Chapter 3. Cultural Values: Ambivalences and Ambiguities

This chapter is about the ambivalences and ambiguities relating to cultural identity which manifest themselves through differing inter and intra-cultural interpretations, articulations and actions. In particular, I explore inter-cultural attitudes and ideas which relate to patterns of consumption, education, work, self betterment and the forms of labelling that take place when people fail to adhere to the "caring and sharing" ethos. This exploration also considers how the wider Aboriginal trope of "caring and sharing" informs and is bound up with ideas about Aboriginal identity, Aboriginal sociality and Aboriginality itself. As Schwab (1995:3) and MacDonald (2003, 2004) point out, the trope of "caring and caring" informs a complex system which both extends across and shapes ideas and practices relating to kinship and relatedness, social obligation, personhood, morality, and goods and services.

For many Aboriginal people work and its 'rewards' sit ambivalently with the upholding of a distinct Aboriginal identity. Aboriginal people recognise that regular employment affords some of the material things that many would like to have, but are not prepared to forfeit other culturally perceived and culturally attributed values, social obligations and desires (as well as the time to fulfil these). Nevertheless, it would be incorrect to say that Aboriginal people in Wilcannia do not wish to engage in the role of consumer – although this is a different engagement to Bauman's 'norm' which links identity to certain kinds of materiality and to consumption. The norm is at some level desired but is not held up to be as culturally important as other expressed, less material 'values' such as ideas about kinship and 'caring and sharing' which work against the desire of, care of, and accumulation of material things.

When Aboriginal people in Wilcannia criticise whitefellas as not caring for one another and as being obsessed with money and 'things', they cite the "caring and sharing" nature of Aboriginal culture – a culture in which one does not need or hanker after material things. Schwab (1995:3-7) gives several examples from Aboriginal communities around Australia which speak to the emphasis placed on the "caring and sharing ethos". Indeed, "caring and sharing" is something of a pan-Aboriginal trope. It has gained increasing currency as a means of both differentiating Aborigines from non-Aborigines and in affirming an Aboriginal social value of some positive substance (cf. Austin-Broos 2003; MacDonald 2000; Cowlishaw 2004a; Schwab 1995). Keen also comments that Aboriginal "...children are taught that Aborigines are people of a superior kind – more trustworthy, kind, warm and ready to share than non-Aborigines" (1994:6). Moreover, Schwab (1995:12) considers that

for those communities classed as urban, this value "provides a mechanism to exhibit Aboriginality" and is "an act of identity and belonging". However, "caring and sharing" is not a straightforward and easily understood value (MacDonald 2000; Schwab 1995), the rules are hard to discern and differing opinions exist as to how this trope operates, as well as how people think it *should* operate. The holding up of caring and sharing as a cultural value which is distinct from whitefellas is nevertheless common.

There is some degree of internal conflict in taking the moral high ground in relation to materiality. Nevertheless, by asserting moral ascendancy in an apparent purposeful rejection of the worship of the material, Aboriginal people claim a sense of agency and a particular identity. This is not an illusory agency; however, its assertion and practice sits uncomfortably with other more material interests that are held. As Cowlishaw contends, despite Aboriginal fears, suspicions and complaints about whites, there is "...a disavowed admiration, envy, and even longing" (2004:42) for the position of whites. Thus, the holding up of an oppositional stance is not without its own tensions, and creates a certain dissonance for some Aboriginal people.

Work and Intercultural Identity

As in dominant culture, social, economic and political nuances and differences are present in the Aboriginal 'community' of Wilcannia. However, these differences are often similarly subsumed by an overarching Aboriginal rhetoric in the drive to produce some semblance of a clear Aboriginal identity *and* a clear cultural differentiation from the whites. Thus, it is easier for locals (both black and white) to compare Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people as holistic categories than showing intra-cultural differences (political, economic, social, class) which make messy and complicate any general comparisons being made. There are of course pragmatic as well as more conceptual theoretical tensions when considering the differences between identity of a more voluntary nature, and that which is ascribed by virtue of structural, historical and ideological factors. The more voluntary and agent-centred aspects of the 'individual' creating an identity *with* some and *against* others may be in tension with the less voluntary positioning occasioned by ideology, language and history (Bottomley 1997:42-43). As Bottomley ably demonstrates, there is a "double edged aspect" of self-identification and structural factors (1997:43) which, in the case of Wilcannia, include a history of racial, cultural, economic and political difference through many patterns and mutations of identity and identification over time. The deeply embedded racial division of rural areas of Australia (Cowlishaw 1997:179), and the structural effects of protection,

assimilation and self-determination has seen a range of identities and ways of identifying both with and against others come to play. As Bottomley notes,

> One can identify positively with people who are perceived as similar to oneself, but mutual identification rests on shared objectives and understandings, as well as less conscious and less controllable orientations, perhaps in the form of habitus as described by Bourdieu – 'a sense of one's place' – and by definition, of the place of others. To put it more strongly self-identification requires recognition, in a precarious balance that reflects back to my introductory comments about the significance of structure, policy and interaction within specific social fields (1997:43).

I am interested in what Aboriginal identity means for people in Wilcannia: the processual and productive nature of identity and identification as these are actively invoked and in the ways that identity is ascribed inter and inter-culturally. What does it mean to invoke a Barkindji identity or an Aboriginal identity? The requirement to justify one's Barkindji and/or Aboriginal identity, particularly in the context of native title, has institutionalised Aboriginal culture as an objectifiable 'thing'. I argue that this thematising has been taken on board in many areas of life: in the making of art, in reflecting upon and in responding to racism, and in the battle for Wilcannian Aborigines to assert that they are indeed "real" Aborigines.

Although identity is etymologically linked with sameness, in asserting sameness, difference is also being invoked. At times it is the rejection of being the same as the Other that leads to the assertion of identity; rejection, being a form of denial, often involves some degree of antipathy towards that which is being denied. Indeed, as people in Wilcannia have had increasing interaction with dominant society institutions and agencies since the 1960's, both black and white increasingly emphasise difference (see also Austin-Broos 2003:119). The "caring and sharing" trope is but one expression of this asserted difference, illuminating as it does particular aspects of 'being' Aboriginal and Aboriginal identity (see also Schwab 1995:12).

The book *A dialogue on Indigenous Identities: 'Warts and All'*, written by a group of nine Indigenous Australian academics (Oxenham et al., 1999), attempts to highlight the diversity of Aboriginal identities and the problematic criteria that many Aboriginal people use to define themselves. According to one of the authors,

> We're defining ourselves...against white people. But the extreme parts of white society, the extremely conservative parts. So that's what we're trying to get at, you know, maybe that's something of a false dichotomy, because there's no homogenous Aboriginal person or group, as there's no homogenous white. But what we pick for our comparison is the very conservative Protestant middle class image (Dudgeon 1999:98).

The Aboriginal experience of employment and its rewards to some extent (historically by virtue of the jobs held and currently by virtue of skill levels and job availability) militates against the likelihood of gaining equal positioning to whites in terms of material wealth and its associated dominant cultural power. I would say that Aboriginal people *associate* themselves with white working class attitudes, whilst defining themselves *against* the white middle classes: the latter in terms of the white middle class' disproportionate access to power, control and material wealth. However, as Dudgeon notes, because Aboriginal people see themselves in light of the white working class, Aboriginal ways get confused with "working class white ways"... For example, to go to university or to get a good education can be to "go above yourself" (Dudgeon in Oxenham et al. 1999:98). This is seen as doing better and "doing better [can imply] the appropriation of a more European lifestyle" (Morris 1994:58), – a more middle class white European lifestyle. I should emphasise that I am not trying to subsume Aboriginal identity with that of the white working class. I am, however, trying to show that working class white ways in terms of attitudes to education and career have certain parallels with some Aboriginal views.

Paul Willis makes the statement that, "The processes through which labour power comes to be subjectively understood and objectively applied and their interrelationships is of profound significance for the type of society that is produced" (1977:2). This subjective understanding coupled with its objective application sees white people in Wilcannia controlling the majority of the skilled and professional positions. Whites own and run the businesses in town: whites control the means as well as the forms of what constitutes production and the income from production. They also control the forms and processes through which labour power is understood and acted upon.

The kinds of jobs which Aborigines previously held such as shearing, droving and fencing are now virtually non-existent and Aboriginal people are not stepping up or stepping into other contemporarily available positions. The lack of appropriate skills and education are of course aspects for consideration, but these cannot be isolated from a complex array of other economic, social and political factors.

I contend that some Aboriginal people in Wilcannia respond to their subjection by rejecting regular employment. This rejection is at times outright but is also linked with the feeling many Aboriginal people in Wilcannia express that they are only offered the "shit jobs" that whitefellas will not do. Why strive for the "shitty jobs" of the white working class? Perhaps Aboriginal people, in resisting the dominant culture way of 'work', are resisting becoming

the even poorer (always black) version of 'poor white trash' – the black working proletariat – which, to date, has been their only real option. Thus, although it was anticipated in the early days of the colony that Aboriginal people would eventually join the working class, there is little evidence that Aboriginal people think of themselves in this way, nor do they see themselves as a group in relation to 'work' (MacDonald 2004:4 & 6). As MacDonald notes, there is little evidence that Aboriginal workers of the pastoral industry were conscious "...of themselves as part of a working class even though... they were aware of their rights as workers" (MacDonald 2004:13-14). Like other Aboriginal groups in NSW, the people of Wilcannia are no longer 'People of the Dreaming' in the same way that their distant ancestors were, neither, however, are they people of the white working class (MacDonald 2004:17).

In Bourke, another town with a high Aboriginal population, blacks express similar "contemptuous" feelings towards the type of jobs on offer (Cowlishaw 2004a:103). "When the cotton industry wants the chippers we all know that that's a job for blackfellas. You don't see a lot of white people chipping the cotton because it's far too hot and it's too dirty. The white people wouldn't do it" (Cowlishaw 2004a:103). The rejection of these "shit jobs" is a coherent response to what is seen to be the subjection of black people. People talked about how white "consultants" come to town and charge "hundreds of dollars a day" for what is seen to be very little 'work', paid for by "black dollars". Many of these consultants are recruited by federally- funded Aboriginal agencies and government agencies as "experts", including anthropologists, archaeologists, and other 'professional' people with expertise in 'Aboriginal culture', 'capacity building', 'governance' and 'training'.

One of my Aboriginal friends was asked to go out with an archaeologist and another Barkindji woman on a site survey. This survey was to determine the extent to which the laying of underground communication cables might interfere with Aboriginal sites of importance, such as those containing human remains, cultural artifacts and those with ceremonial or ancestral Dreaming links. My friend found out how much the archaeologist was going to earn for two days work (about eight hundred dollars) and he said, "if them there fellas can get that, I'm going to ask for the same". His reasoning is that he is a cultural expert by virtue of being part of the culture whose heritage was possibly at risk. Indeed, it is reasonable to ask: what better *cultural* expert can there be? But this is not how expertise is measured. Experts in this context are people who are validated by white educational structures, practices and measures – people who can demonstrate their expertise through

proof such as mainstream education with associated qualifications and a curriculum vitae with demonstrated outcomes. This is only *commonsense,* the kind of "commonsense" that "...assumes the dominant culture way of perceiving the world "is the natural, self-evident one..." (Morris 1997:64). This kind of commonsense dictates that expertise is measured according to dominant culture legitimation. The "informal, intimate transmission of skills" is no longer respected, knowledge must be authenticated on paper (Gellner 1987:29).

My friend had a 'service' to sell, a service which legislation required to be purchased. My friend asked for the same amount as the archaeologist half expecting not to get it, but at the same time being aware that all developers are required to undertake an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), and hire TOs where Aboriginal heritage might be uncovered. He was pleased but nevertheless surprised when he got the amount that he asked for and laughed that maybe he should ask for more next time. This view might seem *unreasonable* and even fraudulent to some whites, but *reasoning* of the kind which sees a TO as a legal requirement to a survey, but not an expert, is unreasonable to many Aboriginal people. Moreover, the opportunity to make this kind of money and the knowledge that you, or your fellow TOs, must be consulted, affords a sense of power within dominant structures which is rarely offered. In this instance, my friend can be thought to be asserting both his cultural expertise and his financial worth as equivalent to a white professional. I would suggest that this does not mean he wishes to associate himself with the white middle classes in any pointed or purposeful way. Rather, he is asserting and demonstrating his capacity as a 'cultural expert', as well as his ability to take or leave this kind of 'status' – a thumbing of his nose, if you like, which at the same time offers self-esteem.

