Relationships in Remote Communities: Implications for Living in Remote Australia

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There are issues with living in remote regions of Australia that arise from the different forms of social relationships. In this paper we outline three forms of relationships that are useful in teasing out issues when living in remote regions. We then consider several ways that relationship issues might arise in remote communities and some solutions through examining the interactions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, settlers and service providers. We also show how a graphic drawing of relationships from the perspective of remote communities can be utilised to help communities to plan their own solutions.

Australia has between one and two thousand settlements in its desert regions, from very small outstations of a few people up to a few major centres such as Alice Springs (Newman et al., 2008). There are many social properties of living in remote[1] regions that do not depend upon the personal characteristics of the people involved but rather, upon the situation, and that are neither good nor bad in themselves but which can be used strategically for varied ends (Cocklin & Dibden, 2005; Folds, 2001; Foster, Mitchell, Ulrik & Williams, 2005; Moisseff, 1999; Oeser & Emery, 1954; Walsh & Mitchell, 2002; Young & Fisk, 1982).

In this paper we discuss several ways that living in remote Australian communities is affected by the different forms of social relationships commonly experienced, especially from the residents' reliance on remote services. We outline several ways that various groups around the world have tried to overcome the properties they find undesirable. The main question is how to best deal with these changes and tensions in relationships.

What are Relationships?

In the remote regions of Australia there are a variety of communities, and they are organised in different ways. Relationships in an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander[2] context are different to relationships in most non-indigenous contexts, despite the attempts by successive governments to assimilate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to non-indigenous ways. Settlers in remote regions also brought specific ways to interact, as have governments and government service providers. However, when discussing relationship issues between groups or people in remote Australia, such as between settlers and Aboriginal people, problems are often delegated to or 'explained' as arising from essential differences between the groups of people, or from 'traditional ways' (Guerin & Guerin, 2007). In this paper, however, we will show how we can make this a little more concrete and less essentialistic by suggesting three forms of relationships that help tease out relationships and their issues in remote regions (Guerin, 2004). These are not meant to be firm or fast categories and many exceptions and variations occur, but are merely meant to inspire thinking in terms of diversity of relationships while still providing something concrete that avoids essentialisms.

People enter into relationships when they exchange goods, attend events, bolster reputation or provide opportunities, through interactions or structural events. This broad interdisciplinary idea covers many sorts of relationship interactions and prevents thinking about relationships merely in terms of liking or attraction as the sole source of relationships, because not all functional

relationships centre on liking or attraction (Guerin, 2004).

Table 1 presents a brief summary of the approach showing seven social properties of the three forms of relationships, drawn from literature across all the disciplines of social sciences. These are not meant to be mutually exclusive nor rigid, but a guide to social properties of some typical clusters. There is no 'best' form of relationship because there are good and bad features of them all, and this also depends upon people's reputation in

Table 1.

Three Types of Social Relationships and their Main Social Properties (adapted from Guerin, 2005)

Strangers:

Form of reciprocity: Exchange with a society of strangers is done via money

*What you can get do*ne is typically by paying someone and can be done at a distance, and in principle: there are no other social relationships involved; there are no other social obligations; they do not usually impact on other areas of life

Personal influence depends upon having economic (resource) status, often contextualised as a show of commodities

Monitoring: Will often not see them again, and others will not see each other

Accountability is mainly through public rule following and policing, institutionalised

Avoidance and escape of consequences is easy especially if wealthy, and people can easily withdraw from social relationships. Secrecy and lying therefore are also easy.

Conformity & norms: Will usually be towards what is publicly available and especially on media and through government and high status citizens

Friends and family social networks:

Form of reciprocity: specific supports that are returned (emotional, social, material, etc.)

What you can get done depends upon your networks and the reciprocity you provide. The people are usually relevant in other arenas of life

Personal influence will depend upon status within networks

Monitoring: Will see some of the people regularly, but not others. The others will not all see each other regularly, except if family

Accountability through public rules and policing, and through network members' contacts

Avoidance and escape of consequences is only easy if constantly changing networks or if high status within networks, or there are coalitions within networks (cliques).

