

Australia

Chapter 13: Fighting Today for a Better Tomorrow

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For millennia, my people have been the stewards of this land. Coming from a place rich with everything one could want for, my ancestors lived by a strict and binding law which dictated that each individual would look out for the collective and the collective would look after each individual. A circle of balance, with this knowledge and responsibility, passed from one generation to the next. With a governing core philosophy which stressed the importance of individual responsibility for the betterment of each other, my people created a balance with themselves and the world around them. The arrival of Europeans and the Western identity changed this world forever, and now the modern age has heralded changes for us which we must look to overcome, to adapt to, to survive and to thrive alongside in this new world. Although split into many tribes and clans across the country, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as a whole constitute the longest continuing culture on the planet, with my people being here over 50,000 years. However, it is important to stress that for this time, we have not remained fixed in time as some of the Western stereotypes may depict the image of the unchanged “noble savage.” No, we have been able

to survive and thrive as long as we have due to the fact that we are the most adaptive people on this earth. As circumstance and necessity dictate, so we adapt, and so we overcome. Today this same principle applies, and although we have a drastically altered and different experience ahead of us, drawing upon the same core philosophy of our past we indeed shall not only survive but thrive, adapting to a new world and once again showing why we indeed are the longest continuing culture in the world to date.

My personal ancestry walks in three worlds: that of Torres Strait Islander, Aboriginal, and Western. My father is an Eora and Yuin man from Sydney and the south coast of New South Wales, and my mother is a Wagadagam woman from the Torres Strait Islands hailing from the St. Paul's community on Moa Island. Tied in through this cultural identity is a Western identity with origins across Europe, as indeed some of my ancestry has hailed from shores far from home. The dominant paradigm of Western culture and identity has been placed on Indigenous Peoples and, over the last two centuries, we have been influenced by its presence. However, where once I saw only difficulty in trying to reconcile a life walking between these different cultures and worlds, today I see an opportunity as I have witnessed my people once again adapt to a situation beyond our control. Today we have adapted to a world which has been geared against us as, through decades of racist government policy (where once we were not so much classed as people

but rather placed alongside flora and fauna), we have endured and overcome decades of social experimentation by the Australian government with everything from protectionism, segregation, assimilation and self-determination, all policy flags flown by the Australian government over the last century. Moving forward to the situation in 2018, we now sit in a place in which we have the opportunity to take back our own destiny despite the numerous socio-economic and political challenges which lie ahead of us.

Today, my people face massive hurdles and obstacles on our way towards equity and empowerment. After the crippling effects of colonization and apartheid on generations past, today we are left to pick up the pieces and begin to rebuild this fractured world we inherited. The chaos which now ravages our communities through justice issues and incarceration (we have the highest rate of incarcerated people in the world today; with only 3.3% of the total population of Australia, we constitute over 27% of the prison population¹), chronic health conditions including major issues with diabetes, obesity, cardiovascular disease and

¹ Australian Law Reform Commission, *Pathways to Justice – An Inquiry into the Incarceration Rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (ALRC Report 133)* (Sydney: Commonwealth of Australia, 2017), https://www.alrc.gov.au/sites/default/files/pdfs/publications/final_report_133_amended1.pdf.

substance abuse issues,² a housing crisis (in some regional and remote communities, overcrowding is a reality with lack of accommodation or adequate housing³), and a myriad of other socio-economic hardships which rampage through our community. These issues have ramifications both circular and perpetually in domino, in that as one issue takes effect, it inevitably leads to others. These issues, however, whether they be incarceration, poor health, substance abuse or poverty, are only symptoms of something much larger; tackling the root of these issues is what we, as the next generation, must confront if we are to walk towards a brighter future.

As a young Indigenous man, I sought to change the fortunes of my people through blending ancient traditions and law with the realities of the 21st century, and utilizing constructs which govern the way civilization operates today. With the state having far-reaching and governing powers, the dismantling of previous traditions and methods of conduct and operation was first and foremost a priority for the state to ensure and legitimize its power. The onset of capitalist notions of production and societal construction have meant a dramatic turn for a society where individual responsibility

² Ibid.