If there is the feeling that the only jobs available to you are "shit jobs" that whitefellas are not seen to want, the tendency to 'knock them back' is understandable. High unemployment and the offer of what are perceived to be lesser valued, lesser paid, often short-term government-funded jobs and programmes does not encourage either a strong work ethic or any sense of personal worth in relation to mainstream regular 'work'. Mainstream work and 'non-shit' jobs are seen to be the domain of the whites, or those who are *like* whites. In rejecting both, there is a rejection of whiteness and its values, and an assertion of blackness and its values: being black means not being white. The contradictions and impossibilities are, however, at times a double bind and a double burden. Asserting blackness means positioning oneself with particular identificatory practices, relations and alliances against whiteness, against white ways of working and being. This helps "...to construct both the

identities of particular subjects and also distinctive class forms at the cultural and symbolic level as well as at the economic and structural level" (Willis 1977:2). However, such attitudes and practices entail a continuation of subjection in certain terms.

Willis' (1977) discussion of the working class in Northern England in the 1970's provides a relevant comparison. He talks of the "element of self-damnation" apparent in the attitudes of the working class in relation to their taking on identificatory practices and roles which the middle classes might perceive to be counter-productive and harmful. However, Willis argues that this 'damnation' is paradoxically experienced "as true learning, affirmation, appropriation, and as a form of resistance" (1977:2). Similarly, although dominant culture may perceive Aboriginal people's refusal to participate in the "shit jobs" available to them (or indeed to take up the role of the 'working class worker' altogether) as counter-productive, for many people in Wilcannia it is a positive form of resistance.

Many Aboriginal people oppose and resist the identifying link of whiteness and regular mainstream work both directly and indirectly. An example of this opposition was related to me by a white workplace trainer who works for an Aboriginal housing service. This incident took place between the trainer and one of four Aboriginal workers fixing up a house. According to the trainer, the workers had arrived late and then proceeded to make a cup of tea, have a smoke and a yarn. The trainer indicated that the work being done was spasmodic and often delayed whilst the workers talked with people they knew passing by.

After lunch, one of the Aboriginal workers said that he was leaving. The trainer asked him where he was going and the man replied that he had a doctor's appointment. The trainer then asked him why he had made the appointment on a day the worker knew several people had been organised to come together to complete a job. The trainer told the worker that his presence was required for the job to be completed that day. According to the trainer, the worker "went off" at him saying he had to look after his health and that he had diabetes. The trainer said that he didn't mean for the man not to go to the doctor, but that it might be better if he could plan his visits around work. The worker asked the trainer if he wanted him "to work like a white cunt". When the trainer asked him what he meant he replied, "twenty-four hours a day".

Inhering within this dialogue is an assertion of differentiation, as well as a mutual assertion of 'rights' with inter-cultural overtones. In voicing his rights to good health, and in not wanting to work twenty-four hours a day, the man is asserting his difference from those

"white cunts". The supervisor, on the other hand, is asserting the 'right' to expect a worker to account for time considered to be 'work' time, 'paid' time, time 'owned' by the employer. Clearly, the "cultural characteristics" of attitudes to work "...are here a kind of companion to racial identity" (Cowlishaw 2004a:118).

An Aboriginal attitude to work is sometimes expressed with humour and not a little irony. One young Aboriginal man, Jarrid, who holds an outdoor job with the Shire and who is known for being a "hard worker", plays his guitar and sings the following song which he wrote about the Community Development Employment Programme. The chorus of this song seems to be modelled on the Jimmy Little hit song *Royal Telephone* recorded in 1963.

> *The CDEP Lament.*
>
> *I drove past the yard early Monday morning*
> *All the boys just laying there just stretched out on the lawn*
> *I asked them then "Is there no work today"*
> *They said they were waiting there until we get our pay*
>
> *Chorus: Telephone the office, Oh what joy divine*
> *CDEP will pay you even if you're not on time*
> *You can go up to the yard and sit around all day*
> *Because in the evening you will still get your pay*
>
> *After smoko time I went to have a look*
> *All the boys were sittin' there reading dirty books*
> *I just said to them, "There's still no work today"?*
> *They said we are waiting here we never got our pay*
>
> *Repeat Chorus.* (Jarrid Cattermole 2003 Wilcannia).

This song at once recognises a particular attitude to 'work' and 'reward' in an accepting and humorous way, whilst also recognising the irony of the situation; that is, the song is a *lament.*

Coconuts

A dilemma of ambivalence in relation to regular employment and its associations with whiteness can be more fully elaborated when looking at Aboriginal people who are called "coconuts" by other Aboriginal people. An exploration into the naming of coconuts further

exemplifies the importance of not only kin and social relationships, but actions, traits and characteristics in determining the social worth of a person, to *who you is* and therefore one's social value. Whether a person is employed or unemployed is irrelevant in that the sum of a person is measured against other qualities, actions and characteristics irrespective of the 'type' or supposed status of the occupation in dominant culture terms. However, importantly, employment is often the catalyst that stands to generate negative measures of personhood: coconuts are very definitely employed.

The statement he/she's "a fucken' coconut" is one made by an Aboriginal person about another Aboriginal person. When I asked what this meant, I always got the same answer, "It means you're black on the outside and white on the inside". Similar metaphors are employed by Native Americans and African Americans, who use the terms "apples" and "oreos" respectively. To be an apple is to be red on the outside and white on the inside and to be an oreo (chocolate-coloured biscuit with a white cream filling) is to be black on the outside and white on the inside. All invoke a traitor-like status suggestive of a too-close white affiliation. The category itself shows some of the polarisation of Aboriginal politics. Part of this can be linked to the creation of Aboriginal-designated positions in the public sector which has seen increasing economic and therefore social *intra*-cultural inequality.

People in Wilcannia said that being a coconut means you are "like a whitefella", "just like those white cunts". Coconuts in these contexts are people who "don't share", who "don't sit down with us blackfellas", who "only think about themselves" and "don't think about our people", who "keep a white house" and who prefer the company of white people to black people. This is an expression of disapprobation and like the term '*white* cunt' it is not a label to joke about/with.[69] A black person can call a white friend a "cunt" in jest and without causing insult; similarly a white person can jokingly greet an Aboriginal friend by calling him a "black bastard". However, "white cunts" and "coconuts" are unambiguously insulting terms.

People in Wilcannia make judgements about specific Aboriginal people who hold down certain types of jobs. These comments, however, are usually framed in the context of

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69 Cowlishaw talks of an "interstitial group" who "sometimes call each other coconuts and up-town niggers in fun and anger" (1988a:115). This interstitial group is a "very loose grouping consisting of some who partially reject Aboriginal identification [and] others who are active leaders in Aboriginal organizations" (1988a:114). These are of course some of the coconuts of whom I speak. However, most of my time was spent with those outside of this interstitial group, those who name the coconuts. Therefore, I did not experience this level of jocularity in relation to the term. My experience was more akin to coconuts being "accused of disloyalty to their own people and also to themselves", in that coconuts have forgotten who they are (Cowlishaw 1988a:253).

passing comment on the actions or behaviour of that person: to how a particular person is acting or treating another particular person or particular people in the community. They are not explicitly connected with the holding of a job, or the job held.

Even though all the coconuts I came to hear about hold jobs, not all who hold jobs are coconuts. That said, I never heard the term applied to someone who was unemployed. When people comment on certain individuals being coconuts, they do not emphasise the type of job held or the types of activity the job entails. "It's her job" or "he's just doing his job" are not considerations when evaluating job-holder behaviour towards people in the community. Although job requirements are mostly not criticised, the holders of certain jobs come under particular attack. These jobs are generally service-oriented and administration positions for government or Aboriginal organisations in the areas of health, the justice system and Aboriginal governance. Notably, most of these jobs are held by Aboriginal people who do not live in town, but who come to work in Wilcannia periodically. Some of the people who hold these jobs and who are Wilcannia-born but no longer live in Wilcannia come in for specific criticism, as I will discuss later in this chapter.[70] Yet, although the job per se is never identified as the cause of 'coconuttiness', in a real sense it is because of the job that *some* of the criticized behaviours and characteristics are evidenced and others become *possible*. Nevertheless, criticisms are always framed in terms of the behaviours and characteristics seemingly evidenced rather than the nature of the job itself.

A job is not considered to be a valid reason why a person might feel unable to observe certain social obligations and responsibilities within a relational kin framework. That cunt B is a coconut by virtue of agreeing with whitefellas, "ignoring" Uncle X in the street or "their own family", of not "lending" Auntie Y some money when she was "short", of keeping "a white house", of not wanting to "sit down and have a drink" with blackfellas and of "big noting" him/herself. In other words, people are coconuts when obfuscating what is seen to be their blackfella identity, social responsibilities and modes of acceptable behaviour.

Those who privilege being on time for a business meeting in preference to responding immediately to a request to see Auntie "up the Mallee", or because "Auntie needs a lift downtown" or a "lift to Dubbo", stand to be seen as coconuts. Excusing yourself from having a yarn in the street or from cooking a feed for Nana because you have to be

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70 Although many Wilcannian people have moved to Broken Hill for work (as well as other reasons), not all of these people are thought to be coconuts. Nevertheless, because of the strong link to jobs that this title has, moving away from Wilcannia and securing a job increases the potential for being so named.

somewhere else for work is being like a coconut. People in positions where they engage with whitefellas in clearly political arenas (such as ATSIC[71], the Community Working Party, the Land Council, and other Aboriginal affiliated organisations) and who engage in coconut behaviours and characteristics are often doubly disliked and multiply named. This is because these people are seen to have particular obligations to Aboriginal people. Interestingly, many times I was told that someone was a coconut by someone who others referred to in the same way.

Although coconut behaviour is generally agreed upon and some people never seem to be free of the title, it is also used to good effect as a known insult when rival families and factions seek to put-down those who are seen to be gaining too much. Being a coconut is not necessarily always a person's ascribed identity in toto – it can be part of their apportioned identity in certain contexts. That is, you can be named a coconut because you big note yourself and hang around with white politicians or white business people, and by preferring the company of whites to blacks. However, a person named a coconut can move outside of this title by virtue of some redeeming behaviour. Thus, although many people are seemingly permanent coconuts, one can shift in and out of this status depending on context and perceived behaviour. Whilst some are labelled coconuts for certain behaviours, others who engage in similar behaviours are named instead as "greedy bastards" or "bitches". Favouring family in decisions to do with delegating housing, other resources and jobs over which one has some authority is not always seen as being a coconut. The particular behaviour involved, as well as who is doing the naming, and their relationship to the named, will specify whichever title is in operation.

There is a strong inequality of access to resources such as vehicles, available 'cultural' consultancies and housing through, for example, the Local Land Council and the Community Working Party. Some of the people who hold positions of authority in Aboriginal bureaucracy have what is tantamount to a mafia-like control of Aboriginal resources, including government funding. These people are criticised for putting the family ahead of "the people" (depending on the context, "the people" can mean all Aboriginal people or specifically Barkindji people). Despite the general criticism of putting self or family ahead of "the people", I experienced only a very few examples of individuals putting "the people", or the perceived needs of the people, before themselves or their own family. Yet, those who

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71   ATSIC was still an active force during my time in Wilcannia.

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create what might be called coconut empires are also those who talk most loudly and most often about their dedication to "my people" over the individual or family view. A Barkindji man picked up my copy of Gillian Cowlishaw's *Blackfellas Whitefellas* one day and laughed until he was wiping tears from his eyes – "Aaaaw fuuuuuck" he said as he continued to laugh. He had just read about a Murri saying of one black leader "If I hear her talk about *my people* again I'll throw up" (2004a:131).

The irony of the rhetoric of "my people" is not lost on most of 'the people'. According to many locals, it is mainly those who have most financial, social and political control and who look out most pointedly for their families and friends that espouse the rhetoric of "my people". Like politicians in dominant culture, some of those who situate themselves as 'of the people' are not always 'for the people'. The coconut empires created by these cultural brokers elicit (from 'the people') disgust, anger, laughter and irony. In mainstream dominant culture, most of 'the people' whinge and complain about 'the pollies' but are in the main apathetic about instigating change. For many Aboriginal people in Wilcannia there is certainly a degree of apathy towards motivating change through action. However, in Wilcannia, not only do most of the decisions made by coconut empires directly affect much of the community, the kin relationships which are present both inflame and temper the responses.

Access to money, and the way a person chooses to spend, is another aspect of being a coconut. Whilst money is needed for what it provides, and is therefore of some value, to accumulate money is to deny one's social responsibility and relatedness (MacDonald 2004:16). Indeed, accumulating anything which is not seen to be appropriately shared is viewed as a sign of greed as opposed to demonstrating success or thrift (MacDonald 2004:16). If you are seen to have plenty and are unwilling to share with those who have less, this is acting like a coconut. The notion that an individual works hard for his money and therefore deserves to enjoy the rewards of that labour is not a sentiment most Aboriginal people in Wilcannia hold. At least, this sentiment is not actively promoted as it operates as a negation of the values inhering within the caring and sharing ethic.