Conformity & norms: Usually directed towards what best friends or closest family perceive is important

Kin-Based groups:

Form of reciprocity: taken for granted obligations

What you can get done depends upon the family social relationships. The same people will be relevant in most arenas of life

Personal influence will be important and depend upon status in the family and community networks. Time is therefore spent talking rather than rule following.

Monitoring: Will see most of the people regularly, and others will see each other regularly

Accountability is through complex family systems with historical context frequently utilised

Avoidance and escape of consequences is difficult and is limited mostly to secrecy and language strategies, or forming coalitions

Conformity & norms: Usually directed towards what the community sees as important and often reflected in historical precedence or ritual practices

relationships. Moreover, the majority of people have different types of relationships with different people. For example, many people in western systems have many daily interactions with strangers while maintaining a network of close family ties and both close friends and weak ties, but they do not have experience in the relationships making up large, kin-based communities.

Living in a western society, the majority of relationships are with *strangers* (for example, at work, in education, in shops), and these relationship interactions are arguably the most frequent, even if not the most satisfying. These are generally handled politely through interaction rituals and, even though the persons involved are strangers, these relationships are not usually cold, hard or impolite and can easily develop into friendships depending on the context (Goffman, 1967). The main exchanges with strangers are conducted through money, in that people must pay others to paint the house, teach children, fix cars, etc., and in that people do things for others because they are given money, either directly or indirectly (Simmel, 1978/1907). One key property of western stranger relationships is that there are no obligations to those in the relationship once the exchange or service has been paid for – there is no obligation to continue the relationship although these relationships can sometimes develop into acquaintances or more.

Many people in western societies, however, also have a small group of *close friends* and *immediate family* with whom they spend a lot of 'quality' time, even if this is only on weekends or during holidays. Such relationships also work through social networks that can link people to acquaintances, partial strangers or 'weak ties' who are not known but can be approached through family or friends for better exchanges (Granovetter, 1982).

Finally, some people live within larger communities of extended family or *kin-based communities* in which most contacts and

exchanges will be with someone who is related by birth or fictive kinship. In this type of relationship almost all properties of relationships and exchanges are with people who are related, and hence, affect almost all social behaviour. For example, greater monitoring is common due to the greater interaction of people in the network and results in less anonymity. This is not necessarily aversive, however, as it would be if it happened within stranger relationships. Exchanges in kin-based communities are typically reciprocated with obligations for other goods, events, reputation or opportunities, and being offered money can be seen as rude or condescending (as it can also be for *close family and friends*). Kin-based groups are varied but include many religious communities such as the Exclusive Brethren that are not based on an ethnic or racial group.

Table 1 shows seven of the key social factors in relationships, although there is not space here to elaborate on these. The point is that the same interactions can occur but with very different social properties maintaining the relationship, and moreover, people typically immersed in one form of relationship can find it difficult to understand how relationships function under another set of social properties. In the present case, this is common between those with frequent relationships with strangers (even if formally friendly) and those immersed in the social properties of kin-based communities. Similarly, people who function in one set of social properties may also have certain expectations about how others should act, their motivations, their reciprocity, and what might be considered satisfactory about an interaction.

Common Relationship Issues in Remote Australia

The reason the different types of relationships become important for the present discussion is that in colonial countries such as Australia, there are typical interactions across these types of relationships that have produced very similar results to other colonised countries

(Guerin, 2004, chapter 6; Moody, 1998). Many Indigenous peoples, refugees, migrants, peoples of slave background, and peoples from developing countries form very strong kin-based communities to this day but come into regular contact with people who typically live within a set of stranger relationships alongside a small number of close friends and immediate family. There are also settlers and descendents of settlers in remote areas who have come from stranger relations but have had to depend on others to a larger extent than is necessary in urban centres. The mix of these three groups produces many of the issues we now discuss.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities

