in which they work, are removed.

I have not included radio in this research. According to Langton (1993, p. 9), visual and oral expressions have traditionally been of great value for Indigenous communities, and this has led to Indigenous Australians producing a remarkable amount of visual art, film, video, music and performing arts. Given that radio is a medium of oral output, one could argue that of all mainstream media it might be the place where Indigenous voices are heard. This would, in turn, make radio an interesting subject for study – one could compare whether there are more Indigenous voices present on the radio waves than in the columns of newspapers, for instance. However, past radio programs are difficult and expensive to access as they are not

readily available in any free database so examining them in this study would have been challenging. Given the time and financial constraints of postgraduate research, it was not practicable to include radio in this study.

Nor have I have included feature length fictional or documentary film in this project. Firstly, there are no feature films specifically about the Northern Territory Intervention; hence it would be difficult to determine which films to include in the data. Secondly, films are not news or current affairs but represent quite a different genre from the other media included in the data. As a result, it would be difficult to combine analysis of film with analysis of news and current affairs. Finally, given my own background is in journalism I would have had to start learning from square one about film analysis. This would have been problematic in light of the time constraints of postgraduate studies as outlined above. A few documentaries (for example *Our Generation* and *The Intervention: Katherine, NT*) have been made about the Intervention, and analysis of them might have provided some interesting and perhaps alternative discourses about the Intervention, but for reasons outlined above they were excluded from the scope of the current project.

Finally, there are a few interesting ‘independent’ – not owned or published by a mainstream media organisation – online journalism and current affairs outlets available in Australia, such as *Crikey*, *The Conversation*, *New Matilda* and *Inside Story*, which are likely to provide a channel for discourses different from those available via mainstream news media. However, these outlets are currently not part of the mainstream news media landscape which is what this research project is concerned with, and are therefore left outside the scope of this study.

4.3 Content analysis of newspaper and television stories

As discussed above, the media texts produced about the Northern Territory Intervention are analysed using both quantitative content analysis and qualitative critical discourse analysis, of which content analysis is the first step. According to Riffe, Lacy and Fico (2005, p. 22), content analysis has been used in mass communication as well as in other fields to describe content and to test theory-derived hypotheses. They also note that not all individual research projects aim to build theory and that even apparently simple descriptive studies of content may be valuable (Riffe, Lacy, and Fico 2005, pp. 13–14). The purpose of content analysis in this thesis is a descriptive one – in other words, it is used to create an overall picture of the news media coverage of the Northern Territory Intervention within the given three-year timeframe. It works as an overview of the coverage of the chosen social issue which I then investigate in more detail by conducting discourse analysis of a smaller sample of texts as well as of the interview data. Moreover, conducting content analysis will help to overcome one

weakness associated with critical discourse analysis which, according to Carvalho (2010, p. 13), is the short time span often characteristic to critical discourse analysis. Carvalho (2010, p. 13) argues that while most studies of media discourse are like snapshots of public issues, concentrating on a few days only, most of these issues have in fact a long 'life' which is tied to representations in the media. Thus the aim of the content analysis conducted in this study is to shed light on the 'evolution' (Carvalho 2010, p. 13) of the government policy known as the Northern Territory Intervention. The content analysis also helps to determine 'critical discourse moments' (Carvalho 2010, p. 15) within the three-year timeframe which are then explored in more detail using the framework of media discourse analysis. These discourse moments will be discussed in more detail below.

Relevant newspaper articles and television news and current affairs stories on the Northern Territory Intervention were accessed via three databases, *ANZ Newsstand* (*ProQuest*) and *Factiva* databases to obtain print media stories and *TVNews* (*Informit*) database to retrieve electronic media texts.⁴ Two sets of search terms were used: the keyword combination for print story searches was *intervention AND indigenous*, and the keyword used to retrieve audiovisual texts was *indigenous*. The reason for not using the keyword combination which includes the word 'intervention' in the *TVNews* database is because test searches suggested that the combination of two keywords would leave out stories about the Intervention broadcast on the commercial networks.

4.3.1 Variables to be coded

The content analysis was undertaken across two phases. The purpose of the first phase was to provide information about the extent of the mainstream news media coverage of the Northern Territory Intervention – that is, how many stories each media outlet under investigation had produced of the Intervention and the size of these stories throughout the three-year timeframe. This was done by recording so called 'key variables' (Macnamara 2006, p. 10) for each story produced within the given timeframe. The aim of the second phase, which is a 'multivariate analysis' (Macnamara 2006, p. 10), is to provide information about the overall theme of the stories logged as part of the first phase. These phases act as groundwork for critical discourse analysis by helping to determine the critical discourse moments subject to the analysis of discourse. I will next discuss these two phases of content analysis in more detail before moving onto critical discourse analysis.

⁴ Newspaper articles were accessed predominantly via the *ANZ Newsstand* database. *The Canberra Times* and *The West Australian* were not available in this database at the time of data collection, hence *Factiva* was used to access stories published in these newspapers.

The method of sampling in the first phase of content analysis is that of census – in other words, the sample includes all units in the population (Macnamara 2006, p. 13; Riffe, Lacy, and Fico 2005, p. 98). Hence all media texts about the Northern Territory Intervention published or broadcast in the chosen news media within the three-year timeframe are examined in the first phase of content analysis. Riffe, Lacy and Fico (2005, pp. 98, 121) argue that a census provides the most valid discussion of the media content under examination in a study because it includes all units and suggest that census be used if the number of recording units is small. Test searches indicated that the number of media texts to be studied in this research project is rather large – hundreds – yet the variables coded in the first phase of the content analysis are simple, as is shown below. Hence some variables were recorded of all texts. This is important in order to learn the extent of the coverage of the Intervention within the three-year timeframe.

According to Macnamara (2006, p. 10), a content analysis coding system should include coding of particular key variables. Typical key variables in media studies are media weighting (the level of influence and importance of a medium studied), prominence (the page number of a story or its order in a news bulletin), positioning (who or what the story mentions and in which part of the story), size or length of the story, and sources quoted (Macnamara 2006, p. 10). The first phase of content analysis in this study recorded some key variables of all the stories published or broadcast about the Intervention in the given news media within the three-year timeframe. The key variables coded in the first phase of content analysis were prominence (the page number of a story published in print media or the order of a story in an electronic news bulletin if available), and the word count or duration of a story. In addition, the date of publication, the headline of the text, and the author of the text were coded, when this information was available in the databases. The key variable of positioning was not coded in this content analysis as issues regarding who or what a story mentions and how these actors or issues are positioned in relation to each other are discussed as a part of discourse analysis. Media weighting is not measured in this study. In a sense, this has already been done as a part of the process of including particular media outlets in the study and excluding others – those which reach a broad audience either nationwide or within a state/territory were selected.

One of the issues this research project is particularly interested in is whether Indigenous voices are present in the news media coverage of the Northern Territory Intervention, given that previous studies have shown an absence of Indigenous voices in mainstream media stories (see chapter 3). However, the key variable of sources quoted is not discussed as a part of the content analysis because one needs to read through whole texts in order to code the

sources. This would have been a time consuming task, and since the number of stories analysed in the first phase of the content analysis is rather large, the issue of sources was not taken into account in the content analysis. Sources are explored as a part of the qualitative examination of discourse. Critical discourse analysis is interested in who gets mentioned in a media text and how these actors are represented, as well as which objects a text constructs (Carvalho 2010, pp. 16–17), hence in this study it is meaningful to examine the sources as a part of the discourse analysis. However, before moving onto describing analysis of discourse, I discuss the second phase of content analysis in more detail.

In addition to the coding of key variables, Macnamara (2006, p. 10) suggests that content analysis should ‘involve examination of multiple variables’. What he means by this is that a content analyst should not conduct a ‘simplistic rating of a single variable such as positive, negative or neutral’ but aim for multivariate analysis instead (Macnamara 2006, p. 10). In this study, these multiple variables are different categories into which stories about the Intervention published or broadcast in the chosen news media fell according to whether they were mostly about the Intervention or about other topics. The categories are described in detail in Chapter 5.

It is useful to note here that this study does not aim to be representative or generalisable in a sense that content analyses often do. The aims of this study are qualitative – that is, I intend to discuss the role of discursive practices in the construction of discourses that emerge from the mainstream news media coverage of the Northern Territory Intervention. The focus of this research project is on key events, identified from the three-year period of news media coverage of the Northern Territory Intervention. The identification of these key events is partially based on clusters of texts emerging from the census discussed above. Other means of identification are discussed in Chapters 6 and 7 that concern discourse analysis of these events.

4.3.2 Transparency of content analysis

One issue worth raising prior to the presentation and discussion of content analytical findings (in Chapter 5) is that it is impossible to conduct a truly objective – or intersubjective – content analysis (cf. Macnamara 2006, p. 9) as the variables from media texts are coded by a human rather than a computer. Human coding necessarily involves interpretation which raises the question of subjectivity colouring the findings. Indeed, Weber (1990, p. 41) notes that the advantages of computer-aided content analysis over human coders are that the rules for coding are made explicit and that the computer provides perfect coder reliability in the application of these coding rules to text. However, computers are unable to categorise

beyond the programmed rules or to identify the range of meanings of a word or to consider the context of content (Macnamara 2006, p. 8; Riffe, Lacy, and Fico 2005, p. 216), hence human coding is used in this study. The issue of subjectivity influencing the findings is dealt with by transparently describing the process of conducting content analysis in Chapter 5.

4.3.3 Material excluded from content analysis

My test runs of the searches in the database for newspaper articles, *ANZ Newsstand*, returned not only newspaper material but also material which is not included in the scope of this study, such as wire feeds produced by the Australian Associated Press, media releases, and transcripts of stories broadcast via electronic media. Given that this study concentrates on the media coverage of the Intervention by the particular news media outlined above and that electronic media are accessed via a different database (providing the whole audiovisual text) this 'extra' material available in the *ANZ Newsstand* database was omitted from the content analysis. However, media releases were sometimes explored in the context of media discourse analysis as a form of discursive strategies of social actors external to media, in order to examine how media professionals have reconstructed other social actors' discourse while producing the stories (cf. Carvalho 2010, p. 19). Further, some of the newspaper articles appeared in the database more than once because the same story had been published in different editions of a particular newspaper. These duplicates were left outside the data as well.

4.4 Media discourse analysis

Deriving from linguistics, semiotics, social psychology, cultural studies and post-structural social theory, discourse analysis takes different forms – such as conversation analysis and different types of textual analysis – depending on settings and textual sources (Muncie 2006b), and many scholars have contributed to the development of discourse analysis (Carvalho 2010; Fairclough 1992, 1995, 1998; Richardson 2007; van Dijk 1991, 2000; Wetherell and Potter 1988, 1992). A selection of different views on discourse analysis will be embedded in the discussion in this section about the methodology, but the emphasis will be on frameworks for critical discourse analysis of media. What distinguishes discourse analysis from other textual analyses of media, according to Richardson (2007, p. 39), is that it takes the discursive practices of media discourse into consideration. Discourse analysis, in turn, becomes *critical* when both what is present and what could have been there but is absent in a text is examined (Richardson 2007, p. 38). Questions of interest to discourse analysts are, for instance: 1. Why are some things said and others not? 2. How are things said and what influence might this have on social relations? 3. Is a text helping to continue inequalities and

other such social practices or challenging them (Carvalho 2010, p. 15; Richardson 2007, p. 42)?

The version of media discourse analysis to be applied in this thesis is mainly based on the work of Fairclough (see for example 1992, 1995, 1998), who has developed critical discourse analysis specifically in the context of media, as well as Carvalho's (2010) recently published framework for critical discourse analysis, also designed for media studies. Fairclough provides a comprehensive guide to the issues critical discourse analysis is concerned with while Carvalho's framework offers a clear systematic approach to what contemporary critical discourse analysis should concentrate on. Fairclough (1992, p. 37) observes that Michel Foucault has had a notable influence upon the popularisation of the concept of 'discourse' and the formation of discourse analysis. Foucault's work will thus also be discussed to some extent, even though it is not media related in the same sense as these other scholars' work.

4.4.1 Discourse

Early in this chapter I referred to discourse as a type of social practice which both constitutes and is constituted by social phenomena (Carvalho 2010, p. 11). Indeed, the important aspect of critical discourse analysis is that discourse is not a neutral transmitter or a purely individual activity but a form of social practice in itself (Fairclough 1992, p. 63; 1995, p. 54; Macdonell 1986, p. 1; Wetherell and Potter 1988, p. 168). However, defining the exact nature of discourse as a type of social practice is not an easy task as the concept seems to have multiple meanings.

To Foucault (1972, p. 117), discourse is a group of statements which belong to the same discursive formation. Further, discourses are limited practical domains which have their boundaries, their rules of formation and their conditions of existence (Foucault 1972, p. 117; 1991, p. 61). They are constituted by the difference between what one could say correctly at one period and what is actually said (Foucault 1991, p. 63). According to Macdonell (1986, p.1), discourses differ depending on the institutions and social practices in which they take shape or on the positions of those who speak and those whom they address.

Fairclough (1992, p. 62) notes that his definition of discourse is narrower than that of social scientists generally. He uses discourse to refer to spoken or written language use but extends the definition to include also other meaning producing activity, such as visual images and non-verbal communication (Fairclough 1995, p. 54). In a similar way, van Dijk (2000, p. 34) suggests that many forms of social issues, such as racism, are discursive which means that they are 'expressed, enacted and confirmed by text and talk'. This text and talk could be anything from an everyday conversation to parliamentary debates and laws, from textbooks

and scholarly articles to mass media content and films (van Dijk 2000, p. 34). The definition of discourse in this thesis follows Fairclough and van Dijk's definitions, as well as that of Carvalho's outlined above: discourse is primarily text, talk and other meaning producing activity that can shape but is also shaped by social phenomena.

However, in my definition of the concept I wish to take the multiple meanings of discourse into account. Sometimes the way Fairclough (1995) talks about 'media discourse' suggests, in my opinion, that the concept of discourse has multiple senses: in addition to being meaning producing activity such as text or talk, it also occurs on a broader level. In other words, discourse can also mean a bigger whole, a social domain which includes particular rules for and practices of meaning producing activity. Fairclough (1998, p. 145) calls the configuration of such rules and practices an 'order of discourse' which will be discussed in more detail below in the following sections. As a result of these reflections on the multiple senses of discourse, in this study the concept will occur on the following levels:

1. As a way of representing someone or something in a text or other form of communication by using written, spoken or audiovisual language. One text may include many different discourses of this kind.
2. As a network of social practices which includes – and is formed by – a combination of different elements and which shapes texts but can also be shaped by them. These networks can be called journalism discourse, current affairs discourse, etc. or, in an even broader level, media discourse.

Discourse in its first meaning described above is used to present my findings. A text may include several discourses of this kind which all represent someone or something differently, and one of the objectives of this study is to explore discourses that emerge from media coverage about the Northern Territory Intervention and examine whether discourses in different media differ from each other and whether they vary at different times within the three-year timeframe. Further, another aim of this study is to find out whether the discourses about the Intervention that emerge from the Australian mainstream news media 'help to continue inequalities and other undesirable social practices or help to break them down' which, as Richardson (2007, p. 42) explains, is a typical question for critical discourse analysis.

The second sense of discourse described above approaches Foucault's (1972, pp. 38, 74) definitions of discursive formation (on the one hand a system of dispersion between a number of statements, and on the other hand a regularity between objects, types of statement, concepts or thematic choices) and system of formation (a complex group of

relations that function as a rule which determines what must be related). This sense of the concept is basically a social domain of a particular type of media and the order of discourse associated with it. These concepts are discussed in more detail below.

4.4.2 Approaches to discourse analysis

It has already been suggested that Foucault has had a significant influence on the formation of discourse analysis (Fairclough 1992, p. 37). According to Foucault himself (1991, p. 69), the purpose of his work has been to try to ‘define how, to what extent, at what level discourses, particularly scientific discourses, can be objects of a political practice, and in what system of dependence they can exist in relation to it’. He is not concerned about knowing what makes discourse legitimate or intelligible, or allows it to serve in communication, thus when it comes to analysing discourse he is not analysing the system of its language or its formal rules of construction (Foucault 1991, p. 59). Instead, he is interested in the set of rules which at a given period and for a given society define, for example, the limits and forms of the *sayable* (what is it possible to speak of and what type of discursivity is assigned to a particular domain) and the limits and forms of *appropriation* (who can have access to a particular kind of discourse) (Foucault 1991, pp. 59–60; original emphasis). To Fairclough (1992, pp. 37, 57), however, Foucault’s approach is ‘abstract’ because of the absence of a concept of practice – real instances of people doing or saying or writing things – including the absence of text and textual analysis. Fairclough (1992, pp. 37, 61) advocates a textually oriented approach to discourse analysis in studies of social and cultural change as he believes that the concentration of textually oriented discourse analysis on concrete instances of practice is likely to strengthen social analysis. The current study examines texts (both media stories and interviews with media practitioners) as a form of construction of social reality, in line with Fairclough’s approach, but keeps Foucault’s remarks in mind as well. In other words, the analysis in this study aims to show the scope of social discussion in the context of the Intervention and to identify who has had access to these particular kinds of discourses within the dominant public sphere mediated by the mainstream media, an issue discussed further in relation to the public sphere in Chapter 3.

Fairclough’s concept of critical discourse analysis is three-dimensional: any instance of discourse is seen as being simultaneously a piece of text, an instance of discursive practice and an instance of social practice, hence critical discourse analysis is a combination of analysis of texts, analysis of discourse practices, and analysis of social and cultural practices (Fairclough 1992, p. 4; 1998, p. 144). The first dimension of critical discourse analysis, analysis of text, is concerned with both meaning and form, and, rather than being a sentence-by-sentence analysis, takes both absences and presences into account (Fairclough 1995, pp.

57–58; Richardson 2007, p. 58). The second dimension, analysis of discourse practice, involves various aspects of the processes of text production and consumption (Fairclough 1995, p. 58–60; 1998, p. 144). Finally, sociocultural practices frame discourse practices and texts, and analysis of this dimension can be analysis of the more immediate situational context of the instance of discourse or analysis of the wider society and culture (Fairclough 1995, p. 62; 1998, p. 144). On this level critical discourse analysis is analysis of ideology: Carvalho (2010, p. 19) explains that ideology is ‘an overarching aspect of the text’ which is ‘embedded in the selection and representation of objects and actors, and in the language and discursive strategies in a text’. To summarise the three-dimensional analysis of discourse, one should not concentrate only on examining what is said in a particular piece of text but also consider the discursive practices and ideology that have influenced the production and interpretation of the text and explore how these factors show in it.

According to Fairclough (1995, pp. 59–60; 1998, p. 144), the key feature of this three-dimensional critical discourse analysis is that the link between texts and society or culture is seen as mediated by discourse practices. He notes that the analysis of discourse practice is a complex of different sorts of analyses but suggests a focus on intertextuality (Fairclough 1998, pp. 144–145). This means a focus on ‘how in the production and interpretation ... of a text people draw upon other texts and text types which are culturally available to them’ (Fairclough 1998, p. 145). Richardson (2007, p. 100) also stresses the importance of intertextuality in critical discourse analysis. Similarly to Fairclough’s thoughts above, he suggests that texts cannot be viewed or studied in isolation because they are not produced or consumed in isolation but exist in relation to other texts (Richardson 2007, p. 100). In Carvalho’s (2010, p. 21) framework of critical discourse analysis, intertextuality can be explored by looking at the links between media texts and texts produced by social actors other than media practitioners. These texts produced by other social actors can be speeches, media releases, reports, websites and other such forms of communication (Carvalho 2010, p. 19). In case such primary documents are not available, Carvalho (2010, p. 19) argues that the discourse of these social actors can be ‘read’ from the media texts.

Indeed, Carvalho (2010, p. 14) calls for ‘renewed attention to be paid to the role of actors’ discursive strategies in media discourse’. In a sense, this is the emphasis Fairclough advocates as well, given that the key feature of his framework of critical discourse analysis is that it is specifically discourse practices that function as a mediating link between texts and society, as discussed above. In this study, discourse practice and discursive strategies are understood to be different terms describing the same thing. According to Carvalho (2010, p. 18), discursive strategies are forms of social actors’ ‘discursive intervention’ in reality ‘in order to achieve a

certain effect or goal'. The concept of social actors includes media practitioners (Carvalho 2010, p. 18). The most significant discursive strategies in Carvalho's (2010, pp. 18–19) framework for critical discourse analysis are: framing; positioning; legitimisation; and politicisation. Framing means the organisation of discourse according to a certain point of view, positioning is the construction of social agents into a certain relationship with each other, legitimisation shows as the justification of a certain action or power, and politicisation is the attribution of a political nature or status to a certain reality (Carvalho 2010, pp. 18–19). The critical discourse analysis in this thesis concentrates mainly on exploring how these discursive strategies show in news media coverage of the Northern Territory Intervention. Analysis of media texts also draws on the industry interviews which are considered as another set of discourses about media coverage of the Intervention.

4.4.3 The order of discourse

For Fairclough (1998, p. 145), an 'order of discourse' is a structured configuration of elements, such as genres, discourses, voices and styles, associated with a given social domain. One could say that the discursive strategies of social actors are rooted in their respective orders of discourse – the element of discourse has been discussed above. In this study, voices are understood to be the sources quoted in the stories either directly or indirectly, and styles, in turn, are language and image related choices made in a text. When it comes to genre in the context of critical discourse analysis, Fairclough (1992, p. 126) defines it as a relatively stable set of conventions which is associated with, and partly enacts, a socially ratified type of activity. As examples of genre he offers informal chat, buying goods in a shop, a job interview, a television documentary, a poem, and a scientific article (Fairclough 1992, p. 126). He also defines genre as use of language associated with and constituting part of some social practice, such as interviewing people or advertising commodities, and reminds that a particular text is not necessarily 'in' one genre but is likely to involve a mix of genres (Fairclough 1995, p. 56; 2003, pp. 34, 66). In this study, genre is understood to be a particular way of doing through spoken, written or audiovisual language, such as an interview, a conversation, etc.

The social domains – and hence the orders of discourse – under examination in the current research project are print journalism, TV journalism, TV current affairs, and qualitative research interview, which all include and are formed by a combination of elements characteristic to them. Some elements may be characteristic to more than one order of discourse. In fact, it is worth noting that the orders of discourse related to media texts and explored in this thesis are similar to each other if compared, for example, with the order of discourse of film, therefore they are likely to include many similar elements. For instance,

both newspaper and television news reports utilise interview as a means to gather information and to make the story a coherent whole.

In his study on media discourse, Fairclough (1995, p. 63) positions the media between public orders of discourse and private orders of discourse. As a part of the media, the social domains of journalism and current affairs, along with the orders of discourse associated with them, are also positioned between public and private. The media's order of discourse has been shaped by the tension between its contradictory public sources and private targets, and it is constantly being reshaped through redefining its relationship to the public and private orders of discourse (Fairclough 1995, p. 63). Moreover, the order of discourse of the media is not only shaped by socially adjacent orders of discourse but may also shape them (Fairclough 1995, p. 64).

Both external relations between orders of discourse and internal relations between different elements within an order of discourse include *choice* relations and *chain* relations (Fairclough 1995, p. 64; original emphasis). These choice and chain relations can be seen as similar to paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations in semiotics (see for example Fiske and Hartley 2003). Fiske and Hartley (2003, p. 34) describe a paradigm as a 'vertical' set of units from which the required one is selected, and a syntagm as the 'horizontal' chain into which the chosen unit is linked with other units to make a meaningful whole.

In semiotics, a paradigm is defined by a certain similarity between its units, but within the paradigm the units are clearly distinguished from each other (Fiske and Hartley 2003, p. 34). When it comes to the choice relations within an order of discourse, the issue, according to Fairclough (1995, p. 64), is to describe the paradigms of alternative discursive practices available within the order of discourse and the conditions governing selection amongst them. Discursive practices are functionally differentiated (Fairclough 1995, p. 64). This means that the different orders of discourse in this study – print journalism, TV journalism and TV current affairs – each have an internal selection of paradigms of discursive practices and elements from which the media workers can choose when they produce texts. So each order of discourse includes discursive practices and elements characteristic to it.⁵ However, the discursive practices within a particular order of discourse are distinguished from each other in a sense that the selection of a unit media workers make influences the text they produce. The external choice relations between orders of discourse are concerned with how an order of discourse chooses within the potential available in adjacent orders of discourse

⁵ Although as noted above, the orders of discourse examined in this study are similar with each other compared to other orders of discourse, such as film, hence it is possible that their discursive practices and elements are quite similar.

(Fairclough 1995, p. 64). This means that the discursive strategies of social actors external to media as well as the strategies of other types of media outlets may be used by a medium belonging to a particular order of discourse.

In semiotics, the units selected from the various paradigms are combined into a meaningful whole called a syntagm, and this is done according to agreed rules and conventions (Fiske and Hartley 2003, pp. 34, 36). Syntagms are easily thought of as a chain; however, syntagms of visual signs can exist simultaneously in space (Fiske and Hartley 2003, p. 36). In this research, these meaningful wholes are the media texts under examination. In Fairclough's (1995, p. 65) version of critical discourse analysis, a media text can be regarded as a chain of texts. In other words, a journalistic story that appears to be an autonomous text is, in fact, a chain of texts; as Fairclough (1995, p. 65) explains, communicative events move along internal and external chains, and earlier texts in the chain are embedded in later ones. The internal chain relations refer to the process of text production within a media institution (Fairclough 1995, p. 65). The external chain relations, in turn, are concerned with both the source texts that lie outside the media – such as conversations, debates or reports – and communicative events for which media texts may themselves be sources (Fairclough 1995, p. 65). Important questions in the context of choice and chain relations, according to Fairclough (1995, p. 65), are: how unitary, or variable, and how stable, or changeable, are media discursive practices? These remarks about choice and chain relations bring me back to intertextuality and discursive strategies.

I have already referred to the importance of intertextual analysis above. Fairclough (1995, p. 65) remarks that intertextual analysis is concerned with both choice and chain relations. One purpose of the intertextual analysis is to unravel mixtures of different elements which are in a choice relationship in the order of discourse, and another part of the analysis is concerned with the transformations which texts undergo in shifting along chains and how these transformations leave traces in embedding relations within texts (Fairclough 1995, p. 65). This is what the analysis in this study aims to do as well; one of the objectives of this study is to explore the choice and chain relations of the media texts produced about the Intervention and consider these relations' role in the formation of discourses about the policy approach that emerge from the selected news media. The focus will be on the discursive strategies of both media practitioners and social actors external to media, as these strategies influence the choices of elements made in the course of construction of stories and the chains of communicative events – both inside and outside a media outlet – that stories go through while being constructed. This kind of analysis helps to determine whether news media

coverage about the Intervention helps to challenge the power relations reproduced in discourse (cf. Richardson 2007, p. 42).

The emphasis on discursive strategies is in line with the suggestion that everyday practices of the media play a key role in the problematic mainstream media representations of Indigenous peoples and affairs, outlined in Chapter 3 (see Meadows 2001b, p. 202; Meadows and Ewart 2001). In addition, as noted earlier, there is a recognised need for more research to be done about how media practitioners themselves describe the everyday practices that influence the construction of media texts about Indigenous affairs (Ewart 1997, p. 115). Therefore this study explores media practitioners' thoughts on the media coverage of the Northern Territory Intervention, concentrating on everyday discursive practices.

During semi-structured interviews, the participants were asked about the discursive practices of both media workers and social actors external to media. These interviews were treated as a form of discourse and analysed for any discursive patterns emerging from them regarding media coverage of the Northern Territory Intervention or Indigenous affairs in a more general context (for analysis of interviews see Wetherell and Potter 1988, 1992). This will help to elucidate the relationship between discursive practices of news outlets/other social actors and the final product, media text. The analysis of interviews is discussed further in section 4.4.4.

As discussed above, critical discourse analysis is a time intensive way to analyse texts, thus it is not possible to analyse the entire data-sets of newspaper and television stories, identified via content analysis, from the viewpoint of discourse. A smaller sample for critical discourse analysis is selected from the stories logged as part of the content analysis. Carvalho (2010, p. 15) suggests that, from a large amount of data, the number of texts to be subjected to discourse analysis can be defined by looking at 'critical discourse moments'. These are periods that involve specific happenings which may be defined by factors such as political activity, scientific findings or other socially relevant events (Carvalho 2010, p. 15). These kinds of happenings have the potential to challenge the 'established' discursive positions (Carvalho 2010, p. 15).

4.4.4 Framework for discourse analysis in this study

The issues critical discourse analysis is concerned with have been discussed above. Fairclough (1992, p. 225) reminds that there is no set procedure for doing critical discourse analysis, hence the way it is conducted depends on the project at hand. However, as discussed above, the analysis of discourse should concentrate on three dimensions: texts, discourse practices and social practices. Fairclough (1992, p. 231) remarks that these three

levels of analysis inevitably overlap in practice. In this study critical discourse analysis is used to find answers to the following questions: What discourses emerge from news media coverage of the Northern Territory Intervention? Of all possible discourses why are these the ones that emerge? It has been argued above that the key feature of critical discourse analysis is the role that discursive practices play in the formation of discourses. Another important question is therefore: What are the respective roles of media practitioners and other social actors in the construction of these discourses? Thus the focus of the analysis in this thesis is the investigation of the discursive strategies of media practitioners and other social actors. As previously related this analysis is achieved by both exploring media content and talking to media practitioners – both data-sets are seen as discursive accounts concerned with the same topic.

This mixed method was chosen because previous studies on mainstream media representations of Indigenous Australians and affairs have suggested that the everyday practices of the media play a key role in that representation (Meadows 2001b; Meadows and Ewart 2001). Further, the importance of both media practitioners' discursive practices alongside those of other social actors in the construction of media texts has been noted in different frameworks of critical discourse analysis as well, as pointed out earlier in this chapter.

I have referred above to Carvalho's (2010, pp. 18–19) description of four discursive strategies of social actors: framing, positioning, legitimisation and politicisation. Discourses emerging from media stories on the Intervention are revealed through analysis of these strategies. This study aims to unravel: 1) what facts, opinions and value judgements are selected and how these elements are organised (framing); 2) the relationships into which social actors are constructed with each other (positioning); 3) if a certain power or action is justified or sanctioned and on the basis of which reasons (legitimation); and 4) if a certain reality is attributed with a political nature or status (politicisation) (cf. Carvalho 2010, pp. 18–19). I will attempt to distinguish the discursive practices of media practitioners from those of other social actors by examining media releases, reports and other such forms of communication, if they are available (cf. Carvalho 2010, p. 19). This can also be done by 'reading' the discursive strategies of social actors from quotes and indirect speech in the media texts, which is a process in which a so-called comparative-synchronic analysis (cross-referencing of media outlets) is of help (Carvalho 2010, pp. 19–21). As discussed above, a number of news media outlets are included in this study. Importantly, this exploration of alternative constructions of the same reality is also a helpful strategy in identifying the ideological standpoints of different social actors (Carvalho 2010, pp. 19–20).

The discursive strategies referred to above are examined by identifying and naming actors constructed in the texts, analysing claims made by either sources or reporters and the justification of these claims, and analysing the use of active and passive form and word or image choices generally. Exploring the actors mentioned in a text is particularly important as, according to Carvalho (2010, p. 17), they have perceived influence in shaping the overall meaning of the text. This study is particularly interested in which people or institutions are constructed as agents, who have the capacity of doing things, and who as objects without such capacity (cf. Carvalho 2010, pp. 16–17).

When it comes to the audiovisual media texts, image choices are explored as a part of the examination of vocabulary, style and grammar. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) provide a useful ‘grammar’ for analysis of images. Their ideas of image size, perspective and angle are consulted in the analysis of the TV stories (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, pp. 114–153). In addition, analysis of agents and objects constructed in stories also draws on MacDougall’s (1995, pp. 227–228) three different ways perspective can be *assigned* in audiovisual texts: ‘testimony’; ‘implication’; and ‘exposition’ (original emphasis). Testimony means the ‘first-person perspective’ which is typically the ‘mode of interior monologue, confession, and interview’. Implication ‘involves the viewer in the process of lived experience’, creating ‘identification by allying the viewer to the perspectives of specific social actors’. This mode, as MacDougall (1995, p. 227) explains, is typical of much fictional narrative, and is therefore not expected to feature greatly in the data sampled here. Finally, exposition is the mode of ‘third-person narration, by a third person displaying and explaining the behaviour of other third persons’ (MacDougall 1995, p. 228). In the current research project, exposition is thought useful in identifying presences through a reporter’s voice.

Analysis of the interviews with journalists concentrated on exploring participants’ accounts regarding media practice as well as other social actors’ discursive practices in the context of the Intervention. The semi-structured interview schedule was constructed around Carvalho’s remarks of the four discursive strategies as well as around the key areas of journalistic practices which Meadows and Ewart (2001) found to constrain the coverage of Indigenous affairs (Chapter 3). These key areas are: (imagined) readership; sources used in stories; news policies of media organisations; and daily routines (Meadows and Ewart 2001, pp. 117–121) which, I argue, are largely consistent with Carvalho’s discursive strategies. The participants were also provided with an opportunity to raise any aspects they wished to talk about regarding media coverage of the Intervention. All interviews were conducted on the telephone, were digitally audio recorded and followed for the most part the same interview schedule of clusters of mostly open-ended questions concerned with journalistic practices

under investigation. The audio recordings were then transcribed by a professional transcriber, and the analysis was predominantly based on the transcripts. However, the original audio recordings were consulted in case a section in a transcript was unclear.

The approach taken towards the interview data is inductive and discourse analytical; detailed themes from the transcripts were logged on small cards, and these cards were updated or new ones set up as the interviewing project proceeded. The location of passages relevant to the theme as found in a transcript was also marked down on the cards, and the data was later copied into an electronic database. This coding phase is loosely based on Wetherell and Potter's (1992, pp. 100–101) summation of coding for a discourse analysis of interview data. Describing their research project, which mapped white New Zealanders' discourse on the Maori population, they note that

As our understanding of a particular theme developed we would find it necessary to go back to the original materials and search through them again for instances that we could only now see as relevant. Often themes would merge together ... others would disappear as we started to see them as incoherent or as more usefully represented as subparts of others (Wetherell and Potter 1992, p. 101).

The current study analyses detailed themes present in the interview data in a similar fashion, attempting to reveal any discursive patterns emerging from them. Wetherell and Potter (1988, pp. 172–173; 1992, p. 90) call these patterns, or discourses, 'interpretative repertoires' which they describe as building blocks used by speakers to construct versions of actions, self and social structures in talk. Such discourses are available as resources to be used in a number of ways that can be in contrast within, for instance, one interview (Wetherell and Potter 1992, p. 93). This is because discourse is oriented to different functions and is therefore 'highly variable': people's accounts vary according to what they are doing (Wetherell and Potter 1988, p. 171). It is, however, useful to note that such variability is not necessarily a result of a deliberate or intentional process but can take place due to people saying what 'seems right' for the situation (Wetherell and Potter 1988, p. 171).

As is the case with media texts, the 'metaphor of construction' is 'an important one in discourse analysis' of interview data as well, according to Wetherell and Potter (1992, p. 94). They suggest that texts and talk have the ability to 'make a particular reality appear solid, factual and stable' by drawing on a number of devices and techniques (Wetherell and Potter 1992, p. 95). Accepting this viewpoint, I attempt to analyse the discursive patterns constructed by the participants regarding both media practice and practices of social actors other than media workers as well as discuss the influence of these patterns on media

discourse on the Northern Territory Intervention – and perhaps Indigenous stories more generally.

4.5 Limitations of study

As discussed in section 4.3, newspaper stories were retrieved by using a keyword combination of *intervention AND indigenous*. Further, as I also explain in section 5.2.1 in Chapter 5, inclusion of newspaper stories in the sample was undertaken by looking at the headline, lead and first two paragraphs of the story because of the usual organisation of a news story in which the headline and the lead are used to express the ‘crux of the news event’ (Teo 2000). I acknowledge that some stories do not conform to the traditional inverted pyramid structure of news, such as feature stories which may follow a more narrative-like structure. As a result, in retrospect, the decision to concentrate only on particular (opening) sections of a text may have excluded some interesting stories that reference the Intervention later in the body of the text from the newspaper data-set analysed in the current research project. In retrospect, it would have been interesting to include various keyword combinations in the scope of this study, and to look at the whole text rather than the headline, lead and first two paragraphs in the course of sampling for content analysis. This also constrained the number of texts in the final sample of the content analysis and the size of corpus in each discourse moment. However, because of time and resource limitations of postgraduate research, sampling had to be limited.

For the same reason, newspaper and television stories were analysed as they were retrieved from the given databases – that is, no original newspapers or microfiche copies, or full TV news bulletins or current affairs programs were viewed. This means I was unable to analyse the dimension of the daily supply of news items in a media outlet and the place of a story about the Intervention in it. However, discourse analysis of the critical discourse moments, discussed in Chapters 6 and 7, does discuss the social context within which stories are constructed by examining discursive practices of not only journalists but also non-media social actors at the time of the discourse moment.

