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**Aboriginal socioeconomic change in
the Northern Territory, 1986-91**

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- identify and analyse the factors affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in the labour force; and
- assist in the development of government strategies aimed at raising the level of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in the labour market.

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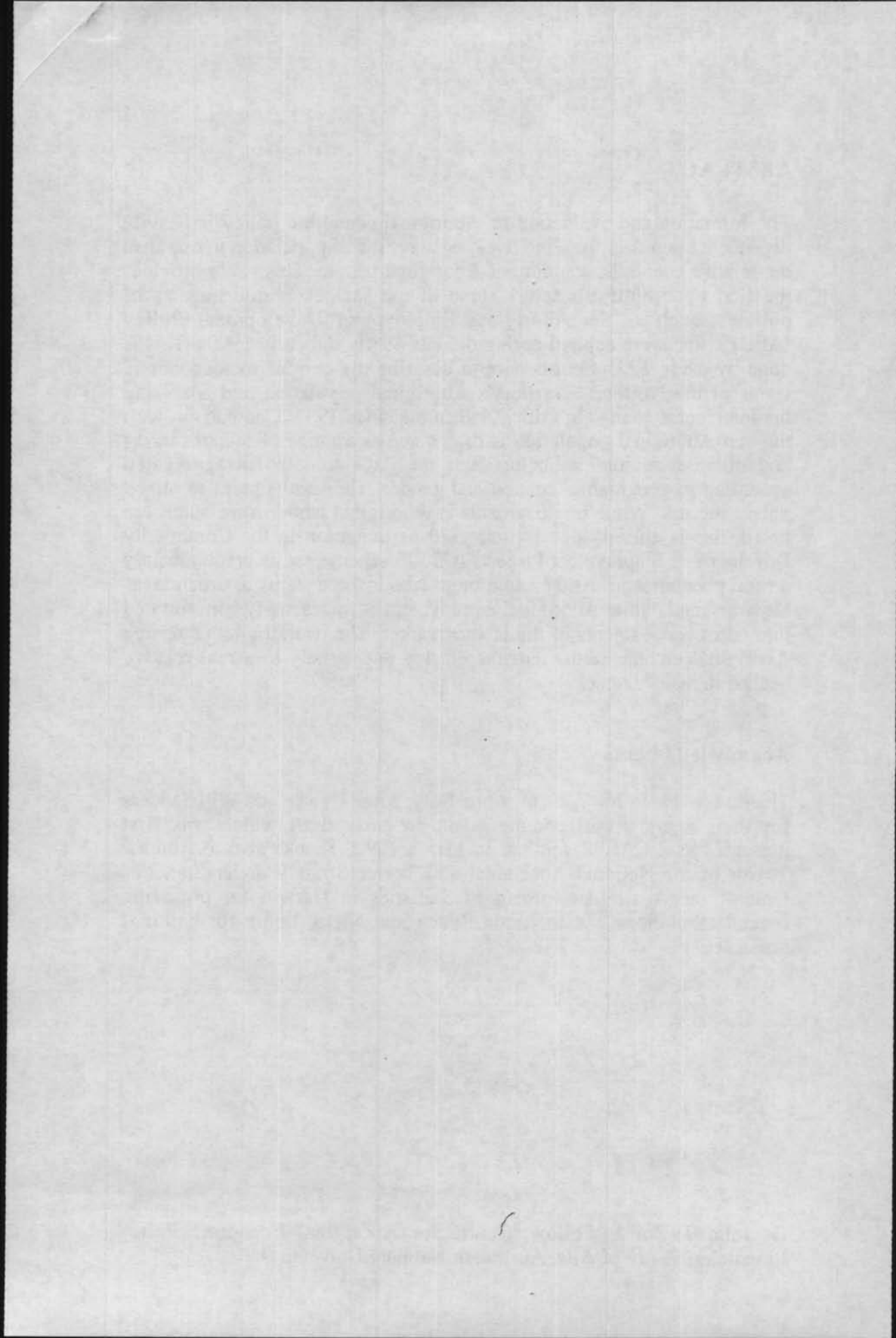
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ABSTRACT

The formation and evaluation of Aboriginal economic policy is heavily dependent upon data from the five-yearly census of population to establish the relative economic standing of Aboriginal people. This paper provides the first opportunity to assess some of the socioeconomic impacts of policies, such as the Aboriginal Employment Development Policy (AEDP), that were applied during the late 1980s and early 1990s. This is done by using 1991 Census data to describe the current socioeconomic status of the Northern Territory's Aboriginal population and analysing the intercensal change in critical indicators since 1986. Comparison with the non-Aboriginal population is drawn across a range of labour market and other economic indicators and the data are also disaggregated according to geographic location and gender. The results point to mixed policy success. While improvements in Aboriginal labour force status are noted, this is entirely due to increased participation in the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme and is predominantly a rural phenomenon. At the same time, labour force status in urban areas has worsened, while Aboriginal employment is increasingly concentrated into narrower segments of the labour market. The overall goal of raising Aboriginal income status remains elusive due largely to a real relative decline in male incomes.

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Since the first attempt in 1971 to enumerate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander¹ people in the Australian census by self-identification, successive census rounds have provided the most complete and reliable (though less than ideal) means of assessing change in the relative socioeconomic status of the indigenous population at national, regional and local levels. Conclusions from the last round of exhaustive analyses, based on 1986 Census data, were unequivocally of the view that while some improvements were discernible, the economic status of indigenous Australians, as measured by standard indicators such as labour force status, occupation of employment and income, remained comprehensively low when compared with the rest of the population (Tsfaghiorghis and Altman 1991; Jones 1991; Taylor 1992a). This was despite a generally higher economic status observed for Torres Strait Islanders compared to Aborigines (Taylor and Gaminiratne 1992).

Since 1986, significant shifts have occurred in a number of factors that impinge on the socioeconomic standing of indigenous Australians. On the one hand, macroeconomic circumstances are now less favourable as radical restructuring of national industries and regional economies have combined with generally depressed economic conditions to significantly reduce the employment prospects of those, such as indigenous Australians, who have limited human capital resources to mobilise in mainstream labour markets. On the other hand, policies designed to enhance the economic status of indigenous Australians have been strengthened during the latter half of the 1980s, most notably with the adoption of the Aboriginal Employment Development Policy (AEDP). This has significantly boosted funds directed towards the goal of achieving equality in employment and income status between Aborigines and the general population and has created a focused economic stimulus within the labour market whose effects are, potentially at least, countercyclical in a macroeconomic sense. Between the financial years 1986-87 and 1990-91, for example, at a time of general budgetary restraint, national expenditure under the AEDP totalled \$1,071 million (Commonwealth of Australia 1991: 21; Altman and Sanders 1991a: 12) - an amount allocated for an approximate population of working age at the end of this period of 123,805 (Gray and Tsfaghiorghis 1992). As for the numbers participating in labour market programs, a total of 23,738 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were approved for all programs in the single financial year of 1990-91 (Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) 1992: 5). In the same year, expenditure on the entire range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs fell just short of \$1,000 million (Commonwealth of Australia 1991: 21).