In the case of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, belonging to kin-based communities and obligations is one of the most frequently cited properties that sets them apart from other Australians (e.g., Poirior, 2005). To understand the minutia of behaviour and behaviour patterns, an understanding is needed of how people in kin-based communities function and how the whole system works together. Kin-based communities should not be construed as perfect or conflict free, as systems models often portray (Guerin & Guerin, 2007), but the whole system functions differently from a stranger society built on monetary exchanges with strangers (which can also be complex, intricate, satisfying, conflictual, subtle, etc.).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have had strong kin-based relationships in which people rely on one another and have long-lasting and serious obligations to others. A large part of what people in these groups accomplish is through family obligations as a 'way of life', and these obligations are taken for granted. For example, if children need to be looked after there will often be a family member who can do this (but perhaps with some grumbling), instead of paying someone for baby-sitting. The ties (exchanges) are very strong, even when conflictual, so phenomena such as avoidance relationships occur in which, because of the structure of family relationships, certain people cannot be in the same room or sit with one another (e.g., Poirior, 2005). Some small Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander settlements are even physically structured so that different family groupings live apart from one another.

In terms of the distances of remote communities, many people in these relationships report finding it aversive to be away from one another for extended periods, which can inhibit travelling to cities for employment, education or medical treatment. However, this does not mean that people do not want to leave the community. Indeed, much work has reported the high geographic mobility of Aboriginal people in remote communities (Biddle & Hunter, 2005). Resistance to moving away from remote communities might therefore relate to an aversion to being surrounded by strangers, or people who treat you as strangers, rather than from being away from kin *per se* – that is, from relationship issues of another nature. People living in urban areas often have more contact with strangers and are forced to deal with strangers on a regular basis. Although people in remote Australia certainly have experience in dealing with strangers, they are perhaps still used to forming stronger and more trusting relationships before allowing strangers to influence them. This is why building relationships is so important for researchers and service providers in remote regions, since the manner of interacting is just as important as how people speak and behave (Zimmermann, Davidson, Cacciattolo & Mahon, 2007). Just being paid to do some work for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote communities does not guarantee that a relationship of any other sort will develop, and the way in which westerners can switch relationships and obligations on and off in such a controlled manner with strangers can be confusing for someone from a kin-based community.
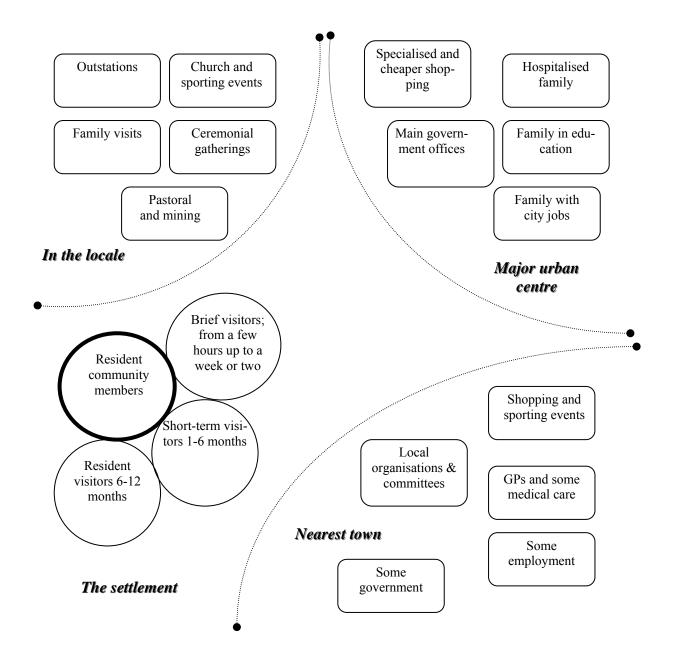
Figure 1. Typical groups needing to maintain relationships in remote Australia (based on extensive discussions with community members).