³ Australia Institute for Health and Welfare, “Housing Assistance in Australia 2018,” last modified June 28, 2018, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/housing-assistance/housing-assistance-in-australia-2018/contents/housing-in-australia>.

towards the collective and not only oneself was paramount. Walking with an understanding of both realms, the challenge today is how in a globalized world do we hold the balance between the two? To walk the line between the differing philosophical and ideological governing methods, I as a 19-year-old established an organization which would assist in caring for my community. Since I could not see the state nor any institutionalized body assisting my local community, I instead set up an entity which would operate under the premise of helping to address some issues we faced as Indigenous youth, utilizing all methods of modern state accountability and transparency. This organization, however, has one major fundamental difference at its core: this entity would adhere to an ancient philosophy of social responsibility which my forbearers enacted. The core of this modern age institution would be grounded in Indigenous knowledge and law and thus we would put into motion a strategy to ensure, as in the previous millennia, that we would not only survive in this new world, but that we would thrive.

The organization I established is named The Streets Movement organization (TSM), a community development organization and social impact initiative with a primary emphasis on youth, education and positive pathways. The projects developed from this entity would range from health promotion projects like community gymnasiums and centers, to drop-in centers and spaces for youth, music and arts programs, school initiatives, and academic and cultural exchanges, all of which

would assist our people in crafting a better future for themselves and for our communities. From this grassroots beginning, I was fortunate enough to be able to construct a community center when I was in my early twenties which served as a community boxing gym, a place where we could teach our ethos and begin to give back simply in a way and format with which we were familiar.

Initially, our philosophy was taught through the medium of boxing and fitness. Boxing and fitness are prime conduits for teaching the lessons of our philosophy and ideology in a very practical sense. The mere fact that I was given these lessons growing up in a cultural context, along with the fact that I was taught and able to relate these attributes through the medium of boxing, was enough to provide justification to pass these same teachings on through this particular medium. Additionally, boxing and Indigenous Peoples have always had a great relationship. Particularly in the days of racist government policies and apartheid of Indigenous Peoples in Australia, boxing was a space in which one had equality with anyone whom they stood against, irrespective of color. Therefore, with a solid historical relationship and a spirit within the sport itself which breeds strength over adversity, boxing was a prime candidate and medium through which to help my people. Training and fighting taught resilience to suffering, strength over weakness, unrelenting commitment to a purpose or goal and the idea of “the fight.” These lessons and attributes were learned through the very real and practical

implementation of boxing and its associated health and fitness techniques. For example, one cannot expect to become stronger and subsequently fitter unless one trains. The physical aspect of these actions requires maximum physical effort and pushes one into a mental state of “I push myself to my physical limits,” which in turn also ensures that my mental state is pushed to break my own barriers and I am forced beyond what my current physical limitations are. Within this space, I build an understanding and appreciation of what hardship brings, in that through this suffering and exertion I am able to find myself—that is, the strongest version of myself. What I am taught in this space is that through hard work and dedication, I am able to better myself and that I should embrace the hardship or “grind,” as it is only through this that I am able to strengthen myself both physically and mentally to various kinds of hardships. Therefore, training was used as a microcosm for life.

In our lives as young Indigenous men and women, just as in training, hard times will come; however, what is in your control is how you respond to these events. If you embrace these challenges and use them as motivation to better yourself rather than caving and crumbling to the challenge, you can and will exceed and thrive in this world. These examples are drawn from ideas on evolution or adapting to one’s situation, rather than letting circumstances or situations break us and destroy us. We use this as motivation and reason to stand up and do more, ensuring that we as