Access to money allows certain choices to be made: the choice to wear smart clothes, to buy goods such as a television, a DVD player and furniture for the house; however, "taking pleasure and pride in having 'nice things' in the realm of house and clothes can expose one to suspicion of wanting to be white" (Cowlishaw 2004a:114). It is not choosing to buy these things that prompts being named a coconut, it is if these things are seen to be bought at the

expense of, or valued over, other more 'social' alternatives. In economic terms, these alternatives can be thought of as a social 'opportunity cost' which comes with the social obligations of sharing with and lending to kin. Sharing can mean allowing extended family to come and live in your house for undetermined periods of time, the expectation being that those with money (itself equated to those with certain jobs or access to resources) have plenty to share. By restricting access to your house, it is more likely that the house is seen as a 'white' house. White houses are those where there is some degree of material comfort and pleasure and pride in this. If unlimited access is allowed to your house, it is not a white house by virtue of allowing access. A high access house can never be a white house as high numbers of people mean high impact on the house and its contents.

My own disposition in regard to 'nice things' and the keeping of a 'white' house became evident one day in my flat in Wilcannia.[72] I was at the time renting a one bedroom flat from the Shire and had gone to Broken Hill to buy a few posters and a couple of cushions for a settee which came with the flat. This, together with my scrubbing down and cleaning surfaces, was me in effect 'putting my mark' and taking ownership of the flat. Like a dog pissing up against a tree, I was marking my territory – making the flat my own. One day a group of four young girls visited and came hurtling into the flat, taking up various positions on the settee. Many children in Wilcannia run around with bare feet, as did these girls. Their feet were covered in the red dust of Wilcannia and so, in turn, were my cushions. I remember being a little dismayed that the children did not wipe their feet before coming into the house and was a bit surprised and annoyed that my cushions were being so soundly disregarded. Although I tried to respond in a carefree way to the children's desire to visit the lady with the funny accent who will give us a drink and who lets us watch telly, my "expressive performance" was false: the expression I "gave off" (Goffman 1971:2) did not match up with my true feelings. The children were not playing by the rules of my white house': they were in fact completely oblivious to them. I responded by trying my best *not* to outwardly express my inward feelings. As with W. Sansom's character Preedy, I was aware of and concerned with the impression that I was making and wished to make (Sansom 1956). My 'kindly' Lorraine, 'carefree' Lorraine tried to kick into gear but I was mildly annoyed. Moreover, I felt guilty and ashamed that this was how I felt – I was very aware of how this

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72 This was one of five 'homes' I had whilst in Wilcannia. Over my period of fieldwork I stayed at the nurses' quarters, in a share house with a nurse, in a flat at the woman's safe house refuge, and with the Administration Manager of the Local Aboriginal Land Council and CDEP.

kind of whiteness is judged. Ideologically I wanted no part of it, but my worldview and my experience protested and I was left feeling dissonant and dishonest.

The ambivalence of identity politics can see a person named a coconut by some but not by others. For example, I got to know the manager of the visual arts department at Broken Hill TAFE – a Koori from Sydney who was also teaching a part-time TAFE art course in the neighbouring community of Menindee as part of the Broken Hill campus regional programme. I asked him how it had gone and he said that some of the people in his class had taken exception to his manner. As an Aboriginal man in a 'good' mainstream job he had immediate potential as a possible candidate for 'coconuttiness', but it was his apparent attitude in telling the Aboriginal people of Menindee what to do that saw him named a coconut. Although Aboriginal, he was seen to be acting like a white boss, yet with no rights to do so. Not only was he not white, he was "not one of us", "not from 'ere". He told me that the people in the art course responded by calling him "a fucken coconut". His response was to take out his payslip and show it to the class; he said, "See this, this is what I take home every week, I'll be a fucken banana if it means I take this home". In saying this, the teacher was telling the class that it did not matter what names the class called him, in the end he took home a sizeable pay which meant that he could live the way he wanted to live. Yet, this is precisely part of what the class was criticising. There was a clear difference in values operating which indirectly inverted the meanings of the class/teacher exchange. The teacher in his way thought that he had 'got one up' on the people calling him a coconut, but for those naming him a coconut his actions simply confirmed the label. Ultimately, coconuts are those who subvert the "caring and sharing" ethos by separating themselves from the community and valuing money and the material over social relationships.

Caring and Sharing

Aboriginal people in Wilcannia are proud of what they see as a strong sharing and caring ethic. Many times I was told that "no blackfella who comes to Wilcannia will go without a feed". Peter Myers also documented such statements in 1988 when George Dutton, an Aboriginal man, said to him "I been living in Wilcannia since I was three and I'll tell you mate, there's no blackfella that will come here that won't get a feed and a place to sleep" (1988:139). This is suggestive of an unrestricted open-ended approach to the sharing of at least food. This idea that no blackfella goes without a meal 'feeds' into the wider trope of sharing and caring and is suggestive of altruism (at least at an explicit verbal level).

However, since sharing operates mostly as a solicited practice, it is better considered in terms of Peterson's (1993:861) "demand sharing or mutual taking".

Whilst it does seem to be the case that all blackfellas who come to Wilcannia will get a feed, this is due to familial and/or network connections as opposed to any open slather approach to an unsolicited sharing with all blackfellas. Far from "caring and sharing" being a non-evaluative or purely altruistic practice, there are closely applied restrictions and jealousies as to who gets what from whom. Although Aboriginal people in Wilcannia emphasise 'generosity' and sharing as an altruistic norm (and occasionally an inherent trait), social action in relation to sharing is, according to Schwab (1995:7), "guided by what may be described as a calculus of reciprocity". This suggests that sharing is not a generalised, altruistic and undifferentiated norm, but an inherently strategic practice. Although there is much strategy and working-out at play in a caring and sharing ethos, I would add that it appears to be of a short-term nature and operates from day-to-day and week-to-week as opposed to revealing a longer term strategic plan. It is more useful, I think, to place the emphasis on a set of "principles" which underpin and guide not only a caring and sharing system, but Aboriginal social interaction more broadly (see Schwab 1995).

In discussing the Pintupi, Peterson (1993:869) draws on Sansom's "grammar of service exchange" and states that "many of the obligations that underwrite the economy of service exchange arose from the specific personal histories and patterns of nurture that have brought an individual to adulthood" (see also Sansom 1988; Smith 1980). For the Pintupi, nurturance encompasses not only material goods but nourishment, support, protection and care which transmit "knowledge, experience, property and authority" (1993:869). In return for these forms of caring and sharing, the Pintupi senior generations demand deference. "One's parents grow one up and in return one offers obedience" (Myers 1986:174). There is a built-in hierarchy whereby the generosity of the senior nurturers "becomes the complement of authority [and] in return for respect and deference, the subordinate generation can legitimately make demands for goods on their relatives in the senior generation" (Peterson 1993:869). Thus, according to one Barkindji man who regularly takes wild meat and other food items such as bags of fruit to an old woman at the Mission, he does this because the woman "helped rear me up" and "carried me across the flood-waters for my poor mother".

People in Wilcannia often talk about people they have "reared up"; however, unlike the Pintupi case, there does not appear to be a "hierarchy of ritual apprenticeship" operating in any formally understood sense. Rather, there is a generalised understanding that there will

be reciprocal caring and sharing between those doing the rearing and those being reared up. On the part of the people doing the 'rearing', the caring and sharing involves the material and financial as well as degrees of emotional and physical support, care and protection.

I spent quite a bit of time with some men who stated that they had helped "rear up" children. Unlike the Pintupi, whereby senior men nurture boys and senior women nurture girls, these men claimed to have helped rear up both boys and girls who today call them Father or Dad. Men in Wilcannia do not only help rear up children, they take on young adults in their twenties who are perceived as needing spiritual, psychological or material care. This might be considered a response to the break down of more formal caring structures, or a new cultural way of being. One Elder I spent much time with claimed to have helped rear up many men and women; he said of one particular young man he felt needed help, "I told him I would be his Dad". This statement of intent can translate into seeing them and maybe giving them money whenever paths accidentally cross, or phoning them occasionally. This form of caring and sharing for young adults can perhaps best be understood as being as much an expression of intent as one of action. It is a form of social affirmation that appears to operate as much by virtue of the expression to care and share for someone as opposed to necessarily requiring more formal or structured concrete action.

Drawing on Fred Myer's (1986) work with the Pintupi, Peterson talks about how members of the senior generation are obligated to "look after and nurture the succeeding generation, preparing them for holding the law" (Peterson 1993:869). Although in Wilcannia "our law" is talked also about in terms of "our way", "our tradition", and "our culture" as a more generalised invocation and is quite differently connoted to Pintupi law (which is a specifically recognised sphere), nevertheless, certain parallels with Pintupi law in relation to nurturance can be drawn. Peterson explains that for the Pintupi "generosity becomes the complement of authority" as a consequence of "hierarchy and authority" coming to be "presented in the guise of concern and nurturing" (1993:869). What this means is that the younger generations in deferring to the senior generations can expect and are given the seniors' generosity in both physical and spiritual terms. In the same way, the seniors can expect to receive deference and authority from the young, thereby creating a hierarchy: there is a reciprocal complementarity.

In relation to the Wilcannia Elder I mention above, those who ask for his help talk about him as an authority figure as well as someone who they say "looks out for us", "looks after us". They often ask him for both money and advice. They also however say some terrible things

about him and the other Elders. This man's desire "to learn the young ones" about culture and his sharing of time and money can be seen to reflect the Pintupi form of nurturance. The fact that he does not always want to 'share' himself or his money and gets quite angry and "shitty" about it, and the fact that the young do not always give him respect while taking, does not reduce the efficacy of a recognised mutually understood (at some level) ethic of caring and sharing beyond the material.

The following example from my fieldwork describes the ambiguous and at times ambivalent role of the Elders in relation to caring and sharing in social and cultural terms. I was at the home of a Barkindji friend when his "little mate" came to visit. My friend is thirty years old and his mate is twenty-one. His mate was very drunk and he kept asking my friend to "tell me some more tales, bro [pronounced bruh]". He kept saying how he was a Barkindji man and loved his country and began to get quite emotional, saying to my friend "cut me, bruh. Cut me, bruh". My friend said that they did not do that anymore: "That's gone, bruh". He went on to say that they do not have the law or the lawmen that know how to do that, and that the meaning of each "*nincka*" (cut) had been lost. His mate kept insisting that if my friend did not cut him that he would cut himself: that he just felt like throwing himself against a tree or jumping into the River. He said, "I want to learn, bruh. I'm all ears". I asked if maybe speaking to one of the Elders might help. He said that one of his Uncles (an Elder) was going to take him to snake cave (a sacred site at Mutawintji where male ceremonies used to be held[73]) but that each time he tried to talk to or learn from this Uncle, his Uncle was drunk: "He's a drunk cunt". My friend told his mate that he had a right to his opinion but that this particular Elder had taught him much and he respected him.

Some time later I was talking to this Elder and I asked him about his expressed responsibility to share what he knew of his culture with the young ones. I presented a hypothetical to him around the young man's comments. He said that he felt very responsible for teaching the young ones but that the demands on him and his time were so great that if he didn't get drunk he would "go mad". This apparent safeguard against being burnt-out by the demands of kith and kin (see also Schwab 1995) can be applied to those who have access not simply to material resources in terms of goods and money, but who are seen to hold the much in-demand resource of 'cultural knowledge' – which is now thought to be scarce.

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73   A photograph of snake cave can be seen in (Black 1943:17:Plate 81).

The onus on the Elders to be the caring and sharing leaders and exemplars is also in tension with the fact that 'cultural knowledge' is a primary political, economic and socio-cultural resource. Family and other rivalries have seen restrictions on the sharing of what is talked about as "cultural knowledge" (particularly in relation to the nature and location of certain sites). Sharing certain knowledge which might assist in caring for the young is now rationed in accordance with a different economy of exchange. A Barkindji male Elder told me that a senior female relative had shown him and told him about several "women's sites", including some at Mutawintji National Park, before she passed away. According to this man, this sharing of gendered knowledge was deemed necessary because his relative felt there were no women around at the time who would use the knowledge wisely. He in turn has not shared this knowledge as he claims that there are still no women who would hold this knowledge in the proper way. He claims that "greed" would see this knowledge used for personal gain.

It is difficult for white Australians to cast "demand sharing" as generosity because of the more romanticised views that many Westerners have of certain Aboriginal groups, together with the positive values that the west ascribes to unsolicited giving and generosity (Peterson 1993:870). The strength of these values would logically see demand sharing as a more negative practice (Peterson 1993). Peterson advocates that rather than seeing demand sharing as a strategic practice, it is more useful to focus on this kind of sharing as a "deeply seated sedimented social practice often well removed from self-conscious calculation" (1993:870). This may be the case for some social groups, indeed, according to Beckett (1958) sharing was a sedimented practice for Wilcannia Aborigines in the 1950's. It may be the case that values relating to caring and sharing which were arguably practiced less strategically in the past (Beckett 1958) are being activated as a trope as they break down in certain areas of practice. I contend that the changing economy of Aboriginal people in Wilcannia as elsewhere has seen a rise in self-conscious calculation in relation to certain goods and services: in particular, those resources such as royalties and other funds which certain families have access to, as well as 'cultural knowledge' which is seen as a reified and objective 'thing'.