As argued elsewhere (Taylor 1989a), the disbursement of such large public program expenditures targeted at specific groups is unlikely to

have been achieved without discernible socioeconomic impacts, not least in the area of employment spin-offs. Indeed, so pervasive has the program dollar been in recent years and so favourably disposed are program expenditures to the generation of employment opportunities that are amenable to Aboriginal people, that the notion of an 'indigenous' labour market, with its own internal dynamic operating separately from that of the mainstream, has been canvassed (Taylor 1992a, 1993). With this in mind, one purpose of this paper is to identify early signs of socioeconomic impacts in the Northern Territory that may be due to interventions such as AEDP. This is done by using 1991 Census data to describe the current socioeconomic status of the Territory's Aboriginal population and analysing the intercensal change in critical indicators since 1986.

Previous analysis of 1986 Census data for the Northern Territory has stressed the role of geographic location as an explanatory variable in the determination of Aboriginal socioeconomic status (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 1990; Taylor 1992b). More specifically, an urban/rural gradient has been noted with economic status lowest in the remotest, most rural localities. It is partly in response to such realities that the AEDP outlined separate strategies for people living in or around remote towns, provincial and capital cities (those with 1,000 or more population where a labour market is deemed to exist) and those living on Aboriginal land, Aboriginal owned pastoral properties, outstations and settlements of up to 1,000 population (where mainstream labour markets are regarded as either undeveloped or non-existent) (Australian Government 1987).

While the overall aims of achieving employment and income equality remain the same in both cases, the focus in urban areas was primarily on boosting employment in both public and private sectors of the mainstream labour market via the Training for Aboriginals Program (TAP). In remoter rural areas, the emphasis was directed more towards employment generation in community enterprises and development projects via the TAP (community sector) as well as in traditional pursuits. In effect, much of the AEDP program effort in rural areas of the Northern Territory has been subsumed under the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme which, as essentially a work-for-the-dole scheme, suggests that significant differences in employment outcomes may be expected according to urban/rural location. With this in mind, the analysis examines intercensal shifts in economic status using a modified section-of-State classification.

Population change by section-of-State, 1986-91

In recent years there has been growing recognition among Aboriginal affairs policy-makers of the diversity which exists in the social and

economic circumstances of Aboriginal people. Such diversity derives from the differential impact of European settlement in the various regions of Australia. To some extent, variable lifestyles have also been facilitated by government intervention as, for example, in the case of financial grants to Aboriginal people wishing to settle in remote localities (Altman and Taylor 1989: 23). During the 1980s, the Commonwealth Aboriginal affairs portfolio identified several categories of Aboriginal communities which reflected this varied pattern of settlement. These categories were divided into a broad rural/urban split with rural areas comprising:

- i Discrete Aboriginal townships in remote areas often located on Aboriginal land and likely to be responsible for their own municipal-type services.
- ii Outstations and other small groups in remote areas linked to a resource organisation in a nearby Aboriginal township or other regional centre.

and urban areas including:

- iii Aboriginal people in State or Territory capital cities and major urban areas.
- iv Aboriginal people who are residents of country towns mixed in with a predominantly non-Aboriginal population.
- v Groups of Aborigines living in an identified location or camp site near or within an urban area and having different arrangements from the town for municipal services, or no such facilities at all.

In translating these categories as closely as possible into census geography, a slight modification of the standard section-of-State 'rural/other rural' classification was performed to produce three geographic levels for the Northern Territory:

- i Urban areas. These include all places with more than 1,000 population as well as the small country towns of Pine Creek, Mataranka and Elliot. Although ideally, town camps within places such as Darwin, Alice Springs and Katherine would have been separated from the general urban population and identified as a separate category, their lack of universal coincidence with discrete census collection districts (CDs) prevents this.
- ii Aboriginal townships. These include all rural localities with a population of between 200 and 999 persons. In addition, those CDs

with less than 200 persons where more than 50 per cent of the Aboriginal population was resident in a settlement listed as eligible for receipt of local government grants by the Northern Territory Local Government Grants Commission² (Northern Territory Local Government Grants Commission 1992), were classified as townships.

- iii Outstations. This category comprises the population in the balance of CDs in the Northern Territory and represents those in the smallest and remotest places. The term 'outstation' is employed here as a euphemism, this being the predominant settlement type in a category that also incorporates people resident on pastoral excisions and other scattered localities.

Table 1. Aboriginal population change by Northern Territory section-of-State, 1986-91.

	1986		1991		1986-91	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Urban	12,488	36.0	14,029	35.1	1,541	12.3
Township	15,905	45.8	18,751	47.0	2,846	17.9
Outstation	6,341	18.2	7,121	17.9	780	12.3
Total	34,734	100.0	39,901	100.0	5,167	14.9

One of the features of Aboriginal population distribution in the Northern Territory over the past two decades has been increasing dispersion as the population resident in relatively small groups at outstations has grown. This trend has been described for the period up to 1986 elsewhere (Taylor 1992b). Between 1986 and 1991, the population at outstations continued to grow at an equivalent rate to the population in urban areas but at a somewhat slower rate when compared to the population in Aboriginal townships which experienced the greatest increase both in absolute and relative terms³ (Table 1).⁴ In short, comparing the overall 1991 distribution with that of 1986, the Aboriginal population of the Northern Territory is slightly less urban, slightly less remote and slightly more likely to be located in Aboriginal townships.

Such is the case, at least, at the Territory-wide level. If the section-of-State data are disaggregated according to selected regions of the Northern Territory a somewhat different picture emerges. This is done in Table 2 which shows population change by section-of-State in each of three regions - Top End, Middle and Centre. These regions derive from a

crude taxonomy which attempts to reflect something of the social, economic and ecological variation within the Northern Territory by drawing a distinction between the monsoonal Aboriginal lands, mining towns and Darwin in the Top End, the predominantly pastoral areas and small service towns across the middle of the Territory and the Aboriginal lands and pastoral areas of the more arid Centre together with Alice Springs. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission regional council areas were used as the basis for this regionalisation with those of Tiwi Islands, Yilli/Rrueng, Jabiru and Miwatj comprising the Top End; Victoria River, Daly River, Mulgun and Yapakurlangu comprising the Middle; and Papunya, Arltarlpilta, Alice Springs and Imphyara comprising the Centre.

Table 2. Aboriginal population change by Northern Territory section-of-State and geographic region, 1986-91.

	Top End		Middle		Centre	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Urban	862	13.3	462	18.5	217	6.2
Township	1,194	17.2	1,201	25.0	451	10.8
Outstation	572	24.0	404	24.7	-196	-8.4
Total	2,628	16.6	2,067	23.1	472	4.7

The remarkable feature of regional population growth is the enormous variation between the high growth rates in the populations of the Top End and Middle regions and the relatively low 4.7 per cent growth in the Centre. This means that the Aboriginal population of the Top End experienced an annual rate of growth of 3.3 per cent - notably above the overall rate of 2.9 per cent for the Territory as a whole. In the Middle region the annual rate of growth at 4.6 per cent was almost 50 per cent higher than the Territory average. By stark contrast, population growth in the Centre region, at 0.9 per cent per annum, was barely one-third that of the overall rate.

As Table 2 shows, the main reason for this wide variation was the very substantial increase in population in Aboriginal townships and outstations of the Top End and Middle regions compared with the relatively low population growth evident in Alice Springs and Aboriginal townships in the Centre combined with an actual decline in the number enumerated at outstations. The accuracy of these data and the factors underlying them are issues for further research. Suffice to say here that they do not result

from demographic processes alone and are more likely to reflect census error emanating from enumeration procedures in remote areas either in the 1986 or 1991 Censuses, or in both. The limitations imposed by remote area enumeration procedures on the interpretation of census data are discussed in detail elsewhere (Taylor 1992c). Apart from concerns regarding the census counts, this shows that variations in the recording of remote area census characteristics also leave room for doubt, not so much over the veracity of some information, but rather what it portrays. With this cautionary note, the analysis of socioeconomic change now proceeds.