individuals are empowered enough to be able to take the necessary steps in our lives to make a change not only for ourselves but for our communities and for the world as well. Being born into difficult socio-economic circumstances, coupled with the dynamics and teachings of my own people, has shaped this thinking. Additionally, I have drawn from the resilience of my people against the myriad issues which have afflicted my people—everything from genocide, on to apartheid policies, through to the crippling effects of post-colonial society which afflict Indigenous communities today. Our philosophy was a way of drawing upon that intergenerational trauma and pain and directing it to something which would empower us. We suffered; however, because we suffered, we should be stronger—stronger to face the issues we have today. Those who have not faced our challenges are not as equipped to handle the hardships and complexities that life throws at all of us. Although we have started behind the rest of society due to theft of land, loss of wages and life and a host of other social and economic determining factors (e.g., lack of intergenerational wealth, systemic destruction of languages and culture by the state, forced removal of Indigenous children by the Australian government to “breed” out Aboriginality, among others), we are able to overcome the harsh reality of the world today because we have endured so much hardship and pain before. In this sense, our philosophy teaches us that this pain that was meant to break us has forced us to adapt and we have now used it as fuel for our proverbial fire; therefore, we

can achieve more, we can do more, and we can be more because of where we have come from. This is our “fighters’ mentality.”

My mission was to change the social narrative of my people and to enact some sort of social and economic revolution through which we would be able to cast off the shackles of poverty and dispossession and the control over our culture by non-Indigenous entities. For example, many non-Indigenous companies sell tourism packages where I live and across Australia; however, funds from these do not go towards Indigenous communities but rather back towards the non-Indigenous entities which control these particular markets and NGOs which have major control over Indigenous funding sources and community development opportunities. I looked to begin to create and maintain our communities and culture in our own way. Growing up, I experienced a particular narrative about Indigenous Peoples, namely that my people were alcoholics, drug users, criminals, poor and a problem for society. Growing up, I experienced very real racism from kids who felt that because I was Indigenous that, somehow, I was less than they were. I can recall remarks from other youth on the subject of my Indigeneity; this included everything from open mockery and ridicule to the typical degenerative slurs. The most confrontational incidents, however, came from the police. During one particular incident, I was walking my friend home (who was a young non-Indigenous woman). I was but 17 years of age at the time and walking

with my friend, my two younger brothers, and one of their friends. It was around 9:30 pm and we were around 400 meters from my home when a police car drove by us. After the car drove by, the police car lights came on and the vehicle turned around and proceeded to pull up in front of us. We were confronted by two white male police officers who asked our names and what we were doing out. We told them everything they asked for and explained that it was late so we were walking our friend home so that she was safe. One officer then proceeded to demand that we empty our pockets and asked what we had on us. Growing up with a criminal defense lawyer for a father (he worked for the Aboriginal Legal Service in Sydney), I knew my rights when confronted by police, so I replied to the officer that it was not a legal requirement for me to do this. He then pulled out a baton and threatened to, and I quote, “beat the s#*t” out of me and “put [me] in the back of the wagon.” What followed was a tense few moments with only the intervention of the other officer stopping his colleague from hitting me. Unfortunately, this was not an isolated incident and on the rare occasions as a youth, if and when I had encounters with law enforcement, they were not always of the kindest nature; unfortunately, the experience of harassment and “stand over” tactics were common elements. Needless to say, experiences such as this have left an impression on me and have helped mold my views of society and politics in this country.

Walking in-between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous worlds growing up was a confronting experience and has shaped my thinking to this day. The issue and challenge, as I perceived it, was the fact that we were living under a dominant discourse imposed by Western colonialism and the ideologies related to race and place which this brings. The “white fella” today has economy, position and privilege, systems of operation and control, institutions and political and social cohesion. In contrast, we have been robbed of our standing and have been forced to believe for generations that we are less through ideological brainwashing and racial apartheid tactics. We have no economy of our own, no social cohesion or unity (given the hundreds of tribes across the nation, this has always been a major issue) and the societal and political issues we confront through our dealings with the state and its institutions have left a mark on our communities that we are still dealing with to this day. For us to move forward as a people, we need to begin to address some of these very critical community development issues. Our philosophical disposition coupled with the socio-political situation of Indigenous Peoples in Australia has made for a “perfect storm”; now we must build our own organizations, and our own institutions with an ideological premise and approach based on empowerment and independence, one which can reconstruct the narrative around how Indigenous Peoples are seen and how we see ourselves in this world.

