Primitivism Prevails

The Cultural Problematization of Aboriginality

A Study of Contemporary Aboriginality in a rural Australian town increasingly geared towards tourism

M.D. Thesis

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Abstract

Contemporary Darwin is characterised by racial, that is socially constructed notions of culture, structures that are partly produced by stereotypes through misperceptions on the contents of cultural capital. In this thesis, performance is analysed so as to reveal a lacking working consensus between different ethnic groups. Busking performance participates in racial stereotypes that are supported by government approved discourses on what is expected of Aborigines in order to promote the tourist industry. It thus participates in the cultural problematization of what constitutes Aboriginality. The contents of cultural capital are consciously used by performers in order to articulate their own sense of Aboriginal identity. Public misperceptions of Aboriginality is made explicit in analysing repertoires, interactions with the audience and confrontations with each other and the police. The social order of cultural expectations is informed by a dichotomy, authentic versus inauthentic and this comes to inform contemporary racial stereotypes. The themes of cultural problematization is widened with the study of houseless Aborigines and discourses related to public drinking. Houselessness, public drinking and begging all imply resistance, partly because rituals among the wider population in Darwin imply a confirmation of non-indigenous hegemony. Public drinking contributes to discourses of social disorder and cultural pathology, and are articulated by members of the the public and government officials to promote increased surveillance and policing. The themes of cultural expectations thus involve disproportionate amounts of symbolic violence resulting in bio-power. Contemporary and future reconciliation needs to acknowledge the issues surrounding lack of consensus on what Aboriginality, or the contents of cultural capital of Aborigines, consists of.

Introduction

Introduction

Within popular Australian national culture and among many international tourists who visit Australia, the Aborigines of Australia are regarded as the oldest indigenous ethnic groups of the world. As we will see, such views participate in discourses of primitivism that will be criticised later on. Aborigines have never been totally cut off from contact with other groups; prior to Europeans they had contact with Indonesian traders and fisherman and with Melanesian groups (Swain 1993). Contact with Europeans often involved them reinventing their traditional ways of life, so as to pass on cultural knowledge through word of mouth and through beliefs carved and painted into various forms of stunning artwork. The changes brought by colonial conquest and contact has raised onto the national public state widespread claims of the cultural inauthenticity of contemporary Aborigines, and perhaps especially concerning urban Aborigines. This thesis studies urban Aborigines in the northern city of Darwin,

The word "Aboriginal", which is used both as a noun and an adjective, is originally latin and stems from three rootwords:

Ab «from» or «out of»
origin «beginning» or «source»
al «one belonging to»

"Aboriginal" then, can be translated as "One from the beginning". However, the Latin word "origo" also means "I rise" or "I become visible", making an alternative translation of the word "One who is from the Beginning who is rising and becoming visible" (Arden 1994).

Aborigines in Australia are and have throughout history been involved in immense struggles for landrights and for the recognition of their culture and identity. Since the arrival of Captain Cook and subsequent massive English settlement from 1788, colonisation and marginalisation have been a substantial part of race relations in Australia. Numerous juridical and federal acts have been established, resulting in loud feedback from NGOs and individuals with various degrees of acceptance. Many Aboriginals claim that Captain Cook, that is the cultural logic of colonial power, is still present. In everyday life they often meet with hostility and rejection from mainstream Australian citizens. The management of identity and racial interactions (Goffman 1983) is an ongoing aspect of the urban context. Aboriginal interactions

and meetings with outsiders often takes place via institutional contexts. In an urban environment, there is some scope for evading these forms of institutional control which are also encoded forms of racial power. Homelessness offers one such avenue of escape, or more accurately realm for reclaiming some autonomy (Collman 1988). In Darwin, where my fieldwork was undertaken, racial confrontation was to be seen all around by any visitor. This confrontation involved physical fights and forms of harassment which were grounded in different ideals, norms and values.

Race

It is important to point out that when I use the notion «race» in this thesis, it is not primarily a matter of biology in the way a scientist would understand biological differences. Any mention of race in this thesis is one of socially constructed categories and this include popular folk notions of biology. Race cannot be ignored because it is used by social actors within the ethnographic context. There are publicly articulated racial differences in Darwin and throughout Australia, involving terms such as "Whitefella", "Blackfella", "Yellowfella" etc. Race as a socially constructed category is of primary concern to my informants. Perceptions of racial differences are also undergoing change as informants talk about how skin colour is no longer a reliable marker, for some Blackfellas can easily pass as white. When dealing with contemporary racial difference, we are dealing with ways of embodying cultural and social differences. Whilst skin colour may have declined, white informants will focus on hair, facial features, bodily gestures, and social mannerisms to spot and typify others, To some extent, race has been partly de-biologised in contemporary Australia as people come to use culture and social practices to identify and create racial differences.

Theoretical conceptualisation

In this thesis, there are three aspects to racial antagonisms that need elaboration with different theoretical perspectives: Power, capital and performance.

Power will be mainly understood within a framework adopted from the work of Michel Foucault (Foucault 1998). We will see how Aborigines are viewed as "the Self-Destructive Other" and how this justifies constant surveillance. This monitoring and discipline of Aborigines is phrased as a form of humanitarian care that also protects property, commerce and social peace. Such forms of surveillance participates in regimes of bio-power. Bio-power here refers to the diverse institutions of social control that seek to foster power of production and life through technologies of surveillance and discipline directed at bodies. As we will see

in chapter 2 and 3, there is clearly a disproportionate amount of bio-power that is directed at managing Aboriginal lives through police, the welfare system, housing agencies and the juidical-penal system.

In terms of the theme of capital, it will be understood in various ways using from the work of Pierre Bourdieu. In his book *Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction* (1973), he distinguished three forms of capital that will be used throughout this thesis. First, there is the economic capital. As we will see later, economic capital was often thought of as the primary motive behind Aboriginal busking performances that were also a means of articulating cultural identity and important social meanings. Secondly there is social capital, which Bourdieu defines as:

> *The aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition* (Bourdieu 1973)

Social capital is in other words the resources a social actor receives through group membership and other relationships. As we will see, such capital can be considered crucial in the contexts of busking performance as well as with many aspects of the lives of homeless Aborigines in Darwin. However the third form of capital distinguished by Bourdieu is perhaps in this context the most central one. It is cultural capital, which can basically be defined as the forms of knowledge (in a wide sense) gathered through interactions with members of the groups one relates to. As we will see in chapter 2, the content of such cultural capital is often contested. I will focus on the cultural contents of music and the legitimacy of its performance so as to explore the forms that racial antagonisms assumes in Darwin.

When it comes to analysing public performances, the theories of Erving Goffman will be of vital importance. Especially when dealing with busking performance, but also other kinds of performance such as begging, As we shall see, those performances can be important in maintaining group membership. The theories of Goffman and Bourdieu will help to illuminate how interaction between *busking* individuals and groups can generate social divisions and relationships between different Aboriginal groups as well as with non-Aboriginal audiences in Darwin.

Methodological approach

Heading out to the field in Darwin in January 2009, my initial plan was to engage with the

Aboriginal Rights Commission (ARC), who were reportedly active in central Darwin. I soon found out, however, the commission was not active during the time of my stay. I also tried repeatedly and unsuccessfully to arrange interviews with local Aborigines. Accordingly,, I found myself in a bit of a social vacuum. During this time I stayed in tourist hostels so as to get to know visitors' perspectives on Aborigines. The local staff at the hostels were usually very helpful in suggesting where to go for different opinionated people.

In Darwin, I started to take notice of the different street performers and their social spaces, their choices of both locations and repertoires seemed to have s socio-cultural significance. As an intermediate musician myself, I gradually started involving myself in the performing scene. Having gotten to know a few Aboriginal buskers as well as non-Aboriginal ones, I noticed their varying successes and failures. There was a strong racial aspect to what different buskers performed, where and and how.

Another major source of material of this thesis was when I temporarily became homeless. This was pretty late in my fieldwork but it certainly had an effect in getting informants to talk honestly to me. It was in fact revealing to see how much their information changed during the time I was myself without a house in Darwin. Not only did they share more information, they also seemed to reveal their current state of affairs in a manner that involved much less shame than previously. Indeed, as we will see, pride is often a key word that informants use because it is so precarious to maintain in the contested urban environment.

Primitivism

The core of the thesis lies in its attempt to illuminate perceptions of authenticity that involve racial classifications among social actors. It will show how aspects of Aboriginal culture are viewed through primitivist lenses. Constructed as standing unchanged and outside of time, there is primitivism related to morality, to a perception of Aborigines as intellectually backward and with a stunted form of moral development that is often linked to their perceived inadequate technological development. Part of the tourist culture that draws visitors to see Aborigines in Darwin is that they are seen to have a static primordial culture. Aborigines are thus expected to perform their culture and in doing so, because they have changed and become so visibly westernised, they become also objects of failure to outsiders. As we will see in chapter 2 and 3, romantic primitivist expectations serve to reinforce negative racial stereotypes. They are the other side from which their fall into modernity is measured. In short, government supported traditionalism serves not to benefit Aboriginal social actors, but rather puts them in a situation where they are bound up by racial prejudice in negative and positive

terms. Tourism thus has a tremendous effect on perceptions of Aboriginality and even in the dislocating of poor Aborigines in town. They are heavily policed by private and government institutions which seek to regulate them through new forms of bio-power that no longer operate through total institutions.

Confrontation and reconciliation

This thesis will explore how racial tensions and conflicts are experienced in the every day lives of urban Aborigines as well as by non-Aboriginal people in central Darwin. It will provide the reader with intimate empirical accounts and reflections especially surrounding activities that can be seen as exclusively linked to urban life. These activities include busking, street begging. and homelessness by Aboriginals in Darwin.. These issues revolve around the negotiation of identities in an Australian urban context..

Reconciliation has been a national theme in Australia for quite some time. Many mainstream whites believe Aborigines are getting more than their legitimate rights, collectively as well as individually.. They would even go as far as to say they receive undeserved benefits from the Federal Government and the mining companies in the Territory. Such benifits include land rights, unemployment benefits, housing assistance, special medical services, Abstudy grants and other forms of financial help.

History of Colonialism in Darwin

Many Aborigines in Darwin, talk metaphorically about Captain Cook[1] still being present even though he never came into the Northern Territory. There are many Aboriginal myths about Captain Cook (Maddock 1988; Rose 1994) where this historical figure is made to represent the colonial powers which have continually turned the lives of all Aboriginals of Australia around through dispossession, assimilation and genocide. The colonial powers in the Northern Territory can be said to have tried to assimilate the Aboriginal groups by measures that can be considered utterly extreme. One important aspect of this is the Stolen Generations. This refers to the "half-caste" Aboriginal children taken away from their homes by the government and placed in mission stations and in white families for the sake of assimilation. It was thought that such measures could help "breed out their Aboriginality". In fact, such policies have existed even as recently as 1969 (Nehl & Walker 2000). One problem was that after having been forced to accept the norms of the wider Australian society, many still found it hard to be

1 Captain James Cook is officially recognised as the discoverer of Australia. Even though many European explorers had reached the shores of Australia before he and his crew arrived in 1788, it was after this that the English settling and colonisation started.

accepted. As former high court judge Ronald Wilson puts it:

> *Children were removed because the Aboriginal race was seen as an embarrasment to white Australia. The aim was to strip the children of their Aboriginality, and accustom them to live in a white Australia. The tragedy was compounded when the children, as they grew up, encountered the racism which shaped the policy, and found themselves rejected by the very society for which they were being prepared.* (ALII 2004)

In 2001, then prime minister Kevin Rudd made a public speech concerning the horrible events that has taken place over generations, and apologised on behalf of all Australians[2]. Almost all the Aboriginal I spoke to who was victims of these policies were alcoholics living in low-budget government funded housing. One woman who people called China (because of her physical appearance) expressed concern about the effects of Kevin Rudds speech. She said she considered it as nothing but a lipservice in order to gain votes. An apology from "politician Whitefellas", she said, was merely empty words with no contents. In fact the "sorry-speech" made many bitter because it made it seem like the tensions were over. Whatever may have been the intentions of the public speech, colonisation is experienced as an ongoing process by many Aboriginal persons. Resistance is a central experience for many Aborigines in Australia (Cowlishaw 1988; Morris 1989; Trigger 1992). Some Aboriginals say that whereas before they fought back with physical violence, they now fight back with words. This is reflected in Aboriginal poetry, songs and art as well as in political protest movements around land rights and the Intervention. I will explore the subtle diverse forms that everyday resistances assume in an urban context.

Previous research

The Aboriginals of Australia have been subjects to an enormous amount of anthropological research by scholars such as Baldwin Spencer, Frank Gillen, Radcliffe-Brown, Emile Durkheim, Max Gluckman and Claude Levi-Strauss and Nancy Munn. It is not the aim of this thesis to give a history of this substantial research but a brief history is necessary to explore the debates about contemporary Aboriginal culture. A substantial part of anthropological research has been in terms of kinship and cosmology. This has inadvertently supported a popular culture which questions the degree to which Aboriginals today "live up to their cultural traits" in an urban situation.

2 The Guardian 13. February 2008. http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/feb/13/australia

In the beginning of anthropological thought, the perception of Aboriginals as representing "the noble savage" implied a positively oriented romanticism. Bernard Smith has shown how the Aboriginals had existed in the European mind long before the arrival of Captain Cook in Australia (Smith 1960). This positive perception was however quickly replaced by a negative view of the Aboriginals as the most primitive groups of the world in opposition to a modern West. The were situated within social evolutionary models where Aboriginals were considered to be the lowest stage of cultural evolution; the first primordial hunters and gatherers. Such social evolutionism helped legitimise the colonisation of Australia and the movement of Aborigines off their land. In the early twentieth century, popular belief held that indigenous groups of Australia would fade away either through adaptation to modern life, or simply by dying out as the result of natural selection (Morphy 1996). Though such beliefs have been put to rest at a scholarly level, they remain part of everyday culture and underpin everyday racial confrontations. Racist distinctions are definately alive in mainstream Australia despite public efforts to promote reconciliation.

The first anthropological studies of Australian Aboriginals involved mainly two subjects, kinship and religion. These studies have been very important in the development of anthropological theory here. When it comes to the study of indigenous kinship in Australia, Baldwin Spencer is considered a pioneer (Mulvaney & Calaby 1985). Aboriginal kinship is characterised by totemic clans which in most areas patrilineal, though matrilineal clans and moieties can also be found in the norther part of Australia (Povinelli 1993: 8). As most students of anthropology would know, a clan is a group of people based on and is often called a descent group (Dürkheim 1954: Povinelli 1993: 29). The clans were exogamic, meaning that marriage where both parts belong to the same clan is prohibited. "Totemic" basically means that any member of the clan relate to a specific natural phenomenas (Munn 1971). These can include animal species, the wind, stones or plants. The species function as symbolic markers for a clan (Morphy 1996). Kinship can perhaps be considered especially important in an Australian indigenous context as it has both ideological dimensions and social organising aspects. Claude Levi-Strauss (1969) has argued that Aboriginal kinship is based on marriage alliances, which has generated some debate. The complexity of Aboriginal marriage strategies has been central to the development of anthropological kinship theory (Hiatt 1965; Stanner 1966).

When it comes to the study of Aboriginal religion, W.H.C. Stanner has been an important developer of both empirical data as well as theoretical contributions. By looking for the emic meanings and experience in Aboriginal religion, he published brilliant accounts on

the Aboriginal concept of "the Dreaming" (Stanner 1966). The Dreaming (*altjirra, gurruwari, wangarr*) is basically the Aboriginal story of creation (Morphy 1994: 88). However, in addition to describe happenings in the past, it is also something happening "now"; it is the invisible presence of the past in the present (Munn 1971). Dreaming beings are sacred creative beings who lived long ago and created the world from which they have now withdrawn but not totally. They still exist in the present from the past, or as some of my informants explained, they exist in "no-time". The Dreaming characters created the landscape of Australia and gave the traditional Customary Law to human beings. This raises the question of urban Aboriginal connections to this Dreaming, and how their perceptions of it have been affected by various process of modernisation. For many urban Aborigines Dreaming beings are still present and occasionally exercise their power. Issues of cultural continuity about the Dreaming and knowledge of Customary Law are important for forming the legal basis of Aboriginal land rights claims (Povinelli 1993). Aborigines have to show ongoing settlement and cultural attachment to the land to claim their landrights they must do so though proving they still have their customary cosmology. All of this festishises tradition and primordial unchanging Aboriginality, and has provoked heated debates in contemporary Australia.

Organisation of the thesis

Chapter 1 will be a description of the field and the principal subjects with whom I was involved in Darwin.. I will discuss the multicultural aspects of Darwin and the construction of different identities that make Darwin unique in relation to other regional capitals in Australia?

Chapter 2 will focus on busking by Aborigines in Darwin. The chapter will use transcribed conversations and analyse the performance repertoires used and how this was influenced by the wider tourist context and the personal and social knowledge of buskers. The competition between buskers is important in this regard, and this includes competition with non-Aboriginal buskers as well as other Aboriginal buskers. Who competes with who? For what kinds of capital? Capital in this context will be understood in Bourdieu's sense of the term. Relevant here is the impression management that is inevitable (Goffman 1959) in a performance context and the extent to which urban Aboriginals articualte their identities in the streets of Darwin. Social and cultural concerns can be merged with personal biographical details and this is almost always expressed through different repertoires by single busking individuals as well as busking groups. What forces are active in decision-making about whether or not a person will busk alone or find a group to busk with? What are the benefits of

group-busking and what are the potential losses? Through the incorporation of Western elements into busking repertoires, we will see how members of the audience can sometimes reject Aboriginal performances which are taken as indicative of the problems of contemporary Aboriginality.

Chapter 3 will focus on homeless Aboriginals in Darwin, on their experiences, perceptions and social relationships.. It will be argued that despite Aborigines and the wider culture emphasising close links to land, they often perceive "home" more as merely an abstract idea and a state of mind than an actual place. The definitions of "homeless" differs in different nations in the world. In Australia a homeless person is defined as one "[who] has inadequate access to safe and secure housing" (SAAPA 1994). There is, in other words, a set of competing discourses to be found here. What makes a home safe and secure? Urban Aborigines living in the streets of Darwin rarely expressed concern about their safety compared to living in a house, except ironically with the respect to the dangers of being harrassed and assaulted by police. I was surprised that they did not express more dissatisfaction about homelessness. What tensions there were often involved conflicts between the different homeless groups. In this thesis, I prefer to use the term *houseless* for three main reasons. First and most importantly, they rarely use the term *homeless* themselves. Second, they considered the street (or the 'land') their real home because there were always shelters to be found. Third, they had more often than not specific places where they slept unless they were chased away by the police. Indeed, a central part of racial confrontation in Darwin involves confrontations with police. Never during my 5 month stay did I see an Aboriginal person wearing a police uniform. Urban Aborigines continually complain about being always viewed as potential lawbreakers. Indeed, Aboriginal ID-cards in the Northern Territory have 50% of their space devoted to instructions stating what to do when arrested by police. To be put in *the Cage*, is how Aborigines refer to police cars, which are often utes with a small metal holding bay at the back, As elsewhere in Australia, in Darwin, police officers patrolling the parks are much more likely to check up upon Aborigines than non-Aboriginal people. The offers of free food and other forms of charities by private organisations will also be considered for their social implications. Whilst many may believe that such help promotes reconciliation with non-Aboriginal people, it also promotes suspicion and anger when urban Aborigines ask for money for food

Another important theme in chapter 3 is discourses concerning alcohol consumption. Part of the tension and violence connected to alcohol consumption has to do with urban Aborigines having to handle two very different modes of economic management; one that is

based on reciprocity and gifts; and another that is based on money and is much more individualistic and geared towards the needs of the nuclear family. Different sources of income are often allocated to be spent differently so as to handle this conflict. The income from the state, from Centrelink, exists alongside other income from busking and begging for money and cigarettes in the streets. The chapter will explore how public drinking plays a central part in the confirmation of non-indigenous hegenomy as well as Aboriginal resistance and the defining of Aboriginality. In short, it will investigate the competing and contested discourses on public drinking in terms of racial identity and racial conflict.