To give a feel for the different groups with which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in a remote community engage, we have tried to draw a 'community plan' from talking with many groups involved in one remote community in Central Australia. While there are several ways to draw community profiles (e. g., Walsh & Mitchell, 2002), none focuses sufficiently on the relationships involved. For confidentiality we will not provide details of the community involved, but this material was compiled over several trips to the community over two years, during which we talked with community members as well as service providers. In any event, it is not meant as definitive or representative, but is given here as illustrative.

Figure 1 shows that there are several layers of contact that must be maintained for sustainable living in remote regions, all of

which for urban dwellers can be accessed relatively closely without much travel. Many of these contacts are at a great distance, but the point here is that there are many types of relationships that must broached, and in many cases they are infrequent so little can be done to sustain relationships if that is what you are expecting (from living in a kin-based community). Dealing with all these strangers and their ways of interacting on rare trips must also make travel uninviting. The high mobility, therefore, is more about travelling to areas in the locale where there are family members, or to urban areas to visit families (Biddle & Hunter, 2005).

Similar points arise from Figure 1 when sending family to large urban centres for employment or education. Maintaining relationships in those cases is not just about maintaining the family connections and exchanges at a distance, but also having to deal with a large number of stranger relationships by necessity. In the case of secondary and tertiary education this often means some years away from the community and family.

Health is also complicated in this regard because although most small settlements have some form of local health services, albeit usually with few facilities, these often employ many outside people who are not local, do not have family in the community, do not stay long, and are working under conditions of poor resourcing. Even with excellent, dedicated and caring professionals, working in these situations is difficult at best and at the worst is not sustainable. Moreover, for chronic or serious health matters, moving to a nearby town or major urban hospital is often required, for either short visits or permanently (Wakerman et al., 2005). For example, most small settlements do not have dialysis machines and so those needing such equipment on a regular basis have to move to an urban centre or big town since the small health units cannot acquire or maintain one. This causes much distress for families (Devitt & McMasters, 1998a, 1998b).

Service Providers in Remote Communities

Remote Australia also has a large band of service providers who are occasionally locally raised but much more likely to move from cities to remote Australia on employment contracts (Haslam McKenzie, 2007). Those who are brought in typically have family ties elsewhere, so a person from Sydney might take a position in Alice Springs for a short time. This shows an interesting contrast to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who often must leave their home for employment or education with some resistance, and it shows the strong employment advantage of 'westerners' in such situations: that the family ties are often not so strong that they need to be in constant contact. In many western families members can be out of contact for some years with only intermittent interaction (by phone, for example, or just visiting once a year at Christmas) and still maintain the family relationship. This property is as useful today for mobile employment as it was for colonists to settle in remote regions.

Some government officials go to remote communities for very short terms, often only a day or two (see Figure 1), and then return to close family and friends, but the main government offices that have control over desert settlements are typically in remote urban centres rather than in the bush. In some cases, a nearby town has branch offices of government but these are often small and do not include all services or the responsibility to act or implement changes. The main medical and education centres are likewise in remote urban centres and health inequities reflect the associated problems (e.g., Underhill, Goldstein & Grogan 2006). Most remote settlements have some health facilities relatively nearby and perhaps schooling up to primary level, but the fact is that for most people in remote communities, serious or chronic medical problems and obtaining an education requires moving out of the settlement.

Most service providers and government officials who go to remote communities have been raised within western relationships

(usually in cities) and most start off with little or no understanding of kin-based communities, how they function, and the obligations assumed even when a stranger relationship is broached (Dillon & Westbury, 2007). While this is advantageous in so far as it was mentioned above (i.e., that this means they can travel to remote areas for extended periods without feeling too much distress from being away from their own families), it does mean that problems are likely to accrue because they usually do not understand how relationships in remote regions are maintained and function.

Despite being able to stay away from family longer than for those immersed in kin-based communities, service providers also tend not to stay for extended periods (years or decades) so it is common to have high turnover. This is very problematic for most remote communities around the world. The frequent requirement to induct and form relationships with new service providers is both stressful and time consuming. Even in the western context, high staff turnover is seen as problematic, though the structures often accommodate such turnover. The importance of developing relationships in remote communities challenges the ease of substituting staff.