Working within the community development and charity space has taught me that societal perceptions of charity and Indigenous Peoples are predominantly based around “handouts,” poverty and providing aid relief for those in need. However, this altered perception of what constitutes assistance has been detrimental to the way in which community organizations and indeed community itself looks to address complex socio-economic issues. The premise of assistance must center on opportunity and the ability to look holistically at issues which have arisen in the community. These issues are not only socially based, but also cross into the realm of economic, political and cultural issues. The fact that these issues are so intrinsically linked means that initiatives designed to address them must be flexible and encompassing enough to deal with all types of hurdles. Examples of these types of hurdles can be seen at our community centers and are often related to disengaged youth. Whilst the youth involved at the space may be there for a multitude of different reasons, if a particular youth has come in because they are in trouble with the law or experience school disengagement, the reasons for their current situation must be explored. Upon deeper analysis, the deeper root of this criminal justice contact or disengagement may stem from a vast array of reasons. For example, this may have stemmed from the youth’s home situation, where issues such as domestic violence, alcohol and substance abuse and physical abuse may be prevalent. If such issues are further analyzed, it may come to light that the

reason this situation has worsened is lack of employment for the individual's parents or caregivers, which has caused significant financial pressures and stress to the point of a loss of meaning and purpose for these individuals. This may have impacted the parent(s) or caregiver(s) to the point where they have lost hope of looking for a better future. Some then give up on themselves and others, self-medicating these issues with alcohol and mind-altering substances. This in turn has a domino effect as these symptoms further go on to impact other areas of life, until the path of damage has reached into the youth's life, who further perpetuates the cycle, as they too must try to confront these issues that spill over and consume their identity. Whilst only a rudimentary and very basic example, this is a reality we have confronted, with a fractured social and identity base and underlying symptoms at its core—including the effects of intergenerational trauma and the individual's own personal grievances and issues—all taking hold to further harm themselves and others in the cycle. This destructive and crippling cycle is far-reaching and goes beyond just the social realm. It entails cultural identity and responsibility, economic disposition and political standing, hence the holistic approach is the only way to address some of these critically complex issues.

The current model of looking to address singular issues or symptoms has a critical fault as the system looks to address the infection but not the disease. For example, many homeless services

provide accommodation, but little to nothing in the way of looking at the reasons for initial homelessness, such as mental health issues, poverty and economic deprivation, and abuse. Diversionary Centers provide bedding and meals, however, they may not provide adequate if any actual programmatic intervention and diversion from alcohol and other substances. The socio-political economy of the social services industry remains a significant barrier to community development for Indigenous Peoples and, as long as these issues are circulating within society, they will continue to shape and formulate the narrative around how charity and assistance are developed. This is significant for Indigenous Peoples, as each year billions of dollars of charity and social assistance money are allocated to be spent in Indigenous communities across the nation. However, the actual percentage of these funds that reaches the people it is intended for is questionable, as great numbers of non-Indigenous bodies are given Indigenous funding to address issues in Indigenous communities or relating to Indigenous Peoples. State and non-state institutions continually run ineffectual, inappropriate or limited-scope socioeconomic programs with Indigenous earmarked funding. This leads to the continued disempowerment of Indigenous communities and individuals, while they are simultaneously used as excuses for spending the economic capital provided for the NGO sector continually looking to “save” these people. While I cannot deny that indeed some people do come through this system and are able to

better their lives, and indeed some NGOs (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) do tremendous work, these examples are disproportionate compared to the amount of NGOs who claim they are assisting Indigenous Peoples each year and yet are doing nothing of the sort. The issue remains that whilst there is economic incentive in the politics of poverty and dispossession, the social services sector approach is limited in its scope and in its education of the wider community around what indeed assistance should look like or what it is to be a charity and provide “a hand up” over just “a handout.” Through these lessons on both local and international levels, we look to begin a transition away from conventional charitable thinking and look to expand into a holistic portal of community and individual empowerment rooted in the Indigenous law of social responsibility. The emphasis is on self-autonomy and education, building up our people and our community so that we can begin to manage and create a narrative which reflects who we are, and we can begin to create a future determined by ourselves rather than by others.