Change in labour force status, 1986-91

Between 1986 and 1991, the overall employment rate for Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory showed distinct signs of improvement. If this is expressed as the ratio of employed Aboriginal people to every 100 of those aged 15 years and over, then the rate increased from 27.4 per cent to 30.3 per cent (Table 3). It is instructive to consider this trend in the wider labour market context as corresponding figures for the rest of the Northern Territory adult population showed a slight decline from 69.1 per cent to 67.9 per cent. Thus, a marginal degree of convergence in overall employment levels has been experienced in recent years, although it is important to note that Aboriginal rates are still considerably below the Territory norm.

Table 3. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal labour force status, Northern Territory 1986-91.

	Aboriginal		Non-Aboriginal	
	1986	1991	1986	1991
Employment/population ratio ^a	27.4	30.3	69.1	67.9
Unemployment/population ratio ^b	14.8	10.6	5.8	7.2
Unemployment rate ^c	35.0	25.8	7.7	11.5
Participation rate ^d	42.2	40.9	74.9	75.1

a. Those employed as a percentage of the population aged 15 years and over.

b. Those unemployed as a percentage of the population aged 15 years and over.

c. Those unemployed as a percentage of those in the labour force.

d. Those in the labour force as a percentage of the population aged 15 years and over.

All figures exclude those who did not state their labour force status.

A rough measure of the enormity of this gap is provided by Altman (1993) who has calculated that it would take 55 years for employment equality to be achieved, assuming that the difference in employment/population ratios between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Territorians were to diminish at a constant rate and that the non-Aboriginal employment rate also remained constant. This, of course, takes no account of the likely bulge in the Aboriginal population aged 15 years and over as outlined by Tesfaghiorghis and Gray (1991), nor does it address the meaning of the term 'employment' as defined in the census, especially in relation to Aboriginal participation in special labour market programs.

A similar closure of the gap in labour force status between Aboriginal people and the rest of the Northern Territory population is apparent from the intercensal shift in unemployment rates (Table 3). Whether those unemployed are expressed as a percentage of the population aged 15 years and over or, more conventionally, as a proportion of those in the labour force, the results point to a significant decline in Aboriginal unemployment at a time when non-Aboriginal rates have risen noticeably. Taking the more conventional measure of unemployment, Altman (1993) has calculated that the ratio of Aboriginal to non-Aboriginal unemployment rates fell from 345.5 per cent in 1986 to 224.3 per cent in 1991. Aboriginal rates are still much higher, but far less so than in the past.

It is important to qualify discussions of relative employment and unemployment rates with data on relative rates of labour force participation since the proportion of Aboriginal people aged 15 years and over who are formally attached to the labour market has always been comparatively low. Evidence from the 1991 Census indicates that this is still the case (Table 3). In fact, Aboriginal labour force participation declined slightly from 42.2 per cent in 1986 to 40.9 per cent in 1991, while non-Aboriginal participation rates remained more or less steady at much higher levels.

A number of points are relevant in interpreting these data. First, compared to the Aboriginal population, the non-Aboriginal population of the Northern Territory is far more responsive to changes in the business cycle and a classic response of surplus labour in times of economic downturn in the Territory has been to move interstate (Taylor 1989b). Available evidence indicates that such a response is far less likely among Aboriginal residents of the Territory (Taylor 1992d), with the result that any growth in Aboriginal working-age population (which has been substantial at 3.1 per cent per annum) has to be absorbed by the local labour market just to keep labour force status at constant levels, to say nothing of actually improving employment rates.

Another factor that is likely to have restricted the rate of growth in labour force participation in particular, may be the success of efforts under the federal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (AEP) to encourage higher levels of Aboriginal attendance and retention in educational institutions. Certainly the proportion of Aboriginal people aged 15 years and over who were attending an educational institution in the Northern Territory, either full-time or part-time, has risen substantially (43.2 per cent), representing an increase from 1,651 in 1986 to 2,365 in 1991. While this growth in attendance at educational institutions may result in employment dividends at some later stage, its immediate impact has been to moderate the labour force participation rate. At the same time, according to Altman (1993), higher educational retention rates account for less than 10 per cent of those not in the labour force which suggests that the standard explanations advanced by labour economists of apparently intractable low participation due to discouraged worker effects or high income replacement ratios, appear to have some validity (Daly 1992; Altman 1993).

Table 4. Aboriginal labour force status by section-of-State and gender: Northern Territory, 1986-91.

Labour force status	Urban		Township		Outstation	
	1986	1991	1986	1991	1986	1991
Males						
Persons aged 15+	3,502	3,983	4,483	5,314	1,879	2,310
Employment pop. ratio	37.7	33.8	27.5	30.7	26.0	36.8
Unemployment rate ^a	31.1	34.7	37.4	25.5	45.3	16.7
Participation rate	54.7	51.8	43.9	41.2	47.4	44.2
Females						
Persons aged 15+	4,093	4,557	4,931	5,852	2,043	2,210
Employment pop. ratio	23.2	28.6	16.3	24.3	11.1	16.8
Unemployment rate ^a	22.7	22.7	36.4	22.7	55.1	16.2
Participation rate	30.0	39.1	25.7	31.5	24.7	20.1

a. Those unemployed as a percentage of the those in the labour force.

Locational and gender variations

A quite different picture of intercensal change in labour force status emerges from a disaggregation of the data by section-of-State and gender (Table 4). In urban areas, for example, contrary to what might be expected, male employment and unemployment rates run counter to the generally favourable trends with employment levels and labour force participation rates falling and unemployment rising. This contrasts with

the fortunes of urban females whose labour force status has notably improved. By far the greatest improvements, however, are apparent in Aboriginal townships and in outstations, where increases in employment rates have been substantial and unemployment rates have shown a remarkable decline, particularly among females.

The actual magnitude and direction of these shifts in labour force status are more clearly indicated in Table 5 which shows that the greatest improvements in employment and reductions in unemployment have been achieved in the smallest and remotest localities. The male unemployment rate at outstations, for example, fell by 28.6 percentage points while that of females virtually halved. Such sizeable impacts in remote rural areas do not derive from free market forces and point to the effect of widespread program intervention, particularly in the form of the CDEP scheme. Conversely, the improvements in labour force status that may have been expected to occur in urban areas due to the application of private and public sector employment programs do not emerge from the data. In 1989-90, for example, a total of 2,535 Aboriginal people were placed on TAP labour market programs in the Northern Territory (DEET 1991: 38) to say nothing of those who may have obtained employment and/or training through mainstream programs of the Commonwealth Employment Service (CES). Even applying a fairly crude assumption that program placements are distributed proportionally according to section-of-State, the lack of positive impact on urban labour force status is striking. One explanation may be that many TAP placements do not represent 'new' entrants to 'new' jobs but simply reflect the recycling of individuals through a constant, or even declining, pool of positions. Another may be found in the short duration of subsidies and program support, combined with the failure of some participants to remain in programs. Whatever the case, it is apparent that in urban areas of the Northern Territory, the AEDP has fallen behind in its task of achieving employment equality or even improving employment status. At best, it has probably prevented Aboriginal people from falling further behind in the very restricted labour market of the late 1980s/early 1990s.

