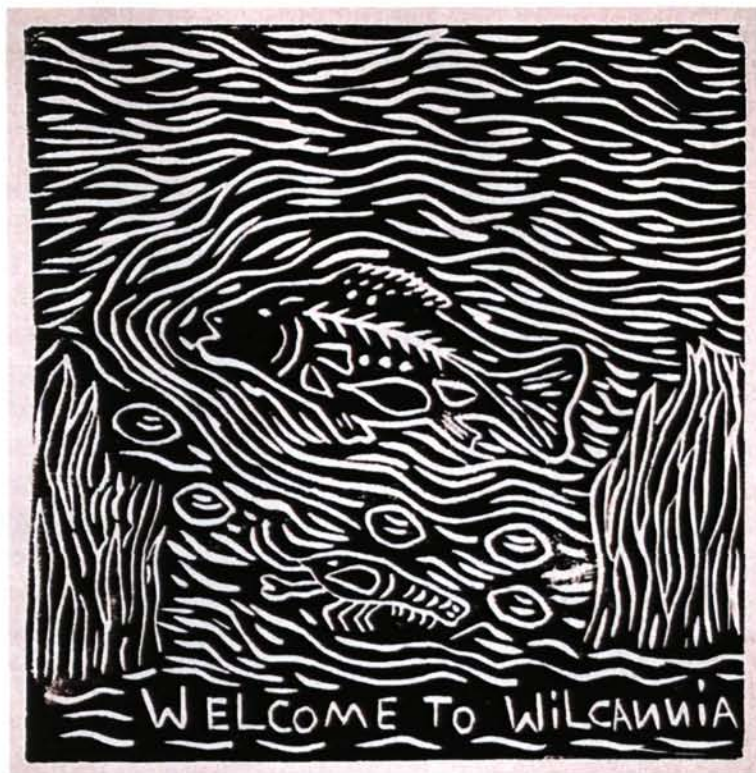


Articulating Culture(s): Being Black in Wilcannia



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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Anthropology

Division of Society, Culture, Media and Philosophy

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MARCH 2006

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Cover Image: ‘Welcome to Wilcannia’, lino print by Badger Bates

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Abstract

Dominant society discourses and images have long depicted the Aboriginal people of the town of Wilcannia in far Western New South Wales as having no 'culture'. In asking what this means and how this situation might have come about, the thesis seeks to respond through an ethnographic exploration of these discourses and images. The work explores problematic and polemic dominant society assumptions regarding 'culture' and 'Aboriginal culture', their synonyms and their effects. The work offers Aboriginal counter-discourses to the claim of most white locals and dominant culture that the Aboriginal people of Wilcannia have no culture. In so doing the work presents reflexive notions about 'culture' as verbalised and practiced, as well as providing an ethnography of how culture is more tacitly lived.

Broadly, the thesis looks at what it is to be Aboriginal in Wilcannia from both white and black perspectives. The overarching concern of this thesis is a desire to unpack what it means to be black in Wilcannia. The thesis is primarily about the competing values and points of view within and between cultures, the ways in which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people tacitly and reflexively express and interpret difference, and the ambivalence and ambiguity that come to bear in these interactions and experiences. This thesis demonstrates how ideas and actions pertaining to 'race' and 'culture' operate in tandem through an exploration of values and practices relating to 'work', 'productivity', 'success', 'opportunity' and the domain of 'art'. These themes are used as vehicles to understanding the 'on the ground' effects and affects of cultural perceptions and difference. They serve also to demonstrate the ambiguity and ambivalence that is experienced as well as being brought to bear upon relationships which implicitly and explicitly are concerned with, and concern themselves with difference.

This is to certify that this thesis has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution. All work contained within this document is original and my own, unless otherwise acknowledged.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Gibson', is written over a horizontal line.

Lorraine Douglas Gibson

Date: 21. 09. 06.

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