Economics is another crucial and fundamental factor in building a future for my people and it has a significant impact and influence on young people as the inheritors of the future in this country (as it is with all nation states around the world). As part of a globalized and increasingly connected world, we too are subject to the international forces and pulls of economic power.

Within this sphere, economic independence ensures a base from which to allow social, political and cultural survival and growth. The current situation in Australia sees many Indigenous Peoples sitting on land and resources that are valuable both economically and culturally, however due to the way in which Australian law and politics are established, coupled with local community dynamics, the actual profit and revenue from these holdings is a minimal percentage of what it could be. This is particularly significant for younger people as we are increasingly shut out of our own potential for building enterprises of which we should hold significant capital and say. Instead, this situation is one in which we are given the promise of lower-end opportunities working for these multinationals that control our economic base. Mining conglomerates and the political influence they acquire ensure that the profit and investment which should go into the local community are instead siphoned off, paying the bare minimum in “royalty” payments provided by the mines to local people. Many Indigenous communities in these positions who sign off on these deals with multinationals do so on an imbalanced negotiating field. Mining companies forgo the offer of any major or significant agreement in regards to profit and dividend sharing and unfortunately, in some instances, all they will provide to the local community is the token gesture of jobs and minimal or limited-impact community development initiatives. In regard to jobs, the nature and value of the roles provided through these arrangements is

minimal, as all too often quotas on these jobs are for labor work and are nothing in the way of executive management nor any shareholding positions. This is particularly significant for young Indigenous men and women, as we are increasingly given the illusion of opportunity when the reality of the situation sees us given no pathways towards future white-collar management or ownership within this realm. If we cannot break into this market or are given access to the opportunity to take some form of authority and control, how does our future look? Mining magnates in Australia are guilty of this method of operation of illusionist opportunity, continuing to offer the narrative of justification that they are “helping provide jobs” and not simply providing “corporate cash welfare.” Despite reaping billions of dollars from Indigenous lands, they do not see fit to provide adequate financial investment back into the community. Attitudes and actions such as these are a form of economic apartheid, as Indigenous communities are given the “crumbs from the table” as powerful non-Indigenous individuals and companies continually reap the land and community of their economic value. These attitudes are also incredibly detrimental in that any non-Indigenous community would not be subject to the same legal conditions of ownership as are placed on Indigenous Peoples. The ideas that powerful individuals and corporations have around “corporate cash welfare” and the provision of jobs being good enough for the local community are racist to their core. This is a double standard, because Australian companies would be forced to

provide adequate compensation or even partnership if working with other non-Indigenous groups around the country. What perhaps adds insult to injury is the fact that in one instance in particular, one of these well-known mining magnates works in tandem with the government to write policy for Indigenous Peoples. The fact that economic power has now leveraged its way into the creation of policy that affects Indigenous Peoples, is justification enough to begin to search for ways to take back our own livelihoods. When looking at this issue from a youth perspective, this is extremely relevant as we look to inherit this situation from our current leadership and any stalled action or inaction on our behalf will only serve to further the struggle we and the generations to come will face in the future. The lack of intergenerational wealth, the theft of land and stolen wages by the state through previous government policies (Indigenous Peoples were wards of the state, with their lives controlled by mission managers) have meant that a situation exists today in which we have very little economic capital or base from which to work. We must also remember that land is sacred and while some tribes are happy to develop particular industries, others do not intend to do so and this is a wish that should be respected in tandem with other viable economic options (e.g., cultural/environmental tourism, etc.). Whether through the mining example or other industries, we must look for the opportunities within these spaces not only for ourselves, but for the future generations who come after us. Today, we, the next generation, face many challenges because

of our peoples' past. However, while economic disparity and unethical and imbalanced situations such as these do exist, we as young people must look at securing what is ours and building local, national and international partnerships based on respect and balance rather than continuing with the economic situation that exists today.