Chapter 4 will deal with the reconciliation process that has been part of the a national agenda in Australia for quite a while. A vast number of written documents about this have been published, and a day rarely goes by without reading about it in newspapers or hearing about it in local and national news reports. What can be done to promote a sustainable reconciliation process? I will argue that this requires mainstream recognition of urban Aboriginals as not having failed to integrate into mainstream Darwin and as having their "own culture". Urban Aboriginals have developed an impressive knowledge and skills to handle urban poverty and racial marginalization. This apparent adaptation is not to be considered as assimilation or as social dysfunctionality, for such perceptions are often underpinned by primitivist expectations of them staying traditional. What is often seen as dysfunctionality is a product of welfare and police regimes of bio-power which produce alternative ways of managing everyday relations and resources so as to sustain their lives in a capitalist modern world .

Chapter 1 – Ethnographic context

Introduction

This chapter will lead the reader into the ethnographic field of Darwin. It will start out by introducing some vital general points about Darwin as a whole with special focus tended to the cultural aspects of it. The second part will narrow down into more specific spheres of the field by presenting the most essential locations and institutions for my informants. This will help the reader get intimate with the ethnographic context and visualisation will thereby be more comprehensible. It will also be useful as a foundation for further reference to the relevant places in later chapters.

Darwin

Darwin is the capital of the Northern Territory. The town is located in the top end of Australia, making it the most northern city of the country. Encompassing about 112 square kilometers (11,178 hectares), at June 2009 Darwin had over 124 000 inhabitants (Australian Buerau of Statistics 2010), and is in addition to being a resident and a commercial area also a military one. In 2006, 9,7% were classified as Aboriginals (2006 census). In all of the Northern Territory about 31% are classified as Aboriginal (DCC 2006).

Fig 1. Central Darwin[3]

3 Map drawn using satelite photographs from Google

Before European settlement was officially established in the Northern Territory in 1869, the inhabitants of the area around Darwin were the Larrakia Aboriginal people. Relatively few people lived there before around 1880, when the hunt for gold and pearls started. This gave white settlers a very good reason to try their luck in Darwin. Having always been a melting pot of different ethnic identities, there have always been racism to be found. In 1901, when there were approximately one Chinese for every fourth Europeans, there was racial discrimination to be found on an institutional level against Chinese settlers. In the 1930s, Territory Chinese were excluded from permanent public service positions. This institutional racism is by many seen to have vanished through processes of reconciliation and changing ideals. However, as this thesis will show, this may not be the case. In 1911 the first suburbs of Darwin were established, namely Larrakeyah, Parap and Stuart Park. The city also have a history of being directly involved in the Second World War as it served as an important base for the allied forces due to the strategic location. The town was raided 64 times by the Japanese with a total number of 243 people losing their lives. In the 1950-1960s the town experienced considerable growth as it gradually expanded into areas such as Nightcliffe, Rapid Creek, Winnellie and Alawa. Another crucial negative impact on the inhabitants of Darwin came on Christmas Eve in 1974 when the cyclone Tracy hit town, leaving only about 500 of the estimately 8000 houses inhabitable. (Snelling 1982).

As Julie Roberts and Martin Young have suggested, the impacts these events have had on the collective mental image of the 'place' of Darwin are not to be taken for granted (Roberts & Young 2008). They have argued that especially these two events, namely the bombing raids and the cyclone Tracy, have been subject to a negotiation of memories leading way to a re-imagining of Darwin "by promotional strategies in a way that unhinges the past and attempts to construct a new identity attractive to potential migrants and tourists" (Roberts & Young 2008: 51). In other words, Darwin is viewed upon as a place of mobility, and its sense of place is required to be constructed to attract people by promoting its Otherness. This is clearly seen in the streets of central Darwin. No visitor can miss all the tourist brochures proudly presenting offers to see "unique and authentic Aboriginal culture" (Crick 1989). Artworks from communities outside of Darwin is often sold in town, as well as trips being organised to ancient Aboriginal sites in the Territory such as Uluru, Katherine Gorge and Kakadu. The community of Maningrida, for instance, has its own art store in the most central area of town in Mitchel Street where the merchandise sold is exclusively from their community. The self-presented Otherness of Darwin today is thus clearly related to Aboriginal culture. In fact the theme of "Aboriginality" can be considered central when it comes to the

construction of the Australian nation-state as a whole (Lattas 1993). Aboriginal expression through various forms of art is even part of the symbolism that constitutes the structure of government institutions (Sutton 1988 in Bourke, Bourke & Edwards 1998). The paradox then, is that an alarmingly high proportion of the non-Aboriginal population of Darwin seem to have harsh prejudices and overwhelmingly negative characteristics of "Blackfellas" dwelling in town.

Traditional landowners

Prior to european colonisation, the Larrakia were the landowners of the Darwin region. In the beginning years of the colonisation the area was relatively untouched by settlers. The remoteness of the location as well as the rough climate making it unsuitable for agriculture made it a relatively protected area for some time (Rowley 1972: 14). Today, however, the Larrakia nation are struggling for landrights. In accordance with the the Aboriginal Land Right (NT) of 1973 and the Native Title Act of 1993, Aboriginal groups need to prove their linkage to the land in order to reestablish their control over it. This includes proving ongoing responsibility over sacred sites. As a result there have been longlasting court trials where representatives have to prove eligibility for their belonging. In cases of land rights and Native Title, primitivism is ideal for Aboriginal social actors, because it is what constitutes the propositions of granting them. Recordings of the still ongoing Kenbi trial has shown how opposition is sometimes silenced, a significant indicator of the ambivalent discourses on the value of primitivism, as we will see later (Povinelli 1993: 247).

Climate and the social implications of seasons

Darwin is located at the Top End of Australia, making it part of the tropical climate zone. The very high concentration of air humidity in combination with the warm temperatures, among with other traits, contributes to the growing international tourist industry. As we will see, this industry promotes primitivism through advertisements describing "authentic" Aboriginal culture (Roberts & Young 2008). In this region, the seasonal changes are generally divided in two: The very humid 'wet season', which is characterised by heavy showers of rain, and the drier 'dry season'. Temperatures are not very different in these two seasons, but the temperature feels very different on the body. The seasonal changes also brings about seasonal migration patterns for urban Aborigines in central Darwin. Whereas they often sleep in more open spaces during the dry and more touristic dry season, there is much bigger needs for shelters during the wet season. As we will see later, the fierce competition for tourist attention

among busking and begging Aborigines is much more prevalent during the dry season, during the wet season there is much more a sense of community during the wet season, when the tendency is more people shelter in the same spots. Social boundaries among Aborigines are partly defined by climate patterns. In short, the seasonal changes have signifcant impacts on social life among urban Aborigines in Darwin.

Drinking culture

In addition to the characterisation of Darwin as a place of mobililty, it is also characterised by a massive drinking culture. Rarely a day goes by without reading about the consequenses and impacts of binge drinking in local newspapers, and this is definately not only regarding Aboriginal people. Statistically, Darwin represents a very overrepresented presence of drinkers compared to other towns in Australia. In fact it is arguably the city in the world with the largest per capita beer consumption at 230/l a year (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010[4]), more than double the average rate of Australia. It is no surprise that any backpacker magazine would refer to Darwin as "the drinking capital of Australia". The number of fullpacked bars (*hotels*) even on weekdays and even during the wet season reflect this seemingly growing demand.

The drinking culture has a connection to the historical frontier tradition of excessive drinking in the area, especially among males. The excessive drinking culture can be seen as people showing off their abilities in the contest against natural elements, that is it is a culture that celebrates masculinity. It is the ability to drink and remain in self control which is celebrated and which is used to distinguish the drinking culture from Europeans from those of Aborigines, who are seen to be disordered through drinking. In the context of racial confrontation, drinking among non-Aborigines in Darwin is ritualised and celebrated in the annual Beer Can Regatta (see chapter 3) as a way of confirming non-Aboriginal dominance in the realm of drinking. The drinking of Whites is channeled in playful competition for charity and is displayed in a benevolent way. Up until 1967, when they acquired the right to vote, Aborigines were prohibited from drinking, For many Aborigines, drinking confirmed their acquisition of citizenship. These socio-cultural history as well as the hot humid climate and the tourist industry make alcohol consumption a part of life in Darwin

Religious affiliation

In terms of religious affiliation, Darwin is a relatively secular town. However it is dominated

4 http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/mf/4307.0.55.001/

by catholic Christianity. According to a 2006 census made by the Northern Territory government, the number of Christians (56 613) is a little over twice the number of non-religious people (26 695). The second most popular religion is that of Buddhism (2 281). There is no significant differences in terms of religious belief between genders (NTSD 2006). Many Aborigines dwelling in Darwin has adopted a Christian belief. Some of them had always recognised themselves as Christians because they were raised with it. The colonial past has had a significant impact on their cosmological thinking. Some Aborigines have converted more recently after having come to town. What was common among urban Aborigines in Darwin, however, was that whilst believing in the Christian religion, their cosmological and ontological thinking was often defined by Aboriginal traditions. Telling stories about the Dreaming, they did not seem to think that it contradicted the story of Christ. More often than not they viewed the story of Christ as merely symbolic and not an empirical account with historical accuracy.

Social plurity and racial segregation

Generally speaking Darwin is quite racially segregated. The further south you come, the less Aborigines will be present. This sociogeographical division is not an absolute one, but the tendency is clear. As the main tourism streets are located in the south, this social allocation of space is clearly wished for by governmental institutions because, as we will see later, Aborigines are seen as not being true to their culture. Their culture is seen as static and the consequenses of such essentialist approach will be elaborated from different angles in the following chapters.

One out of ten individuals in Darwin classify themselves as Aborigines. It has to be noted that urban Aborigines in Darwin are by no means a homogenous group (Coulehan 1990: 10). In addition to the vast number of linguistic groups, individuals have different values and ways of life. Especially at and around the Top End of Australia, different linguistic groups are several. In Darwin, the most prominent one is Laragiya, but in an urban context linguistic groups often mix, and perhaps increasingly as we will see causes later. Other prominent lingos included Limilngan, Daly, Giimbiu, Umbugarla and Tiwi. However, there are clear tendencies and a certain set of values that can be generalised as we will see in later chapters. In my experience, the importance laid by my informants on linguistic traits were surprisingly downplayed. Many knew how to handle different lingos, including children who sometimes had parents originally belonging to different groups. Children would then have to learn lingos, as social life in an urban setting like Darwin is often the principal languagea in contexts

outside of their own homes.

Essential locations

This section will describe places that a number of my informants agreed to be the most important for their lives in Darwin. The locations are important in different ways. Some of them are crucial because of the institutions they compromise while others because of convenience when it comes to security as well as for gaining capital (in every sense of the word).

Streets

Smith Street is arguably the second busiest street in Darwin. Despite this, it was also the street considered the most profitable for *busking* (see chapter 2). Usually the reasons for *busking* here were related to the competition aspect. At times there were too many people *busking* in the Mall and the buskers who came in late often chose the northern parts of central Smith Street instead of the more profitable south one. Far to the north of this street were some government funded low-budget houses where mostly Aborigines lived. One of my informants was in fact a Maori in his 40s and while he was officially homeless he often stayed with his Aboriginal girlfriend here (see chapter 3).

Mitchell Street is by far the busiest street in Darwin. What makes it interesting in this case is that Aborigines pretty much seemed to stay away from this street. The reasons were many, but the most important one was that people often verbally threw them out of the street areas. Dresscodes in bars were much more strict, and it is clear that the street was intended for tourists much more than any street in town. This is reflected by the high number of backpacker hostels and restaurants, as well as the general demographics observed when walking there. Aborigines were dislocated in a number of ways from this street in order to make way for tourism. This was reportedly done through unofficial agreements between shopkeepers, police and Aborigines about where they are to locate themselves. Aborigines would get stopped more often, searched, asked what they were doing etc, if they resided in this area.

The police station in Mitchell Street is one of the busiest I have ever visited for such a small town. Numerous times did I witness Aborigines complaining by the desk about what they refered to as unfair treatment. They were rarely taken seriously in this regard. According to Aborigines themselves, this was experienced as a major problem of Darwin: The police did not seem to want to listen to them as much as they listened to Whitefellas. When I confronted

police officers about this matter, they often held that Aborigines were very likely to come up with false accusations and some implied not listening as closely to Aborigines as they would to others. Most officers, however, would deny this.

Parks and sheltering

The parks and shelterings are most relevant for chapter 4 about homeless Aborigines in Darwin. The Bicentennial Park is located at the esplanade near the southern end of Darwin. It stretches alongside the ocean and it's rectangular shape makes it easy to police. It was the park with the highest density of Aboriginal groups socialising. Perhaps because of this, it was also the place with the highest density of patrolling police units. Usually there were at least 7-8 different Aboriginal groups sitting in circles, and more often than not there was alcohol involved despite it being an area where alcohol consumption is prohibited. This central park represents the place where the families I got most involved with often met friends for drinking binges .

The Frogs Hollow park was one of the most important places for Aboriginal women to meet. Interestingly this seemed to be a place where alcohol consumption was not that common compared to the other parks of Darwin. Located right next to the oldest backpacker hostel in Darwin, it was also a meeting area for international tourists. Aborigines usually kept to themselves on the south-eastern part of the park while tourists were often seen on the north-western. Never during my stay in Darwin did I spot any local non-Aboriginal people here. Tourists rarely complained about the presence of Aborigines in this park. The park was only used for sleeping by Aborigines in case of emergency or drunkeness. The reason for not sleeping there was according to themselves the unusual high density of insects including mosquitos (*mossies*).

The Wharf is located on the utmost southern part of Darwin. It is important in this matter because it is regarded by many homeless Aborigines as the place best suited for sleeping outside without being harrased by the police. Security guards were often reported showing up at around 4am but they did not have the authority to physically throw people away. People informed me that security guards' threats to bring police officers were almost always merely empty ones, as opposed to the situation in most of the other bases that houseless people had. In the time of my fieldwork, there were major construction projects going on from about 6am and homeless people sleeping there usually had to get up before this. More about this in chapter 4 on homeless Aborigines.

Bars and alcohol outlets

Squires Tavern (*Squires*) was undoubtedly the bar most popular among urban Aborigines in Darwin. This has partly to do with the dresscodes. Even though the dresscodes were formally present, bartenders usually seemed to ignore them. There was definately exceptions to this but the tavern had an overall reputation among urban Aborigines as being the place to go for a few beers. It was also a tavern preferred by some locals because tourists very rarely went there. Squires Tavern represents one side of the scale measuring segregation level because its segregational variables were not taken too seriously by the owner. Its location in the more northern part of central Darwin also further supports the previous claim about Darwins racial segregation. Despite the high proportion of Aborigines drinking there, it was an averagely popular tavern also among local Whites. It has to be noted that Aborigines sat at the outside tables much more often than non-Aboriginals and that the Aborigines and non-Aboriginals usually did not mingle.

Kittys Tavern (*Kittys*), located on the fringes of Mitchell Street, is originally an Irish pub and its atmosphere reflected this. Aboriginal buskers often went here because of the high number of musical performances in the genre of country music. As opposed to Squires Tavern, the consumption of alcohol among Aborigines here was notably more moderate. Some of my Aboriginal informants told me they went here to gain inspiration for future busking. The performance acts were usually by local non-Aboriginals. Later we will look into this seemingly paradox; the Aboriginal ambivalence when it comes to appreciating Western culture.

The Discovery is located in the midst of the busy Mitchell Street and can be considered the opposite pole of Squires Tavern when it comes to its segregational nature. There were practically never any Aborigines observed here during my fieldwork. Despite being a place designed for tourists, local residing Whites seemed to enjoy this place alot. It was very much oriented towards metropolian urban youth culture. This was reflected in the cost of beers, dress code, as well as being much more policed or strict. The strictness of Discovery included mandatory photographs of any visitor.

Woolworths (*Woolies*) is the main supermarket in Darwin. It is located in Cavenagh Street which parrallells Mitchell Street, and represented more than merely a place for buying groceries and other needed supplies. *Woolies* was an important meeting point for Aborigines. Groups of at least 10-15 Aboriginal people were usually gathered here at daytime. Woolworths is a chain of supermarkets that is found throughout all of Australia. Most Woolworths in the Northern Territory has a huge variety of alcoholic beverages sold in a but

linked discount liquor store next to the actual supermarket store. Even the outlets where alcohol is sold have dresscodes. In Darwin this applied only to footwear. When talking to the security guards that guarded these outlets some of them admitted not always understanding the point of the dresscodes. Others referred explicitly to "keeping drunken *Abos* away". *Abo* is a term loaded with prejudice. It can be said to be the Australian version of the american term *nigger*. The term *Abo* was sometimes used instrumentally by Aborigines as a self-caricature as well as with new positive meanings embedded. Aboriginal informants often told me stories involving attempts to steal beverages (usually moselle wine), which included trickery such as distracting shopkeepers. Interestingly these reports said that Aborigines usually tried to steal as cheap a wine (*goon*) as possible. Locals often complained about the high density of Aborigines begging for money outside of the shop. In addition to requesting money, Aborigines were often observed asking non-Aboriginal people to buy wine for them. *Woolies* can be regarded as a place central to the establishing and reinforcing of racial stereotypes in Darwin.

Welfare

The Red Shield Salvation Army hostel (*Salvation Army*) was located in the outskirts of Mitchell Street, which is arguably the busiest street in Darwin. At the time of my fieldwork the shelter was operated exclusively by Whites, making it an important linking between ethnic groups. Although it is actually for men only, they have family units for special emergency cases. This was an offer that the familywhom I was most involved with once had to make use of. This involved sheltering and to some extent clothing. When asked about the effects this could have on the reconciliation process they all seemed to believe it had tremendous influence how?. The perceived influence was not only among Aboriginals who had actually used the offers. The awareness of its existence was seemingly the most important thing here. Many received their clothing from the Salvation Army, but as we will see later in chapter 3 there are complex social implications of welfare that reduces the prevalence of receiving anything from welfare institutions.

The Stokes Hill Wharfs (*Fishermans Wharf*) importance lies in its function as a place for distributing welfare from local authorities. Free food was handed out to anyone who needed it two times a day (at 12am and 6pm).

St. Vinnies (*Vinnies*) is located far north of Stuart Highway and it was an important institution and a place for getting to know homeless Aborigines. It is basically a welfare-institution based on Christian belief and it's name is derived from the Christian figure St.

Vincent De Paul. Free food is offered three times a day to anyone in need. In addition to food, there is free use of showerstalls, toilets and a seperate building where clothes can be picked up for free. Food was offered without any questions. The clothes, however, was restricted in that anyone would have to go through an interview with the clerk to prove that the clothes were honestly needed. This procedure implies a suspicion of welfare misuse.

As we will see in chapter 3, the social implications of such welfare is a complex one. An ambivalence to the appreciation of these institutions demands exploration and questioning.

Other important spots

Cullem Bay was Mick and Aileens favorite fishing spot. The bay is located a significant distance from their home and they often took a taxi to this place because of the sadly weakening condition of Mick. Mick himself often complained about having to go with them because he felt like a burden. The other members of the family however stressed the importance of having him with them because of his lack of activities and his general sad state of mind. The bay was fairly isolated and at arrival more often than not there were no people there.

The Aboriginal Fine Arts Gallery, located in Smith Street, was important to many of the Aborigines dwelling in town as well as surrounding communities (especially Maningrida) because it gave them the opportunity to display their artwork. This was usually paintings following traditional styles and often using symbolism from Dreaming characters. In addition to dignifying Aborigines as individuals, the art can be seen as a form of resistance in that Aborigines performed their identity through the performance of custom. As we will see in the next chapter, other forms of art can articulate identity. When it comes to art, this thesis will focus especially on music as a means to articulate identity as well as reconstructing the meaning of Aboriginality.

Mindil Beach is located in the north-west of Darwin. Its importance lies in its connection to rituals. It used to be a ritual burial ground for Aborigines (Day 2001), while now it is the site for a new ritual which implies racism or at least sustains racial structures in Darwin, as we will see in chapter 3.