The magnitude of employment shifts in terms of the net number of new jobs created is shown in Table 6. Overall, the number of Aboriginal people in employment in the Northern Territory increased by 1,721 between 1986 and 1991. Just over half of these new jobs (54.2 per cent) went to females. With their far fewer numbers in the labour force, the impact of new employment growth was thus much more favourable for females compared to males. Marked variation in the distribution of new jobs is apparent according to section-of-State. The most notable feature is the very low level of job growth in urban areas, particularly among males. The vast majority of new jobs (88.5 per cent) were created in rural areas. For females, most of these new jobs were in Aboriginal

townships while new jobs for males were almost evenly split between townships and outstations. Thus, only 11.4 per cent of new jobs were created in urban areas where 35.2 per cent of the Aboriginal population aged 15 years and over reside. By contrast, 59.0 per cent of new jobs occurred in townships which accounted for 46.1 per cent of the adult population and 29.6 per cent of the intercensal job growth occurred at outstations where only 18.7 per cent of the adult population was located.

Table 5. Net change in Aboriginal labour force status by section-of-State and gender: Northern Territory, 1986-91.

Labour force status	Change in per cent Urban	Change in per cent Township	Change in per cent Outstation
Males			
Employment/pop. ratio	-3.9	+3.2	+10.3
Unemployment rate	+3.6	-11.9	-28.6
Participation rate	-2.9	-2.7	-3.2
Females			
Employment/pop. ratio	+5.4	+8.0	+5.7
Unemployment rate	0.0	-13.7	-38.9
Participation rate	+9.1	+5.8	-4.6

Table 6. Aboriginal net employment growth by section-of-State and gender: Northern Territory, 1986-91.

	Urban		Townships		Outstations		Total	
	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent	Number	Per cent
Males	26	3.3	400	50.8	362	45.9	788	100.0
Females	170	18.2	617	66.1	146	15.6	933	100.0
Total	196	11.4	1,017	59.0	508	29.6	1,721	100.0

Change in industry of employment

One expectation, following several years of applying the AEDP, was that Aboriginal employment would be more concentrated in particular industry categories when compared with the rest of the workforce, and most notably in those industries allied to the task of servicing the Aboriginal population (Altman and Daly 1992a). Intercensal comparison of broad industry divisions of employment in the Northern Territory

confirms such a trend. In 1986, the index of dissimilarity between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal male employees across the 12 industry divisions was calculated as 35.7. In other words, just over one-third of Aboriginal males (or non-Aboriginal males) would have been required to shift their industry division of employment in order to eliminate any difference between their distributions. By 1991, the index had risen to 43.2 with the compensatory shift required to achieve a balance in industry distributions now involving almost half of all workers. Corresponding indices for female workers (28.9 in 1986 and 34.8 in 1991) show a similar trend towards increased industry segregation.

Locational and gender variations

The actual gains and losses by industry division that have led to a growing concentration in a few industries are shown in Table 7 according to gender and location. It is evident that the lack of male employment growth in urban areas has been due to job losses in almost all industries but particularly in construction and public administration. The loss of construction jobs is consistent with a general decline in that industry. Although male employment in public administration has also generally receded, the loss of Aboriginal employment in this area is more noteworthy in view of AEDP efforts to encourage public sector involvement. Almost all new male jobs in urban areas have been in community services and, to a lesser extent, in the wholesale and retail industry. A slightly broader industry spread of new jobs is apparent among urban females although the familiar pattern of a growing concentration in service jobs emerges once again. This pattern is emphatically revealed in rural localities where almost the entire impetus for new job creation has come from public administration and, particularly in the case of outstations, community service industries.

The factors which lie behind this rapid growth of community service employment, even in the Territory's remotest localities, are not difficult to identify. It is known, for example, that in June 1986 four Northern Territory localities had enlisted in the CDEP scheme with a total of 720 participants. Some of these CDEP scheme workers would have been in employment during the week before the 1986 Census and recorded in the enumeration as such. At the same time, it appears that an element of confusion may have surrounded the correct designation of what some census enumerators at that time viewed as simply receipt of social security and therefore not employment. To the extent that this occurred it would have had the effect of lowering the 'real' employment rate. By June 1991, the total number of Northern Territory localities engaged in the CDEP scheme had risen to 29 with a total of 4,136 participants - an increase of 3,416, or 474 per cent, since 1986.⁵ Only one of these, Tangentyere with 199 participants, was located in an urban area.

Table 7. Net change in Aboriginal employment by industry division, gender and section-of-State: Northern Territory, 1986-91.

Industry	Urban		Township		Outstation	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Agriculture, forestry etc	-43	-4	-81	-27	-18	+4
Mining	+8	+4	-1	-1	+1	+1
Manufacturing	-17	-6	-13	0	+3	+6
Electricity, gas and water	-5	+2	-4	0	0	0
Construction	-55	-6	-28	+2	+11	+3
Wholesale, retail	+33	+29	+24	+33	-11	-2
Transport and storage	-6	-8	+7	+10	-3	0
Communication	-9	-4	+1	-1	0	0
Financial services	-7	-11	+2	-2	-9	-5
Public administration	-63	+34	+211	+202	-6	+1
Community services	+81	+32	+269	+354	+387	+135
Recreation, personal serv.	+7	+40	-26	-10	-20	-6
Not stated	+102	+68	+39	+57	+27	+9
Total	+26	+170	+400	+617	+362	+146

In the 1991 remote area census enumeration, field instructions to interviewers were more clearly spelt out - CDEP scheme participants employed in the week prior to census night were to be recorded as such. Furthermore, where the designated employer was a community council, an industry coding of public administration was applied in cases where councils were listed in the Business Directory, otherwise they were assigned a coding for community services.⁶ Even if only a fraction of CDEP scheme participants were recorded as employed in the 1991 Census, their impact in rural areas on labour force status and employment levels in the public administration and community service industries would clearly have been considerable. This is precisely what the analysis of intercensal change indicates. Indeed, it is not unreasonable to suggest that expansion of the CDEP scheme accounted for all net growth in Aboriginal employment in the Northern Territory, and that without it the numbers employed would have fallen in absolute as well as in proportional terms.

Occupational change

It has been argued elsewhere (Taylor 1992a), that given the direct links between occupational and economic status, as well as the intractability of low occupational status among Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, the

goals of AEDP policy clearly indicate a commitment towards raising the occupational status of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce so that it more closely parallels that of the general workforce. Accordingly, this thrust is explicit in much of the AEDP which lays heavy emphasis on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander placements in formal training and skill improvement programs in both public and private sectors, as well as affirmative action to enhance the representation of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in executive positions. Running counter to this, however, is an expansion of the CDEP scheme which has had the effect of increasing active workforce participation among Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, particularly in remote areas, but generally in unskilled occupations (Altman and Daly 1992b). The upshot of these opposing tendencies in the Northern Territory has been to maintain the degree of occupational segregation between Aborigines and others in the workforce at a constant level. In 1986, the index of dissimilarity between employed Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal males across the 8 major occupational groups was 26.6 and this increased slightly to 27.8 in 1991. Also, little change was found in the female index which rose from 16.3 to 17.5.

Table 8. Net change in Aboriginal employment by occupational major group, gender and section-of-State: Northern Territory, 1986-91.

