11. Owning Your People: Sustaining relatedness and identity in a South Coast Aboriginal community

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Peterson's seminal 1993 article critically reframed the ethic of sharing in hunter-gatherer society bringing into spare relief a moral terrain surprising to the Western moral conscience. This chapter examines the relevance of Peterson's (1993) explication with respect to a NSW South Coast semi-urban Aboriginal community (see Altman, Gomes, Martin and Saethre, this volume, for more on demand sharing). The crucial importance of relationship to kin in achieving practical sustenance and the attainment of personhood is found here, as elsewhere in Aboriginal Australia, to bring a testing element and emotionally coercive pressure to calls for sharing (Myers 1986; Peterson 1993; Peterson and Taylor 2003). This chapter seeks to extend the analysis by considering how contemporary issues of racial politics seep into relational constructs. Foregrounding the local moral imperative to '*own* your own people', a central concern is to demonstrate how, in the wake of colonisation, demand sharing at Jerrinja has come to constitute an exacting test of a person's commitment to and acceptance of an Aboriginal identity. The workings of a robust Indigenous moral economy will be further shown, as per Peterson's earlier writings (1985), to have articulated with changing government policies, to permit significant degrees of disengagement from mainstream social circles and the market economy; such distance, supplying both the space for cultural reproduction and the guarantee of ongoing socio-economic disadvantage.

In his influential 1993 paper reassessing the ethic of generosity prevalent amongst hunter-gatherers, Peterson demonstrates that, in opposition to Western expectations, much sharing takes place in the context of demand, not in the free and 'altruistic' disbursement of gifts (cf. Allen, Altman, Gomes and Martin, this volume). The location of generosity at the point of response rather than of self-propulsion, he argues, makes it no less a moral act but one more compatible with the particular social dynamics, moral imperatives and economic limitations of these small-scale kin-based societies (Peterson 1993: 870).

While socio-biological perspectives can go some way in explaining the practice, Peterson argues, any explanations that attempt to deal with demand sharing

simply as a mechanism for meeting material needs will necessarily fall short. The practice must also be examined in relation to its critical role in the production and reproduction of social relations (Peterson 1993: 861). In Aboriginal society, as Myers (1986: 72) has shown, relatedness cannot be taken as a once-and-for-all given but must be sustained through constant social action (Peterson 1993: 870). Through the exchange of things, relatedness is objectified, mediated and reproduced. Since in this light a demand for sharing can be seen to carry a significant moral load, Peterson (1993: 870) has pointed out that it must be read, at least in part, as 'a testing behaviour'. In the willingness to ask, and in the responsiveness to the request, the existence and current status of a relationship are being both demonstrated and measured. The demand poses a question: 'Do you acknowledge relationship to me?'

In the Indigenous context, where notions of the self are not strictly bounded in the fashion of Western individualism but extend beyond the physical individual to incorporate identification with other persons, things and places (Myers 1986: 108), relatedness entails a notion of shared identity. The test represented by demand sharing, then, also encompasses a demand for recognition and acceptance of shared identity.

The constitution of identity for Aboriginal Australians is, in the context of their colonial subjugation, much changed. In settled Australia, particularly, the meanings and values upheld by Indigenous peoples are constantly being brought into play with non-Indigenous frames of reference, often in opposition to them (cf. Ono, this volume). The pervasive penetration of racial issues into identity formation has introduced an additional burden into demands for relatedness. If demand sharing calls for a recognition and acceptance of shared identity, a failure to share represents not only a rejection of relationship with the other, but also a refusal of one's Aboriginal identity.

Jerrinja: From Aboriginal reserve to suburban enclave

In 1900, when the original Roseby Park Aboriginal Reserve was first officially gazetted, its location some 20 km east of Nowra, at the mouth of the Crookhaven River, met the requirements of the Aborigines Protection Board well. Cloistered between bush and farmland, the new reserve's isolation served the twin purposes of dampening protests from the local white citizenry and segregating the board's charges from the baneful influences of its less respectable elements. The newly created reserve incorporated a small number of fringe-dwellers already

living in the area with families relocated from the erstwhile blacks' camp on the Coolangatta estate. Nevertheless, it was not a large settlement. Three years on, according to board records, the population at Roseby Park stood at 65.