Aboriginal centres

I have focused more on the central areas as this seems to be the most relevant for the meeting between Aborigines and non-Aboriginal people. Many of my Aboriginal informants actually lived in the suburb of Parap, which is located north to central Darwin, but usually came to the

central areas to busk during evening hours. I was told that conducting anthropological work in this suburb involved the risk of being physically harmed, and I even received a death threat in this area during my research. One of the most most important physical field was a small community in Darwin consisting of 5 houses, where one of the extended families in particular were the most responsive and supportive. Even though this community is located within the city borders of Darwin, it is fairly isolated from surrounding settlements as any visitor and/or inhabitant will have to walk through a bushway to get there.

In addition to the overall streets and social landscape of Darwin, a small community can be considered my starting point of research. I wish to go into a more detailed account of the lives of the people living there. First of all, the household was characterised by having a lot more members than the average non-indigenous household. In one of the 5 houses, 15 people were often sharing the same room, which functioned both as a place to sleep as well as a place for trivial activities. There were two smaller rooms separated from the main one with two small stairways leading up to the rooms were the father in the house as well as the wife slept. They often had relatives to visit for days so the actual number of people living there varies. The family consisted of 5 children, of 4, 7, 9, 13 and 17 years old. They often took part in trivial activities such as cleaning the house, collecting needed supply from the bush and sometimes preparing fishing. In addition to the 5 children and the 2 parents, there were 3 nephews and 5 sisters. It has to be noted that these people were not as often in the house as the core family, but they considered themselves an integral part of the household. The mother in the house had to take care of most of the teaching, as the father was, unfortunately, very ill and could not participate to the extent the others could. The household did not have a computer, and often complained that modern society nearly demanded people to have access to the internet to gain certain benefits. What they did have of communication tools were two cellular phones. These were supposedly shared by the whole household, although the mother in the house usually kept one of them as well as the 17 year old. Other one-way communication tools included a stereo, a small (but mostly not working) television set and a radio (they did sometimes listen to the only local Aboriginal radio station: Radio Larrakia).

Since the father and the mother of the house was speaking two different versions of Aboriginal language.. To my surprise, none of the members of this family were of Larrakia descent, even though Larrakia is the group most recognized in Darwin. The other houses of the community was organised in pretty much the same way, with a large area for social and trivial activities, and smaller bedrooms for some of the people living there. One of the houses was more of a 'dwelling place' where only 3 people actually lived (these were three sisters).It

was usually inhabited by larger groups of people, some who was just in Darwin for a while, and some who usually lived on the street in central Darwin. Busking was a very common activity for most of these people, and they were the ones that introduced me to other buskers as I started participating myself.

Chapter 2 – The Cultural Problematization of Busking

Introduction

Now that the ethnographic context of this thesis is presented, I will document and analyse the everday practices that make up the social life of urban Aborigines in Darwin. This chapter will focus on busking performance, and the use of tradition as a form of capital (in every sense of the word) for surviving in a modern capitalistic society. It will study the socio-cultural role of *busking* in articulating Aboriginal identity in a rural town increasingly geared towards an international tourist market.

The theoretical framework of this chapter will be one of symbolic interactionism merged with the theories of Bourdieu. The interactionistic part of the analysis will use mainly the theories of Goffman on the performative and emergent nature of identity; on front and back stage nature of identity (Goffman 1959). From Bourdieu, I borrow the concepts of symbolic capital (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977; Bourdieu 1984) so as to analyse the conscious and unconsious aspects of motives and meanings behind busking performances. Bourdieu's concept of symbolic cultural capital is highly suitable because, as we will see, economic capital can be considered as existing alongside other forms of socio-cultural capital. In many instances, economic interests and motives are intertwined with other forms of capital and, in many cases, may actually be subordinated to other forms of capital. The theories of Goffman and Bourdieu will help to illuminate how interaction between *busking* individuals and groups can generate social divisions and relationships between different Aboriginal groups as well as with non-Aboriginal audiences in Darwin.

In this thesis, *busking* will refer to street performances involving various kinds of artistic mediums. In Darwin, this phenomenon was almost exclusively related to musical performances. It's history can be traced back to the jongleurs of Europe in the medival age (Williams 2009[5]), and since then travelers and marginalised people have long used busking to at least partly provide them with economic income. When first entering Darwin in late January 2009 I was amazed by the number of performers on the streets. Though Darwin is an ethnically and socially diverse city, the *busking scene* was dominated by Aborigines who performed their own different styles of music for an increasingly international audience. The popularity of busking as a way of earning income can be related to the changing nature of the city as it moves from being an administrative and comercial centre, which serves a large rural hinterland to being a city that also needs to display *culture* and to give visiting tourists an

5 http://www.sino.gov.tw/en/show_issue.php?id=200979807096E.TXT&table=2&cur_page=1&distype=text

experience of remote outback life (Lea, Kowal & Cowlishaw 2006; Roberts & Young 2008). Music was one medium for producing this sense of an outback country lifestyle. As an intermediate musician myself, I was lucky enough to get involved in these activities as a participant, mostly by adding guitar solos and extra rhythm-guitar.

It has been argued that music should be understood as a process rather than a product, and that it is guided by the performer's cultural understandings (Blacking 1973). In this chapter I will argue that it is not merely a process *guided* by cultural understandings, it is also a way of articulating identity and can have much more complex implications in social life than what is experienced directly. It can be seen as a socially constructed symbolic discourse that while acknowledging the current political situation also seeks to shape and often in the smallest of social contexts. Until the early 1990s anthropological thinking have pretty much ignored the politics embedded in symbolic production (Gerstin 1998: 385). In addition to the politics articulated through music, music in itself has the capacity for articulating and even developing self and cultural identity (Hays & Minichiello 2005). It has been argued that musical activities is a useful vantage point for exploring how cultural identities and culture in itself is not static (Hudson 2006: 629). This chapter will provide ethnography supporting this claim.

Ethnography on Aboriginal busking is surprisingly limited. However there is good ethnography concerning busking among other minority groups around the world, such as by Gypsies (see Hooker 2007; Peycheva & Dimov 2004; Garlias 1984). Despite clear differences related to geography, society and culture, different Roma groups have important aspects in common with Australian Aborigines because of their mobility culture as well as their alienation and previous history with genocide (Alt 1996). There are published studies revolving around Aboriginal popular music and how identity and culture are contested on a national macrolevel. This chapter, however, explores more the microlevels of such contestations. Given the lack of ethnography on Aboriginal busking in urban areas, the chapter will first document in empirical detail the specific contexts of busking.

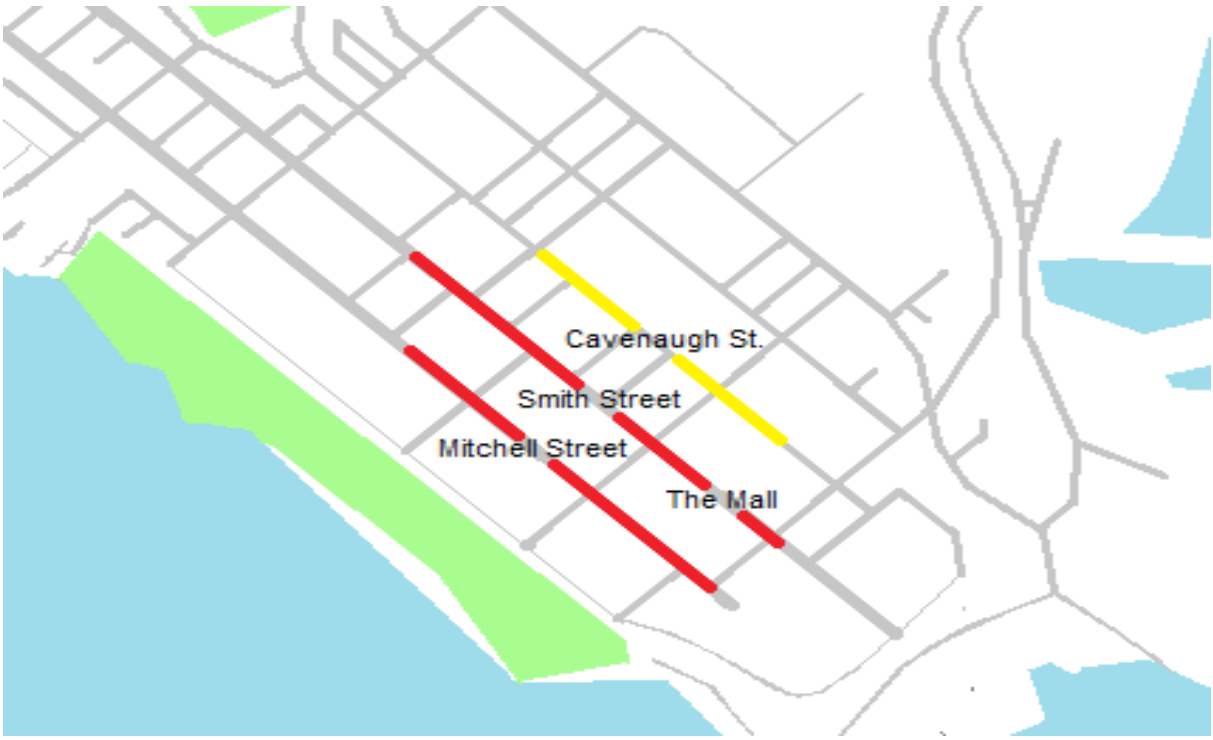

Fig. 1 – Central Darwin – Primary (red) and secondary (yellow) busking areas

Busking areas

As seen on fig 1, there are two main areas that are considered the most profitable in economic terms. The first and most highly coveted street is that of Smith Street. This street can be divided in two. The south-eastern half of Smith Street is referred to as "The Mall" (*the Mall*), and this is definately the part of town where profits were the highest. The most notable aspect of the division is that where the Mall starts, car traffic stops (except for police patrol cars). The Mall is known for its large numbers of tourists. Many shops there are aimed specifically at tourists who come from a variety of backgrounds such as Europe, Japan, United States of America and Spain. In addition to all the souvenir shops located in this street, one of the most popular bars was located at the very south end of the street: "The Victorian Hotel", also known more popularly as "The Vic". The owner of this bar is reportedly also the owner of many tourist hostels in Mitchell Street. Indeed, many of the hostels in Darwin give vouchers for free meals at The Vic. This generated huge streams of tourists (mostly backpackers) wandering through the Mall every evening and offering increased potential for income for any busker. Consequently, there was massive competition between buskers for the best spots on Smith Street. There is a tacit understanding between buskers about which spots are whose. As we will see, this social construction of space also includes racial divisions where Aboriginal buskers are deemed to occupy less profitable spots than non-Aboriginal buskers. One of the

dangers for a poor busking individual was the high number of patrolling police cars, especially during evening hours. A *busking permit* was even more essential here in the best part of Smith Street than in other areas of the city. Another problem with busking in Smith Street was that good relations with local shopkeepers was essential. Aboriginal buskers were definately not popular among shopkeepers, with a lot of the people walking through the street trying their best to avoid them. For this reason, the immediate areas around shops were avoided by Aboriginal buskers. White buskers, on on the other hand, were often more than welcomed to perform in front of shops. They were regarded a cleaner, tidier and a more ordered form of subjectivity. They were seen to evoke less fear and unease in potential customers. Local shopkeepers' assumptions and hostility was maintaned despite the fact that tourists often gathered around Aboriginal performers to the extent that area became quite crowded.

The part of the inner city that was sought for busking was Mitchell Street. What makes this street so attractive to buskers is the large amount of tourist hostels: At the time of my fieldwork there were eight different hostels in addition to the Salvation Army Hostel. Five of these handed out vouchers for free meals at the Vic. While Mitchell Street was indeed often crowded with tourists, the street had a less relaxed atmosphere than The Mall. A major reason to this is the busy car traffic. Traffic had a way of limiting potential for busking profits because of noise muting the performance both in terms of sound as well as visibility. This forced buskers to occupy only one side of the street at a time. Indeed, audiences in Mithcell Street would take much less notice of busking performances than in the Mall where it was possible to stroll in a more leisuredly manner.

Other less profitable areas for busking included Cavenaugh Street, which ran parallel to Smith Street but further to the north. The street was commonly used for busking at certain times. While there was hardly any buskers present at daytime and in the less touristic wet season, it was used during evening hours especially on weekend nights when the most profitable areas further south were occupied. Cavenaugh street was in other words only used if there was no other place to busk. Shops there were much more oriented towards local consumers; there were hardly any souvenir shops or restaurants nor any hostels. According to my informants, the only positive thing about busking here was the relative lack of police surveillance, such as through patrol cars.

Motives

Widespread poverty among urban Aborigines meant that the primary motive for busking

performances were economic. However, this did not mean that performers did not also give their performances other meanings related to race and personal experience. I hesitate to call these other meanings secondary for this serves to downplay their significance. Whilst they were not the reason why people busked, these alternative private meanings acted to create a meaninful reserved part of the performance through which Aboriginal performers could reclaim the ”true” meaning of their songs. The songs had therefore often a public and private aspect, with the two not being unrelated. For the public explicit meaning of the song resonated with life historical experiences. An exclusive focus on the obvious economic motive ignores some of the other important social and cultural factors which help to organsie busking. This includes helping to organise the contents of performances and the internal organisation of performing groups. What I also found in my research was that kinship, language and indigenous notions of intellectual property rights and copyright could function as mechanisms in both knitting groups tighter together as well as generating outsider statuses. While friendship and dependance are words often used to characterise the social effects of busking in Aborigines’ own terms, hostility and competition are often just as real.

A major aspect of busking is the inter-racial interactions that performances can generate. These can have a positive and a negative quality. One positive aspect is that it allows Aborigines to gain trust, respect and value, however limited, from tourists and other non-Aborigines, for as they put it themselves "at least its not merely begging". Busking had more the quality of earning an income and so there were forms of self-dignity and autonomy in these performances, where relationships with non-Aborigines had more the quality of an exchange of gifts (see Mauss 1924) rather than of total economic dependency. Busking had a higher form of symbolic capital than just begging or the receipt of welfare payments. Though there were forms of economic power, along with other forms of racial power, highly coded in the interactions and context of busking, it was nevertheless prefered by both sides as a framework for interacting. In short, busking was an important form of symbolic capital for urban Aborigines. It was a way of dignifying exchange relations with non-Aborigines. Yet busking also had some negative qualites in that especially traditional chants were often considered inauthentic by some members of the audience. Unable to understand the words or the genre of this music, many viewed the chants as just drunken melodic rambling. They suspected they were being tricked. There was a sense that this was another con by crafty urban Aborigines, who were manufacturing and stageing their “traditional culture” for economic gain. Such suspicions around busking are simply local versions of wider racial perceptions of Aborigines as able to exploit the charity of Whites through staged made-up

forms of traditional culture. When investigating the validity of these claims about buskers, I found that in most cases it was most definately not the case. The so-called "melodic ramblings" were frequently proven to be traditional chants learned via the passing of Aboriginal knowledge through respected kin. For many buskers, this created a sense of ownership over their songs and they did not feel free to copy other people's traditional chants. Even with Western songs, as we shall see, buskers would seek to personalise and modify the song so as to make it their own.

Economic income levels from busking varied significantly due to several aspects related to both time, space and race. In the wet season, the average income from an evening of busking was reportedly less than half of what it was in the much more tourist-active dry season. An average economic income for an evening performance by an Aborigine ranged from about 10 AUD to about 90 AUD. There are numerous factors in determining the unstable income levels. From what I found in my research it depended on busking spots, time of day, time of year, choice and range of repertoir, degrees of tidiness and cleanliness as well as outsiders perceptions of the quality of the performance (i.e. if the performance was considered "good"). Due to the very unsteady amounts, busking was most certainly not considered a reliable income source for an Aboriginal family.

Economic income gained from performing in the streets served two particulary important purposes. First, money gained from busking could be used to buy cigarettes and alcohol. A central feature of the income management system for indigenous welfare in the Northern Territory is that income to food vouchers can not be used on alcoholic beverages or tobacco. Such quarantining is handled through the Centrelink card system (SAAPA 1994[6]). A significant part of welfare income is directed into a Centrelink account and Centrelink vouchers are used for purchasing supplies. Money gained from busking is unrestricted and for drinking Aborigines becomes a necessity. Second, earnings from busking were seen as extra income for purposes that were non-essential. Such money was usually not saved up for future use because it was seen as a bonus that could be spent right away in the pursuit of commodified forms of pleasure. Conspicious consumption was therefore a common trait among Aboriginal buskers. This is important because it shows that not all money is treated the same. There is indeed a social nature to money. Money among Aborigines in Darwin has a different character depending on how it is collected. There is also a gender theme to be seen in that men will busk more often than women and so they have this profit to spend legitimately in ways they saw fit. With busking income, they did not have to rely on women for economic

6 http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/indigenous/index.htm#payments

resources (see chapter 3). Indeed, economic profit gained from busking was often perceived as having higher value than money collected elsewhere because of the greater autonomy it confered in terms of how it could be spent. In particular, it was money outside the moral economy of the domestic family unit and was money that men could use in terms of building up relations between themselves.

There was also a racial difference in income levels from busking. Non-Aboriginal buskers seemed to earn much more than Aboriginal buskers, The music that non-Aboriginal buskers performed was often well known by tourists. It was much more up-to-date and closer to the kinds of music being popularised through the mass media at the time. They shared more of a common culture of entertainment. There also seemed to be a racial nature of financial rewards from busking as tourists could get away with paying Aborigines less for music. It was a widely circulating rumour and an assumption amongst locals in Darwin that Aborigines spent busking income money on alcohol or drugs. There was the resassuring belief that less money would be good for Aborigines, it would provide less for alcohol. Such a belief legitimised not giving them too much so as to protect them from themselves, for they would only squander it in self-destructive behaviour. There was thus a racial structure and content to the busking economy in Darwin

Instruments

Non-Aboriginal buskers had a strong tendency to play pop music mostly from the United States of America, England, Ireland, Spain or Australia. It was almost exclusively acoustic guitar based music combined with vocals. Aboriginal performers, on the other hand, had three major ways of producing music.

The first and most common of these was the use of clapsticks (*bilma*) which were combined with vocals consisting usually of traditional chants. Many of the chants had been taught by the actual busker's biological father. Sometimes performers produced the same music but used their hands to create rhythm rather than *bilma*. One reason often given was that competing busking groups had stolen their instruments. Yet the *bilma* used in busking performances are often just medium sized wood sticks that can easily be collected from almost anywhere, even around the streets of Darwin. However, many performers did prefer *bilma* that were carved out from a specific type of wood in order to get the best acoustic ring. This also served to give more authenticity to a performance, to make it seem less like begging and also less fraudulent (i.e. more like a cultural performance). The second most common musical style involved using the guitar, which was usually combined with vocals playing

country western music. Such performances had a tendency of involving one individual alone. When asked about the reason for this, buskers often stated that having other performers with them would make them lose artistic freedom and supress the emotional quality of the song, that is their ability to identify and live the song's meanings in their own performance of it. It is perhaps also the case that it would mean more performers sharing the same limited amounts of tips. The third most common musical form involved using the didgeridoo (*yidaki*), often combined with *bilma*. For many tourists, this consistuted a more authentic performance of Aboriginality, which they were eager to witness and reward. Such performances were read through primitivist understandings of an authentic essential Aboriginal identity maintaining its existence alongside the corrupting temptations of modernity. The didgeridoo symbolised and objectified the primordial musical core of Aboriginal identity for outsiders. The *yidaki* is a wind instrument made out of a long piece of eucalyptus wood that has been partially hollowed by termites. The hollowing is further carved out in the middle to make it more thorough. Its acoustic sounds are created with air being forced through using circular breathing techniques that create a sustained tone characterised by a deeply felt bass. While most Aborigines in Darwin knows how to play a *yidaki*, not very many actually posess one. An important aspect of *yidaki* as a posession among Aborigines in Darwin is its perceived inherent "soul". This makes it at object that can never be traded away. It represents more than merely an instrument in that it stands outside of commercial exchange ties, even though there is a mass production of *yidaki* for tourists shops. The value of a personally given *yidaki* is in it being a symbol that identifies the performer's history and being. The perceived spirit of the *yidaki* can be parallelled to the Maori notion *hau* in that it carries not only practical functionality, but also the identity of the owner (Mauss 1924).