Occupational major group	Urban		Township		Outstation	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Managers and administrators	+18	+25	-6	+13	-5	+3
Professionals	+16	+50	+33	+59	+2	+17
Para-professionals	+43	+57	+119	+91	+64	+10
Tradespersons	-50	+16	+63	+59	+33	+8
Clerks	+7	-69	-12	+22	-1	+4
Personal services and sales	+22	+46	+29	+136	+8	+27
Plant and machine operators	-57	+5	+17	+7	+27	+3
Labourers and related	-62	-23	+168	+215	+171	+50
Not stated	+89	+63	-11	+14	+63	+24
Total	+26	+170	+400	+617	+362	+146

Locational and gender variations

Although many new jobs have been created in higher-skill categories, particularly in para-professional occupations, the overall impact on skill levels has been moderated by an even greater expansion of labouring jobs, notably in rural areas (Table 8). In urban areas, virtually all additional job growth for males and females has been in managerial and

professional occupations. While this may be encouraging from a policy perspective, more ominous signs are indicated by substantial losses in occupations that are traditionally accessible along gender lines - trade occupations and plant and machine operator jobs for males and clerical jobs for females.

In rural areas, employment growth was experienced across a broader range of occupational groups, although the major emphasis was still on an expansion of para-professional and labouring jobs. Given the focus in the CDEP scheme on the generation of unskilled jobs (Altman and Daly 1992b: 11), there is every reason to suspect that the expansion of labouring jobs in rural areas derives from the growth in CDEP scheme participation. More puzzling is the concomitant growth in skilled employment, particularly of professionals and para-professionals in rural areas. In view of the rural employment impacts already attributed to the CDEP scheme, plus the fact that a 1991 Census cross-classification of professional and para-professional occupations in the Northern Territory by industry of employment (ABS 1991 Census table CAD5003) shows that the vast majority of such jobs (86.8 per cent) are in community services and public administration, it is highly probable that most new skilled jobs in rural areas are also attributable to the expansion of CDEP. This seems to support the idea, first suggested by Altman and Daly (1992b: 15) on the basis of observations from the 1986 Census, that CDEP may have been serving as a substitute funding regime to support the growth of vital community occupations in areas such as health, education, welfare, and office management that are more appropriately the functional responsibilities of the Territory and local governments.

Change in industry sector

The broad distinction in census data between Aboriginal employment in public (government) and private sectors appears to be increasingly problematic. In the 1986 Census, employment provided via Aboriginal organisations and the CDEP scheme was generally classified as private sector employment on the premise that such employers were not government bodies. They are, however, publicly funded. To reflect this, coding procedures were changed in the 1991 Census to classify such employment under local government in those cases where community councils or organisations were clearly stated as the employer. If such an employer was not specified, then a private sector designation was applied. This change in procedure is reflected in the intercensal shifts in industry sector data shown in Table 9, particularly in places such as Aboriginal townships, where employment generated by Aboriginal councils and organisations is relatively high.

Table 9. Net change in industry sector of Aboriginal employment by gender and section-of-State: Northern Territory, 1986-91.

Industry sector	Urban		Township		Outstation	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Australian government	-48	+1	-3	0	-1	-5
State government	-64	-66	-28	-9	+21	-9
Local government	-36	+28	+529	+428	+9	+10
Private sector	+112	+160	-98	+178	+312	+154
Not stated	+62	+47	0	+20	+21	-4
Total	+26	+170	+400	+617	+362	+146

The substantial increase in local government employment evident in Aboriginal townships is difficult to explain in terms other than the growth of the CDEP scheme. The private sector expansion at outstations really reflects the same thing and is most likely a construct of the coding methodology as described above. The more important issue to emerge from the data in Table 9 is most evident in urban areas and concerns the general decline in Commonwealth and Territory government employment. While Commonwealth employment in the Territory also declined for non-Aboriginal workers, their rate of loss at 1.5 per cent was much less than the 11.4 per cent decline observed for Aboriginal workers. As far as employment in the Territory government sector is concerned, a decline of 11.8 per cent for Aboriginal workers was contrary to the trend among others in the workforce whose employment increased by 3.1 per cent. The point to emphasise in all this, of course, is that the AEDP has sought to raise the level of Aboriginal employment in the government sector through its public sector programs. Judging by 1991 Census results, this has not occurred.

Change in hours worked

The most compelling indication that intercensal employment growth is closely allied with the expansion of the CDEP scheme is obtained from data on the actual number of hours worked each week by new Aboriginal employees. Of the net 1,721 additional jobs created since 1986, 97 per cent were part-time (less than 35 hours per week), with only 50 new jobs having longer working hours. In 1986, 34.3 per cent of Aboriginal people in employment worked less than 35 hours per week. By 1991, this had risen to 50.8 per cent. This was mostly due to a 150 per cent increase in the numbers employed for between 1 and 24 hours per week from 940

in 1986 to 2,352 in 1991. This group of part-time workers now constitutes more than one-third (36 per cent) of all Aborigines in employment in the Northern Territory compared to only 19.6 per cent in 1986. While the growth of part-time employment has been a general feature of labour market readjustment in recent years, the same marked effects are not apparent among non-Aboriginal workers in the Northern Territory. In 1986, more than three-quarters (76.5 per cent) of non-Aboriginal workers were employed in full-time jobs, a figure which fell only slightly to 73.2 per cent in 1991.

The actual composition of net new jobs according to hours worked, gender and section-of-State is shown in Table 10. Two features stand out. First, the substantial loss of full-time employment for males in urban areas and Aboriginal townships compared to the growth of full-time employment for females. Second, the over-concentration of new jobs for both males and females in all localities in the lowest category of hours worked - 1-24 hours per week. This is consistent with the nature of new employment generated by CDEP.

Table 10. Net change in full- and part-time Aboriginal employment by gender and section-of-State: Northern Territory, 1986-91.

Hours worked per week	Urban		Township		Outstation	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
0	+20	+36	-4	+9	+5	0
1-24	+81	+43	+414	+401	+357	+114
25-34	+37	+11	+79	+39	+7	+20
35-39	0	+83	+27	+60	-3	+5
40 and over	-145	-41	-59	+112	+9	+12
Not stated	+33	+38	-57	-4	-13	-5
Total	+26	+170	+400	+617	+362	+146

Change in income status

An explicit goal of the AEDP is an improvement in Aboriginal income levels to a point where they equal those of the general population. In this endeavour, much depends on not just accelerating the rate of Aboriginal employment growth above that of the rest of the workforce, but also ensuring that the type of jobs created generate incomes that are at least commensurate with those in general. Given that net new Aboriginal employment in the Northern Territory has been generated by

participation in the CDEP scheme, there seems little prospect that the income gap between Aborigines and the rest of the population in the Northern Territory would have been narrowed. Notwithstanding the customary interpretive difficulties presented by high non-response rates for the census income question and the fact that data on 'no income' were available in 1986 but not in 1991, Table 11 supports the above contention. Indeed, the figures reveal a slight relative decline in the Aboriginal median income from 38.5 per cent of the non-Aboriginal median in 1986 to 37.6 per cent in 1991 with the gap between the two still very considerable. Furthermore, the Aboriginal upper quartile income has also fallen behind from 47.1 per cent of the non-Aboriginal figure in 1986 to 38.8 per cent in 1991.

Table 11. Change in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal individual income status: Northern Territory, 1986-91.

