

Social Identity Within Life History: A Portrait of Young Indigenous People in Australia's Neo-colonial North

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Abstract

This paper is about social identities of young Indigenous people in contemporary Australia, based on fieldwork in the rural community of Yarrabah, in Queensland, particularly on ethnographic interviews with women and men in their twenties and associated *in situ* fieldwork. I explore how diverse social discourses have influenced the social identities of young Indigenous people in contemporary Australia. The influence of historical discontinuity resulting from the impact of colonialism on these social identities is explored, as well as how this has framed the cultural and familial continuity/discontinuity. Historical discontinuity is shown to be a crucial socio-cultural context for self-representation and life narratives for these young Indigenous people. Forms of discontinuity are apparent in the diverse discourses and experiences they bring to their life-histories, most visibly through their stories about social institutions such as the family, the school, the mass media, the community, and the church. This new material shows how Indigenous value systems, broadly understood by the participants to be based on collectivism, constantly come into conflict with Western values based on individualism. While the young Indigenous people of Yarrabah do continuously interact not only with multi-cultural Australia but also with global influences, they are constantly aware of their own distinctiveness in both

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contexts. And they remain vulnerable to the often invisible and broadly manipulative racist discourses promulgated around them; vulnerable especially by their modes of internalising stereotypical images of Indigeneity in contemporary Australian society but always conscious of that influence on their self-perception.

Introduction

From a global perspective, multicultural Australia looks like a mosaic, of many minority and immigrant groups. However, the fact that the country's Indigenous groups occupy a position clearly distinguished from other minorities is only very ambiguously acknowledged in Australia. Indigenous people have continuously inhabited the continent for approximately 60 thousand years (O'Halloran, 2004). Notwithstanding the differences between their cultural and historical realities, they now share a collective sense as a group that derives from colonial experiences such as dispossession of their land, removal from their traditional lands and the damage to family bonds and systems epitomised in the plight of the Stolen Generations. Aboriginal people across the country share the often traumatic socio-cultural change that resulted from colonial policies and missionary work, and they continue to endure racial discrimination.

The Indigenous community Yarrabah in rural Queensland is one of the places where these traumatic memories are present today. I here seek to convey their manifestations in narratives and life histories that also reflect the social identities of young people there.

The focus is on the discursive practices of storytelling, specifically the narrative creation of a life history, by which young Indigenous people negotiate a coherent self. Through the life history of one young woman, Maliana, I analyse the identity-shaping influences of the diverse social discourses that are produced within certain institutions. Young people at Yarrabah participate in multicultural situations and they experience global influences in local social institutions. At the same time, they are highly aware of their cultural distinctiveness in both contexts. As Maliana's case shows clearly, young

Indigenous people can be especially vulnerable to the often invisible and broadly manipulative racist discourses promulgated around them; vulnerable especially because they tend to internalise stereotypical images of Indigeneity while always remaining conscious of that influence on their self-perception.

In the case of Maliana, I follow the transitions of her social identity formation, paying particular attention to these three themes: first, her institutional experience of racism as she worked to reduce or to enhance her self-esteem; second, how Indigenous beliefs and value systems were perceived as clashing – and in fact partly damaged by, but always interwoven with, colonial experiences and interacted with in day-to-day life; and finally, the ways in which her social relationships in institutionalised spaces such as the family, the community and the church reduced or enhanced her cultural pride, self-reliance and her perception of the future for young Indigenous people at Yarrabah.

Making a life history the content of narrative analysis requires some additional reflection. According to Klapproth, who examined the aesthetics of narrative in Central Australian Aboriginal myths and stories, ‘casting experience into narrative form is one of the most central ways by which human beings attempt to make sense of their lives’ (1962: 3). She also notes that ‘by creating stories out of the raw material of experiences such processes are both created and shared’ (1962: 3). Therefore, it is well conceivable that the process of identity formation among young Indigenous people in Yarrabah is manifest in the structure of their narratives. My analysis will thus focus on the dynamic interaction between the formation of identity and the structures of life narrative.

Furthermore, life history telling is shaped by the concepts, beliefs and practices the story-tellers value. Working with the understanding that ‘narrative texts are the socially conditioned ways of perceiving, evaluating and representing their culture and society and function within it’ (Klapproth 1962: 4), I have extracted significant concepts pertinent to the analysis of narratives based on social identity theories (Tajfel 1982). I here examine how Maliana, my case study, categorises herself in relation to a *common fate*, to *interdependence in the in-group* (which often, but not always, means

young people at Yarrabah), overt *conflict within the in-group*, and *out-group relations* with broader social contexts. These terms help explain how Maliana and my other respondents create meaningful group boundaries that encapsulate the influences of social discourses and their life experiences. In this sense, it is significant to observe how Maliana identifies being Indigenous as uniqueness in terms of both out-group relations and belonging within in-group relations. It is equally significant to note which discourses and experiences are associated with antipathy towards out-group relations. Finally, I describe how young Maliana perceives social hierarchies within their cultural contexts, and how she internalises hierarchical patterns from the broader Australian society through the influences of social institutions. While Maliana's life history would not be representative of all young Indigenous groups in Yarrabah, her history nevertheless offers important insights into being a young Aboriginal person in a particular place. I here seek to present which social discourses mainly and partly influenced her; how she was institutionalised in the neo-colonial context; and which socio-cultural pressure and support constructed her life decisions.

Methodology

The key tool for this ethnographic project, life history interviewing, is an ethnographic interviewing method that differs in certain respects from the ethnographic approach often referred to as cultural anthropological fieldwork, as well as from other kinds of in-depth interviewing. According to Heyl, 'ethnographic interviewing is one qualitative research technique that owes a major debt to cultural anthropology, where interviews have traditionally been conducted on-site during lengthy studies' (Heyl 2001: 368). Ethnographic interviewing presumes that researchers will have already established respectful, ongoing relationships with their interviewees, including enough rapport for there to be a genuine exchange of views and enough time and openness in the interviews for the interviewees to explore purposefully with the researcher the meanings they place on events in their worlds (Heyl 2001: 368). Indeed, the ethnographic component of this research draws heavily on two disciplines: sociology and anthropology. Sociologists have used many of the same fieldwork methods as

anthropologists because they often share the same central concerns. However, between anthropological and sociological fieldwork major differences in approach and method persist. Sociologists have emphasised organising concepts 'such as social role and structure and norm and are more concerned with issues of power and class' (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993: 7). Moreover, ethnography as practised by anthropologists has retained and foregrounded characteristics of both art and science, while 'sociology has concentrated more upon technical or scientific aspects of the research enterprise' (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993: 7). Since my aim to discover more about the social identities of young Indigenous people, I deploy sociological emphases on social roles, structures and norms to offset a more anthropological approach. An account of ethnographic interviewing is nevertheless important in explaining how I have generated the data to be analysed.