According to Peterson, there are "grounds for assuming demand sharing to be an important and intrinsic feature of Aboriginal Australian social life" (1993:870). However, whether this feature is one which is a "transitional phenomenon resulting from a breakdown in social obligations and surges in wealth differentials" (Peterson 1993:870) is unclear. Certainly, for

Wilcannia Aboriginal people, the caring and sharing ethic is emphasised as an ongoing and continuous cultural value and strong cultural 'tradition'.

It seems to me that caring and sharing does not need to be seen in light of an either/or separation: that is, either as generosity or strategy. I think that the situation in Wilcannia shows it to be both at different times, with variables such as personal mood, levels of sobriety, current finances, the state of present relationships (including kin, lovers, and friends) and past relationships all having some bearing. For example, a falling out or an argument can see a family member refuse to help another for a time until the situation blows over and then sharing will resume. Similarly, people will not lend to family and other kin whilst they have "got the shits" with them: demands are not always responded to positively. For me the interesting aspect of the caring and sharing ethic espoused in Wilcannia is the strength of its assertion as a generalised application versus what appears at times to be the decisions made in terms of its practice.

One day I was visiting an old Aboriginal man. He was sitting on the bed outside his house with an oxygen tank beside him, as he had chronic emphysema and had been in and out of hospital over the previous months. Prior to my visit I had asked one of his daughters if he wanted anything from Broken Hill as I was going there to do some food shopping. She said to bring him some bananas, that "he love bananas". I went to visit him with about eight bananas. We were sitting outside his house and one of his little grandkids started crying; he gave her a banana which quietened her down. Off she wandered and a few moments later his daughter came out of the house yelling "you've got more than one fucken grandkid, you know". A few more children came out of the house and the old man began sharing out the bananas. There were probably about ten children in all, and he started to halve the bananas so that all the children could get some. Eventually all the bananas were gone and he never got one; certainly the daughter did not ensure that any bananas remained for him.

Austin-Broos states that old people are often "bullied by their descendents into giving money with nothing in return", and that for old women in particular their reduced ability to negotiate the complexities of demand sharing often sees them treated poorly: in some cases suffering malnutrition (2003:127). I am still not clear to what extent the giving of all the bananas was the *generosity* of a grandpa, to what extent this was an *obligation* to share, or the lesser *expectation* to share. Did he even like bananas? Was the daughter's request for bananas even for him? The daughter's response that he had more than one grandkid is indicative of familial jealousies and rivalries between close kin for what is on offer.

I asked this old man one day what memory stood out for him (if any) from when he was growing up and living along the river. The memory that stood out was that the community "was one family" and "everyone shared". He went on to say that no-one shares now – "they too greedy". Indeed, older people cite greed as a problem in relation to younger people as well as other older people. I was asking an older Aboriginal man and friend one day why there seemed to be so much animosity between certain families in relation to Mutawintji National Park and its politics. He said, "If you had a tree with eleven mangoes on it, and there were ten people, you'd give each person one and leave one for the tree, wouldn't you". He went on to say that nowadays his 'people' would take all the mangoes and leave nothing for anyone else, including the tree. The alleged propensity for particular families, particularly TOs (who have access to certain benefits from their 'country' including greater access to jobs on 'country'), to hoard and take everything whilst not giving to anyone outside of the family group is an oft-cited example of contemporary greed. This is nostalgically compared to the "old days", which are remembered as a time when "everybody shared".

Ultimately, it seems that the caring and sharing ethic is wrought with ambivalence. It is currently advanced as a held and practiced value whilst simultaneously being refuted both verbally and in practice. The importance of this value, however, is not in question. It is a value which is strongly related to the identity of being Aboriginal and to not being white – to a positive difference.

Variations in Access to Resources and Attitudes to Caring and Sharing

Many Aboriginal people who for various reasons have moved away from Wilcannia and who are in a material sense far more comfortably placed than those in Wilcannia say how difficult it is to negotiate the maintenance of Wilcannia relationships whilst also maintaining an above-average level of material comfort. As in past times some Aboriginal families distance themselves from relations because meeting the demands of a caring and sharing ethic militates against the materiality of the lives they wish to lead (Beckett 2005b; Cowlishaw 2004a). Others manage to find a way to maintain relationships and a level of materiality across socio-economic divides – but this is never easy. These people complain and rail at both the demands made upon them for smokes and money and the 'utilitarian' attitude to material property that some of those actively advocating and invoking the obligations of a caring and sharing ethic seem to take.

Caring and sharing seems to have taken on a different tenor where there is greater access to and availability of consumer goods. In 1957 Beckett indicated in relation to thresholds of sharing that "it may be significant that it is with regard to non-traditional goods that there is most ambiguity" (2005b:106). Although Beckett does not specify what goods are non-traditional, he does say that "with money and the more costly goods the property rights of individuals are likely to be exclusive" (2005b:106). Indeed, today welfare money is very much seen to be the property of the individual. Husbands, wives and de-facto partners mostly have their own key cards and talk in terms of lending to one another as opposed to any automatic pooling of family funds. Although money is tightly controlled by the individual and many times a strict dollar-for-dollar accounting is observed in repayments, it also has a transactional value. That is, the money "takes on [the] character of an amount subject to valuation in acts of help, helping and helping out" (Sansom 1988:159). There are times when fifty dollars is lent and fifty dollars is what is wanted in return. People seek each other out on welfare days to repay and to seek repayment of loans. However, certain relationships dictate that repayment is neither likely nor expected – in some cases because experience has shown repayment to be unlikely and in others because it is felt that repayment is unnecessary. The relationship between lender and borrower dictates the expectations here and the kind of reciprocity at play. The relationship can be kin or friendship-based and the present state of the relationship plays a large part in the decision to lend and the expectations regarding repayment. One man told me that when his kin ask for a loan and he says no, they will respond "but we're your 'lations". He then would take a ten or twenty dollar note out of his pocket and say "see this, this got no 'lations" (his generous lending practices contradict this tongue-in-cheek, capitalist invocation). I was with him one time when he did refuse a loan and I offer this anecdote to show the ways that humour can be utilised to refuse requests for money. We were in his car driving down Reid Street and one of his relations sang out to him, "Hey Uncle [X] give me a loan, I'm short". Although she was alluding here to her need for dollars and not her stature (which is indeed short), her 'lation' yelled back, "Yeah, an' your fucken loud, too" – and kept driving.

During the 1950's, Beckett (1965:18) noted that because of the nature of pastoral work and subsequent irregular patterns of payment, "the sharing of food is an economic necessity as well as a civic virtue, and there is a crucial dependence between households". Sharing between households can still be considered a civic virtue and an economic necessity and continues to be a common practice, although this is not attributable to irregular patterns of payment as in the 1950's. Most families in Wilcannia are on welfare and receive regular

fortnightly payments – the amounts of which are known and calculated in advance. However, the majority of those on welfare have no funds left after one week, which necessitates borrowing from kin and friends. In recognition of this, Centrelink has introduced staggered payments, whereby some of the community receive their payment one week and some on the following week. This means that some of your kin will almost certainly be on a pay week when you are on an off week. Because of this, families are usually in a position to help each other out financially.

Particular families are known for borrowing more than others and for not reciprocating. Those who are on the receiving end of being "bitten", "tapped", or "touched" by these "bludgers", usually in relation to money, complain bitterly to other kin about this, and say that they "won't give them again", although they often do. However, I have never seen an absolute refusal in relation to food. The apparently implicit rule to share food may have correlates with the ideals of a hunting and gathering culture. When hunting and gathering was a major source of sustenance, "the sharing of food was important...because the fortunes of the chase were uncertain and a regular supply of meat for each family could only be ensured in this way" (Beckett 1994:129, [1965]; see also Eades 1994). Yet the presence of some refrigerators in homes has seen the putrescible nature of food reduced. People often catch fifty, sixty, or more fish, share some and freeze the rest. At the same time some people complain that this practice is greedy and is depleting fish stocks. There is an invocation that one should only take what can be readily eaten and shared.

In some sense it can be considered difficult to refuse to give food. Wilcannia is a small town – people see what is being bought in the one food store in town, they know if family have gone to Broken Hill on the bus and come back with food, they know if it is payday for a family and they know if a family member has gone hunting or fishing and has been successful in procuring food. This is not to say that people willingly disclose what food they have. Many times people lied about the number of fish they had caught or the amount of "wild meat" hunted.

On one occasion I was fishing with people and we caught about fifty fish between four of us. That evening in the pub a few people mentioned to me that they had heard I'd been fishing and asked me how many fish we had caught. As this was early on in my fieldwork I was not aware that one always underestimates the catch when asked – an important means of reducing the numbers of fish to be shared. I said proudly, "Oh we caught fifty fish". One person said "the old bastard" (referring to one of the men I went fishing with), "he told me

youse only got eleven". Later the same evening another man, this time a whitefella who I later found out was a regular fishing partner of one of the men I went fishing with, said that he'd heard I'd gone fishing. He asked me where we had gone and I told him that we had been fishing at Scobie's Hole.[74] In saying this I inadvertently named the fishing spot where the fish were biting. Although in this instance my openness or stupidity, call it what you will, was all part of a friendly rivalry between two fishing buddies, I learned my lesson after that: to be vague about how *many* fish, and *never* to say where the fish had been caught. The location of where the fish are 'biting' is only shared with particular people. I was being sounded out for my alliances, my relatedness, as well as my awareness (or lack) of these (Image 19).

Image 19.   Cyril Hunter and his grandson Chris, fishing at Scobie's hole.

Beckett (2005b:105) asserts that even "bludgers", people who are more or less "parasites", get what they want from adult woman because they "don't like to see the little children going short". However, many children in Wilcannia do go "short" according to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, although the measure of what going short is varies from person

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74 An interesting aside: I asked one of the men I was fishing with why it was called Scobie's Hole and he said that it had something to do with the skin infection of "scabies". I asked what the connection was and he said he did not know really. Some months later I was reading Bobbie Hardy's (1976) book *Lament for the Barkindji* and read of a Robert Scobie – a "representative of the Wentworth district" – who argued for funds for the Aborigines of the Darling area in parliament at the turn of the twentieth century (1976:176). When I mentioned this to him he said he knew nothing of Robert Scobie and that the water hole was both something to do with scabies and named after a friend's father who fished there. An historian would no doubt put money on Hardy's Scobie being the namesake of the waterhole. Yet history is made and remade by people, and scabies may well win out in times to come.

to person. On several occasions I heard Aboriginal adults espouse the view that children should not go hungry and criticise people who do not look after their children properly. This is usually a general criticism as opposed to a direct criticism of specific individuals. Statements such as "our children are our future" are commonly made and are a constant catch-cry for most organised events in town such as the National Aboriginal Islander Day of Celebration (NAIDOC) and related school events. Condemnation of parents who let their children go hungry while they are either drunk or drinking is very common. This criticism does not seem to be a judgment regarding the use of resources, that is, food versus drink and smokes. There is a constant recognition that it is not right that kids are not fed, yet there is a real discrepancy between some of those espousing these views and their action in this regard.[75]

Money, alcohol, cigarettes and food are the most commonly circulated goods in the caring and sharing economy. Goods such as washing machines, clothes and tools are used and borrowed. Cars are borrowed less, but it is common for people to ask the owner to give them lifts; sometimes the petrol money is offered for a longer journey. Although lenders complain that tools and other goods are often misused and in some cases not returned, this does not see the cessation of lending to that person or to others.

Just as sharing was important in a hunting and gathering economy and in the 1950's Wilcannia pastoral economy due to infrequent and staggered income, so too is sharing important in a welfare economy, but for different reasons. Welfare payments are not irregular but they are small; furthermore, because of the economics of freight to Wilcannia, food is more expensive than in towns such as Broken Hill. Although a community bus operates daily between Wilcannia and Broken Hill, leaving in the morning and returning around five o'clock in the evening, this bus is funded by the Health Department for the purpose of getting out-patients to Broken Hill for treatment: patients get priority on seating with spare seating being offered to the community. Moreover, the bus rules restrict

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75 I cannot begin to do justice here to the complexities of caring and sharing in these contexts. However, the frequency of comments about particular ways of caring for children and what seemed to me to be at times marked discrepancies with actual practice seems to be more than the simple difference between what is what is said and what is done in a culture, and, more than the "repeated banalities taken from populist debates" (Cowlishaw 2003:4) regarding the care of and importance of children. My comments here are necessarily ambiguous in part because this whole area is a touchy subject and, because although I have what can be considered a deal of empirical evidence on this matter, the time limits of thesis completion has not allowed me to give this topic the thinking required. However, I feel that the extent to which there appears to be a discrepancy within the local context requires noting.

passengers to two bags of shopping. The point is that food is expensive, money is tight and sharing is necessary and acceded to as well as avoided.