When it comes to the discourse moments analysed, stories aired on SBS’s Indigenous affairs program, *Living Black*, were not included in the samples as the program did not broadcast on the days on which coverage peaked – that is, days that were examined. This is an unfortunate artefact of attempting to use a consistent sampling methodology.

In addition, radio had to be excluded from the current research project due to issues of access and the funding constraints of postgraduate study. For reasons outlined in section 4.2, analysis of radio programs could have provided interesting material for comparison with

print and TV platforms. However, accessing past radio programs would have been expensive since they are not readily available in any free database.

Lastly, I had hoped to interview more journalists about their perspective on the media coverage of the Intervention. However, the number of interviews settled to twelve due to reluctance of journalists to participate, as discussed in section 4.2. Yet I argue that the number of interviews is sufficient for the current research project, given its qualitative, rather than quantitative, approach.

As also discussed in section 4.2, three participants were working in Indigenous media at the time of the interviews, two of them Indigenous journalists. Since this study is interested in who has access to discourses constructing knowledge about Indigenous policy, it would have been desirable to include more Indigenous perspectives in the data-set of interviews. It is useful to note here that Indigenous journalists are still largely under-represented in Australian journalism, making up only 1.8 percent of 605 journalists interviewed in a recent study (Hanusch 2013, p. 36). Out of the 32 journalists approached in the current research project, six (or 18.8 percent) were Indigenous, and two agreed to participate. This is perhaps due to the often busy life of journalists, but also the fact that research is seen, by Indigenous peoples, as a key means for colonisers to racialise Indigenous peoples and construct society (Rigney 1999, p. 113). The remark proposes the need for another research project that would stem from the insights of Indigenous journalists and the issues they see as pressing. This is discussed further in Chapter 8. One of the objectives of the current research project is, after all, to analyse mainstream journalists' discourses about coverage of Indigenous affairs, particularly the Intervention, in order to understand the role journalistic practices as well as practices of other social actors play in the construction of mainstream news discourse on the issue.

4.6 Chapter conclusion

This thesis explores discourses that emerge from the Australian mainstream news media about the federal government's Intervention in the Northern Territory from the start of the policy approach in June 2007 to the federal election in August 2010. In addition, I examine how discursive practices of both media workers and other social actors influence media texts and discourses emerging from them. The key claim of this study is that the discourse practices within the orders of discourse of different media are in a dialectical relationship with social practices (Fairclough 1995, pp. 63–64; Richardson 2007, p. 45). This means that on the one hand discourses that emerge from the media may be shaped by ideology prevalent in society, but on the other hand these discourses can also influence the dominant ideology

in society and either help to maintain status quo or accelerate sociocultural change. Therefore it is important to explore what discourses emerge about the Intervention in the media as well as various social actors' discursive strategies that influence these discourses and to discuss what these discourses and discursive strategies suggest about the state of sociocultural change in the Australian society.

This is done using discourse analysis that draws on critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a tool. The model of CDA is useful in approaching questions regarding the two-way relationship between media and society as well as the role media content plays in the construction of reality and in sociocultural change (Richardson 2007, p. 221). Frameworks for CDA take not only texts but also social and discursive practices into consideration and enable one to explore both what is present in a text and what could have been there but is absent (Richardson 2007, pp. 38, 221). Since these issues are of interest to this study, CDA was chosen as the most effective means of analysing the social construction of meaning.

The current project combines discourse analysis with a content analysis of a larger sample of media texts in order to map several years of news media coverage of the Northern Territory Intervention. Content analysis provides a means for examining a wide range of data over an extensive period (Macnamara 2006, p. 7), and was therefore selected as the most efficient way of achieving an overview of the media coverage of the Intervention. The content analysis was undertaken prior to conducting the discourse analysis as it was used to inform the selection of key discourse moments.

Further, the examination of media content is combined with the analysis of interviews with media practitioners. The interviews bring another set of evidence to the study, and the combination of two different sets of data helps to build a stronger case (cf. Potter 1996, p. 289). The purpose of the analysis of the interviews is not to present truth claims but to outline news workers' discourses about the same topic as the media texts under examination and to help understand the relationship between discursive practices of various social actors and discourses present in the public arena of mainstream media.

The current project aims to contribute to the existing knowledge about the way the discursive strategies of both mainstream news media practitioners and other social actors influence media coverage of Indigenous affairs, focusing on the Northern Territory Intervention. I also discuss any potential change in the way mainstream news media cover Indigenous topics, with reference to previous research on media representation of Indigenous affairs (cf. Budarick and King 2008; Hartley and McKee 2000; McCallum 2010; Meadows 2001b; Mickler 1992, 1998).

Chapter 5: The Intervention in the news media 2007–2010

5.1 Introduction

As previously discussed, the focus of this study is the relationship between discourses that emerge from media texts produced about the Northern Territory Intervention and the discursive practices of various social actors, such as governments, organisations, ‘ordinary’ citizens and media practitioners. This key focus, which combines both content analysis and discourse analysis, draws particularly on ideas put forward in frameworks for critical discourse analysis. As noted earlier, the role of content analysis in this project is to provide an overall picture of the mainstream news media coverage of the Northern Territory Intervention within the three-year timeframe, from the announcement of the Intervention on 21 June 2007 to the end of August 2010 during which a federal election took place.⁶ This overall picture helps to identify the ‘critical discourse moments’ that emerge from the coverage of the Intervention (Carvalho 2010, p. 15). These moments are then subject to a more detailed discourse analysis.

In this chapter I detail the process of the content analysis and discuss the findings. As noted earlier, newspaper articles as well as television news and current affairs stories were coded in two phases. The processes of sampling and first phase coding of these different platforms – print and audiovisual – are discussed in separate sections here because their analysis differed, due to the different nature of written and audiovisual texts as well as each being archived in different databases. In other words, some variables that could be coded from newspaper articles could not be coded from TV stories and vice versa. *Filemaker Pro* software was used to store data coded from both data-sets. The processes involved in the first phase of content analysis are discussed first, followed by the processes regarding the second phase of coding as well as the findings.

In section 5.4 on research findings I also draw on the interview data as some themes emerging from the interviews proved useful in elucidating content analytical findings.

5.2 Phase one – coding of key variables

The first step of the content analysis of newspaper and TV stories was to define the policy framework and the kind of stories that would feature it. In this process, a transcript of a press conference held by John Howard (2007), who was the Prime Minister at the time the Intervention began, and a media release by Mal Brough (2007), then Minister for Indigenous

⁶ The federal election of 2010 was held on 21 August, but media texts were examined until the end of August 2010 to allow any discussion related to the Intervention that might have taken place in the media in the aftermath of the election.

Affairs, worked as guidelines as I decided which stories were to be included in the sample and which to be excluded. In his media release, issued on the day the Intervention was announced, Brough (2007) argued that the Australian government was ‘responding’ to a ‘national emergency confronting the welfare of Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory’. According to the federal government, the response ‘reflect[ed] the very first recommendation of the Little Children Are Sacred report’ and that the purpose of the measures introduced as a part of the Intervention was to ‘protect children’ (Brough 2007). These measures included: bans on alcohol and pornography in Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory; welfare reforms in the form of compulsory income quarantining; enforcement of Indigenous children’s school attendance by linking parents’ welfare payments to their children going to school; health checks for Indigenous children which at the time of the announcement were to be mandatory; compulsory acquisition of communally owned Indigenous land by the federal government through five year leases; an increase in policing; a clean-up of communities and improvement of housing; scrapping of the permit system in place on Indigenous land; and improvement in the governance of Indigenous communities by government business managers (Brough 2007; Howard 2007).

This is the general framework that guided the inclusion/exclusion process of both newspaper and TV stories. The coding of the key variables outlined in Chapter 4 are discussed next.

5.2.1 Sampling of newspaper stories

Potential stories were accessed via *ANZ Newsstand (ProQuest)* and *Factiva* databases. Stories about the federal government’s policy of the Northern Territory Intervention were searched for via a keyword combination of *intervention AND indigenous*, limiting the results to ‘full text documents only’ and sorting results by ‘most recent first’. In retrospect, it would have been more practicable to sort results by ‘oldest first’, because of the chronological timeframe of the current research project. As discussed in Chapter 2, the official name of the Northern Territory Intervention is the Northern Territory Emergency Response and because initial searches using the official name of the policy framework as a keyword returned considerably fewer stories than the keyword combination of *intervention AND indigenous*, the word ‘intervention’ was chosen as a keyword. However, it is worth noting that because the word ‘intervention’ may also refer to issues other than this particular federal government policy, not all stories including the words ‘intervention’ and ‘indigenous’ were automatically included in this study. Moreover, in the newspaper articles that are retrieved with the search described above, the keywords ‘intervention’ and ‘indigenous’ may have been used anywhere in the article, however a decision was made to concentrate the analysis only on the headline, the lead and the first two paragraphs of the stories which resulted in the exclusion of some

potentially interesting texts from the sample. These issues are discussed in more detail shortly.

Searches were also limited by date. Instead of searching for stories published within the entire three-year timeframe, searches were run on a month-by-month basis: date range was set to 'specific date range' and the appropriate date entered in the fields. The search results in the *ANZ Newsstand* database include material from a variety of sources, such as a number of newspapers, wires by the AAP as well as some radio programs (transcripts only), but further attention was paid only to stories published in selected newspapers as defined in the methodology chapter.

Next, relevant stories published in the selected newspapers were logged. As noted in Chapter 4, the newspapers of interest to this study are the metropolitan daily newspapers published in the capital cities of each state and territory of Australia as well as the national paper, *The Australian*. These papers are distributed across Australia beyond capital city boundaries (Tiffen 2006, pp. 107–108). This study is interested in mainstream news media discourses about the Northern Territory Intervention because mainstream media are 'conceived and designed specifically to reach a large, often nationwide, audience' (Spaaij 2011, p. 128) and can therefore potentially have a great influence on the public opinion on Indigenous affairs. The selected news outlets are part of the mainstream media field in Australia. Material from other sources available in the *ANZ Newsstand* database, such as regional newspapers, AAP wires, transcripts of radio programs, and media releases, falls outside the scope of the current research project, and was not further examined. However, this material was sometimes revisited during the discourse analysis phase. In addition, stories to be examined were limited to those written by staff, including opinion pieces and editorials, and to individually published opinion pieces by non-staff.⁷

Given the usual organisation of a news story in which the headline and the lead are used to express the 'crux of the news event' and to suggest particular ways of reading (Teo 2000), a decision was made to concentrate on the headline and the lead, as well as the first two paragraphs, of a story in the process of defining whether it is included in the sample or excluded. I chose to look not only at the headline and the lead but also the first two

⁷ Stories that were mere lists of news topics or quotes (e.g. *Top 10 stories of the week*, published in the *Sunday Times* in Perth) or compilations of several news stories (e.g. *State of the nation*, published in the *Australian*, which in the *ANZ Newsstand* database appeared as a single story consisting of pieces of news from the different states and territories in Australia) were left outside the sample, as were letters to the editor (which are also often compiled into a single story in the *ANZ Newsstand* database). The reason for excluding compilation stories is practical – often only one of the items compiled into a single story would have included a reference to the Northern Territory Intervention, but the word count in the *ANZ Newsstand* database would have been for the whole story which, if coded as such, would have distorted the data. In addition, reviews of TV or radio programs as well as books were also excluded.

paragraphs because this provided more material on which to base my decision regarding the inclusion or exclusion. Paragraphs were taken into account as they appeared in the *ANZ Newsstand* and *Factiva* databases. As discussed in section 4.5 in Chapter 4, the restrictions applied to sampling may have excluded some stories that referenced the Intervention in the body of the text, as opposed to the first paragraphs. However, due to time constraints associated with the current research project it was necessary to confine the content analysis of the newspaper stories to the first part of the texts as described above.

In view of the definition of the Intervention, as described in the introduction of section 5.2, it was decided that a newspaper story would be included in the sample if its headline, lead or the first two paragraphs referred to any of the following: the federal government's policy of the Northern Territory Intervention; one or more of the measures introduced as a part of the Intervention; the *Little Children Are Sacred* report; or Indigenous child (sexual) abuse.

This is the general rule of inclusion in the content analysis conducted in this thesis. The first two points were included in this rule because one of the aims of this study is to map the extent of the coverage of the policy, and it was thought that a story mentioning the policy itself or its measures would – more or less – be about the Intervention and thus relevant to the study. The two latter points were included because of the way the federal government framed the policy it implemented – as a response to the *Little Children Are Sacred* report and as a means to protect Indigenous children in the Northern Territory from (sexual) abuse. Merlan (2010, p. 122) has argued that while child sexual abuse in Indigenous communities does exist, it is a relatively small part of a larger set of issues framed by entrenched social disadvantage and fragmentation. Further, (sexual) abuse of children is not an issue to do with Indigenous communities alone but with the wider community in Australia. However, as the media release by Brough (2007) and the press conference held by Howard (2007) together with Brough point out, Indigenous child (sexual) abuse was outlined as the main reason for the rollout of the Intervention by the government and is therefore taken into account in accordance with the rule for including stories in the sample.

The other general rule regarding sampling is that stories that emerged from the *ANZ Newsstand* and *Factiva* database searches but did *not* refer to the policy of the Northern Territory Intervention, its measures, the *Little Children Are Sacred* report or Indigenous child (sexual) abuse in the headline, lead or the first two paragraphs were excluded from the sample of the content analysis. There are two kinds of newspaper articles that fall under this category: stories that discuss the Intervention in later paragraphs, and stories that appear in the searches because they do include the words 'intervention' and 'indigenous' but in fact use

‘intervention’ in a context other than the federal government’s policy taking place in the Northern Territory. One example of exclusion is a story titled *Escape plan for student Aborigines* (Karvelas 2007), which discusses a plan to build boarding houses for Indigenous students. The story does refer to child sexual abuse but does not do so in the headline, lead or first two paragraphs. In addition, the word ‘intervention’ is used in the story but again in later paragraphs and in a more general context, rather than in that of the Northern Territory Intervention.

It is important to point out that references to the Northern Territory Intervention as well as to its measures and to the *Little Children Are Sacred* report in the stories that are counted in the sample include a variety of words and phrases. Krippendorff (2004, p. 105) talks about this as ‘categorical distinctions’ which means that units are defined by their membership in a class or category. In other words, ‘any character string that refers to a particular object, event, person, act, country, or idea’ together with others that designate the same object, event, person, etc. form a class that has something in common (Krippendorff 2004, p. 105). Therefore references to the Intervention include not only the word ‘intervention’ but a whole lot of words or phrases used to describe the policy or action related to it.

In the course of content analysis I discovered that the Intervention was described variously as: a ‘national emergency’; ‘Howard’s/Brough’s approach/plan/initiative’; a ‘takeover’; a ‘historic package of indigenous reforms’; a ‘government crusade to stamp out Aboriginal child abuse’; and ‘a cavalcade of army trucks’, to name but a few. Further, the *Little Children Are Sacred* report was referred to as both a ‘landmark report’ and ‘yet another devastating report’. The government’s plan to introduce measures similar to those in place in the prescribed remote communities to Indigenous town camps in the Northern Territory was also referred to somewhat euphemistically as ‘control of town camps’.⁸ These various descriptors and their influence on discourses that emerge from news media coverage of the Northern Territory Intervention are not analysed in more detail at this stage but feature later as a part of discourse analysis. At this point I have drawn attention to them simply in order to shed light on the variety of ways the Intervention is referred to in media texts and to explain what kind of texts were seen as being about the Intervention.

However, the sample does not include every single newspaper article with references in their headline, the lead or the first two paragraphs to the Northern Territory Intervention, its measures, the *Little Children Are Sacred* report or Indigenous child (sexual) abuse. As discussed above, if the word ‘intervention’ was used in a context other than the federal government’s

⁸ The examples given here are not an exhaustive list of ways used to describe the events in the media texts.

policy in the Northern Territory, the story was excluded. In addition, any references to the measures introduced as a part of the Intervention had to clearly designate these measures, for the story to be included in the sample. For example, stories that discussed ‘income management’ or ‘welfare quarantining’ were logged as these phrases clearly refer to the welfare reforms implemented as a part of the Intervention, whereas references such as ‘carrot-and-stick welfare’, ‘welfare gets tough love’ and ‘welfare free rides are over’ were seen as too general, resulting in the exclusion of the story from the sample. Also, if a story discussing measures similar to those of the Intervention in states other than the Northern Territory clearly indicated that these measures, for example alcohol restrictions, had been implemented before the Intervention began, the story was left outside the sample.

Further, for a story discussing Indigenous child abuse to be included in the sample the reference to child abuse had to be clear – ‘suffering of children’ or other similar phrases alone were not seen as references clear enough. For example, in a story published in *The Age* (Skelton 2007) which reports the death of an Indigenous baby due to family violence, the Northern Territory Intervention is mentioned toward the end of the story but it is not referred to in the headline, the lead or the first two paragraphs, and neither is child abuse or neglect. As a result, the story was excluded from the sample.

Sometimes the search results in the *ANZ Newsstand* database included two or more versions of the same story. This happened due to different editions of one issue of a newspaper appearing in the search results. In case of such duplicate stories, the one appearing in the month-by-month search results first (results being sorted by ‘most recent first’) was coded and the following ones logged as duplicates in the *Filemaker Pro* database created for storing data coded from the newspaper texts.

These are the guidelines used in the process of sampling newspaper stories for the content analysis conducted in this research project. The following step after sampling was the coding of a number of key variables which is explained next.

5.2.2 Coding of key variables from newspapers

Once the framework for including stories in the sample subject to content analysis was created, coding began. As discussed in the methodology chapter, a particular set of key variables were to be coded in the first phase of content analysis in this study. Drawing upon Macnamara’s (2006, p. 10) suggestion for key variables, the page number of a story, being an indication of prominence, as well as the size of it were included on the list of key variables to be coded. In addition, the newspaper, the date of publication, the headline, and the author of the story were coded, as these details are important in the process of describing the overall

coverage, or the ‘evolution’ (Carvalho 2010, p. 13), of the Northern Territory Intervention. In other words, studying all these key variables together helps determine if space given to the Intervention changed over time or between different media outlets and if it was particular journalists that reported on the issue throughout the timeframe of interest. Possible changes in the content of the stories over time are examined in the second phase of content analysis as well as in discourse analysis.

In addition, some variables regarding the editions of a newspaper story were coded. These variables were: the edition of the newspaper in which a coded story was published; number of different editions the story was published in; and possible different headlines. The purpose of recording data related to the editions was to keep a track of which story was coded particularly in case several editions appeared in the search results in the *ANZ Newsstand* database.

As a result, the database created to store the coded data was organised into columns as demonstrated in Table 5.1.

Headline	Newspaper	Date	Section	Author	Page no.	Word count	Edition	No. of editions	Different headlines
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Table 5.1 – Variables coded from newspapers in the first phase of content analysis.

The analysis of these key variables listed in Table 5.1 is discussed in section 5.3 which concerns the results of the content analysis conducted in this thesis.

5.2.3 Sampling of television stories

As with the newspapers, the content analysis of television news and current affairs stories began by retrieving stories about the Northern Territory Intervention. Potential stories were accessed via *TVNews (Informit)* database on a month-by-month basis. As discussed above, the purpose of the content analysis in this research project is to create an overall picture of the mainstream news media coverage of the Intervention from the start of the policy approach in June 2007 to the federal election in August 2010. Indeed, newspaper articles were examined from the announcement of the Intervention in June 2007 to the end of August 2010 to include any discussion on the issue after the election, which was held on 21 August. Unfortunately television news and current affairs stories could only be examined from August 2007 onwards, as no material appeared with the keyword *indigenous* in the *TVNews* database prior to this.

There is also another difference concerning the database searches of the newspaper articles and the TV stories: test searches in the *TVNews* database indicated that the keyword combination *intervention AND indigenous*, used to retrieve newspaper articles, returned hardly any stories broadcast on the Australian commercial networks. Therefore it was decided that a single keyword, *indigenous*, would be used in the process of retrieving TV stories about the Intervention, along with a search term that limited search results to one month at a time.⁹ For instance, to retrieve stories broadcast in August 2007, a search term *dob=20070801-20070831* was used, ‘dob’ meaning ‘date of broadcast’. In addition, the results were limited to ‘full text records only’ and the date range was set to the respective year – for example, ‘2008 to 2008’. The results were sorted in the same way as the newspaper articles: by date, with the most recent story appearing first.

Because only a single keyword *indigenous* was used, the month-by month search results included a number of stories that were not about the Intervention. The appropriate stories were identified by examining the title and synopsis of each story available in the search results in the *TVNews* database and by viewing the video if the metadata suggested that the story might be about the Intervention. This process is discussed in more detail in the section about sampling below.

As discussed in Chapter 4, this study is interested in stories about the Intervention that were broadcast on the free-to-air television networks in Australia. These channels are the public service broadcasters, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), as well as the commercial networks, Seven, Nine and Ten. These networks broadcast nationwide. It is also suggested that television is the most widely used mass media form in Australia (Flew and Gilmour 2006, p. 175; Harrington 2014, p. 173) which makes these networks of interest to this study for reasons argued above in the section about sampling of newspaper stories.

As discussed above, the initial step in the process of deciding whether an audiovisual text was to be included in the sample was to examine the title and the synopsis of the story as available in the list of search results in the *TVNews* database. The second step was to view the story if the title or synopsis included references to the Intervention, its measures, the *Little Children Are Sacred* report or Indigenous child (sexual) abuse. However, because the information regarding each story available in the *TVNews* database was not always useful, a story was also viewed if it was of a topic that would *potentially* include references to the

⁹ In the *TVNews* database the date range field cannot be used to limit searches on a month-by-month basis – it is only possible to enter the desired year(s) in the date range field. Therefore such limiting of search results had to be done by entering *dob=[yyyymmdd]-[yyyymmdd]* in one of the search query fields.

Intervention – even if the policy approach was not mentioned in the metadata about the story. Such topics were reconciliation, the formal apology to the Stolen Generations, Indigenous wellbeing, issues regarding Indigenous land, and the federal budget or election, to name but a few. An example of a video that had no reference to the Intervention in the title or synopsis but that was viewed and logged for coding is a story about Galarrwuy Yunupingu, an Indigenous leader, signing a 99-year lease with the federal government over his community's lands in the Northern Territory, broadcast on the ABC in September 2007 (McLaughlin 2007). Even though the metadata had no reference to the Intervention, the story was viewed because it was anticipated that it might mention the Intervention or its measures. Indeed, the story referred to the compulsory five year leases introduced as part of the Intervention which resulted in the story being included in the sample.

The general rule of inclusion regarding TV stories is mostly the same as the one regarding newspaper articles: it was decided that an audiovisual text would be included in the sample if it at any point refers to: the federal government's policy of the Northern Territory Intervention; one or more of the measures introduced as a part of the Intervention; the *Little Children Are Sacred* report; or Indigenous child (sexual) abuse.

The difference to the sampling of the newspaper texts is that no limits were set regarding the part of the story in which these themes were discussed for the story to be included in the sample. In other words, even those TV stories that referred to the Intervention or related issues towards the end were included in the sample, whereas only those newspaper articles that discussed these issues in the headline, the lead or the first two paragraphs were logged. This is because of the narrative form a TV story often takes (cf. Abel 1997, p. 11) – thus setting a limit comparable to the one regarding the newspapers was seen as too arbitrary. Also worth noting is that not only verbal references to the Intervention or related issues but also images were taken into account in the course of sampling the TV stories.

Once the guidelines for including TV stories in the sample were set the coding of them began. The key variables coded from the audiovisual texts are discussed next.

5.2.4 Coding of key variables from television stories

As with the newspaper articles, a particular set of key variables were coded from the television news and current affairs stories. The time of broadcast (timeslot) and the duration of the story were coded as an indication of the prominence and importance of the story within the program on which it was broadcast. Macnamara (2006) emphasises the order in a news bulletin as a good indicator of the audiovisual story's prominence and importance, but unfortunately no information regarding the order of stories in a news bulletin was available in

the *TVNews* database. It could therefore not be coded as a key variable in this study. It is possible, however, to contemplate the prominence and importance of a story by comparing the time it was aired to the whole timeframe of the particular news bulletin or current affairs program within which the story was broadcast. Other key variables that were coded from the TV stories were the network, the program, the date of broadcast, subject ID (the title of the story as shown in the *TVNews* database), and the reporter. Again, the purpose of the coding of these key variables is to detect the ‘evolution’ (Carvalho 2010, p. 13) of the coverage of the Northern Territory Intervention.

As a result, the database created to store the coded data from the audiovisual texts was organised into columns as demonstrated in Table 5.2.

Subject ID	Network	Program	Date	Timeslot	Duration	Reporter
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Table 5.2 – Variables coded from audiovisual stories in the first phase of content analysis.

The analysis of these key variables listed in Table 5.2 is discussed in section 5.4 which presents the findings of the content analysis – both of newspaper articles and of TV stories – conducted in this research project.

5.3 Phase two – multivariate coding of newspaper and TV stories

The purpose of the second phase of content analysis conducted in this study is to shed some light on the content of the stories included in the sample in the course of the first phase of the analysis. In the methodology chapter this was referred to as ‘multivariate analysis’ (cf. Macnamara 2006, p. 10). After the first phase it was evident that in some stories the Northern Territory Intervention was the main topic whereas other stories were mostly concerned with other issues but included a brief reference to the Intervention which resulted in them being counted in the sample. The second phase of the content analysis places media texts on a scale according to whether they were framed around the Northern Territory Intervention or around other issues.

The stories were coded on a scale from one to four depending on whether they were mostly about the Intervention or mostly about other issues. The four categories are: *The Intervention*; *Child Abuse*; *Extension of the Intervention*; and *Other* (Table 5.3). This ranking system was developed to help to deal with stories that included references to the Intervention, and were therefore logged as part of the data, but were not framed around the policy framework, as opposed to stories that were clearly concerned with the Intervention. The first phase of the content analysis directed the identification of the four categories used in this study: in the course of coding the key variables, I was able to familiarise myself with the data and form an

idea of the topics that were often discussed in the texts that included references to the Intervention. These topics were sorted into four relatively broad categories into which media texts logged in the course of the first phase of the content analysis were placed during the second phase of analysis. Consequently, the ranking approach taken in this study is partly inductive, partly deductive: inductive because the categories used to indicate the extent to which a story discusses the Intervention were created as a result of the first phase of the content analysis, and deductive because these categories were defined prior to placing stories under the categories. The four categories are described in Table 5.3.

Category	Description
1 The Intervention	Mostly about the Northern Territory Intervention or its measures, discussed in the context of the Northern Territory.
2 Child Abuse	Mostly about the <i>Little Children Are Sacred</i> report. Mostly about child (sexual) abuse or neglect in Indigenous communities or issues related to child (sexual) abuse in an Indigenous context. Mostly about the continuing neglect by various parties of the issue of child (sexual) abuse in an Indigenous context.
3 Extension of the Intervention	Mostly about the introduction of the Intervention measures to Indigenous communities in other states. Mostly about the introduction of the Intervention measures to the wider Australian community.
4 Other	Mostly about other Indigenous issues. Mostly about an individual. Mostly about politics and non-Indigenous issues.

Table 5.3 – Multivariate categories coded from both newspaper and television stories.

Category one, *The Intervention*, includes stories that are primarily about the federal government's Intervention policy in the Northern Territory. In the context of newspaper texts, these stories focus on discussing the Intervention or any action related to it in the headline, lead or the first two paragraphs. Such 'action' could be anything from action taken by either the federal or the Northern Territory government in the remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory to Intervention legislation or from protests against the Intervention to announcements of support for the policy. Category one TV stories, in turn, either emphasise the Intervention or action related to it throughout the story, or use the policy approach as the main frame in a case where other issues are also discussed.

The second category, *Child Abuse*, includes stories that discuss child (sexual) abuse in remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory – the reason the federal government gave

for the Intervention at the time it was launched. However, as discussed in Chapter 2, the government admitted that child abuse is not an issue of the Northern Territory alone (Howard 2007). Hence stories about child abuse in an Indigenous context in any state or territory in Australia were placed under this category. In addition, the second category includes stories that refer to the *Little Children Are Sacred* report (without otherwise discussing the Intervention) and issues related to child sexual abuse, such as widespread sexually transmitted infections in children or protection of children from abuse – all in a context that is clearly set as Indigenous in the media text. In addition, stories that generally discuss long-standing neglect, by various parties, of the issue of child (sexual) abuse in Indigenous communities, were included in the second category. The category may also include stories that touch on child abuse in Indigenous communities but discuss the issue in the wider community as well.

The third category, *Extension of the Intervention*, includes stories that refer to the expansion of the Northern Territory Intervention to Indigenous communities in other states or to the introduction of measures similar to those implemented as part of the Intervention in Indigenous communities outside the Northern Territory. In addition, stories that discuss the extension of the Intervention measures to a wider Australian community are included in this category. A year into the Intervention, the Rudd federal government released a report in which it argued that the measure of compulsory income management, for instance, was producing some positive results (Department of Families 2008a, p. 14). While the report included some figures based on a ‘situation report provided by the NTER Operations Centre’ (Department of Families 2008a, pp. 32–34), a close reading of the report indicates that much of the evidence is anecdotal. The government, perhaps encouraged by this, suggested progress caused by the Intervention, later decided to introduce similar measures to the wider Australian community. As discussed in Chapter 2, the Rudd government promised to reinstate the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (RDA), suspended in the Northern Territory when the ‘emergency response’ was launched, but chose not to abolish the Intervention. Consequently, extending some of the Intervention measures to the wider community enabled the government to deal with the issue of the RDA. This is why stories that discuss the implementation of such measures in other states or nationwide are also of interest to this study.

Finally, category four, *Other*, includes the stories that do not fit under any of the first three categories. There were three main types of media texts ranked as *Other*. The first type is stories that focus primarily on Indigenous issues other than the Intervention but also mention this particular policy. Such other Indigenous issues were, for instance, reconciliation,

disadvantage, social dysfunction, the ‘Closing the Gap’ policy, human rights, education, and culture and arts. The second type is stories that emphasise an individual. Such an individual could be either a prominent person or a ‘regular’ citizen, as long as he or she was discussed in a way that linked him or her to the Intervention. Finally, some of the stories included in the fourth category emphasised politics generally, concentrating mainly on any political or societal issues other than the Intervention or Indigenous child abuse. Stories placed under the fourth category referred to the Intervention only briefly.

A simple yes-no coding, used, for instance, in framing analysis, was utilised in the process of ranking stories into the four categories. In their study on the extent of common news frames in stories about European politics, Semetko and Valkenburg (2000, p. 98) developed a series of questions to which the coder had to answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’. The purpose of such simple yes-no coding was to measure the occurrence of frames in the news (Semetko and Valkenburg 2000, pp. 98–99). Likewise, a list of questions was developed in this research project to assist the coding of stories into the four categories described above. Answering yes or no to the questions developed for each category was intended to imply whether a story belonged in that category or not. These questions are presented in Table 5.4 below.

Category	Questions
1 The Intervention	Does the story emphasise the Intervention policy or action taken due to it? Does the story refer to Intervention measures in the context of the Northern Territory? Does the story refer to changes regarding the Intervention?
2 Child Abuse	Does the story refer to the <i>Little Children Are Sacred</i> report? Does the story discuss Indigenous child (sexual) abuse or neglect? Does the story refer to issues associated with Indigenous child (sexual) abuse?
3 Extension of the Intervention	Does the story refer to implementation of the Intervention measures in Indigenous communities in other states? Does the story refer to the extension of the Intervention to the wider Australian community?
4 Other	Does the story emphasise Indigenous issues other than the Intervention? Does the story emphasise an individual rather than the Intervention? Does the story emphasise political or societal issues other than the Intervention? Does the story only briefly mention the Intervention?

Table 5.4 – Questions used to determine multivariate categories.

The analysis of both newspaper and TV stories coded into these four categories is discussed in the findings section below.

5.4 Findings

The role of content analysis in this study, as noted in the introductory section of this chapter, is to create an overall picture of the mainstream news media coverage of the Northern Territory Intervention within the chosen timeframe. A timeframe of three years, from the announcement of the Intervention on 21 June 2007 to the end of August 2010, which was the month of federal election, was set in order to examine how the coverage of the Intervention evolved over a fairly long period of time. This section discusses this evolution, drawing also on commentary emerging from the industry interviews conducted as part of this research project.

5.4.1 A pattern of decline

The Intervention generated hundreds of stories on both the print and the television platforms from the start of the policy framework in 2007 to the federal election in 2010. The coding of newspaper articles reveals that a total of 915 stories that meet the coding rules discussed in section 5.1 were published about the Intervention or related issues within the three-year timeframe. The way these stories were spread over the examined period is demonstrated in Table 5.5 below.

Year	No. of stories	% of total
2007 (21 June to 31 December)	417	46
2008	260	28
2009	168	18
2010 (1 January to 31 August)	70	8
Total	915	100

Table 5.5 – Number of newspaper stories published about the Intervention per year.

The data indicates that a significant number of the stories that discuss the Intervention or Indigenous child abuse were published within the first few months after the announcement of the ‘national emergency’ in the remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory: out of 915 newspaper texts, 417 – or 46 percent – were published between 21 June and 31 December in 2007. After 2007, the number of stories started steadily declining, apart from a few peaks here and there which are covered in more detail in the discussion about key discourse moments in Chapters 6 and 7. Certainly, one has to take into consideration that only eight months were examined in 2010, compared to full 12 months in 2008 and 2009. However, if a monthly average is calculated of stories published during each year of the

sample, it confirms a noticeable decline in the volume of stories about the Intervention across the research period.

When it comes to the television stories, replicating this analysis is problematic due to issues of availability of material in the *TVNews* database, as explained in section 5.2.3; Indigenous stories only started appearing in the database in August 2007. As a result, television coverage of the first months of the Intervention cannot be examined, and therefore data logged about stories broadcast in 2007 is not absolutely comparable to the newspaper data. However, a similar pattern of decline can be found in TV stories about the Intervention within the timeframe of the study if one does not take year 2007 into consideration. In 2008, 337 stories – or 41.3 percent of the total of 816¹⁰ stories – with references to the Intervention aired on the Australian free-to-air channels, with a slight drop to 288 stories in 2009, followed by a further decline with only 82 stories broadcast in the first eight months of 2010 (Table 5.6).

Year	No. of stories	% of total
2007 (1 August to 31 December)	109	13.4
2008	337	41.3
2009	288	35.3
2010 (1 January to 31 August)	82	10.0
Total	816*	100

Table 5.6 – Number of television stories broadcast about the Intervention per year. *) Some of the stories are duplicates, that is, one story broadcast in separate news bulletins of the ABC around Australia.

This decline, present particularly in the newspaper coverage of the Intervention but also in the TV coverage toward the end of the given timeframe, may be linked to news values discussed in Chapter 3. When the Intervention was announced, it undoubtedly accommodated Galtung and Ruge's (1973) news values of threshold and unexpectedness, or Brighton and Foy's (2007) more recent news value of topicality: many media texts described the Intervention as 'unprecedented' as did the journalists interviewed for this study. In other words, federal intervention in Indigenous affairs of this scale, with the army involved in the logistical aspect of the policy approach, had not been seen before which made the occurrence 'new' (Brighton and Foy 2007, p. 26) and 'intensive' (Galtung and Ruge 1973, pp. 63–64; Richardson 2007, pp. 91–92) and therefore newsworthy. Further, the Intervention kept producing material for the media during the first few months after it was announced –

¹⁰ The ABC has separate news bulletins in the different states and territories of Australia, and so the total number of television stories, 816, broadcast within the three-year timeframe includes some duplicates – that is, one story that was broadcast on different news bulletins around the country. Such duplicates were logged as individual stories because it is important to see how widely a story about the Intervention was broadcast, given the extent of the coverage of the policy framework is of interest to this study. Further, these stories sometimes had different introductions which can be of interest at the discourse analytical stage of this project.

its various measures were slowly rolled out, as the program was made into laws, and the unexpected scale of the program continued to create debate among Australians. One could also say ‘new twist[s] on an old news item’ (Brighton and Foy 2007, p. 26) occurred, which contributed to the newsworthiness of the Intervention even after its initial implementation.

However, as is often the case with ongoing news events, they eventually die out over time because intensity and the factor of the ‘new’ both fade, as other ‘breaking’ events become more likely to cross the threshold of newsworthiness. In addition, finding a fresh angle for an ongoing news event is likely to become more and more difficult as time passes which may also contribute to the decline in reporting on such an event. Indeed, Anthony Downs (1972) identified that this is a common pattern with issues of public interest. Within this pattern, which he calls the ‘issue-attention cycle’, public interest in – and media coverage of – an issue develops from a ‘pre-problem’ stage to ‘discovery of a problem’ and ‘cost of solving the problem’ stages, only to end up with a gradual decline of public interest and a place in the ‘twilight realm of lesser attention or spasmodic recurrences of interest’, particularly if the issue concerns a (numerical) minority (Downs 1972, pp. 39–41). A number of the journalists interviewed for this project made similar assessments on the newsworthiness of the Intervention. The following extract from an interview with Stephanie Peatling, of *The Sydney Morning Herald*, provides an example:

Mesikämnen: How would you personally describe the newsworthiness of the Intervention?