It took more than five months to establish the prerequisite personal relationships with young community members on the basis of which I gained their support and consent to interview them. I conducted formal extended ethnographic interviewing in English with ten female and seven male interviewees in their twenties, one of them being Maliana. This interview is the central text for my analysis of social identities of young Indigenous people at Yarrabah, supplemented by my broader experience in the community, to which I returned three times between February 2007 and November 2008, with my longest visit lasting six months.

Social Identity Within Life History

Yarrabah, established as an Anglican Church mission station in 1892, counts over 2,300 residents, with a median age of 21 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009). Following the closing of the mission in the late 1960s, the new Yarrabah Community came under the control of the Queensland Government. In 1986, the Community received its Deed of Grant in Trust land tenure status, making the Yarrabah Community Council self-governing (The Yarrabah Aboriginal Community, 2010). Most Yarrabah people clearly perceive their community as a meeting place and it seemed that their sad history dominated by the Stolen Generations, who were removed from other homelands to the Yarrabah mission, gave this additional meaning. The majority of local people are descendents of the Gunganji tribe, which is the main tribe indigenous to the area. Others belong to the Idinji, Djabugaidjandji tribes or about 35 different tribes including Torres Strait Islanders, who were removed from other homelands to Yarrabah. As this population has grown rapidly since the time of old missionaries and settlers, Yarrabah is neither an historical place doomed to extinction nor an olden space of a standstill that refuses young people to change their world. As the following case study seeks to show, young people need to come to terms with these historical complexities as well as current cultural, political and personal challenges.

Cultural Pride and Self-esteem (Stage 1: Childhood)

Maliana has been widely exposed to Indigenous cultural practices and politics within her family throughout her childhood. From this foundation her increasing engagement with the multicultural context of the community resulted in her identifying herself as socio-culturally differently from non-Indigenous peers. My first explicit aim in this section is to explore her childhood in order to depict how she established her self-esteem and cultural pride within certain cultural milieu. I will also explore how this stable social identity has been challenged or confirmed by exposure to various new institutional contexts during her childhood.

Maliana is a single mother of three children who is originally from outside Yarrabah. Compared with the other interviewees, she has been more influenced both by tribal elders and by her parents. She could not furnish information about her whole family tree as she is a descendant of members of the Stolen Generations³, but she described how her great grandparents were forcibly removed from Woodrow and Stone Henge in Western Australia to Yarrabah, and how their descendants attempted to rejoin the original tribes. At the age of five, her family finally moved to Yarrabah:

“My father’s side was from a tribe from 55 km down Yalumgu in Moto Range. My mum’s from Broome Bardi tribe from Western Australia. I was born in Broome, Western Australia, and at the age of about 5, I think, we moved back here. We first lived at Vingaral which was another town. I stayed there for a few years of my life and then we moved to Yarrabah which is where I grew up ever since. The history is in this place. My grandparents, actually my great grandparents, were brought here from Alice Springs and my great grandmother came from Stone Henge, my great grandfather comes from Woodrow.”

Despite spending most of her life at Yarrabah, and her mother having lived there as well in her youth, Maliana does not understand herself as being from Yarrabah, even if “the history is in this place”. Maliana first accessed stories about the Stolen Generations from her parents, who used to tell her their grandparents’ stories about the mission. The structure of the stories stresses a sense of belonging, a recognition of specific historical and geographically located experiences. But her family history, which starts from the colonial experience, establishes another sort of belonging for her with the particular spatial boundary of the Yarrabah mission. While she emphasized where she was from originally in terms of her family tree, she also clarified that she comes from a “family history of Stolen Generations”. In the interview, she stressed the words “Stolen Generations” to explain herself, framing her own life story as historical

³ The Indigenous people forcibly removed from their families as children between the 1900s and the 1960s, to be brought up by white foster families or in institutions such as the mission station. Thus, ‘stolen generation is the term that the Aboriginal people have embraced for their collective tragedy – the separation of thousands of children of mixed descent from their mothers and communities: the term covers a wide variety of circumstances – from forcible removal by agents of the state to the relinquishment of children following the application of moral and legal pressure on powerless young Aboriginal women by those who thought they knew what was best’ (Manne, 2001:2).

evidence concerning Australian society in a story clearly told to me as the other, who is from outside of Australia. Maliana started her story with her great grandparents:

“[My great grandparents] didn’t move here, they were forced here in the olden days. My great grandparents, he’s from Colin/Young area, [the government officers] found him [grandfather] when he was from Stone Henge. That’s on my grandfather’s side. Years ago when, before, when the settlers first came they were all taken away from their families and communities and put where the government wanted them and they were forced to live there. They ran away. They would grab them and bring them back. They were put into dorms [dormitories] and were taken away from their families that why they call them the Stolen Generation cause there was plenty of that, that went on. I come from a family history of Stolen Generation.”

Maliana generally associates the mission experiences of her great grandparents with unpleasantness, resentment, and hatred of the European settlers. Her specific expression at one point is that “we were dogs” – an emphatic empathizing with people who were victims of colonization and an equally strong delineation of Indigenous group identity: “One day at a certain age they were allowed to get married and live together in a certain area and like we were totally under government ruling like we were dogs or something you know.” This perceived group boundary, which clarifies a distinct sense of Indigeneity or Indigenous group identity based on their colonial experiences, signifies the collective Indigenous identity, the division between us as Indigenous people and the other as the settler. These family narratives influenced Maliana’s recognition of social hierarchies and power relationships in Australian society. She was constantly aware of social injustice vis-à-vis Indigenous people.