In 1906, as part of a new thrust towards intervention and reform, the reserve was declared a government station. It was placed under the permanent supervision of a resident manager with visions of turning it into a special 'training home'. Assuming something of the character of an institution, movements on and off the station became subject to heavy regulation. Children were schooled on site and residents enlisted in skills training programs. Close surveillance of and strictures over daily activities and formal home inspections became part of the attempt to inculcate residents with European values and standards.

The controls on individual freedoms experienced by the residents of Aboriginal stations have led Morris (1988: 35) to compare them with what Goffman called the 'total institution', but the applicability of this comparison must be counted as limited in this context. Whereas the inmate of Goffman's total institution is completely isolated from the 'stable social arrangements [of] his home world' (Lemert and Branaman 1997: 53), the stations involved the confinement of whole families and broader social networks, preserving, at least to a substantial degree, familiar frames of reference in which one's identity and an independent outlook on the world could be anchored. Ironically, the Aboriginal reserves—designed to dismantle Indigenous traditions and effect major moral reforms on Aboriginal people—served, in significant ways, to insulate and protect kinship networks and socio-cultural difference and to shore up group identity through the creation of a solidarity born of shared oppression.

Moral pressures for the development of habits of industry, reinforced by the selective distribution and withholding of rations, pushed Roseby Park residents towards engagement in paid employment, although complaints of Aboriginal indolence and the inclination of some to work only when absolutely necessary made their way into official records (for example, Aborigines Protection Board 1910: 10; Antill 1982: 71). With government subsidisation and a significant continuing reliance on fishing and gathering, Roseby Park's residents presented a cheap source of, mainly seasonal, labour for local farmers and oyster producers. In general, however, harvesting work and other types of employment available to the residents, such as work on forestry gangs, once again created environments of closed Aboriginal sociality, with only limited opportunities for interaction with whites.¹ Distance and prevailing racist attitudes precluded sustained contact in the townships.

¹ At picking time, for example, people travelled in extended family groups to join seasonal camps on the far South Coast where hard work was coupled with the rapid dissipation of earnings in large gambling schools.

While authoritarian controls had in the first place served to confine residents of Roseby Park on the reserve, the strong investment of the residents themselves in preserving their social universe was demonstrated by the dogged resistance met in later attempts to disperse them. In 1966, the last resident manager was withdrawn and at this time, with newly adopted assimilationist policies in place, the Aborigines Welfare Board held hopes that the population of the station could be relocated in town and a smooth transition into mainstream society effected. In this, however, a core of residents proved uncooperative, refusing to abandon the place they called home or to disband their community. Such recalcitrance was underlaid, as will be canvassed below, by a complex mixture of inward-looking conservatism and radical political leadership.

Rather than effecting the closure of Roseby Park, the Government in the end capitulated and, with the instigation in the early 1970s of a major housing project, Aboriginal presence on the reserve was consolidated. In timing, this coincided closely with changes to the welfare system with Aboriginal people for the first time having direct access to individual social security payments. This new guaranteed flow of income, albeit modest, combined with internal structural factors to set the stage for a new level of disengagement from the market economy. In the same way that Peterson (1985:92) has demonstrated for remote communities in the Northern Territory, low consumer dependence arising from an adherence to 'a traditional economy of limited objectives', significant continuing reliance on (in this case) fishing and gathering and a cultural emphasis on sharing served to buffer the populace from mainstream incorporation. In outward appearance, the community held the trappings of a modern economic existence, but at a 'deep' structural level, as Macdonald (2001: 182) has argued for central New South Wales, 'higher order structures of morality, value orientation and social relatedness' persisted.

In 1983, as a further victory for local and more widespread political agitation, ownership of the Roseby Park reserve was transferred to the Jerrinja Local Aboriginal Land Council under the newly instituted NSW *Aboriginal Land Rights Act*.