Peatling: At the time, huge.

Mesikämnen: Yep. And later on?

Peatling: Mm, diminished. The longer it goes on, the less interest there is.

The participant’s answer to a follow-up question about why the interest toward the Intervention diminished further explains the decline in the number of stories about the policy framework:

I suppose it’s like a lot [of] other ... large scale policies. The ... interest is huge in the first place, because the story is *new*. [I]n that particular case it was, you know, *quite controversial policy*. [I]t involved ... things like, you know, sending the army in and things like that. ... So, *it was certainly ... an enormous development in that area*, and *it came from a government that was not known for ... being particularly interested in Indigenous politics*. ... So, all of those factors made it incredibly newsworthy to start off with and ... obviously continued like that for a few months, and so on, but I’d say ... *the longer these go ... the less interest there is*, because *they’re just not that new anymore* (my emphasis).

This passage clearly indicates that the Intervention was something ‘new’ and ‘intense’ and hence newsworthy but that interest towards it later subsided, as with so many other issues

covered by media. What is also interesting in this account is the acknowledgement that the Howard government had not been particularly interested in Indigenous issues prior to the announcement of the Intervention, as discussed in Chapter 2. This seems to have contributed to the newsworthiness of Intervention policy framework as well.

Accounts of reasons why sustained attention was not given to the Intervention in the long run are varied. The passage featured above shows that in some instances the Intervention was seen as just like any other big policy announcement, ‘like other large scale policies’, and it is therefore not surprising that the media coverage of it followed the common life span of a public interest issue, discussed earlier. However, this common cycle is not the only factor influencing the way the coverage of the Intervention evolved.

Some participants suggested that there is generally no interest in Indigenous affairs in Australia. Ashleigh Wilson, of *The Australian*, described it as follows:

Whether it was a story of interest to ... the people who buy newspapers, I would think less so, and it's just a fact of life that that's the case.

Murray McLaughlin, of the ABC, was on common ground, saying:

I'm aware that ... in Australia there is a limit of appetite for ... Indigenous stories. ... [T]here is among Australian news media a certain ennui ... that ... applies to Indigenous stories.

As a result, it seems that due to a perceived lack of public interest in Indigenous affairs – perhaps coupled with the fact that many news outlets are businesses that have to attract audiences which, in turn, attract advertising revenue – the media also lack interest in Indigenous issues. Indeed, some participants made remarks to it being pointless to produce stories that no one would read or watch. The question of strained budgets at news organisations was also raised by many of the journalists interviewed for the current study. Given the suggested lack of interest by the wider Australian community in Indigenous affairs, is also likely that limited resources contribute to the decline of stories about the Intervention – with the news organisations likely to be reluctant to allocate funding for stories not seen as a priority.

This lack of sustained interest in Indigenous issues was raised as problematic by some participants. For instance, a print journalist working in one of the metropolitan tabloids (whose quote has been de-identified due to confidentiality) criticised the Australian

mainstream news media for being lazy when it comes to following up stories about the Intervention that appeared on the agenda when it was first launched:

I think they get lazy. I think that's basically it. You know what? It is dead simple ... it is much easier to go out ... to uncover a horror story ... to say, 'Oh, look, this terrible thing is happening,' and you write about it in colourful and florid ways. [It] is much more difficult then to ... follow it up and to make sure that what has come out of it is implemented There's no ... hoopla and balloons going up ... a year down the track. ... [P]eople lose interest. Like I say, there's an exposé, there's an ... investigation ordered, there's a report that comes out the other end of it, and everyone goes, 'Yes, this is fantastic! There are a hundred recommendations and ... the government says they're going to implement all of them.' And then the media just loses interest. The media does not ... I believe, maintain sufficient interest to ensure that the recommendations that are supposed to be implemented are actually implemented (Participant no. 7).

Suggested laziness, or boredom regarding Indigenous issues as described by the ABC's Murray McLaughlin above, is likely to influence not only the number of stories that were published or broadcast about the Intervention but also what is in the stories – or what is absent – such as the selection of voices. This is discussed further in Chapters 6 and 7.

According to a few participants, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, the public interest would have been better served by sustained attention to the Intervention following the initial intense coverage. This view emerges from commentary about various topics discussed during the interviews. For example, as a response to a question about the newsworthiness of the Intervention a few years after it started, Ashleigh Wilson, of *The Australian*, said:

[T]he same importance in ... these issues remains from a public policy point of view ... and from a personal point of view, ... as in terms of ... the people who are being affected.

Later, while talking about the difference sources used in stories about the Intervention, he commented:

[I]t's important to be able to cover ... and touch on as many different aspects of this as possible ... *because it did and does affect so many of the nation's more honourable people*, and ... for a public policy like this to be ... stretching out across the Northern Territory ... it demands nothing less (my emphasis).

Angela Bates, of the National Indigenous Television (NITV), spoke of the impact of the Intervention on people living in the remote communities in the Northern Territory in a similar way:

[B]ut for people on the ground and in the communities, because I've spent a bit of time up in the Northern Territory early this year, ... it's still a big issue for them. ... [T]he laws and the measures that they live under is still affecting them on a daily basis, and you know, they're the people that get forgotten

These passages are an indication of the journalists' acknowledgement of the significant impact the Intervention had – and continues to have – on Indigenous Australians living in the Northern Territory, and that because of this the policy is still newsworthy. However, as discussed above, exploration of the overall numbers of stories about the Intervention shows that in general no sustained attention to the issue was paid, regardless of some journalists emphasising the importance of such practice. Story numbers per news outlet are examined next to see how the coverage evolved in different media and to see whether any of the news outlets under examination in fact provided more sustained coverage.

5.4.2 Issue of interest for a few news outlets, less so for others

Most of the stories included in the newspaper sample of this study were published in the broadsheet papers under examination, with tabloids having notably fewer stories about the Intervention (Table 5.7). Categorisation of newspapers into broadsheets and tabloids to draw conclusions on elite versus popular readership, or quality versus sensationalist reporting, has become somewhat unreliable due to broadsheets becoming 'broadloits'. This concept refers to the increasing tendency of broadsheet papers to adopt the stories and styles of tabloid journalism – a development that has raised debate about whether this trend is leading to a more democratised or dumbed-down news agenda (Franklin et al. 2005, pp. 28–29). Newspapers' online versions and search engine optimisation are also driving news media in a more tabloid direction. However, I will use the categorisation here to make some comparisons with an earlier comprehensive research project about the representation of Indigenous affairs in Australian mainstream media.

Newspaper	Format*	No. of stories
The Advertiser	Tabloid	35
The Age	Broadsheet*	167
The Australian	Broadsheet	417
The Canberra Times	Broadsheet**	64
The Courier-Mail	Tabloid	29
The Daily Telegraph	Tabloid	15
The Herald Sun	Tabloid	14
The Mercury	Tabloid	9
Northern Territory News	Tabloid	28
The Sunday Times (Perth)***	Tabloid	2
The Sydney Morning Herald	Broadsheet**	119
The West Australian	Tabloid	16
Total		915

Table 5.7 – Stories published about the Intervention by newspaper. Figures include both weekday and weekend/Sunday editions. *) Format within the examined timeframe, that is, from June 2007 to August 2010. *The Age* has since changed its format to a tabloid size. **) The Sunday edition of the paper is in tabloid size. ***) This paper is published on Sundays only.

In their study on media coverage of NAIDOC week in a number of media in 1994, 1995 and 1996, Hartley and McKee (2000, pp. 219, 227) found that the cities in which both broadsheet and tabloid papers were published, the broadsheets tended to present more Indigenous stories than their tabloid competitors. This applies to the findings of this study as well: *The Age* in Melbourne and *The Sydney Morning Herald* in Sydney published notably more stories about the Intervention than their tabloid competitors, *The Herald Sun* and *The Daily Telegraph*. This may be because broadsheets are traditionally known for ‘lead[ing] on the ‘issue’, or the substantive consequences, of a story rather than first-hand human interest approach more typical of tabloids’ (Franklin et al. 2005, p. 29), and because the two broadsheets would have recognised both NAIDOC week and the Northern Territory Intervention as issues of importance to Australian society.

However, while Hartley and McKee (2000, p. 227) found that the national paper, *The Australian*, also a broadsheet, was not the major source of Indigenous stories in any of the years they investigated, this research project shows that *The Australian* was clearly a significant source of stories about the Intervention: 46 percent of all the newspaper stories within the three-year timeframe were published in *The Australian*. This finding provokes discussion on the ownership of the print media examined, and their political affiliations.

The Australian is owned by News Limited, the Australian branch of Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation. While the impact of ownership on media content is often indirect rather than

direct, manifesting itself for example in the ways reporters learn what topics to cover and how to cover them (Shoemaker and Reese 1996, p. 170), in the case of *The Australian* the proprietor's influence is direct. Journalist and academic Margaret Simons (2007, p. 328) notes that the national paper's move to the right was due to direct instruction from Rupert Murdoch. According to Simons, Murdoch saw the move to the right

as a business strategy, though doubtless it also suited his personal politics and propensity for 'picking winners' during the Howard years. Move to the right, he told new editor-in-chief Chris Mitchell, and you will leave the Fairfax broadsheet forced either to move to the left – not smart in the prevailing political climate – or more likely take up a wishy-washy middle position satisfying no-one (2007, p. 328).

The Australian has been described as a 'campaigning' newspaper, backing causes it – or its proprietor – approves of (Manne 2011, pp. 3–4; Simons 2007, p. 344). It is also widely recognised as right wing, including its approach to Indigenous affairs. During the Howard era, the paper gave big publicity to the views questioning dispossession of Indigenous peoples, put forward by historian Keith Windschuttle (Simons 2007, p. 345), and has been found to push its own conservative political agenda, or campaigns, when it comes to coverage of Indigenous affairs, particularly the Intervention (McCallum 2010, p. 157; Reid 2012; Reid and McCallum 2012). Similar accounts emerged from some of the interviews conducted as part of this research project, suggesting that the editorial leadership of *The Australian* has, particularly in recent years, identified and driven Indigenous affairs as an important topic, regardless of the impact of this on circulation. Many participants also believed the national paper is particularly prone to give space to conservative viewpoints such as those of Noel Pearson who advocates for individual responsibility in Indigenous communities.

While Hartley and McKee's research project, conducted before the rise of conservatism during the Howard era (Chapter 2), focused on an event largely concerned with arts and culture, the Intervention was launched and continued as highly conservative Indigenous policy, driven by a conservative government. Given *The Australian's* political affiliation and tendency for campaigning journalism, it is not surprising that the national paper emerged on top of the list about frequency of stories about the Intervention in the newspapers examined. The political position of the two Fairfax broadsheets is generally recognised as centre-left, which has been reinforced by *The Australian's* move to the right (Simons 2007, p. 328). However, they are not known to drive their own campaigns in a way their national right-wing counterpart does, which shows in the frequency of stories about the Intervention. It is important to note here that since nearly half of the print stories analysed were published by

The Australian, this may also influence findings regarding discourses available in the mainstream news media about the Intervention.

When it comes to the notably lower number of Intervention stories in the metropolitan dailies, compared to the national paper, *The Australian*, the news value of ‘relevance’ (that is, ‘cultural proximity’) may provide an answer (Brighton and Foy 2007, pp. 25–29; Galtung and Ruge 1973; Richardson 2007, pp. 91–92). News outlets tend to run stories that they believe are of interest and importance to their audiences, which, in the case of many of the Australian dailies, is predominantly the population of the state or territory, or indeed the city, in which they are published. Further, as discussed in Chapter 3, Hartley (1992, p. 207) has noted that Australian media tend to position Indigenous Australians as ‘outside’ the domain of ‘wedom’ of their perceived audience. An extract from the interview with a journalist working at one of the metropolitan tabloids (whose quote has been de-identified due to confidentiality) elucidates the relevance of proximity:

I thought the newsworthiness of the Northern Territory Intervention was high, because ... I believed that it was ... quite ... an undemocratic imposition on Australia’s First Nations people, ... but I appreciate the fact that the [state in Australia] readership of [newspaper] may not ... share my view ... with that, so. I mean, I ... would’ve like to see a lot more coverage of it and a lot more criticism of it ... in all media right across Australia, including [newspaper], but ... like I say, I understand that it’s ... something that’s happening in the Northern Territory ... therefore it doesn’t fit high on the news radar in [state in Australia] (Participant no. 7).

This passage describes the way the news value of proximity, coupled with news outlets’ ideas of their readership, can influence story selection; the Northern Territory Intervention did not take place in the proximity of the audiences of most of the newspapers, published in other states or territories. This is likely to have affected the low numbers of stories about the Intervention. Again, the matter of proximity can be linked with the suggested lack of interest in Indigenous affairs by non-Indigenous Australians as well as the dual market of audiences and advertising revenue relevant to most media examined in this thesis. As discussed in section 4.2 in Chapter 4, circulation of newspapers has plunged in the past two decades, making print news media an industry that is trying to stay afloat and re-invent its business model. As a result, a policy like the Intervention that concerns a group of which the wider population is not interested in does not make an attractive topic to these media.

It seems all these factors together diminished the newsworthiness of the Intervention for many of the news outlets. As the interview extract above indicates, individual journalists’ views of the Intervention as an important topic and their desire to provide sustained

coverage and criticism alone would not necessarily result in a more sustained coverage of the policy if their employer chose to avoid it.

The data-set of television stories shows that of the free-to-air networks the ABC, the public service broadcaster, aired the biggest number of stories about the Intervention. The ABC's share of stories broadcast about the Intervention or related issues within the given timeframe was a considerable 527, more than half of the total number of 816 (Table 5.8). Australia's other public service broadcaster specialising on multicultural content, SBS, aired the second highest number of stories about the Intervention, with 247 out of the total of 816. The commercial networks had significantly fewer stories on the topic, with 24 stories broadcast on Ten, 11 stories on Seven and as few as seven stories on Nine. 308 of the stories broadcast on the ABC and 126 of the stories aired on SBS were news items on their nightly bulletins, with the remaining stories broadcast in various current affairs programs on these networks. 18 of the total of 24 stories on Ten, eight of the total of 11 stories on Seven, and only one of the total of seven stories on Nine, were news items.

Network	Type	No. of stories
ABC	Public service broadcaster	527
Nine	Commercial network	7
SBS	Public service broadcaster*	247
Seven	Commercial network	11
Ten	Commercial network	24
Total		816

Table 5.8 – Stories broadcast about the Intervention by TV network. *) The funding model of SBS is hybrid – it is funded by both public funds and advertising revenue.

It is not surprising that the ABC and SBS had the most stories about the Intervention, given the obligations of these broadcasters, outlined in their legislatively determined charters as well as internal codes of practice. According to the charter of the ABC, outlined in section 6 of the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation Act 1983*, one of the broadcaster's functions is to reflect the cultural diversity of the Australian community, and to take the country's multicultural character into account in its broadcasting services (Australian Government 1983). Further, the code of practice of the ABC also suggests that because it is the public service broadcaster of a diverse society, operating with public funds, it is 'expected to contribute in ways that may differ from commercial media, which are free to be partial to private interests' (Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2011, p. 5). Similarly, the charter of the SBS notes that as Australia's multicultural broadcaster it has to service different communities within the society, including the Indigenous population, and 'promote

understanding and acceptance of the ... diversity of the Australian people' (Special Broadcasting Service 1991). Yet it remains somewhat surprising how little attention the commercial networks paid to the topic.

Since the three commercial networks have the biggest share of the free-to-air channels (Table 4.2 in Chapter 4), the findings regarding frequency of stories about the Intervention available via different TV news outlets suggest that people watching only commercial channels would have hardly heard of the Intervention. Interestingly, recent program ratings do show that the ABC's news bulletin is on the eight place on a list of top 10 national programs in Australia (Dyer 2014). However, Nine and Seven news bulletins rank even higher, holding the second and fourth place (Dyer 2014). Further, past figures show that people watching news bulletins of the commercial channels are more likely to read a tabloid paper rather than one of the broadsheets (Simons 2007, p. 33). As discussed above, the tabloids did not perform well either when it comes to the frequency of stories about the Intervention.

In light of the data discussed above it does seem that unless a news organisation had either consciously decided to drive Indigenous issues – like *The Australian* – or functioned under duties towards the diverse population of Australia, as the ABC and SBS do, it paid only intermittent attention to the Intervention. The next section discusses how the stories published or broadcast about the Intervention fit into the four categories developed during the content analysis – in other words, how many stories were clearly framed around the Intervention compared to stories emphasising another issue.

5.4.3 The Intervention as part of common parlance

As discussed earlier in this chapter, stories in the sample were coded on a scale from one to four depending on whether they were mostly about the Intervention or mostly about other issues. These four categories are: 1. *The Intervention*; 2. *Child Abuse*; 3. *Extension of the Intervention*; and 4. *Other*. Examination of the newspaper data shows that category 1 was by far the most common theme in the papers, with most of the newspaper stories coded in this study, 60.9 percent, framed around the Intervention itself or one of its measures in the context of the Northern Territory (Table 5.9). The second most popular category was number 3 which concerns the introduction of the Intervention or one of its measures to either a selected community in the other states or territories in Australia or nationwide. As Table 5.9 demonstrates, the reason for this category taking the second biggest place is clearly *The Australian*, which published 108 of the 207 stories ranked as '3'. I suggest that the explanation for this can be found in *The Australian's* established interest in Indigenous issues, as discussed in section 5.4.2: given that it has been identified as driving Indigenous affairs

with a particular, conservative agenda, it is not surprising that the national paper covered the expansion of the paternalistic Intervention measures to other parts of the country.

Another trend regarding category 3 is that more than half of the stories published in *The West Australian* discussed the extension of the Intervention measures to state of Western Australia, where the paper is published. The paper was perhaps not too interested in the Northern Territory Intervention as such, but paid notably more attention to suggestions by various social actors to extend the Intervention or to introduce Intervention-like measures into Western Australia. The news value of proximity might well have been at play here – the Intervention in the Northern Territory was seen as an event too distant and therefore of little relevance to the readership, but when similar measures were contemplated in the proximity of *The West Australian's* audience the topic was covered.

Categories 2 and 4 – that is, stories emphasising child abuse or any political or societal issues other than the Intervention – did not have a strong presence in the print media material coded as part of this study. As a result, the data suggests that the majority of the newspaper stories published within the three-year timeframe of interest concerned either the Intervention taking place in the Northern Territory or similar measures being introduced elsewhere in Australia.

Newspaper	C 1	C2	C3	C4
The Advertiser	29	0	4	2
The Age	111	18	26	12
The Australian	240	32	108	37
The Canberra Times	37	1	14	12
The Courier-Mail	16	2	9	2
The Daily Telegraph	8	0	4	3
The Herald Sun	10	0	2	2
The Mercury	5	1	2	1
Northern Territory News	23	1	3	1
The Sunday Times (Perth)	1	0	0	1
The Sydney Morning Herald	72	14	25	8
The West Australian	5	0	10	1
Total	557	69	207	82
% of total of 915 stories	60.9	7.5	22.6	9.0

Table 5.9 – Stories about the Intervention per category per newspaper.

The television data tells a slightly different story. The biggest category among the TV stories coded in this study was also category 1, that is, stories that were framed around the

Intervention itself, with 349 news pieces or current affairs programs coded into this category (Table 5.10). However, the margin between category 1 stories and the other categories was not nearly as great as it was in the data-set of newspapers: 42.8 percent of TV stories were ranked as ‘1’ compared to 60.9 percent of newspaper stories. Moreover, the difference between the biggest and the second biggest category within the TV data was marginal, with the second biggest category, number 4 or *Other*, claiming 42.5 percent of the total number of stories. This difference may of course be partly because the two platforms explored here covered different occurrences or framed the same occurrences in a different way. However, the rules for inclusion of stories in the sample may also explain the large number of stories categorised as *Other* within the TV data; relevant newspaper stories were searched with a keyword combination of *intervention AND indigenous* whereas TV stories were mapped with a broader search command of *indigenous*. Further, newspaper material was either included or excluded based on the headline, lead and first two paragraphs while audiovisual texts were viewed as a whole. It may be that more newspaper stories ranking ‘4’ would have been included in the sample if the rules of inclusion for the print platform were less restricted.

Network	C 1	C 2	C 3	C 4
ABC	206	34	35	252
Nine	2	0	0	5
SBS	129	19	24	75
Seven	4	3	0	4
Ten	8	2	3	11
Total	349	58	62	347
% of total of 816 stories	42.8	7.1	7.6	42.5

Table 5.10 – Stories about the Intervention per category per TV network.

It is interesting, however, how many television stories that were generally framed around another topic in fact included references to the Intervention or one of its measures, causing them to be included in this study. The topics of these kinds of stories varied from Indigenous issues other than the Intervention, such as reconciliation or Indigenous disadvantage generally, to political interviews with government ministers or members of the opposition. As stated earlier in this chapter, the purpose of the content analysis is to provide an overall picture of the coverage of the Intervention. The ranking of the stories into the given categories indicates that the coverage of the Intervention was not limited to stories that concentrated specifically on this Indigenous policy framework but that it was spoken about in the context of a number of topics, particularly on TV.

Such diverse occurrences of the Intervention in stories in the mainstream news media suggest that the term has become common parlance in the Australian society, particularly in public discourse mediated by the (news) media. This may be due to media practitioners bringing up the issue in the media but also because of other social actors, such as government representatives or ‘ordinary’ citizens, highlighting the issue either in their own forms of communication or in the mainstream news media when they are used as sources. Questions regarding whose voices were present in the stories about the Intervention are explored further in Chapters 6 and 7 as part of the examination of the key discourse moments.

5.4.4 Overall, an event not so prominent

As discussed earlier in this chapter, in order to examine the prominence and importance assigned to the stories about the Intervention, the page number and word count of a newspaper story or the timeslot and duration of a TV story were coded. The findings suggest that although the Intervention was seen as an important story in some of the news outlets, the overall prominence of it was not great, particularly toward the end of the three-year timeframe of this study. The following discussion looks at the newspaper data first, followed by data from the TV stories.

The findings show that 10.5 percent of the newspaper stories within the sample appeared on the first page (Table 5.11), and were thus given prominence by editorial staff.

Time period	P. 1*	% of all stories	P. 2-5	% of all stories	P. 6-10	% of all stories	P. >10	% of all stories
2007	42		107		117		151	
2008	34		65		91		70	
2009	18		52		43		55	
2010	2		17		27		24	
Total	96	10.5	241	26.3	278	30.4	300	32.8

Table 5.11 – Number of newspaper stories about the Intervention per page per year. *) The number of newspaper texts published on page one includes both stories that started on page one but continued on the following pages of the paper and stories that were positioned on the front page as a whole.

The review of each year separately indicates that 2007 with 10.1 percent, 2008 with 13.1 percent and 2009 with 10.7 percent of page one stories follow the general proportion of stories published on page one within the whole sample. The slight surge in front page stories in 2008 is likely to be due to the first anniversary of the Intervention, as otherwise there were no clusters of page one stories. However, 2010 is an exception from this trend. In 2010, only two stories (2.8 per cent) were seen as important enough to be given space on the front page.

This decline in page one stories follows the general pattern of decline in the volume of stories on the Intervention – identified in the total count of newspaper articles on the policy between June 2007 and August 2010. Moreover, examination of front page stories across different news outlets reveals that most were published in *The Australian*. The national paper published 30 of the 42 page one stories in 2007, 26 out of 34 in 2008, 14 out of 18 in 2009, and finally one out of two in 2010. The data thus indicates that the prominence – as measured by presence on the front page – of the stories about the Intervention was clearly driven by *The Australian*.

The data also indicates that most stories about the Intervention were published from page 11 forward. I suggest there are two major reasons for this. Firstly, the broadsheets in this study often published feature stories about the Intervention which tend to be placed in a specific section towards the end of a paper rather than on the news pages that come first. Secondly, the tabloids consist of dozens of pages which, coupled with the smaller size of the page as compared to broadsheets, decreases the chance of a story appearing in the earlier pages. When it comes to the first 10 pages of the papers, there were generally more stories placed on pages six to 10 than two to five, with the exception of year 2009. However, the difference between these two brackets in 2009 is not considerable. These findings regarding page numbers alone suggest that the Intervention was not given great importance or prominence in most of the newspapers explored in this study. However, it is useful to combine the analysis of page numbers with the analysis of the size of the stories, since feature articles published towards the end of a paper are generally assigned more space than a news story and are therefore made prominent.

The examination of the size of the newspaper articles coded in this study reveals that most stories about the Intervention were between 300 and 800 words throughout the three-year timeframe (Table 5.12). The longer stories within this group – those that were between 501 and 800 words – were published predominantly in the broadsheets.

Time period	0-100	101-300	301-500	501-800	801-1000	1001-1500	1501-2000	>2000
2007	17	66	148	107	31	28	14	6
2008	7	27	89	93	13	15	11	5
2009	5	24	56	54	11	9	4	5
2010	7	20	22	11	3	3	2	2
Total	36	137	315	265	58	55	31	18

Table 5.12 – Number of newspaper stories per word count per year.

Indeed, the data shows that the importance and prominence assigned to the Intervention in the tabloids tended to be diminished not only by relatively few stories about the topic in these papers (see section 5.4.2) as well as their positioning within the pages, but also by little space given to the topic when it was covered: most of the stories under 100 words were published in the tabloid papers. Further, there were only a few occurrences of stories over 500 words in the tabloids. The broadsheets ran longer stories, which is not surprising, given the way the two different types of papers tend to cover any issues – traditionally, tabloids concentrate on big headlines and pictures whereas broadsheets generally allow for more detailed discussion.

However, *The Australian's* share of the longer stories was, again, notable. The national paper published 151 of the 265 stories within the bracket of 501 to 800 words (57 %), 32 of the 58 stories within the bracket of 801 to 1,000 words (55 %), 35 of the 55 stories within the bracket of 1,001 to 1,500 words (64 %), nine of the 31 stories within the bracket of 1,501 to 2,000 words (29 %), and finally 13 of the 18 stories within the bracket of more than 2,000 words (72 %). Further, as discussed above, only *The Australian* gave notable prominence to the Intervention through several front page stories from the launch of the policy approach to the end of 2009. As a whole, the findings discussed above suggest that the Intervention was not a very prominent or important event in the newspapers, except for perhaps in *The Australian* which has an established agenda regarding Indigenous issues (Reid 2012; Reid and McCallum 2012).

The exploration of prominence and importance in the television stories shows that most were aired in primetime, that is, between 6:00 pm and 10:00 pm (Table 5.13). This is not surprising, given the main news bulletins of the majority of the networks examined here are scheduled in primetime. Only Ten has its news bulletin at 5:00 pm. Similarly, most current

affairs programs coded as part of this project air in primetime. Stories aired after 10:00 pm were exclusively broadcast on the ABC's *Lateline* program.¹¹

Time period	<5:00pm	5:00pm-6:00pm	6:01pm-7:00pm	7:01pm-8:00pm	8:01pm-10:00pm	>10:00pm
2007	5	17	44	37	2	4
2008	11	19	98	156	7	46
2009	11	5	86	155	4	27
2010	7	1	20	49	0	5
Total	34	42	248	397	13	82

Table 5.13 – Number of TV stories per time of broadcast per year.

Consequently, examination of the timeslots of the stories about the Intervention across all networks does not provide detailed information about the prominence and importance assigned to them. In order to better explore these key variables, story placement within different news bulletins was mapped. At the time the sample was taken, two of the networks examined, Ten and SBS, had an hour long news bulletin, starting at 5:00 pm on the former and 6:30 pm on the latter. The other networks' bulletins were half an hour long, starting at 6:00 pm on both Seven and Nine, and 7:00 pm on the ABC. It is useful to note that the afternoon and evening bulletins of Australian TV networks are much more varied today, particularly when it comes to the ABC's 24-hour news channel. For this study each network's news bulletin was divided into timeslots that allowed for examination of stories aired during the first minute of the bulletin, between the second and the fifth minute, between the sixth and the 15th minute, and so on, depending on the duration of the bulletin.

Exploration of the ABC's state and territory wide news bulletins shows that most stories about the Intervention started between the sixth and the 15th minute of the bulletins (Table 5.14). According to the data, 38 stories (out of a total of 308 news stories broadcast on the ABC news in the different states and territories) featured as the opening story of the bulletin. The majority of these stories – 25 – aired in the Northern Territory bulletin. In fact, over half of the ABC news stories coded as part of this study were broadcast in the Northern Territory. The data therefore suggests that although the ABC covered the Intervention extensively, particularly as compared to the other networks, it was more likely to assign the topic prominence in the area where the policy framework was implemented. It appears the news value of proximity, discussed in the context of the newspapers, also applied to the public service broadcaster.

¹¹ The other public service broadcaster, *SBS*, has a late night news bulletin at 10:30 pm, in addition to its main bulletin at 6:30 pm. However, if any of *SBS*'s news stories about the Intervention aired in the later bulletin they were not available in the *TVNews* database, used to access audiovisual material.

Time period	7:00-7:01pm	7:02-7:05pm	7:06-7:15pm	7:15-7:30pm
2007	1	1	4	0
2008	10	24	70	22
2009	25	19	79	15
2010	2	4	27	3
Total	38	48	180	40

Table 5.14 – ABC 7:00 pm news bulletins, number of stories per time of broadcast per year.

The data regarding SBS, Australia's other public service broadcaster, indicates that most stories about the Intervention aired during the second quarter of the network's hour long bulletin (Table 5.15). The Indigenous policy featured as the first story of the bulletin only four times over the three years examined in this study. Further, it was placed as the second or third story (that is, within the timeslot of 6:32 to 6:35 pm) only five times. These findings suggest that the Intervention was not assigned great prominence and importance in the SBS news bulletins. This is somewhat surprising, given SBS's position as the country's multicultural broadcaster, with charter obligations to service Australia's Indigenous population among others.

Time period	6:30-6:31pm	6:32-6:35pm	6:36-6:45pm	6:46-7:00pm	7:01-7:15pm	7:16-7:30pm
2007	3	2	4	4	1	1
2008	0	1	17	23	5	2
2009	1	2	10	28	9	1
2010	0	0	3	8	1	0
Total	4	5	34	63	16	4

Table 5.15 – SBS 6:30 pm news bulletin, number of stories per time of broadcast per year.

When it comes to the commercial networks, the lack of prominence assigned to stories about the Intervention was more significant. Most of channel Seven's news stories were broadcast between the sixth and the 15th minute of the bulletin, and only once did a story with references to the Intervention open Seven's bulletin (Table 5.16). However, the focus of the story was not the Intervention but the national apology to the Stolen Generations in February 2008, including only a brief reference to the Intervention measures. The Nine network's only news item within the whole timeframe of three years, which was framed around the national apology as well, was broadcast as the second or third story of the bulletin

(that is, within the timeslot of 6:02 to 6:05 pm).¹² The remaining six stories aired on Nine during the timeframe of this project were broadcast on different current affairs programs.

Time period	6:00-6:01pm	6:02-6:05pm	6:06-6:15pm	6:15-6:30pm
2007	0	0	1	0
2008	1	0	2	0
2009	0	0	1	0
2010	0	0	3	0
Total	1	0	7	0

Table 5.16 – Seven 6:00 pm news bulletin, number of stories per time of broadcast per year.

Like the ABC and Seven, channel Ten also aired most of its Intervention-related news stories within the timeslot of sixth to 15th minute of the bulletin (Table 5.17). No story referencing the Intervention opened Ten's news bulletin within the three years examined. However, as discussed in section 5.4.2, Ten did broadcast more stories about the Intervention than its commercial competitors and, in that sense, assigned more prominence to the topic. Having said that, Ten is still far behind the two public service broadcasters when it comes to the overall story count across the free-to-air networks.

Time period	5:00-5:01pm	5:02-5:05pm	5:06-5:15pm	5:16-5:30pm	5:31-5:45pm	5:46-6:00pm
2007	0	1	3	0	1	0
2008	0	1	5	2	0	0
2009	0	1	0	1	1	0
2010	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	3	8	3	2	0

Table 5.17 – Ten 5:00 pm news bulletin, number of stories per time of broadcast per year.

Exploration of the television story duration shows that a typical story about the Intervention was a news story, rather than a current affairs story or an interview. This is because most stories throughout the three-year timeframe fell into the duration bracket of 01:01 to 03:00 minutes (Table 5.18). This is the usual duration of a news story, whereas current affairs stories or interviews tend to be longer. Having said that, some of the stories within this bracket were aired on current affairs programs, such as on *Living Black*, the Indigenous program of SBS. There were also relatively many stories that were less than a minute long. Examination of the data shows that these were either headlines, previews, recaps or short news stories which did not involve a reporter at all but consisted of news presenter's voiceover and a few images, with an occasional sound bite from a source.

¹² No table was created to present this one story.

Time period	00:00-01:00	01:01-03:00	03:01-05:00	05:01-08:00	08:01-10:00	10:01-15:00	15:01-20:00	>20:00
2007	14	30	16	32	7	4	2	4
2008	62	150	45	42	13	14	4	7
2009	54	154	20	29	7	10	4	10
2010	6	48	6	15	3	1	0	3
Total	136	382	87	118	30	29	10	24

Table 5.18 – Number of TV stories per duration in minutes per year.

This pattern of story duration stayed fairly consistent over the three-year timeframe of the current study – there were no notable peaks in either shorter or longer stories, and the share of the bracket of average length news stories remained the biggest each year. It therefore seems that trends emerging from the data regarding the story duration followed the general pattern of decline, identified earlier in this chapter and theorised by Downs (1972).

The data regarding the key variables of timeslot and duration of the TV stories indicates that of all the networks, the ABC provided best prominence for the stories about the Intervention by having the biggest number of opening stories about the topic in its news bulletins. However, such stories were scarce even on the ABC and concentrated on the bulletin in the Northern Territory rather than in the other areas of Australia. None of the networks tended to broadcast stories about the Intervention within the first few minutes of the bulletin but were more likely to air them during or after the sixth minute. Further, most of the stories fell into the bracket of a typical news story of one to three minutes. These findings suggest that although the Intervention was covered fairly frequently by the public service broadcasters, assigned particular prominence on the mainstream free-to-air networks.

5.4.5 Key discourse moments

The exploration of the newspaper data and television data together shows that the coverage of the Intervention generally peaked during traditionally timely news events, such as the anniversaries of the Intervention, as well as releases of reports, government's response to reports or government's policy announcement or other such activity (Appendices 2 and 3). While some of the peaks emerging from newspaper and television coverage of the Intervention were different, there were a few common peaks throughout the timeframe of three years. The two most notable peaks that appeared on both platforms are the first anniversary of the Intervention in June 2008 and a report by the Productivity Commission in July 2009 about Indigenous disadvantage getting worse. Further, stories discussing welfare

quarantining going national in November 2009 did not provide such a notable peak as the other two moments but generated a few stories on both platforms at a time when coverage of the Intervention was declining and becoming more and more sporadic. These peaks were chosen as the three critical discourse moments analysed in the course of discourse analysis in this research project and are discussed further in Chapters 6 and 7.

5.5 Chapter conclusion

Two major patterns emerge from the content analysis of the newspaper and television stories about the Intervention conducted in this thesis. Firstly, the coverage of the Intervention followed the usual pattern of decline of issues of public interest, as identified by Downs (1972). The interest paid by the mainstream newspapers on the major Indigenous policy framework was quite remarkable within the first few months, only to be followed by a gradual decline of interest and concentration on particular events, such as the anniversary of the Intervention. The coverage on the public service broadcasters was somewhat more sustained during the first two years after the launch of the Intervention but declined notably in 2010. It seems that news values such as topicality and intensity of an event also played a role in this pattern of decline. Secondly, the coverage was clearly driven by the national paper, *The Australian*, and the public service broadcaster, the ABC. Had these two news outlets been excluded from the sample, the overall picture of the coverage of the Intervention would have looked even more sporadic.

It was also identified that the news value of relevance, or proximity, influenced the way the Intervention was covered in different news outlets and how its coverage evolved. Some of the journalists interviewed as part of this project referred to a lack of interest in Indigenous affairs by non-Indigenous Australians. Coupled with the fact that most media examined here are businesses that need to attract audiences in order to keep going, it seems clear that the perceived lack of interest in Indigenous issues, particularly if they happen outside the circulation area, limited the coverage of the Intervention.

Further, the content analysis helped to identify three peaks that emerged from both newspaper and TV coverage of the Intervention: the first anniversary of the policy framework; a report by the Productivity Commission on Indigenous disadvantage; and an announcement of the income management to be extended nationwide. These events are looked at as the key discourse moments in the following chapters.