	1986		1991	
	Aboriginal (\$)	Non-Aboriginal (\$)	Aboriginal (\$)	Non-Aboriginal (\$)
Q1 ^a	1,449	5,648	5,355	8,920
Median	5,817	15,270	7,574	20,248
Q3 ^a	10,745	22,810	11,932	30,756
Ratio Aboriginal/ Non-Aboriginal median		38.5		37.6

a. Q1, the first quartile shows the income level which divides the income distribution so that 25 per cent of individuals had incomes below this level and 75 per cent were above this level. The median income divides the income distribution in half and Q3, the third quartile, divides the income distribution so that 75 per cent of individuals had an income below this level and 25 per cent above.

Locational and gender variations

The fact that overall income levels are influenced as much by the nature of work as by the rate of employment growth is reflected in data showing change in Aboriginal income status by section-of-State (Table 12). Despite the fact that intercensal growth in Aboriginal employment has been heavily concentrated in rural townships and outstations, income status remains inversely related to geographic remoteness. While some slight closing of the rural/urban gap is indicated by the fact that township median income rose from 70.9 per cent of the urban median in 1986 to 74.5 per cent in 1991, and that at outstations from 66.1 per cent to 71.3 per cent, the composition of much rural employment as remuneration

based on unemployment benefit equivalence leaves rural areas structurally disadvantaged, compared to urban areas, where a much greater proportion of jobs are full-time and tied to award rates. This is also suggested by a growing gap between urban and rural areas in the upper quartile income figures. At the lower quartile end of the income range, disparities between urban and rural areas are minimised, highlighting the considerable levelling effect of welfare payments irrespective of location.

Table 12. Change in Aboriginal individual income status by section-of-State: Northern Territory, 1986-91.

Income level	Urban		Township		Outstation	
	1986 (\$)	1991 (\$)	1986 (\$)	1991 (\$)	1986 (\$)	1991 (\$)
Q1 ^a	1,934	5,930	1,140	5,514	1,469	5,161
Median	7,432	9,751	5,269	7,206	4,916	6,893
Q3 ^a	13,794	17,748	9,618	10,805	8,794	9,731

a. Q1, the first quartile shows the income level which divides the income distribution so that 25 per cent of individuals had incomes below this level and 75 per cent were above this level. The median income divides the income distribution in half and Q3, the third quartile, divides the income distribution so that 75 per cent of individuals had an income below this level and 25 per cent above.

The primary cause of the widening gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal incomes was a considerable relative decline in Aboriginal male incomes. In monetary terms, the median Aboriginal male income in 1986 was almost half (44.4 per cent) of the total non-Aboriginal median. By 1991, this had fallen to just over one-third (36.2 per cent). In contrast, Aboriginal female median income rose in proportion from 35.5 per cent of the total non-Aboriginal median in 1986 to 39.4 per cent in 1991 and is now higher in monetary terms than that of Aboriginal males (\$7,930 as opposed to \$7,279). If these figures are adjusted according to the Consumer Price Index (73.5 in 1985-86 and 105.3 in 1990-91), the real gender-based shift in incomes is apparent with Aboriginal male incomes falling substantially from a median of \$9,193 in 1986 to \$6,912 in 1991 and the female equivalent showing a clear countercyclical tendency by rising slightly from \$7,380 to \$7,530. This divergence in male and female incomes is consistent with the trend revealed by Treadgold (1988) for the intercensal period 1976-86 and appears to be linked to the relatively better performance of females in sectors of the labour market less affected by the vagaries of the economy.

Conclusion and policy implications

The successful implementation of a policy which seeks to increase the relative rate of Aboriginal employment growth, as well as upgrade occupational status in the hope of raising Aboriginal incomes to less disadvantageous levels, was always going to be difficult in the context of a national economic recession and rising unemployment. This analysis of change in Aboriginal socioeconomic status in the Northern Territory during the intercensal period 1986-91 provides a first indication of the impacts of such policies since they were implemented in the latter half of the 1980s. The results, in terms of stated policy objectives, are mixed.

On the one hand, Aboriginal employment and unemployment rates show distinct signs of improvement leading to a closing of the gap (albeit slowly) in these indicators with the rest of the population. On the other hand, when these results are disaggregated spatially and the nature of employment growth is dissected, the achievement is revealed to be a predominantly rural phenomenon involving mostly part-time work with an increasing emphasis on labouring and para-professional jobs in community services. At the same time, labour force status for males in urban areas has actually worsened while the overall impact, in terms of reducing income differentials, has been negligible.

The most significant policy implication to emerge from this analysis is the indication that recent net Aboriginal employment growth in the Northern Territory has been due entirely to the expansion of the CDEP scheme. While the census provides no direct measure of CDEP employment, nor, indeed, any precise indication as to how such employment was coded, the coincidence of substantially increased participation in the scheme, together with marked shifts in related census characteristics such as rural labour force status, hours worked, industry sector and industry division of employment, leaves no other possible conclusion. With the continued expansion of the CDEP scheme around Australia, it is essential that steps be taken to ensure that scheme participants are adequately identified in official statistics. The most likely means of achieving this would be to indicate involvement in the CDEP scheme in answer to the employer question on the 1996 Census schedule and make provision for this as a coding option for industry sector.

In contrast with the expansion of CDEP scheme employment, is the general lack of growth, and in some cases actual decline, in urban-based public and private sector jobs. While this runs counter to expectations, given the strength of program efforts to encourage such employment, it may be that the impact of AEDP public and private sector programs in the context of a depressed mainstream labour market has been to simply ameliorate what might otherwise have been a far worse outcome. This

proposition is hard to validate from census data alone and requires close scrutiny of DEET's program placement and post-program monitoring (PPM) data to examine the precise nature and spatial application of labour market programs, as well as their links with employment outcomes.

An anticipated corollary of program-driven job growth has been an increased concentration of Aboriginal employment into narrower segments of the labour market. Involvement in public administration and community service industries, for example, is now more concentrated than before as is employment in the local government sector and in para-professional and labouring occupations. While this may reflect, in part, census procedures in coding Aboriginal data, the pattern is consistent with the expanding role of Aboriginal organisations and special programs as employers of Aboriginal labour. While there is nothing inherently problematic with this, not least as it may reflect Aboriginal preferences, it does raise the issue of a likely growing dependence of Aboriginal employment on sustained public funding. Not only does this run counter to the avowed aim of government policy to reduce Aboriginal dependence, it also ties an increasing share of Aboriginal employment to the caprices of government policy. As Altman and Daly (1992a) have noted, this poses a policy dilemma in so far as, on the one hand, striving for employment equality via the mainstream labour market exposes Aboriginal people to the vagaries of market fluctuations (as seen, for example, in the downturn in urban male employment in the Northern Territory), while on the other hand, dependence on government subvention leaves Aboriginal employment vulnerable to changes in government policy. If, as in the Northern Territory, such employment is primarily in the CDEP scheme, it also hampers the longer-term AEDP goal of achieving income equality. Despite obvious growth of Aboriginal employment in the Northern Territory between 1986 and 1991, income differentials remain firmly in place not only between Aborigines and the rest of the population, but also between Aborigines resident in rural areas as opposed to those living in urban areas.