Maintaining the Lines

Today, Jerrinja, or 'the Mish' (mission) as it is popularly known, is home to a population approaching 200 people. The demographic is typical of the Aboriginal populace throughout the State, heavily weighted towards the very young and considerably depleted in the upper generations. Twenty-seven homes are distributed around two parallel cul-de-sacs overlooking the river. Hemmed in between 1950s fibro holiday cottages, non-descript brick homes

and the pretentious mansions that signal the South Coast's increasing urban consolidation, the community is no longer an isolated outpost, finding itself instead enveloped in white suburbia.

Besides the physical encapsulation of the community, multiple and essential ties enmesh it within the web of mainstream social institutions, infrastructural facilities, government agencies and the wider economy. With limited exceptions—such as the few clinics operating from the community medical centre and services provided by the Aboriginal legal service—Jerrinja residents patronise the same schools, shops, medical facilities, workplaces (in a small number of cases) and social clubs as the area's non-Aboriginal residents.

The wide array, apparent mundanity and frequency of interactions represented belie the fact that such forays—as they are commonly experienced—are, for many Jerrinja residents, attended by significant feelings of ill ease, self-consciousness, inadequacy, stress, shame and alienation. In part such feelings reflect an acute sensitivity to actual and perceived racist disdain and exclusion. Historical exposure to strong forms of racist discrimination, as well as the continuing everyday denigrations and rebuffs, which form the normal experience of Koori life,² have left them highly attuned to the negative attitudes sustained by a majority of non-Aboriginal people, and, in many cases, beholden to an internalised sense of their own inferiority and inadequacy.

Feelings that they are being subject to intense and critical scrutiny from outsiders haunt people even while on the mission, but exposure in the outside domain creates a painful degree of intensity. Lacking the necessary cultural capital, many are uncomfortable negotiating even the simplest social transactions and struggle tremendously when dealing with bureaucracy in general and with the health and legal systems in particular. Sharing educational and other socioeconomic deficits with poorer sections of the white community, they are further disadvantaged by the burdens of race and by the cultural specificity that confronts them in all their dealings with the mainstream. Not all experience the same degree of distress, but, generally speaking, when out in public, keeping in company with their own kind is felt to be, beyond preferable, almost mandatory. Safety is found in numbers. Withdrawing into the margins, spaces are staked out where, grouping together, temporary social havens can be established. If caught 'one out', it is best to keep one's head down, get the business over with and beat a hasty retreat. In all, keeping actual interactions with whites to a minimum is the preferred policy. For an element of the Jerrinja population, this is a maxim most effectively met by rarely leaving the mission at all.

2 Koori (sing.) and Kooris (pl.) are Indigenous terms for Aboriginal people, specifically for Aboriginal people of coastal New South Wales.

Kinship and the Demands of Sharing

Home, of course, is not merely a place of exile. The counter side to the substantial degree of social closure that marks relations with the 'outside' world are the familiar, binding and compelling kinship ties of the 'inside' domain. Although hardly free of hegemonic influences, an alternative, distinctively Indigenous socio-cultural order—presenting its own edifications, its own engaging dramas and its own compelling demands of loyalty—prevails and a space where people live their own world taken for granted is maintained.

Jerrinja is best understood as a kin-based moral community, in which relatedness provides the primary structural principle for social, economic and political organisation and in which a person's identity and worth are measured, in the first instance, by one's recognition of and by family and one's participation in sociable relations with them. The community can be conceived as constituted by an intricate network of kin relations, in which individuals are bound, often through multiple affiliations. The field is not an even one. While it is, in theory, possible to link any one person on the mission to any other by tracing a path through consanguinal and/or affinal ties, in the daily construction of social life and polity some measures of relatedness are considered supreme; others without productive significance; some remain unknown; some are not activated; and some vigorously renounced.