The future for Indigenous empowerment and independence has great potential. However, overcoming hurdles of community perceptions, stereotypes and the current low standard which the state and its institutions have placed on us are barriers which must be broken. While the system presents many challenges, we have internal and local issues we must confront in our own communities as well. The realities of life as an Indigenous person means we face a number of issues for which we are directly responsible, and addressing the faults in ourselves is something which must not be overlooked either. As a young Indigenous man, confronting the standards we place on ourselves and confronting the ideas that others have placed on us is a constant pressure and a battle that must be addressed. An example I have encountered on this matter appears in the case of a program we established through our community organization, entitled the Mulumlung International Scholar Initiative. In the case of the Mulumlung International Scholar Initiative (an international academic and cultural exchange initiative), we, as an organization, approached a vast array of state and non-state actors and institutions such as

schools. In this particular situation, having the engagement and cooperation of schools was fundamental in spreading information around the initiative, since the vast majority of students we intended to engage with this initiative are between 15 and 18 years of age (between the tenth and twelfth grades). Under this program, academic success is not the primary prerequisite (grades are not the only or even the primary criteria for selection); community, culture and even interest in the international community, personal resilience, character and local impact are all important factors in the selection criteria. This message was communicated to schools across the region as well as to the education department so as to cast a wide net in looking for willing applicants. Despite these efforts, however, gaining traction proved to be a difficult endeavor. When we began to notice a lack of applications, we made an effort to go and talk to the schools and find out what the issue was in relation to the lack of applications. At first, we thought maybe a lack of interest with the student cohort was the reason; however, upon discussion at the various schools, a particular theme began to emerge. This lack of applications was not due to lack of interest from students, but rather a failure and lack of communication on behalf of the teachers and staff who were not passing on program information or details to students within the school. This became apparent on a particular trip to a local high school. At a meeting with staff at the school, I stated, “We are looking for Indigenous students who want to make an impact, be inspired and could

see a future in attending university. We are taking them over to Oxford and Cambridge in the U.K.” The teacher responded with dismay and stated, “Oxford and Cambridge, huh? We don’t have Indigenous kids like that. I can give you some Asian or white kids though.” This short response showed me the disconnect we were having and unfortunately this rhetoric was not isolated to one school; rather, I received similar responses from staff members from schools across the region. The issue did not lie with the youth, but rather the perceptions and attitudes of certain teachers and staff. Whether through incompetence, laziness, lack of prioritization or preconceived prejudice and underlying racist sentiments, limitations were placed around what opportunities Indigenous students may undertake in comparison to non-Indigenous students. In situations where staff were supportive and communicated the message effectively, application numbers flowed. However, our results were too sporadic from school to school depending on which staff member we were talking too. We were forced to re-strategize and find a way to engage with students without having to work through these confines. The preconceived notions about education and opportunity for Indigenous students, coupled with a lack of care or incompetence in relation to something as simple as passing on the information around an opportunity which did not involve the teacher but rather the interest of the student, was where we confronted a major barrier. To address this issue, we took to explaining the program in-person to students rather

than only through emails or promotional materials. This new approach was successful and, through direct engagement, our numbers swelled and applications grew tremendously for this initiative.

The path ahead for young Indigenous men and women is not easy. We have a dramatically altered and changing world beneath our feet, however, while we still have a firm conviction in and knowledge of our own culture and identity, we can begin to shape a future for our communities. The issues which exist irrespective of where they sit across the social, cultural, economic or political sphere, can be corrected provided that we can educate, empower and, importantly, unify. While we may constitute hundreds of differing tribes with our own languages, traditions and laws, we have a common and shared experience which has now allowed for a common identity to emerge, that of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander in this country. The shared history of dispossession and oppression is a unifying force and one which can help solidify and consolidate a national force to go forth and represent our interests. Leadership within this space is a critical issue, as today no elected or legitimate authority to lead our people from our people has been given to any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. While we have leaders in every community, we do not have a leader representing a national voice, identity and interest for us all. The current makeup of assumed or perceived national leadership among Indigenous Australia is a significant hurdle, as all too often the Indigenous