Chapter 6: The Intervention ‘one year on’

6.1 Introduction

This chapter takes a discourse analytical approach to examining news media coverage of the Northern Territory Intervention. As discussed in Chapter 4, discourse analysis of media is concerned with discovering unequal relations of power in a society and revealing the role of discourse in reproducing or challenging social power through the news (Garrett and Bell 1998, p. 6; Richardson 2007, p. 29), discourse being a form of social practice in itself which both shapes and is shaped by social phenomena (Carvalho 2010, p. 11; Fairclough 1995, 54–55). Key questions of interest to discourse analysis of media texts, as already noted in Chapter 4, are: 1. What things are said and what are absent? 2. Why are some things said and others not? 3. How are things said and how might this influence social relations? 4. Is a text helping to perpetuate or challenge inequalities and other ‘undesirable’ social practices (Carvalho 2010, p. 15; Richardson 2007, pp. 38, 42)?

This chapter explores the relationship between discourses about the Intervention perpetuated in the mainstream news media and the discursive practices of social actors – both media workers and people or institutions outside media. In this way I endeavour to address the questions outlined above. Frameworks for media discourse analysis advocate three-dimensional analysis – that is, the examination of texts, discursive practices of different social actors as well as the society and culture within which texts are produced, because all three factors participate in the construction of meaning (Fairclough 1995, 57–62; 1998, p. 144; Richardson 2007, p. 15). This applies to audiovisual texts as well: formulating a framework for analysis of images, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, p. 114) distinguish between ‘represented participants’ and ‘interactive participants’, of which the former means ‘the people, the places and things depicted in images’, and the latter ‘the people who communicate with each other *through* images, the producers and viewers of images’ (original emphasis). They place these participants into three kinds of relations:

1. relations between represented participants; 2. relations between interactive and represented participants (the interactive participants’ attitudes towards the represented participants); and 3. relations between interactive participants (the things interactive participants do to or for each other through images) (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006, p. 114).

In other words, their guidelines for analysis also recognise the importance of not only what is in a (visual) text but also the production and the interpretation of this text in the process of meaning construction. To summarise, the production and interpretation of texts cannot be

studied in isolation because they are not produced or consumed in isolation (Fairclough 1998, 144–145; Richardson 2007, p. 100). However, Carvalho (2010) reminds that it is journalists who play a major role in the discursive construction of social issues by either assigning or denying other social actors framing power.

As discussed in Chapter 3, earlier research suggests that everyday journalistic practices are the central reason for the often problematic mainstream media representations of Indigenous affairs in Australia (Meadows 2001b, p. 202). The key practices affecting the construction of these representations, also outlined in Chapter 3, are: imagined audiences; sources used in stories; news policies; and daily routines (Meadows and Ewart 2001, 117–121). These key practices, as argued in Chapter 4, are largely consistent with Carvalho's (2010) discursive strategies of framing, positioning, legitimisation and politicisation. This chapter traces these four strategies across news media coverage of the Intervention, discussing their role in the formation of discourses emerging from media texts. The way these four discursive strategies serve as analytical tools in this examination of media coverage of the Intervention is discussed further in section 6.2.1. It is important to note here that there are many players in the formation of media discourse – it is not only the discursive strategies, or practices, of media professionals but also those of other social actors active within society that are of interest to the current research project.

The discursive practices of social actors, be it journalists or those functioning outside media, can be explored by comparing reported speech in stories published or aired by different news outlets as well as examining other documents, such as reports or media releases, that may have prompted media coverage (cf. Carvalho 2010, pp. 19–21). This study also draws on industry interviews with journalists who have some experience in covering the Intervention. Following the idea raised in Chapter 1 that social scientists' accounts (including this dissertation) are a discursive construction (Wetherell and Potter 1992, p. 66), the interview data is also treated as discourse and therefore as something that is constructed. This was discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 and is briefly revisited in section 6.2.2. The purpose of conducting interviews with media practitioners was to shed light on the media process, which is part of the construction of media discourse. The interviews may also elucidate other social actors' discursive practices and how these influenced stories about the Intervention. The interviews are thus used to complement the analysis of the discursive practices of different social actors as 'read' from media coverage or other documents concerned with the Intervention.

This chapter looks at one of three ‘critical discourse moments’ (Carvalho 2010) identified from the coverage of the Intervention via initial content analysis of stories published or broadcast in the given news media from the start of the policy in June 2007 to the federal election in August 2010 (see Chapter 5). As outlined in Chapter 4, critical discourse moments are periods that emerge from specific ‘newsworthy’ happenings, such as political activity, scientific findings or other socially relevant events and, importantly, may challenge ‘established’ discursive positions (Carvalho 2010, p. 15). The key discourse moment explored in this chapter is the first anniversary of the Intervention in June 2008; the remaining two (a report by the Productivity Commission in July 2009 which revealed that Indigenous disadvantage was getting worse, and the federal government’s announcement of welfare quarantining, one of the Intervention measures, going national in November 2009) are discussed in Chapter 7. These were identified as key discourse moments because coverage of the Intervention peaked at these times in both newspapers and television and because they included political activity or another socially significant event. This chapter examines discourses emerging during the first key moment and analyses the influence of media practitioners on the one hand and social actors external to the media on the other hand on these discourses. Whether these discourses reproduce or challenge previous discourses regarding Indigenous Australians and affairs, discussed in detail in Chapter 3, is also revisited here. Preliminary findings of this chapter have been previously published (Mesikämnen 2013).

6.2 Analysing discourse moments

6.2.1 Media texts

Applying key frameworks for media discourse analysis (Carvalho 2010; Fairclough 1995; Richardson 2007), discussed in Chapter 4, discourses emerging from media stories on the Intervention are revealed through an examination of discursive strategies – framing, positioning, legitimisation and politicisation. In Carvalho’s (2010, pp. 18–19) framework for media discourse analysis, ‘framing’ is used to describe the organisation of discourse according to a certain point of view, ‘positioning’ means the construction of social agents into a certain relationship with each other, ‘legitimation’ is the justification, or sanctioning, of a certain action or power, and ‘politicisation’ is the attribution of a political nature or status to a certain reality. The examination of these discursive strategies was done by identifying and naming actors constructed in the texts, analysing claims made by either sources or reporters and the justification of these claims, and analysing the use of active and passive form and word or image choices generally as well as exploring the social context of the texts – that is, what was happening in the society at the time the stories were produced, what were the

(discursive) actions of other social actors, such as the government or Indigenous organisations.

The stories relevant to the identified critical discourse moments were retrieved from *ANZ Newstand*, *Factiva* and *TVNews* databases. The audiovisual stories were transcribed unit by unit on sheets that mapped the time code, image, music/sound/actuality sound and the voice of reporter/presenter/source, with the unit of analysis being each shot in a story. Printouts of both newspaper stories and transcripts of TV stories were colour-coded according to traces of the four discursive strategies discussed above.

The analysis of the stories published or broadcast during each critical discourse moment began by examining the presence of different actors in the stories, utilising Carvalho's (2010) discursive strategies of framing and positioning as an analytical tool. In her framework, the term 'actor' includes 'both social agents (someone who has the capacity of doing something) and characters in a (staged) story' (Carvalho 2010, p. 17). The examination of framing and positioning was done by identifying who were constructed as agents having active presence in the stories and who as grammatical objects – or who were positioned as objects in images. An agent could have active presence either through a direct quote/sound bite or as described by a reporter or another agent used as a source. Further, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, pp. 63–65) provide a useful description of how relations between agents and objects – 'actors' and 'goals' – can be studied from images. In the current research project, if a TV news report portrayed, for instance, a nurse in the foreground examining an Indigenous child, the child was considered to be constructed as an object.

These matters were logged on a coding sheet for presences in a story, developed during the initial reading of the stories about the first key discourse moment under examination (Appendix 4). This helped to determine not only where the viewpoints present in the stories came from but also the relationships constructed between different actors. Presence in the stories was chosen as the starting point because, as Richardson (2007, p. 87) explains, it is important to 'consider who gets to speak in the news' as 'access to the news is a power resource *in itself*' (original emphasis). Analysis of presence also helps to signal who the stories might have constructed as 'us' and 'them' (Richardson 2007, p. 222), which is important in the context of Indigenous affairs in Australia, given Hartley's (1992, p. 207) findings that mainstream media have traditionally tended to exclude Indigenous Australians from the imagined community that the media construct.

In addition to looking at who had presence, the analysis of framing also included examination of content in viewpoints and value judgements put forward in the stories. Cross-

analysis of media outlets as well as examination of documents such as media releases and reports were utilised to investigate whether framing was based on claims by a social actor external to the media or perhaps by media workers themselves.

Analysis of legitimisation was carried out by logging claims made in the stories into a database. Then the passage of the text justifying the claim was also recorded. In the case of the TV stories, legitimisation may have been established through the combination of image and voiceover. In addition, a note was made about who made the claim and whose justification legitimised it. Again, legitimisation could come from either the journalist or someone used as a source or otherwise presented as an agent in the story (that is, a social actor functioning outside the media), and one story could include several legitimised claims.

It can be argued that Indigenous affairs in Australia are historically highly politicised due to the relationship of control between settler state and the Indigenous population, as well as party politics between the two major political parties, Labor and the Liberals (Chapter 2). Nevertheless, analysis of politicisation was conducted by exploring notable traces of attribution of a political nature or status to a reality such as the Intervention policy or Indigenous disadvantage. Passages of this kind were colour-coded on the stories analysed, as explained above.

6.2.2 Interviews

As discussed in Chapter 4, twelve journalists identified as suitable interview subjects either through their stories about the Intervention or by other participants were interviewed in the course of this project. Eight journalists worked in newspapers and four in TV. Two participants were Indigenous people who, at the time of the interviews, were working in Indigenous media. One of the non-Indigenous participants was also working in Indigenous media at the time of the interview. The majority of the participants had prior experience in covering Indigenous issues due to either an interest in these issues or their position in a state or territory with a relatively large Indigenous population. Some spent only a few months reporting on the Intervention as a result of the demand for more journalists to cover the policy in the early stages of it.

The semi-structured interview schedule was constructed around journalistic practices identified as important in the context of representation of Indigenous affairs (Meadows and Ewart 2001), and Carvalho's (2010) four discursive strategies, discussed above. The participants were also provided with an opportunity to raise any aspects they wished to talk about regarding media coverage of the Intervention.

As explained in Chapter 4, the approach taken towards the interview data was inductive and discourse analytical which involved discerning themes, then re-examining and re-fining these themes. I took a similar approach to that of Wetherell and Potter (1992, pp. 100–101) regarding coding for a discourse analysis of interview data. According to them, discourses are available for speakers as resources to be used in a number of ways that can be in contrast within one interview, because people's accounts vary according to what they are doing (Wetherell and Potter 1988, p. 171; 1992, p. 93). Further, texts and talk have the ability to 'make a particular reality appear solid, factual and stable' by drawing on a number of devices and techniques (Wetherell and Potter 1992, p. 95). I analysed the interviews conducted in the current research project for any discursive patterns constructed by the participants regarding both media practice and practices of social actors other than media workers.

6.3 The first anniversary of the Intervention

One critical discourse moment that emerged from the news media coverage of the Intervention is the first anniversary of the policy approach. The anniversary was identified as a socially relevant event because there was a spike in the coverage of the Intervention a year after the policy was launched, with accelerating discussion about the progress and success of the Intervention. In other words, the moment carried the possibility of discourses that could challenge the 'established' discursive positions – which for those who launched the Intervention and their supporters, according to Macoun (2011), are that Aboriginal culture is part of the cause of the social problems in remote Indigenous communities and that child abuse and other issues in these communities should be addressed and solved by control by the settler society. Another established discursive position in place after the Intervention was launched was that the policy approach could not work because it excluded Indigenous Australians from the process of finding solutions, disempowering them (Ring and Wenitong 2007). This viewpoint was held for instance by the authors of the *Little Children Are Sacred* report who emphasised that it was paramount that solutions to social dysfunction were looked for together with Indigenous people in the communities (Wild 2007). However, the latter discursive position was often overpowered by the dominating position described by Macoun (2011), as research on media coverage of the early stages of the Intervention found (McCallum and Reid 2012).

Further, activities by the Intervention taskforce as well as the federal government contributed to the first anniversary becoming a key discourse moment. In their report launched at the anniversary of the policy approach, the Intervention taskforce recommended that the viability of remote Indigenous communities in the future should be discussed (Northern Territory Emergency Response Taskforce 2008). This was a notable departure from the

views according to which living in isolated communities, or the homelands, is beneficial for Indigenous Australians (Altman et al. 2008; Broome 2010, pp. 247, 259–260). In addition, the Rudd Labor government announced it would implement the measure of linking parents' welfare payments to children's school attendance – a measure already planned by the Howard government but not implemented during the early stages of the Intervention (Howard 2007; Macklin 2008c, 2008f). These announcements can be seen as political activity which in part made the first anniversary a critical discourse moment.

As part of the exploration of the media coverage of the Intervention's first anniversary, 19 newspaper articles published between 19 and 22 June 2008, and 17 television stories broadcast between 19 and 21 June 2008 were analysed. Twelve of the print stories examined were news reports, six were features and one an editorial. Four of the TV stories were interviews, 11 were news reports and two current affairs stories. Five of the 11 news reports were 'original' as some of them were the same story aired on the ABC's news bulletins in the different states and territories of Australia.¹³

When it comes to whether the stories were framed around the Intervention or other topics, nine of newspaper news reports were placed under category '1' ('mostly about the Intervention'), created as part of the content analysis conducted as part of this research project (Chapter 5). Two news stories were ranked as '2' ('mostly about child abuse') and one as '3' ('mostly about extending the Intervention'), while all the features were categorised as '1', as was the editorial. Of the TV stories analysed 16 were categorised as '1' in the course of the content analysis, while one, an interview with then Chief Minister of the Northern Territory, was ranked as '4', as it was mostly concerned with topics other than the Intervention.¹⁴ This shows that most of the stories published or broadcast around the first anniversary of the Intervention were predominantly concerned with the policy framework rather than other topics.

6.3.1 Direct voice belonged to official actors

Analysis of the discursive strategies of framing and positioning in the stories about the first anniversary identified a number of actors, which can be both agents and objects. The actors were categorised into five broad actor types: individuals; institutions; groups of people; documents and abstract concepts; and the Intervention itself. The analysis also found that presences assigned to these actors varied from a direct voice to a mediated one as an agent

¹³ As explained in section 4.5 in Chapter 4, sample did not include stories aired on SBS's Indigenous affairs program, *Living Black*.

¹⁴ See Chapter 5 for a detailed description of the categories.

and presence as an object. Documents and other such inanimate or abstract actors were included in the actor types as they can be delegated the position of an agent or an object.

The most obvious way of identifying presence is of course to examine quotes in a newspaper article or sound bites in a television story. As discussed in Chapter 4, MacDougall (1995, 227–228) identifies three different ways in which perspective can be assigned in audiovisual stories: ‘testimony’; ‘implication’; and ‘exposition’. The first one of his modes, ‘testimony’, which means the ‘first-person perspective’ (MacDougall 1995, p. 227), is a useful concept when it comes to analysing agents constructed in the stories about the Intervention. The actors who were most often assigned such testimonial power through direct voice in both newspaper and TV stories were prominent: the former and then Indigenous Affairs Ministers, Mal Brough and Jenny Macklin as well as Prime Ministers, John Howard and Kevin Rudd; and two then Intervention taskforce heads, Major-General David Chalmers and Dr Sue Gordon. Only one of these actors – Dr Gordon – is Indigenous.

The cross-analysis of different media outlets as well as the investigation of discourse by social actors outside the media texts reveals that many of the quotes or sound bites by Jenny Macklin, the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, were based on press conferences or other such appearances by the minister. It is useful to note here that press conferences are explicit attempts by a particular social actor to control (media) discourse, and that not all social actors have power to establish such an event – or to attract the media in a case where such an attempt to influence discourse is set up. It seems the media also utilised Macklin’s media releases in their reporting on the first anniversary of the Intervention. Presence other than direct voice (such as paraphrasing of documents or someone’s spoken account) is discussed more in section 6.3.2, but the following example includes a brief reference to such presence as it provides background for Macklin’s direct voice in the example stories.

On 20 June, Macklin released a document outlining the Rudd government’s plans to link school attendance with welfare payments in six selected communities in the Northern Territory. In the media release, the minister stated that

Parents who fail to enrol their children or take reasonable measures to get their children to go to school, may have their income support payments suspended until their children are enrolled or attend school (Macklin 2008f).

The analysis of the accounts related to this topic in two newspapers, *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Australian* (Karvelas and Robinson 2008; Peatling 2008; Table 6.1 below), particularly the first paragraphs, suggests both drew on Macklin’s media release. Further, the

stories also indicate that the minister addressed the media in person in order to announce the measure of linking parents' welfare payments with their children's school attendance. This is revealed in the descriptions about the minister visiting the town of Katherine and the utilisation of the same quote by her (see passages in bold in Table 6.1).

Paragraph	<i>The Sydney Morning Herald</i> , 21 June 2008	<i>The Australian</i> , 21 June 2008
	Truant's parents to lose welfare	Send kids to school or lose welfare
1	Welfare payments for all parents, indigenous or not, stand to be cut off unless their children regularly attend school in a tough extension of the Northern Territory intervention to the rest of the country.	Parents who fail to enrol and regularly send their children to school will have their welfare payments stopped under a radical plan being trialled in six Northern Territory communities.
2	At the same time, the taskforce investigating the intervention says the viability of some remote indigenous communities must be assessed, raising the spectre of shutting down towns and moving thousands of people to new homes.	On the first anniversary of the Northern Territory intervention, the Rudd Government has revealed it will force school principals to tell Centrelink when children were failing to turn up to class.
3	Next year, eight areas will participate in a trial of a system in an attempt to enforce requirements that all school-aged children go to school. 'We are saying to parents you have a responsibility to make sure your children attend school regularly,' the Minister for Families and Community Services, Jenny Macklin, said during a visit to Katherine to mark the first anniversary of the intervention in remote Aboriginal communities.	The trial includes both white and indigenous children.
17 Ms Macklin announced the changes yesterday at the Clyde Fenton School in Katherine alongside Northern Territory Education Minister Marion Scrymgour.
18		'It's a responsibility of all state and territory governments to make sure that children are enrolled at school,' Ms Macklin said.
19		'It's the law that children are enrolled to go to school, that they attend school on a regular basis.
20		'What we are doing today is really saying to parents 'You have a responsibility to make sure that your children attend school regularly'.'

Table 6.1 – Two newspapers' utilisation of the same official source.

The same account by Macklin was used in the TV news reports aired on the ABC bulletins on 20 June. This is illustrated below in Table 6.2 featuring a piece of the transcript of a news report broadcast in the state of Victoria (Tlozek 2008).

Time code	Image	(Actuality) sounds	Voice(over)
00:00	ABC News mid-break theme.	ABC News theme	
00:01	Presenter in the foreground. In the background key image of a police badge and two Indigenous children.		Presenter: Tomorrow is the first anniversary of the federal intervention into Northern Territory Aboriginal communities, and the Rudd government is preparing to tighten the screws. In a trial next January, family welfare payments will be subject to children's attendance at school.
00:19	Medium long shot of Jenny Macklin getting off a plane and walking to shake hands with a man dressed in an army uniform.		Reporter: Instead of giving back permits and employment programs, Jenny Macklin is now taking something away.
00:25	Medium shot of Jenny Macklin, outdoor location. In the background Dave Chalmers and next to Macklin Marion Scrymgour, part of whom is left outside the frame.		Macklin: What we are doing today is really saying to parents, you have a responsibility to make sure that your children attend school regularly.
00:36	Birds view of Indigenous children sitting on the floor in classroom. Jenny Macklin sitting on the floor with the children.		Reporter: From next year, parents will have their Centrelink payments suspended until their child is enrolled at school and attending most days.

Table 6.2 – A news report featuring official direct voice, aired on the ABC on 20 June 2008.

The sound bite seemingly cut from an appearance by Jenny Macklin is the same as the quote present in the two newspaper reports discussed above. In addition, although the TV story does not clearly state that the minister paid a visit to a school in Katherine, the sequence of images – Macklin getting off a small plane typically used to fly to the remote communities in Australia, speaking in an outdoor location and sitting in a classroom with Indigenous children – does indicate that she travelled to visit a school in a community with a number of Indigenous children and made an announcement while in this community. Another TV story aired on the ABC's *Lateline* program on 20 June and many of the newspaper reports published on 21 June also included information stated in Macklin's (2008e, 2008f) media releases as well as reported speech by her, although not necessarily with a reference to where or when she had talked about the reported issues. However, the examples discussed above

suggest that any reported speech by Macklin was based on the minister's appearance in Katherine.

On 21 June, Jenny Macklin (2008c) held another press conference in Darwin in the Northern Territory, during which she discussed the Intervention taskforce's report on the first twelve months of the policy framework and, consequently, also the progress of the Intervention. She also released a document summarising the recommendations of the report by the taskforce (Macklin 2008g). Most of the TV stories aired on 21 June included a sound bite from Macklin's press conference, as did one of the three newspaper stories published on 22 June. This presence assigned to Macklin coupled with the finding that direct voice was most often assigned to actors associated with either the government or the Intervention taskforce in the first anniversary stories, noted above, indicates that the federal government, along with its ministers, and the taskforce held notable framing power over the media coverage of the first anniversary.

Some of the stories examined did include a selection of direct Indigenous voices, particularly those broadcast on TV, but many of these voices were present in the context of the demonstrations against the Intervention that took place on the anniversary around Australia, as opposed to being able to set their own agenda in a neutral or more sympathetic environment. For instance, the first direct voice in the following story about a demonstration in Darwin, published the day after the anniversary in the Sunday edition of the *Northern Territory News*, belonged to an Indigenous person:

Protesters call for end of intervention

A crowd of up to 60 people gathered at Tamarind Park in Darwin's CBD yesterday for a protest to mark the one-year anniversary of the Federal Government's intervention into remote indigenous communities in the Territory.

A smattering of curious bystanders stopped to listen as a procession of speakers from as far away as Galiwinku and Kalkaringi branded the intervention 'racist' and 'evil'.

Maurie Ryan, 59, a member of the Gurindji clan and grandson of land rights pioneer Vincent Lingjari, said he wanted to see a royal commission into where all the community funding from NT and Commonwealth governments had gone over the years.

'They didn't talk to anyone when they did this (intervention),' Mr Ryan said.

'There was no consultation' (Bevege 2008).

The story continued with two other direct Indigenous voices who were assigned the opportunity to share their views on the Intervention or take ownership of some solutions to the issues in the Indigenous communities, eventually implemented by the federal government through the Intervention. However, although the story presented a selection of (Indigenous) protesters' voices, certain choices made in the construction of the story worked to

undermine these voices. The following passage from the same report, starting from the 13th paragraph, provides an example.

Some of those who gathered to listen to the speakers, which included Norman George from the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency and NT Anti-Discrimination Commissioner Tony Fitzgerald, had not made up their minds on the intervention.

But Darwin resident and Aboriginal elder Kath Mills, 73, said the intervention was the ‘worst form of racism’.

‘People are justifying it as ‘save the children’,’ she said.

‘But it’s about controlling Aboriginal people.’

But bystander Tommi Husband, 38, from Darwin, said he was all for the intervention as he’d seen ‘abhorrent’ things in his three years in the Territory.

‘I went to Katherine recently and saw a 16-year-old girl with three kids,’ he said.

‘Her dad was the father of each of the kids.

‘She had been sent to town from her community as she had been raped but the people supposed to be looking after her there (in Katherine) ripped her off’ (Bevege 2008, my emphasis).

In the 13th paragraph of the story it is stated that not everyone present at the protest had made up their minds about the Intervention. The next paragraph starts with the word ‘but’ which assigns importance on the viewpoint presented in that paragraph – that the Intervention is the ‘worst form of racism’ and is ‘about controlling Aboriginal people’, voiced by Aboriginal elder Kath Mills. However, ‘but’ is also used in the beginning of the paragraph following Kath Mills’ accounts, assigning weight to the views of bystander Tommi Husband who talks about the ‘abhorrent things’ he has seen in the town of Katherine. The source does not identify the girl he is talking about as Indigenous, but since the area around Katherine has a large Indigenous population and the statement takes place in the context of the protest against the Intervention, the suggested reading is that he indeed refers to an Indigenous girl. The use of ‘but’ before Tommi Husband’s eyewitness account undermines Kath Mills’ previous statement of the Intervention as means to control Indigenous people, particularly since the story presents no more accounts by other protesters that could counteract Husband’s statement. As a result, the reader is left with the potential reading that although the Intervention might be racist it is needed because there are ‘abhorrent’ things happening in Indigenous communities which need a government intervention in order to be rectified.

The way of naming, or absence of it, also contributed to the relative lack of power by the ‘ordinary’ citizens’ voice. As Richardson (2007, p. 49) explains, the way people are referred to in the news has potentially ‘significant impact on the way in which they are viewed’. Some of the Indigenous people provided with direct voice in the stories were named as an ‘Aboriginal elder/leader’, which enhanced their authority as a source, while others were left without a caption. The following passage featured in Table 6.3, which is from a news report broadcast on SBS on the anniversary of the Intervention (Bou Melhem 2008) , provides an example of

direct voice assigned to a few protesters, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, who were not named.

Time code	Image	(Actuality) sounds	Voice(over)
00:34	Medium long shot of a crowd of people marching towards camera, people in front holding a big placard that looks like the Aboriginal flag with words '...ginal affairs' and 'No racist in...vention'.		Reporter: Marching in solidarity,
00:36	Medium shot of a crowd of people marching, holding a placard 'Stop the NT...'. Caption: 'Sydney'.	Mild chanting sounds or chatting in the background.	people of all colours joined the Australia-wide pro-
00:38	Medium shot of two elderly ladies who appear to be white, marching amongst a crowd, one with a walking stick.		test against the Northern Territory intervention.
00:41	Medium shot of an unnamed woman (no caption) who appears to be Indigenous, walking in a crowd holding a placard, talking to her side to presumably the reporter.		Unnamed woman: I'm just walking with my brothers and sisters today in regard to our brothers and sisters that have been badly done by.
00:46	Medium shot of an unnamed woman (no caption) who appears to be white, walking in a crowd talking just a bit to the side from the camera, presumably to the reporter.		Unnamed woman: And these people are suffering more because of this legislation, because of the laws.
00:50	Medium shot of an unnamed man (no caption) who appears to be Indigenous, talking a bit to the side from the camera, presumably to the reporter. In the background, police on horseback, behind the marching crowd.		Unnamed man: And ah [they] should be able to determine their own affairs.

Table 6.3 – A news report featuring unnamed direct voices, aired on SBS on 21 June 2008.

The example passage in Table 6.3 assigns direct voice to protesters, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, through a sequence of grabs but leaves them unnamed. Consequently, although the beginning of this news report draws on the 'ordinary' citizens' views, it does not place great importance on these voices. The story did name two Indigenous sources later on, Lyall Cooper as someone from 'Darwin's Bagot community' and Vince Forrester as

‘Mutitjulu elder’, and generally naming practices in the context of ‘ordinary’ people’s voice was mixed in the stories about the anniversary. One cannot therefore say that a clear pattern emerged in which all protesters or ‘ordinary’ citizens would have been left unnamed or without a title. However, the media texts were rarely framed around the protesters’ or other ‘ordinary’ citizens’ presence, as most stories positioned the government or the taskforce as an actor with ‘the capacity of doing something’ (Carvalho 2010, p. 17) already in the first couple of paragraphs of a newspaper text or in the intro of a TV story, including the example TV report discussed above.

In the odd case a story about the key discourse moment explored was clearly framed around the views of the people who lived in the communities under the Intervention, without the setting of the protests or the policy announcements by the government and the taskforce. Such stories allowed for Indigenous people to set their own agenda. The following excerpt from a feature in *The Age* provides an example. The story begins with a description of the community of Mutitjulu, after which the first instance of direct voice is assigned to an Indigenous elder:

This is where John Howard’s emergency intervention into remote Northern Territory Aboriginal communities, to rescue children at risk of abuse and neglect, began. So one year on, what is the truth about what the intervention has brought to Mutitjulu? ‘Lots of Toyotas,’ elder Bob Randall drily observes as he drives home past the traffic delivering the day’s quota of bureaucrats. Three or four loads rolling up every day (Chandler 2008).

Throughout the story, the reporter leans on accounts by a few residents of Mutitjulu as well as her own observations. Towards the end, the story reads:

Senior elder Donald Fraser, who found his voice with land rights in the 1970s and has been raising it ever since, takes time out to reflect on the truths of the intervention in Mutitjulu. For all its haste, and despite the fears, ‘it was a good thing, a bit of a shake-up, right across the territory’, he says. But it’s lost momentum since the change of the government. He wants Kevin Rudd and Jenny Macklin to sit on the earth under the rock, at a meeting such as this, to listen and talk for a few hours about what comes next (Chandler 2008).

This passage is interesting as it not only positions the senior Aboriginal elder, Donald Fraser, as an important source by providing him with a direct voice and naming him with a title, but also positions the reporter as someone who has taken the time to sit down with the residents of the community, by referring to ‘a meeting such as this’, to talk about issues significant to them, calling federal ministers to do the same. The significance of such practice is discussed further shortly in section 6.3.3.

6.3.2 Presence of people affected by the Intervention through official sources

Not all people or institutions identified as having presence in the stories about the first anniversary of the Intervention had a direct voice. Some agents had presence indirectly, assigned to them by the journalists either in written text or voiceover and images, depending on the platform. Further, those who were assigned direct voice by the media practitioners had the opportunity to position other individuals or groups into relationships with each other. In MacDougall's (1995, 227–228) terms, this mode of perspective is 'exposition', 'the mode of third-person narration, by a third person displaying and explaining the behaviour of other third persons'.

The exploration of presence assigned to people or institutions by a reporter's voice reveals that, again, the stories tended to present official people or institutions, such as the government, ministers, the Intervention taskforce or its report, as agents – that is, as someone who has the capacity of doing something (Carvalho 2010, p. 17). In the TV stories such presence was often enhanced by active images of the actor in question. Moreover, the reporter's voice often constructed vague agents by deleting the person or institution performing the act from a transitive action. This phenomenon, which is used to describe the relationships between participants within a text, 'removes a sense of specificity and precision from the clause' and is typical of newspaper language (Richardson 2007, 54–55). At the same time, such language structures positioned 'ordinary' people, often Indigenous, as objects on whom things were done by an unidentified agent, for example:

Parents who fail to enrol and regularly send their children to school will have their welfare payments stopped under a radical plan being trialled in six Northern Territory communities (Karvelas and Robinson 2008).

In most cases the vague agent was of course the federal government or the Intervention taskforce, and so the passive form reproduced the power of these official institutions over the people living under the Intervention measures. At times, the government was also positioned as an object over which either the Intervention taskforce or documents, such as the taskforce's report, had power – that is, the taskforce could issue recommendations to the government regarding future policy. In a few cases, even the 'ordinary' citizens were assigned the opportunity to position the authorities as the object of their will. This happened mostly through the construction of agents and objects within these actors' direct accounts which is discussed further below. However, positioning the government as an object did not occur nearly as often as positioning 'ordinary' citizens as objects of government policy.

When it comes to presences in the testimonies of sources, the people associated with the government or the Intervention taskforce often enhanced their active role by referring to either themselves or the institution within which they functioned as agents. To provide an example, in the account by minister Jenny Macklin, discussed in Tables 6.1 and 6.2 ('What we are doing today is really saying to parents, you have a responsibility to make sure that your children attend school regularly'), she constructs the federal government ('we') as an agent with capabilities to tell parents what they ought to do and to place sanctions on them. Another example of this practice in the stories about the first anniversary is the former Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Mal Brough, who, in quotes or grabs assigned to him, frequently referred to either himself ('I') or to a vague actor 'we' which in some contexts seemed to mean the Howard government. The following extract from an interview with Mal Brough, aired on the ABC's *Lateline* program on the eve of the first anniversary, provides an example:

... I feel *if we've had another twelve months* to drive the initiatives, to continue to bring the business community and the medical fraternity behind us, I think *we could've achieved more* than has been achieved today (Trioli 2008, my emphasis).

The context reveals that 'we' in this passage refers to the Howard government in which Brough was the Minister for Indigenous Affairs. However, he often used the vague actor 'we' to describe other groups as well, as this passage from the same interview indicates:

... what I can tell you now from the people that I spoke to yesterday who live in the communities there's still too many drugs, too much alcohol coming in and still too much abuse, therefore that tells us, rather than stabilising we need to continue to ramp up those resources. Not to do so means we'll be saying sorry again in another 20 years' time, but now we'll have no excuse because we know better (Trioli 2008).

Here, I suggest, Brough is not referring to the Howard government but to either governments or other such authority generally or perhaps even to Australia and its citizens as a nation or society. My suggestion is based on Brough's reference to the national apology to the Stolen Generation for past policies and injustice, issued in February 2008 by then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd. The apology received wide support in Australia, and by referring to 'we' in the context of 'saying sorry', Brough seems to include Australians as a nation in this group of 'us' he is talking about. At the same time, the reference to the apology seems to leave Indigenous Australians outside this constructed domain of 'us', as the apology was issued for Indigenous peoples by the government and, in a sense, the non-Indigenous population generally, depending on how broadly one reads the apology.

The actors associated with the government and the Intervention taskforce were not the only ones assigned the opportunity to construct the Australian ‘we’ domain. For instance, Indigenous academic Mick Dodson and Pat Anderson, the co-author of the *Little Children Are Sacred* report, could do so in some of the TV stories broadcast around the anniversary, one of which was an interview with Pat Anderson. In their accounts, Dodson and Anderson were able to include Indigenous Australians into ‘us’, in contrast with Mal Brough’s account discussed above. A passage from a news report aired on channel Ten, featured in Table 6.4, shows how Mick Dodson constructed the ‘we’ domain (McCloskey 2008).

Time code	Image	(Actuality) sounds	Voice(over)
01:17	Medium long shot of remote community, people in army uniforms in the foreground, Indigenous people in the background. Camera moves to show a person wearing a uniform go and shake hands with an Indigenous woman.		[abu]se. Reporter: Critics say it denies basic human rights. Dodson: What’s this
01:21	Medium shot of Mick Dodson, outdoor location. Caption: ‘Prof. Mick Dodson, Australian National University’.		say about us as a country that we’re so prepared to act in a racially discriminatory way against one group of Australians.

Table 6.4 – Construction of ‘us’ in a news report aired on channel Ten on 21 June 2008.

Dodson refers to ‘us as a country’ and assigns an active role to this actor, and the use of the pronouns ‘us’ and ‘we’ includes him into the Australian nation or society. At the same time, he is able to include Indigenous peoples into this group, given he is Indigenous himself. However, these kinds of occurrences were relatively rare compared to the power of actors related to either the government or the Intervention taskforce to construct themselves and their institutions as agents.

These prominent government and taskforce actors also positioned themselves – and were positioned by the news workers – as agents who could speak for people living under the Intervention:

Sue Gordon, retiring chairwoman of the NT Emergency Response Taskforce, says the intervention still has a long way to go, but steady progress has been made with 18 communities provided with a police presence. ‘Women and children in these communities feel much safer now,’ she says. ‘I have also received positive feedback about the impact of quarantining. There is less grog being consumed and more food on tables’ (Skelton 2008b).

This passage provides an example of the way the presence of the people living in the communities often took place through an official mediator's testimony. It also shows how 'ordinary' Indigenous presences mediated by official actors were often used to legitimise accounts that the Intervention was working and should be continued. Such practice was present on both platforms. However, TV stories provided somewhat more opportunities for the residents of the communities to position themselves and their communities as critics of aspects of the Intervention. The following piece of transcript illustrated in Table 6.5 provides an example of an opportunity assigned to a resident of a remote community to voice their views and contribute to the construction of 'we' (Tlozek 2008).

Time code	Image	(Actuality) sounds	Voice(over)
01:16	Medium shot of legs of Indigenous children playing at a playground.	Children's talk and screams.	Reporter: But there's a sense the main aim of the Intervention to wipe out child sexual abuse has been less successful.
01:22	Medium shot of Mavis Malbunka, outdoor location. Caption: 'Mavis Malbunka, Hermannsburg council'.		Malbunka: We don't see any actions happening about what families and peop... other families have reported to the police or to the team.

Table 6.5 – Construction of 'us' in a news report aired on the ABC on 21 June 2008.

In this passage an Indigenous woman, Mavis Malbunka, who according to the caption given in the story is representing the council of the community of Hermannsburg, is assigned the opportunity to position the council, or perhaps the whole community ('we'), as an actor. Further, through being interviewed she is able to point out a notable concern regarding the Intervention: that it has not addressed the issue the federal government said it was launched to address – child abuse. Instances such as this may open a media text to a counter-reading, as opposed to the dominant one (Hall 1984, 136–138), and therefore initiate social change. However, the power of these accounts was diminished by the dominant presence of official government actors.