A related issue concerns the possible role of the CDEP scheme as a substitution funding regime. Given the excessive concentration of Aboriginal employment in areas of the labour market that are functionally the preserve of State and local governments, the likelihood that the CDEP scheme serves to offset responsibilities in this area has frequently been raised (Altman and Sanders 1991b: 520-1). Empirical support for such a notion has been presented by Altman and Daly (1992b) using 1986 Census data. The evidence of labour market shifts revealed by 1991 Census data in the Northern Territory, particularly in industry sector of employment, strengthens this hypothesis. What is not clear, however, is the extent to which apparent job losses in Commonwealth, State and private sector employment simply represent hidden transfers

caused by reclassification into an expanded local government sector. Indeed, the census can provide no direct measure of employment substitution and the intercensal change data are only indicative of the possibility.

Aggregate data on socioeconomic change clearly has the capacity to conceal important intra-regional and gender variations. In brief, marginal improvements in labour force status at the Territory level are seen to be reversed in urban areas and exaggerated in rural areas. Notwithstanding this, rural incomes remain firmly behind those in urban areas. Likewise, the economic status of women shows distinct improvement compared to that of men which, in income terms at least, has regressed. This clearly underlines the importance of assessing policy impacts on Aboriginal socioeconomic status at varying scales of analysis and for different sub-groups in the population. At the same time, however, spatial disaggregation of census data reveals intercensal shifts in population distribution which appear untenable in the context of normal demographic processes. To the extent that this may undermine confidence in the analysis of change in related census indicators, urgent scrutiny and validation of regional demographic data is required, and consideration needs to be given to possible means of adjustment should any glaring discrepancies emerge, before detailed policy analysis based on census interrogation proceeds further.

Notes

1. Hereafter, unless otherwise stated, the terms 'Aborigines' and 'Aboriginal' are used throughout this paper as an abbreviation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. In 1991, Torres Strait Islanders constituted only 1.5 per cent of the indigenous population of the Northern Territory.
2. In distinguishing between Aboriginal townships and outstations at the base of the settlement hierarchy a rational basis for classification is required. While population size and stability is one criterion, the scale and range of central place functions is another. These are both taken into account by the Northern Territory Local Government Grants Commission when deciding on eligibility for grants to communities.
3. To some extent, the distinction between urban, and particularly township and outstation populations, is a false one and subject to demographic interpretation due to substantial population mobility between the various types of locality. However, there undoubtedly exists a continuously resident population at each section-of-State even though the actual individuals may vary from time to time. The census counts shown here represent temporal cross-sections through these resident enumerated populations, and to that extent are indicative of the changing distribution between sections-of-State.
4. All the data contained in this paper were derived from special tabulations of the 1986 and 1991 Censuses produced by the National Aboriginal Statistics Unit of the Australian Bureau of Statistics, Darwin.

5. In June 1986 these included: Gapuwiyak, Yirrkala, Galiwinku and Barunga. By June 1991 the list had expanded to include: Gapuwiyak, Yirrkala, Barunga, Milikapiti, Bawinanga, Nauiyu Nambiyu, Palarumpi, Pine Creek, Ngadunggay, Gumatj, Laynhapuy, Marthakal, Umbakumba, Ngarinman, Dagaragu, Lajamanu, Beswick, Yugal Mangi, Mungoorbada, Alpurrurulam, Canteen Creek, Waanyi Garawai, Tangentyere, Ntaria, Tjuwampa, Willowra, Yuelamu, Aputula, Santa Teresa, Imanpa.
6. Correspondence from the Director, Population Census Processing and User Services, ABS, Canberra, dated 24 February 1993.