In *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Bourdieu (1977) draws an analogy comparing the opposition between theoretical and 'practical' kin relationships with the maps and tracks worn with use. The logical relationships constructed by the anthropologist are opposed to 'practical' relationships—practical because continuously practised, kept up and cultivated—in the same way as the geometrical space of a map, an imaginary representation of all theoretically possible roads and routes, is opposed to the network of beaten tracks, of paths made ever more practicable by constant use (Bourdieu 1977: 37).

At Jerrinja, one might literally read the series of well-worn trails between households as some sort of map of practical kin relations. Like a cat's cradle, these paths crisscross the mission, channelling the traffic of people, goods, money, information and political influence in an economy driven by the ethic of demand sharing.³ The best-worn paths are traversed frequently, with relaxed confidence. Paths less trodden become, as Bourdieu suggests, increasingly difficult to negotiate. The ease with which demands are made, satisfied and, at times, deflected marks and maintains serviceable kin relationships across households.

3 Although voluntary prestations of food, particularly seafood, are sometimes made.

Demands for sharing, of course, do not always involve treks between households. Individuals in any social situation—at home, at a drinking party, in town, anywhere they meet—will find themselves pressed by kin and, when other options have run short, by kind. Everyday food items, cigarettes and cash constitute the most common objects of exchange, while requests for lifts, child care, and physical or political backup can also test one's loyalties. In making the request, the relationship upon which the expectation of being satisfied is based is commonly foregrounded; hence '\$5, aunt' or 'give me a smoke, bruv'.

Of course, those subject to demands within this system may refuse and the capacity to do so is held by Peterson (1993: 864) as one of the features that makes it a successful adaptation. At Jerrinja people did so frequently. Their refusals, however, are always couched in the frame of legitimate, if not always believable, excuses.

Maria, who had asked me for a lift to the shops, was assailed by her nephew as we backed out of the driveway, asking her for cigarette money. She turned him down, telling him she had none and was merely coming along for the ride. Upon reaching the shops, however, Maria's sense of familial obligation got the better of her and she bought a packet of cigarettes to take back to him.

Limits exist, too, on how far one may press one's luck. Feeling that her young cousin had been overtaking her resources, a woman rebuked her with the accusation that she was not feeding her kids properly. The two came close to blows and did not speak to one another for some weeks.

If sharing is hailed as one of the virtues that defines their social world, the observation that things are not like they used to be is, as Macdonald (2000a) has noted for the Wiradjuri, a common theme amongst Jerrinja residents. There is a sense in which it is not so easy to ask anymore and people are not so willing to give. People look back nostalgically to the 'old days', when it is said everyone was friendlier, when they all pulled together and were 'happy with little'. 'We was that close...and we'd all help one another.'

At Jerrinja, more than one person traced the negative changes in atmosphere to the 1970s housing project, which saw meagre shacks replaced with three-bedroom brick homes. 'Ever since the first postholes were dug', I was told, things went downhill. 'Before everyone was friendly; you could walk into anyone's house and they'd give you a feed.' It is not difficult to see how changes in the built environment could have contributed to a degree of breakdown in sociality. In the old houses, there was 'barely room to swing a cat', necessitating a good portion of everyday life being conducted outdoors. In contrast, the new homes, with their relatively spacious interiors and sense of closure, tend to produce, in both perception and reality, the cloistering of individual family

life, decreasing opportunities for friendly engagement, sheltering (or depriving) people from demands, giving greater opportunity for hiding resources and generally raising the level of suspicion and jealousy. The overall effect has been, as one woman puts it, to make the place a 'ghost town'. Another man echoes: 'It's like a morgue... They keeps to theyselves. You don't see nobody.'

Macdonald sees reason to question whether in fact demand sharing has collapsed in settled Australia. She concludes that while the ethic is still alive and well, the absence of resources suitable for distribution makes people unable to fulfil their obligations, leading to an escalation in 'tension, hostility, resentment, competitiveness, back-stabbing and vendetta-type behaviour' (Macdonald 2000b: 17).