6.3.3 Official sources and the significance of trust

Exploration of presence in the stories about the first anniversary suggests that journalistic practices, such as reliance on official sources, but also the discursive practices of the government provide some explanation for the presences constructed in the stories about the first anniversary of the Intervention. Traditionally, mainstream news media tend to use expert sources, as the 'relative authority' of such sources helps to enhance the credibility of the news reports (Allan 1999, p. 58). Further, it has been identified that the 24-hour news

cycle of today in which journalists have less time to investigate ‘encourages a reliance on official sources ... that can provide the information quickly’ (North 2009, 506–507). Some of the themes emerging from the interview data support the hypothesis of traditional journalistic practices playing a significant role in the construction of presences in the stories about the Intervention. According to one of these themes, official or expert sources function as regular sources for journalists, including in the context of the Intervention. Further, many participants also referred to trustworthiness or reliability as defined by journalists while talking about regular sources, which was also mapped as a theme emerging from the interviews. The following excerpts from an interview with Russell Skelton, working at *The Age* at the time of the interview, elucidate these themes further:

[S]ources exist for all sorts of different reasons ... motivations are many and varied ... one doesn’t just accept what a source has straight-up. ... you have to verify it; you have to know that it’s true.

He later noted that

[W]hen the Intervention was happening ... you were turning your own stories every day ... and therefore you’re working to a deadline, therefore stories had to be verified very quickly, and you had to be careful what you wrote, make sure it was accurate, because you’re on a very tight timeframe. ... But if it was based around a government statement, or a government claim, then it was quite straightforward.

These extracts illustrate how an official institution – the government – was seen as a source that could provide useful reliable information within tight deadlines, just as existing research on media practices has suggested (Shoemaker and Reese 1996, 108–109). Indeed, time and financial pressures faced by news workers in today’s world produce greater reliance on government and other such official sources who know the routines of the media and know how to work with those routines. As Shoemaker and Reese (1996, p. 180) explain, if the media do not come to big business, they go to the media. Moreover, according to Strömbäck and Van Aelst (2013, p. 354), ‘all social and political institutions and actors, including political parties, have become more dependent upon the media’ which has ‘created incentives for political parties to adapt to the media’. This has contributed to the ‘mediatization’ of politics (Strömbäck and Van Aelst 2013, p. 354) which has influenced Indigenous policy making in Australia, as McCallum et al. (2012) found. The passages above also outline the importance of the accuracy of sources’ statements which links the use of official sources with the trustworthiness of them – interestingly recognising simultaneously that discourse of such official sources can be ‘claims’ rather than absolute truths. It seems that while the interviewee

acknowledges that 'official' social actors might be driving a particular agenda, they are still seen as reliable sources in the fast-paced environment of news reporting.

Many participants also talked about the reliability of a source as something that defines whether it could be used in the context of the composition of a story – that is, which viewpoints are selected and how they are organised within a story. The following account by Ashleigh Wilson, of *The Australian*, sheds further light on the significance of reliability:

[I]t's fair to say that ... while I had ... a broad range of sources, there were of course ... a relatively small number of people whose judgement I trusted ... who brought ... unique perspective and ... a perspective that I trusted... .

This account highlights the importance of the trustworthiness of sources as defined by the news workers during the process of putting stories together. The findings regarding actors in the stories about the first anniversary of the Intervention, discussed above, show that journalists relied greatly on official sources that carry authority due to their position within society. The themes emerging from the interviews regarding official or expert sources or indeed reliability of sources as defined by reporters could be placed under a broader discursive pattern which exemplifies journalism as a set of professional, institutionalised practices that help journalism to carry out its public service function to scrutinise power but also do so in a timely manner with limited resources.

However, the exploration of the discursive practices of social actors external to media suggests that the federal government quite actively drove its agenda through the media releases and press conferences of the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Jenny Macklin. This may have also influenced the powerful presence of government and Intervention taskforce actors in the media stories about the Intervention's anniversary. Indeed, a few participants interviewed in this study noted that often those who are easier to contact or who know the way the media work and what is newsworthy to the media are most likely to be heard. According to Natasha Robinson, of *The Australian*, 'sometimes ... the voices that are heard the loudest are the people who shout the loudest'.

There was also another side to trust emerging from the interview accounts, which also potentially constrained the presence of Indigenous voices in mainstream media stories about the Intervention. Many participants referred to Indigenous Australians' lack of trust toward mainstream reporters and their reluctance to talk to the media. This stems from the historically problematic coverage of Indigenous peoples and affairs by mainstream media, discussed in Chapter 3. In a recent study on media and Indigenous policy making in

Australia, McCallum, Waller and Meadows (2012, p. 107) found that journalists' 'lack of empathy for Indigenous issues contributed to poor journalism practice and negative portrayals', and some participants acknowledged the existence of such problem. The following extract from an interview with Angela Bates, of the NITV, elaborates the issue further:

I come from a town in Western New South Wales called Wilcannia. It's a very small community, I think population is less than a thousand, and ... we've always gotten a rough trot from the ... media. ... I remember speaking to non-Indigenous journalist that ... says, 'Oh,' you know, 'I heard that ... people in Wilcannia lie down in the middle of the road, ... pretending they are injured, and when you stop to help them they rob you.' And, oh, well I just laughed, because ... that's the kind of reputation, you know, it's not true. ... So, I come from a town like that, and people are very cynical of ... mainstream reporting.

Consequently, Indigenous people living under the Intervention may have chosen not to speak to the media due to previous negative experiences, which may have further contributed to the lack of Indigenous presence, particularly direct voices, in the stories about the first anniversary of the Intervention.

Accounts by the Indigenous participants suggest that Indigenous reporters have an advantage when it comes to gaining the trust of people in the communities so they are willing to act as sources. This is interesting, as at the same time these Indigenous journalists draw on the same traditional journalistic practices in their accounts as non-Indigenous journalists. Perhaps Indigenous journalists have more 'empathy for Indigenous issues' (McCallum, Waller, and Meadows 2012, p. 107) than their non-Indigenous counterparts and are hence better placed to juggle the complexity of Indigenous issues with the traditional journalistic ideals. One way of addressing the lack of trust would therefore be an increase in the recruitment of Indigenous journalists by the mainstream media. There are, however, issues with this approach, to which participant Amy McQuire, of the *Tracker* magazine drew attention:

[W]e really had to get more Aboriginal journalists in, and not just in sort of ... mainstream media have certain places where they put Aboriginal journalists, for example SBS has *Living Black* ... ABC has their own Indigenous affairs department, but in some ways that's a problem as well, because you're sort of just pigeon holing into Aboriginal affairs.

McQuire suggested the problem with simply getting more Indigenous journalists in the mainstream media is that these journalists are 'influenced by the non-Indigenous journos at the top, and there's no change'.

Another related solution for mainstream journalists could be to spend time in Indigenous communities to build rapport and nurture trust with them, instead of ‘fly-in fly-out’ reporting. Waller (2010) has formulated a framework for reporting on Indigenous issues which draws on Indigenous research methodologies and emphasises listening, discussed in Chapter 3 and revisited in Chapter 8. Such practice would allow for the building of meaningful relationships between journalists and Indigenous communities which might in turn help journalists to develop their ‘cultural competence’ (McCallum, Waller, and Meadows 2012, p. 107) regarding Indigenous affairs. In fact, a few participants did refer to a practice similar to that advocated by Waller, raising the importance of taking the time to spend time with the people in the communities and to listen to what they had to say. Ashleigh Wilson, of *The Australian*, described this as follows:

I often found that when dealing with ... when visiting Aboriginal communities, especially remote ones ... the more time I could spend there and not just five minutes, or ten minutes or an hour ... the more time I could spend there ... was far more preferable than ... going in and out. ... Which was inevitable anyway, because I would be going in and out, but ... taking the time to ... sit down and listen patiently was ... important.

There were also some traces of this practice in at least one story about the anniversary of the Intervention (see Chandler 2008). Other patterns emerging from the interview data, however, suggest that there are constraints to this ideal practice.

6.3.4 ‘Foreign correspondents’: Language and cultural differences

A few participants also referred to language and cultural differences as factors that potentially limit the presence of Indigenous voices in mainstream news media stories about the Intervention. Looking at language first, a number of Indigenous Australians living in remote communities speak an Aboriginal language as their mother tongue, with English being the second, third or perhaps fourth language. This may work as a constraint when English speaking journalists from English language media report on Indigenous affairs – Murray McLaughlin, of the ABC, described it as follows:

[I]n the Northern Territory there are dozens of ... Aboriginal languages spoken. I speak none of them. I understand none of them ... so, that will always be ... for ... non-Indigenous journalist ... the biggest hurdle.

Further, as another TV reporter suggested, people in the communities might ‘feel uncomfortable about their level of English’ and may not thus want to talk to the media.

In addition, many participants talked about cultural differences between the wider Australian community and remote Indigenous communities as something that constrains coverage of Indigenous issues. This – references to cultural differences – is a discursive pattern that manifested in the interview data in a number of ways. Firstly, a few participants suggested that people in the remote communities do not often know ‘how to deal with’ the media. The following extract from an interview with Natasha Robinson, of *The Australian*, provides an example:

[T]here’s cultural challenges ... in dealing with people, who sometimes ... would never have dealt with the media before and may not speak ... English very well.

This relates back to the journalistic practice of using official sources, discussed in section 6.3.3; official sources have learned the ways of news media and are often able to provide useful comments within tight deadlines of the media whereas residents of remote communities have not. Secondly, the complexity of Indigenous affairs or culture was outlined as a factor complicating coverage of Indigenous topics, particularly if they concerned remote communities. This is evident in the following excerpt from an interview with a TV reporter (whose quote has been de-identified due to confidentiality):

Mesikämnen: Anything that would influence ... finding and using sources?

Participant no. 8: Well, one thing that would influence using sources, if they actually turned up when I arrange to meet ... so, that quite often happened, that someone would say, ‘Yeah, sure, ... I’ll talk to you,’ and then we’d fly 800 km and get there and ... they would not be there ... [T]hat was again a *cultural thing*, people say that they’re willing to help, but then for certain reasons they cannot or will not, or whatever. ... [T]here would be people who I think would want to talk, but then couldn’t, because they were not traditional owners of that particular area (my emphasis).

Here, the participant explains that difficulties to do with finding Indigenous sources derive from Indigenous culture. Interestingly, the participant then suggests that the Intervention enabled more and more people to voice their viewpoints (who could not do so before due to cultural reasons):

[T]hat seemed to change a little bit over the Intervention. I think some people kind of found their voice, and felt that they were entitled to also have their say ... because I think a lot of communities were suffering from ... internal tensions at the time ... with power struggles, particularly in communities that had kind of been artificially created, where they had different clans and different family groups living together, who had not previously lived together ... in generations past, and were living on land, but didn’t belong to them, so traditional owner groups were dominant, even though these people had lived in this particular town or community their whole life ... so, there were those kind sort of constraints sometimes about people feeling that they couldn’t talk ... there were people who didn’t want to talk (Participant no. 8).

While suggesting that there are ‘internal tensions’ and ‘power struggles’ in remote Indigenous communities, which complicate journalists’ work, the participant also acknowledges that such struggles are caused by previous policies by the settler state (Chapter 2). This may function as a trace of ‘cultural competence’, referred to in section 6.3.3. However, reflecting on the statement about the Intervention helping people to find their voice, analysis of presence in news media content about the first anniversary suggests it was not easy for these voices to find their way into stories. Factors that may have influenced this are discussed in section 6.3.5.

Cultural differences were emphasised by a few participants to the point where they likened reporting on issues concerning remote Indigenous communities to the job of a foreign correspondent.

6.3.5 Limited resources and the issue of remoteness

The recent technological changes, particularly the rise of the online platform, have driven many news organisations around the globe to rethink the way they work as well as their business model, and Australia is not an exception. Certainly, a study on the first two months of the Intervention found that the loss of revenue and extensive structural change experienced by the newspaper industry were likely to have limited newspaper journalists’ ability to follow routine journalism practices that are supposed to enable ‘more reflective’ reporting (Dunne Breen and McCallum 2013). The participants interviewed in this study also drew on material constraints on discursive practices of the news organisations in Australia while talking about practices regarding sources for stories about Indigenous topics, including the Intervention, and the interview data therefore suggests that limited budgets work as a constraint for Indigenous voices, particularly those in remote communities, in mainstream stories. Participants from both print and TV platforms raised the issue of the lack of resources as an obstacle for reporting when it comes to remote areas. A TV reporter referred to the situation as follows:

[I]f we wanted to go somewhere quite remote, we usually had to rely on a lift with a government plane ... often stories for us would ... eventuate, because the government had said, ‘We’re flying to ... because this minister is going out to make this announcement’ or something. So, we’d say, ‘Right, there’s our chance. We’ll go out. We’ll have four hours on the ground before they fly us back, because we can’t afford a plane ... we’ll go out there and we’ll do this ... and this, and we don’t actually care about that government announcement.’ ... we’d have to take those opportunities, because we didn’t have the budget to get anywhere. So, we were a bit restricted in terms of where we could go, and it was usually communities that were driving distance from Darwin ... or from Alice Springs (Participant no. 8).

This extract describes how the geographic isolation of the Northern Territory together with limited resources is identified as a hurdle regarding remote reporting, and it can be argued that this constrained the coverage of the Intervention. The participant's account outlines the lack of opportunities mainstream reporters may face regarding travel to the remote communities to spend time with and listen to the residents of these areas. Although the reporter suggests that the news organisation did not necessarily cover the story the government flew them to a remote location for, the statement regarding stories 'eventuating' because of the media crew getting a lift with the government does highlight the agenda setting power of the government which could be weaker if news organisations had more resources. It is useful to note here, however, that the allocation of scarce resources is also a matter of priority. Chris Graham, of *Tracker* magazine, referred to this in his interview:

It's not about resources, it's about priorities, and it's about political will. In the case of the government, it's about ... a political will, and in the case of the media, it's absolutely about priorities. [T]hey wouldn't bat an eye ... a girl can get ... killed ... on a property ... on the north coast of New South Wales, but the media doesn't bat an eyelid at hiring a helicopter to fly over and film a mother grieving over the body of her child.

In a climate of reduced staff and budgets, it seems clear the media have to look for new ways of including Indigenous voices into their stories in addition to investigating how to provide reporters with opportunities to build rapport with remote communities. The Indigenous participants interviewed in this study, who were working in Indigenous media, referred to the importance of influencing the agendas of mainstream media by trying to get them to pick up their stories. Perhaps this – forming connections with Indigenous media, 'listening' (Dreher 2010) to their ways of reporting and picking up their stories – could address the issue of cost mainstream media face regarding reporting on remote areas. This is discussed further in the concluding remarks in Chapter 8.

6.3.6 Presenting 'both sides of the story'

What, then, were the messages put forward by the agents who were assigned presence in the stories about the first anniversary? Framing provided by the government agents, such as the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Jenny Macklin, and the Intervention taskforce heads, Sue Gordon and David Chalmers, was that although the Intervention still had a way to go, it had improved Indigenous lives in the remote communities, particularly those of women and children. Examples of such framing are discussed further in section 6.3.7 which looks at how it was legitimised. This framing is relatively prevalent in the stories about the first

anniversary, given these official social actors were positioned as agents more often than others.

In passages which were not relying on reported speech but on the journalist's voice, the framing was similar – that some parts of the Intervention had worked while others had not. However, the media workers' framing was in some cases more critical than that of the official government or taskforce actors, stating that the Intervention has failed to deliver on its promises to address social dysfunction, most importantly child sexual abuse, in remote Indigenous communities. The extract from a story in *The Sydney Morning Herald* below elucidates this further:

A year ago to the day, John Howard, then prime minister, described the situation of children in remote Aboriginal communities as 'Australia's Hurricane Katrina'. It was a metaphor both apt and alarming: if one defining feature of Katrina was disaster, the other was an utterly failed rescue. After recognising and wading into Australia's most catastrophic social problem, the former and current federal governments may be about to commemorate one year of an incomplete and patchy rescue mission (Skelton 2008a).

Such framing by some of the journalists is not surprising, given that one of the discourses emerging from the interview data exemplified the role of journalism as the 'watchdog' of power within society. In other words, many participants interviewed for this study described the role of journalism as the 'fourth estate' which scrutinises power within society, particularly the government and its policies. The following extract from an interview with Natasha Robinson, of *The Australian*, provides an example:

Mesikämnen: [W]hat do you see as the role of ... journalism in contemporary society?

Robinson: Um...

Mesikämnen: Another big question.

Robinson: Yes, it is. Do you mean in relation to Indigenous affairs? Or ... just in general?

Mesikämnen: [I]n general, but also in relation to Indigenous affairs.

Robinson: Well, I think ... the role of journalism in contemporary society is ... probably what it's always been, which is to ... inform, act as a watchdog ... on behalf of the citizens. ... [Y]ou know, to scrutinise what is happening in public institutions.

...

Robinson: Mmm. And as far ... the media's role ... in regards to Indigenous affairs, well, I think it's primarily to scrutinise ... government policy and ... you know, there are huge amounts of money poured into ... attempting to combat Indigenous disadvantage in Australia. ... And ... governments have a pretty poor track record in that regard in this country. ... And so, I think it's now... like at the moment, it's sort of more important than it ever has been ... to really scrutinise what governments are doing. What they're spending that money on. How they... how they do that ... you know, what ... their policies are, and ... how they are ... implemented on the ground.

This extract indicates journalists regard their role as part of the ‘fourth estate’ as particularly important in the context of Indigenous issues because of the ‘poor track record’ on Indigenous policies by successive governments. Yet this watchdog role appears diminished by over-reliance on government and Intervention taskforce voices in news media coverage on the first anniversary of the Intervention, as per the findings of this research. What is also interesting in the account above is that it emphasises the fiscal side of Indigenous policy rather than social justice issues. This approach to Indigenous policy is discussed further in analysis of the second key discourse moment, the Productivity Commission’s report on Indigenous disadvantage (Chapter 7).

Nevertheless, some framings evident in this coverage competed with those of government agents, suggesting the Intervention has not or cannot work for various reasons. For example, in occasions of direct voice assigned to her, Pat Anderson – co-author of the *Little Children Are Sacred* report – repeatedly talked about the importance of empowering Indigenous communities and said that by launching a response like the Intervention the government was ignoring the report’s first recommendation, that solutions to the issues in remote communities should be sought together with Indigenous Australians. Similar framings were put forward in accounts by people demonstrating against the Intervention. However, the framing of the Intervention as failed or unworkable policy appeared far less often than the government’s framing of it, discussed above. Further, the data indicates that the framing of the Intervention as unworkable was more likely to be extensively present within the genre of political interview than in news reports (for genres see Fairclough 2001, p. 123).

The presence of such oppositional framings within one story can be explained by the ‘routine of objectivity’, the term Shoemaker and Reese (1996, pp. 112–113) use to refer to the practice of presenting conflicting views in a story, thus enabling journalists to represent themselves as ‘fair’ to protect against criticism, particularly when opposing viewpoints are presented through direct speech by sources. This discourse was present in the interview data collected for this study as well – many participants talked about the importance of ‘balanced’ or ‘fair’ reporting meaning the representation of ‘both’ or ‘all’ sides of the story. Interestingly, instead of seeing such practice as means to fend off criticism the journalists’ accounts signal balance is viewed as an ethical dimension. The following excerpt from an interview with a TV news worker (whose account has been de-identified due to confidentiality) elucidates this further:

Mesikämnen: [C]an you talk me through a typical process of selecting facts and viewpoints and arranging them into a story?

Participant no. 8: ... I mean, we would ... do everything in our power to ensure that we had ... both sides, because as I said before, ... the Intervention was so polarising that we would do everything we could to ensure that both sides ... were heard, and ... maybe not always with equal weight, but that would depend on the way we were choosing to tell the story ... I guess, we made an effort to ... yes the balance, because we felt that was our responsibility, but we felt like we had an additional responsibility, which was to get the voices of people, who would otherwise not be heard out there as well.

Mesikämnen: Right. That's interesting. [W]ere there any editorial guidelines specifically ... for stories about the Intervention?

Participant no. 8: [N]ot specifically about the Intervention. I think we were all just expected to employ normal [name of news outlet] editorial policy to achieve balance, to be accurate, all those sort of things ... applied equally, I think.

By referring to the 'normal editorial policy' the participant implies that the Intervention was treated as stories usually are with attention to accuracy and balance. Moreover, by citing 'additional responsibility' the journalist also describes Intervention coverage (at least in this particular news outlet) as a means for those affected by the policy framework ('who would otherwise not be heard') to have their voice heard. Thus news workers themselves see 'balance' as ethical practice and not so much – or not only – as a way to avoid criticism.

The above interview excerpt, however, also emphasises the role news workers play regarding the availability of different voices/viewpoints in the public arena. The participant's reference to 'the way [they] were choosing to tell the story' indicates the power of newsrooms when it comes to framing stories; although the journalistic cornerstone is that 'both' or 'all' sides of a story should be told in order to be fair or balanced, in the end, news workers can consciously concentrate on a particular voice or viewpoint if they think it should be stressed. The interview passage above suggests that in this case such conscious decisions on framing may have worked for the benefit of Indigenous Australians living under the Intervention, as the participant remarks that their intention was to 'get the voices of people who would otherwise not be heard out there as well'. However, analysis of presence in stories on the first anniversary of the Intervention suggests this good intention may not be easy to achieve.

The most common claims in stories about the first anniversary and their legitimisation are discussed further in the following section.

6.3.7 Legitimising the Intervention

Analysis of the discursive strategy 'legitimation' in stories about the Intervention's first anniversary reveals that several claims were justified by various social actors. Examining a sample of 19 newspaper articles and 11 original TV stories (see section 6.3), analysis of legitimisation was conducted by logging legitimated claims made in the stories into a database and investigating their frequency (see section 6.2.1). A claim did not have to be a quote or a

sound bite – it could also have been made in occurrences of indirect speech or reporter’s voice – and one story could include a number of legitimated claims. These legitimated claims and their frequency within the sample are presented in Figure 6.1 and discussed in more detail below.

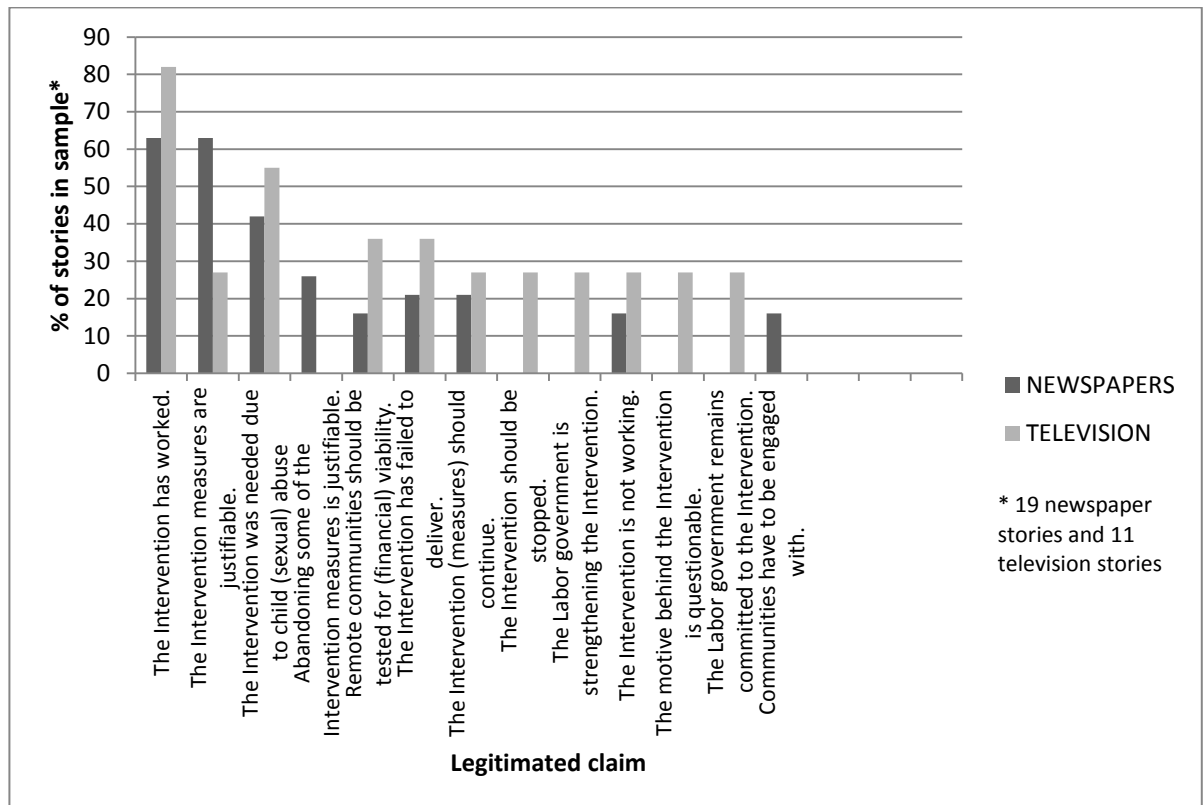


Figure 6.1 – Frequency of legitimated framings in newspaper and TV stories about the first anniversary of the Intervention.

The dominating claim legitimised by various agents in the stories on both platforms was that the Intervention has worked, made progress or benefitted Indigenous people (in 12 newspaper articles and nine TV stories). In addition, a claim in the newspapers that the Intervention measures are justified was just as common (Figure 6.1). These claims were often made by ministers or the Intervention taskforce personnel who legitimised them by presenting data from reports relating to the Intervention’s first year or citing accounts by community residents, but some legitimation was also done by media workers when stories omitted reported speech from any sources. The following passage from a story published in *The Mercury* provides an example:

Mr Rudd has denied he has used the past seven months in government to wind back the reforms and says the intervention to date has been a success. ‘Many families in remote communities are reporting that they feel safer because of the increased police presence, reduction in alcohol consumption,’ he said.

According to a 12-month report card handed down by the Government this week, 11,000 children have had free health checks, with ear, nose and throat surgery performed on 46 and dental surgery on 40. Audiology services have been provided to 669 children and non-surgical dental services to 350 children.

School nutrition programs are in place in 49 communities and associated outstations and seven town camp regions, creating 785 jobs.

Fifty-one police are on the ground and safe houses have been built in seven communities with courses in financial management running in 42 communities. More than 1000 people have gone from work-for-the-dole positions into government service delivery jobs.

Ms Macklin said there were also anecdotal reports of a reduction in alcohol consumption and weight gain in children.

Certainly there are fewer bruised and battered women hiding in shelters from their boozed-up husbands and children are getting a good night's sleep.

'An indigenous woman told me that, for the first time she could remember, she had had a week of sleeping peacefully,' said the former national president of the Australian Medical Association, Bill Glasson ('One long year of Intervention' 2008).

Firstly, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd suggests that the Intervention has been a success and justifies this claim by referring to 'many families' who 'report' that they 'feel safer' due to some of the Intervention measures. The reader cannot tell whether Mr Rudd has in fact spoken to some residents of these communities himself or received this information through a mediator. However, his position as leader of the Australian nation assigns more discursive power to this account compared to a situation in which, for instance, a resident of a community demonstrating against the Intervention would argue that many people from their community say the Intervention measures have not made them feel safer.

The story then goes on to present data from a '12-month report card' which further legitimises the Prime Minister's claim that the Intervention has been a success as the data describes some achievements of the policy approach. The account by Jenny Macklin, then Minister for Indigenous Affairs, that follows, continues to justify the claim made by Mr Rudd with its reference to 'anecdotal reports' on some benefits of the Intervention measures.

Finally, the story suggests that there is 'certainly' less domestic violence and women and children are able to sleep without disturbance from drunken men. What is interesting in this sentence is that one cannot establish whose voice it is that is heard. Is it the reporter's or perhaps an unquoted source's? Further, the phrase 'boozed-up husbands' is significant as it provides stereotypically negative picture of Indigenous men in the communities. Again one cannot tell who is voicing the claim. This claim, about 'fewer bruised and battered women' and 'their boozed-up husbands', is partially justified by a quote from Bill Glasson, a prominent person as the former national president of the Australian Medical Association, who is positioned as someone who can mediate an unnamed Indigenous woman's account

about being able to sleep peacefully. However, the most likely reading of this passage is that the claim is made by the reporter as the sentence before Glasson's account does not include references to any sources but matter-of-factly states that this is how things are. As a result, the whole passage legitimises Kevin Rudd's framing of the Intervention as a success.

Official agents were not the only legitimisers of the Intervention or its measures – some of the justification appears to have been done by Indigenous residents from remote communities. The following passage from a story in *The Age* provides an example about the legitimisation of the measure of compulsory income management:

According to Mutitjulu women young and old, their most vulnerable children are better off for the intervention. They have full bellies, courtesy of the quarantining of welfare payments into household accounts, which started here last September. Women have 'money to spend on food and clothes, instead of it going on grog and ganja,' says community chairwoman Judy Trigger. The grandmothers, left with children when their parents vanish 'into town' for a drinking session, embrace the quarantining. Now they can access children's welfare through accounts at the local store, which has extended its inventory to meet demand (Chandler 2008).

This passage constructs 'Mutitjulu women' as supporters of the Intervention because the 'most vulnerable children are better off' due to the policy framework. This framing is legitimised by the following sentences, first of which seems to be news worker's voice: the reporter first justifies the claim by stating that the quarantining of welfare payments has enabled children to have 'full bellies'. This statement may have come from the women the journalist interviewed, but the way the passage is constructed involves the reporter as one of the agents legitimising the claim that children are better off due to the Intervention. The claim is further justified by a quote from the community chairwoman Judy Trigger. This passage – and the story it is part of – is a rare example of voice being assigned to people affected by the Intervention, albeit a small one. The story reflects the reality that some residents in the communities under the Intervention may have found particular elements of the policy approach beneficial. For instance, as explained in Chapter 2, the government had for years ignored calls for help from Indigenous communities and organisations regarding a number of issues, such as policing, educational opportunities, primary health care and community safety (Brown and Brown 2007, pp. 621–622; McMullen 2008, p. 14). However, when it comes to the whole sample about the first anniversary, the claim that the Intervention measures were justifiable was mostly legitimised by agents related to the government or the Intervention taskforce, including documents such as the taskforce's report on the Intervention.

The second common claim legitimised in both newspaper and TV stories about the first anniversary was that the Intervention was needed due to child (sexual) abuse or general dysfunction in remote Indigenous communities (in eight newspaper articles and six TV stories; Figure 6.1). This is illustrated in the following extract from a story in *The Australian*:

Despite the moaning of critics that the intervention was a land grab and not about child sexual abuse, disturbing indications of the scale of the crisis are in clear view in central Australian communities. In Hermannsburg, 130km west of Alice Springs, *Inquirer* witnessed a boy who looked about eight approach a visitor to the community and put his hand straight up the woman's crotch. As the shocked young woman spun around and rebuked the boy, his friend, who also appeared to be under 10, retorted: 'He wants to f..k you.'

Locals speak nervously of the plight of young women in the town, who have been raped so often that when approached for sex after dark in the community's streets, they simply lie down and capitulate. A report was recently made to Hermannsburg police of young children simulating sex with one another (Robinson 2008).

The legitimisation of the claim that the Intervention was needed because of child abuse in this passage relies predominantly on the reporter's eyewitness account. The journalist states that there indeed is a child sex abuse 'crisis' in the communities and justifies this claim by describing children's seemingly sexual behaviour toward a visitor, witnessed by the newspaper as *Inquirer*, one of the paper's sections, also visiting the community. This eyewitness account is particularly strong through the use of *Inquirer* as the agent rather than the individual journalist in the form of 'I' – *Inquirer* has institutional authority – as well as through an indirect quotation from an account by 'locals' who describe the disturbing state of young women in the community who have been raped over and over again. This reported speech represents the locals as fairly trustworthy sources as they 'speak' of the plight of young women rather than for example 'claim' or 'allege'. Richardson (2007, p. 103) notes that these kind of verbal processes 'chosen to characterise reported speech frames reader understandings of the reported event', and in this case the eyewitness account together with the neutrally presented indirect quotation legitimise justification of the Intervention on the grounds that remote Indigenous communities are so dysfunctional, given the prevalence of sexual abuse of young women and children behaving in a sexual way. 'Speaking' also constructs a more personal and less official or legal relationship between the 'locals' and *Inquirer* – and perhaps eventually the reader.

There are also other pointers that make the given claim and its legitimisation uncontested in this passage: there is no room left for other viewpoints. This is manifest in the first sentence; the argument according to which the Intervention was the federal government's attempt to

get hold of Indigenous land¹⁵ is dismissed as ‘moaning’. This choice of word serves rhetorically to delegitimise critics and further empowers the legitimisation of the need for the Intervention that takes place in the eyewitness account and reported speech discussed above.

The third of the common claims legitimised on both platforms examined differ (Figure 6.1). In the newspaper stories the third common claim put forward was that abandoning some of the Intervention measures, such as the abolition of the permit system¹⁶, is justifiable (in five stories). On TV, however, the claims were: remote communities should be tested for (financial) viability – and as a result some should perhaps be closed; and the Intervention has failed to deliver (in four stories).

The claim put forward in the newspapers – that abandoning some of the Intervention measures is acceptable – was mostly justified by government agents, such as Jenny Macklin, the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, which is not surprising, given the Rudd Labor government wanted to change some parts of the Intervention launched by the Howard Liberal government. In some cases, however, legitimisation was performed by an Indigenous source or the journalist. Table 6.6, featuring extracts from three different stories (Bevege 2008; Skelton 2008a; Smiles and Skelton 2008), illustrates legitimisation by three different agents.

¹⁵ For further discussion on different arguments regarding what brought on the Intervention, see Chapter 2.

¹⁶ As part of the Intervention, the Howard government abolished a system which required non-residents of communities located on Indigenous land to request a permit to enter this land.

<p><i>The Sydney Morning Herald</i>, 21 June 2008</p> <p>The intervention we had to have</p> <p>Significant parts of the agenda Macklin inherited have been partially abandoned. As always, the reasons are complex. The Brough strategy was bold but was being implemented on the run.</p>	<p><i>The Age</i>, 21 June 2008</p> <p>Truckies target underage girls for sex</p> <p>Taskforce chief Jonathan Nicholls told a conference in Melbourne that the permit system in the Northern Territory – that required outsiders to get approval to enter remote communities – is being abused in some cases. The system was abolished by the Howard government when it launched the federal intervention last year. But it was reinstated by the Rudd Government, which argued that it helped the police keep grog smugglers and pedophiles out of communities.</p>	<p><i>Sunday Territorian</i>, 22 June 2008</p> <p>Protesters call for end of intervention</p> <p>Mr Djirrimbilpilwuy, who manages the famous Chooky Dancers, said he felt income management was unfair – if it was imposed on blackfellas, it should be imposed on everyone.</p> <p>He said the permit system was necessary to prevent trespassers coming on to private Aboriginal land.</p>
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Table 6.6 – Legitimation in three newspaper stories.

In the first column, the passage from *The Sydney Morning Herald* story states that ‘significant parts’ of the Intervention have been abandoned for reasons that are ‘complex’. The reporter’s voice then justifies the process of abolishing some Intervention measures by noting that the policy framework of former Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Mal Brough, was implemented in a hurry (see sentence in bold). This statement by the reporter legitimises abandonment of parts of the Intervention as one possible reading is that since the policy approach was undertaken in haste some measures might not have served the goals of the Intervention, as announced by the Howard government – that is, to address child sexual abuse.

The passages in both the second and the third column present legitimation of the claim that reinstatement of the permit system is justifiable. In the story published in *The Age*, the claim is legitimised by the Rudd government, detailing how the permit system assisted police in keeping alcohol smugglers and pedophiles out of remote Indigenous communities (see sentence in bold). In the *Sunday Territorian* story (in the third column), the claim is legitimised by Mr Djirrimbilpilwuy, an Indigenous community resident, who is reported to have said that the permit system helped to keep trespassers away from Indigenous land (see sentence in bold). This shows how one claim could be legitimised by a number of different agents with slightly varied justifications. Both stories, however, go on to present claims that the Intervention was needed or its measures justified, along with legitimation for these claims.

On the TV platform, the first of the third common claims (Figure 6.1) was that remote Indigenous communities should be tested for viability, that is, whether services could be provided and people find employment in these communities in the long run – and as a result some should perhaps be closed. This framing and its legitimization was put forward by either the previous Minister, Mal Brough, the then current Minister Jenny Macklin, or the Intervention taskforce and its report. The extract presented in Table 6.7, from a transcript of a story aired on the ABC (Harper 2008), provides an example.