I am not sure to what extent fairness, personal decision or obligation operate when it comes to sharing. However, at times people go to great lengths to avoid sharing alcohol, cigarettes and money, although food may be placed in a different category. It seems to be the case that anyone, even those who do not reciprocate, can always get a smoke – if not a full cigarette then at least a "bumper"[76] of someone else's cigarette. For example, people who take part in drinking circles in the park will share smokes with particular others in the group. Most of the time the group will sit in a circle and one person will signal for another to throw the lit cigarette across the circle to them. Each lit cigarette is usually shared between two or three people when smokes are low. There are those who seem not to need to signal for a bumper and those who have to ask. This differentiation is not necessarily kin related (in consanguinial or affinal terms). Two unrelated friends often reciprocate with smokes in silence, whilst a kin relation may find it necessary to ask.

In order to restrict sharing, new packets of cigarettes will be opened up before going to the pub, visiting someone's house, or sitting in the park with a group of people. Half or more of the cigarettes will be removed from the packet and held elsewhere: in a brassiere, the waistband of a skirt, a jacket or trouser pocket.[77] This limits having to share an entire packet of cigarettes. A person will say "I've only got two smokes left" and they will then share the last two apparently remaining smokes, thereby fulfilling the obligation to share, whilst knowing they still have some for later – which too will later invariably be shared with a more select group. These are some of the 'counterstrategies' adopted not only to prevent giving to the "lazy and manipulative" (Peterson 1993:860) but simply to avoid giving to those one does not care for: or care for at this particular moment in time. One has to consider how much of a moral imperative sharing is when fluctuating family relationships appear to temporarily override and negate the sharing ethic. Social relationships and glitches in relationships can see the ethic suspended for some and for a time, and mediate the practice of the ethic to a high degree.

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76   A "bumper" is both a draw of a cigarette and the butt of a cigarette.
77   The placing of items in parts of the body or clothing which are not accessible to others can be aligned with the practices which both Peterson (1993) and Thomson (1939) cite in relation to demands for tobacco in Arnhem Land and the Northern Territory. Here old men carved their pipes with sacred designs which rendered them taboo thereby restricting access (Thomson 1949). Similarly, although brassieres and pockets are not sacred, they are certainly taboo in the sense that they are 'no go' areas.

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This refusal sometimes operates as a silence, a pretending not to hear or passively ignoring the person making the request. A person might ask "can you lend me twenty dollars" "till I get paid", "till Thursday", or "buy me a schooner, Unc", "give me the price of some smokes, Auntie". The person being asked will variously give the money, buy the drink, say they have no money to give, or take on what I can only describe as a kind of glazed avoidance state. There appears at times to be a 'tactic of avoidance' when people are unwilling to lend money or buy a drink for someone making this request. This occurs when people do not look at or respond to the person asking to borrow, acting as though they have not heard any question. This avoidance state can be maintained even where the request is made two, three or more times. I asked someone what this was about and he said that this form of response was "probably" because the person was a persistent borrower, or someone who did not pay back. Moreover, I mostly saw this behaviour enacted towards people who were drunk.

Goffman (1969:7) says that "the person who can witness another's humiliation and unfeelingly retain a cool countenance himself is said in our society to be 'heartless', just as he who can unfeelingly participate in his own defacement is thought to be 'shameless'". Goffman is talking here about Anglo-Americans, but I think this analysis can be useful in the Wilcannian context. If the person being "bitten" for money ignores the borrower by maintaining a cool countenance of sorts he is perhaps neither being heartless, nor is he participating in or explicitly recognising the shame of the inveterate borrower and non-returner. This face-saving tactic enacts the effect of Goffman's combined rule of self-respect and rule of considerateness which requires that (in this case) the potential lender "conduct himself during an encounter so as to maintain both his own face and the face of the other participants" (1969:8).

That there is shame in the constant borrowing of money and non-return is clear in the talk about those who are always on the take. I remember being in the pub one afternoon and a woman I did not know very well came up and asked me to lend her the price of a packet of cigarettes (about twelve dollars). I said that I did not have twelve dollars and gave her five. She was very drunk and kept asking me to give her some more. I answered that I did not have any more and her niece who was sitting with me said to her, "come on Auntie, that's enough, you make me shame". On reflection I might have been better to give her the five dollars and then pretend that she was not there. My embarrassment at the constant requests and my attempts to save face saw me respond to her demands, and by responding to them I

perhaps made present, or exposed, the shame of the request, thereby affecting the response of her niece.

Early in my fieldwork I used to squirm with embarrassment for the person making a request and being so soundly ignored. My whitefella sensibilities meant that I wanted to intervene, to 'talk over' or 'smooth over', or at least recognise that a question had been asked, which to my mind demanded some response – at least by way of maintaining a degree of social etiquette. To ignore the person was, in the whitefella way, rude. I had to learn to fight against saying anything and to look out into the middle distance and similarly try to pretend that I was not listening, not 'present': not an easy task.

Ultimately, the circulation of smokes, alcohol and money can be considered a form of social and material investment, but one which does not accrue interest and one in which the 'investor' does not always break-even. The demand to share elicits both a *ces la vie* approach as well as much hostility depending on the mood of the recipient of such demands. People who swear vehemently and angrily that they will never lend again to the same person because they never pay it back often "soften". I could never quite get the hang of what was happening, but it is fair to say now, as Beckett did in the 1950's, that the system of sharing "is maintained because of the security it provides and the threat of ostracism against those who do not participate, but also because solidarity with friends, and, more particularly with kin is one of the basic dogma of aboriginal [sic] society" (Beckett 2005b:108).

Leaving Wilcannia and the Ambiguity of Identity

Those born in Wilcannia who have moved away in order to get work and "improve" their lives and those of their immediate family often defensively justify their position. One man, a respected authority figure who moved to Broken Hill in the early 1980's was in the Wilcannia golf club one night on one of his regular visits to town. I was with him having a drink with a few locals. Another man (his consanguineal cousin) kept 'having a go' at him in a light hearted way, about him "goin' and desertin' us". He responded by saying, "What would you want me to do, stay here an' become a fucken drunk on the riverbank? Then you could call me a fucken old drunk". He said to me later, "I didn't desert anyone; I went to get skills... If I had stayed I would have had the shakes an' been older than I am". He went on to say that it was only by leaving Wilcannia that he learned what tourists want to see and hear about. He said he knows now when he walks white people around Aboriginal sites that people want to hear things like, "this is where they used to cook emu". This man said that

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when he "comes home" to Wilcannia he brings money with him and that he shares this. He asked me "what should I have done...bring skills back to my people, or stay in Wilcannia and drink myself to death?" He was expressing the alternatives as he saw them. If he had stayed in Wilcannia he felt that he would have become a drunk and, as he saw it, would not be respected. Because he left Wilcannia he was seen by some to have deserted his people. His self questioning and his answers are suggestive of a 'damned if you do and damned if you don't' scenario – where neither alternative is satisfactory.

When this man comes to Wilcannia (which is quite frequently) he will buy drinks and cigarettes for people at the golf club. I have known him to spend, lend and give away 400 dollars over two days, and this is not an irregular occurrence. People borrow from him and ask him to "buy me some smokes, Unc", "a schooner, Unc". As an employed man he is seen to have plenty of money; very rarely does anyone ever buy him a drink back, or offer him a cigarette in return. Although this man has a full time job he is not, however, seen as a coconut by the majority of locals. This is because he shares and will "sit down with us" which, in turn, makes him "one of us". This man is recognised to be a "leader" of his people: he "looks out for us", "looks after us". As MacDonald notes, "Leaders are identifiable by the prestige they acquire through their action of 'caring and sharing' in terms of...moral codes, and not in what they have accumulated or achieved in Euro-Australian terms" (2000:97).

Anthropologically, it can be argued that this man is investing in his own future (Sansom 1988): that his giving is less an altruistic leaning than a cultural way of 'banking in kind', an insurance policy for the future. Yet there is little evidence to suggest that this kind of longer term calculation occurs. Moreover, if he is grumbling now about a lack of reciprocity what is there to suggest that the future will be any different? Schwab talks of the more current benefits of "social renown" and the generation of social capital as "good will", as well as future material assistance (1995:10). There is, however, a tension between this man's hurt and annoyance at people always taking and not giving, and his sense of achievement at being in the *position* to give.

Indeed, he relayed a particular incident to me which offended him quite deeply. He had asked one of his male relatives if he had any fish in the freezer. His relative said that he had some and offered to sell him one for ten dollars. Also present at this exchange was another Elder and family member. This Elder apparently chastised the relative, saying "you don't sell fish to the Elders", to which the Elder seeking the fish replied "no, no that's alright

brother", and proceeded to pay for the fish. He told me later in not so many words that the young man selling the fish would get his come uppance, that he "would keep" and inferred that he needn't come asking him for drinks and smokes in the future. Clearly, although this man may be accorded at times the prestige and respect accorded those who "do the right thing by their people" (MacDonald 2000:98), differing inter-generational expectations are creating tensions. I would suggest that this man's expressed feelings of both hurt and anger in response to the 'fish incident' speaks to gaps and misunderstandings in the changing 'rules of the game'.

Although jibes at people about "leavin' us" and "desertin' us" are often said in a light hearted way, underlying feelings may run deep; this kind of seemingly jocular exchange masks strong feelings on both sides. During my time in Wilcannia, the CDEP and LALC were under threat of being taken over by a government administrator unless they were willing to accept administrative assistance from the Broken Hill CDEP which operated out of *Thankakali* Aboriginal Corporation.[78] This caused quite a bit of dissent among a few Aboriginal members of the Community Working Party yet was well received by the majority of whites on the party, as well as some blacks in town. One of the Working Party expressed the view that, "They'd [*Thankakali* people] better not think they will be takin' over. I know some of 'em was born and bred in Wilcannia, but they don't live here anymore… We don't want outsiders coming in an' takin' over".

One of the men to be brought in to give assistance was a Barkindji man who was born in Wilcannia and lived there from the early 1960's until 1985. This man moved with his family to Broken Hill to find work and worked with *Thankakali* CDEP until his death in 2004. I asked him why he thought the Working Party was against *Thankakali* helping out. He said the "people in Wilcannia are very hostile to outsiders" and that he is trying to explain to them that "we just want to help 'em". He said he doesn't know how it will go, and that there are "too many people doing what's best for them as individuals" and not for the community. I said "surely you're not an outsider?" He gave me a wry smile and said he apparently was now, despite being born in Wilcannia and living there until 1985. I asked him if the people

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78   This is an Aboriginal Corporation registered in 1995 with the objective of operating a Community Development Employment Project in Broken Hill. The Corporation employs approximately fifty people in the *Thankakali* Cultural Centre and the *Thankakali* Yard Maintenance projects. The Cultural Centre houses a café and art gallery where working *artists* sell works on a commission basis. Works by Aboriginal people from areas outside of Broken Hill are sold on consignment. The main objective of the CDEP is to "initiate and maintain long term employment generating projects and training opportunities which contribute to the Broken Hill Aboriginal Community having a better standard of living by improving health, social and economic standings within the community as a whole" (from the Rules approved by the Registrar 31/7/1995).

calling him an outsider were Barkindji like him and he said "yes", that many of them were. This might also allude to a possible shift in identification which sees Aboriginal Wilcannian identity occasionally supercede a wider Barkindji identity. Certainly, Barkindji people who have moved away from Wilcannia, who have 'left' Wilcannia, are in certain contexts not part of this stronger town identification.

For those who leave Wilcannia, there seems always to be a partly veiled onus to justify this decision to those who remain and, for some people, to themselves. Many of those who leave Wilcannia go to live in Broken Hill and there is a great deal of movement between the two towns. For some, the relocation may be anything from a few months to a few years, for others it can be a more or less permanent move. Those who leave cite many reasons for going: jobs, better schools, a house of their own, and to be near a favourite relative(s).

Those who claim to have *chosen* not to leave make this assertion with no small amount of pride. It is said in a way that means "I didn't desert 'my people'; I stayed despite what this means for me". Not deserting 'my people' has several meanings and inferences. Some of these inferences allude to the 'giving up' of a 'better life'. Others claim these 'losses' are the consequence of making a seemingly firm decision to 'go down with the ship'.