Complaints and laments aside, far from the vital economy of demand sharing having collapsed, there are those at Jerrinja who continue to throw themselves almost wholly at its mercy. Despite the fact the community is, in the main, sustained economically by *individualised* social security payments—a reason Macdonald suggests as a factor in the decline in demand sharing—the sustenance of the individual at Jerrinja continues to be a community achievement. There are probably few who rely solely on their own thrifty budget management skills to make a dole or pension payment last over the weeks. Most people operate on a boom/bust cycle. Money comes in only to enter substantially into wider circulation.

It is not uncommon for a person (particularly amongst the drinkers) to declare broke on the same day their benefit is received. A household shop-up or contribution to kitty, repayment of moneys borrowed, a spate of demands for loans, smokes, several card games and a major contribution to the 'throw-in' for grog soon deplete the limited windfall. People are reliant, then, upon the largesse of others, the loans they can procure and often their fishing and gathering efforts to see them from one payday to the next.

In a practical sense, the viability of the system depends on the staggering of social security payments, whereby cash injections are distributed over the weeks.⁴ In a social sense, this style of economic management is substantially reliant on the upkeep of close and dependable relations with kin; it is a product of, and dependent upon, the value placed upon relatedness and the Koori ethic of 'sharing and caring'. The continual transactions of demand sharing, on the other hand, service and keep relationships vital. The social security system, then, is put to service in the reproduction of Aboriginal sociality, working only indirectly to sustain the individual.

4 People report that in the past social security payments were synchronised and the boom/bust cycle was greatly exaggerated.

The Jerrinja case clearly affirms Peterson and Taylor's (2003: 106) observation that the Indigenous domestic moral economy involves members investing much of their day-to-day income in producing and reproducing social relationships beyond the immediate domestic group; but more than one 'currency' is transacted in the process of sustaining relatedness at Jerrinja. Money, food, smokes, alcohol, but also time, talk, knowledge, respect and children, all circulate within an internal economy whose product is social connectedness. On a daily basis relationships are affirmed and reproduced through sociable and sympathetic interaction.

While some have sought explanations for the pervasive popularity of drinking and card playing in Aboriginal communities in redistributive mechanisms (Altman 1987) and oppositional politics (for example, Fink 1957), the appeal, which is far from ubiquitous, at Jerrinja would seem to lie primarily in the way these practices engage people in sociable activity in which moral values of egalitarianism, sharing, autonomy and relatedness are afforded both symbolic and practical expression. In the divvying of alcohol, the performative display of the egalitarian ethic is raised almost to the level of ritual. Amongst port drinkers, the effort to ensure that people receive an equal share involves the appointment of one person as pourer, his or her job being to measure out, under careful scrutiny, equal nips, which are then mixed with Coke into a cocktail, referred to as a 'Tyson'. The pourer can take pride in his/her consistent measures and ability to remember the order of drinkers. Besides being true to a precept of fair shares, the practice also accords with the code noted by Sansom (1980: 61) amongst Darwin Aboriginal fringe-camp dwellers that co-drinkers should go through the stages of inebriation together; they should remain 'all level'. In practical and in symbolic ways, the values of relatedness and shared identity are continually being exercised and reinforced at Jerrinja.

What, then, of those who refuse to participate, who too often fail to respond to requests, disappear from the social circuit, who threaten to abdicate to the mainstream? The contours of this moral terrain are brought to light by an examination of two local idioms: on the one hand, the praiseworthy attribute of being willing to '*own* your people'; on the other, the condemnatory censure of 'being flash'.

Owning Your People

The moral precept seeming to have most force at Jerrinja and giving direct expression to the imperative to recognise and protect relatedness is that which dictates that one ought to '*own* one's people'. In Standard English usage, the word '*own*', as it relates to human relationships, is confined to the special case of

master and slave. Here the connotation is that the slave is reduced to an object, owned as any other thing. 'Disown', on the other hand, is generally employed with a different sense and broader applicability. The *Macquarie Dictionary* offers: 'to refuse to acknowledge as belonging or pertaining to oneself; deny the ownership of or responsibility for; repudiate; renounce.' 'Disown', as far as I am aware, is not used in Aboriginal English; rather the formulation is 'don't own' or 'doesn't own'; but a reversal of the above definition effectively captures the sense of the word 'own' as it is applied in relations with others.