Group busking versus individual performance

An important division in the nature of busking performers was whether or not one was busking alone or in a group. Interestingly group buskers had a tendency towards playing more traditional Aboriginal music than individuals. Individual buskers more often used the guitar as a means to express their life situations. Performing in a group had positive and negative implications on the success of a performance. While busking in a group obviously reduced the economic income as it would have to be shared, such groups were also slightly less vulnerable to audiences verbal attacks than a busking individual (Williams 2006[7]). Another major

7 http://www.sino.gov.tw/en/show_issue.php?id=200989808098e.txt&cur_page=1&distype=text&table=2&h1=People&h2=&search=&height=&type=&scope=&order=&keyword=&lstPage=&num=&year=2009&month=08

advantage is the groups capacity to occupy prized busking spots. When challenged by a single busker over their right to use a certan spot, the group would frequently maintain its position. A single busker confronted by a group would also have to be very strong in order not to lose his spot. A single individual busker was more open to attack and ridicule from his audiences as well as from competing buskers.

Dealing with authorities

Fear of police usually did not have much relevance to whether or not buskers performed in groups or solo. In order to busk in the most central areas of Darwin, a performer will need a *busking permit*. This cost 2,50 AUD and lasted 24 hours. It has to be noted that when confronted by the police about this matter, the only real consequence would almost always be to be ordered to stop their activities and not to continue further until a permit was aquired. Ultimately the police were the main enforcers of this social allocation of uban space and income, and they do so with a view to the interests of government, residents and businesses. The following encounter helps describe the hostility towards the police. It took place in at the southeastern part of Smith Street:

Walter:	*(Busking using bilma and chanting)*
Policeman:	Have you got a permit for that?
Walter:	What? *(looks angrily at police officer and sighing)*
Policeman:	A busking permit is required to perform here.
Walter:	What you mean permit?
Policeman:	We have talked about this before.
Walter:	No.
Policeman:	No what? You haven't got a permit do you?
Walter:	I don't need a permit, it's not your call.
Policeman:	You will need to aquire a permit or I you will have to move on.
Walter:	*(Continues performing as if nothing happened)*

Walter ended up buying a permit because he did not want to let a highly prized spot slip away. The above transcript illustrates how police have a large degree of personal discretion and are the ultimate enforcers in policing the use of social space. Walter could afford a permit earlier, as he had been busking quite successfully for some time in a less policed part in Cavenaugh Street the same evening. However, he considered it his right to perform freely unless it was

absolutely necessary to aquire a permit He later explained to me that he had been told to get a permit numerous times. In fact he usually expected this type of confrontation to happen. He avoided overt confrontations that could lead to his arrest by playing at being dumb: “What you mean permit?” The police officers who had warned him many times acquiesces to this performance even though he rejects its truth. Walter told me Whitefellas were never asked about busking permits and it was because of his lifestyle that the police harrased him. Having heard him saying this, I observed non-Aboriginal buskers for quite a while to see whether or not it was true.

In situations like this, people were usually asked to show identification. A certain version of these verifications of identity are exclusively for indigenous people in the Northern Territory and contains information about given names, surname, date of birth, home adress, town/community as well as place of birth. What is interesting about the identification sheets however is its clear assumptions of client behaviour. 50% of the space is used for instructions as of what to do if the client is arrested.

On only one occation did I witness a non-Aboriginal busker being confronted with the question of a busking permit and identification. This happened to a self-declared hippie Englishman (*pommie*) known as Frank, whom I knew from one of the hostels I stayed in. He had been busking many times a week for months without even knowing about the need to aquire a permit. The police were much less hostile towards Frank than Walter, and Frank never felt harassed by them. In fact, when finally confronted, Frank had tried to talk his way out of the sitution. Instead of using a hostile form of address, the police talked to him in a respectful and almost apologetic manner. They informed him about their duty as officers and reported that they did not necessarily agree with the policy but had to enforce it. I was never asked about a permit, even when I busked with Aborigines who were asked. There is a great deal of personal discretion in when to enforce the law and when not to enforce it, but there is also a consistency in those personal choices that says something about racial forms of solidarity and conflict, for the police officers were invariably non-Aboriginal. In short, we are dealing partly with forms of racial governance.

Aboriginal buskers were not blind to this state of affairs which for them was indicative of Aboriginal people’s frequent conflicts with police and the poor realtions between them. In the inner city, there was a social regulation of space, which police enforced. The enforcement of rules varied significantly depending on who was confronted. Aboriginal buskers were considered with suspicion and sometimes hostility. For them, there was always the fear of a possible arrest, that the confrontation might escallate in uncontrolled ways. In contrast, non-

Aboriginal buskers felt more secure; they were informed of the need for a permit in a polite non-threatening manner. Non-Aboriginal buskers were seen as more legitimate, as cleaner, tidier, more trustworthy and as genuinely working for their money by offering good music in exchange. Non-Aboriginal buskers thus had a much higher cultural capital in terms of how they were regarded by locals residents, police and businesses. These groups also tended to throw aspersions on the cleanliness, tidiness and quality of the music of Aboriginal buskers. Some locals and tourists even saw Aboriginal buskers as drunk because of their chanting. They looked for evidence of the drunken stereotype and found it in the melodic repetitive chants of custom. As mentioned earlier, there is a widespread perception of Aborigines as cultural frauds, as fraudulently manufacturing their culture in order to take advantage of tourists, of good-meaning white people, whereas in fact Aborigines were actually performing their custom.

Styles - from country western to reggae and hip hop

Much of contemporary Aboriginal identity is often articulated through various aspects of global culture, which have their own history of circulation and which are localised in particular ways by Aborigines. Country and Western offered the older generation one style of music which they eagerly embraced. Reggae and hip hop offered contemporary youth other styles of music but also others styles for being Aboriginal. It offered them more contemporary forms of a pan-Black cosmopolitanism. This section will look into the characteristics and history of the three genres as well as showing how and why they have become popular amongst Aborigines as ways of articulating identity based on qualities that they recognise and embrace.

An interesting feature of the guitarbased busking in Darwin is that in addition to the intercultural differences, there also seems to be a transformation when it comes to time. I was told by both Aborigines and non-Aborigines that some thirty years back you would almost only hear traditional chants from Aboriginal performers in the street. The type of country music played by Aborigines in the streets of Darwin is usually in a minor melodic key which often reflects a sad state of mind. This sadness articulated through music involves an aesthetisation of a history of colonial conquest which is seen to be re-enacted in tragic, individual self-destructive behaviour of which the performer also seeks to bear testimony of. This aesthetisation of sadness is also an attempt to recast and renegotiate the critical white gaze of the audience which watches over them and which is full condemnatory moralisms. The performance becomes performable within the alternative space of meaning that the song

unfolds to replace other less sympathetic judgements.

This aesthetic of sadness has a long history in Aboriginal culture with its traditional mourning songs around death and the dead (Berndt 1950; Reid 1979; Howitt 1984; Marret 2007; Glaskin & Tonkinson & Musharbash 2008). It perhaps also explains why Aborigines took up country and western music which was also appropriated as a style, especially by Aborigines who worked on cattle stations. The skills of cattle mustering and horse riding were a source of pride to Aborigines who could now celebrate their rural identity in a new way through work. It was celebrated through many Aborigines adopting the cowboy style of dress and personhood as a new modern way of identifying a modern person belonging to the land (McGrath 1987). The style originated in USA through black blues and gospel music. Despite this, country singers are usually thought of as white. In Aboriginal Australia country music has had a widespread influence through centuries. By the early 20th century most Aborigines had been dispossesed of their land and forced into reserves and church-run mission stations. Aboriginal language and ceremonies were prohibited (Nehl & Walker 2000). As a result of this Aboriginal music became inspired by Whitefella gospel roots, just like in the USA. From the end of the 19th century, Aboriginal performers provided music for dances and and other white social events. Stringbands such as "The Brown Brothers" incorporated traditionally European and American instruments such as fiddles, banjo, guitars and mandolins, while also making use of their own *bilma* and gumleafs (Nehl & Walker 2000). It has been suggested that country music became popular among Aborigines partly because country music is centred around themes such as stockmen, cattle herding and last but not least poverty and suffering. Significantly, country music as a genre tells stories which you can relive and communicate through the lyrics. The sharing of experiences of hardship through music isoften a central part of what relates together individual and collective Aboriginal identity.

One of the main pioneers in Aboriginal country music was Billy Bargo. Touring with Slim Dusty, who was himself a Whitefella, he proved that it was possible for a Blackfella in Australia to achieve recognition in performing music. Other important Aboriginal country singers are Jimmy Little, Vic Simms, Dougie Young, Hernie Bridges, Kevin Gunn, Roger Knox and Troy Cassar-Daley. In the 1960s, Aboriginal country music became more politically oriented. Bob Randall and Herb Laughton are regarded as pioneers in the increasing resistance nature of Aboriginal country music. Both were part of the stolen generation that had been forcible taken away from their parents, they sang about the horrors and the impact it had on their lives. These stories served as protests to the ongoing assimilation policies enforced by the government. As we will see, protest singing does not necessarily have to be explicitly

political.

In 1969, at the peak of the partly global hippie movement, the world champion bantamweight boxer Lionel Rose became the first Aboriginal performer to have a number one single in Australia: *I Thank You* and *Please Remember Me*. Following this, country music became a symbol of pride for many Aborigines and a way of articulating their identity as well as fighting for reconciliation through originally Whitefella cultural forms. In the early 1970s Auriel Andrew became the first widely recognised Aboriginal woman to perform country music. In the 1980s the profile of Aboriginal music was further pushed as indigenous radiostations were established in urban and rural areas.

Country music provided a means to articulate Aboriginal identity by using the art of storytelling. As Aboriginal country artist Bobby Mcleaod put it in the documentary "Buried Country": "People will listen to you more through music than if you try to talk to them" (see also Grahan & Robinson & Mulhall 2009). As we will see, this is also an important part of my friend and informant Alan's reason for busking using country music. Regardless of the origin of his songs, they serve to tell stories of his life to people he would not have reached without the use of his musical performances.

Country and western was adopted not just as an empty style but for the aesthetic aspects of the blues singing it often articulated through songs concerning life on the land. It leant itself as a style for composing life experiences within an aesthetics of pain and suffering that emphasised the tragic authenticity belonging to those who labour with their hands and who earn their existence from the land. The hardship of the land but also of race relations and colonial history as a displacement from the land came to be formulated within songs about the biographical experiences of individuals who now wander in a rambling way down dirty paths that sidestep death (McGrath 1987). Some of the songs performed were originally of more mainstream origin. However, in their performance, Aboriginal singers would change the lyrics in these songs so to revoice and articulate the buskers' own life situation and background, and those of Aborigines in general. Methods include erasing specific verses describing colonial race relations, renaming of characters and even renaming names specifying places. What was usually left of the songs was explicit pride centered around regionalism. The song was often transformed into being about the place where the performer in question was born and raised before moving to Darwin. Ultimately, many were songs about dignity and its loss, and how to keep alive as a form of hope. The new regionalism in the songs articulated new ways of identifying the self which were different from traditional totemic descent models of identity and belonging.

Recovering black pride

While the elderly generation of Aborigines is the largest of the busking groups in Darwin, the younger generation, of whom many are potentially future buskers, is just as interested in music as a response to White dominance. In their case reggae as well as some hip hop communicates their new sense of identity or, more accurately, their experiments with creating new modern cosmopolitan forms of Aboriginality that locate in as part of a global celebration of black resistance. This has a clear connection to the socio-cultural and historical roots of these two styles of musci. Both explicitly articulate resistance to White dominance and colonialism. Just as blues and gospel music originated within black communities, so did reggae (Jamaica) and hip hop (New York, USA). I did not observe any performance of Aboriginal hip hop music during my fieldwork, but Reggae was often performed with or without guitars. Instead of changing the lyrics so as to localise them like the elderly generation often did with American country/western-songs, reggae performers were more likely to interpret the lyrics differently rather than change them. They were more focused on the degree to which they could relate to the songs as they were originally written. Nevertheless, as we will see, this style of music was still adapted and reinvented to fit with contemporary Aboriginal life.

Reggae music was established during the 1960s in Jamaica and paved the way for a strengthened black identity and ethnicity (Utaker 1999: 6). Its lyrics promoted black culture, and while young Aborigines often listen to Jamaican reggae, they also created their own style by incorporating the musical elements as well as its vocabulary. The most characteristic musical element in reggae is the steady slow 4/4 beat where a guitar chord is struck at every second offbeat. The vocabulary is often influenced by biblical notions. In new Aboriginal pan reggae, while still using symbolic phrases such as *Babylon* (meaning Western society) they integrate *Captain Cook* as a symbol to represent the colonial powers, the Whitefellas; the Other. Where original reggae was deeply connected to the articulation of Rastafari religion, those traits are usually left out in Aboriginal reggae so as to give room to more social criticisms. Aboriginality is integrated into the new form of pan reggae emerging by including traditional instuments such as the *yidaki* and *bilma*.

Aboriginal youth can relate well to the struggle of Rastafarianism because the latter's dynamic counter-myths promoting racial equality (Utaker 1999: 43). Rastafarian myths have effectively countered colonial myths, resulting in a type of resistance that in fact celebrates unity instead of turning to violence (Rastafarians are pacifists). Hip hop, on the other hand,

often proudly promotes physical and psychological violence (Ibrahim 1999). In my observations, hip hop was exclusively used as a means to retrieve black pride and was never used in a busking context. While it can articulate identity well, it is not suited to express such pride in a busking context because of its explicit hostile confrontational nature. It was in other words music Aborigines would listen to, but not perform. Audiences would not be expected to sympathise with such performances because of their inherent contents. Instead of the grief, sorrow and dis-ease inherent in country music or the cultural pride expressed through reggae, what we hear in hip hop is blatant hostility and anger which is less likely to result in money from a non-Aboriginal audience (Ibrahim 1999).

Alan

Guitarbased repertoirs are especially interesting because of the incorporation of cultural elements from Western culture. They often used country music from the USA or Australia, and were based on a very limited number of songs which were extremely important to the individual buskers. One example is Alan, who became a *busking* friend of mine for a while. He was definately the most informative of my informants in terms of busking and its history. He had been long-time Aboriginal busker in Darwin and had witnessed many of the changes in economic income, identity, culture and social life in the town. Alan was in his 50's during the time of my fieldwork. He had very distinctive apperance due to his huge twined hair (*dreadies*). Every day, all day long he wandered around in town. Usually Alan did not have a place to sleep except parks and the street. His busking repertoire consisted of 4 songs, all imported country/western music from the USA. He usually did not play Aboriginal country music. He had started listening to country because of its storytelling qualities, which he adapted to include his own life. The techniques of performing with his nylonstringed guitar was taught by himself about twenty years ago. Alan had always taken deep comfort in very basic 4-chord songs. He kept saying that he did not need any addition to his busking repertoir because these were "[his] songs" and that they reflected his state of mind. He had been an alcoholic for the past ten years. The songs were strictly composed with minor chords giving them a characteristic melancholic ring, and the gloomy lyrics mirrored the musical notes.

The nature of confrontation

The fact that busking is more proitable in certain parts of Darwin can bring forth a fierce competition for the best spots in town and the need for tacti agreements between groups and individuals on how this urban space is to be carved up. Those who arrived first to a covted

spot would often invoke this as their right to it, whilst others might invoke the fact that they had prior claim to it through a long history of using that spot. This could produce bitter exchanges which never seemed to come to any violent blows. Ultimately the police were the main enforcers of this social allocation of uban space and income and they do so with a view to the interests of government, residents and businesses and maintaining a sense of order for tourists, shoppers and other users of the Mall.

Alan preferred playing in the Mall in the evening hours, and he had a certain spot as his favourite. This spot was ideal for any busker in Darwin. It was on the other side of the street from the Vic, where as previously mentioned most of the tourists were walking towards or from. Another excellent, perhaps better, spot was on the same side as the Vic, but as Alan had learned long ago, it was always occupied by a local non-Aboriginal busker playing well known pop songs. Alan had learned to accept this, and was forced to witness the significant larger amounts of money that a larger appreciate audience gave the opposing street busker. He was happy with his spot nevertheless because, as he said, for an Aboriginal busker the perfect spot next to the Vic would be too much to expect. In addition, the bouncers at the Vic would no doubt have harassed him as he had experienced one time when he had tried to occupy that spot. Alan's own spot was subject to competition, so he usually had to get there as early in the evening hours as possible in order not to get into a fight with other rival buskers. Alan was persistent and sometimes told me that I had to hold onto his spot whenever he had to go away periodically. He was also very conscious of not "letting the spot slip", as he put it, whenever I had to go away for periods of time. Once when he lost control of his spot to a competing group of three buskers, Alan confronted them and intimidated them to move on in the following manner:

Alan: We don't need more [people]. We busk here.
M1: We were here earlier.
Alan: (*Shouting*) I've been here all day!
M1: I will sit here.
Alan: Never, go away you cunts!
Me: Alan...
M1: *(Snarls and goes away in northern direction)*[8]

The above negotiations show the fierce angry competition for the most profitable busking

8 The conversation occured in a local Aboriginal language which Alan translated into English for me

spots and how swearing is part of everyday Aboriginal negotiations. It is another reason why many businesses try to move Aboriginal buskers away from their shops. Such hostility was often focused on prized spots. In less profitable regions, such as in Mitchell Street or other more peripheral streets, there was far less conflicts and a much more of an open-for-all kind of social athmosphere. A busker's potential to befriend fellow buskers was sacrificed in spots involving fierce competition. Indeed, social boundaries became more evident the more profit was in sight. Symbolic capital bound up with racial identity was important in having the support of local business. In other areas seen as less profitable, it was not uncommon to see buskers who did not know each other beforehand gathering to busk together. In other words busking groups in periphal areas were significantly more fluctuating in composition than those in the central ones. My research and participation revolved mostly around the more central spots.

Alan's repertoir

Alan's busking repertoir serves to illustrate a number of important aspects of Aboriginal busking, namely, the performer's relation to the contents of his repertoir. Indeed, the repertoir is often experienced as capturing the most significant aspects of the performer's life story. The music certain is there to secure economic income; but it also functions to resonate and articulate the performer's identity and the way he experiences the social world in which he has lived. The song serve to mirror, or more accurately to objectify, the story of Alan's life. The stories provide a cryptic and coded way of communicating with the world as well as with himself. In his 4-song repertoir, the first song was an explicitly melancholic song in minor chords:

> *Sometimes I don't know where*
> *This dirty road is taking me*
> *Sometimes I don't even know the reason why*
> *I guess I'll keep on rambling*
> *Lots of booze and lots of gambling*
> *It's easier than just a-waiting around to die*

I later learned that this song was written by Townes Van Zandt in the 1970s. Van Zandt himself apparently died from a heart attack due to heavy alcoholism; a tragic parallell to Alan's way of life. Such performances are complex, for they partly mirror back racial self-

caricatures of drunken Aborigines but do so within an aesthetics of pathos that give alcoholism wider significance making it a metaphor for life's unknown painful qualities. Within these performances there is the opportunity to re-negotiate the meaning of racial identitites, of the racial caricatures by making them part of broader narratives about the dirt roads that make up life, and the difficulty of giving meaning and direction to human existence. Alan's songs do not deny the racial stereotypes of a self-destructive life of booze and gambling but seeks to fill that racial stereotype with aesthetic depth grounded in localising and reobjectifying the broader notion of life as a journey full of unknown tribulations. The image of a dirt road is especially powerful for it captures both the local material quality of Aboriginal life in a bush rural environment and the sense of a dirt road as a devalued secondary journeying terrain when compared to the paved roads that others can take.