Service providers often deal with issues that require some specialised knowledge and history not often included in training programs, and this cannot be taught overnight when one set of service providers is substituted for the previous ones. Learning these things is usually left up to the initiative of the new worker, or worse, considered unimportant. Whereas those living in a city can substitute one greengrocer store for another without much of a problem, high turnover of service providers in remote communities can cause multiple relationship disruptions and much frustration and stress to those living there because of the forms of social relationship in addition to any service delivery issues.

Settlers in Remote Regions

The other main group in remote Australia, who account for much space even if numbers are smaller, are the settlers, pastoralists, and descendents of settlers. Settlers form an interesting mix of the types of relationships characterised in Table 1. Unlike service providers, settlers do not have close family in distant places since after many years in one spot they usually have most family close by for support. This also means, however, that they must rely on those around them more than the transitory service providers in the same area, and this changes the relationships settlers make and how those relationships are sustained. Settlers might form closer ties with each other even though not kin-based, but the relationships might not be utilised or realised except in emergency situations.

Some of these suggestions were outlined in comments about the early pastoralists of the far North of Western Australia, and their relationships with the local Aboriginal workers (such as the Peet brothers below). How pastoralists handled and developed relationships depended on the *potential* reliance or dependence they might have:

Their husbands who were out and about with the workers did not seem to be gripped by the need to keep themselves separate and, with real work to do, did not suffer in the same way. These men, like Mr. Campbell, were even known to invite the lowly mail drivers indoors for a cup of tea when they called each week. The Peet brothers, grateful for any consideration shown to them on their long hot run, knew whenever such an invitation was issued on such stations that the missus was away. It would never happen otherwise… They also noticed the change in attitude as soon as they entered the Gascoyne area further north. There the stations were even more remote and consequently

more mutually dependent. None of the whites could afford to consider themselves better than the next: after all, no-one knew just when they would require help, or from whom. Up there the mail drivers were treated like one of the family… (Dingo, 1998, p.151)

Again we see that distance relates to relationships, that as one became more and more remote, relationships needed to change for potential help, but our point is that this no longer applies to the service providers who only come for short stays. If they require help they will typically get it from their family or organisation back in the urban centres.

Solutions to Issues in Remote Relationships

Relationship problems are not the only or biggest problems for small settlements in remote regions. Lack of employment (Fuller, Caldicott, Cairncross, & Wilde, 2007) and cost of transport are two other major problems that need new solutions, for example, as does health servicing (Panagiotopoulos, Rozmus, Gagnon, & Macnab, 2007; Underhill et al., 2006; Wakerman et al., 2005). However, underlying the lack of solutions to these other problems, as we have tried to show, are the problems of maintaining relationships both across far distances and also across the different types of relationships that typically exist in remote Australia. We explore some possibilities to the relationships issues raised above, rather than attempting to provide solutions to all problems of living in remote Australia.

Although many solutions to relationship issues have been attempted over many years, there are probably possibilities that have never been documented, which means that others cannot take advantage of them. Luckily, solutions to similar problems around the world have been documented and might be adapted these to remote solutions (e. g., Nikora, Guerin, Rua & Te Awekotuku, 2004; Nikora, Rua, Te Awekotuku, Guerin & McCaughey,

2007; Panagiotopoulos et al., 2007; Teddy, Nikora & Guerin, 2005).

Overall, there are two main relationship issues that require solutions. First, explicit strategies to bridge the different types of relationships need to be developed. Currently, for example, the strategy is for people who will be working in these new relationship scenarios to attend 'cultural awareness', 'cultural competence' or 'cultural safety' programs (Aboriginal Resource and Development Services, 1994; Bourke, Bourke & Edwards, 1994; Congress for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Nurses, 2002; Hill & Augoustinos, 2001; Kiselica, Maben & Locke, 1999; Lindsley, 1998; Partington, 1995; Reid & Holland, 1996; Taylor & Wright, 2003). While these programs can provide people with some knowledge, understanding, and sometimes skills for working 'cross culturally', they do not explore the *functionality* of different types of relationships and the *contexts* of those relationships.