To 'own' your people, and to be 'owned' by others, implies an acknowledgment and affirmation of relationship. It entails a sense of belonging, acceptance, solidarity and mutual sympathy, care and respect. The term likely derives its existence from a traditional semantic field where, as Myers (1986) has shown, references to kin and relatedness are entwined with notions of identity, belonging and ownership. Tonkinson (1978: 107) has Mardudjara *walydja* as 'own' and explains its use in signifying close relationships, consanguineous over classificatory or in recognition of a relationship involving some other type of 'special bond'. Myers (1986: 109), meanwhile, shows that '*walya*' amongst the Pintupi carries valences of: 1) possessions; 2) 'kin'; 3) 'one's own' (my own); 4) a wider sense of belonging; and 5) 'oneself', as in the phrases 'he did it himself' or 'she is sitting by herself'. Having regard to the relational notions of the self that typify Aboriginal constructions of personhood, Myers (1986: 107) also draws attention here to the 'view of kinship as identity with others as part of the self'.

The compunction to 'own', and the desire to 'be owned', places value, then, on the recognition and acceptance of shared identity. At Jerrinja, the phrase is used in reciprocal fashion in the evaluation of individual and group allegiances.

Two small children, who live off the mission with their non-Aboriginal mother, were staying with their grandmother for a few days. They came to pay a visit to their great-aunt, giving her a hug and a kiss. After they left, she commented, 'They're good kids. They weren't brought up on the mission, but they *own* you.'

In another example, following a funeral, discussion in the household where I was staying revolved around attendances and absences. Relatives who failed to show were criticised as 'thinking white way'. One woman, noting the absence of a great niece, who kept away from the mission at other times too, threatened to ask her 'straight out, if she *owns* us'. 'She wouldn't want to come near me', she added, angrily. Her nephew, she said, was 'a different thing altogether. He always *owned* all his people.'

To venture into the mainstream is perceived as a threat, a potential betrayal, a distancing that negates relationship, diminishes the opportunity for mutually

beneficial interaction and is frequently read as a message that one holds oneself above the rest. A person who lives in or lays claim to life in the outside world, and its values, will be judged on their willingness to 'own their own people' and 'to mix it' with them.

'One's people' is a reference primarily to one's kin but it is sometimes applied to more inclusive groupings such as the community, South Coast Kooris or Aboriginal people broadly. To 'own your people' has to do with fulfilment of kinship obligations; one is supposed to acknowledge one's relationship with kin and to show them affection, care and respect. Beyond the immediate commitment to kin, however, the concept encompasses a broader loyalty. In the contemporary context, 'to *own* your own people' entails a commitment to honour one's Aboriginal identity. Such a commitment comes at a heavy price, for given the disrepute attaching to Aboriginal identity in the mainstream Australian context, it would, as the historical choices of some have shown, in many ways be easier to wash one's hands.

When the elderly woman mentioned above related the story about her great-niece and great-nephew coming to visit and noted the fact that they *owned* her, I detected a tone that always seemed implicit in the notion—a tone of self-deprecation mixed with a defiant bristling pride, as if to suggest that such ownership involved the embrace of an inferior or untouchable status. In that case, her comments were, I felt, in part to do with the acceptance of her degraded physical state—a slight stroke-induced paralysis—but this served only to highlight the fact that, in the context of the shame that surrounds Aboriginal people under white oppression, the conclusion to which *owning* your own people leads is to the *owning* of a degraded condition.