The decision to go down with a sinking ship was exampled by a man I got to know quite well. Most of the time when I saw this man he was either drunk or suffering from the shakes as a result of alcohol withdrawal. One morning about 10.30am, I walked past the pub on my way to a Community Working Party meeting and saw him outside waiting for it to open at 11am. I asked him what he was up to, and he inquired about my own activities. I told him that I was going to the Community Working Party meeting and asked him why he and most of the Aboriginal people in town did not attend. He indicated that it was a waste of time, that the people on the Working Party didn't care about the people but "only themselves". Like many of the Aboriginal people in town, this man inferred that the Community Working Party was not working in the best interests of Aboriginal people and did not represent the community. Moreover, the working party only advanced the power and privilege of a few Aboriginal individuals and their friends and families. He went on to say that the Working Party "need to take the people with them. They need to be like a little ladder, take a little step and say come with me, and wait till everyone is on that step and then say take another step. But, they have to do this together". This man continued, "ask yourself this: what is a man with my knowledge and my education doing here sitting outside the pub at 11 o'clock in

the morning waitin' for it to open...ask yourself this". He went on to say that if his people go down then he will go down with them.

Bell talks of the identification that Aboriginal people have with the group as taking the form of "participational identification which can be expressed in terms such as, 'These are my people. I am at home with them and can relax with them'" (1965:403). Bell states that this "...is directly opposed to historical identification, or the interdependence of fate expressed in terms such as, 'I am ultimately bound up with the fate of these people and there is nothing that I can do about it'" (1965:403). I consider that this man was expressing the latter view in tandem with the first. They are his people and he is at home with them, but in his acknowledgment that he is 'going to go down with' them he also seems to be suggesting and or accepting that his people's situation is not good and that he is bound up with their fate. The extent to which this is a voluntary or involuntary choice, or perhaps a rationalisation, I do not know.[79]

Clearly, maintaining a distinctive Aboriginal identity in Wilcannia entails what may be perceived as certain sacrifices. Those who move away in order to 'better' themselves or who are seen to take on white values are judged harshly. Being seen to 'get ahead', as this is related to 'opportunity' and 'success' can result in certain sanctions which seek to maintain equality. As the following chapter discusses, these sanctions can be considered as resulting in a circulating mediocrity which operates to quash motivation for any kind of individual ascendancy – except in the rare instances where individuals have been able to successfully negotiate the demands placed on them.

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79   This man was quite a force in the 1970's through "Bakandji Limited" (Memmott 1991:143), also known as the Barkindji Housing Association, which Beckett (1958b:17) refers to as the "first grass roots organization" in Wilcannia concerned with Aboriginal civil rights. From the 1970's onwards Aboriginal engagement with dominant culture in matters of civil rights and thence to the "politics of indigeneity" (Beckett 1958b:17) saw the emergence of politically aware Aboriginal leaders. Disputes between these leaders, entwined with aspects of family histories, saw battles for leadership positions which continue to this day. This man's assertion that he is voluntarily going to 'go down' with his people cannot be read apart from his expressed bitterness and apparent despondency regarding the envy that (as he sees it) caused him to lose his position at Bakandji Limited and later at the Legal Service. Nor can it be read apart from local Aboriginal social acts and discourses which operate to discourage difference in these terms.

Chapter 4. Praise, Success and Opportunity

In this chapter, I am concerned with the ways that Aboriginal people in Wilcannia constitute notions of praise, success and opportunity – and the sanctions that are applied to those who "get above themselves" or are considered to have this potential through economic, political, social or cultural difference. I argue that these levelling mechanisms serve, in part, as a safeguard from the disappointment that might result from hollow promises: those which purport to offer success and opportunity but (in the opinion of Wilcannian people) do not come up with the goods. Amongst friends, families and rival factions, envy, jealousy, social snubbing and ostracism, malicious gossip and verbal (and occasionally physical) attacks are all mechanisms brought to bear in matters pertaining to exhibited difference or potential for difference. Although Aboriginal people in Wilcannia do not espouse an explicitly egalitarian worldview, there are elements of this ethos operating in the community, a theme I take up in the latter part of this chapter. I also consider the ways that some groups of people, particularly artists, have been able to moderate the potential ramifications associated with praise, success and opportunity.

The reaction to the success of the rap group 'The Wilcannia Mob' provides an important means of demonstrating the attitudes that some Aboriginal people in Wilcannia have towards notions of praise, success and opportunity, and how these attitudes are pertinent to a caring and sharing ethic which implicitly places stress on equality. 'The Wilcannia Mob's' hit rap record *Down River* was made with the assistance of the Shopfront Theatre group and Morganics, and was funded by the Ministry for the Arts. Following the success of the song, it became part of a successful album *All You Mob* produced by Morganics. The organisers of Home Bake 2002 (an annual festival of Australian contemporary music) subsequently invited the boys to go to Sydney and perform at this function. The boys also won a 2003 'Deadly' award for Best Single at 'The Deadly's', which recognises Indigenous achievement in arts performance. During this period, the boys were feted and praised locally, regionally and nationally by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

As part of an ABC radio interview to discuss the success of 'The Wilcannia Mob', the interviewer Rhianna Patrick asked Kerry King, the mother of Lendall (one of boys in the group), whether she thought the recording experience and its aftermath had been "a great experience for them [the boys] to have in building their own self esteem and being proud of who they are and where they come from and what they can do?"

Implicit in this questioning is the assumption that self-esteem and pride are absent or at least incongruous qualities for these boys. Moreover, this particular kind of attention and success will highlight the boys' capabilities to others/Others as well as themselves. The question is not so much about the boys' success as a questioning of success given the circumstances of the boys on the basis of previous discourse about the town.[80] Kerry responds not in surprise at such a question, but in a matter of fact and well-practiced way, in full knowledge of its underlying assumptions.

> Most definitely. Cause too many times we've always felt that we've had to live in shame. This would have to be one of the first positive stories that come out from up there [Wilcannia]. So, and these little boys are making it happen. I guess we're proud because we've [been] put down over and over for years and years that something's good come out of it (Patrick ABC Radio 2002).

Cowlishaw (2003:3) notes from her own experience that Aboriginal people "are overwhelmed by the fact that they are already known to others, not as they experience themselves, but in the images, stereotypes and discourses which have made them known in the public domain". Kerry clearly recognises the stereotypical images and discourses through which Wilcannia has come to be known and she responds to the interviewer accordingly.

Kerry's response should not be interpreted in any way as being complicit with the assumption that the boys were lacking in pride or self-esteem prior to their success, nor that Aboriginal people of Wilcannia have little pride in light of the shame invoked by hegemonic external discourse. Pride and self-esteem are not seen to be lacking for Aboriginal people in Wilcannia, although these may be differently conceived and differently expressed. Through her answer Kerry informs the interviewer that finally people from outside might learn who Wilcannia and its Aboriginal people are. Kerry, as with most Aboriginal people who live in Wilcannia, considers Wilcannia to be a "great place". Aboriginal locals know of Wilcannia's negative reputation but they do not agree with it. Kerry indicates this when the interviewer asks her what she hopes will be "achieved by these boys gaining recognition for their music"; Kerry responds by talking not about the boys and their music specifically, but

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80 This approach is all the more interesting given that the interviewer is a Torres Strait Islander. Rhianna Patrick seems to unproblematically run with the 'mainstream' reputation of Wilcannia. I think this demonstrates the often ignored or denied 'gap' between different Aboriginal ways of living and different perceptions about those ways of living.

more broadly about the town. She alludes to the stereotyping that has gone before, the recognition that this has had a stifling effect on the Aboriginal people of the town, and the more positive image that local Aboriginal people have of themselves:

> I think what the achievement that will come from it is for the Aboriginal communities, especially us in Wilcannia, it'll open a roof up, let fresh air in, because it's about time we all started breathing fresh air, and let all the bad an negative stereotype go. Once the roof is open and just breathe in the fresh air and let the world know that we are people and we ain't hopeless blacks, we ain't no-gooders (Patrick 2002).

The stifling discourses, images and stereotypes are known but are not agreed with; nor are their defining values. However, the effects of these discourses are clearly recognised. The boys' success is a portal to enlightening "the world" that "we are people and we ain't hopeless blacks, we ain't no-gooders". Kerry's words are suggestive of an entreaty to Aboriginal people. Moreover, they offer affirmation of Aboriginal communities as much as they offer a definite lesson to whites who make stereotypical assessments and who, although wrong in Kerry's view, are known to have the power to name and to stifle the Wilcannia community.

In some ways both the interviewer and the mother draw on the boys to stand for the Wilcannia community. Yet, I suggest that there are important implicit differences in their positions. The interviewer and the mother both recognise the negative publicity Wilcannia has received, but the interviewer is asking whether the experience will make a specific difference to the boys' lives. On the other hand, the mother, in extending the success to all Aboriginal people of Wilcannia, is telling us about the ways in which Aboriginal people of Wilcannia perceive themselves relationally within their own networks and the wider Australian public.

For the purpose of my analysis it is important to recognise that the mother does not discuss the boys as individuals, they are framed as representative of the people of Wilcannia – they are *part of* the people of Wilcannia, the body of Wilcannia, and their success is a reflection of the Aboriginal people of the town. The mother responds not in a way specific to the boys and their music, but to let the wider society know that the Aboriginal *people* of Wilcannia are worthy. The boys and their music are never individuated or isolated from their relationship to the town and the people. Their 'success' is firmly tied to the Aboriginal community of Wilcannia.

After a flurry of news about the group and a number of performances by the boys, one of the Aboriginal people of the Western Region who had been instrumental in gaining and co-ordinating 'The Wilcannia Mob' project commented to her Aboriginal friend that she was a bit disappointed that the boys had not gone further with their music – that they did not practice at all and really showed no interest in progressing their music or in being "successful" – of making something of the "opportunity".[81] The friend replied that the boys were not under any obligation to the co-ordinator or the project, commenting that "the programme was a success" and nothing more is, or should be, required of the boys. She justified the success of the project by saying that the goal was to make a record and the boys did this.

When the program co-ordinator went on to express her disappointment that the boys had not taken the "opportunity" offered, the friend replied: "that's not our way". She said the boys learned to rap and now they can rap – "they don't have to rap in public for it to mean anything, or if they don't want to". She continued by saying that "our people" might be good singers but that they don't have to sing in front of people to be good singers, they are still good singers even if they do not sing in public. Moreover, her daughters who are both good dancers "don't even dance in front of their own father".

Although both the project co-ordinator and her friend are Aboriginal, neither is Barkindji or from Wilcannia (both live in Broken Hill). However, the latter is married to a Barkindji man born in Wilcannia and has a strong knowledge of 'local' culture. Therefore, when the project co-ordinator expresses disappointment at the boys' lack of initiative, and the friend states that this "is not our way", the different ways in which "our way" is understood are signified. The friend's 'way' which ideologically rejects seeking praise, or to stand out or be singled out as different and special, is the way most readily invoked and presented by Wilcannian Aboriginal people. The co-ordinator's thinking can here be more aligned with that of a coconut, in that her ideas about success more closely conform with dominant culture views regarding what it constitutes and how it is achieved: success here requires some degree of effort and is manifested in an altogether more publicly agreed and recognised form.

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81   I was not there when she said this, but her friend relayed this to me and a mutual friend (an Aboriginal man).

The reluctance to stand out or individualise oneself in Wilcannia can be understood in part as the result of self-consciousness. People do not want to be singled out or named in a way that might cause "shame" or elicit envy (expressed as "jealousy"). Praise may be given but its reception appears to call for certain responses. To openly accept praise is to be seen to be "up yourself", to be a "show pony", to be "big noting" yourself or "getting above" oneself. Praise may be thought of as potentially threatening to group unity. To be singled out for any reason is undesirable and for this reason is to be avoided. This avoidance of praise is not an expression of false modesty – Uriah Heep's humble mumblings hold no truck here. The reluctance to be singled out for praise is, I suggest, more a desire for self-preservation, a necessary tactic.

Gaining praise can be the first step towards the ambiguous position of being thought successful – a position which carries the possible sanction of being named "not one of us" any more. Success connotes difference: it is also associated with 'having' – a having construed at times to be at the expense of others.[82] With success one has what others do not have: this can be social, political, economic, or 'cultural' success or, importantly, the potential for it. Success, its cultural construal and the perceived threat it might pose for identity (particularly, group identity), is complex.

Morganics, the producer of the *All You Mob* album on which 'The Wilcannia Mob' feature, in talking of the project said that it:

> was a great way for these kids to both experience something new and different, and clear the *shame* [my emphasis] that cripples so many of our young kids. 'All You Mob' is something concrete that they can look back on and say 'At least I gave that a go'. The appearance and performance of 'The Wilcannia Mob' at Homebake 2002 in Sydney proves that point. They'll go home now with a memory they'll never forget, pride in their hearts – and probably big heads! (ABC 2002).

Here again, the discourse of absent self-esteem is inferred. According to Morganics, the project was partly seen as an exercise in getting over the "shame" hurdle that "cripples" many young Aboriginal children. Morganics is here alluding to the existing, historical and externally applied "shame" that Aboriginal children are perceived to embody by virtue of being part of a marginalised minority and, in the case of Wilcannia, by children living in a town which suffers constant negative media publicity. It is unlikely that Morganics is

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82   This should not be taken to be an "Image of the Limited Good" (Foster 1965).

alluding here to the shame that might be generated or invoked by accepting praise from within the Wilcannia Aboriginal community.