More practically, people in kin-based communities must also be prepared to work with the relationship functions of others, and vice versa. People from remote kin-based communities moving into urban centres might also find it useful to prepare for the ways of action required to get things done (Table 1), otherwise there might be a heavy reliance on the few kin-folk who may already be living there. Likewise, people accustomed to working amongst strangers and moving to kin-based communities might find it useful to prepare for the ways of action required to get things done, or else there might be a reliance on others who are very similar to themselves, thereby creating social divisions within these communities.

There is one interesting proviso to this 'mutual appreciation' stance: entering into western relationships is by their very nature easier than entering into a kin-based relationship, providing one has some form of self-sustaining income. As long as a person has money, he or she can enter into stranger relationships since there are few other expected

obligations or necessary social ties (see Table 1). Entering into kin-based communities, on the other hand, sometimes cannot happen at all except through birth (which people typically do not have control over), although some intermediary forms of affiliated or fictive "kinship" are often granted based on outsiders' trust and commitment to the community. But for those entering into relationships with people from kin-based communities, the relationship will never be the same as for members of the kin networks. Relationships can still be satisfying, fun, long-lasting and productive, but they will not be the same as for family. This point is one strong argument for having *local people determine solutions* since they are in the best position to implement any changes. Some of the problems will be resolved if local people are employed as the service providers, etc., but this in turn will most often require further education or training which might need a long visit to an urban centre.

The second main point for developing solutions is about spanning the remoteness of distance rather than relationship. For the cases shown in Figure 1, in which people from kin-based communities need to visit or move to towns or cities, relationships need to be explicitly handled. Some groups around the world in similar situations form associations or kin-based groups within the cities to support each other (Nikora et al., 2004; Walker, 1975). A nice variation on this is the New Zealand Tühoe community who live in a nearby town and organise sports groups and host an annual sports event on the homelands that everyone need to attend (Nikora et al., 2004). This insures that family all visit the homelands at least for the sports events once a year, although having to get away from work or education commitments once a year still causes some disruption in life. (However, it must be kept in mind that the "long distances" involved are not long by Australian remote standards.)

Another common strategy is for people moving to a town or city to stay with family as

boarders for the duration of their visit (Nikora et al., 2004; Nikora et al., 2007). This can put pressure on families but these pressures probably have easier solutions, such as affordable houses that are larger. Innovative uses of telecommunication can also alleviate some of the stress of living away from kin. Most migrating groups now stay in contact with kin they have left behind through phone, internet or video links (e. g., Teddy et al., 2005), and the use of videoconferencing still holds much promise for unique solutions to these problems although repeated waves of enthusiasm since the 1960s has not led to much progress in ordinary life.

Rather than adapting to living away, some services can be re-designed to come nearer or into settlements. Many of these solutions have been tried and some tested. First, utilising local populations as a workforce is a sensible solution although there are also difficulties in doing this. For example, local people in remote communities may not have had the access to education and training needed to take over any jobs provided. But, overall, these issues can be addressed with long-term planning to improve children's access to education and by thinking 10 or 20 years into the future.

Following this point, too often it is thought that education can only take place in centralised areas. However, much tertiary education has now been re-designed into intensive teaching blocks – even university courses that have traditionally been taught as a series of lectures spanning two or three months. This means first that visits to cities can be done as intensive visits rather than as a three-year stay to obtain a bachelors degree or diploma, and secondly, it means that intensive courses can potentially be brought to the remote regions more easily than a long series of lectures. Some teaching institutions are already doing this, it should be noted, but much more remains to be done. There is also an increasing availability of online and distance education programs.