Justice Pat O'Shane reflects:

I used to get the impression that...somehow or other, to be a 'true Abo' amongst urban Aboriginal communities you had to behave and think like a mongrel dog that had been kicked into the gutter. That's how Australian society has always treated blacks and without question; I mean, I grew up with that. (O'Shane 1994: 39)

In tracing her family history, Aboriginal author Sally Morgan recounts a visit to Port Hedland where she met with people who were her relations. She writes:

An old full-blood lady whispered to me, 'You don't know what it means, no-one comes back. You don't know what it means that you, with light skin want to own us.' We had lumps in our throats the size of tomatoes, then. I wanted desperately to tell her how much it meant to us that they would own us. My mouth wouldn't open. I just hugged her and tried not to stop. (Morgan 1987: 225)

Given the heavy stigmatisation of Aboriginal identity, acceptance of relatedness necessarily exposes one to the threat of bringing every negative connotation of one's race upon oneself. Firmly recognised, in Koori eyes, this burden provides no excuse for denial.

If a willingness to 'own one's people' earns one credit, refusals to accept identity and, therefore, maintain equivalence with others attract strong moral censure. The person at Jerrinja who does not respond when 'bitten' for a loan, who refuses a drink, who speaks in plum tones, aspires to go on to higher education or buys a new car is—like the subjects of Fink's Barwon study (1957: 107)—likely to find themselves dubbed 'flash'.

'Flash' and its variants—'hoity-toity', 'posh', 'upper-class', 'up him/herself'—are underlain by a complex of values. In the first place, a critique of egotism and individualism is implicated. To be 'flash' is to deny equality, relatedness and interdependence, to make an ostentatious display of oneself, go one's own way and assert distinction from and superiority over others. 'Who does she think she is?' The social value lies rather in egalitarianism, mutual recognition and in forging identity and relationship.

The aspersion also reflects a negative valuation on materialism and acquisitiveness. Poverty—being central to the experience of Jerrinja people past and present—has become a constituent part of their identity as Kooris; first, as something against which they, and their predecessors, have had to struggle; and second, as a confirmation of their anti-materialist ethic and propensity to share rather than accumulate. In Koori eyes, the ownership of symbols of wealth speaks not positively of status and success but of the negation of obligations to kin. One could afford expensive items only by hoarding one's resources and closing one's ears to demands from others. Further, as Macdonald (2000b: 16) argues, monolithic items (car, house) are not amenable to division and distribution. While some analysts have tended to interpret Aboriginal antipathy to flashness, and the adoption of behaviours inverse to it, as a case of opposition for opposition's sake, a symbolic refusal of white norms and defiant assertion of social distance (Fink 1957; Morris 1988), there is room for recognition of greater positive content. Aversions to the quality of flashness also reflect a well-founded perception of the irreconcilability of mainstream ideals with the classic Koori moral universe. At base, a conflict exists between the contrary world views and ethical demands inspired by capitalism and a social system configured on pre-capitalist principles.

Critically, 'flashness' is perceived to entail a rejection of Aboriginality, both because it implies an investment in mainstream standards and attitudes that judge and condemn Aborigines, and because 'not being flash' has come to play a role in defining what it is to be Koori. To be flash is to align oneself with whites,

to assume an attitude of contempt and superiority and a desire for distance. If 'flashness' implies a critique of white values and priorities, the vitriol behind the accusation is directed especially at the perceived treachery of those 'coconuts' who would cross the line to deny themselves and their people.

Radical Activism

I noted earlier that the maintenance of the Indigenous life world at Jerrinja depended historically on two strands of local resistance: an inward-looking conservatism and a radical political leadership. This chapter has focused in the main on the inward-looking conservatism, which continues to mark the attitudes and lifestyles of the Jerrinja majority. It is a conservatism that, I have argued, has depended for its persistence on a strong, although necessarily partial, degree of disengagement from mainstream society. In its present form, however, it also owes a debt of survival to that second brand of resistance, which, converted into a series of fierce political campaigns waged at State and local government levels, successfully preserved and eventually secured local ownership and control over the reserve lands.⁵

Far from operating in a disconnected vacuum, such battles have drawn certain community leaders into extended networks of cooperation with State and national Aboriginal activists, unions, politicians and clergymen. Street marches, protest camps, lobbying, union work bans and engagement in government consultative committees were all means for asserting the interests of the community and wider Aboriginal causes.