The strong influence of Maliana’s father shaped this political perspective. His stance on Indigenous issues underpinned her fundamental value system and her standard demeanour in many aspects of life. Her father, who strongly identified with his role as an Indigenous protestor, provided her with a positive role model upon which to build her own self-esteem. She consciously identified with his sense of cultural pride, his

notion of justice, and his politically conceptualised Indigenous group boundary set apart from a unitary Australian identity:

“My father’s been a very political man. While I was growing up, he was always into fighting for our land, our rights. For years he would’ve travelled to Sydney and fought of [for] the people of Yarrabah and their lands and like any other individual who would fight for Yarrabah. I guess deep in his you know, he’s the type of person who is very quiet, very personal, very private type of person and growing up we never really spoke much. But he fought in Vietnam and he’s gone through a hard childhood. His father was very cruel to him; for a child who’s been smashed from pillar to post he’s come out on top and I was so proud of him. One day I’ll be the same.”

The Indigenous cultural sources that her parents drew upon helped to strengthen her sense of belonging to Indigenous groups in general, as well as her cultural pride. Maliana experienced Indigenous life through the activities that her parents organised. Thus, she became accustomed to associate herself and her family with Indigenous culture via family activities:

“Before my family got the store we did a lot of camping, fishing and reefing. My father made sure that we had excitement in our life that taught us a bit of survival skills. There I remember he brought a spear out I never knew he knew how to use a spear, I thought he was too political. I didn’t realise he knew how to use a spear. So walking along the beach one day there were this group of stingrays on the shore and he speared a fish and I said “Dad teach me!”, and he said, “When you see that wave come you will see that fish in that wave and you quickly throw it....” Yeah, my parents taught how to crack oyster and what seafood you can eat and when you can eat it. They taught us about Yarrabah and the medicine water that is around this way and who owns what land. As far as they knew they taught us how to make fires and when you get lost in the bush what to look for, there were quite a few things he taught us about survival skills.”

Figure 1 is an annotated diagram of the key influences on Maliana's social identity formation in relation to in-groups and out-groups. It demonstrates how forces of belonging, antipathy, group differences, social hierarchies, uniqueness as well as belonging and common faith have combined to shape Maliana's social identity.



Figure 1. Conceptualised social identity (Maliana, Stage 1: 4 to 11 years-old).

Internalized/Externalized Self-hatred (Stage 2: Adolescent Period)

During Maliana's adolescent years, she began to recognize various contradictions between cultural pride and racism: the Dreaming and Christianity; Indigenous family membership and individualism; and self-esteem associated with belonging to the Indigenous community and social ostracism from settler society. She had been exposed to a multicultural milieu at school; as a result, she encountered difficulty adapting to the unfamiliar school environment and suffered from loss of self-confidence and self-worth due to culture shock and ostracism based on racism. According to Eduardo Duran, such self-hatred, which is another form of sunken self-worth, can be either internalized or externalized (Duran 1995: 29). His research demonstrates the grim reality of internalized hatred resulting in suicide or alcoholism, and externalized self-hatred resulting in violence. In this regard, Maliana, who had developed a strong sense of cultural pride, experienced self-hatred to a level of despair, tantamount to being disconnected from the social network and barely persisting with school education. According to Marika Moisseff (2011: 250), 'adopting elements of the sovereign Western "culture" may give Aboriginal young people the temporary impression of having incorporated the power these elements connote'. As Maliana experienced it in her adolescence, 'this is all the more so as most Aboriginal youths do not have the opportunity to cross the boundaries that separate their world from the Western, White one' (Moisseff, 2011:250). As a result, this teenager encountered diverse social contradictions in the neo-colonial context but her life-stories highlight the girl's experiences of loss of self-confidence, and how she failed (at least in part) to deal with the contradictory discourses and confusion that she had to contend with while she formulated her identity around the culture shock that she encountered during this period.

In this stage of Maliana's life-story, she emphasized her encounter with culture shock and racism in the school where she experienced a crisis of confidence associated with maladaptation to a new environment. During her childhood, Maliana's family's overarching emphasis on cultural pride and self-confidence seems to have sidelined her questions vis-à-vis the real social status of Indigenous people and the power

relations that persist among diverse social groups in a settler society. When faced with the public education system, Maliana struggled to adapt to the mainstream school environment. Frustration, which resulted from the discrepancy between Western and Indigenous knowledge structures, became a core issue for her. This was particularly so when she was confronted with the inconsistent narratives, such as two different interpretations of Captain Cook's reputation in Australia, produced by two contradictory structures of knowledge.

“Yeah, I learnt about Captain Cook [in school] and all his doings but then I sort of pushed it aside because it created so much hate in me because I learnt about all he'd done so I sort of pushed it all out because of the hate it created in me what had hurt really bad aside. [I heard this story] From [one of descendants of] the Stolen Generation [in the community], what hurt the most was the stories of how they used to get babies' heads and use them as a soccer ball.”

According to Gordon Briscoe (2011: xxiii), many European settlers have dismissed the idea that historical documents are indeed subject to interpretation because they see the written word as fact. He stresses that ‘colonial administrations and even Australian government agencies have, in some instances, either omitted or tended to skew records in favour of their own view of the past’ (Briscoe 2011: xxiii). Consequently, Indigenous people's voices have been either ‘dismissed or ignored, or included as abstractions and shadowy figures’, even within the Australian education system (Briscoe 2011: xxiii). Such cultural eradication was felt in Maliana's intellectual struggles in school, which distracted her attention in class and reduced her capacity to respond to the Western knowledge system pivotal to public education. While her faith in the discourses that her family and community provided was continuously fostered within a firmly established value system, distrust in the content of her school curriculum was gradually exacerbated. Since she embedded a shocking story (as below) about the mutilation of the corpses of Aboriginal infants in her mind, she inwardly struggled to accept the elements of Western education, which she regarded as unreliable and disrespectful knowledge.

In her first year of high school at Gordonvale, Maliana began to be seriously affected by the discrepancy between the Indigenous and Western knowledge structures. She was also struggling with the gap in the Yarrabah and Gordonvale schools' curricula when she moved from Yarrabah to a school dominated by white students and a white curriculum. Unable to cope with the feeling of shame that stemmed from her lack of confidence, her sense of cultural pride became mixed with diffidence and self-distrust:

“I went to Gordonvale State High School. My first year of school was very hard cause the education [at Yarrabah] was so watered down. We had no idea what we were dealing with, they were teaching us things that we had never learnt. I was too ashamed to ask. Growing up we never learnt about confidence and standing up for ourselves. It was all shame, shame!”