Time code	Image	(Actuality) sounds	Voice(over)
00:38	Medium long shot of people sitting in an outdoor setting, some appear to be Indigenous, one person is holding a dog.		Reporter: One block away from this rally
00:40	A long shot of a woman playing a guitar-like instrument in a park-like area outside a big building, with people in the background, banner on the far right with words 'Intervention = racist – human rights now'.		in Darwin, the federal Indigenous affairs minister
00:42	Medium long shot of Jenny Macklin walking through a door into a room, camera following her as she is walking.		was releasing the Intervention taskforce's more upbeat assessment of the emergency response.
00:48	Close-up of the cover of the <i>Northern Territory Emergency Taskforce's Final report to government, June 2008</i> .		If this report's recommendations are implemented, some smaller Aboriginal
00:53	Close-up of one of the pages of the report described in the previous unit, with a focus on section '4.1 Viability and Government Investment'.		communities could be deemed unviable based on their size,
00:56	Extreme close-up of the cover of the <i>Northern Territory Emergency Taskforce's Final report to government, June 2008</i> .		location and ability to lure private sector investment.
01:00	Extreme close-up of one of the pages of the report, with the words 'strongly recommends' standing out as they are in bold.		That means they'd miss out on new
01:02	Medium long shot of Indigenous people, both adults and children, standing and sitting on the ground in an outdoor location that appears to be a remote community.		housing, police and schools and Jenny
01:04	Long shot of two Indigenous people sitting on the ground in a remote community with backs towards the camera, a dog sitting in front of them, behind a metal fence next to a building.		Macklin gave some hint of
01:06	Medium long shot of two Indigenous children, one sitting on the ground and the other one sitting on the porch of a house, behind a metal fence.		her intentions today.
01:07	Medium shot of Jenny Macklin, indoor location, with microphones in the foreground.		Macklin: I want to make sure that children are going to school. I want to make sure that parents are able to get work.

Table 6.7 – Legitimation of the call for a viability test in a news report aired on the ABC on 21 June 2008.

According to this passage, the Intervention taskforce's assessment is more optimistic than that of 'ordinary' people demonstrating against the policy framework – whose views the story presented before this passage – although this statement is not legitimised. Instead, the story moves on to present the taskforce's recommendation that the government would test the viability of remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. The meaningfulness of such recommendation is legitimised by Minister Macklin's grab in which she says she 'wants to make sure' children attend school and parents can find jobs. Some commentators have argued that one issue causing dysfunction in remote Indigenous communities is that people have no jobs but rely on government benefits (see for example Pearson 2000a), and in light of this, Macklin's account supports the Intervention taskforce's suggestion for a viability test.

The second of the third common claims present on the TV platform, that the Intervention has failed to deliver, was legitimised by either the reporter, Indigenous residents of remote communities or Mal Brough. The following passage presented in Table 6.8, part of a story aired on the ABC (Tlozek 2008), shows how the framing suggested in the reporter's voiceover is justified by the following short clip from an interview with Indigenous woman Mavis Malbunka.

Time code	Image	(Actuality) sounds	Voice(over)
01:16	Medium shot of legs of Indigenous children playing at a playground.	Children's talk and screams.	Reporter: But there's a sense the main aim of the Intervention to wipe out child sexual abuse has been less successful.
01:22	Medium shot of Mavis Malbunka, outdoor location. Caption: 'Mavis Malbunka, Hermannsburg council'.		Malbunka: We don't see any actions happening about what families and peop... other families have reported to the police or to the team.

Table 6.8 – Legitimation of the claim that the Intervention has failed to deliver in a news report aired on the ABC on 21 June 2008.

In this passage, the reporter first suggests that the Intervention has not been successful in what the Howard government launched it for – to address the issue of child sexual abuse in remote Indigenous communities. This is then legitimised by presenting an account by a resident of the community, Mavis Malbunka, who says that families living in the community have reported matters, perhaps cases of child abuse, to the police and 'the team' – which most likely refers to the Intervention taskforce – but that the authorities have not done anything about the families' concerns. This passage has the potential to open the text for a 'counter-reading' as opposed to the dominant one (Hall 1984, pp. 136–138) and to invite the

viewer to ponder the functionality or even the motives of the Intervention, but it is not pursued further. Thus it seems the passage's function simply fulfils the journalistic routine of 'telling the both sides of the story', discussed in section 6.3.6. The extract in Table 6.9, also from a news report broadcast on the ABC (Barker 2008), provides another example of this kind of claim and legitimisation.

Time code	Image	(Actuality) sounds	Voice(over)
04:28	Long shot of scenery from remote community, buildings and a couple of people walking in the background.		Reporter: Even before the review findings, there's broad agreement that more must be done to focus on the issue that
04:35	Medium long shot of Indigenous children walking outdoors, filmed from neck/waist down.		forced the intervention in the first place, sexual
04:38	Medium long shot of Indigenous child sitting on the ground, filmed from neck down.		abuse. Only a handful of perpetrators
04:41	Medium long shot of Indigenous children walking on a street in a remote community with their backs towards camera. A young Indigenous man walking towards the camera holding a small container against his mouth.		have been identified or caught, and there have been few
04:44	Long shot of scenery from remote community, Indigenous people walking on the porch of a house, truck passing.		programs that might keep young men from resorting to violence at all.

Table 6.9 – Legitimation of claim that the Intervention has failed to deliver in a news report aired on the ABC on 20 June 2008.

This example is different from the previous one, presented in Table 6.8, in that it does not include a sound bite from a source which would legitimise the claim put forward in the story. In the passage presented in Table 6.9, both the claim that the Intervention has failed to deliver on its promises and its justification are essentially provided by the reporter's voiceover. The viewer is not told where the discussed 'broad agreement', or information about lack of perpetrators caught and preventative programs, originate from. They might be based on documents, such as the Intervention taskforce's report on the first twelve months of the policy approach, or interviews with different social actors, but this is not evident in the passage.

When it comes to the sequence of images, the shot of a young Indigenous man holding a small plastic container against his mouth further reinforces the suggestion that the

Intervention has not solved the targeted social issues of remote communities as the image implies petrol sniffing is still common. Otherwise the images are typical ‘wallpaper’ shots of remote Indigenous communities; analysis of the TV stories on the first anniversary revealed a pattern of these communities being portrayed from afar. This may reflect discretion towards those living in remote communities, or signal endeavours to make the story more ‘objective’, but it can also distance the viewer from the communities. This, as Kress and van Leeuwen (2006, pp. 124–126) explain, is because the size of the frame in visual texts derives from face-to-face interaction, and a long shot of people tends to portray them ‘impersonally, as strangers’. This may, in turn, contribute to the construction of the domains of ‘us’ and ‘them’.

Looking at the fourth of the common claims (Figure 6.1), one of two claims in newspapers was that the Intervention failed to deliver on its promises, particularly that of making children safer (in four stories). This means it ranked below all the other claims discussed above when it comes to frequency of legitimated claims in stories. The issue was assigned presence in a number of stories through official agents’ accounts – for instance, a minister or one of the Intervention taskforce heads might have acknowledged that the policy framework still had a long way to go but that significant progress had been made – but legitimised at length in notably fewer stories. The following passage from a story in *The Age* presents one example of how such legitimisation was accomplished:

Documents reveal that:

- Welfare quarantining has been introduced in less than 60% of the prescribed communities, or to 10,000 of 19,000 recipients. While anecdotal evidence confirms it has been welcomed in the Central Desert, there have been complaints about bureaucratic bungling, and unfair targeting of functional families and the elderly.
- The partial phasing out of CDEP before the federal election last November has eradicated 1900 jobs and replaced them with 1147 real jobs. On paper at least, 753 people appear to be worse off, although significant numbers of people who were paid by the government on the cheap now have full-time, fully entitled positions. Confusion persists over Ms Macklin’s plans to reintroduce CDEP in a more disciplined form to make people work ready.
- School attendance remains patchy at best. Some schools, where quarantining has been introduced, show higher attendance, while others have registered steep falls as families move to Alice Springs in search of work, medical services and to avoid more stringent alcohol bans. At Ampilatwatja, attendance has fallen from 110 to 68. At Canteen Creek it has jumped from 83 to 111.
- A number of communities with bad histories of violence and unlawful behaviour remain vulnerable without police. They include Docker River, a community west of Alice Springs near the WA border that has been pleading for a police presence since 1990 (Skelton 2008b).

While including a few claims and supporting evidence that the Intervention has been beneficial, the extract also outlines problems with the Intervention measures. For instance, the story claims that the Intervention has not simply improved school attendance, justifying this by presenting evidence on attendance actually dropping in some communities since the policy framework was launched. The claim that the Intervention has failed to deliver is further legitimised by the statement regarding lack of police presence in communities which have requested it. As discussed in section 6.3.6, the presence of the claim that the Intervention has failed to deliver and its legitimisation in the stories about the first anniversary can be partially explained by the discourse of journalism as the ‘watchdog’ emerging from the interview data. The idea(l) of journalism as ‘telling both sides of the story’ is also likely to contribute to this kind of framing.

The other one of the fourth common claims in the newspaper stories was that the Intervention measures should continue (also in four stories). This was also one of the fourth common claims present on the TV platform (in three stories; Figure 6.1). This claim was legitimised on both platforms by accounts according to which the measures were protecting Indigenous children, that they were needed in order for people in the communities to feel safe enough to provide evidence against abusers or that it takes time to achieve change in remote communities. The claim and its legitimisation were provided by the Intervention taskforce heads or the former or then Ministers for Indigenous Affairs.

Finally, the claim that the Intervention was not working, along with proper legitimisation, ranked well below that of the Intervention being beneficial – it was one of the fourth common claims on TV and one of the fifth common claims in the newspapers (in three TV and print stories respectively; Figure 6.1). The following passage from a story in *The Canberra Times* illustrates this claim further:

Murri leader and Aboriginal Rights Coalition spokesman Sam Watson said the intervention did little more than erode the rights of Aboriginals. ‘Mr Rudd should put \$1billion on the table and work with Aboriginal political leaders and lay down strategies and programs which will alleviate problems,’ Mr Watson said. ‘He has shrouded himself with a small number of hand-picked advisers and is not talking to the broader Aboriginal community’ (Hand 2008).

In this extract, Indigenous leader Sam Watson suggests that the Intervention has not or cannot work. He justifies this claim in two different ways. Firstly, Mr Watson argues that the policy framework has ‘eroded the rights’ of Indigenous Australians. It is useful to make a note about the relations between the settler state and Indigenous Australians here: as also discussed in Chapter 2, some commentators suggest that government control and top-down

policies that disempower the Indigenous population have had devastating effects on Indigenous wellbeing, both historically and more recently in the context of the Intervention (Burden 1998, p. 196; Ring and Wenitong 2007). In this context, Mr Watson's statement about the Intervention having done 'little more than eroded the rights of Aboriginals', while being a claim in itself, legitimises the framing that the policy approach has not and cannot work. Secondly, he justifies his claim by indicating that more money and wider consultations with the Indigenous community are needed in order for contemporary government policies to be beneficial for Indigenous Australians.

To summarise, the analysis of legitimation in the stories about the first anniversary of the Intervention reveals that the most common claims along with their justification follow the findings regarding presence, framing and positioning in the stories, discussed above. The most common voices in the stories were those of official social actors who were positioned as agents and whose message predominantly was that although the Intervention still had some issues to be solved, it had worked and should be continued. News analysis provided by the journalists in the stories also often suggested that although the Intervention had failed to deliver in some areas it had made progress in others. Most common legitimations present in the stories justified the most common framings, thereby marginalising legitimation regarding Intervention as a policy that has not – or cannot – work and the call for the inclusion of Indigenous Australians in the policy making process.

6.3.8 Politicised Intervention

Analysis of the news media coverage of the first anniversary of the Intervention suggests that the national newspaper, *The Australian*, tended to politicise the policy approach. The Intervention was 'attributed a political nature' (Carvalho 2010, pp. 18–19) by turning complex policy into politics. The following paragraphs from a feature story in the national paper illustrate this further:

As is now clear, the Howard-Brough intervention was a seismic event in Australian politics, as well as in its impact on the ground in the Centre and Top End. For *when Howard moved, he challenged the long-held assumptions of the enlightened intelligentsia about Aboriginal people in the remote world*. The broad paradigm that believed in land rights and separate development as a panacea, and a kind of recompense, for the effects of colonisation.

Howard and Brough, building on the space won for them by Cape York leader Noel Pearson, argued that welfare and licence were rotting communities away. They proposed a coercive regime of increased policing, of work and constraint. *Their intervention, then, was an assault on Western dreams of Aboriginality*, and on the values of a political generation, as much as it was a challenge to the bush communities themselves. And this explains a great deal of the fury with which the Howard-Brough putsch of June 2007 was greeted by its critics.

The campaign against it was a new chapter in the culture wars. Yet Aboriginal society divided on the issue. Pearson, with his close ally Marcia Langton from the University of Melbourne and northeast Arnhem Land traditional leader Galarrwuy Yunupingu, came out in strong support of the intervention, as, after they saw its early effects on the ground, did prominent indigenous women in central Australian communities.

But *many urban Aboriginal leaders and a broad swath of policy intellectuals were forthright in their condemnation. This was the contested terrain into which Rudd and Macklin edged their way*, seeking to position their Government for the long term, and acutely conscious they were dealing with Australia's most contentious international image problem.

Privately, even as they wound back the sharper elements of the Howard-Brough blueprint, they were briefing sceptical observers: *'We won't be hijacked by the Victorian socialist Left,'* they confided. *'Give us space: we mean to do something really big in Aboriginal affairs'* (Rothwell 2008, my emphasis).

In other words, in this story the Intervention was largely approached from the viewpoint of party politics regarding Indigenous affairs, rather than as policy measures launched to improve lives of Indigenous Australians, particularly children, in remote communities. Representing the Intervention in such a politicised way left little room for discussion on how the measures were working, of the impact they have on the people living under them, and so simplified public debate on the issue. Further, the language used in story passages that politicised the Intervention or its measures was often loaded, presenting certain groups in a negative light or as detached from the reality of remote Indigenous communities (for example 'urban Aboriginal leaders' or 'Victorian¹⁷ socialist Left'), diminishing the message put forward by these groups. In the passage above, people or groups objecting to the Intervention are positioned in this manner. This is not surprising, given it is acknowledged that *The Australian* has a political agenda on Indigenous affairs (Reid 2012; Reid and McCallum 2012).

There were traces of this kind of politicisation in stories produced by other news outlets as well, as this extract from a story in *The Sydney Morning Herald* shows:

Under questioning, Scrymgour confirmed the overall number of referrals to child protection authorities was no different from any other year, despite the intervention and a small increase in the number of child protection officers on the ground.

For conspiracy theorists - and there remains a number of vocal urban critics - her revelations reinforce the belief that the intervention was planned long before it was announced, that it was ideologically driven and cynically deployed by a prime minister who, for 10 years, had sat on his hands on Aboriginal disadvantage. Only in the twilight of office was he moved to act.

But few doubt the intent of the passionate, if pugnacious, crusade by Mal Brough - Howard's indigenous affairs minister - against child abusers. It had the unintended

¹⁷ This refers to the state of Victoria which is geographically far from the Northern Territory.

consequence of entrenching the impression that he regarded all Aboriginal men as serial abusers (Skelton 2008a).

Here, people who were suspicious of the Howard government's motives regarding the Intervention are positioned as 'conspiracy theorists' or 'urban critics' who believe the Intervention was 'ideologically driven'. This politicises the Intervention, attributing a political nature to an array of policy measures. However, presence of such politicisation was notably more extensive in *The Australian*.

6.4 Chapter conclusion

Analysis of the first anniversary of the Intervention suggests that the dominant discourse emerging from the media coverage is that although the Intervention still had a way to go it had been beneficial. This was the discourse of the federal government and Intervention taskforce which set the agenda for most stories about the anniversary as they had overpowering presence as agents. Many of the stories were framed around these official voices' announcements regarding the future of the policy framework as well as the remote Indigenous communities of the Northern Territory generally (Macklin 2008c, 2008f). Indigenous Australians who live in the communities under the Intervention rarely had direct presence through first person testimony, regardless of whether these voices would have been for or against the Intervention – or, indeed, spoken positively about some elements while identifying others as problematic. There were a few exceptions, mainly in stories that represented demonstrations against the Intervention, but most of these stories were not clearly framed around the Indigenous voices, or these voices were undermined by certain choices made in the construction of the stories. Moreover, presence of 'ordinary' Indigenous Australians affected by the policy measures were often mediated by official government or Intervention taskforce agents, or these people were positioned as objects controlled by the government through its policies.

Further, discourse constructed by journalists in their own analysis on the Intervention – that is, passages of stories that were not clearly relying on reported speech – was similar to that of official agents: that parts of the Intervention had worked while others had not. However, journalists' discourse had a slightly different tone; their voice was often more critical of the government than, of course, the government itself in its statements about the success of the Intervention. This finding can be linked with the traditional idea of journalism as the 'fourth estate', emerging from the interview data. According to a number of participants, the role of journalism is to scrutinise power, and analysis suggests that this idea(l) influenced many stories about the anniversary of the Intervention. Such 'watchdog' role was, however,

diminished by over-reliance on government or Intervention taskforce voices in the news reports. It also reduced the power of discourses different to that of government, for example that the Intervention had not worked – or cannot work – because it did not include Indigenous Australians in decision making. Importantly, engaging Indigenous communities was a major discourse in the *Little Children Are Sacred* report (Wild and Anderson 2007) which the federal government used as a justification for the Intervention.

Findings regarding the first key discourse moment suggest that traditional journalistic practices played a significant role in whose voice was heard in the anniversary stories. In her study on how ‘racialized’ communities ‘talk back’ to news media and how the media ‘listen’ to these communities, Dreher (2010) found that the ‘racialized’ voices were included in mainstream stories through conventional news values rather than in a way that would have changed news agendas, and this seems to be the case with the first anniversary of the Intervention as well. Analysis of the interview data suggests that traditional journalistic practices, such as emphasis on official sources, trustworthiness of sources as defined by journalists and the idea(l) of ‘balanced’ reporting, influenced how stories were framed, how these framings were legitimised and how presences of different social actors, particularly Indigenous, were included.

There are of course a number of other factors that have an impact on which discourses are present in mainstream media stories about a news event. Drawing on accounts by contemporary media professionals, this study identified cultural differences, limited resources, and the lack of trust toward journalists by Indigenous Australians as significant in the context of the Intervention. However, the described lack of trust also has its roots in traditional journalistic practices, given the negative experiences of Indigenous Australians with mainstream media identified by the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody over two decades ago (Johnston 1991a).

As a result, analysis of mainstream news media stories about the first anniversary of the Intervention suggests that the media texts reproduced rather than challenged sociocultural power regarding public discourse on Indigenous issues.

Chapter 7: From ‘rising disadvantage’ to ‘income management for all’

7.1 Introduction

This chapter explores two more critical discourse moments that emerged from news media coverage of the Intervention within the three-year timeframe studied in the content analysis of this research project: i) the Productivity Commission’s report on Indigenous disadvantage, released in July 2009; and ii) the federal government’s announcement to extend the compulsory welfare quarantining as applied to the Indigenous population in the Northern Territory, nationwide. As explained in Chapter 6, these two ‘events’ were identified as key discourse moments because both newspaper and television coverage of the Intervention peaked at these times and each met the criteria of being either a political activity or other socially significant event.

The approach taken to these key moments in media coverage of the Intervention is discourse analytical, as outlined in Chapter 6. In other words, I explore how and why some perspectives are represented in media texts while others are not, and how this relates to society (Carvalho 2010, p. 15; Richardson 2007, p. 42). The process of analysis, which uses Carvalho’s (2010) discursive strategies of framing, positioning, legitimisation and politicisation as analytical tools, was explained in section 6.2.

7.2 Productivity Commission’s report on Indigenous disadvantage

The Productivity Commission’s (PC) report about Indigenous disadvantage was released in July 2009 (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2009). It emerged as a key discourse moment because its findings indicated that Indigenous disadvantage was getting worse in many areas of life despite the federal government’s ‘Closing the Gap’ policies that were intended to bridge the socioeconomic and life expectation gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The Rudd Labor government adapted Closing the Gap as its approach to Indigenous affairs in 2008 and included the Northern Territory Emergency Response – the Intervention – into this wider policy framework (Department of Families 2009; Macklin 2008a). The release of the Productivity Commission’s report created a peak in the coverage of the Intervention on both print and TV platforms at a time when the coverage was rapidly decreasing, making it an event of interest to this study.¹⁸

¹⁸ For more information about how the coverage of the Intervention developed over time, see Chapter 5.

It is useful to note here that the Productivity Commission is the government's 'independent research and advisory body on a range of economic, social and environmental issues affecting the welfare of Australians' (Productivity Commission 2014). While this description includes social and environmental matters into the scope of the Commission, it is largely a body associated with economics. Certainly, according to its official description, the Productivity Commission focuses 'on ways of achieving a more productive economy' (Productivity Commission 2014). The report released in 2009 was the fourth of its kind, outlining six targets set by COAG and six indicators used to measure Indigenous disadvantage,¹⁹ which were developed together with Indigenous Australians and researchers (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2009, pp. 3–6). While the report drew largely on statistical data, it also featured 'things that work' – successful community initiatives acting to improve Indigenous disadvantage (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2009, pp. 2.7–2.8).

The analysis of the news media coverage around the Productivity Commission's report consisted of 12 newspaper articles published between 3 and 4 July 2009, and 19 television stories broadcast between 2 and 4 July 2009. Seven of the print stories examined were news reports, one was a feature and five were editorials. Two of the audiovisual stories were interviews, 13 were news reports, three current affairs stories and one was a recap of a news story. Six of the 13 news reports were 'original' as some of them were the same story aired on the ABC's news bulletins in the different states and territories, as was the case with the reports about the first anniversary of the Intervention.²⁰

When it comes to the multivariate analysis conducted in the course of the content analysis (Chapter 5), the categories into which the stories published or aired around the release of the Productivity Commission's report fell differed from those of the stories about the first anniversary of the Intervention. While most of both the print and the audiovisual stories about the first critical discourse moment predominantly concerned the Intervention itself, the majority of the stories analysed as part of this second key discourse moment were not. Most of the TV stories were about Indigenous disadvantage, child abuse or politics and policies more generally and were therefore categorised as '4' ('mostly about other topics') during the content analysis (Chapter 5). Only one TV story aired around the Productivity Commission's 2009 report fell into category '1', 'mostly about the Intervention', one was

¹⁹ The targets are: life expectancy; young child mortality; early childhood education; reading, writing and numeracy; year 12 attainment (Australian equivalent to finishing high school); and employment. The indicators are: post secondary education; disability and chronic disease; household and individual income; substantiated child abuse and neglect; family and community violence; and imprisonment and juvenile detention.

²⁰ As explained in section 4.5 in Chapter 4, the sample did not include stories aired on SBS's Indigenous affairs program, *Living Black*.

categorised as ‘2’, ‘mostly about child abuse’, and one as ‘3’, ‘mostly about extending the Intervention’. There was more variety in the categories into which the newspaper stories fell, with five being categorised as ‘1’, four as ‘4’, two as ‘2’ and one as ‘3’. However, the Intervention was clearly not the main focus of these stories produced two years after the announcement of the policy framework but was more likely to be assigned only a brief reference in the mainstream news media.

7.2.1 Official testimonies dominated

The actors most often assigned direct voice in stories around the Productivity Commission’s report were official sources – as was the case with the first anniversary of the Intervention. Most occasions of direct voice in both newspaper and TV stories were assigned to either federal or state/territory ministers, or to ‘expert’ sources who represented established organisations. A few of the expert sources from non-government organisations were Indigenous.

This may be explained by the fact that the Productivity Commission’s report was released at the same time as the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting was taking place in Darwin. Firstly, the COAG meetings attract media attention and coverage in general, and news organisations would have appointed resources into covering the meeting. Further, the Prime Minister as well as the Premiers and Chief Ministers of Australia’s states and territories gathered under the same roof for the meeting which was likely to have been convenient for journalists seeking comments on any issue under discussion – this time one of the dominant themes just happened to be Indigenous disadvantage. In other words, government (on both federal and state level) had significant discursive power over the news event of the Productivity Commission’s report on Indigenous disadvantage, resulting in its dominant presence in the stories. Undoubtedly there are other reasons for this strong presence as well, such as the trustworthiness of sources (discussed in section 6.3.3) and the time and resource pressures of contemporary journalism. However, I suggest the government’s discursive power enabled by the COAG meeting played an important role in the framing of stories about the Productivity Commission’s report on Indigenous disadvantage.

Indeed, the cross-analysis of different media outlets shows that many of them used the same account by Kevin Rudd or referred to it indirectly. The following extract presented in Table 7.1, which is from a transcript of a news report aired on SBS (Middleton 2009), features this account.

Time code	Image	(Actuality) sounds	Voice(over)
00:02	Medium close shot of presenter in studio. In the background key image of Indigenous people with a pram and a child, with their backs towards the camera, blending in with an image of the map of Australia and the Aboriginal flag. Caption: 'Indigenous Deal'.		Presenter: Here there's been a national agreement to improve literacy, housing and the availability of fresh food in Australia's Indigenous communities. It follows a new report from the Productivity Commission showing conditions are going backwards. Meeting in Darwin, the Council of Australian Governments said the report exposed a disturbing lack of progress.
00:22	Very long shot of the lower house of the parliament full of people, some standing up and clapping their hands.	Cheering and applauding.	(pause) Reporter: Last year the nation
00:24	Medium long shot of a crowd standing and clapping their hands. Captions: 'February 13, 2008' and 'Canberra'.		apologised to Indigenous people,
00:26	Medium close shot of Kevin Rudd and a few other people in suits clapping their hands. Caption: 'February 13, 2008'.		vowing to address disadvant-
00:28	Long shot from a remote community; earth, a shanty, rusty barrels, rubbish and two Indigenous people sitting on the ground in front of the shanty.		age. But the latest study reveals a disheartening picture.
00:31	Medium close shot of Kevin Rudd, outdoor location, in front of a building. Caption: 'Kevin Rudd Prime Minister'.		Rudd: This is a devastating report, it is unacceptable and it requires decisive action.

Table 7.1 – An example of government voice in a news report in a news report aired on SBS on 2 July 2009.

This identical sound bite from Rudd's statement about the report being 'devastating' and requiring 'decisive action' was used in a news report broadcast on the ABC's news bulletins in all states as well as in a different piece aired on the ABC's late night current affairs program, *Lateline*. The framing of the ABC's news report was very similar to the SBS story, with references to Indigenous disadvantage getting worse in the introduction, and also to the national apology in the beginning of the actual report. The only commercial TV story available for analysis around the release of the Productivity Commission's report also

included a sound bite from Rudd which again referred to a ‘devastating’ report (Kapalos 2009). This is shown in Table 7.2 below.

Time code	Image	(Actuality) sounds	Voice(over)
00:03	Medium close shot of presenter in studio. No particular key image.		Presenter: Prime minister Kevin Rudd has branded as devastating a damning new report which finds abuse of Aboriginal children is worseni-
00:12	A very long shot of a house and Indigenous people sitting on the ground in a location that looks remote, surrounded by bare earth and trees.		ng. The Productivity Commission report found Abor-
00:15	A long shot of a remote location, portraying a car and a house that looks like a shipping container.		iginal children are now six tim-
00:17	Medium long shot of a run-down room, with a broken mattress on a simple bed frame and a broken TV stand with a TV on top, rubbish. Camera turns to show another broken bed.		es more likely to be abused than non-Indigenous chil-
00:20	Medium long shot of an Indigenous woman and child standing in front of a run-down house, with her back towards the camera.	Child’s vocalisations.	dren.
00:21	Medium close shot of Kevin Rudd, outdoor location, in front of a building. Caption: ‘Kevin Rudd Prime Minister’.		Rudd: This report on Indigenous disadvantage is a devastating report in terms of the gap which still exists between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia.

Table 7.2 – An example of government voice in a news report aired on channel Ten on 2 July 2009.

Although the sound bite by Rudd in the story on channel Ten differs slightly from the one in the stories on the ABC and SBS, the images suggest that the Prime Minister’s statement was based on a standard appearance by him in front of the media: the location looks the same in all stories discussed above.

The under-representation of first person testimony of Indigenous Australians living under the Intervention was clear in the media coverage of the Productivity Commission’s report. Direct voice to ‘ordinary’ Indigenous people or community leaders was assigned in only one current affairs TV story and one newspaper feature. The TV story was concerned with

housing conditions in town camps (Carter 2009), while the print article was looking at Jenny Macklin touring remote communities with the intention of introducing the federal government's housing deal (Skelton 2009). These examples about direct voices together suggest that the government held discursive power over any other social actor when it comes to voicing one's viewpoint about Indigenous disadvantage – and, by implication, the Intervention.

7.2.2 Non-human entities assigned presence as agents

The assigning of presence to people or institutions by a reporter's voice, in stories published or broadcast around the Productivity Commission's report, was somewhat different compared to the first key discourse moment analysed in this study. While stories about the first anniversary tended to present official people or institutions as agents, the most common actor type assigned with the capacity of doing something (Carvalho 2010, p. 17) in stories about the Productivity Commission's report was documents and abstract concepts. The stories analysed as part of this second discourse moment relied greatly on the given report as a source, referring for example to a 'study', 'figures' or 'findings'. The first few paragraphs of a story published in *The Australian* provide an example:

Aboriginal disadvantage is worse than previously thought, with indigenous children almost seven times more likely to be abused or neglected despite a massive government effort to close the gap with the rest of the population.

Kevin Rudd warned yesterday that indigenous disadvantage was more profound than had been believed as he released a *Productivity Commission report* that *found* although improvements were being made in some areas, the gap between the indigenous population on child abuse and neglect was widening.

The Productivity Commission report, released every two years, *found* substantiated child abuse cases in the indigenous community more than doubled from 16 per 1000 children in 1999-2000 to 35 per 1000 children in 2007-08.

The report, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage*, *found* that in the same period abuse cases among non-indigenous children increased from five per 1000 to six per 1000.

The figures suggest indigenous children were almost seven times more likely to be abused or neglected than non-indigenous children in 2007-08 (Franklin and Maley 2009, my emphasis).

This practice was evident in both newspaper and TV stories. In addition to the Productivity Commission's report, government policies and other such inanimate or abstract concepts were positioned as agents. Various levels of government, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and the Productivity Commission were also often assigned presence as agents. This type of actor – institutions – included some Indigenous organisations or communities as well, but their presence was overpowered by governments and the Commission. In terms of individuals assigned presence by a reporter's voice, this mostly

applied to ministers and representatives of the opposition on both federal and state/territory levels. On TV this was enhanced by active images of these actors. A few Indigenous Australians who were identified as prominent yet lacked connection to government or any organisations were assigned presence by a reporter's voice.²¹ However, there were very few incidents of 'ordinary' Indigenous people being assigned this kind of presence on either of the platforms analysed in this study – four references to individuals of which only two were named (the other two were 'elderly Gurindji man' and 'Indigenous child') and 20 references to groups of people, such as 'Aborigines', 'Lajamanu's women' or 'residents (of town camps)'. 'Ordinary' citizens had occasional presence through images portraying them as active, but, again, these were far outweighed by over twice as many occurrences of active images of politicians.

'Presence' in instances of direct voice assigned to sources followed the pattern emerging from the quotes and sound bites analysed as part of the first anniversary of the Intervention. Government representatives, mainly Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and Indigenous Affairs Minister Jenny Macklin, referred to themselves or the government as agents who can take action on Indigenous affairs, particularly through the use of vague actor 'we'. On some occasions this 'we' could also have read as 'Australia as a society':

With the government attributing most of the increase to greater detection, the report sparked a realisation among state and territory leaders at the Council of Australian Governments that the nation could be dramatically understating the real depth of indigenous disadvantage, already widely recognised as serious.

'As we all engage in this and try and collect better data and as, for example, law enforcement efforts in various communities seek to extract better information, we're also likely to see a tip up in the data itself through greater reporting,' Mr Rudd said (Franklin and Maley 2009, my emphasis).

It is likely that by referring to 'we all' engaging in better data collection Prime Minister Rudd is talking about various levels of government – and perhaps other authorities as well – which are mentioned in the preceding paragraph. However, the second instance of 'we' could be read more broadly as including all Australian citizens. I suggest Rudd is moving from more specific to more general by this kind of reference to two levels of 'us' – from governments/authorities to Australians in general, which is typical of politicians.

Some of the non-government sources who were assigned direct voice also referred to Australia as a nation and criticised the government. Such occurrences often positioned the

²¹ For example lawyer and leader Noel Pearson, and politician Warren Mundine who was referred to as a 'leader' and 'former Labor Party national president'. Only one TV current affairs story concerned with housing positioned two other Indigenous men, who were named as community leaders, as agents.

government, or indeed Australians generally, as a social actor, one that has to take Indigenous disadvantage seriously and consider alternatives for current policies. The passage of a TV news report featured in Table 7.3 provides an example (Bardon 2009a).

Time code	Image	(Actuality) sounds	Voice(over)
00:34	Close-up of a dark-skinned hand drawing numbers on a sheet of paper.		Reporter: Justice groups are angry imprisonment rates are rising.
00:38	Close-up of Priscilla Collins, outdoor location. Caption: 'Priscilla Collins CEO NAAJA'.		Collins: And nothing seems to be happening to be looking at reducing it. We've been asking for, um, diversionary programs, rehabilitation services.
00:47	Close-up of an Indigenous child's back with a stethoscope held against the child's back. Camera tracks back to show two Indigenous women examining the child in mid shot.	Child crying.	Reporter: Indigenous health organisations are also worried.
00:51	Close-up of Stephanie Bell, indoor location. Caption: 'Stephanie Bell CEO AMSANT'.		Bell: We need to recognise that maternal and child health and youth services is a relevant way to go [inaudible] requires additional and further investment.

Table 7.3 – The construction of 'us' in occurrences of direct voice by two non-government sources in a news report aired on the ABC on 2 July 2009.

In this passage, Priscilla Collins, Indigenous representative of an Aboriginal justice agency, North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency, is assigned the opportunity to position her organisation ('We've been asking for...') as one that knows how disadvantage could be alleviated in the context of imprisonment but whose viewpoint has not been considered by the government regardless of their requests. Further, Stephanie Bell, also Indigenous and the representative of a non-government health organisation, Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory, is able to position the Australian public ('We need to recognise...') as an actor who needs to take responsibility for improving the living conditions for the nation's Indigenous population. However, as discussed in section 7.2.1, the occurrences of direct voice by non-government sources, particularly Indigenous, were comparatively few, thus the ability to construct 'us' and position social actors as active agents or influence media agendas belonged predominantly to government representatives.

7.2.3 Framing the report: emphasising the negative

Analysis of stories published or broadcast around the Productivity Commission's (PC) report suggests that the main news value applied to the event was negativity. Two kinds of 'negativity' emerged from the stories: that Indigenous disadvantage was getting/had got worse; and that government policy had failed.

Looking at the first kind of negativity, stories were framed around the findings of the report according to which Indigenous disadvantage had got worse on many social indicators measured – particularly that rates of child abuse and incarceration had increased. The first two paragraphs of news stories published in *The Australian* (Rintoul 2009) and *The Sydney Morning Herald* (Narushima 2009b), presented in Table 7.4, provide an example.

Paragraph	<i>The Australian</i> , 3 July 2009	<i>The Sydney Morning Herald</i> , 3 July 2009
	Grim toll of abuse 'out of shadows' – Bridging the gap	Howard years came to naught, says Labor
1	The level of child abuse or neglect in indigenous communities is almost seven times higher than in non-indigenous communities, with reported cases more than doubling between 1999 and last year.	An indigenous child in Australia is now six times more likely to suffer abuse or neglect than a non-indigenous child and 28 times more likely to be jailed.
2	A Productivity Commission report, released yesterday, found the rate of abuse or neglect soared during those years, leading up to the Howard government's dramatic Northern Territory intervention, from 16.4 per 1000 children to 35.3 per 1000. The rate for non-indigenous children rose from 4.8 to 5.5 per 1000.	Despite government attempts to stamp out inequality on six social and economic measures, a biennial report by the Productivity Commission said disparities were widening or showing negligible improvement.

Table 7.4 – Framing of the Productivity Commission's report in two newspapers.

These extracts from newspaper stories, coupled with the passages of TV stories presented in Tables 7.1 and 7.2, provide an example of a pattern of negativity in the media coverage of the PC report. Most stories analysed as part of this second key discourse moment referred to the findings of the report that described how Indigenous disadvantage is getting worse. Media coverage around the PC report thus reproduces rather than challenges a pattern of emphasis on negative issues and confrontation in the context of Indigenous affairs, identified in earlier research projects (see for example Budarick and King 2008; Meadows, Hippocrates, and van Vuuren 1997). Reflecting on the terms of reference of the Productivity Commission, explained in section 7.2, the body comes from an economic rather than social justice view, which may have influenced the construction of its report and, consequently, the way the media reported on the issue.