The second song Alan used was also an American song that reflects longing and methaphorises the journey of life. However as opposed to the first song, this one is more of a traditional folk song and its specific origins is not known. The way Alan performed it was characterised by his own way of singing the blues. The two chords used for this song were major chords, but nevertheless it is characterised by melancholy and longing. He said he learnt this song while listening to the radio:

I'm just a poor wayfaring stranger
Traveling through this world of woe
I'm going home to see my mother
I'm going home to where I could

Alan was indeed a wayfaring stranger. Songs of travel can be songs of loss and longing, of return or a desire for return, of pathos. The notion of life as a journey takes over from dreaming tracks. Even though the song is presumably about a soldier dying, the meaning of the song has a contextual character because of its very open metaphors. Indeed, there was no doubt that the intense feelings Alan revealed when playing this song showed how much he could relate to it. Every time Alan performed it, the word "stranger" was the word most intensely expressed in his singing. It was as if when he played, he built it up to let his passion peak at the word. Where the original "stranger" in the song is presumably a soldier behind enemy lines, Alan felt alienated in what he saw as his own land, yet still behind enemy lines. Giving me ques to play solo in the musical bridges in between verses, Alan nodded and almost fell into tears in heatfelt emotion. Listeners were usually successful in decoding this

expression as an honest attempt to portray his feelings. In fact studies have shown that audiences generally feel the emotions of the performers of expressionate music (Gabrielsson & Juslin 1996). In the context of Alans life, "this world of woe" stood as a fierce metaphor to colonised Darwin. Alan was indeed "poor" and he longed for a "home". Sadly his mother was long since deceased and "home" could therefore also refer to an afterlife, or to a resting place that contains generative possibilities (“I'm going home to where I could.”). Mother is place of beginnings and unconditioned love, and it is from this that Alan is alienated and seeks to return in a pilgrimage narrative of a journeying self searching for a home.

Alan's third song, "Nine Pound Hammer", was the least melancholic of Alan's songs and had a more singalong-friendly melody, making it the most popular among audiences in Darwin judging by the amounts of money given. However despite the characteristics of the melody, the lyrics portray another side of Alan. In addition to the chorus, he only sung one of the verses, and interestingly enough he chose the verse that includes the hunt for alcohol and submission to death. I learned it was written by Merle Travis early on and the song was learnt from listening to the radio. In my experience it was the song Alan performed the least passionate:

Well it's a long way to Tassy
It's a long way to Katherine
Just to get a little brew
When I'm long gone
You can make my tombstone
At a number nine coal

When performed by Alan, the song was rewritten in order to poistion the contents of its lyrics in a context relevant to his own life situation and background. This was not uncommon among busking Aborigines in Darwin. In these performances, singers will change the lyrics in songs so to revoice and articulate the buskers' own life situation and background. Some of the changes involved erasing specific verses so as to now describe colonial history or race relations, of characters and, as in Alan's case, even renaming places. The "long way" here clearly relates to Alan's situation as "to get a little brew" in his often unsuccessful attempts to buy alcohol from the outlets in town. Many of the shopkeepers knew him: He was viewed upon with deep suspicion and was more often than not met with hostility. It seemed this song was most often used to please crowds and Alan performed this song most often when he was

in desperate need of money. Another notable aspect of his performance of this song was that he often stopped in the middle of it because he wanted to go on to play another one. The song is about the pursuit of desire, of captivating pleasures, that draw forth self-destruction. Again it is the pathos of certain racial self-caricatures which are ojbectified and particularised. The popularity of the song in a tourist economy geared around travel for pleasure also resides in not being just about the Aboriginal condition but also a way of living modernity and its pleasures. The song functons as a moral warning and is encrypted wth ambiguous meanings as making a tombstone at number 9 coal. Coal is something that burns and it is in a sense desire having been brought to rest, made inert and cold through death.

Alan's fourth and last song was characterised by much more explicit and less metaphoric lyrics than the others. The song, "My Old Friend The Blues", was to Alan his "all time favourite song" because it told the listener as well as the performer how important music could be as a reliable "friend" in hopeless times. Its lyrics reflected the role music had in Alans life:

Just when every rake of hope is gone
I should have known you would come along
I can't believe I ever doubted you
My old friend the Blues

The first time he performed this song to me was early in my fieldwork, when at one point I asked Alan about his habit of always carrying the guitar wherever he went. In addition to his fear of having it stolen from him, he also referred to this song. Whenever he felt that "every rake of hope [was] gone" he sat down playing this song. An interesting aspect of this song is its personification of "music" as a never-decieving friend of the performer. The anthropomorphic rendering of music makes it a companion to keep close and cherish when dealing with loneliness. As Alan said himself so wisely: "Aloneness is being, while loneliness is feeling, and my music helps me deal with the feeling". Alan did not perform this song in a busking situation as often as the other songs, because this song was more about referring to himself as a means to ease the pain. Indeed, he self-medicated himself with music, especially at times when he did not have money to buy alcohol.

Within all 4 of Alan's songs, there is also an aesthetics of tragedy, of life requiring self-destructive diversions (drinking and gambling) to make it bearable. There is an aesthetic attraction to the songs that Aboriginal performers chose for their audience and themselves.

Indeed, the songs are not random. In addition to the songs reflecting his state of mind and soothing Alan, the western style lends itself to creating an aura of authenticity around the singing of pain, and the individual nature of the performance adds to its confessional quality.

Another thing worth noticing is how all the songs use the I-protagonist perspective. There is no broad explicit political context in any of them and they all deal with a protagonist way of dealing with a life remarkably like that of Alan's. His songs are not characterised by explicit political contents like the very popular hybrid song “Gurindji Blues” by Galarrwuy Yunupingu, which was played part as of the organising of political activism during the early 1970s (Nehl & Walker 2000). However, Alan’s songs do have tacit political content in their way of expressing discomfort and in their creation of discomfort in the audience through their performance (see Graham,& Robinson & Mulhall 2009). Alienation is a common theme in all the songs, and such alienation undoubtedly stems from racial structures in Darwin. The racial structure of modern urban segregation is now done not through coloured bodies but through dresscodes (see chapter 1). They serve to provide access to social contexts and to create forms of value and hierarchy between peoples. It is these ways of beng marginalised and devalued as a person which are encoded in notions of wandering homeless subject looking for rest. It is significant that Alan does not need other more explicitly political songs. All his existing songs can do the intellectual and aesthetic work required of them. They serve as means to protest against the social marginalisation and dislocating of Aborigines by dominant non-indigenous colonial powers. They also not so much reflect the wanderings of the tourists culture as creative narratives for wandering tourists about other kinds of wanderings.

Interacting with the audience

Local Whites rarely give any money to Aborigines in the streets. They regard them as the undeserving poor, those who exploit the good sentiments of white people. The anger of white people towards Aborigines is partly about Whites being treated as a ”soft-touch”. Such self-portraits allow Whites to create themselves as needing to make themselves hard so as to avoid being taken for a ride by Aborigines who destroy themselves through charity provided by Whites. The phenomenological or existential structure of race relations is more complex than non-Aboriginal people claiming intellectual superiority. They also claim a moral superiority where the moral immorality of Aborigines is seen to reside in their exploitation of the humanitarianism of white Australians (Lattas 2003).

When local non-indigenous people talk to Aborigines, it is often in a very different way from the tourists. When Aborigines were busking, non-indigenous locals interject or

engage in conversation with Aborigines that had a serious and often highly offensive tone. They would publicly scold them about their drinking, clothing, getting a job, etc. These were public pedagogic performance meant perhaps to educate the tourists in how to read these busking performers. The tourists are seen as naïve and as having too romantic a view of Aborigines which needs to be corrected. In their own conversations with buskers, tourists tried to choose their words more carefully and to exercise a certain etiquette of respect. However, all too often this could also come across as another form of top-down communication. Local Whites chose a more everyday no-nonsense scolding language for their communications, a language that implied familiarity and the right to offer rebuke as a way of letting Aborigines know that could not trick this old hand.

Some of the awkwardness of tourists interactions with busking Aborigines came from their view of culture as an artifact. The following conversation took place in Smith Street, about 50 meters from the Vic:

Participants: A (english tourist), B (english tourist), C (Aboriginal busker).
Location: Smith Street (The Mall)

A: I *(points to chest)* like how you are able to play your people's music.
B: Where did you get those nice sticks you've got there?
C: *(Pauses clapstick rhythm)* Five dollars brother?
A: *(Smiles)* Oh, no I'm sorry but I need it myself. *(Looks over at B briefly)*
B: Hehe

(C starts performing again, looking intently at A)

A: *(Grinning)* I don't think he wants to answer.
C: *(Directing me)* Five dollars.
Me: *(Offers him a cigarette)*
C: Thank you brother. Five dollars?
Me: Sorry mate.
A: Can you... *(points at C and pauses, smiling sarcastically)*
...sing a song for me? *(points to chest and looks at me, grinning)*
B: Let's get going, we can't waste time with this. They're waiting for us.

The above two tourists have no mean intentions, but especially the ending line from A reveals a specific way of thinking. Tourists often communicated with busking Aborigines in an overly polite manner. but also slowly and with simple re-emphasising gestures as if speaking to a child or someone with a mental handicap. These ovet and exaggerated forms of politeness were full of good intentions, but Aboriginal buskers often seemed offended by them because their presence was not met with the kind of respect they sought based on a knowledge of their culture or as equals in a normal conversations. My Aboriginal informants often told me about this kind of behaviour especially from young tourists. As Alan put it: "They know nothing about our dignity. They don't have a clue. It's our country and noone seems to know". Polite exaggerated forms of regard are seen as covering over the very obvious truth of dispossession.

Tourists often function as a point of contrast for local whites, who regard tourists as the soft whites. They are the naive international audience that is hoodwinked by Aboriginal claims to culture and custom. Within the busking scene of Darwin, there is anger by white Australians at the international pressure and support that Aborigines are able to mobilise and this is confirmed in the tourists' perceived nativety and sympathy for crafty Aboriginal buskers. For the white local audience, they must maintain their governmental hold over Aborigines and their clear head despite naive international pressure from good meaning humanitarians (see also chapter 3). The local everyday context of tourism plays out wider politicial structures that expose divisions within the non-Aboriginal community. Aborigines singing about life in the most miserable of conditions is seen by locals to confirm stereotypes of their perceived culture of complaints: They are always unhappy; it does not matter how much you give them or do for them and they do not appreciate it. One of the first thing tourists are told by local non-Aborigines is often about the benefits that Aborigines get; that Aborigines in Darwin, while complaining of being negatively discriminated, they are actually positively discriminated. There is a concern by locals to properly educate the tourists. The tourists must be told how to read the performance as not a sign of poverty and dispossession but of crafty, lazy, unthankful individuals seeking to enrich themselves by tapping into the sympathy and compassion of others.

Analysis

Having presented the main features of busking in Darwin in empirical terms, I wish to go now into further analysis of its social organisation. I will use the theories of Erwing Goffman and of Bourdieu. In his dramaturgical model of social life, Goffman (1959: 239-241) argues that social interaction can be considered a performance between actors. The various actors'

behaviour are rooted in their efforts to construct impressions with their communication partners, both consciously and unconsciously.. This goes under the notion of *impression management* (ibid.). A social actor's identity is in this way constructed from the actual impression management going on. The management itself has a dualistic character. As Goffman puts it: "We often find a division into back region, where the performance of a routine is prepared, and front region, where the performance is presented″ (Goffman 1959: 238). The backstage/frontstage duality is not always fixed and is itself able to changed or renegotiated between actors.

An important point of analysis in this context is separating what the busker want to express and the more unintended forms of expression. Goffman distinguishes these two modes of expression, which can be related to how a explicit busker's intentions are often linked to celebrating and benefiting from his forms of cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977; Bourdieu 1984), whilst at a tacit level his performance can serve to reinforce racial stereotypes because the performances are re-read as fraudulent pretences by the audience. Goffman calls such incongruence assymetrical modes of expression. Indeed, when talking to audiences who had stayed in Darwin for some time, they often stressed that Aboriginal buskers was fraudulently manufacturing their culture instead of performing it authentically. Most tourists had usually no knowledge about the country western traditions of Aborigines. This goes back to the previously mentioned primitivist view of Aboriginal culture, that its truths are seen to reside in an ancient primordial cultural past. Aborigines are expected to perform their culture, and they are perceived as not living up to what people expect. Even when they perform their customary chants these are read as drunken ramblings by people who have lost the power to compose words because of their excessive lifestyle. However culture is not static; performing their culture is exactly what Aborigines do when they peform country and western songs or reggae songs. Guitar-based country music goes back many decades, perhaps more than a century and it has been localised to articulate profound deeply felt truths that can serve as the basis for modern Aboriginal identities. Though the cultural capital involved in these contexts are seen as fraudulent, the performances require the use of Aboriginal tradition and identity even if it is not ancient. The music Alan performed, then, is an articulation of his sense of contemporary Aboriginality because of his knowledge and ties to Aboriginal as well as American country music.

Goffman also introduced the notion 'working consensus' to describe how people define social situations initially (Goffman 1959). In the context of Aboriginal busking in Darwin there is a lack of working consensus because of the assymetrical nature of the two modes of

expression. The content of cultural capital is often not agreed upon because of essentialist perceptions of Aboriginality. Busking among Aborigines therefore often do not have the performative qualities that was initially intended. The social meanings and impressions in busking become complex because the assymetrical nature of the two modes of expression does not always become apparent to the performers nor the audience, or at least it cannot be acknowledged publicly.

The perception of the contents of performances as fraudulent served to reinforce existing racial stereotypes and to undercut the forms of cultural capital and the symbolic exchanges claimed by Aborigines. It confirms a view of urban Aborigines as having lost their culture, of being removed from the ordering effects of culture and as being a crafty group who systematically try to hoodwink Whites with their claims to customary knowledge. Such perceptions of Aborigines as manufacturing culture for economic gain are widespread in wider Australian culture and are part of popular critiques of native title and Aboriginal claims to customary ties with land. Aborigines are often seen as manufacturing such ties for economic gain. Busking participates in these wider racial stereotypes. It provides an everyday opportunity to watch Aborigines fraudulently manufacturing their culture for others for gain. Such views serve to undercut the symbolic quality of busking as an economic exchange, making it closer to begging based on fraudulent self-presentations that trades on the goodness and naivety of white Australians and foreign tourists. The racial stereotypes being created are not just of urban Aborigines as inauthentic cultural beings but also involve related positive self-caricatures by Whites as those who give even though they know they are being hoodwinked. Whites position themselves as the true altruists who give despite the fraudulent quality of what is being presented; they see beyond the fraud yet still give.

As we have seen in this chapter, degrees of cleanliness and tidiness as well as race have tremendous effects in the success of a busking performance. Whether success is defined in terms of economic profit, occupation of a busking spot or just enjoying pleasures brought by playing, appearance is often a very defining factor. In Alan's case we have seen how he consciously picks songs expressing life as a stranger and that his personal demeanour matches the performance. His performance was seen by tourists not as an expression of his Aboriginality but rather an impression of him having lost his culture. While this was a common perception, busking Aborigines performing traditional chants were also seen to be fraudulently manifacturing their culture. There is in other words racism inherent in audiences perceptions of both types of busking performances. There was no escape from this caricature.

Busking also has organisational qualities inherent in the interactions it plays out. In the

context of busking. ″Performance" here does not necesarilly mean the actual perfomance of songs in a busker's repertoir. It refers to the whole preparations and planning of any busking activity. There are forms of solidarity involved in who is allowed into the backstage. Aborigines allow each other into the backstage so it is an arena of kinship solidarity and of racial solidarity. The backstage arena is crucial for the organising of busking groups. Part of the familiarity claimed by local non-indigenous people is of a backstage familiarity, or a desire to enter the backstage, to claim familiarity with the staged nature of the performance. That the performance is staged everyone acknowledges, but what is being staged is an object of contention. For local Whites, it is culture being fraudulently staged and not for cultural ends but for material gain. The need by urban Aborigines to gain a livelihood is used to undercut their cultural authenticity by accusing them of manufacturing and merchandising not just culture but also a tragic narrative for youthful naïve tourists.

Feedbusking

This chapter has exlored the dominant form of busking for money but I should also mention that there were also performers who claimed to *busk* for other reasons than economic motives. They were after other forms of profit; namely inspiration for creative output and experience in performing in front of unknown people. These were almost always local non-Aborigines from Darwin who carried the guitar around and sat down to have a *jam session* on their own. They refused to take money for it. They never took up the usual Aboriginal busking spots as *feedbusking* was usually engaged in parks and outside certain restaurants. This was not very common, but they provide a point of contrast that reveals how busking is not necessarily just a way of begging. These individuals claimed just cultural capital and, indeed, the cultural capital of their performances was perhaps increased through them refusing money as a motive. When talking to Aboriginal buskers about feedbuskers, they usually admitted not even considering it as an alternative. Feedbuskers had more cultural legitimacy in their performance because of racial stereotypes and serves as a contrast to the performances of Aboriginal buskers who were sometimes seen as not to care about their cultural performance and of only being interested in the tips. In short, this social order is informed by a dichotomy, authentic versus inauthentic and this comes to inform contemporary racial stereotypes.

Part conclusion

Cultural identities are a product of contested processes. In Darwin, busking performance is requires the use of tradition and authenticity as a form of capital. It has a tremendous quality

of highlighting how "tradition" is subject to immense misrepresentations because of popularly understood forms of Aboriginal essentialism that link it to primordial truths. Busking reveals how cultural capital can be confered to Aborigines often only within an essentialist framework that celebrates an unchanging tradition. Yet Aboriginality is not a static set of cultural traits. Busking transforms the performative content of culture. The customary context disappears and culture becomes something to be performed for a wider non-indigenous audience which is often a harsh judge of one's authenticity. As seen in the case of Alan, it also includes later additions such as the incorporation of non-indigenous traditions. Country and reaggae music are part of contemporary Aboriginality. Tourists and locals judge buskers authenticity harshly because they percieve them as lacking cultural capital, whereas the reality is the opposite. Such perceptions become embedded in broader national topics about landrights, making busking performance a highly relevant topic when analysing what counts as culture, or in this case Aboriginality,. It becomes a crucial topic for anyone interested in the continuation of Aboriginal rights.

Busking performances occur within social constructed spaces. While producing the potential for alliances across racial differences, it can also seperate people from one another. It brings inter-racial interactions to the front stage of an urban environment where interaction is inevitably and intentionally direct. It confirms racial structures by means of disproportionate policing. In studying busking one sees the social nature of money and social forms of capital racially, collectively, individually and in terms of gender. Busking reproduces stereotypes and in many cases might actually stimulate xenophobia.

Music in an Aboriginal busking context is a socially constructed symbolic discourse that lets the audience into the lives of performers. The lyrics mirror, or more accurately reobjectify the performers' position and life story as it searches for understanding and sympathy with the audience. The music is not only personal, it also has the socio-cultural role of articulating Aboriginal identity and this can be in ambiguous ways that are not always controlled by the performers. The telling of stories through songs functions as a form of protest that personalises history and dispossession but it also allows personal protest and racial resistances to be re-read within dominant narratives of ungrateful Aborigines who do not properly acknowledge the care they receive. The gift giving context of busking opens up a larger politics of giving within which race relations are imaginatively constituted.

Chapter 3 - The social meanings of having a house

Introduction

Having described and analysed the discourses and practices surrounding *busking* activities in the previous chapter, I will now go on to discuss the social meanings of houselessness in Darwin. I will focus on public drinking as a means for Aborigines to affirm social status as well as its implications for confirming racial stereotypes in Darwin and more broadly throughout Australia. Public drinking is one of the activities that articulates the conflict and tension between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals. In this thesis, drinking will be understood mainly as a form of resistance, but also as a means to deal with pain and suffering which. as we have seen, was alos prominent in busking performances.

Being homeless is usually considered as something that is merely negative. In a typical Western mind, it is considered "the lowest of the low", and only the uttermost unfortunate people come to be homeless. Without ignoring the fact that many houseless Aborigines in Darwin do desire a better life and are not happy with the situation that they are in, there are many other aspects to being without a house that need to be considered. Being houseless sets up particular kinds of social dynamics and requires the use of social relations, often on a temporary fluctuating basis. As we will see, public drinking has an important role in people's lives. It provides almost a form of of selfmedication from trauma for some. Rather than being a random or haphazard phenomena, it relates people together and shapes the composition of groups. I see the latter the most relevant for anthropological purposes and so this chapter will not be one of moralism. As Collmann (1979b:209) has argued: 'The understanding of drinking among contemporary Aborigines will not advance until moral judgments about its effects on traditional society and about the irresponsibility of people who drink are suspended'.