Maliana's self-esteem became almost irreparably damaged during this period. Her damaged self-confidence led her to view the cultural pride she had depended on as dubious. As she faced this situation, which required her to accept practices that were unfamiliar and contradictory to her previous knowledge, value systems, and internalized habits and attitudes, she became reserved and withdrawn. She disconnected from other cultures, networks and social relationships in order to defend both her physical self and her cultural pride:

“I used to get into fights, I was so frustrated. I was taking out my frustration on other people cause I didn't understand anything, cause they were trying to teach us and you know, Fair enough they wanted to help us but I refused help.”

HSJ: Why?

“I was too ashamed, too proud. I didn't want to communicate with other people, other cultures cause I didn't know how to.”

Indigenous people's sense of themselves is particularly influenced by the diverse forms of colonial discourse disseminated both by community members and their peers at school. Maliana gradually devalued herself and her cultural identity due to the influence of discourses that destroyed her dignity and her confidence in life. When she

entered into the non-Indigenous Australian society, her fear of new environments became maximized by her self-distrust and her distorted notion of Indigeneity:

HSJ: Were you afraid?

“Yes, I feared coming up against other cultures because I thought they were more intelligent, way more intelligent than Aboriginal people, that Aboriginal people were just dumb bastards. That was my mentality then, yeah, I really believed that from hearing different comments from different places. When you hear these things they stay in your mind and that built up fear in me. When I reached high school, it was like, “Oh god, here I am, this little black woman and coming to this big high society place”, that’s why I lashed out a lot out of fear and frustration.”

Around the age of 16, Maliana’s attitude, including aggressiveness and non-communicativeness, worsened along with her weakened confidence, eventually disposing her to use drugs. She became even more isolated and withdrawn, hardly interacting with anyone. She found herself estranged from what she had learned from her family and felt a deep consciousness of guilt, aware that her behaviour would result in disappointment in herself as well as in her parents:

“You know, when you get to a certain age, you know teenagedom. You are just not interested any more, you get really rebellious and you don’t want to know anything. It’s like, “I don’t want to know what you going to teach me I want to know about all these others.” I had that attitude...you find out all these things aren’t new and then you find out it’s killing you... At that age, grade 12 I got into dope, and I’ve smoked it ever since then on the sly going for my first time was my graduation... [But] your culture is always in the back of your head. It’s always there, especially when you been taught well with bits and pieces from everywhere. You don’t forget, who you are, no matter how far you drift from it.”

Her negative understanding of social hierarchy became heightened by her experience of racial abuse and the negative discourse on Indigenous people in the broader society.

Her experiences prompted her to describe herself as “lower class”, “a little black person” who could not be included into “high class” society:

“Yeah, I hear it, I never used to talk much. But because of the way society made us feel in the past you know as lower class people, oh, we are the dogs. You know we hear this and that you hear comments like that, when you growing up in the background, and it’s like when you wanna go somewhere there are all these high class people and there you think I’m a little black fella how am I going to get through this.”

Maliana also became more sceptical and rebellious in relation to her religious faith. She stopped attending church and observing Christianity. She felt negatively overwhelmed by the Christian boarding school’s administration. During her adolescent years the insufficient support from the school and her reservedness constantly undermined her self-confidence, making her feel stigmatised as a rebellious Indigenous student, both by the school and the church.

“I did [go to church at high school] actually, partly forced and it caused me to reject God altogether because when you have to do as you are told and if you don’t do as you are told you get hit and whether you like it or not we had to go to church every Sunday. Eventually I became rebellious and didn’t want to have anything to do with God maybe for one year in my high school age. When I became rebellious against it and said no instead of finding out for myself.”

Figure 2 shows the interacting dynamics of Maliana's social identity between ages 4 and 11, that is, in the years leading up to the acute crisis of adolescence.