voices given credibility to speak on behalf of Indigenous Peoples are government-sponsored representatives and others who advocate for the government on policy and legislation (usually based on personal funding arrangements between the parties). These individuals receive positions, funding and state support to further their agendas under the guise of Indigenous representation both domestically and internationally. This kind of assumed leadership and voice is given a substantial amount of mainstream media coverage and attention from non-Indigenous Australia. However, this assumed position of authority is not in any way, shape or form representative of the broader voice of Indigenous Australia. The voices of our young people—particularly those from regional and remote areas—are lost in this political arena amid the jostle for rank, position and title from the current Indigenous hierarchy. The Indigenous “bourgeoisie” are a voice in Indigenous Australia, but they are not the only voice. To build true unification and solidarity, a system must be established where our people are able to appoint their own voice rather than having it given to them. Indigenous leadership is a complex issue and one that varies from tribe to tribe in terms of how they believe putting forward their representative and leader should occur. However, while we continue to fight for a system which works for us, what is clear is that the current national government will not support this kind of leadership or advancement. This would be against the national interest of the Australian government, as they maintain that the

current representatives are representatives of all Australia, with Indigenous Peoples falling under this category. However, this plays more to an uneven power relationship rather than to the idea of representation. The government does not see any form of legal or political pluralism with Indigenous Australia as a way forward, as this would have significant legal, economic and political ramifications for the government. Our culture, issues and our place as first on this land, put us in a unique position as we do not look to assimilate to Australia. We have our own culture and identity, one far older than the current dominant culture that was forced onto us. It is inconceivable that the government will ever let go of their control of Indigenous Affairs (the Indigenous Affairs Minister in Australia is not Indigenous nor has there ever been an Indigenous Minister managing Indigenous Affairs in this country). As a young Indigenous man, the only recourse and action I can see to take us forward and out from this perpetual limbo is for us to take back our own political destiny by working around their system. Institutions and systems have power insofar as there is faith, legitimacy and trust placed in them. Therefore, if we place this same aura of legitimacy and trust in our own institutions and systems, what will be the result? This might look like establishing our own bodies which we fund and work within; agreeing to principles and treaties between differing tribes rather than focusing our attention in these agreements towards a relationship with the government; or building our own representative

chamber where we have our own representatives, leaders and delegates chosen by our people from community to community, where we are free to come and raise matters of concern or interest about our communities. Rather than look to work within a constitutional framework designed to uphold the current status quo, we need not concern ourselves with the hypocrisy of the democratic goodwill of a flawed and geared system which seeks our assimilation rather than our empowerment. We have seen the true nature of this beast with their social experimentation on our Indigenous Peoples and, for us to move beyond this, we must not seek permission from this system for change but rather we must take it ourselves. We will not tear down the system others rely on here (as the reality is we too are subject to this system), but we can build our own and operate parallel to this system and begin to operate in a way which is cultural, politically and economically responsible for ourselves and for our communities. Our operation as our own sovereign entity operating with political pluralism in this nation, with a leader from our people, chosen by us, is a future I hope to see in my lifetime.

The path ahead for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders is a significant and monumental challenge. However, as stated at the beginning of this chapter, we are the most adaptive people in the history of this world with the oldest continuing culture. Providing the necessary opportunities through education and economics will ensure we are on a level playing field with the rest of the

globalized world. However, upholding and honoring our own cultures, traditions, laws, lore and history will ensure we stay true to our own unique identity. While education, economics, social development and opportunity as well as political strength will take us far, this means nothing without holding true to the strength of will of our people. We must tackle our own demons and confront our own faults relentlessly, just as we look to address the problems which come from the outside. We must seize our opportunities and chances and not be afraid to fail. Our path ahead will take many decades. As the destruction and dismantling occurred over 220 years, we too shall take time to truly heal. Fighting today for a better tomorrow is a staple and ethos of our ideological disposition, whether this fight is in the social realm by helping build up our people and communities from the grassroots (such as with community organizations), in the economic realm (building companies, partnerships and an economic base), in the political realm (changing the political paradigm) or in the cultural realm (ensuring our culture is represented by us and in our way). Our will to act must be unyielding and ever-consistent, but what is important here is not what is possible or impossible in relation to our rise. All we must remember is that is has never been more necessary.