Medical care and hospitals have other concerns, and remote treatments are less likely

to happen, although some solutions are possible (Congress for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Nurses, 2002; Panagiotopoulos et al., 2007; Underhill et al., 2006; Wakerman et al., 2005). Other than the government buying the same equipment for all small settlements and providing the professionals to run it, people in remote communities with chronic conditions needing specialised care will still need to travel to major towns and cities. This means that solutions mentioned above for better negotiation of family networking in major towns and cities are needed. This is a problem everywhere and needs new considerations (Devitt & McMasters, 1998a, 1998b).

A number of ways could be explored to better handle maintenance of treatments for chronic conditions in remote areas. Where there are strong kin-based networks it makes sense for people with chronic conditions to have a community mentor to help with treatment maintenance. However, this person would need to be chosen by the community and would need the same training and monitoring that would be the case in major towns and cities, but should provide strong support in maintaining treatments without the need for medical consultation.

A Note on Long-term Solutions

The way we think about remote settlements, homelands, and communities might need to change. For example, thinking that the settlement or homeland is the 'hub,' where most people should reside in order to be considered community members, leads to certain ways of approaching issues, and many of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities view their homelands in this way. It is possible, though, to consider that the settlement or homeland is a community centre and a 'place' where people have ties, but most of the members will live outside of that region, in remote urban areas, for at least some of their lives. In this way, the importance and integrity of 'home' remains, but the ways in which this is sustained become different. There are

examples in the Pacific and New Zealand in which the focus has changed so that homelands are seen as the origin or spiritual hub of the community (for example, in Māori this is called the iwi takiwā, or tribal region) but the majority of community members live outside of that (Guerin, Nikora & Rua, 2006).

This change, however, requires a change in social organisation to ensure that the sense of community (i.e., the sum of kin-based relationships) does not disappear altogether. That, then, is the challenge: how to have most people living outside of the community settlement without losing the sense of community and kin-ship – how not to lose the forms of relationship engendered by having kin-based communities (as shown partially in Table 1) when most people live elsewhere for at least part of their lives.

For long term sustainability of remote communities, utilising the power of kin-based relationships to adapt into new relationships would be an advantage. One of the powerful benefits of kin-based relationships is the cooperation and sense of obligation to do things for each other. Most government solutions have ignored this because of not wanting to trust community members to work as a whole, and from trying to pin responsibly onto individuals rather than whole communities, as western forms of relationships require (Table 1). But the power of kin-based communities to 'get things done' could be better harnessed in future solutions if communities are given more power to choose their own futures (Dillon & Westbury, 2007; Moran, 2004; Smith & Hunt, 2006; Waltja & WAVE, 2005).

Figure 1 as a Tool for Communities?

What can be done, and this is one goal for future research, is to develop some community development 'tools' that explicitly address the concerns of this paper and facilitate communities finding their own specific solutions, rather than expecting a solution that will fit everyone. For viability and sustainability, the community as a whole can learn to negotiate relationships of different functions and across large distances. People in communities can discuss the problems and

solutions noted here, can draw different versions of Figure 1 for their specific circumstances, and can design ways to maintain those relationships that are necessary (cf. Walsh & Mitchell, 2002). Part of this might require the education of their relationship partners as well as community members. It might also require a sort of reverse cultural awareness training for some kin-based communities to provide ways of interacting better with those used to stranger relationships. It might allow roles to develop for certain skilled community members to deal with some of the relationships in Figure 1 that are necessary, rather than spreading this across the whole community and trying to educate everyone at once. The hope is that if communities, and those who deal with communities, can better manage relationships and how they function, then many of the other difficulties experienced in living in remote communities might be solved.

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Notes

[1] There are definitional arguments about what is remote and what is rural (or other terms).

We will not go into this as it differs between countries as well. We think that the approach of Hugo (2005) is the most sensible option: defining in terms of accessibility rather than physical distance, but we will not pursue that here.

[2] As is well known, there are other ways of referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including "Indigenous" and using local names such as Kaurna. In this paper we use the first of these out of respect for the people of the Adelaide plains who prefer "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders" when a specific group is not being referred to.

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