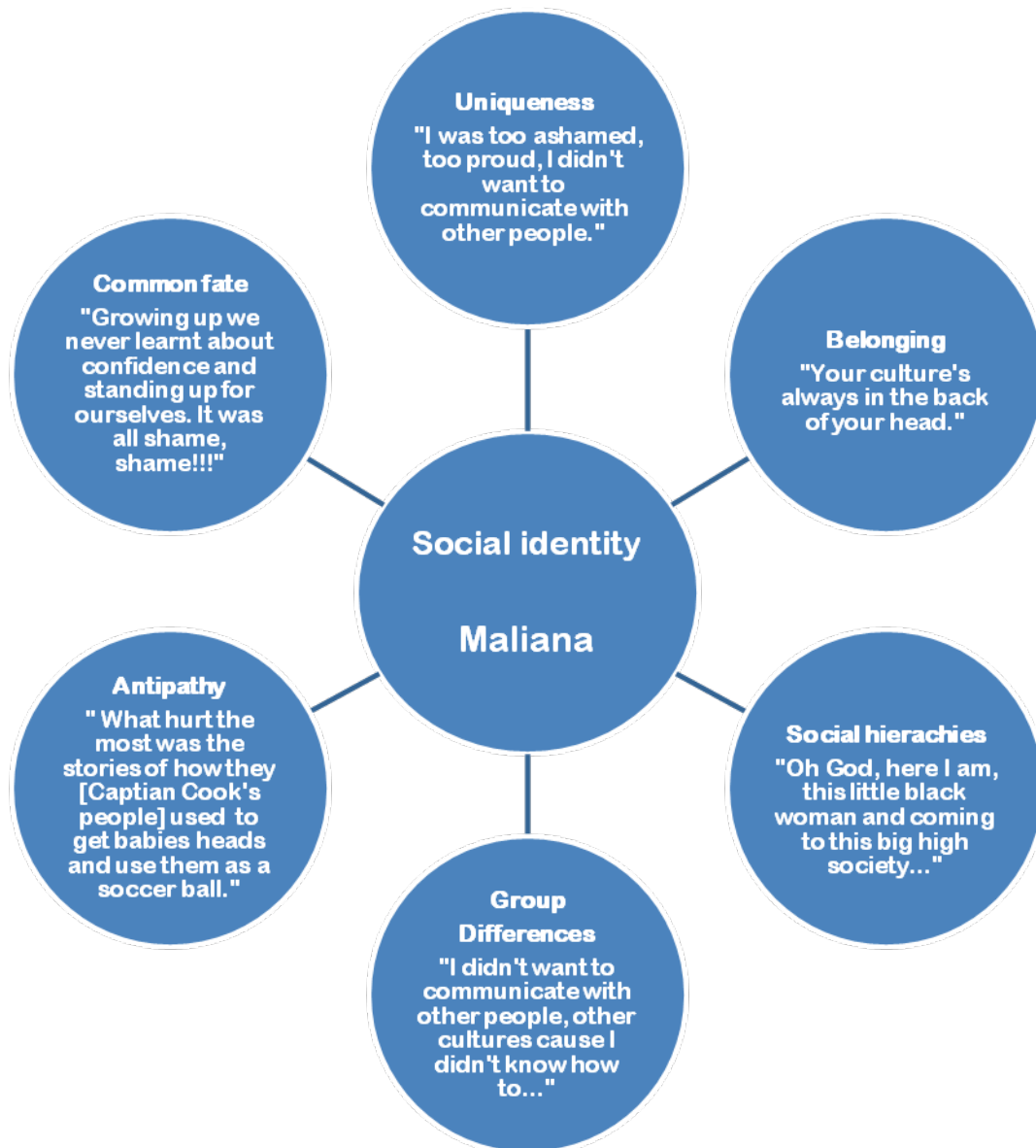


Figure 2. Conceptualized social identity (Maliana, Stage 2:12to 19 years-old)

Self-worth Within Indigenous Patriarchal Society (Stage 3: Late Adolescence / Early Adulthood)

During the early stages of Maliana's adulthood, she began to establish her own family and partnership. As she started to live in Yarrabah independently of her parents, the workplace, community, the relationship with a partner and her own family became her main concerns at this stage of her life. However, Maliana, who had largely disconnected from social networks in the wake of culture shock and ostracism experienced at school, started suffering from isolation and alcohol-related spousal abuse. My analysis at this stage initially focuses on how an Indigenous woman encountered new experiences in relation to gender relations within an Indigenous, patriarchal milieu, which had been transformed by a colonization process in complex, diverse and contradictory ways. Maliana in particular became a victim of domestic violence during this period and spousal abuse devastated both her self-worth and self-esteem, which had been already weakened by her experiences of ostracism and racism since she started schooling. However, in order to avoid the pervasive prejudice characteristic of the insidious paternalism threading through public discourse on domestic violence in Indigenous communities, I will eschew stereotyping her when analyzing the gender relations that obtain within the current form of Indigenous patriarchy.⁴

This analysis of Maliana's late adolescence/early adulthood shows how the strong boundary around an isolated community and the trivial routine of new adult responsibilities within such isolation are inextricably bound up in the attractions of alcohol and gambling. These can exacerbate, if not necessarily cause, violence in the community. I will examine how Maliana's situations in life have resulted in the

⁴ The negative, stereotypical images of the Indigenous people promoted by the mass media and prejudiced groups in society have been widely distributed. These tacit discourses have influenced to shape the typical images of Indigenous people in society. Either paternalistic or hateful, these discourses ultimately strengthen the idea that Indigenous people constitute a homogeneous group, which commonly shares negative, particularly criminal and violent experiences. As Yanmin Yu maintains, Indigenous people are more likely to be portrayed as follows: wife beaters, criminals, rioters, drug users, petrol sniffers, welfare dependents, school dropouts, patch burners, lazy, dirty, violent, live in drug-infested slums, do not want to work, cannot hold a job, helpless, and hopeless (2005: 6). Journalists and settler society hardly pay attention to Indigenous stories, that is, to stories told by Indigenous people that could prove attractive material for journalists and the majority. Biased and stereotypical views worsen the situation of the Indigenous people: the typical discourses levelled at them exacerbate the more fallacious and erroneous images that society tends to attach to them. Yanmin Yu states that 'most journalists in Australia do not have a sufficient understanding of Indigenous people, their history, their culture, their way of living, and their sufferings... journalists are not trained to cover Indigenous affairs adequately' (2005: 7).

solution-seeking and decision-making practices within the community boundary. The community of Yarrabah itself is a major factor at this point in her life and while it may provide benevolent concern and care for community members it can also invite reticence regarding domestic problems, often regarded as private concerns that others should not be involved in.

In her early adult life Maliana encountered a devastating loss of self-worth as the result of her partner's domestic violence. I will particularly focus on the impact of domestic violence as part of a distorted patriarchal dominance in the Indigenous family system apparent at Yarrabah, which has been transformed by modern influences but also undermined by the mission experience and broader colonial situation. Maliana's internalized self-hatred and frustration continued to devastate her psychological health, self-confidence, and impede her potential ability to adapt to the non-Indigenous community. Before she moved back to Yarrabah, she had managed to work at five jobs at a time in order to afford dope and alcohol. But her self-destructive behaviour, which worsened her emotional isolation and frustration, was exacerbated by violent partnerships. Her sense of insecurity in unfamiliar environments diminished her discernment, resulting in her entering into new partnerships that repeatedly rendered her vulnerable to spousal abuse. After Maliana moved back to Yarrabah due to pregnancy, conflict with her domineering partner resulted in physical disorders and serious depression:

“When I finished school I had five jobs. I was a schoolteacher's aide, and I worked part time at the store after [my family] sold it and I worked as a barmaid and another little store but I had them for the wrong reasons with the insecurity in my life... when I finished school I got into smoking dope and drinking. I still felt lost you know and lonely. I found a partner for all the wrong reasons. I found a guy and we lived together after two weeks I never got to know him. I said I made all the wrong moves cause I was insecure I felt lonely... I learnt to overcome it and as I say I moved in [to Yarrabah], had my two beautiful children and lived with domestic violence for many years until I nearly

killed him and he nearly killed me, till I got to the point where I finally had enough, packed my stuff and never looked back.”