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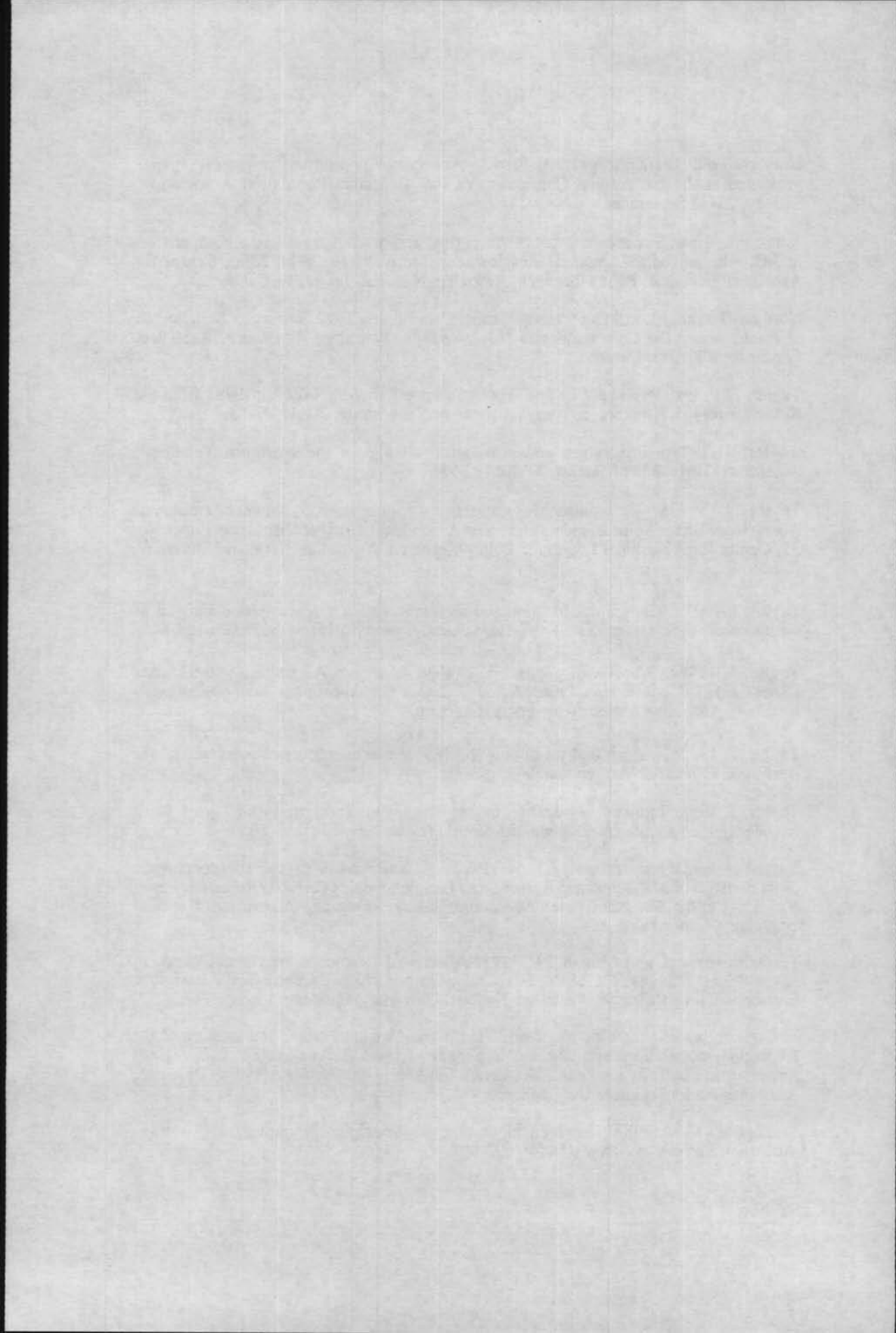
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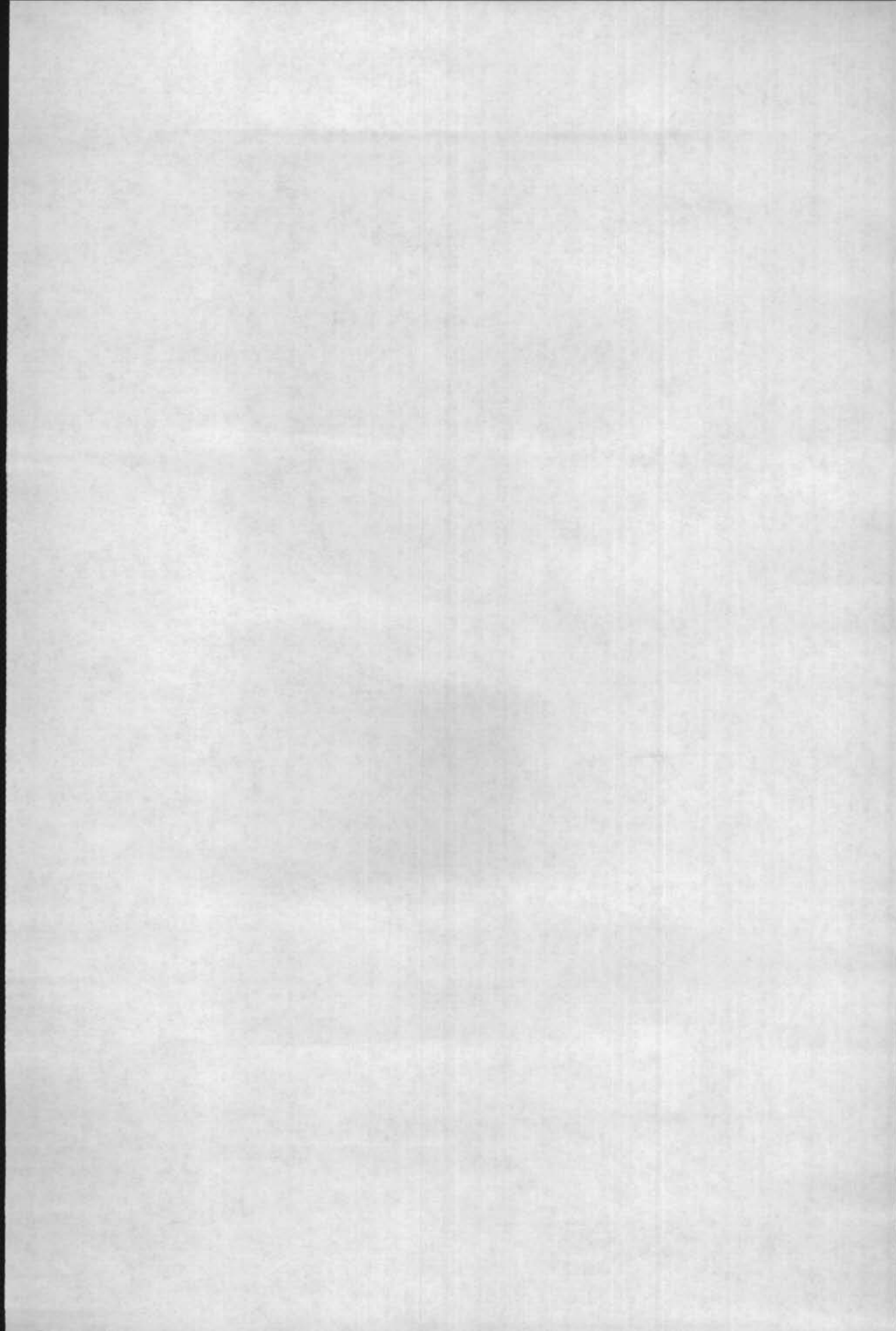
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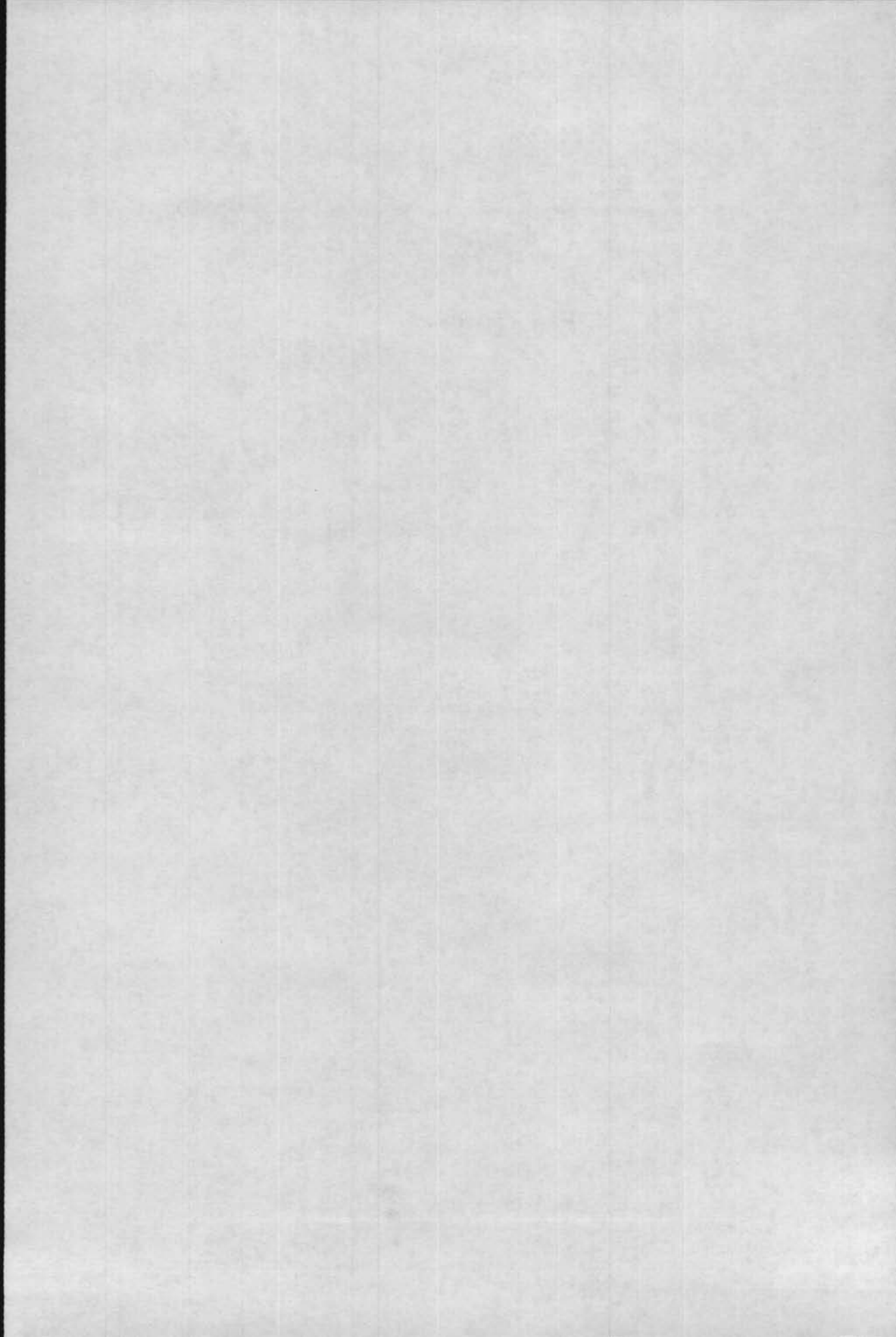
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