The proportion of people who live rough[9] that is classified as Aboriginal is significantly higher in Darwin compared to other towns in Australia. Numbers have been increasing at an alarmingly high rate. Especially after the introduction of the Federal Emergency Response Act (NTER) in June 2007. Indeed, numbers of houseless people in Darwin keep increasing despite other policies introduced that are supposed to reduce it (Holmes & Williams 2008: V). According to a study produced by the National Drug Law Enforcement Research Fund in 2008, the most stated reason for migrating to Darwin is to

9 55% of houseless people are Aboriginal in Darwin which is significant considering a roughly 10% general demographic number.

avoid family problems in Aboriginal communities. However this study covered mostly people who had only stayed in Darwin for a number of months. My research revolved mostly Aboriginal informants who had stayed longer in Darwin, often shifting between having a house and living on the streets for various reasons. Reasons for such oscillations[10] and the backgrounds behind will be presented later.

Ethnography

In stark contrast to the lack of ethnographic material on Aboriginal busking performances, a vast number of works describing and analysing Aboriginal houselessness and public drinking have been published. The perspectives differ and can broadly speaking be divided in three. First, there are the 'culture of poverty' models arguing that the importance lies in the perceived apathy that poverty shapes (Dagmar 1975; Lewis 1966; Lippman 1973: 145). Second, there are studies that criticise the latter approaches because they fail to acknowledge how Aboriginality is constituted through the resistances involved in such activities (Collman 1979; Sansom 1980; Morris 1989; Cowlishaw 1994; Day 2001). Third, there are epidemiological studies, which while documenting trends, fail to explain the processes that initiate them. The latter research is often built on surveys involving self-reporting by informants. This places an immediate limitation on the resulting collected data for in a highly controversial racially-loaded subject, there is less likely to be honesty in subjects' answers to questions asked by often white middle class researchers. This is the result of a mixture of pride, suspicion and paranoia due to historical experiences. Such studies often objectify the people being studied in ways that fail to recognise important aspects of their social lives . The research often treats the lifestyles of houseless Aborigines as individualised decisions whereas they are also the result of political and cultural factors. An ethnographic approach can bear more fruit because in highlighting data that otherwise may seem irrelevant it can expose underlying meanings of social life. To understand substance abuse, or in this case Aboriginal houselessness and public drinking, it is not enough to document and explain the dynamics of suffering (Burgois, Lettiere & Quesada 1997). Perhaps especially in dealing with sensitive issues such as the social meanings of having a house, the anthropologist will have to translate it into a meaningful essence that does not unconsciously reproduce structures of inequality and discourses of subordination. However in order to understand the situation, there needs to be a dialog between quantitatively and qualitatively oriented studies.

My position is neither of the three approaches mentioned above. While acknowledging

10 I use the word 'oscillations' because of its non-hierarchical implications.

that homeless people are traumatised and that their selfmedicating with substances often bring vicious cycles of increasing trauma resulting in apathy, this part of the subject will not be treated with the same kind of focus as that of the social dynamics it brings about. While it is true that houseless Aborigines in Darwin drink in public as a means to ease the pain, it is also about maintaining group (*mob*) composition and confirming civil status. I also stress the importance of seeing the social dynamics both inside a group and in terms of race relations. Racial structures are important in studying the role of houselessness and public drinking because it is the one area of socio-cultural life in Darwin where racial confrontation is the most explicit.

Homeless?

Aborigines with no fixed place to sleep rarely use the term "homeless" when describing their life situations. Social welfare workers and government discourses tend to use this category to capture the plight of those without established residential addresses in the urban area. The category of homeless does not exist or is not employed to describe remote rural Aborigines who might wander from camp to camp. Homelessness therefore has to be seen as an urban phenomena and part of the social and cultural problematization of the urban poor.

I will use the term "houseless" for two main reasons. First, a "home" can be considered a term that is too loaded with western definitions of belonging and identity which are not necessarily appropriate in an Aboriginal context. Home can thus be a contested category which from an Aboriginal vocabulary, it is partly a state of mind that refers back to other ways of grounding identity in kin and landscape rather than in a house. Houseless Aborigines in Darwin often contest government, welfare and other non-Aboriginal ways of defining home. Second, many urban Aborigines often speak of the streets and various make-do shelters as their "home". They often told me that they were going home even though they had no "home" in the typical Western way of perceiving it. This was often said ironically to me but also in casual speech stule to refer to public places to which they claimed ownership over.

The Australian government has defined homelessness in its Supported Accomodation Assistance Program Act of 1994, as such: “A person is homeless if, and only if, he or she has inadequate access to safe and secure housing” (SAAPA 1994). Two phrases in this sentence are very much unclear. What is meant by “inadequate”? Views on this differ significantly from person to person and from culture to culture. Who defines what is “safe and secure housing”? Houses inhabited by Aborigines were not defined as homeless in dominant hegemonic discourses because they were often doorless. Any person could enter at any times.

They were therefore not "safe" in the way non-Aborigines often used the term. They were merely safe from weather conditions such as the heavy monsoons during the wet season as well as providing shade from the hot sun during the dry season (see chapter 1).

Entering the houseless sphere

During my research I unsuccessfully tried to get in touch with houseless Aborigines. I soon discovered, they were much harder to communicate with than people who had a home. This was most probably because of their perception of me as being part of a dominant White community whose philanthropy and care could be just as problematic as their negative hostile caricatures. A breakthrough came after a while, when for a period of about two weeks I was myself houseless in Darwin. This was due to a sudden overbooking of all the hostels in town because of the Arafura Games[11]. Queues for getting rooms and apartments were endless, and it was also difficult to rent out for a short period of time. It was of course a somewhat frightening situation to find myself in, but in retrospect it turned out to be fortunate. During this period I encountered many Aborigines who had much experience with finding shelters in parks and other surroundings in Darwin. Usually they did not believe that I, a white young man from "the bottom of the world"[12], how could I possibly be homeless. Throughout Australia, through intermarriage and other interracial relationships, many contemporary Aborigines could pass as white. Amongst houseless Aborigines, there was a legitimate assumption born out from experience that people with no shelter in town were Aboriginal or older white males, who could sometimes be alcoholic.

Inter-ethnic solidarity

Ironically, the person who first introduced me to the life of houselessness was a Maori in his 40s originally from New Zealand. This was during the second month of my stay, when I was staying at one of the several hostels in town. His name was Aperahama Twehatu, but people often referred to him as Lenny. One could perhaps say he had the stereotypical Maori appearance due to his long hair, heavily built body and characteristically hoarse voice. Lenny had been roaming the streets of Darwin the last 12 years, usually houseless, having strong ties to Aboriginal people as well as non-Aboriginal people. This is interesting because though as dark as many of the houseless Aborigines on the street, Maoris are not pathologised by white

11 In 2009, the Arafura Games were held from the 9th until the 17th of May. Bookings extended these dates both prior and after the event.

12 Interestingly Aborigines in Darwin frequently said I was from "the bottom of the world" when I told them I was from Europe. In contrast they referred to themselves living at "the top of the world".

Australians in the same way as urban houseless Aborigines who are seen to be the lowest of the low. This means that Maoris have more symbolic or cultural capital in the racial hieararchy and this allows them to mix more easily with non-Aborigines who pay them greater respect in terms of being willing to have a conversation or a drink with them. Racial hierarchy is not so much a matter of colour but of a defective culture seen to be inherent in people's being.

According to Lenny, if there is one thing a houseless person in Darwin knows, it is that respect must be earned by means of giving. He had gathered lots of friends throughout town, but also enemies. He kept saying that people considered him too rough because of his anger or short temper. This also protected him on the street from being easy prey to others (Bourgois 2002). It can be said that he cultivated the proud warrior aspects of Maori culture and used it as a defense mechanism on the street. At one point, Lenny slept at Elizabeth's place. Elizabeth is a very soft-spoken Aboriginal woman in her 50s. During this time she had temporary housing in one of eight rooms in a government-funded project in Smith Street. Government housing rules strictly prohibited alcohol consumption on the premises, but nobody in the building seemed to care. People in this house saw it as their legitimate right to consume alcohol anywhere at any times. Lenny was eventually kicked out for being too loud. What should be noted here is how indigenous women often have access to public housing and men form a floating population that comes and goes, that is dependent on the women's generosity and this can also generate conflicts as we shall see later. Lenny was kicked out due to complaints from neighboors, but it was Elizabeth who told him she would contact the authorities if he did not move. This was a harsh blow for Lenny, as Elizabeth had been reliable in giving him a place to stay during the night as well as some financial security.

Lennys story serves to illustrate the inter-ethnic relations which often make up the social life of houseless people in Darwin. Many members of the dominant white community claim that Aborigines do not want anything to do with other ethnic groups. They often use this point as a way of explaining and justifying why they do not want close relations with Aborigines. In other words, white Australians project their own marginalisation practices onto Aborigines who are often accused of being racist, and of having a dislike of white Australians. Yet what one notices on the street is how many other ethnic groups associate and shelter with Aborigines, including homeless non-Aboriginal people who sometimes get to know Aborigines from having spent time with them in prison. Forms of solidarity created in institutions can be the basis of some friendships on the street.

In terms of Lenny, but also other Maori and Pacific Islanders, there seemed to be

forms of solidarity between different colonized groups. Maori and Pacific Islanders have close relationships with each other despite their differences in language and culture. In terms of the dominant white community, the Maoris of New Zealand are perceived as having emerged better off from the colonization process than Aborigines in Australia. Despite Aborigines sometimes comparing their historical treatment to that of Maoris, the two groups are differentiated. Maoris are less culturally pathologised than Aborigines and their perceived superior intellect and culture is seen to have granted them a better colonial outcome. The homogenising stereotype of houseless Aborigines that non-Aboriginal locals were often ranting about, proved on the ground to be much more loosely knit groups in terms of ethnic composition.

Composition of houseless Aboriginal groups

Houseless Aborigines in Darwin often resided in groups that they referred to as *mobs*. While some *mobs* were more fluctuating in composition than others due to reasons we will investigate below, there are important aspects of composition that need elaboration. First, there is a gender nature to houseless groups that can to a certain degree be generalised. While there were some houseless groups of mixed gender and age, women tended to stay together with each other while men frequently sought to join them rather than the other way around. As we will see, this often has to do with the gender nature of begging.

In terms of age composition, *mobs* were very variable. Many *mobs* had more people in their 40s and 50s rather than young. adults, However, generally most *mobs* had at least one person in his or her 20s. The older ones were often seen as a source of stability and respect by the younger ones, and they were often refered to with classificatory kinship terms, such as 'cousin' and 'aunt'. For many groups, it seemed important that they consume alcohol because, as we will see, there was a shared economy of gifts between them. Trust was seen as an important aspect of this gift economy and generally all members of a houseless group were seen to have a responsibility to gain money through activities that will be investigated below.

Lynn

Lynn was houseless in Darwin during my stay. She was originally from a Katherine suburb. Due to unforeseen events in her life, Lynn had been oscillating in between being houseless and having a home for the last 6 years, residing in Katherine as well as Darwin. She had stayed with several relatives for some days but were usually kicked out because of her chronic alcoholism. In desperate times she had stayed in one of the communities of Darwin, but was

usually forced to leave after a while. At times when she was feeling relatively good about life considering the traumatic circumstances she often found herself surrounded by, she resided with a small group of four other older houseless female Aborigines in Darwin, all of which she referred to as her aunts. Lynn urged me to write in my book[13] how frustrated she was about the hostile social environment of both Darwin and Katherine. She felt harrassed by locals and she was especially concerned about police practices and rhetorics. At one stage she told me: "Coppers are always wondering what I do when I do nothing. They think I been doing wrong, but what can I do?".

Lynn had long experience with sleeping rough in urban environments. While she never really had a permanent camp for shelter, she told me how the beach was her favourite place to dwell if there were not too many other people present. At times, when she felt really anxious, she explained to me on several occations how she pondered on the stark contrast between the stars and the city lights. When sleeping in more central areas of town she would see the lights of hotels and houses and it would make her mad to the point where she almost lost her mind. It is the world of the white man's lights that disorients her and she creates the stars, the lights of the bush, into a more domesticating soothing influence over her. We can see here how some people can internalise the disorder of colonialism, the urban environment and the white man's world. Lyn creates a poetic contrast between different ways of lighting up the night. She condenses her harrasment by police, who often travel around in cars that are lit up with lights and sirens, into a need to be away from artificial western ways of lighting up what is dark. There is a poetry in madness that captures the logic of a racial social order in its seemingly arbitrary imaginary ramblings.

Lynn would self-medicate with *goon* which refers to the cheapest brands of 2- and 4 litre cask wine and because of this had reciprocal ties to a number of other houseless Aborigines in Darwin. At the beach, on the other hand, the stars were there as an everpresent reminder of a potential for better times, which had existed prior to the whiteman's arrival She said it was tragically ironic how the southern cross have come to be a symbol of Whitefella Australia. The southern cross, she stressed, had previously been there for Aborigines and the colonial powers stole it from them. It was not just the land that Europeans took away from indigenous people, but also the imaginary structures that allowed people to light up the night time of their lives. The stars were romanticised by Lynn as something that belonged truly to those who lived out in the bush. This is a more general vision of Aboriginality. It is a new way of creating a pan-Aboriginal identity which is being forged here in romantic nostalgias that

13 Most houseless Aborigines had problems understanding what a thesis is, and frequently called it my "book".

are not grounded in the specificity of a particular Aboriginal group's myths, songs and kinship ties. Racial divisions create new forms of solidarity between different Aboriginal groups and these require their own mythology of the bush and nature within which to resituate Aboriginal belonging,

For Lynn, the moon, with it's shifting but stable patterns, reminded her of how the world really was in the process of becoming. It's presence soothed her in hard times. Perhaps the feminine temporal aspects of the moon's cycles seemed to capture the coming and goings of her own moods. In the more central areas of town, she felt that her dreams of a return to a life without pain were forcibly struck down. Wherever Lynn went away from the beach, she felt like a constant stranger having to avoid police. She felt persecuted and alienated. Even though she sometimes did beg, Lynn was afraid to beg and often had to rely on others for everyday support. The world of the houseless is made up of these everyday relations of care between those who have little.

Making public space private

When a person is houseless, pretty much all of his or her time is spent in public spaces. This generates the need for various strategies that have to be learned and applied in order to maximise comfort and to adjust to his or her environment (Spradley 1970: 98). In his work on homeless alcoholics and tramps in the United States of America, Spradley argues that for an urban nomad, a crucial part of this is to remain as far as possible invisible for much of the time (ibid: 123). For many houseless Aborigines in Darwin, strategies in terms of minimising drinking in public were often not a priority and, indeed, this rule seemed to be deliberately flouted in a defiant way. I believe that white Australians were aware of the forms of defiant protest that were inscribed in choosing to drink out in the open in full knowledge of the outrage in provoked in Whites

Choices and strategies concerning where to sleep were considered highly important by many houseless Aborigines. In Darwin, different counterstrategies have been developed by government institutions in order to remove houseless Aborigines. Sometimes Lynn slept in public restrooms during the night. When she did, she had ways of making it seem like she was using it for legitimate purposes. This included flushing the toilet whenever she heard someone outside of it. Many contemporary restrooms in Darwin today have electric automated doors that open after a certain amount of time. Another strategy of survival was *buttpicking*. When houseless Aborigines roam the streets, partly burned out cigarette butts were constantly picked up in order to collect the remaining tobacco. They would store such tobacco in bags for future

use. This is also done by Aborigines who do have a house indicating that it is the result of poverty and the high cost of retail cigarettes. There seemed to be no fear of pollution or revulsion against other people's bodily substances. *Buttpicking* was not an activiy seperated from other activities. In addition to asking others for cigarettes, smoking Aborigines were constantly looking for free tobacco lying on the streets. The disgust felt by mainstream observers served to reinforce everyday forms of avoidance and racial segregation

While buttpicking is not illegal, during my time in the field, there were public discussions about whether or not to criminalise the tossing away of cigarettes on the streets in Darwin. Reasons given included reducing litter, the risk of fire but also supposedly health hazards from buttpicking. Many laws seek to make it difficult for those without a house to reside in urban areas. While it is legal to sit and lie down on benches, it is de facto illegal to fall asleep on them. Security guards would threaten to call the police immediately and often pretended as if though they had the rights to enforce the laws by means of physical removal. According to Lynn, they would do so in order to scare houseless people into either leaving town or to get a permanent place to sleep. Such laws makes the removal of houseless Aborigines easier.. During the Arafura games, many of us who had previously lived in hostels were temporarily houseless and so we stayed in groups during the nights. When we[6] explained our situation to security guards, they were more empathic towards us as mainstream whites and told us to go sleep in our car up north at the artificial Lake Alexander. As we saw in chapter 2 with busking permits, there are tacit racial structures that govern the relations between police and civilians.

Lynn was always met with hostility and however much she tried to explain that she was residing on the beach peacefully, she was moved on from place to place. She had grown to deal with this kind of confrontations by having a cyclical pattern of locations in order to know exactly where to go the next time she was told to move on. There are strategies in being houseless in Darwin that are complex for "home" can involve several locations. Aborigines migrate due to seasonal changes and social threats. Indeed, houseless Aborigines in the inner city more closely resemble the category "urban nomads" described by Spradley (1970) than those described in other ethnography focusing on the fringes of Darwin (Sansom 1980; Day 2001). When houseless Aborigines who were not bound to a specific camp said they were going "home" in casual speech, they were often referring to one of several spaces of attachment and partial belonging in urban Darwin. Lynn would do her best to hide any traces left behind in her temporary camps so as to be able to return at a future date. There are certain informal forms of knowledge which individuals acquire so as to survive successfully without

a house in the urban environment (Spradley 1970). Many of these different strategies are learned and used in order to minimize surveillance and conflict with mainstream residents.

Begging as a performative strategy

In the previous chapter we saw how busking, in addition to bringing in economic income, can articulate cultural identity and participate in racial stereotypes that often reduce busking to a fraudulent performance that represents a concealed form of public begging. Among houseless Aborigines public begging was more common than busking. The main difference between these two ways of collecting money is that begging seem to not feature a cultural performative content. Yet begging can be analysed as involving its own performances. Using a Goffmanesque approach, we might say that it can involve backstage-frontstage shifts as we will see shortly.

When asked about why they did not busk instead of beg, many houseless Aborigines told me they had no knowledge about or interest in musical performance. They stressed more so than buskers what they perceived as mainstream Darwin residents owing l Aborigines money because of the colonial history of dispossesion. As Lynn put it: "They took my land and its time they pay [me] back". However, they also sometimes revealed how they experienced begging as a degrading experience. Aboriginal informants frequently told me that in contrast to outsiders perceptions of their reasons for begging, they usually stopped the activity when the amount they needed was collected. There was usually no attempts to maximise profit. Aboriginal beggars would often be harrased and lectured to by locals who scolded them about their appearance and particularly about their lack of gratitude for the welfare benefits that Aborigines receive. I observed much begging next to the bus station outside of Woolworths in Cavenaugh Street. The constant comings and goings of visitors provides an impersonal setting within which the embarrassment of begging can be minimised or endured until certain essential personal needs are met (Åleskjær 2009).

As opposed to minorities begging in Europe (e.g. by Gypsies), Aboriginal beggars usually begged alone. Even when they lived in a group, they still operated like individual beggars as they spread themselves around town. If there was ever a woman begging alone, it turned out she was with a *mob* that sat around elsewhere in town, often in the same street or one nearby. The most common beggar was the single male in his 40s or 50s. Women were generally more successful in begging perhaps because of their ways of getting people to sympathise with them. Males often sounded more demanding and used much more aggressive strategies than women. There is indeed a gender nature to begging among Aborigines in

Darwin. This often resulted in womens' kin and others becoming dependent upon them. As we saw in the case of Lenny and as will be elaborated later, women maintain a powerful position over men in their potential for gaining income because mainstream residents and tourists tend to give more to women than men. Women begged less often than men and they were significantly less visible. Despite this, their begging was often more successful. It was seen as more legitimate for women to beg perhaps because they were perveived as more vurnerable. They were seen as potential caretakers of children and this perception was sometimes used pragmatically for gaining sympathy.