The causes of Indigenous spousal abuse can be explicitly different from the case of domestic violence of non-Indigenous groups as a consequence of gender relations. Indigenous patriarchy has been transformed and partly distorted by colonial experiences and socio-cultural changes, which also resulted in the frustration and confusion in gender relations in family hierarchy (cf Moisseeff 2011). In fact, not only Indigenous women but also Indigenous men have been victimized by the extreme stress and frustration resulting from drastic social/cultural change, which, in a broad sense, can be attributed to colonization. Most of the interviewees in this research confessed that they were unable to overcome their self-distrust and sense of alienation due to fear of the non-Indigenous society, and fear of an unpredictable or typical future that may not sustain young people through difficult times. Therefore, the Indigenous patriarchal milieu transformed by the drastic socio-cultural changes is not the only contributing factor to family violence, but also young people’s externalized self-hatred caused by unpleasant experiences such as social discrimination and culture shock. Bonnie Duran stresses that ‘much of domestic violence in Indigenous communities can be interpreted as a venting toward someone who is helpless although the root of anger is toward the society’ (Duran 1995: 30). However, any attempt to direct their anger toward its roots results in swift social retaliation. It is safer for the perpetrators to cathect their anger on ‘their helpless family member who represents the hated part of themselves’ (Duran 1995: 30).

The conflict between Maliana, who suffered from depression due to internalizing her self-hatred, and her partner, who lacked confidence due to unemployment, was provoked by being exposed to each other’s frustration and despair rather than by any specific incidents. This elective affinity between anger towards society and patriarchal mentality has combined to victimize Indigenous women and men through domestic violence in Indigenous communities. Violent perpetrators seem to vent their anger on helpless others; but, ultimately it is self-destructive behaviour, as they simultaneously

lose their self-esteem, their emotional family bonds, and the positive Indigenous sense of patriarchal authority in the family, as Maliana's case shows:

“He just wanted to control women, very domineering. I realized I needed him cause I was lonely not cause I loved him.”

HSJ: So you separated?

“Yeah, I walked out, walked out. I rang my parents and the cops and everything came and my dad came and got me and that was the last time he kicked my guts in. He went to jail for a year, not for that and every other time he belted me. After, he flogged me when we were separated and then finally he went to jail after all that I was done to.”

In Maliana's story, the structure of androcentric discourse vis-à-vis domestic violence in Yarrabah seems to be a distorted masculinism. Despite the prevalence of domestic violence and its negative effects on the parties' personal and public lives, forms of violence including wife beating and sexual harassment are regarded as private tragedies in the community rather than as brutal crimes that provoke public outrage. People are somewhat reticent regarding spousal matters in the community. The authority of patriarchy at stake in Indigenous families symbolizes the distorted fragments of Indigenous traumatic change, which have not been sufficiently traced to the Indigenous cultural transformation caused by the drastic impact of colonization. In this regard, Moisseff also highlights that Aboriginal men's traumatic experiences of disempowerment and the current situation of unemployment make it harder for them to play the role of breadwinner, leading them to relinquish their nurturing duties to outside agencies (2011: 264). As their loss of power seems to affect sons much more than daughters, young men would lose their ability to undertake activities capable of promoting positive masculine models (Moisseff, 2011: 264-265). Thus, when the young men would attempt to achieve the adult status, they try to distinguish themselves from women by taking on the 'exterior signs of masculinity, such as the characteristic of violence' (Moisseff, 2011: 265). Indeed, some interviewees in this research engaged in violence during their teenage years as a means of regaining their self-confidence after having been damaged by racism in school and in non-Indigenous

communities. Indigenous men's penchant for domestic violence may in a distorted way help them regain their patriarchal authority, which has been dissipated by modern and colonial demands that Indigenous people have struggled to fully internalize, due to an unreasonable traumatic change that Indigenous history never required. The key factors in Maliana's young adult life are depicted in Figure 3:

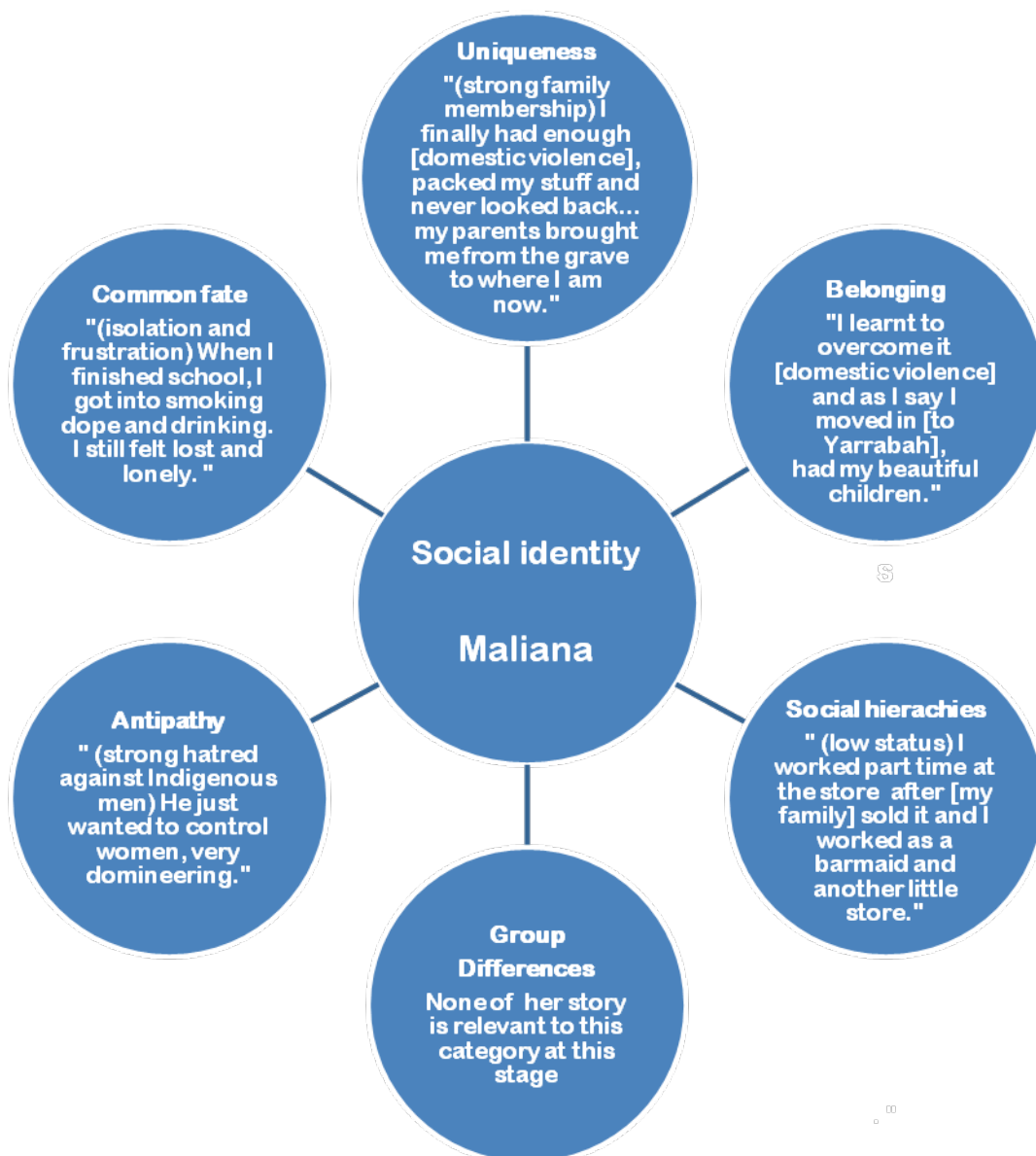


Figure 3. Conceptualized social identity (Maliana, Stage 3: 20 to 25 years-old).

Indigeneities Within Settler Society (Stage 4: The Present; or, Her Late Twenties)

In her late twenties, Maliana attempted to adjust her concepts of social injustice and prejudice towards Indigenous people, clarifying her own ways of coping with her accumulated indignation and antipathy towards Australian society. As she had settled in Yarrabah to rear her children, government policies in relation to public education, alongside ways of enhancing her sense of well-being as an Indigenous person, became her central concerns. In this sense, Maliana, who had undergone a traumatic separation from a partner due to domestic violence, started to overcome her suffering with the crucial aid of family and community members, who strengthened her self-reliance and criticism of society. This primarily illustrates how the Christianized Indigenous young woman sees Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian society, perceiving current Indigenous affairs through social institutions such as the mass media, which is the most spectacular source of Indigenous stereotypes. My analysis here, focussed more or less on the present tense life stories of this Indigenous young woman, explores how she identifies herself as an Indigenous person in terms of social hierarchy, observing how her self-esteem and cultural pride interlock with her sense of living in a hierarchical society. In this section, therefore, contemporary Indigenous issues, including the currency of specific terms such as cultural loss and reconciliation, will be re-conceptualized from Maliana's own standpoint.

Recovery and Recuperation

In recent years Maliana has revitalized her Indigenous cultural and social identity after the traumatic experience of domestic violence and divorce. Maliana, who mostly overcame her depression after reuniting with her family, embarked on an attempt to adapt to both her workplace and the community, and to consolidate once more the cultural and political sense that had been weakened and fragmented by traumatic experiences in both Indigenous and white societies. Instead of self-reproach, she developed her own mode of criticism indebted once more to the original cultivation by her father, the Indigenous protestor. Maliana's criticism centers on a particularly

salient point for my research: she believes that Indigenous Australians have not been extricated from colonial trauma and she is particularly concerned at what she sees as their increasing sense of persecution, which for her is a continuation of the ways in which Indigenous people were obliged to deny their cultural pride and self-worth by the European missionaries. This perception of Yarrabah Christianity emerged from Maliana's struggle with her own notion of Indigenous Christianity, which caused her to hesitate to rejoin the Christian groups in the community:

“Still a bit of a struggle for me because I know I will find much less struggle and peace if I do go to church. If I do go to church I will stop drinking eventually even though I know that cause the church nowadays is more welcoming than it was before, but people in Yarrabah still hold onto that old mentality that the church had when it was run by white men of “oh, you mustn't do that”.

Maliana's specific expression “the Whiteman church mentality” might possibly be reworded as “the legacy of hypocrisy of European missionaries”. While for the Yarrabah people the reputation of European missionaries remains ambiguous, for Maliana the differences between religious doctrines and the brutal reputation of the missionaries were important as a direct product of colonization. According to her interpretation, the Anglican Church would be the place where the Yarrabah people might and perhaps should encounter the colonial legacy and perceptions of colonial trauma. Like many of the young interviewees in this research, she did not attend church despite her faith in Christianity; her distancing of herself from the church directly imputed that the Anglican Church, as the predecessor of the mission in Yarrabah, has yet to be absolved of the brutal memories associated with the colonial history. Maliana understood this as the “Whiteman church mentality”:

HSJ: The Whiteman church mentality?

“It made people think that the church is unforgiving and not understanding. That's the old way when the first Catholics came in that was the wrong way. A lot of people blame God for that [colonisation] because you have these Christian people come in and stealing children from tribes, doing all these wrong things

that are totally against what God says. A lot of people saying I'm not going to hear them because they hypocrites. But their mind is still back in the olden days. People stuck in the past. There been a lot of changes and the church is all new age. It is better to be understanding than unforgiving."

The internalized traumatic consciousness contextualized by the colonial discourses surrounding the community constantly influences the social identity of young Indigenous people; at Yarrabah, they all share the traumatic sense of a common fate. According to Jaffrey C. Alexander, 'cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways' (Alexander 2004: 2). Maliana, who has been significantly influenced by narratives about Indigenous genocide, emphasized the emotional link between Indigenous historical persecution and her socio-cultural sense, indicating that the structure of traumatic narratives must be dismantled before the stories can be transmitted to younger generations:

"I heard it from ladies who have done Aboriginal Studies about their own place here and other Aboriginal communities and in Melbourne where all the archives are held. I don't know why Melbourne but I think it has been done by the white people who want to send everything away and keep everything hidden. So they can't say that the biggest massacres have been in Tasmania, it's right here in Australia with the Aboriginals and Jews. That's why Aboriginals and Jews understand each other because these were the biggest massacres in the world."

The discomfort and frustration caused by the colonial traumatic change that undermines their positive sense of social identity is, as Alexander suggests, a trauma resulting from 'acute discomfort entering into the core of the collectivity's sense of its own identity' (Alexander 2004: 10). Maliana, who was influenced by discourses of traumatic cultural loss, manifested a profound concern, discomfort, and feeling of deprivation as a traumatic social identity.