In Wilcannia, children self monitor for shame related to many factors. However, they do not seem to have the need to self monitor for shame associated with praise until young adulthood. This may be because their potential for real difference – of a kind that matters – is not seen to be feasible until adulthood. A couple of the boys in 'The Wilcannia Mob' did, as Morganics predicted, get "big heads" according to some in town. These people cited the behaviour of one boy in particular who has a reputation for being "wild" and is seen to have become more so because of the praise he received whilst travelling with 'The Mob'. For the most part, however, the Aboriginal people in town were very supportive of the boys and took every opportunity – local meetings, dances and get togethers – to comment on their 'success' and to congratulate them.[83]

During the period when praise was being heaped upon the boys, no expectations were voiced regarding the necessity to pursue their music any further and there were no pressures to perform or practice. 'The Wilcannia Mob' do not show the dedication to the role that the dominant culture expects of 'artistes'. For Aboriginal people in Wilcannia this is unproblematic. As I go on to discuss in chapter five, the role of artist or artiste is not something generally considered in Wilcannia. In the case of 'The Wilcannia Mob' how should the responses of the mother, the co-ordinator, and the co-ordinator's friend be taken in relation to notions of praise, success and opportunity?

I consider that the generosity of praise in the case of the children, together with the lack of concern as to whether they grasped or continued with any 'opportunity' can be read on many levels, two of which I discuss: the ability of the Aboriginal 'community' of Wilcannia to retain social control and that of preventing disappointment for the boys.

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83 Non-Aboriginal people, although speaking about the boys with pride, were at the same time often not so complimentary. People said that the boys had not been interested in playing music/singing before this opportunity and that the record was a "one hit wonder". Many whites saw the 'opportunity' to make a record and attend various events as arising out of what is perceived to be a politics of Aboriginal advantage. That is, non-Aboriginal people consider that Aboriginal people are provided opportunities which are not provided to non-Aboriginal people and which "they" are thought to waste. One man, without rancour, nevertheless alluded to the different ways "they" (Aboriginal people) operate compared to "us". He said that when the organisers took the boys to Sydney they were "put on the bus" in Wilcannia with nothing but "the clothes they stood up in". He added that when they got to Sydney the boys were taken shopping and bought expensive fashion clothes which they wore home. He expressed that this kind of practice is unsustainable and gives the boys a false sense of reality: a reality which in his mind has arisen out of a kind of giving which according to many whites has become naturalised as an expectation by Aboriginal people.

When adults in Wilcannia praise children, they retain control over the praise, when it is given, how much and to whom. However, people of Wilcannia have little control over the praise white and black outsiders generate, which is spasmodic, transient and of an unknown quantity. The praise generated internally, that is, the praise coming from within the town can (as differentiated from the external praise) be controlled and modulated readily if there is the *need*. The *need* for control of praise might arise if it is perceived that there is a possibility of the boys being let down or disappointed by those outside and over which there is limited control – or if they begin to "get above themselves" or "big note" themselves too much.

In relation to 'The Wilcannia Mob' and others in Wilcannia (particularly visual artists) who come to external attention, praise is being generated not within the community but mostly by whites outside the community. This can be problematic when the person being praised has not sought the praise, but is being praised, held up or valorised in some way by people who are external to Wilcannia. Even unwanted or unsolicited attention and praise can result in the individual being "stirred up" as a pre-emptive levelling device.

The boys are allowed and encouraged to enjoy the moment: let them enjoy the moment, but do not let them hang their hats on relying on consistency of outside dollars, outside encouragement and outside praise. It has been the experience of the majority of adults that outside promises of success, of support, of opportunity are short lived and fraught with disappointment. Planning for success is not encouraged, as it has proved unfruitful in the past. By seeing and promoting 'success' or 'opportunity' as a 'take it or leave it' choice that 'we' make, the people retain control over their and their children's lives. Resisting or ignoring what Others see to be opportunity can be viewed not only as a form of oppositional agency but also perhaps as a form of self-preservation which adults vicariously apply to the children based on their own previous experiences.[84]

Praise and Adults

What of the control of praise in relation to adults? Why might the control of praise and opportunity for adults require monitoring? The issue of wanting to reduce the chance of an individual being disappointed, or of not wanting to internalise another's disappointment

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84 Wilcannia has for some years been a 'target' site for numerous social plans, health surveys and other social (government and non-government) programmes and initiatives which, according to local Aboriginal people, claimed to offer opportunity but "don't listen to us" and which go over the same old ground and never seem to achieve anything. There is a high level of cynicism in Wilcannia regarding the kinds of 'success' that the 'help' and opportunities offered by dominant society has achieved to date.

because one has been there too often before, might be a reasonable suggestion as to why the acceptance of praise is monitored by both the praisers and the praised. In other words, do not set yourself up for a fall. It is not a contradiction to say that there can be envy associated with others' success and opportunity as well as the presence of more altruistic feelings and motivations: those of attempting to maintain and/or perhaps advance an egalitarian ethos and a coherent group identity.

However, praise can also lead to success, which is connected not only to individualism but to change, threatening the coherence and identity of the "community" as imagined. The idea of an Aboriginal "community" has arguably been promulgated (in part) since the introduction of self-determination in the 1960's: it is a trope which is drawn upon in various contexts. Many Aboriginal people cite a sense of community as a value to be observed in the face of divisive and disruptive acts by both black and white.

Sanctions of control rest on the fear of being named "not one of us" anymore, of being outcast. Since family and kin are paramount this is no small consideration. The need for acceptance seems set to outweigh any desire to be different, even if in asserting difference an opportunity[85] can be taken up. Closeness of kin is no protection against the sanctions placed on difference through success and opportunity. Envy is evident in close family relations: it may indeed be more strongly and keenly felt the closer the relationship. Many emotions are brought to bear on the person being praised including that of shame.

There is, as Biddle notes, an emphasis on shame in Aboriginal Australia (1997:236). According to Schwab (1998:9), shame is a pervasive theme in Aboriginal communities, indicating "…a complex concept incorporating notions of embarrassment, shyness and respect". Stanner, too, talks of the emotion of shame as being "perhaps the most powerful in Aboriginal life" (1979:5). Shame is referentially a restraint against difference and to 'getting above oneself'. The shame associated with an individual thinking they are "better than us" can be considered a threat to the removal of group identity and the caring and sharing group.

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85   I am using the term opportunity here based on examples such as being offered a job, a free place in a TAFE or other learning course, the offer of a commissioned artwork, offer of an art exhibition and invitation. These are recognized by most in dominant culture as opportunities. Although a few Aboriginal people recognise these as opportunities, it seems to me that most have a 'take it or leave it', laissez-faire approach to offers of this kind. Short term opportunities such as cultural consulting and work as guides during school holidays are more readily grasped.

I cannot do justice here to the complexity of the expression and experiences of shame (cf. Biddle 1997:236). I mention shame at all because it goes hand in hand with praise and with other emotions such as jealousy which Aboriginal people express is a noticeable feature of life in Wilcannia. People say often that others are jealous of them and want what they have. Indeed, popularity, access to resources, being seen to 'get ahead' all generate strong emotion in the community, although this emotion might be more accurately described as envy. Foster states that envy "...stems from the desire to acquire something possessed by another person, while jealousy is rooted in the fear of losing something already possessed" (Foster 1972:168). Given these definitions, those who attempt to modulate 'external' and 'internal' praise may also be exhibiting a form of jealousy. That is, they are attempting to maintain what they consider to be a collectivity, a unified group identity: something they perceive they already have and which is threatened.

A few individuals resist this conforming control (coconuts being some), but peer pressure in a town with little to offer except family and belonging hedges against taking up an 'opportunity' which may alienate friends and family, and which may also, given previous experience, be considered fleeting and impermanent. For those applying these pressures (and I am not suggesting these are always or even necessarily knowingly applied) one issue at stake is: if there is no identifiable "us" then who are "we?"

In a town where the population is dwindling, what keeps people together is what makes them stronger and what makes them stronger is their keeping together. Any threat to this division can create dissonance for the ones being left behind. There are in white terms pernicious consequences to this kind of implicit control, although they are not necessarily perniciously applied. There are ambivalences and tensions associated with success: while there is sympathy for those who are seen to fail or let go of an 'opportunity', there are nevertheless feelings of relief when this occurs. In the case of rival families and factions there is also a measure of satisfaction at seeing someone get their comeuppance when an 'opportunity' does not eventuate or is in some way stymied.

In dominant culture terms what might be viewed as overt discouragement, sour grapes, or envy, and which appears to fly in the face of 'caring', might well constitute a form of protection. For example, sanctions such as back biting, snubbing and social ostracism can be seen to encourage common understandings and discourage economic and status differentiation and individualism (from which the 'gains' are not shared); these can be

considered as processes which seek to strengthen the bonds of community, as opposed to being considered community weaknesses (Jayawardena 1968:441).

Egalitarianism and Getting Above Yourself

Questions relating to notions of egalitarianism in Aboriginal society are prompted by these processes and cannot be ignored. Although "egalitarianism" is not a term I ever heard Aboriginal people in Wilcannia use and neither did people speak of a "fair go for all", locals see themselves as equal, if in opposition to, whites. Pressures to maintain black/black equality and black/white equality are of a different order, nevertheless, equality is an overall expressed value in Wilcannia in relation to the practices of the caring and sharing ethic together with a "humanist egalitarianism" which stresses the equality of people as human beings (Jayawardena 1968:413).

Another type of egalitarianism, is referred to by De Tocqueville as "equality of condition", i.e., substantive equality (or differences within narrow limits) in political, economic and other social conditions and/or equal opportunities to attain these" (cited in Jayawardena 1968:414). Although both forms of egalitarianism are not mutually exclusive, Jayawardena claims that "typically, notions of human equality are dominant in a sub-group to the extent that it is denied social equality by the wider society or its dominant class" (1968:414). This humanist egalitarianism is expressed in Kerry King's statement to the wider public that "we are people, and we ain't hopeless blacks".

Taken together, ideas about success, opportunity, egalitarianism and their relevance to Aboriginal societies must be considered in light of the shifts in Aboriginal social structures occasioned by the engagement of Aboriginal people in mainstream dominant culture politics. In particular, the need for Aboriginal leaders and 'community' representatives on various government and non-government committees, organisations and boards, together with their charge to represent their community and their people (and agreement about who 'the community' and 'the people' actually are), is subject to contestation. These factors must be recognised in terms of the effects they have had and continue to have on Aboriginal notions of and processes pertaining to hierarchy, authority and equality (see Howard 1982).

In *The Social Contract*, Rousseau proposed that the "institution of society itself required almost at once the establishment of forms of inequality, and the more complex society became, the more widespread were the institutions of inequality" (cited in Hamilton

1987:130). Applying this to Australia, early white settlers saw no recognisable evidence of Aboriginal people having any "hierarchical structures of authority, and control through which domination could be imposed" (Hamilton 1987:132). There was however much emphasis on the savagery and Godlessness of Aboriginal people and their proximity to 'Nature' as opposed to Culture and civilisation (Hamilton 1987). Nevertheless, during the early 1960's there was an inversion of dominant society's previous view that societies which lived closer to nature were subordinate and inferior (Hamilton 1987). "Nature was now evaluated as a beneficial rather than a negative condition for human existence" and Aboriginal societies with their foraging traditions were viewed as being those "where human society was maximally harmonious... and where egalitarian sentiments and institutions prevailed to the fullest extent" (Hamilton 1987:136). This led to the assumption that in pre-contact Aboriginal societies an egalitarian communalism existed naturally in relation to the distribution of resources among equals, and that consensus in decision making was customary (Hamilton 1987:136-137). The creation of 'Aboriginal communities', which in Wilcannia's case brought together groups of people from many areas, was based on a misunderstanding that perceived "Aboriginal society as egalitarian in the same way that 'the masses' were believed to be a unity by virtue of their class position" (Hamilton 1987:137).[86]

Recent research however (Hiatt 1987; Myers 1986) shows that a network of asymmetrical relationships possibly based on "sibling sets" as opposed to "solidary groups" was in place (Hamilton 1987). Competition was far from absent, even if the systems of production worked to "inhibit the permanent establishment of asymmetrical relations or the emergence of permanent hierarchically ordered groupings" (Hamilton 1987:137). Egalitarianism was an illusion "fostered by considering the whole as a single undifferentiated system..." (Hamilton 1987:138). Related kin groups were "under the influence of older members... and men generally extracted what surplus could be provided within such an economy from women... Each person was able to utilise the products of the land, not because all land was owned equally by all, but precisely because each person was him or herself an owner" (Hamilton 1987:138).