While political activity in the 1970s and 1980s occasioned tentative involvement on the part of some, the attempts by leaders to arouse a broader radicalisation of consciousness amongst Jerrinja residents were disappointing. While the Jerrinja populace was, and continues to be, a beneficiary of such struggles, these activities were seen as anathema to a wider section of the community. The radical stance of opposition to whites runs the risk of 'rocking the boat' and drawing unwanted negative attention, but, perhaps more significantly, such a stance is perceived to be contradicted by the degree of close engagement with whites the positioning actually entails. Ironically, waging legal and political battles or undertaking other strategic interactions with mainstream players—albeit working to challenge, negate and undermine the hegemonic order—calls for increasing knowledge, expertise and familiarity with the ways and values of opponents, all of which effectively serve to reduce the distance existing on

⁵ Ownership was not immediately vested in the community but in the Jerrinja Local Aboriginal Land Council instituted under the NSW *Land Rights Act 1983* and, in the long run, residents of Jerrinja have not retained direct control over the settlement.

either side of the divide (Barth 1969: 35). This is a distance that, despite a now high and inescapable degree of mainstream enmeshment, a majority of Jerrinja residents hesitates to broach and often actively works to maintain.

This account should not close without noting, as well, that the community is not without small numbers of residents who have long been in full-time employment, some of whom have pursued education to tertiary level and some of whom operate households that could be counted as striving towards self-containment. Although to date low consumer dependence has continued to mark the lifestyle of a majority of Jerrinja inhabitants, there can be little doubt that the feeling of lack attending poverty in an urban consumerist environment is markedly keener than that experienced by the inhabitants of remote NT communities documented by Peterson in the 1980s (Peterson 1985). It remains to be seen how escalating consumerist desires amongst a younger generation heavily exposed to images of affluence in the media and in their suburban surrounds will continue to be weighed against internal moral pressures in the future.

In enumerating factors weighing towards the modernising of the domestic moral community, Peterson and Taylor (2003) have noted that interracial marriages have served to provide both compulsion and means for individuals to extricate themselves from the wider demands of the sharing economy. This is variably the case at Jerrinja—generally more so with those couples who elect, for commensurate reasons, to live off the ‘mission’; non-Aboriginal partners who reside with their families in the community tend to become closely absorbed into the workings of the local Indigenous moral economy. At present, the compulsion, delineated above, ‘to *own* your own people’—extending to a politicisation of black and Indigenous identity in global terms—and significant degrees of social closure are productive of a pattern strongly favouring in-group (Aboriginal) partnerships.

Conclusion

Although the barriers once held in place by institutional closure and physical remoteness have long gone, a marked tendency towards social occlusion continues to define and reproduce Jerrinja as a community apart. External exclusionary forces and internal prerogatives have combined to maintain a social distance between the community and the mainstream, protecting a space in which a distinctly Aboriginal socio-cultural domain has been able to flourish. The primacy of kin relations in ordering their social world lends much to the community’s introversive character, for beyond the realm of kin the bearings for interaction are lacking. The internal moral economy commands the upkeep and affirmation of ties of relatedness. In this arena, demand sharing, as Peterson has

importantly highlighted, continues to perform the role of marking, measuring and servicing relationships between kin. New meanings of identity forged in the post-colonisation context, however, insert a novel dimension into demands for recognition of relatedness.

Reflected in the local maxim to '*own one's own people*', the call for acceptance of, obligation towards and identity with kin, represented by demand sharing, now serves to put to the test not only one's commitment to and acceptance of relatedness to another, it also interrogates one's commitment to Indigenous values and one's willingness to consciously identify as an Aboriginal person. Such loyalty, although fiercely expected, is, given the shame and stigma that cling to Aboriginality and the multiple disadvantages that accrue as a result of membership of that minority, recognised to be borne at a heavy cost. The insistence on shared Aboriginal identity is accompanied by a compelling pressure to hold distinction and distance from whites. The propensity for disengagement from the mainstream is critical to the survival of an alternative socio-cultural order but is also implicated in the continuing reproduction of chronic levels of economic and social disadvantage.

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