Although Maliana felt that her self-confidence and cultural pride had been damaged by social prejudice, discrimination and traumatic abuse, the sense of cultural uniqueness and belonging that her father had imbued in her persisted constantly, offsetting the time she spent heaping self-reproach and self-distrust, upon herself. After overcoming spousal abuse with the aid of her family and the community, Maliana's sense of belonging to both the community and Indigenous groups strengthened, restoring her self-esteem and cultural pride within the community boundary. Building upon her life experiences, she clarified her identity precisely through her sense of Indigenous connection to all beings and Indigenous spirituality. She claims that nothing will change in at least that respect: Indigenous people for her are beings who sympathize with an entirely interwoven network of nature; and individualism, based on a European value system, has attempted to undermine this Indigenous collective and connected sense of Indigenous Australia:

“Spirituality is a connection that is from within to whatever. It's like a drawing feeling just say I'm feeling so connected to the land. I will feel that it is on fire that I can sense when it is on fire like I am connected with my kids and I can sense when they are hurting... It's not just the individual, it is connected to others and your homeland and the animals and how you live rather than just the person. The big picture is all in this person, even the way of life the cultural dancing the language the costumes all make up the individual and the individual is nothing without them.”

Figure 4 sketches the forces of recuperation in Maliana's life:

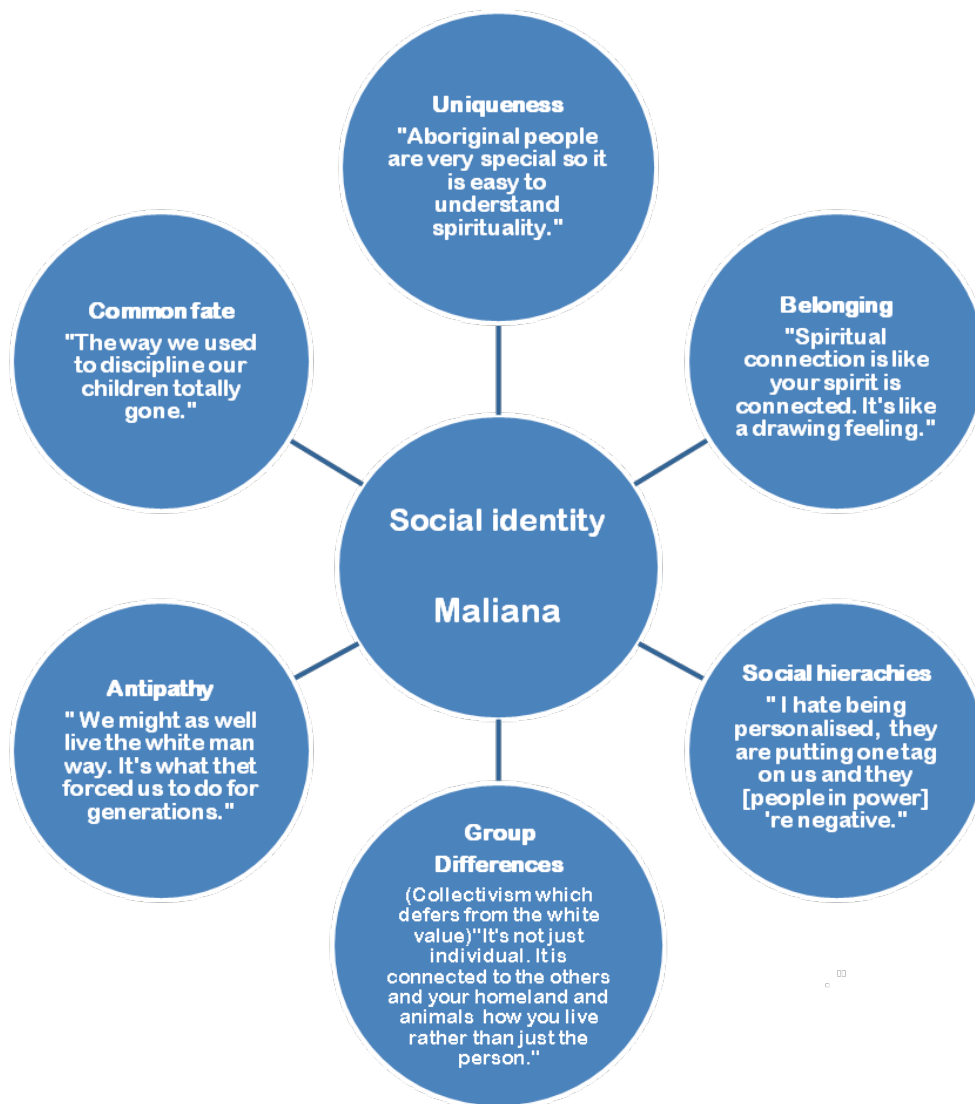


Figure 4. Conceptualized social identity (Maliana, Stage 4: 26 to 29 years-old).

Conclusion

This paper has tried to depict how a young Indigenous woman has constructed her social identity, negotiating with her institutional experiences in diverse socio-cultural contexts in contemporary Australia. Her life history demonstrates the shifting ways in which Indigenous people in Australia have actively transformed their way of life, interacting with diverse non-Indigenous practices and institutions. Many people

commonly regard Indigenous people as an 'historical symbol' or as unique 'cultural beings', who can play the didgeridoo and throw boomerangs, or, conversely, as elements of a social problem which must be managed and resolved by white Australia not only without the assistance of Indigenous people themselves but probably obstructed by their inadequacies and incapacities. I have tried to clarify how egregiously stereotyping and inaccurate both of these views are. Indigenous people are social beings continuously interacting with various social influences, including multi-cultural/global impacts and various colonial legacies. These forces have confused and frustrated young Indigenous people and they have been pivotal in producing traumatic difficulties for under-resourced and generally disempowered Indigenous communities, who live with alcoholism, violence, and other forms of self-destructive behaviour.

In contemporary Australia, people can clearly see Indigenous people surviving through various forms of cultural continuity. However, I argue that Indigenous people need something more than continuing Indigeneity, which remains tied to images of Indigenous cultural primitivity. As most people desire respectful relationships within the broader human network of society, Indigenous people need cultural pride, confidence, self-esteem and self-reliance in order to face their day-to-day challenges as social beings. For that reason, this case study can be seen as a portrait of a young Indigenous person negotiating self-esteem and cultural pride in relation to partly and painfully transformed Indigenous systems, struggling with the legacies of colonization as well as with institutional racism in contemporary Indigenous Australian society.

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