In his book *Begging Questions*, Hartley Dean (1999) has argued that what seperates a successful or worthy beggar in a typical outsiders' perception has to do with a number of aspects. Active beggars, like Aboriginal males in Darwin who seem much more demanding because of their direct engagement with people passing by, are more likely to be seen as apathetic and as having a dislike of work. The more resigned beggar, in our case typically Aboriginal women, are more likely to be met with sympathy. One common strategy used by Aboriginal women in Darwin was to ask for food, a cigarette or a few cents so as to observe whether or not the giver had interest in giving away anything at all. Afterr or in the process of the small offer being met, the woman might ask for a slightly more substantial gift of maybe a few dollars. They would qualify it as a gift that the person was free to freely give, In short this strategy trapped the benevolent giver within the humanitarian logic of their initital small gift. Another common way of asking bypassing people was to beg for money for a bus ticket, usually to Palmerston[14]. In these performances, the giver are thought of being more accesible because they can relate to the situation and thereby avoid moralism. They are more likely to meet a beggar with sympathy. The strategy rids the performance temporarily of racial stereotypes.

There were also other ways of appealing to the giver’s humanitarianism. This involved asking for money for a bus ticket to the Darwin hospital or to visit sick relatives in a nearby suburb. In the latter strategy, a double humanitarian appeal is implied. A potential giver is invited to feel sorry for both the person requesting the money as well for the supposedly real sick person in need of company. In such presentations, the beggar reveals him- or herself as empathic in wanting to support another person but needs support in order to support another. Indeed, the art of succesful begging revolves around finding a balance between portraying oneself as a passive victim while still showing active engagement (Dean 1999). The following encounter helps describe how an Aboriginal woman in Darwin sought to manage this balance.

14 A bus ticket to Palmerston cost 3 AUD.

It happened very early in my fieldwork when I first met Lynn:

Lynn: Can you help me? I'm so hungry.
Me: You can have this kebab. Are you ok?
Lynn: I'm so hungry. I need to go to Palmerston.
Me: To Palmerston?
Lynn: My cousin is sick there.
Me: How much?
Lynn: She's very sick.

Lynn was looking very worn-out and seemingly expressed deep concern about her sick relative. I gave her enough money for a bus ticket but observed her walking to a group of 4 other Aboriginal females in a nearby park. Approaching them, I asked them about her sick cousin and they all asked me for cigarettes while ignoring my question. I felt rather abused by the woman and I was not pleased. Later in my fieldwork, when I was myself houseless, I came to understand that this is a strategy quite commonly used. While during my days as houseless I did have money because of my scholarship and did not participate directly in begging activities, Aboriginal beggars could relate to me more easily. I got to know the woman whom I had encountered early on in my fieldwork. When I told her about the occurence, she suddenly became apologetic and she explained how she had tried begging with full honesty but was usually met with an attitude expressing no concern whatsoever. Her need for money was seen by those passing by to be the result of apathy and having a culture of complaints.

Such appeal to the humanitarianism of mainstream residents outrages many of them and fuels racial anger and stereotyopes. For anthropologists, whether or not Lynn's claims were accurate or not is not the main issue. As anthropologists, while acknowledging that motives should be investigated for their accuracy, the social meanings behind deceptions is also an ethnographic reality to be investigated (Spradley 1970). Lynn stressed that Whitefellas owed Aborigines money and so there was a perceived legitimacy in her begging performances. Interestingly Aboriginal beggars also told me they frequently checked the color of the skin of tourists; a newly arrived tourist from colder areas of the world would be very easily recognisable because of his or her pale skin. They were seen as much more likely to give because their state as newly arrived usually meant they had lots of money in addition to having greater sympathy for the indigenous people in a new country.

As seen above, begging has a performative quality and it is often organised in a backstage arena where a group spreads out in town and meets again to share income as well as planning how, where and when to spend it. The success and failures of different strategies are passed on and this creates shared cultural understandings about begging: It helps to create a culture of begging. With Lynn, begging was phrased as a form of resistance because the income generated was simply a demand to return what had previously been taken away. Aborigines do not see themselves as enaged in deception or as seeking to to steal other people's hard earned money. Instead, Aboriginal beggars perceive their performances as last desperate resorts in reclaiming resources that they had previously been dispossed of. There is in other words a cultural reasoning related to historical perceptions and collective racial identity involved in begging..

Oscillations

Like Lynn, some of my other informants who were houseless at the time of my fieldwork had moved to this state from previously having had a house. Instead of perceiving the situation as utterly hopeless, they expected to have a house in Darwin again in the future. This was most common for people who had stayed with other Aborigines in one of the suburbs[15] and were thrown out due to others' complaints about their behaviour which then forced them to move to the central areas of town. The complaints were often related to substance abuse, agressiveness, and the sharing of food and beverages. These individuals often stated that they had not been treated fairly and so they most often did not feel like they deserved to be houseless. Some had stayed in houses and participated in the distribution of *amarda* explain?? marijuanna before getting caught by the police. After getting out of prison and trying to return to the *mob* they originally dwelled with, they find that nobody wants anything to do with them and so they become houseless again. These houseless Aborigines are demonised by local non-Aboriginal people more so than non-Aboriginal houseless people.

Public drinking and contesting discourses

In 1918, the Northern Territory Aboriginal Ordinance Act prohibited Aborigines from alcohol consumption. When the prohibition was partly canceled in 1948, it made alcohol consumption equivalent to being confirmed as a full citizen (Day 2001: 4). Partly because of the way White Australians embrace drinking as part of their wealth, power and control, drinking could often be used as a form of resistance by Aborigines to White hegemony (ibid. 2001: 89). Spencer

15 Parap and Palmerston were significantly more often reported as previous homes than other suburbs

goes as far as to call alcohol a "communal sacrament" in this type of resistance (Spencer 2006: 162), meaning that it involved collective rituals that affirmed ones independence from white control[16].

During my pre-houseless days in Darwin, I witnessed at first hand how public drinking was often a huge problem among homeless Aborigines. Of course, a houseless person can only drink in public because that person is not allowed to drink in a hotel and has not been invited to someone else's house. Since alcohol consumption is such an important part of many houseless person's lives, public drinking stood out as a central topic in defining their immediate surroundings. The discourses about houselessness are very closely bound up with discourses about public drinking, and together they underpin the racial stereotype that many urban Aborigines confront.

Ironically, drinking is also a central part of white Australian identity and sociality in the Northern Territory. This has a clear connection to the historical past of Darwin which has always regarded itself as the bearer of a frontier tradition, where true Australians test their courage, strength and hard work against the elements of nature. In accordance with this tradition, the consumption of alcohol has been used, paradoxically, by non-Aborigines as a means to position themselves higher morally than the Aboriginal "savages". Whites affirm themselves as those who can handle their drinking; they do not become disordered and disorganised by drinking. They have greater control over themselves; over their minds and bodies. The drinking of Aborigines is seen to reveal their lack of control over themselves, over *their* minds and bodies. Their drunkeness is highlight because it stands in start contrast to the official publicly disseminated romantic image of Aborigines as "noble savages" (Rousseau 19xx). Public drinking among houseless Aborigines in Darwin has always been portrayed as a problem, but also as revealing how Aborigines cannot govern themselves.

The paradox here is the pride taken in the frontier tradition of excessive drinking by non-indigenous Australians. This pride is shown explicitly in the annual Beer Can Regatta (Mewett 1988: 11; Day 2001: 262). As the name of the festival implies, the Regatta is a boat race with boats built more or less successfully out of beer cans. Participants often used the Regatta as an excuse for drinking; to collect as many beer cans as possible in order to build an even greater boat than the year before. What is ironic about the Regatta is that there are hardly any Aboriginal contestants. In fact, the festival itself is located on Mindil Beach which has been an important place of ritual burial for the Larrakeyah (Day 2001: 18). While public

16 In my opinion, using the notion "sacrament" in this context is misleading as there is no clear religious affiliation to the activities. Yet it illustrates the importance laid on public drinking among Aborigines in Darwin.

racism is prohibited, it is most certainly implied in the event, which celebrates the greater more ordered drinking capactity of white Australians. They channel their drinking into organisational structures. The organisers eagerly state that the event raises money for charity[17]. This makes the racial nature of the event even more paradoxical because it confirms White self-caricatures of more ordered forms of alcohol use in this case in the service of the humanitarian goals of the organisers. The Beer Can Regatta be interpreted as a ritual confirming non-Aboriginal dominance and its legitimacy by invoking a sense of humanitarianism. Yet, there are other events such as "Harmony Day", where themes such as "difference" and "equality" are in fact celebrated. There is also a "national sorry day" on every 26th of May followed by a "national sorry week" in Australia. Many of my Aboriginal informants scolded liberal-minded people responsible for such events, because, just like Kevin Rudds "sorry-speech" (see introduction chapter), it invoked a sense of reconciliation that had yet to be realised. It made it seem like the public in Darwin embraced Aborigines whereas reality was all too different. In fact such humanitarian promises of reconciliation re-enforced the national alienation felt by many of the houseless Aborigines. Many felt that true reconcilation should come before any celebration. They were not convinced that the celebrations were a means of bringing about reconciliation, but were interpreted as activities to make Whites feel good about themselves.

Not merely a matter of choice

There are several reasons why houseless Aborigines in Darwin are subjects to a vastly disproportionate focus by White Australians. First, the fact that they are houseless means that when they drink it is in public for they nowhere else to drink. Bar owners in town were usually very restrictive in dealing with seemingly houseless Aborigines, whose clothing and personal hygiene can offend other patrons. Secondly, Aborigines often do not seek to hide themselves or their drinking from the wider public which was often critical of them. Nor would they even try to hide their drinking from the police but instead used it as a means to express what they referred to as their legitimate right. It is this public defiance, the refusal to go away, to humble themselves, that insults and angers white Australians. It is seen as a culture of complaints rather than a culture of resistance, and this unwillingness to stay passive stimulates the xenophobia felt by many in Darwin (Cowlishaw 1994: 80). It underpins the angry emotions concerning what is said to be "the Aboriginal problem". Thirdly, police officers devote significantly more amount of time checking into groups of Aborigines in parks

17 http://goaustralia.about.com/b/2007/07/26/beer-can-regatta-raises-funds-for-charity.htm

than they do regarding non-Aborigines. Most Aborigines are arrested not for assaulting a member of the public or swearing at them but for assaulting or swearing at police officers (Cunneen 2001; Carrington 1993). The fact that you can apply for a *drinking permit* in some parks suggests another way of structuring race relations but this would be unthinkable for Aborigines, and even if a houseless Aboriginal group did, they would most probably not be able to acquire one. Houseless Aborigines tend to gather and drink in the same spots and are easy to watch and police, which is resented by Aborigines who in turn confront police about their over policing and its selective nature.

From a Foucaultian perspective, the discourses of social disorder and cultural pathology articulated by members of the public and government officials promotes increased surveillance and policing of houseless Aborigines. These Aborigines are viewed as "the Self-Destructive Other". The constant surveillance is phrased as a form of humanitarian care that also protects property, commerce and social peace. This form of surveillance participates in regimes of bio-power (Lattas & Morris 2010). Bio-power here refers to the diverse institutions of social control that seek to foster power of production and life through technologies of surveillance and dicipline directed at bodies. In the context of urban houseless Aborigines, there is clearly a disproportionate amount of bio-power when it is directed at managing their lives through police, the wefare system, housing agencies and the juidical-penal system.

Reciprocal ties

Houselessness brings forth new social systems with their own values, rules and regulations. The "us" versus "them" aspect of ethnic identity also included, as previously mentioned, inter-ethnic solidarity ties. Simmel's rule stating that a group's inner solidarity is dependent on the degree of external pressure is relevant to understanding the composition of houseless groups. Another major constitutive factor was reciprocity. It was a central mechanism for mapping out and creating the boundaries of houseless groups, for defining who should belong versus who should not be part of the houseless group. Generalised reciprocity (Sahlins 1972) was perhaps more important among houseless people than for people with houses because in poverty one is more dependent on other people's resources. Give and take play a relatively larger part in being able to equalise out everyday fluctuations in income. Sharing alcohol (*grog*) *as* well as marijuana (*amarda*) is very common among houseless Aborigines in Darwin. Much more so than the sharing of food, which often seems not to be a priority among many of them. Indeed, people seem to sacrifice access to food so as to give priority to the economy of sharing

pleasure which has its own internal moral order.

Upon entering the terrain of a houseless group, it is self-evident to all present that whoever has the moselle[18] shares the moselle. Despite this being a great source for solidarity bonds, it also has the potential of ruining them. Refusing to give within a group could spark verbal accusations and physical fights resulting in the exclusion of a member who refused to reciprocate. All are expected to share and to pay back the hospitatlity that they have received from others. The moral to share is enforced through threats to exclude and to publicly humiliate those who selfishly hide their resources from others. Drinking is portrayed as almost ritualistic where the alcohol is passed around between participants in a way that shows no fear of the pollution of other people's bodily substances. This sharing of embodiment is part of the disgust that outsiders feel, a disgust which reinforces the embodied group solidarity of participants.

The following passage will help illustrate the dynamics of reciprocity amongst a group at Bicentennial Park, one of the most crowded parks in Darwin.

(two Aboriginal females (W1&2), one Aboriginal male (M1))

W1: Give me that.
(M1 starts drinking, ignoring W1)
W1: *(Raising voice)* Give me that!
W2: It's hers!
W1: *(Talking to me)* He's drinking my moselle!
M1: (*talks angrily in local Aboriginal language while pointing to himself)*
W1: I had that three days ago! Give me that! *(Waves M1 off)*

After M1 had walked away with his cask, the two Aboriginal women explained to me why they were so angry about not getting any of his moselle wine. What left me the most confused was W1's statement "I had it three days ago", which implied that the present wine was really a continuation and part of the previous wine that she had supplied. W1 did not say much except scolding M1 vigirously, with W2 acting as her spokesperson. W2 explained that it was "his round". It was his turn to buy and share wine using money gained from begging in the streets.

18 A cask of sweet white wine. It was usually preferred over red, reiselling or port because of its quality of being easy to drink. It was not primarily the taste of wine that drove houseless Aborigines to drink, but rather as a means to bond and to collectively deal with trauma and discomfort as well as confirming civil status by means of resistance.

One of the tensions between Aboriginal men and women is the use of gender authority to subvert the moral order of reciprocity. It was not just M1 who owed the women wine, but also a few other males who were not present at the time. The women were furious and told me they would never sit and share with this man again.

This event is only one of a vast number of occasions like this one. It serves to illustrate how central trust and reciprocity are for sustaining homeless groups and the precariousness of those relations. Trust, an abstract or immaterial aspect of ones relation to another, becomes embodied in the material substance to which they entrust each other. The drinking out of the same containing means that sorcery is not a problem; they all trust each other not to sorcerise each other. Drinking is definately the one thing most spoken about as defining friendships among the houseless. They often have memorized long lists of names of who owes them and to whom they owe. These lists can bring forth accusations, which are difficult to resolve given the overlapping and multiple nature of the gifts and the way these can be selectively memorialised. The (in-)stability of houseless group composition thus has to do with personal commitment as well as degrees of conflict. Some individuals have a significantly wider acceptance for others' unwillingness to reciprocate while others engage in conflict more easily over such imbalances.

Alcohol consumption and gender conflicts

Alcohol is a major component in gender conflicts and the instability of families. I will now present a story from my fieldwork that illustrates this. It was one of the most dramatic, unpleasant and most challenging happenings in my fieldwork both methodologically and in terms of my social life and well being in the field. I was staying with Aileen and Mick during this time. Aileen and Mick are both immigrated Aborigines from Tiwi Island and Cape York. They used to be houseless before getting an agreement with the government for housing. They were however afraid they were going to lose this grant and become houseless again. Indeed, Aileen, Mick and their children are part of the oscillating houseless that most studies seem to overlook.

When I was staying with Aileen and Mick, we decided to go fishing at 9 o'clock in the morning when according to a local newspaper[19] the tides were soon to be optimal. At my arrival to their house, everything was as usual: A perfectly peaceful and harmonious atmosphere. The children were playing on the floor with their bikes and homemade toys.

19 If there were no used newspapers to be found anywhere else, Aileen would go to Woolworths to check the tides announced in the daily NT News.

Mick was as usual sitting in his chair, talking to his oldest son Gill, giving him advice about how to survive in Darwin. I was told that we had to wait for two sisters who would come along with money for a new fishing line. We were supposed to get it on our way to Cullem Bay. I was told we would have to wait for a while. There was no tension about the delay. Aileen suggested we go get some moselle to enjoy while we waited. No longer than an hour after they had started drinking, the atmosphere was literally turned upside-down. What had previously been a peaceful quite social situation was now characterised by increasing confusion and anger. Mick started angrily accusing me of stealing his family, referring to the "bloody Whitefellas taking [their] land". Aileen was crying and so were two of the youngest children. Aileen started shouting at the children and Mick. After a short while Aileen kindly but sadly asked me to leave and said she could not let me see her family like this. I left in a state of confusion. An hour later Mick came to my door of the hostel where I lived in a 12-bed dorm. He said he had left his family behind and needed a t-shirt, a pair of shoes and 10 dollars. It was obvious that he was planning to go to a pub. Feeling sorry for his family while knowing that he would never be let inside a pub, I had to refuse. Pub owners would scold Mick for being "just another drunken Abo". He screamed at me while cursing my presence in Darwin.

This story illustrates how arguments about gifts and alcohol consumption form a major part of gender conflicts in urban areas. Men's relationships with each other are often mediated through alcohol, which in turn can require access to some of the financial resources controlled by women. It was a hard situation to find myself in because at the point when Mick came to my door I had to choose whether to align myself with the woman and children against the man or vice versa. Being well aware of the fact that both alternatives would inevitably bring forth disagreements and hostility, I chose to align myself with the women and children. I knew what a harsh blow this would be to Mick, because he appealed to me and to bonds of male solidarity but found himself opposed by everyone except their teenage son who refused to take any position in the matter. At the time Mick came to my door, I was forced to take sides because both Aileen and Mick turned to me and mediated their conflict through me. What I had to keep in mind was that the intervention of colonial authorities and welfare agencies into Aboriginal families has always been in terms of protecting women and children. Mick said as much when he said I stole his family and equated this to the colonial taking away of the land. He had no money so he had to rely on his wife or sisters, that is on women. Being unsuccessful he appealed to me and to bonds of male solidarity. He cursed me because I was his last option. Relieved that I could continue my relationship with the family, I was

ambivalently happy to hear him apologise sincerely at my door the next day as he broke down in tears. I had been very uncertain whether or not I could return safely to their house. When I did, I oberved that the children were obviously traumatised and even afraid of their parents the next day before they were eventually calmed down.

Ironically, Aileen urged me to explain in my book how her family would literally never exist if it was not for alcohol consumption. Some time before the incident described above, she explained to me how she met Mick. They met when they were both houseless in Darwin. We were discussing the negative impacts of alcohol among non-Aborigines, when Aileen said:

> "[...] So you see they only see it as a problem. I would never have met my mate without drinking. Because we were there to drink, we were there to have fun. A mob is funnier like that. And what happened is I met him there. We were both tipsy and the following days we were together without being tipsy. So you see its not [only] a problem."

What Aileen was pointing to is that Aborigines use alcohol in the same way as non-Aboriginals to break down taboos and reservations that keep people seperated from each other. Alcohol frees people from painful memories and trauma but also from everyday forms of etiquette that prevent them getting to know each other properly. She was very upset with how local people saw Aborigines drinking and often scolded Aborigines immediately, whilst with non-Aboriginals they would almost congratulate them and praise their drinking social relations. Aileen thought of this as extremely hypocritical. She told me numerous times that even drunk Whitefellas told Aborigines to stop drinking, and emphasised how paradoxical it was. When she was in a good mood she would laugh at the tragic-comical way Whitefellas would scold drinking Aborigines while pointing at them with a cask of *goon* in hand.