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86   During the 1950's until the mid 1970's there was much discussion among anthropologists about the social and
      political manifestations of power within "traditional Aboriginal" societies in relation to inequality, leadership
      and government (Howard 1982:2; see also Berndt 1965; Hiatt 1965; Sackett 1978). Anthropologists such as
      Sharp (1958), Meggitt (1962,1964), and Hiatt (1965) considered Aboriginal society as "extremely egalitarian
      and lacking leaders in any recognisable form of government" (Howard 1982:2). Others such as Elkin (1954),
      Berndt (1965), and Strehlow (1970) claim a strong hierarchy of leaders and government institutions (Howard
      1982b:2).

In much of the North and the Centre of Aboriginal Australia, the sense of ownership that Hamilton describes is still strongly evident and people readily state that, "I'm boss for that country" (1987:138). However, these ideas cannot be extrapolated to Wilcannia in a straightforward fashion, given its different historical trajectory in relation to land. Ownership now has a different, more materialistic ring to it. Elders have in some ways sought or are charged with taking on the role held previously by heads of kin related groups; however, there is now quite a different pie being argued for with no agreed rules as to its distribution other than the general values espoused by a "caring and sharing" ethos. There is a distinct lack of recognised authority in the absence of more 'traditional' authority: the Elders in many contexts are recognised under sufferance as well as treated with indifference. This railing against any legitimation of individuals or group bodies as recognised and agreed authorities seems to demonstrate the existence of an egalitarian ideal. I want to look further at egalitarianism and its possible meanings in Wilcannia by drawing on the language of "the tall poppy".

The Language of the Tall Poppy

The Australian National University Dictionary Centre defines the term *tall poppy* as "a person who stands out from the crowd by *being successful*, rich, or famous. It is often said that Australians have a tendency to cut tall poppies down to size by denigrating them. This is known as the tall poppy syndrome" (my emphasis) (ANU: 2005).

Burt Peeters (2004) gives a history of the term and its changing use from a key word to a cultural value bound up with the ethos of Australian egalitarianism. Peeters claims the term tall poppy gained general currency when the premier of New South Wales, John T. Lang used it in the 1930's to introduce "a bill intended to put a cap of 10 pounds a week on all government salaries"; Lang referred to those who earned above this sum as the "tall poppies" (Peeters 2004:4). More important, claims Peeters, was the fact that Lang's bill "followed the introduction of pensions and other forms of social security" (2004:4). This, together with forms of tariff protection for Australian manufacturers, saw the fostering of "a less entrepreneurial, more disapproving attitude to wealth and its trappings... accompanied by a tall poppy feeling about those who did get rich and flaunt their wealth" (Peeters 2004:4-5).

Peeters claims that this meaning has been overtaken by a more general usage (2004:5) which Feather's (1993:153) in turn extends to a "distrust of special excellence and a dislike of authority and status seekers" (Feather 1993:153). Here the term covers not only high income

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earners but those who seek status and authority as well (Peeters 2004:5). For Kapferer, "Tall poppies are more frequently those who invert the principle of egalitarian suspension; that is, they assert dominance, leadership, and superiority by virtue of qualities that separate them from others" (Kapferer 1988:177).

Whilst the term tall poppy "has a distinctively – even though not exclusively Australian ring to it" (Peeters 2004:4) and whilst it is a dominant culture term closely allied to white Australia's individual egalitarianism (cf. Kapferer 1988) there are, I argue, resonances of the 'tall poppy syndrome' operating in Wilcannia between Aboriginal people. I feel that although the underlying reasons why people wish to cut down those who are raised or who are seen to raise themselves above others may culturally differ, the principle in operation can be accommodated by this term.

People in Wilcannia, although never directly using the term tall poppy, nevertheless draw on the language of the tall poppy. They talk scathingly of people who "big note themselves", who are "getting above themselves", or who think that they are "better than us". The latter is said about inter-cultural and intra-cultural relationships and asserts a refusal to be anything but an equal to black or white. In 1825, Barron Field wrote of Aborigines that they, "have no notion of that inferiority to us, the oppression of which feeling reduces the New Zealanders and South Sea Islanders almost to despair...What then must be his opinion of our servants...With us masters, all he contends for nevertheless is equality" (cited in Hamilton 1987:134-135). On one occasion an Aboriginal man said to me quite despairingly, "you know Lorraine, sometimes I think whites still think they is better than us". Given my experience in Wilcannia I thought this to be something of an understatement. My friend however was seriously deliberating this.

When someone is seen to be getting above themselves, others will seek to cut them down accordingly. The possibilities and motivations for "cutting down", "taking down", "teaching the bastard a lesson", or "showing that bastard" vary. For black on black, mechanisms such as verbal slanging, social commentary, snubbing and ostracism take effect. For black on white the mechanisms are usually verbal slanging, often of a direct and public nature. Most whites would consider snubbing and social ostracism to be of little importance or consequence to them. Sometimes the verbal cutting down is direct, but often it is indirectly applied through others in the full knowledge that the information will be passed on.

Dominant society now refers not simply to tall poppies, but to a 'tall poppy syndrome'. Like all syndromes it is a "combination of symptoms, opinions or emotions" (Peeters 2004:13). Therefore, it has wide ranging and changing applications. Grove and Paccagnella (1995) explain the tall poppy syndrome as describing "a tendency to closely scrutinize high-profile individuals, search for reasons to cut them down to size, and experience satisfaction if they suffer a reversal of status" (Grove and Paccagnella 1995:88). I am mostly interested in the kinds of behaviours and sanctions which are brought to bear in what seems to me (in Wilcannia) to be the prevention of 'tall poppies', as well as the cutting down of people.

Kapferer's definition, like Peeters', gives emphasis to the deliberate act of becoming a tall poppy. For Peeters, this is defined by "unwarranted self-adulation" (2004:5). For Kapferer, it is a person "who not only sets himself above the crowd but systematically presents an identity formed in the structures and processes of an artificial world" (1988:176-177). Thus, as well as tall 'poppydom' requiring agency and action the distinction between "natural ability" and "unnatural or created ability" is created.[87]

It is notable that a great deal of the "cutting down" that goes on is *between* those known as coconuts, although coconuts are not the only people who stand to be "cut down". Being favoured by a relative, walking or looking a certain way which evokes envy can cause the tall poppy mechanism to operate. In all instances noticeable difference is the catalyst which calls for cutting down. Coconuts, however, are good examples of how praise, success and opportunity come together with the tall poppy syndrome in ways which discourage subversion of the caring and sharing ethos.

The kind of level playing field promoted by an ethos of equality in all things material as well as social status (e.g., distrust of leaders), together with the sanctions for those who break the status-quo, certainly predisposes towards a mediocrity and a circulating ascendancy whereby there is little opportunity for getting above the group. Those who do get above the group, the coconuts, are differentiated on the basis of their behaviour which stands as a negation of the caring and sharing expressive of an egalitarian ideology.

Given the problematic nature of difference, and the force of "profound family relationships" (Cowlishaw 2003:8), there is a clear ambivalence and ambiguity regarding praise, success and opportunity which is being constantly worked out and fought over. Wilcannian

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87 The difference expressed here between natural and artificial talent has a particular resonance in relation to art and artists in Wilcannia and is the subject of the three successive chapters.

Aboriginal people express human egalitarianism and an egalitarian ideology in as much as this underwrites the values of caring and sharing. These values do not require absolute equality in relation to the sharing of resources; nor do these values appear to be concerned with equal access to opportunity and success so much as with a willingness to share what (ipso-facto) is gained.

I consider that the caring and sharing ethos reflects egalitarian values to the extent that no one should be seen to go without whilst others 'have', but it does not necessarily mean equality as in equal shares. Furthermore, egalitarian ideals in relation to caring and sharing are voiced as opposed to always being followed; to this extent "the norms derived from the ideology conflict with the degree of differentiation that actually exists" (Jayawardena 1968:426) – as coconuts demonstrate.

Using food as an example, sharing was 'traditionally' associated with distribution according to strict rules which did not emphasise equality. There was also unequal access to knowledge, ceremonies, stories, etc., which reveal that certainly a horizontal hierarchy operated. Today, access to goods and other economic, political, cultural and social resources as a result of white invasion has arguably resulted in changing structures which are being created as well as being rejected. Social egalitarianism in terms of equal opportunity now (theoretically) exists *amongst* and *between* the Aboriginal people of Wilcannia, if not wider society: although some would argue that no clear separation exists in a globalised world, and yet others assert that Aboriginal people subvert Australian egalitarian ideals in that they are given advantage over whites (Morris 1997). Despite imagined and real differences, the pulls and tensions which manifest through success and opportunity come together in the stressing of a caring and sharing ethos which tends towards encouraging human and social equality.

In Wilcannia, the modulation of praise can be seen as a kind of pre-emptive strike on the possible creation of tall poppies. Praise can be understood as a catalyst for and a possible precursor of differentiation from the group. As well as being a precursor to praise, praise can be accompanied by 'success' which, for the purposes of my analysis, might best be read as the potential for difference. Praise has the potential to set a train in motion, and since praise often comes from outside, internal social controls are of limited effect. Unsolicited praise from others/Others coupled with the perceptions of others can vicariously make one a tall poppy. In other words, people may not actively raise themselves above others, but may be raised above others, by others – often whites. Sanctions are called into play as preventative measures to praise and its spin offs, to cut the possible effects of praise off at the pass as well

as those which need to be "cut down" after the fact. This is not to say that individual differences do not exist and are not allowed. Success is permitted and even lauded at times as long as this success is shared (sometimes materially through resources sometimes symbolically through cultural status).

The Special Case of Artists

In discussing Australian egalitarianism Kapferer claims that "individual differences do exist, but as unique differences in nature" (1988:175). That is, "the only legitimate difference is that premised upon and growing out of a demonstrated natural difference" (Kapferer 1988:174). According to Kapferer, "Australian egalitarianism is not antagonistic to inegalitarian distinction per se; it establishes the ideological terms of its existence. This is that distinction, inequalities in power and status, should be demonstrated as extending from individual qualities found in nature" (1988:176). Thus, according to Kapferer, differences which seem to be founded in nature – such as "natural" intellect (without study) and athletic ability are often valorised – thereby explaining Australia's enduring love affair with sporting figures such as Sir Donald Bradman. The fact that these abilities are often honed through years of training does not detract from their perceived natural underlying basis.

I, in turn, want to consider the production of visual art in Wilcannia in light of Kapferer's assertions that difference is more palatable if the inequalities are seen to be natural. Whilst a few Wilcannia artists have dabbled in TAFE courses, most are self-taught and some of them make a point of saying how they never had any training, in fact saying that "it just come natural to me". In relation to visual art, natural difference is particularly interesting because in Wilcannia, the content of the art works is expressed both by the artist and the wider Aboriginal community to be "culture". There is a sense that the work is not singularly owned but through its expression of culture the art work is exhibiting characteristics of the group. Although some individuals are acknowledged to know more about culture (they are said to "really know about culture", to "know all about culture"), to the extent that culture is seen to belong to everybody so too does the art belong to everybody.

As an analogy to 'The Wilcannia Mob', visual art produced in Wilcannia does not have to be 'seen' by anyone outside to be considered successful art. Neither do the people who make art works need to be successful outside of community to qualify for success. Art is not required to be externally evaluated to be valued, art's *presence, meaning* and *production* (as I go on to discuss in the following three chapters) is sufficient. It is not sacrilege to hang an

artwork on the wall with drawing pins, it does not need or ask to be beautifully framed, nor does this make the work in any sense 'better', or more valued. Artworks can be exhibited in the National Gallery, the Broken Hill Gallery, or a local hall; an exhibition can be mounted with nibblies and wine to fete the art and artist, but this changes neither the evaluation of the art or the artist for the people of Wilcannia. The art is judged on the basis of internal evaluations and external evaluations are not in the main considered for comparison.

Dominant culture understands an artist's unwillingness or reluctance to attend an exhibition where their work is on show or to prepare work for an exhibition following such an offer to be rejecting an opportunity. Moreover, the offer to organise exhibitions is generally externally driven, and if the work needed to meet the requirements of the exhibition conflicts with the internal drivers or locally based alternatives on offer, then the external drivers lose out most times. Success and opportunity can here again be considered in terms of past experience with promises failing to meet up with outcomes, of feeling like a fish out of water, versus the 'known', the comfortable, the understood: that which can be controlled. Yet, artists have something of a special place in Wilcannia when considering attitudes towards praise, success and opportunity.

It is not however a simple matter, the three successive chapters discuss something of the minefield that Aboriginal artists tread in producing and re-producing culture not only for Aboriginal people but for a wider mostly non-Aboriginal audience and clientele whilst maintaining the caring and sharing ethos and in negotiating success and opportunity. Some examples of this negotiation are shown. The following chapters also tell us something about the different ways in which culture is understood inter and intra-culturally.