The PC report did, however, also talk about initiatives, often community based, that were alleviating disadvantage (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2009). This is evident from the following passage from a statement by Gary Banks, the chairman of the commission, delivered at a press conference organised by Jenny Macklin:

Banks: ... The other point I'd make is that there are some very positive stories in this report about policy initiatives and community initiatives that are actually working. In fact we call them things that work, and so when you look through the report you'll see boxes which are mini case studies of initiatives that seem to be working in areas of early child development, education and health. So that's a very important contribution that the report can make. Many of those things that work are quite unconventional by mainstream policy standards. They're things that communities themselves have dreamed up as ways of dealing with problems. And the no school no pool is just one example, I think, of the kinds of initiatives that have been quite effective but quite unconventional in mainstream terms. So I think we need to learn from those and we need to spread success where we observe it. And COAG is creating a clearing house for good ideas about Indigenous policy and things that work which I think is a very promising development.

There are four key success factors that we outline in this report when you look at all of the things that work. One of them is, the things that work, generally work because of cooperative approaches between government and communities. That won't surprise you. Secondly, there's been a very strong element of bottoms up from communities, not just tops down from government. The third thing is that generally has been characterised nevertheless by strong government support and support that's been enduring, not just a short term support. And finally, by good governance arrangements on both the Indigenous side but also in relation to government and across governments, it's a very important part of success (Macklin 2009b).

Here Banks is not using a particularly economic expression, which is the usual language of the Productivity Commission due to its terms of reference, but talks about 'bottom up' initiatives developed in Indigenous communities that work when it comes to addressing problems in these communities. He also notes that these initiatives can be 'quite unconventional by mainstream policy standards', that initiatives generally work 'because of cooperative approaches between government and communities' and that they should be learned from. While stories analysed as part of this second discourse moment reported that there had been improvements in some areas measured by the Productivity Commission, most did not report on the community-based solutions, raised by Banks, making this view virtually absent in the coverage of the report about Indigenous disadvantage. Only one news report, published in *The Sydney Morning Herald* (Narushima 2009b), and one editorial, published in *The Age* ('Indigenous communities deserve much more' 2009), included a reference to Banks' point discussed above, with none of the TV stories analysed raising it. Further, bearing in mind the traditional inverted pyramid structure of print news stories, the article that did mention the importance of cooperative approaches did so in the last

paragraph of the story, giving the viewpoint less weight than to those present earlier in the story. Some TV stories included brief references to the importance of working with Indigenous people to address disadvantage, but in none of the cases was this part of the overall framing of the story. Instead, such references emerged from grabs taken from sources' accounts, as the following passage from an interview with Dr Sue Gordon, the former head of the Intervention taskforce, shows:

Well, we change politicians, ah and we change people who sit on boards, even me, and people like to visit and people like to talk to people on the ground. But there comes a time when you can have too many reports and nothing coming from those reports. I mean, I once, I said that actually about the *Bringing them Home* report and I got shot down when I said it would be possibly another report that sits on the shelf and nothing gets done. And I've been proved right (pause) mostly in respect to that report. So, I just think that let's stop talking about it and work with Aboriginal people um because from what I've read in today's paper and what I've seen from press releases coming out of COAG ah it's, oh we're getting another report by the end of the year and by this time next year there should be some change. But to me that equates back to, oh well there will be more Aboriginal kids abused by next year (Bell 2009).

Throughout the interview Gordon positions herself as one for 'practical action on the ground' rather than for 'symbols', which is evident in the excerpt above as well. In this regard she positions herself in line with the government's discourse. However, the passage also shows her emphasising that action should be taken together with Aboriginal people. Earlier in the interview she states that she has seen 'some really good Aboriginal people push specific issues', but it is never discussed further what such initiatives could be – neither in this example nor in any other story analysed as part of the second critical discourse moment. As a result, the presence of comments about community based solutions or working with Indigenous people may open media texts for counter-reading (Hall 1984, pp. 136–138) and potentially challenge established discursive positions (Carvalho 2010, p. 15), but I believe they are less likely to achieve such reading as these comments are not followed up, let alone being raised in the overall framing of a story.

Interestingly, a similar pattern of omission of alternative viewpoints emerged from a research project on newspaper coverage of the first few weeks of the Intervention (Dunne Breen 2013). During that time, the Combined Aboriginal Organisations of the Northern Territory (2007) released an alternative plan for the Howard government's Emergency Response. In her study, Dunne Breen (2013) found that only two newspaper articles discussed the alternative plan and that newspaper reports silenced, excluded, misrepresented and smothered Indigenous public opinion. It seems the dominant framings present in stories about the Productivity Commission's report followed a similar pattern.

Secondly, the report's findings were in some cases framed as a failure of government policies. Such framing was predominantly achieved through a reporter's voice which seemingly drew on a source and was then legitimised by an instance of direct voice assigned to this source, as the following passage from a TV news report (Bardon 2009a), presented in Table 7.5, shows.

Time code	Image	(Actuality) sounds	Voice(over)
01:00	Medium close shot of reporter, outdoor location, outside a building.		Reporter: The Territory opposition says the increase in Indigenous child abuse is totally unacceptable, and it says the government hasn't delivered enough resources to tackle the problem.
01:09	Close-up of Adam Giles, outdoor location. Caption: 'Adam Giles Country Liberals'.		Giles: There has not been an increase in child abuse workers in Central Australia.

Table 7.5 – Framing of Indigenous disadvantage as a failure of government policy in a news report aired on the ABC on 2 July 2009.

While this style of reporting meets the news value of negativity, it also seems consistent with journalists' perception of themselves as 'watchdogs' of power, particularly in the context of Indigenous affairs (see section 6.3.6 in Chapter 6 for more discussion). It does not, however, mean that the stories were necessarily serving this role; as the examination of direct voice shows, most quotes or sound bites were assigned to government representatives. The government was therefore able to defend itself against the Productivity Commission's findings. Its response to the worsening conditions among the Indigenous population was that the rise in crime rates may be due to increased or better reporting of them. It also argued that achieving change takes time. These discursive positions of the government are present in the example featured in Table 7.6, which is a passage from a story that aired on the ABC's *Lateline* program (Cooper 2009).

Time code	Image	(Actuality) sounds	Voice(over)
01:50	Close-up of Jenny Macklin, indoor location, portions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags in the background. Caption: 'Jenny Macklin Indigenous Affairs Minister'.		Macklin: This is in part, in part, due to improved reporting. And that is a good thi-
01:56	Long shot of Kevin Rudd and Brendan Nelson walking in the lower house of the parliament, people around them standing and clapping their hands.	Applauding.	ng. (pause) Reporter: For a prime minister who set out to right the wrongs of the past, this report is a set-back.
02:03	Close-up of Kevin Rudd, indoor location, portions of Australian flags in the background.		Rudd: If you ask me, are we better placed than we were 18 months ago to get to that point, I think we are. But you know something, we are barely half a step along the
02:12	Medium long shot of Indigenous children sitting by tables in a classroom. Camera moves to a female teacher standing in the classroom and talking to an Indigenous child.	Chatter.	road. Reporter: So there's no suggestion of switching strategies. Rudd: We [have to redouble and treble our efforts to make an impact].

Table 7.6 – The federal government's framing of reasons for increased Indigenous disadvantage in a current affairs story aired on the ABC on 2 July 2009.

The significance of presence assigned to government representatives, and, as a result, their framing power is discussed further in the following section about legitimization.

7.2.4 Legitimizing Indigenous disadvantage

Analysis of the discursive strategy 'legitimation' in stories published or aired around the release of the Productivity Commission's report shows that while a plethora of claims were justified either by a reporter's or a source's voice, only a few of them featured in more than one story. There were 12 newspaper articles and 12 original TV stories in the sample (see section 7.2). As explained in Chapter 6 (section 6.2.1), analysis of legitimization was conducted by logging claims made in the stories, along with their justification, into a database, and their frequency was investigated once the claims had been recorded. The frequency of legitimated claims present in at least two stories per platform is shown in Figure 7.1.

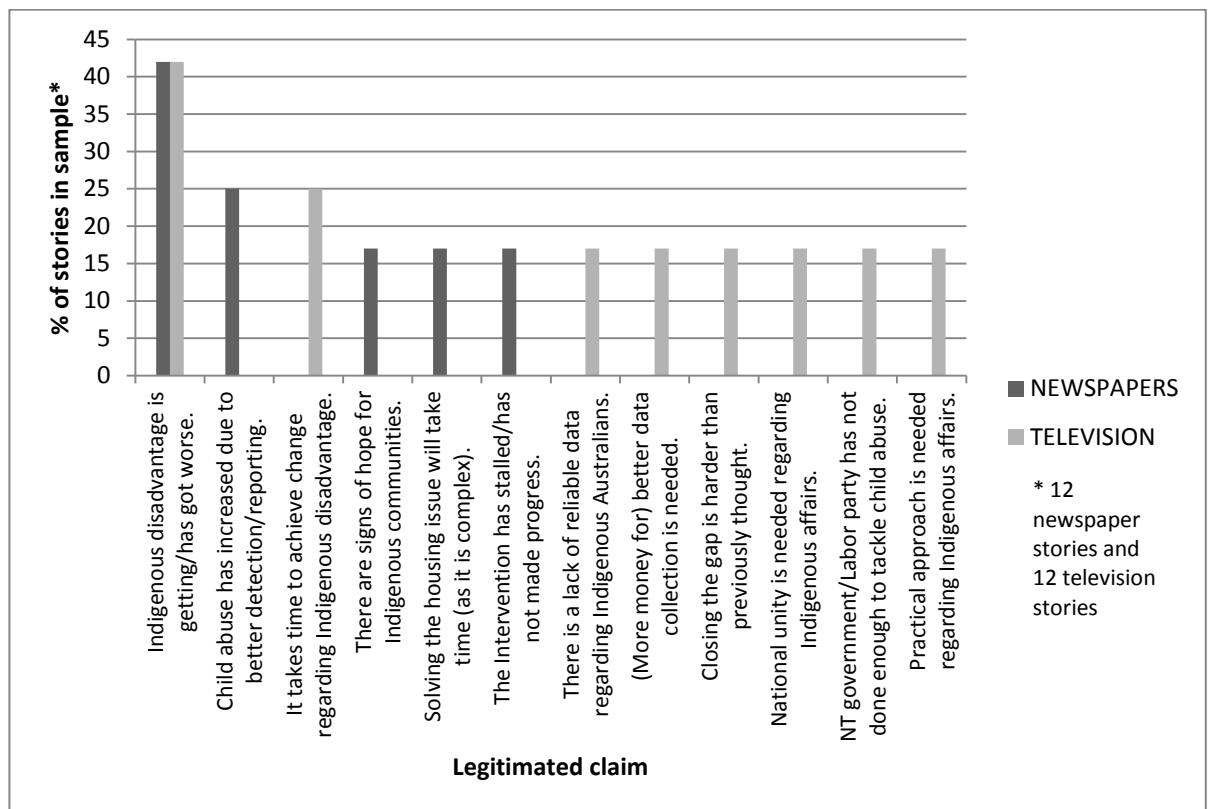


Figure 7.1 – Frequency of legitimated framings in newspaper and TV stories about the Productivity Commission’s report.

The most frequently legitimised claim in both newspaper and TV stories was that Indigenous disadvantage is getting worse (in five print and TV stories respectively). This is unsurprising, given journalists’ reliance on the Productivity Commission’s report as a source, discussed in section 7.2.2. Indeed, this framing and its justification was often achieved by a combination of a reporter’s voice and reported speech based on the Productivity Commission’s report, Gary Banks (the Commission chairman) or in some cases ministers on either federal or state level.²²

Although the second common claims on the two platforms differed (Figure 7.1), they are connected by their function: it seems that the claim that child abuse has increased due to better detection/reporting, present in three newspaper stories, and the claim that it takes time to improve Indigenous lives, present in three TV stories, serves to protect the government from criticism regarding shortcomings of Indigenous policy – in this case it appears that conditions are going backwards regardless of government efforts to close the gap. These claims were mostly legitimised by Prime Minister Rudd or Indigenous Affairs Minister Macklin, as indicated in the example in Table 7.7 below which is from a news report

²² For an example, see Table 6.14 with extracts from two newspaper stories.

aired on the ABC (Bardon 2009a). To give some context, the introduction of this story stated that according to health and justice groups in the Northern Territory, the Intervention is ‘failing’ Aboriginal people.

Time code	Image	(Actuality) sounds	Voice(over)
01:29	Long shot of a few houses in a remote location, with clothes hung on clothes lines outside one of the houses, filmed from a vehicle passing by.		...rs. Reporter: The prime minister maintains the Intervention will work eventually.
01:33	Medium close shot of Kevin Rudd with a microphone in front of him and Australian flags in the background. Indoor location. Rudd shaking his head when he says ‘changing things around’. Caption: ‘Kevin Rudd Prime Minister’.		Rudd: These things take time, and we’re changing (short pause) things around which have been around for a long, long tim[e].

Table 7.7 – Legitimation of framing that it takes time to achieve change in Indigenous affairs in a news report aired on the ABC on 2 July 2009.

In this extract, the reporter’s voice positions Prime Minister Rudd as a defender of the Intervention by stating that he ‘maintains the Intervention will work eventually’. This statement is then legitimised by a sound bite from an account by Rudd in which he argues that changing ‘things’ takes time. Rudd’s account works as a defence against the Productivity Commission’s findings which many of the stories analysed represented as proof of inefficient government policy. Interestingly, as noted in section 7.2.3, most of the stories did not discuss alternatives to current policies, such as community based initiatives.

There was a number of the third most common claims legitimised in stories around the Productivity Commission’s report, but since they were present in only two stories each they are not discussed in detail here (Figure 7.1). Suffice to say, the construction of many of these legitimations drew on either the media’s role as the ‘fourth estate’, scrutinising power, or the government’s defensive position regarding the Productivity Commission’s findings. The following extracts from a news story in *The Australian* illustrate this further. The first paragraphs of the story suggest that the Intervention has stalled because of the way the Rudd Labor government has handled it:

Not one of the hundreds of new houses promised in 2007 for remote communities as part of the Northern Territory intervention has been built.

A day after Kevin Rudd declared that indigenous disadvantage was worse than previously thought, *The Weekend Australian* can reveal that layers of bureaucracy are strangling a \$700 million plan to address poor and overcrowded housing. Indigenous leader and former Labor Party national president Warren Mundine yesterday agreed that not one house had been built under the intervention's housing crisis plan. He described the delays as 'disgraceful and embarrassing'. Mr Mundine, who sits on the Prime Minister's commission on indigenous housing, said the federal government was putting 'speed humps in the way of development' in the form of unnecessary bureaucracy (Toohey 2009).

This claim, 'the Intervention has stalled/has not made progress' (Figure 7.1), is achieved here by stating that the '\$700 million plan to address poor and overcrowded housing' has not produced a single house.²³ This claim is then justified by a piece of reported speech by Indigenous leader Warren Mundine, who says that government imposed bureaucracy is preventing development when it comes to building new houses in remote communities. A few paragraphs later, Minister Jenny Macklin argues that the government 'has to get it right':

Asked yesterday if she was disturbed by the delays, Ms Macklin said: 'We have to get this right, otherwise we will just repeat the failings of the past. The old ways of doing things have comprehensively failed generations of indigenous Australians' (Toohey 2009).

In other words, Macklin suggests that issues around housing in remote communities are complex and that solving them takes time. She uses the discursive position of 'who would like the government to get it wrong yet again' to defend the delays in delivering much needed housing, 'revealed' by the *Weekend Australian* newspaper. I suggest that by doing so, Macklin is also legitimising the delays regarding housing – and essentially the claim that the Intervention has stalled – from the government's point of view. This does not mean the newspaper accepts the government's legitimisation, but the paper does provide the government with an opportunity to explain itself by assigning presence to this quote from Macklin. The extract, in its reference to 'old ways of doing things', also provides an example of politicisation in media coverage of the Productivity Commission's report which is discussed further in the following section.

7.2.5 Indigenous disadvantage politicised as a failure of past and current policies

What is striking in the news media coverage around the Productivity Commission's report is how they politicise Indigenous disadvantage which is represented as a failure of not only contemporary government policies but of decades of Indigenous policy – politicisation being

²³ This is a reference to the Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program (SIHIP) which is part of the Intervention.

the ‘attribution of a political nature or status to a certain reality’ (Carvalho 2010, pp. 18–19; see also section 6.2.1 in Chapter 6). This was notably evident in an interview with anthropologist Peter Sutton, aired on the *7.30 Report* program on the ABC (O'Brien 2009) as well as in two editorials published in *The Australian* ('Education is the key' 2009; 'Food for thought' 2009). Particularly interesting is the last paragraph of one of these editorials which, after referring to ‘encouraging’ or indeed ‘compelling’ people to ‘properly feed their children’, reads:

And we do not need a ‘new approach’ to do this. The Howard government’s Northern Territory intervention established compulsory income management, which specified what people in 73 remote indigenous communities could spend pension payments on. And according to a report Indigenous Affairs Minister Jenny Macklin released last month, it worked, with a survey of community stores showing nearly 70 per cent selling more healthy foods – meat and dairy, fruit and vegetables. On Thursday, Ms Macklin enthusiastically agreed with the Prime Minister’s need for a new approach, adding the Howard government was to blame for much of the present problem. But in politicising the issue, and ignoring the failings of state Labor governments, she went to the heart of our inability to improve indigenous circumstances. Income management for remote Aborigines is not popular with the rights lobby, which places abstract ideals above the health of indigenous children – but it works ('Food for thought' 2009).

While the author of this editorial in the *Weekend Australian* blames federal Labor minister Jenny Macklin for politicising Indigenous disadvantage, he or she is also doing so by referring to ‘the failings of state Labor governments’. The editorial also takes a clear stand for the Intervention, launched by the Liberal Howard government, and against the ‘new approach’ of a licensing scheme for food stores in remote communities, suggested by Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and discussed earlier in the editorial.

Further, some stories positioned viewpoints of representatives of Australia’s two major parties, Labor and Liberals, in a way that created a clear dichotomy along party lines and therefore politicised Indigenous disadvantage. A passage of a story aired on the ABC’s *Lateline* (Cooper 2009), available in Table 7.8 below, provides an example.

Time code	Image	(Actuality) sounds	Voice(over)
02:03	Close-up of Kevin Rudd, indoor location, Australian flags in the background.		Rudd: If you ask me, are we better placed than we were 18 months ago to get to that point, I think we are. But you know something, we are barely half a step along the
02:12	Medium long shot of Indigenous children sitting by tables in a classroom. Camera moves to a female teacher standing in the classroom and talking to an Indigenous child.		road. Reporter: So there's no suggestion of switching strategies. Rudd: We
02:16	Close-up of Kevin Rudd, outdoor location, outside a building. Other people in the background.		have to redouble and treble our efforts to make an impact.
02:19	Medium close shot of Mal Brough, indoor location, in the background a sign with text 'bluearth'.		Brough: Jeez it's simple to say we have to double and treble nothing isn't it. And that's the way I see it.

Table 7.8 – Politicisation of Indigenous disadvantage in a current affairs story aired on the ABC on 2 July 2009.

The way the comments of then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd (Labor) and former Indigenous Affairs Minister Mal Brough (Liberal–National Coalition) are positioned in this example foregrounds conflict and rivalry between the two political parties. As a result, Indigenous disadvantage becomes a blame game in the discursive public arena mediated by the media and potentially also in actual policy-making.

7.3 Extending income management, strengthening the Intervention

The final critical discourse moment analysed in this study is the federal government's announcement on 25 November 2009 to apply compulsory income management nationwide (Macklin 2009a, 2009c). Compulsory welfare quarantining became one of the most contentious measures of the Intervention, particularly given the government had to suspend the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* in order to be able to apply the measure solely to Indigenous Territorians (Calma 2009), and according to Altman (2010), 'the need to introduce these welfare reforms [arose] from the Rudd Government's desire to retain income management (or quarantining) in the Northern Territory, but to make these laws compatible with the Commonwealth *Racial Discrimination Act*'. Indeed, the Australian mainstream news media also approached the government's announcement of the new legislation as an

extension of elements of the Intervention – welfare quarantining – to the wider population (Franklin 2009a; Schubert 2009).²⁴

The analysis of the media coverage around the announcement of this new welfare legislation centred on seven newspaper articles published between 24 and 28 July 2009, and five television stories broadcast on 25 July 2009 – a sample arrived at through the content analysis.²⁵ Five of the print stories examined were news reports, one was a feature and one an editorial. Three print stories were published in *The Australian*, two in *The Age* and two in *The Sydney Morning Herald*. All audiovisual stories were news reports, one aired on SBS and the rest on the ABC. Only two of the four TV news reports on the ABC were ‘original’ as three of them were the same story – aired on the broadcaster’s news bulletins in the different states and territories.²⁶

Two categories (Chapter 5) predominated in the stories published or aired around the government’s announcement of new welfare legislation: the extension of welfare quarantining from Indigenous Australians in the Northern Territory to the wider population, and the Intervention policy itself. The content analysis data reveals that all TV stories analysed as part of this third discourse moment fell into category 3, that is, ‘mostly about extending the Intervention’. Two of the print news reports, published on 24 November, were categorised as 1, ‘mostly about the Intervention’, but included some references to the government’s plans to change legislation to make the Intervention ‘comply with the Racial Discrimination Act’ (Franklin 2009b; Narushima 2009a), while another two published on the day the government announced its new welfare policy, as well as an editorial and a feature published after the announcement, fell into category 3, ‘mostly about extending the Intervention’. Only one print story published around this third discourse moment was categorised as 4, ‘mostly about other topics’,²⁷ but it was analysed along with the other stories as it appeared in the content analysis data.²⁸

7.3.1 Direct voice assigned to official actors once again

Analysis of the actors who were most often assigned direct voice through quotes in stories about the federal government’s announcement of their new welfare legislation revealed a pattern already seen in the other two key discourse moments explored in this study; they

²⁴ See Chapter 2 for more discussion on the Intervention.

²⁵ According to the content analysis data, the coverage of the discourse moment peaked on one day on TV, whereas on the print platform it was spread over a number of days.

²⁶ As explained in section 4.5 in Chapter 4, the sample did not include stories aired on SBS’s Indigenous affairs program, *Living Black*.

²⁷ The story was concerned with a new national curriculum for schools which would embed Indigenous culture and teach school children for example about the Intervention.

²⁸ See Chapter 5 for more discussion on the content analysis and its categories.

were either politicians or representatives of prominent non-government organisations. In fact, only two instances of direct voice belonged to an agent not categorised as a representative of government or other official institution or organisation: one to Indigenous community leader Joy White and the other one to an unnamed young man. Both sound bites were present in a news report broadcast on the ABC's bulletin in the Northern Territory (Bardon 2009b) which aired a longer story than bulletins in other regions. This can be linked to the news value of 'relevance', or '(cultural) proximity' (Brighton and Foy 2007, pp. 25–29; Galtung and Ruge 1973; Richardson 2007, pp. 91–92), to which I referred in Chapter 5. The content analysis conducted in this study found that this news value, coupled with the perceived lack of interest in Indigenous affairs by non-Indigenous Australians, was likely to influence the way the Intervention was covered in different news outlets – or whether it was covered at all. In this case a news report aired in the area affected by the Intervention included a comment from a representative of the segment of the population that first experienced the measure of income management, while the other ABC news bulletins as well as the one aired on SBS relied on government and other official sources. The occurrences of direct voice in the newspaper articles analysed were few, and all were assigned to official agents.

In the brief interview clip, Joy White is able to reflect on the policy under which the Indigenous population in the Northern Territory had lived for over two years before the federal government announced its plans to apply compulsory income management nationwide. Her viewpoint is presented in Table 7.9 featuring a passage from the story that aired on the ABC in the Territory (Bardon 2009b).

Time code	Image	(Actuality) sounds	Voice(over)
02:11	A long shot of Indigenous people, both adults and children, in a supermarket aisle.	Chatter.	Aboriginal community leaders
02:13	A medium long shot of an Indigenous woman in a supermarket aisle with a shopping basket.		say now all welfare recipients will understand the
02:16	A medium close shot of a full shopping basket and the torso of the Indigenous person carrying it.		humiliation they felt.
02:17	A close-up of Joy White, outdoor location. Caption: 'Darwin, Joy White, Bagot Community Leader'.		White: Let them find out how difficult it is. It's not simple or easy.

Table 7.9 – Direct voice assigned to Indigenous leader in a news report aired on the ABC on 25 November 2009.

Significantly, Joy White's remark on what it has been like to live under compulsory income management is placed towards the end of the narrative. Joy White's presence at the end of the story gives her comment prominence as viewers are left with her account. This is different to the inverted pyramid structure of newspaper reports in which the most important matters and comments are presented first. The viewers in the Northern Territory were therefore provided with the opportunity to contemplate an Indigenous viewpoint on the policy the government was now extending. However, all stories (both print and audiovisual) analysed as part of the third discourse moment were generally framed by government policy-making, with the majority including quotes from ministers introducing or justifying their policy. A few stories also presented objecting remarks by representatives of the Greens or the Australian Council of Social Service. As a result, it seems the presence of Indigenous community leader Joy White's voice served the purpose of 'telling both sides of the story', discussed in Chapter 6 (section 6.3.6) rather than being employed to challenge dominant discursive positions.

7.3.2 Political actors as agents through reporter's or source's voice

The assigning of presence to different social actors by a reporter's voice in coverage around the government's announcement of the new welfare policy draws attention to the stories being more likely to present institutions or groups of people as agents as opposed to individuals (see section 6.2.1 in Chapter 6 for explanation of the analysis of presence). The majority of these institutions were various levels of Labor government or other political

parties, particularly the Greens, and the groups of people were mainly welfare recipients, (single) parents, pensioners, etc. – on a few occasions also Indigenous people. Having said that, these groups of people were often positioned as objects as well, as can be seen in the following extract from a story published in *The Age*:

Welfare recipients of all races will be forced to have their money managed by Centrelink unless they can demonstrate personal responsibility, under dramatic changes proposed by Families Minister Jenny Macklin.

The move is a sweeping extension of rules applied to indigenous people in the Northern Territory as part of the Howard government's emergency intervention of 2007.

Ms Macklin wants to restore the operation of the Racial Discrimination Act, which was suspended in the intervention to apply the tough welfare scheme only to Aborigines. To keep the tough rules for indigenous communities, she has extended them to non-indigenous people.

Under the federal plan, an estimated 20,000 people in the NT will be subject to the new race blind income management system from next July (Schubert 2009).

According to this passage, income of welfare recipients' ('of all races') will be managed by Centrelink, a government agency delivering government payments and services to Australian citizens. This measure is 'forced' upon the welfare recipients by an unidentified agent which, of course, is the government. The story describes the measure as 'an extension of rules applied to Indigenous people' as part of the Intervention which, again, positions citizens as objects of government control. A similar pattern emerged from the coverage of the first anniversary of the Intervention (see Chapter 6), and it was pointed out that such passive form, typical of newspaper language (Richardson 2007, pp. 54–55), reproduces the power of official institutions' over 'ordinary' people.

Inanimate matters, such as 'legislation' or 'scheme', were also often positioned as both agents and objects through a reporter's voice. In other words, they were things that were objects of government announcement but at the same time affected welfare recipients. The position of abstract entities as agents was also enhanced through sources' voice, as the passage from a story aired on the ABC (Schwartz 2009), presented in Table 7.10 below, shows.

Time code	Image	(Actuality) sounds	Voice(over)
00:27	A medium shot of white male shop assistant at the till giving change to an Indigenous woman.		(pause) Macklin: The bill tackles on a nation-
00:30	A medium close shot of Jenny Macklin standing at a lectern in the lower house of the parliament, with microphones in front of her. Caption: 'Canberra, Jenny Macklin, Community Services Minister'.		al scale the entrenched cycle of passive welfare through a new scheme of income management and incentives to support people moving from welfare to personal responsibility and independence.

Table 7.10 – Presence of an abstract entity (bill) as an agent in a news report aired on the ABC on 25 November 2009.

Although individuals did not have a dominant presence through a reporter's voice (compared to institutions and groups of people), Minister Jenny Macklin as well as the collective entity that is federal government had active presence as the 'owners' of the Intervention or the new welfare legislation. Both Rudd and Howard governments were represented in this way, and particularly newspapers described policies in this fashion. The first as well as a later paragraph in a story in *The Australian* provide an example:

When Indigenous Affairs Minister Jenny Macklin unveiled *her sweeping revisions to the Northern Territory emergency response* this week, not only did she neatly defuse the intervention's discriminatory aspects, she foreshadowed a transformation of welfare policies on a national scale.

...

The strategic subtlety of *Macklin's move* is considerable: she reinstates the Racial Discrimination Act and appeases her party's ideological Left; she retains income management yet begins to move beyond its cruder provisions; she deepens the most practical measures of the interventions mid-phase, such as licensed community stores. All a dream of progress, at least on paper (Rothwell 2009, my emphasis).

While this example positions Macklin – the individual – as an agent, it also describes policies and legislations as 'hers', enhancing her position as a powerful social actor. It is important to note here, however, that although Macklin is positioned in this fashion, the language used in the passage is quite hostile towards her, subtly questioning her motives for the new welfare policy. The consequences of such practice are discussed further in section 7.3.4 about politicisation.

The phenomenon of presenting the Intervention or its measures as 'belonging' to a particular government or minister was also present in the stories analysed as part of the two other key discourse moments. A pattern emerging from the interview data may explain such practice: a

number of participants identified official and expert sources, particularly the government, as regular sources in the context of the Intervention. Detailing preferred sources on this topic in an interview, Stephanie Peatling, of *The Sydney Morning Herald*, elucidates this further:

[I]t was a policy that was driven by the government, ... one had to go to them a lot, because they were ... the drivers of the policy, so ... obviously you dealt with them a lot. The ... opposition, in terms of what they wanted to say about that, and then ... people in the communities and academics as well, who were involved in that area or had a perspective on it.

While Peatling lists a few regular sources, including people in Indigenous communities, she refers to the government as the ‘driver’ of the Intervention policy. It is therefore not surprising that policies and legislative changes are described in terms of particular ministers who have been involved in the process of making them. Such practice can also be explained by personalisation of politics and political communication which, according to Holtz-Bacha, Langer and Merkle (2014, p. 2), is ‘as old and ubiquitous as politics itself’ but has increased in the recent decades due to factors to do with both media and society. Summarising a number of studies, they explain that personalisation refers to both increased visibility of individuals as opposed to political parties or other party representatives, and an increased focus on individuals’ characteristics and personalities (Holtz-Bacha, Langer, and Merkle 2014, p. 4).

When it comes to presence in direct voice assigned to sources, findings were again very similar to the previous discourse moments analysed in this study. As discussed in section 7.3.1, most occasions of direct voice were assigned to government representatives – predominantly Jenny Macklin – who took the opportunity to either speak for Indigenous people living under the Intervention measures or position the government as agent having control over the ‘ordinary’ people. This is reflected in extracts from two newspaper stories presented in Table 7.11 (Narushima 2009a; Schubert 2009).

<p><i>The Age</i>, 25 November 2009</p> <p>Indigenous welfare rules apply to all</p> <p>‘We are determined to remove the limitations that have applied to the application of the Racial Discrimination Act,’ Ms Macklin said last night.</p> <p>‘And we are implementing these major welfare reforms because we think it is important that people’s welfare payments are used in the interests of children and families. We want to make sure that we support people that need help with managing their money.’</p>	<p><i>The Sydney Morning Herald</i>, 24 November 2009</p> <p>Findings expected on NT intervention</p> <p>Children, the elderly and women were more supportive of contentious elements of the intervention that men said had shamed them as responsible and caring men.</p> <p>‘There’s been a broad range of views expressed but some common themes,’ Ms Macklin said.</p> <p>‘The majority take the view that it has delivered benefits particularly to children and to the elderly, with more money being spent on food.’</p>
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Table 7.11 – Presence assigned by Minister Macklin to other social actors through quotes assigned to her in two newspaper stories (author’s emphasis).

The passage from *The Sydney Morning Herald* story shows Macklin referring to ‘the majority’ of Indigenous people, who were consulted on the direction the Intervention should take, agreeing that the policy framework has been beneficial. The reader is not, however, provided with an opportunity to assess this through quotes from Indigenous people themselves, or representation of survey results, and does not therefore know anything about who ‘the majority’ are, how many they are, what their background is etc. This is relevant from the viewpoint of legitimisation of claims as well, and is re-visited in section 7.3.3. Further, in the story published in *The Age* the minister refers often to the Rudd government through the vague actor ‘we’, positioning it as someone or something caring for the disadvantaged. In her study on discourse used by the architects and supporters of the Intervention, Macoun (2011, p. 530) found the state positioned itself as the ‘solution to a problematic Aboriginality’, previously discussed in section 6.3. Research findings discussed here suggest that the federal government extended this ‘problematic’ positioning to segments of the wider community in its discourse about the extension of compulsory income management. Such framing is discussed further in the following section about legitimisation.

7.3.3 Legitimising income management as beneficial

One of the dominant claims in media coverage about the government’s announcement to apply compulsory welfare quarantining to the wider community was that extending income management is justifiable (Figure 7.2). In a sample of five newspaper articles and three original TV stories (see section 7.3), this was one of two most common claims on TV and one of three most common claims in the newspapers. As explained in Chapter 6 (section 6.2.1), analysis of legitimisation was carried out by logging claims present in the stories and their justification into a database, which enabled investigation of their frequency. The frequency of legitimated claims present in at least two stories per platform is shown in Figure 7.2.

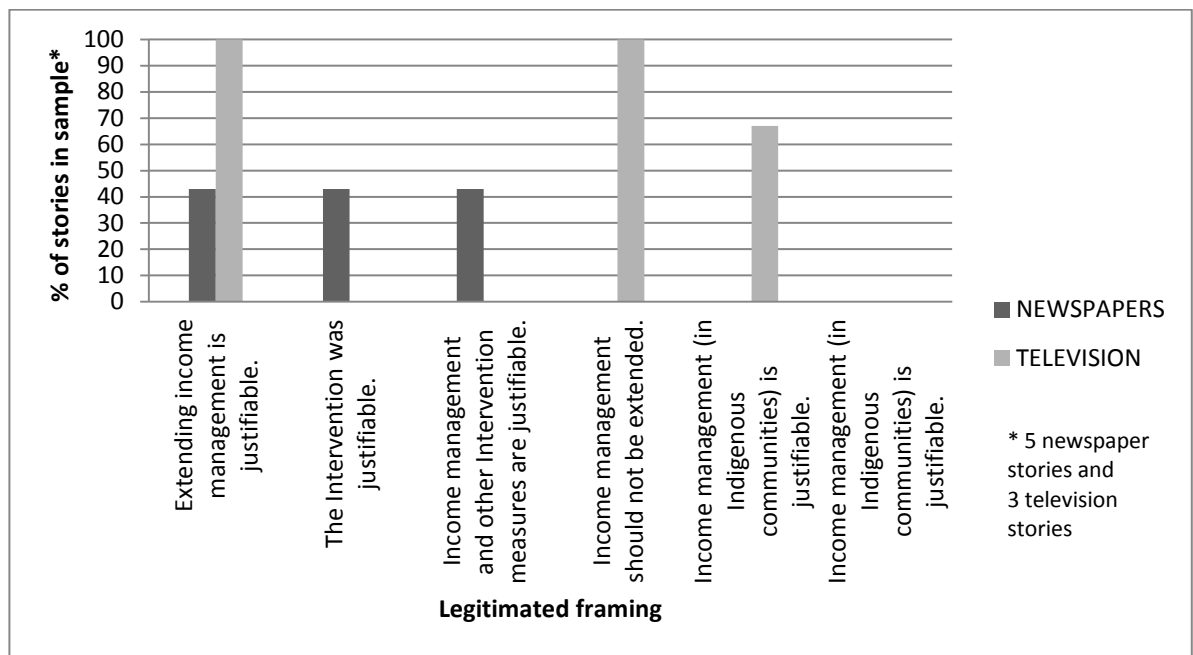


Figure 7.2 – Frequency of legitimated framings in newspaper and TV stories about the extension of welfare quarantining.

The claim that extending welfare quarantining is justifiable (present in three newspaper articles and three TV stories) was legitimised by government representatives, predominantly Jenny Macklin, either through direct speech assigned to her or through a reporter’s voice describing her actions. The following extract from a story in *The Australian* elucidates this further:

Her new laws will retain all elements of the NTER, some with minor changes, with the government insisting they qualify as exemptions under the act because they are aimed at benefiting a particular racial group.
 But on income-management, Ms Macklin’s solution to make it comply with the RDA is to extend it nationwide.
 ‘It will be a non-discriminatory approach,’ Ms Macklin told *The Australian* last night.
 ‘There are a number of people around the country who will benefit from income management. It doesn’t have anything to do with whether they are Aboriginal people.’
 She said income management was clearly helping disadvantaged NT communities, with families spending more on food and communities becoming more peaceful (Franklin 2009a).

In this passage, Macklin justifies the extension of welfare quarantining by stating that it will benefit ‘a number of people around the country’. The measure of income management is further legitimised in a passage of indirect speech by Macklin in which she is reported to have said that the measure was ‘clearly’ helping Indigenous communities. These accounts are anecdotal – no evidence from research findings, for example, is provided, and it is therefore

difficult for the reader to assess the minister's justification. The discursive power of Macklin's legitimisation relies on her position as the minister of the area in question.