The day Aileen said this to me, I had no idea that they had recurring family problems due to periodical excessive drinking. I had seen no hints about that it in their day-to-day lives. The children had never mentioned anything. It seems like they used my presence to enforce new moral codes among themselves. A crucial aspect of the story is how Mick left his family in anger to go drink in town. I suspect that this is often the case: Non-Aborigines usually only see Aborigines when they are in town. When they went to town, it was usually to drink, to beg or to busk. In other words stereotypes are confirmed from a non-indigenous position. They do not see Aborigines living their relatively ordinary lives together with their families. Instead

they see them when they leave their families behind to go drinking. What is seen then is "just another drunken Abo", usually thought of as homeless, and they tend to assume Aborigines are like that at all times. What is also ignored is the internalised contradicitions that are released through alchol use.

Social implications of welfare

All houseless people in Darwin have access to welfare-funded food and clothing. St. Vinnies, which is located on Stuart Highway in the far north of Darwin, offers free food three times every day with no questions asked. In addition to this there is free use of bathrooms as well as a shelter for the rain during the daytime. Clothing is also available in a wide range, although any person must go through an interview with the workers (usually unpaid volunteers). At the southern end of Darwin, there is also food given away twice a day at the Wharf. Many locals scolded Aboriginal beggars and buskers, because there should be no need for begging when there is free food available every day. What struck me is that Aborigines were often a minority in those places despite their over-representation as poor individuals in Darwin. Talking to houseless Aborigines about this issue, many gave accounts which paradoxically enough emphasised forms of autonomy through begging. Thus Alan explained to me:

> "I don't come to Vinnies because it is not right. There is noone who should give me food at those places. I get my own food on the streets."

Begging and busking are here considered differently from mainstream Australian attitudes. Indeed they are considered a more dignified activity than standing in line for welfare food. Many of the Aborigines with whom I spoke refused to use the term 'begging' to describe their activities and instead generally referred to them as simply 'making money'. This for them carried a more active sense of engaging their urban environment for it involved choice about where to stand, how to request money and from whom. As opposed to many non-Aboriginal houseless beggars, there seemed rarely to be any shame involved in the activities. Quite the contrary, they were usually proud to busk and sometimes even beg. Receiving certain forms of welfare on the other hand, was considered much more as a form of surrendering to the Whitefella post-colonial powers. By begging and busking, economic capital and resources were gathered by their own means and so they could be spent as they saw fit. Receiving help from welfare institutions implied much more dependent notions of welfare with less choice and much more moral scrutiny by others. The pride taken in busking and begging has to be

seen in a context of racial surveillance that is often articulated as form of bio-power through the scrutinising forms of help offered by welfare institutions.

Part conclusion

In living in an urban environment, people create new homes or at least new spaces of attachment and belonging. They are constantly inventing and reinventing local urban spaces so as to transform them into places that belong to Aborigines, that is spaces that contain their local memories and social relations. Thus, to perceive them as "homeless" would be simplistic. Alcohol, as a communal gift, has a variety of meanings within the relationships and discourses of houseless Aborigines. First, it reaffirms citizenship due to historical laws banning consumption on a racially discriminatory basis. Second, it produces positive and negative stereotypes on an inter-ethnic level. Third, it has a central role in the production of *mobs* (inclusion and exclusion) through the effects of reciprocity. Fourth, it is a major component of gender conflict and the instability of families.

Houseless Aborigines are feared and despised by the dominant white community in Darwin, who live in secure fenced houses. It has been argued that this condemnation functions to reaffirm White property owners as civilised and cultured (Spencer 2006: 143). It is a way of articulating race through notions of property, poverty and welfare which claim to be above all concerned with security and wellbeing and not concerned with biology. Today racial antaganonisms have been partly de-biologised and perceptions of dangerous homeless nomads is the current form that race takes in contemporary Darwin. The houseless poor Aborigine are especially seen to be a threat to the commercial areas of Darwin that increasingly seek to draw in national and international tourists and often through using very idealised and romanticised portraits of Australian Aborigines. Tourist brochures will aesthetically portray Aboriginal life in the Northern Territory as "traditional". This is partly because tourists expect to see "traditional" aspects of Aboriginal culture in Darwin, close to their hotels.

These expectations make it seem culture is a matter of "having" a possession which can be unproblematically displayed and performed. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Western culture gives Aborigines this burden of always needing to display their authenticity. Tourists expecting such traditionality will most certainly be disappointed. The government and other tourist oriented organisations seem to promote a view of Aboriginal culture as static and timeless in order to promote commercial activities. This essentialist way of perceiving Aborigines serves to legitimise the dislocating of poor seeming inauthentic Aborigines from

the streets. In other words tourism plays an important role in the marginalisation of houseless urban Aborigines through the articulation of mythical versions of Aboriginality (see also Spencer 2006: 162). Government officials have an interest in portraying houselessness as a problem, which scares away tourists and makes the tourist industry's romantic portraits seem fraudulent. Indeed, houseless Aborigines are perceived as a disgrace to their identity by a large proportion of the non-Aboriginal local population. The idealisation of timeless primitive Aborigines sustains the critique of everyday Aborigines who always fall short of their ascribed nationally celebrated imagianary possibilities.

Seen as lower than non-Aboriginal homeless people, racial antagonisms are reinforced and even confirmed by the resistance practices of Aborigines. Public drinking and Aborigines' perceived lack of control over their bodies make them seem as non-adaptable and in the end hopeless cases that need humanitarian and police supervision. Such supervision, however, is avoided or resisted, which reconfirms the racial stereotypes that underpin these calls for supervision

Chapter 4 - Agreeing on contents, agreeing on reconciliation

Primitivism prevails

Though anthropologists emphasise the embedded nature of culture, in every day life other more essentialist understanding of culture as an internal inherited truth often prevail in everyday life. In contemporary Darwin, Aboriginal identity is caught up within multiple discourses which essentialise it in different ways, discovering and imposing their own internal truths upon Aborigines. Those discourses can be: nationalist in scope, bound up with the tourist industry, encode humanitarian welfare concerns, be expressive of the views of business and mainstream white residents' desire for order, cleanliness and hygiene. All sorts of combinations between these interests and discourses are possible and none of them catches the reality of indigenous urban people's everyday experiences even when they are well-meaning discourses that seek to alleviate racial discrimination and Aboriginal poverty. Often the romantic discourses which idealise Aboriginal culture are the other side of discourses which speak of the fallen cultural nature of urban contemporary Aborigines. The more Aborigines depart from the ideal of a timeless, religious, simple, peaceful native, then the more pathological they are seen to have become through a perceived failure to adapt. The urban poverty of Aborigines does not endear them to locals, tourists or state officials. Instead Aborigines are often constructed as having lost their culture, their truths and moral bearings, and as living urban modern lives of anomie without any social ordering principles. There is no knowledge or appreciation of the forms of morality and care shown by the homeless towards each other and often across racial divisions where other groups (such as Maoris) who are marginalised because of their skin and poverty will discover support, care and love in each other's company. Indigenous culture is being reinvented and takes particular forms on the streets and in the parks. Essentialism is not just something that is imposed upon Aborigines, but is also something that they engage in: "we share more than you whites" (Lattas 1993). Those everyday forms of essentialism can be romantic or tragic and they are being reinvented in urban areas, and music is one major medium through which people articulated these new personalised and essentialised historical truths. Totems and clan membership increasingly disappear as the primary badges of identity as people discover and articulate the pathos of their lives as a shared meaningful world of wandering, suffering, being policed, poverty and sharing.

Government and tourist discourses often portray Aboriginality as a possession from the past that people inherit. But there are more contemporary forms of fraternity that people

ceate and share, and often this can involve shared experiences of poverty, racism, policing and institutionalization. A view of culture as a static material possession from the past ignores the everyday practices and contests through which urban Aborigines can articulate identity through performances such as busking in the streets.

The tourist culture encourages a certain fetishisation of Aboriginal culture and the past that downplays how culture is dynamically re-created to articulate meanings for actors. Culture is not a static set of behavioural and perceptional traits inherited from birth and that individuals gradually lose. This essentialising of culture and Aboriginal identity by the dominant society cannot just be dismissed as a mistake, for it is a pervasive aspect of everyday cultural ideologies that structures interactions on the street. For informants, essentialism is a real process of being identified, of being placed and given ideal truths, and not just a set of mistaken views. If it continues to exist, it is because it serves certain purposes and functions. As noted earlier, it serves economical purposes, such as being part of the marketing of Aborigines for the tourist market. Tourists are looking for the exotic and they want Aboriginal culture to have a sense of primordial truth about an original sacred form of religiosity which all humanity shared in a remote evolutionary past. Current urban forms of Aboriginality confirm a discourse about the inability of this idealised past to exist in a modern world, they confirm a perception of the inability of Aborigines to adapt and become modern. In current hegemonic discourse, contemporary Aboriginality is a spectacle of failure, of a culture that is unable to adapt and become properly modern, Romanticism underpins a discourse of pathos that ignores the history of displacement and institutionalisation which has created present forms of distress and suffering in Indigenous people's lives. It is this impact of colonial history that is often displayed and personalised through busking but in ways that can often confirm the discourse of failed adaptation. What this means for urban Aborigines on the street is less a profitable niche within the tourist culture than that occupied by white buskers. Busking is often an attempt to use modern music genres that can articulate suffering and social critique, such as blues, country western and rap to reclaim modern ways of articulating identity and to create a shared culture of understanding with Europeans. But busking groups and individuals are often interpreted critically as cynically manufacturing their culture and suffering when what they actually do is perform it. They are seen as exploiting a culture of guilt and are resented by the mainstream population for this. The performance of personalised suffering is used paradoxically by non-indigenous locals to confirm and reproduce existing stereotypes of Aborigines as crafty tricksters, as untrustworthy and ungrateful, for they supposedly exploit the humanitarian sentiments of Europeans.

Rather than some traditional possession that is shared within a particular group with specific and impenetrable boundaries, contemporary Aboriginality in Darwin is of a fluctuating nature and not static. As we have seen through the meanings behind performances in busking and in the discourses on houselessness, Aboriginality is constituted and articulated through modern systems of symbolic aesthetic styles (e.g. cowboy styles, hip hop, rastafarianism), meanings (e.g. perceptions of "home") and practices (e.g. busking, begging, drinking, sharing, buttpicking) that create forms of belonging and interconnectedness.

The contents of primitivism

Urban Aborigines in Darwin are subject to primitivist expectations for them to stay traditional. Historically, primitivism have gone through three major shifts. As mentioned in the introduction, perceptions of "the noble savage" were prevalent in Europe during the eighteenth century and these ideas have not disappeared totally but have been reconstituted in new forms such as by merging with modern ecology and new age movements (Neuenfeldt 1998; Newton 1988; Povinelli 2002). In this romantic discourse Aborigines are seen as tied to nature and as having superior community-based society. With the movement of Europeans into Aboriginal lands, less romantic views of savage barbarians emerged that constructed them as those who did not know how to reason, did not have government or even any notion of property. This was a more negative form of primitivism that helped legitimised the invasion of Aboriginal lands. Today, remnants and new articulations of this negative primitivism legitimise the forced removal of poor urban Aborigines from the streets and increased amounts of surveillance and policing of them. These cultural constructions are a reliable conceptual tool for promoting symbolic violence that operate as a form bio-power, a ways of regulating and policing populations. What is even more central considering the scope of this thesis, however, is the effects it has on race relations between social actors at a micro level. Contemporary post-colonial primitivism are not just abstract theoretical schemes but inform the everyday assumptions about identity which organise racial interactions. Those assumptions are often played out by tourists, non-indigenous urban residents, police and shopkeepers

Reconciliation

What then, can help bring forth a sustainable reconciliation? Broadly speaking, reconciliation is the reestablishing of cordial relations[20]. In an Australian context the notion almost

20 http://www.thefreedictionary.com/reconciliation

exclusively relates to reestablishing relations between indigenous and non-indigenous people. It has often led to a preoccupation with state legislation rather than relations between people. One of the most important positive legislation acts has been the establishment of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation in 1990 (Bond 2000).

It is true that numerous federal acts have been passed that actually do help Aborigines. However, as we have seen, at a microlevel the reasoning behind such efforts often do not reach the public or fail to change their deep seated opinions. In fact, from my fieldwork experience in Darwin, many past legislative acts that were meant to benefit Aborigines (whether it be urban or rural) are used as arguments against needing to further recognise the aspirations and claims of Aborigines. While it is true that state legislation can help 'close the gap' between Aborigines and non-Aborigines in terms of health and education, it is not enough. Legislation cannot regulate the everyday relations between people. It is not just a question of whether or not to legislate better land rights and better social welfare provisions. It is also a question of law correlating with more harmonious intercultural understandings and forms of empathy. Today racial structures of segregation often deny that race is involved and will for example emphasise dress-codes Even something like the Beer Can Regatta (see previous chapter) can operate to differentiate and celebrate the good humored controlled forms of drinking between Europeans versus perceived uncontrolled, violent forms of Aboriginal drinking. In contemporary Australia, race relations are increasingly being measured by government and Europeans in terms of health and education outcomes with landrights and self-determination being de-prioritized. Aborigines will have no dignity unless the changing nature of modern Aboriginality is incorporated into the national culture that is given to both foreign tourists and local Australians. This view is supported by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation report of December 2000 which states:

> "Continuing acute disadvantage, discrimination and racism suffered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples remains the biggest challenge for reconciliation. [...] A strong grassroots people's movement is the key to ensuring that reconciliation becomes a reality in all aspects of the nation's life and identity." (CoA 2000: chapter 9)

Within national mainstream Australia, there is broad support for reconciliation. This can be seen in large marches such as the Sydney Harbour Bridge-march where up to a quarter of a million people walked across the bridge in a show of solidarity with Indigenous Australian[21].

21 "Surging, dancing towards the light" in Sydney Morning Herald 29 May 2000

However despite this, about half of the national population regard Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders as disadvantaged, if not as dysfunctional.

> "You are deluding yourself if you believe that there has been any significant change of heart by mainstream Australians towards Aborigines in recent times, particularly since the Council's Final Declaration was published. The walk across the Sydney Harbour Bridge [...] means very little if viewed objectively." (D. Tregaskis, Victoria, excerpt from letter to the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 2000)

The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation report goes on by stating:

> "Despite major advances, Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders often still face prejudice when trying to rent a home, find a job, hire a taxi, get service in shops and banks, and when doing the simple everyday things that most Australians take for granted."

Competing discourses on disadvantage

Among the general public of Darwin, there are two main discourses regarding what should be done to lower the obvious disadvantages of Aborigines. First, there are those who argue that despite supposedly positive discrimination for Aborigines in Australia, this has not helped their situation. In this discourse, Aboriginal culture is seen as one that belongs to the stone age, in contrast to 'modern culture'. Such essentialist understandings of Aboriginality often call for more integration into mainstream culture by Aborigines themselves. In this highly hierarchical way of understanding Aboriginality, reconciliation efforts that promote self-determination and separate lifestyles are not seen as the way to raise the standard of living for indigenous people. The other main discourse is one that regards the first one as condescending and highly racist. In this alternative discourse it is often argued that essentialism was indeed the way of colonialists and that today this is maintained in a new form by current discourse which internalise into Aborigines the sources of their disadvantage. It is argued that generations of racial discrimination and exploitation of Aborigines through dispossession of land and genocide are the real reasons for the disadvantages experienced by contemporary Aborigines. It would be argued that what needs to be retained is the dignity of Aborigines. In terms of busking and alcohol consumption, such dignity would be more forthcoming if people were aware of the meanings involved in these everyday activities.

What non-Aborigines in Darwin claim is an apparent loss of cultural knowledge can be understood as a discourse in itself which serves to marginalise and render inauthentic modern Aborigines. Indeed, part of this discourse often blames Aboriginality, or culture, for the poor health and wellbeing of Aborigines in Darwin. There is a contradiction here, where on the one hand, Aborigines are called upon to regain a traditional lifestyle; a demand that approaches Aboriginality through primitivist lenses. On the other hand, contemporary Aboriginality (as constituted through reformed western aesthetic styles) is dismissed as false. When it comes to everyday surviving, however, Aborigines are expected to assimilate as their supposedly best means of ensuring their good health, education and living standards. In this case they are expected to abandon what mainstream primitivists would call their "real culture" so as to become "Westernized". In both cases, Whites position themselves as higher than Aborigines, because it is not just a question of positive and negative stereotypes but also of Whites managing the production of Aboriginality. It is Whites who set themselves up to know how to manage the cultural forms of Aboriginality for the benefit of Aborigines

How ethnography can contribute to reconciliation

In chapter 2, we saw how busking among urban Aborigines often has a central role in the production and maintenance of stereotypes. Busking comprises discourses about the past and the present. It uses those experiences to articulate hope for another kind of future. Sometimes the narratives in the song are of tragic pathos, of a wandering along a painful road whose ultimate destination is unclear. Yet even within the dystopia articulated by such songs there is nevertheless implicitly a desire and a longing for a more utopian existence, for other kinds of journeys and roads. It is space and time which are being imaginatively re-narrated in these songs.

In chapter 3, we explored other articulations of identity, social relations and culture by investigating houselessness, including begging performances and alcohol drinking in an urban context. Where busking performances are seen to confirm a wider public perception of urban Aborigines as fraudulently manufacturing their culture, houselessness and drinking are often seen to be a direct expression of cultural dysfunctionality. They are a central part of the cultural problematization of the urban poor. However, as we have seen, substance abuse can, just like busking, be interpreted as a creative rearticulation of the gift economy among Aborigines. It can also be seen as a form of resistance to non-indigenous hegemony, for drinking is continuously done in public when it could quite as easily be done in more concealed spaces. It is the public claiming of space which is being contested in these defiant

acts where Aborigines congregate to share drinking debts that mirror yet are very different to the drinking debts that whites buy for each other inside pubs, where Whites are said to "shout" each other drinks. It is the context of Aboriginal forms of reciprocity which pathologises them for Europeans who have their own excessive culture of drinking gifts.

I have tried to use Bourdieu's concept to cultural capital to explore the alternative forms of value that urban homeless Aborigines negotiate between themselves. While my main focus on the articulation of Aboriginality has been on street performances, the styles and contents of songs, drinking cultures and houselessness, I have not sought to use the concept of cultural capital to imply that there are no disagreements about how things are valued. Indeed, I have sought to document the forms that disagreements and re-negotiations assume. Some of those disagreements have a gender component and encode the uneven forms of reciprocity that can occur between Aboriginal men and women. Those disagreements and re-negotiations exist between those whose are homeless but they are also a crucial part of racial tensions between urban Aborigines and mainstream Whites. Sustainable reconciliation between these socially constructed races will come through public awareness and education regarding how different values are produced within different contexts.

The need for public awareness

The public documents that seek to solve Aboriginal disadvantage do not confront this issue. For example, The National Strategy to Promote Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Rights by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation calls for a recognition of Aboriginal indigeneity:

> "Governments and their agencies, legal, cultural and educational institutions, Indigenous organisations, and the media work together to improve community awareness and appreciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first peoples with distinct cultures, rights and status." (CoA 2000)

The National Strategy to Overcome Disadvantage seems to internalise the problem of disadvantage as something that indigenous people are responsible for and need to solve:

> "Indigenous communities, families and individuals [should] take more responsibility for addressing the causes and consequences of disadvantage within their control. […] All Australians [should] accept the responsibility to learn more about the causes and

extent of disadvantage and reject racism and related behaviour." (CoA 2000)

The main issue in these reports are the differing views among politicians as well as the general public on what should be done in order to bring forth reconciliation in Australia. There different discourses lack an ethnographic perspectives on what actually constitutes contemporary everyday forms of Aboriginality. This will come from public awareness of the new forms of cultural capital that Aborigines create and embrace in their everyday social relations.

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