Macklin's statement about the value of income management having nothing to do with whether one is Indigenous is also interesting. While one cannot say what Macklin's intention with such an account is, a possible reading is that her statement is steering away from the conservative idea of Aboriginality as 'problematic' (Macoun 2011) and the 'bad behaviour' of Indigenous Australians as the underlying reason for disadvantage in remote communities (Johns 2008).²⁹ The statement includes both Indigenous and any other groups of Australia's population in the same 'them' domain of welfare recipients, controlled by Macklin's 'us' domain – the government. Whether Macklin intended to do so or not, the clause reads as another statement enhancing the justification of quarantining both Indigenous and other people's welfare money.

Just as commonly legitimised claims were that the Intervention (as a whole) as well as income management in Indigenous communities were justified (in three newspaper articles each) and that income management should not be extended (in three TV stories). Findings indicate that while the three dominant framings legitimised in newspaper articles were all about the necessity and benefits of welfare quarantining or the Intervention as a whole, justified by government representatives, the TV stories presented dissenting perspectives, put forward and legitimised by the Greens and the Australian Council of Social Science. Again, this relates back to the media concept of 'balance' and 'telling both sides of the story', present particularly in the television journalists' accounts analysed in this project. While the TV stories analysed were more likely to represent 'balance' in viewpoints compared to newspaper articles, the practice was limited to two opposing framings: that income management was justifiable because it is beneficial and that income management should not be extended because it is unfair and 'un-Australian'. These claims had presence predominantly through official sources, rather than via citizens affected by the policy.

7.3.4 Politicised welfare quarantining

Findings regarding the positioning of abstract entities as agents (see section 7.3.2) suggest that the key discourse moment of extension of compulsory income management was quite politicised in media coverage of the news event. In other words, the policy measure of welfare quarantining was 'attributed a political nature', being assigned with the 'capacity of doing something' for people on welfare (Carvalho 2010, pp. 17–19). Such politicisation was

²⁹ See Chapter 2 for further discussion.

particularly evident in a feature story published in *The Australian* in which the new legislation was assigned such active capacity in a highly political sense:

Macklin's initial releases of information revealed a far-reaching, elaborately structured new architecture. The most crucial test of *the system*, which is to be launched from July next year, will be *its effect on bush indigenous communities, but it will wash over the Territory's bleaker suburbs, too, and have local political consequences*. The chief measure is a recalibration of income management: the quarantining that channels half an individual's welfare payments into a special card that can be used only for basic household supplies (Rothwell 2009, my emphasis).

In this passage 'the system' – that is, the new welfare legislation which extends compulsory income management – is positioned as agent affecting not only remote Indigenous communities but also other (non-Indigenous) suburbs and, significantly, local politics. This is further explained in the last few paragraphs of the story:

One inevitable consequence of this flurry of far-reaching initiatives is its effect on the Territory as a jurisdiction.

Politically unstable, economically dependent, the Territory is serving as a test-bed for Canberra to try out its boldest experiments.

Territory Chief Minister Paul Henderson, in parliament in Alice Springs, affected to welcome this remarkable further intervention into his own government's affairs. In truth, Canberra has just demonstrated how vital a dependent Territory is in the present Australian system, a place where the federal powers are omnipotent and can redraw the policy map instantaneously, at will. The Territory's prospects for statehood, already minuscule, have just been reduced to a distant dream.

In a week of extraordinary headlines, this social policy reform was the true banner event. The Rudd regime has disclosed the scale of its ambition. This is a significant expansion of control over the nation's poorest and most vulnerable population. It is a token of the will and force of a strong bureaucratic state that means business and wants results (Rothwell 2009).

These paragraphs clarify what the author means by the 'local political consequences' referred to in the previous passage: the federal government's decision to trial the extension of compulsory income management in the Northern Territory is described as the end of the Territory's 'prospects for statehood'³⁰ – a possibility discussed in Australia from time to time. Through such practice this story in *The Australian*, by Rothwell, is moving the debate away from whether compulsory income management is workable policy and making it about politics. Interestingly, Rothwell also moves to raise questions about human rights and social justice via his reference to 'control over the nation's poorest and most vulnerable'. There were a few other references to 'the struggling and disadvantaged' who would have to adapt to

³⁰ Although the Northern Territory has its own government, it does not have the same legislative independence as Australia's states. This is why the federal government was able to launch the Intervention in the Northern Territory – it could not have done so in other parts of Australia without the consent of the states.

the 'sharp consequences' of the new welfare policy (Rothwell 2009), but the tone of the story was political rather than about human rights.

Certainly, this kind of politicisation took place throughout the story, as an earlier passage presented in section 7.3.2 demonstrated. That paragraph suggested that the 'strategic subtlety of Macklin's move is considerable' as by reinstating the *Racial Discrimination Act* she 'appeases' her party's 'ideological left'. The passage questions Macklin's intentions and provides an example of how news media turn complex policy into politics, ignoring more nuanced discussion on policy and issues related to policy making. Further, it shows how public debate on policy is often diminished into conflict or rivalry between the two biggest parties in Australia. This politicking may predominantly be done by politicians. However, through the over-reliance on official, particularly political, sources news outlets enhance political social actors' discursive power in the public arena mediated by the media. Analysis of the first critical discourse moment explored in this study revealed a similar pattern of politicisation (see section 6.3.8).

7.4 Chapter conclusion

Findings regarding direct voices in the two key discourse moments explored in this chapter revealed a similar pattern to that of the first discourse moment, the first anniversary of the Intervention: direct voice was assigned predominantly to politicians or representatives of prominent non-government organisations. Further, governments or certain ministers were often described as the 'owners' of the Intervention and other policies, which further enhanced the position of these social actors as powerful agents. On a few occasions Indigenous Australians had a direct voice, but they were mostly sources that could be described as 'official' or 'expert' – a finding corresponding to the interviewed journalists' accounts on such people or institutions as regular sources in the context of Indigenous affairs and otherwise. However, it is important to note that these sources were seen and named as 'prominent' or 'expert' from the viewpoint of the mainstream news media which services the dominant culture, while Indigenous communities might well have different ideas about who were appropriate spokespeople. Indeed, in her study on TV representations of the Maori in New Zealand, Sue Abel (1997, p. 22) found that the media were likely to accept, as sources, only Maori who 'had standing' in the wider community.

There was a clear under-representation of people affected by the Intervention as agents, particularly in the form of first-person testimony. Their presence was mediated by a reporter's voice or government representatives who were assigned direct voice in the media texts. While groups of 'ordinary' people, such as welfare recipients, were positioned as agents

to an extent, particularly in stories about the extension of compulsory welfare quarantining, they were also often positioned as objects of government control. In these cases the government emerged as a faceless social actor through the use of passive sentences, constructing a discourse of citizens having no other option but to consent to government control – and this control being beneficial to them. ‘Ordinary’ people’s position as objects of control was further enhanced by the discursive practice of positioning abstract entities, for example policies or legislation, as agents. This was done by both media workers and non-media social actors, such as government representatives.

Documents, particularly the Productivity Commission’s report, were also frequently positioned as agents. Findings of the analysis of the two discourse moments discussed in this chapter thus suggest that both the media and non-media institutions treat non-human objects as entities that carry authority and whose internal workings need no further explanation. This results in a lack of transparency and discussion on the number of factors that are involved in and influence the process of report writing and policy-making.

Findings also indicate that negativity was a predominant news value when it comes to the coverage of the Productivity Commission’s report on Indigenous disadvantage. Similar observations can be found in previous research projects on Indigenous affairs, discussed in Chapter 3. It is true that many of the indicators presented in the Productivity Commission’s report provided a negative picture, but not all news was bad, as the Commission’s chairman Gary Banks stressed in the joint media conference with Jenny Macklin (see section 7.2.3). The mainstream news media, however, neglected this viewpoint, reproducing stereotypical negative representation of Indigenous affairs.

It seems the two discourse moments were predominantly covered as news events about policy and politics. This is evident in the concentration on the negative, telling ‘both’, *political* sides of the story rather than ‘all’ sides of the story, the over-reliance on government sources and the politicisation of Indigenous policy. There was a lack of humane reporting on the everyday life of Indigenous Australians under the Intervention measures with the perspectives of these people all but neglected, with the exception of a few instances, such as the current affairs story about housing in town camps which portrayed residents’ perspectives (Carter 2009). Analysis of the two discourse moments thus suggests that the mainstream news media kept perpetuating traditional power relations regarding public discourse on Indigenous affairs, as was also the case with the first anniversary of the Intervention.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1 Point of departure

As a result of the colonial history of Australia, the relationship between the Indigenous population and government has been one of control and interference by officialdom in Indigenous lives. As discussed in Chapter 2, this control and interference manifested over time in a number of policy approaches, such as protectionism and assimilation. The introduction of self-determination in the 1970s constituted a significant shift in policy, but the 1990s saw the rise of ‘renewed conservatism’ (Anderson 2003b). The conservative Howard federal government, elected in 1996, cut Indigenous initiatives and resources allocated for Indigenous affairs, and reintroduced the mainstreaming of services to Indigenous Australians (Broome 2010, p. 294; Roberts 1998, pp. 282–284).

In June 2007, five months before it lost office, the Howard government launched a controversial suite of policies (such as compulsory welfare quarantining, blanket restrictions on alcohol and pornography, and compulsory acquisition of Indigenous land) in remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. The policy approach, the Northern Territory Emergency Response (the Intervention), was the federal government’s response to the *Little Children Are Sacred* (LCS) report on child sexual abuse in Indigenous communities in the Territory. The approaching federal election, and the fact that the LCS report was not the first one detailing social dysfunction in Indigenous communities – and that there had been earlier requests from Indigenous communities for help regarding a variety of issues – raised questions about the motives of the government for such unprecedented action. Certainly, instead of following the key recommendation of the LCS report to consult and engage with Indigenous peoples (Wild and Anderson 2007, p. 7), the government suspended the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* and applied the Intervention measures in selected Indigenous communities only (Chapter 2). The Intervention became a huge media event, and some commentators have even suggested that it was essentially triggered by media coverage of child sexual abuse about a year prior to the launch of the policy (Hinkson 2010, p. 231).

The media play a central role in public debate about social issues because they serve as an arena for numerous, competing ideas and assumptions of the world (Molnar and Meadows 2001, p. 196). This arena is often understood in terms of the ‘public sphere’ (Habermas 1991 [1962]). Moreover, the media participate in the meaning construction processes and thus influence issues agendas and public discourse – and, ultimately, social change (Fairclough 1995, p. 51; Richardson 2007, p. 13). This is particularly true of Indigenous issues in Australia as the media are often the only source of information about, or the only ‘contact’ with,

Indigenous Australians for non-Indigenous people (Bullimore 1999, p. 72; Meadows 2005, pp. 38–39).

Mainstream media representations of Indigenous Australians have been identified as problematic in a large body of research (Budarick and King 2008; Dunne Breen and McCallum 2013; Ewart 1997, 2002; Hartley and McKee 2000; McCallum 2010; McCallum et al. 2012; McCallum and Reid 2012; Meadows 2001b; Meadows, Hippocrates, and van Vuuren 1997; Mickler 1998). A variety of representations were canvassed in Chapter 3, including the concept ‘imagined community’ (Anderson 2006 [1983]) as explanation for these representations. As Hartley (1992, p. 207) notes, the mainstream media, which create a sense of belonging for audiences that form an ‘imagined community’, tend to exclude Indigenous Australians from the imagined domain of ‘wedom’ and categorise these peoples as part of the domain of ‘theydom’. In light of this, I suggested that Indigenous agendas and perspectives might be easily ignored in the public arena mediated by the mainstream media, even in stories that concern Indigenous issues.

8.2 Media discourse and the Intervention

This doctoral research project set out to analyse what Australian mainstream news media coverage of the federal government policy of the Intervention indicates about power relations in media discourse regarding Indigenous issues. Taking a critical research approach, the key questions of interest here are: what knowledges can be constructed in the context of the Intervention, and who has the power to construct these knowledges.

Stories about the Intervention were sampled over three years from the announcement of the policy framework in 2007 to the federal election in 2010. Mainstream newspaper and television stories about the topic were studied through a mixed methodology integrating content analysis and discourse analysis. The purpose was to examine how this coverage developed over a relatively long period of time – development here concentrating mainly on quantitative factors such as volume, size and positioning of stories – and what discourses emerged from the news media about the Intervention at different times. Industry interviews were also conducted as it was thought contemporary media practitioners’ perspectives could help explain discursive practices of different social actors that influence media coverage of the Intervention. Collection and analysis of interview data also aimed to contribute towards bridging a gap regarding lack of research on journalism practitioners’ accounts on coverage of Indigenous topics.

When it comes to the development of the coverage, the content analysis revealed a pattern of decline that followed the common ‘issue-attention cycle’ of issues of public interest (Downs

1972). It also showed that the national paper, *The Australian*, and the public service broadcaster, the ABC, provided the most sustained coverage of the topic. As discussed in Chapter 5, this is not surprising, given the widely recognised conservative political agenda of *The Australian* in Indigenous affairs and the charter obligations of the ABC. Had these two news outlets been left outside the sample, the coverage of the Intervention would have emerged as much more sporadic. This can be linked with the ‘pattern of indifference’ towards Indigenous affairs within Australian society (discussed in Chapter 3), which emerged from records of the earliest contact and has continued to present day through mainstream media (Molnar and Meadows 2001, pp. 196–197), and exclusion of Indigenous Australians from the imagined domain of ‘wedom’, constructed by the media (Hartley 1992, p. 207).

In Chapter 5 I also suggested that the perceived lack of interest in Indigenous issues by non-Indigenous Australians, as described by journalists interviewed in the course of this study, affected the declining and sporadic nature of the coverage. Analysis indicates stories about the Intervention and other Indigenous topics are neglected as news organisations commonly operate on an institutional assumption that the majority of Australians are not interested in them. This practice is accelerated by the fact that today’s mainstream media organisations are businesses that have to attract an audience that is willing to pay for the media content and can further attract advertising revenue. The dual market of mass media has of course been affected by technological changes such as the rise of the online platform, but the interview data analysed in this study shows that audiences and their tastes are still considered by the media and still do affect content.

In addition, analysis suggests that the traditional news values of mainstream news media directed the coverage of the Intervention: the peaks identified in the coverage during the three-year timeframe were events that could be linked with news values such as unexpectedness, negativity and timeliness. The news value of conflict was also present, particularly in stories about demonstrations during the first anniversary of the Intervention. This is common in coverage about a group that is racially different from the dominant group in a society: as discussed in Chapter 6, Dreher (2010) found that the ‘racialized’ voices of Muslim groups in Australia were included in mainstream stories through conventional news values rather than in a way that would have changed news agendas. Indeed, not once was a key discourse moment examined in this study based on agenda set by Indigenous communities.

Certainly, findings of both textual analysis and analysis of the industry interviews demonstrate that professional practices, valued by journalists, can be counterproductive

when it comes to construction of knowledge on the Intervention and inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in discourses about the Intervention available in the public arena mediated by mainstream news media. This is discussed in detail below.

Examining the research question on what discourses were present in media coverage on the Intervention, analysis provided a polarised or in some cases no less than one-sided picture. Looking at the first anniversary of the Intervention, the dominant discourse was that although it had some issues, the Intervention was working/had been beneficial. Another discourse present, however notably less powerful, was that the Intervention was not working. The dominant discourse in the context of the release of the Productivity Commission's report on Indigenous disadvantage was that this disadvantage was getting worse. The lesser discourses regarding why this was happening varied from failure of government policy to time needed for achieving change. Finally, the dominant discourse present in stories about the federal government's announcement to extend compulsory welfare quarantining supported this measure as applied in Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory as well as its extension elsewhere. Television stories also provided an opposite discourse – objection to the extension of welfare quarantining – which interestingly did not have a clear presence in newspaper stories. However, this does not necessarily mean that 'balance' was achieved, as is discussed shortly.

Why did these discourses appear in coverage of the three key discourse moments while others did not (or were marginal)? A few major patterns emerging from all discourse moments shed light on this question: there was over-reliance on 'official' or 'expert' sources, viewed as prominent from the wider community's point of view. Further, only a narrow selection of Indigenous voices was heard, or their importance was diminished by the practice of not naming these sources, particularly if they were 'ordinary' people. This affected framings available in stories as well as legitimisation of issues. Through their presence as agents, the government and their representatives, and in some cases the opposition and other political actors, had significant framing power over other social actors. Further, the most commonly justified claims came from these actors.

Importantly, analysis also found that both journalists and non-media institutions, particularly government, tend to treat non-human objects as authoritative entities whose internal workings do not need to be explained further. This manifested as a discursive practice of positioning documents, figures, policies and other such abstract entities as agents – that is, as social actors with the capacity of doing something (Carvalho 2010). As discussed in Chapter 7, this practice removes transparency from the process of policy-making or production of

reports or other such documents that are often used as sources by the news media – in other words, it is not explained that behind these abstract entities there are in fact people who have participated in the construction of them. Ultimately, the discursive practice of positioning a policy or an enquiry as an agent makes it easier to shift responsibility and blame, and masks power behind the concrete effects of discourse.

Further, Indigenous Australians continue to be portrayed as the ‘other’, particularly by different levels of government. In the public arena mediated by mainstream news media, the government positions itself – and sometimes Australians as a nation – as an agent that needs to do something about Indigenous disadvantage. On the one hand this is positive as it can be read as the government taking responsibility, but on the other hand such discourse reinforces prevailing sociopolitical power relations between the state and Indigenous Australians, connecting the government to the active ‘we’ domain and Indigenous Australians to ‘them’ – those who need to be controlled. Historically, as discussed in Chapter 2, this relationship has been about government control.

This is not to say that there were no Indigenous presences whatsoever – some stories included a selection of Indigenous perspectives on the Intervention or positioned community residents as agents. On a few occasions a story was also framed around these Indigenous perspectives. One cannot say, however, that a pattern of this kind emerged from the key discourse moments analysed in this study; these occasions were restricted to a few stories only. The lack of opportunities for voicing their agendas diminished Indigenous Australians’ ability to raise agendas important to them or contribute to the construction of the domains of ‘wedom’ and ‘theydom’. When such opportunity did occur, it was often in a single quote or sound bite which served the purpose of ‘telling both sides of the story’ rather than being employed to challenge the dominant agenda. In other words, Indigenous voices were used as a reaction to the perspectives of those who already have a dominant voice in society.

It is evident that discursive practices of the media have a great impact on discourses available in the public sphere about the Intervention. A number of the journalists interviewed in the course of my research project argued that Indigenous affairs should be covered as ‘any other story’ when it comes to news values, story composition, naming and so on. According to a newspaper reporter,

you approach [Indigenous stories] with an open mind, ask questions, ... write down the answers really. It’s obviously a little bit more complicated than that, but that’s the gist of it (Participant no. 3).

Further, many participants identified ‘official’ or ‘expert’ people or institutions as regular sources both in general and in the context of the Intervention, and made references to ‘balanced’ reporting. However, this thesis demonstrates that current understandings of newsworthiness, suitable sources, and idea(l)s of ‘balance’ or ‘fairness’ do not in fact result in balanced reporting. These journalistic practices, coupled with increasingly mediated practices of official social actors (particularly political ones) often resulted in the availability of two opposing viewpoints, by official social actors, with the omission of a variety of viewpoints from a variety of actors – the ‘shades of grey’. Similarly, Dunne Breen (2013), who analysed newspaper discourse from the announcement to the enactment of the Intervention, found that journalists and politicians worked together to silence opposition to the Intervention, resulting in a lack of public sphere discussion on the policy framework. In Dunne Breen’s (2013) words, the journalistic practice of seeking balance often masks power differences.

A few non-Indigenous participants made references to the complexity of Indigenous affairs and how cultural differences can constrain journalistic work on Indigenous topics. It is clear that encouraging journalists to build and maintain relationships and trust with Indigenous communities is crucial in the process of getting a selection of Indigenous agendas into the news and voices into the stories. Such approach to Indigenous stories was emphasised by the Indigenous journalists interviewed for this research project. A focus on building up mainstream journalists’ ‘cultural competence’ (McCallum, Waller, and Meadows 2012, p. 107) as well as trust between these journalists and Indigenous Australians in remote areas would therefore be essential but would require extra resources, given a number of the media practitioners interviewed in the course of this study identified reporting from remote communities as expensive. Extra resources may be hard to find given the difficult financial situation faced by mainstream news media today. For instance, half way through 2012 the two major print news organisations in Australia, Fairfax Media and News Limited, announced extensive job cuts due to loss of circulation and revenue (Jackson 2012; Zappone 2012). Having said that, the allocation of scarce resources is also a matter of priority. News outlets that have chosen not to prioritise Indigenous issues do not have a problem spending large sums on topics that they believe draw audiences, as discussed in section 6.3.5 in Chapter 6.

The way mainstream news media cover Indigenous stories is significant, as discussed in Chapter 3. Since the media are often the main, or only, source of the dominant group’s knowledge of and attitudes towards minority groups in society (van Dijk 2000, pp. 36–37), they influence the way minority groups are portrayed within society. Moreover, a recent

research project on the relationship between the media and Indigenous policy-making in Australia found that Indigenous policies have been developed in an ‘increasingly media-saturated’ environment (McCallum, Waller, and Meadows 2012, p. 101). Researchers of the project discovered that policy professionals ‘acknowledged their own role in a mediated policy environment and are aware of their mediatised policy practices’ (McCallum and Waller 2012, p. 19).

It is therefore clear that the limited, or polarised³¹, public debate, as mediated and constructed by mainstream news media in their coverage of the Intervention, is unhelpful in developing nuanced Indigenous policy that takes the complexities of the issues at hand into consideration. Nor does it contribute to mending the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Elizabeth Strakosch (2014) has recently pointed out important issues with current Indigenous policy in Australia. She argues that the problem with the ‘Closing the Gap’ in Indigenous disadvantage – a policy approach launched in 2008 by federal Labor government (Macklin 2008a) and continued by successive governments – is that it concentrates on statistics that can be measured, thus ignoring the ‘social and political relationship between Indigenous and settler Australia’ which is fundamental for achieving social change. She writes:

Yet as the impact and political currency of the intervention wanes, closing the gap in statistical disadvantage is now the dominant way of framing the relationship between Indigenous and settler Australia, and of directing our efforts to change this relationship. It is, in effect, our national Indigenous policy.

...

More importantly, the continual focus on the ‘gap’ itself sidelines public debate about why the gap exists and how it can be closed. It is an appealingly neutral approach to such an uncomfortable and contentious policy area. This is because it presents us with a technical rather than political problem that is objectively defined and agreed upon by all.

With it, both sides of politics feel they can set aside ‘ideology’ and come together in hard, practical work to achieve measureable goals.

Yet the bipartisan approach to Closing the Gap is built on a highly political account of the nature of Indigenous disadvantage. In this account, the gap is caused by specific Indigenous behavioural deficiencies rather than complex interactions between issues or underlying structural factors (Strakosch 2014).

Although Strakosch describes Indigenous policy in Australia, she could also be talking about the news media coverage of the Intervention. Analysis of the three key discourse moments shows that much of the coverage concentrated on goals, achievements or failures that can be measured. This is a lost opportunity for the media. A number of the journalists interviewed

³¹ For example, ‘the Intervention is good’ vs. ‘the Intervention is bad’, or ‘the government has succeeded’ vs. ‘the government has failed’.

in the course of this study stressed the public service role of the media, referring to journalism as the ‘fourth estate’ or ‘watchdog’ of power, particularly government. However, instead of facilitating a vibrant debate on Indigenous policy as it derives from, reproduces, and potentially alters the relationship between First and settler Australians, which would have served the civic role they assigned to the media, news outlets mostly reproduced sociopolitical power relations regarding the topic through polarised framing of the Intervention and by providing only a limited number of voices.

8.3 Discussion on future direction

Analysis of three key discourse moments emerging from news media coverage of the Intervention shows a lack of variety of discourses about the policy approach in the public arena mediated by mainstream news media. Findings of the current research project show that Indigenous Australians have little discursive power over matters that concern them, compared to government and other official social actors, and there is hardly any discussion on solutions alternative, or additional, to current government policy despite some social actors referring to such initiatives as ‘things that work’ (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2009, pp. 7–8). Indigenous Australians’ discursive power is diminished particularly through the lack of occurrences of first-person testimony assigned to them, and the practice of positioning documents and other non-human entities as agents by both media practitioners and non-media social actors. In light of the findings of the current research project it is evident that more discussion on the access and representation of Indigenous perspectives in mainstream media is needed. Questions about who gets to speak in media discourse about Indigenous issues and what can be said are important because discourse has actual effects within society. There are approaches in existing research that could be applied to improve the access and portrayal of Indigenous perspectives in the media, of which I discuss two.

The first one is a framework formulated by Waller (2010) which draws on Indigenous research methodologies (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies 2012). She suggests that Indigenous research methodologies used in academic research can also be applied to journalism to change conventional journalistic methodologies to better consider Indigenous perspectives and improve the representations of Indigenous peoples, as well as their participation as sources in mainstream news media. Indigenous research methodologies call for ‘self-reflexivity, meaningful engagement with communities and individuals and structuring of projects so they privilege Indigenous voices and perspectives’ (Waller 2010, p. 22). Importantly, Waller (2010, p. 25) notes that Indigenous research methodologies reject the notion of objectivity and emphasise that research – or indeed

journalism – cannot be neutral or value-free. Accepting this view, the idea of supposedly impartial mainstream news media concentrating on or emphasising Indigenous perspectives becomes less problematic as there is no such thing as ‘objective’ journalism.

According to Waller (2010, p. 27), academics are well positioned to produce not only research but also journalistic texts that utilise Indigenous research methodologies and suggests that such practice is possible ‘within the confines’ of traditional news organisations as well. Perhaps one way of starting to incorporate this practice could be to adopt Indigenous research methodologies as part of the university education of future journalists. Such approach could be beneficial not only in the context of Indigenous topics but also stories concerned with other minority groups.

The second approach discussed here is Dreher’s (2010) suggestion for the mainstream media to genuinely listen to the communities that are ‘racialized’ within society. According to her, there is ‘considerable evidence that Muslim Australians and other racialized communities are in fact making sustained efforts to speak up and be heard’ (Dreher 2010, p. 99). Similarly, McCallum, Waller and Meadows (2012, p. 104) found that Indigenous policy advocates do ‘engage with mainstream media and culturally competent journalists to keep their policy agendas live’. As a result, Dreher (2010, p. 99) stresses the importance of asking: what is the ‘mainstream’ doing?

Drawing on Dreher’s remarks on the importance of listening, this study calls for mainstream media to think about their listening practices. This could be done, for instance, by starting to build connections with and listen to Indigenous media in order to learn about agendas important to Indigenous Australians and a variety of viewpoints and voices available regarding Indigenous affairs. There are opportunities to do so: for instance, in her doctoral thesis on how Indigenous newspapers have contributed to the Indigenous public sphere, Burrows (2009, p. 249) suggests that ‘one of the strengths of Indigenous print media is that they can be accessed by mainstream readers, journalists and policymakers’. Certainly, many Indigenous newspapers or magazines have online presence in addition to their print copies. Further, the National Indigenous Television (NITV) service has also become available for most Australians with its shift from pay TV to the free-to-air platform in December 2012. In other words, Indigenous media are now more accessible for both journalists, decision makers and ‘ordinary’ people alike to engage with.

Another research project might examine whether Indigenous media are beginning to be accorded some agenda setting role within Australian society, and what might help them to achieve such a position. In section 4.5 in Chapter 4 I referred to a recent study, which found

that Indigenous journalists make up only 1.8 percent of the 605 media professionals interviewed in the study (Hanusch 2013). In a way, these few journalists are pioneers in a field that is dominated by Anglo-Australian colleagues, with the professional culture drawing on this origin as well. I raised the idea of a research project stemming from the issues Indigenous journalists see as pressing in today's Australia. Such a project could also examine at length how Indigenous media professionals see their role and what they believe could be done to improve mainstream news media representations of Indigenous peoples and topics.

Mainstream news stories need to represent Indigenous communities through first person testimony to enhance Indigenous Australians' discursive power, and this should be done in a proactive way rather than as a mere reaction to government action. This is a matter too important to be excluded on cost bases and should perhaps be inserted into the code of ethics for journalists. Race relations and the future wellbeing of Australia require the domain of 'wedom' becomes more inclusive of First Nations peoples.

Appendix 1 – List of interviewees

Natasha Robinson, 14 May 2012, *The Australian*

Stephanie Peatling, 23 May 2012, *Sydney Morning Herald*

Ashleigh Wilson, 8 June 2012, *The Australian*

Simon Kearney, 21 June 2012, *The Australian*³²

Murray McLaughlin, 10 September 2012, Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Russell Skelton, 27 September 2012, *The Age*

Anonymous, 4 October 2012, metropolitan tabloid newspaper

Anonymous, 23 October 2012, public service broadcaster

Angela Bates, 19 November 2012, the National Indigenous Television

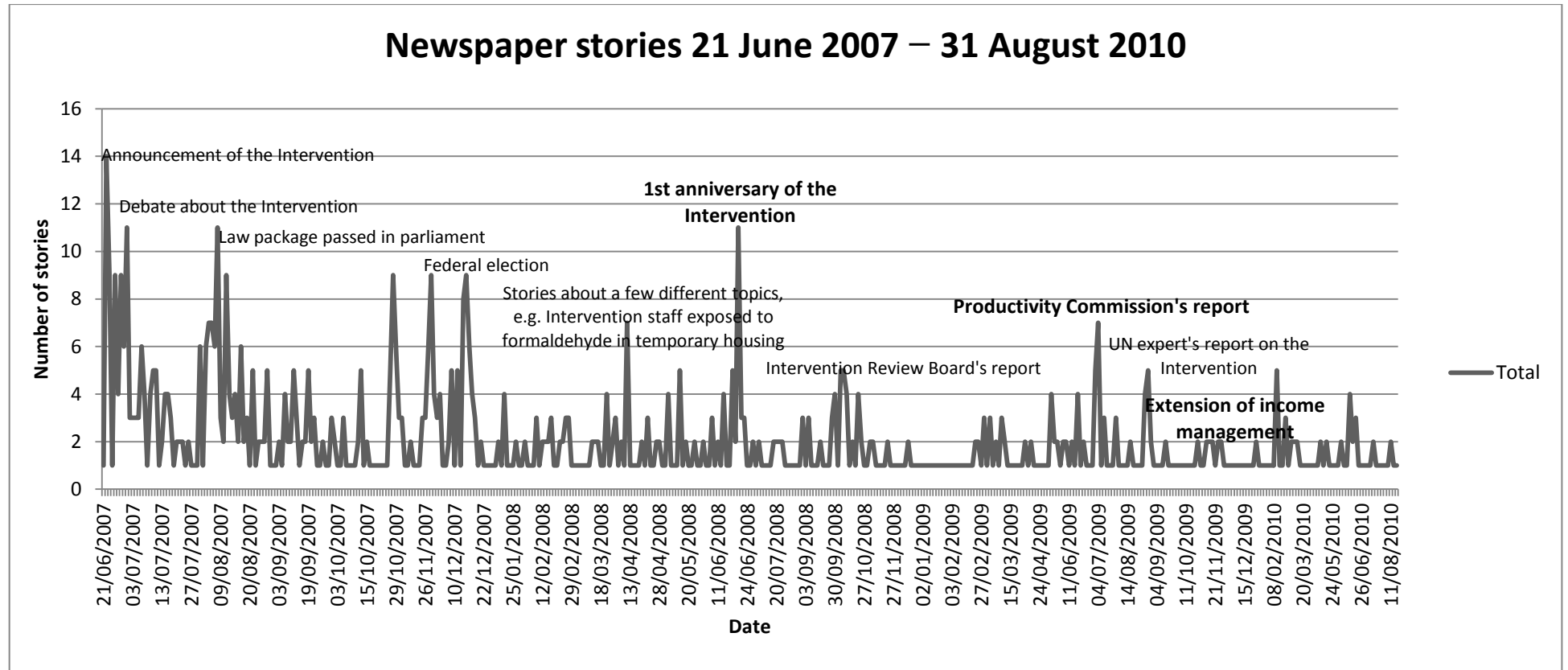
Chris Graham, 13 December 2012, *Tracker*

Amy McQuire, 24 January 2013, *Tracker*

Anonymous, 23 April 2013, public service broadcaster

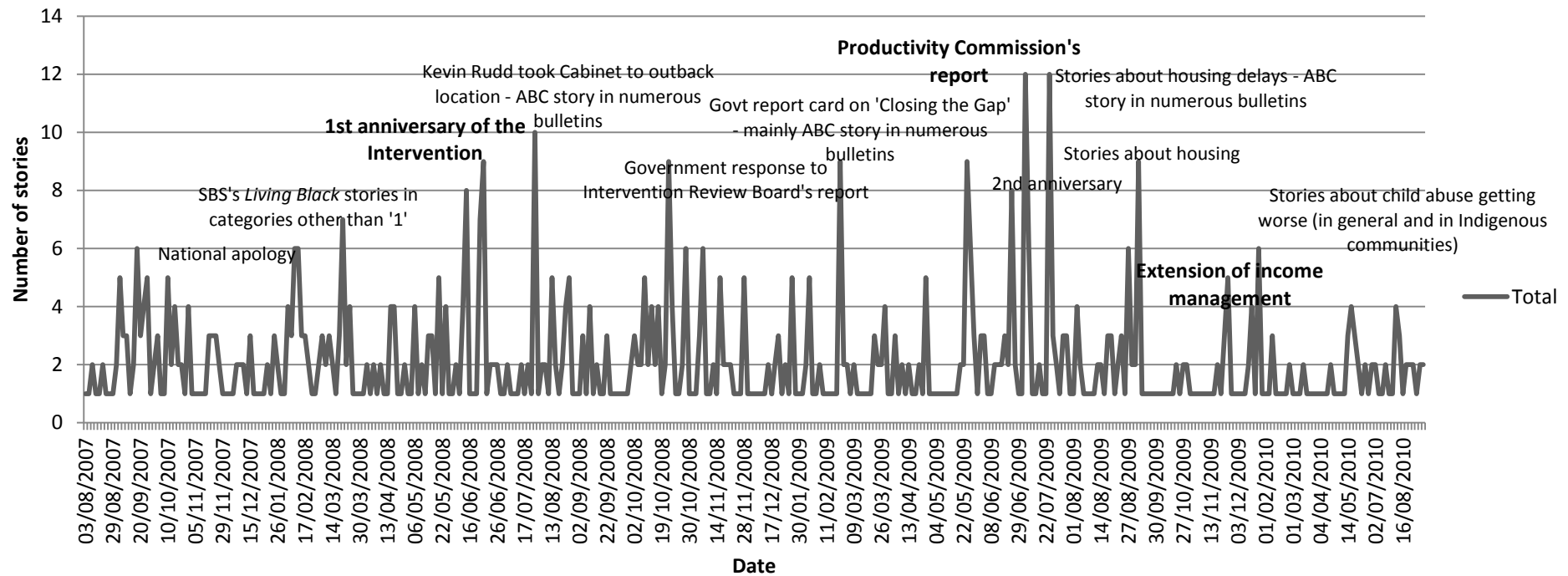
³² At the time of the interview, participant was no longer working for *The Australian*.

Appendix 2 – Development of newspaper coverage of the Intervention



Appendix 3 – Development of television coverage of the Intervention

Television stories 1 August 2007 – 31 August 2010



Appendix 4 – Coding sheet for agents & objects

Print/TV (circle) Record number: _____ Media outlet's name: _____

Story headline/ID: _____

Story date: _____ Story type & section/program: _____

Length of story: _____ Story page no./time of broadcast: _____

Prominence: **1)** Prominent, political affiliation (e.g. party, government, opposition, current & former ministers, govt officials and bureaucrats, etc., including Intervention taskforce and individuals identified as representatives of it); **2)** Prominent, organisational affiliation (any organisation, association, company, including Indigenous organisations or corporations, or an individual identified as a representative of an organisation); **3)** Prominent, individual affiliation (community spokesperson/elder/leader or an expert that cannot be placed under identifier type 1 or 2, e.g. academics, medical doctors, etc. not affiliated with a particular organisation); **4)** “Ordinary” citizen or group of “regular” people (e.g. residents of a community spoken about as a group, Australians, protesters, etc.); **5)** Can't tell prominence (e.g. reports, the Intervention, etc.).

Note 1. This coding sheet is based on Jacqui Ewart's coding sheet for sources.

Note 2. All occurrences of direct voice per one social actor in a story are counted, other presences logged only once per actor.

Name of actor	Male or Female (or n/a)	Indigenous/ Non-Indig./ Can't Tell	Prominence no. <i>(see above)</i>	Direct voice (quote/ sound bite)	Spoken about by reporter/ presenter	Spoken about by other social actors	Active image	Object (including language and image)

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