MAKING ABORIGINAL MEN AND MUSIC IN CENTRAL AUSTRALIA

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The full content of this thesis is my own original work

Örjan All

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Abstract

This is an ethnography of the male world of Aboriginal country, rock and reggae music making in Central Australia. Using the analytical theme of mediation, it focuses on the making and re-making of contemporary indigenous and male modes of being in this sociomusical setting. It approaches the social life of music making as a medium for intercultural engagements of different indigenous and non-indigenous practices, imagery, values and ideas that circulate in a continuum of the local, national and global. The study shows that the ambivalent “mongrel” Aboriginal and male selves that emerge from such engagements are nonetheless experienced as distinctive and deeply meaningful.

Ancestral regimes for gendered, inter-generational, kin-related, interpersonal and inter-group behaviour and relations continue to orient the ways many Aboriginal Central Australian people think, act and form a sense of self and others. As people have engaged with a range of exogenous values, practices, people and expressive forms since white settlement of the region began, ancestral and other normative regimes have co-existed, become entangled and been modified through each other. The forms of music making explored in this study are in themselves a testimony to such intercultural “mongrel” forms. Over many generations, these expressive forms have also become an important means for connecting and transforming a variety of normative practices and experiences that are partially co-implicated in the ongoing creation of unifying as well as differential forms of identification.

The ways in which the Aboriginal musicians articulate and experience masculinity and indigeneity vary with different settings. To account for this multisided character of music and identity work, the thesis follows the men as they engage with different, although interdependent sociomusical settings. It explores the blackfella and male dynamics of a recording studio in Alice Springs; the hinterland music scene of Aboriginal desert communities; the intercultural dynamics of blackfella gigs in white dominated towns; and the male, blackfella and cross-cultural dynamics of interstate touring ventures.

More recent genres of music making are ubiquitous and socially productive features of indigenous life worlds all over Australia. These practices have not, however, attracted much anthropological attention. Explorations of intercultural dynamics of male indigenous Australian experiences and practice are also rare. Investigating these somewhat overlooked topics in anthropological research, this study argues for a focus on mundane, everyday expressive practice to better understand the making and remaking of contemporary modes of being indigenous and male.

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Preface

Set in the largely male world of Aboriginal country, rock and reggae music making in Central Australia, this is an ethnographic exploration of the making of contemporary Aboriginal male modes of being. With the concept of mediation as a central analytical theme, I investigate the social world of Aboriginal music making as a medium for intercultural engagements in which various local and global forms of practice, imagery, values and ideas about being male, blackfella and musicians are connected and recombined. In the process, ambivalent, shifting and multilayered ways of identifying as Aboriginal and male are continuously created that are nevertheless experienced as distinctive, coherent and meaningful.

In a sense, this work of research began in a run-down pub in Alice Springs back in the mid-1980s where I was first introduced to Aboriginal country-rock music. A five-piece, all-male blackfella band stood in a corner of the bar-room. The men looked as if they had blown in from completely different worlds and times. The young, brown-skinned singer wore a Bob Marley t-shirt over his beer gut and his reggae dreadlocks were held in place by a head band in the (political) colours of the Aboriginal flag: red, yellow and black. One of the guitarists was a darker-skinned barefoot man. His shirt and trousers were soiled and torn, his black hair matted, and his face showed signs of years living on the grog. Another guitarist looked part-Indian to me. In his mid-thirties, he appeared in tight, brand new jeans and a buckle belt, shining cowboy boots, a rodeo-style shirt, and a well-worn felt Akubra, the Australian-style cowboy hat. The skinny bass guitar player was the most dark-skinned and oldest band member, maybe in his mid-fifties. He was dressed neatly in a sports jersey, jeans and sneakers, the casual attire of many white men in town. The twenty-something drummer showed off his muscles in a black t-shirt with ripped-off sleeves. He looked more like a street fighter than a country drummer in his mirror sunglasses, a cigarette hanging from his lower lip and scars lining his light brown face and tattooed arms.

With the ease of highly experienced performers, this eclectic combination of black, male-styled guys churned out country-rock covers that belonged firmly in the tradition of the honky tonks that I know from southern Texas. The affectionate response from the likewise variously styled and coloured blackfella patrons in the Alice Springs pub was also similar to that of the white people in those Texan bars. Just like country

was “our” music for the working class, red-neck folks I met there, this was clearly “our” blackfella music in Central Australian life worlds, too.

In the two decades since, I have sought out Aboriginal country, rock and reggae gigs in Central Australia and elsewhere. Apart from truly enjoying the music, I have been drawn to this largely blackfella musical world because of its untidy sociocultural quality and melding of musical and male styles that I continue to find both fascinating and refreshing. Every gig works as a healthy reminder of the futility in trying to fix and define decidedly what others and selves are and can be. They provide a kind of counter-narrative to a globally widespread preoccupation with defining and “purifying” national, racial, gendered and other forms of being in ways that delimit and at times violate people’s rights to define their experiences and existence in their own terms.

These experiences led to my choice of dissertation topic. I wanted to learn about the invigorating “mongrel” quality of distinctively Aboriginal ways of being and making music that I never saw represented in public debate or media. I wanted to investigate how music can be a way to formulate contemporary Aboriginal experiences. I did not aim for a classic anthropological study of the role of music in a micro-setting of a particular language group or in a single Aboriginal community. I was interested in the practice and social life of music as a means to move across and between different indigenous and non-indigenous life worlds. I thus started in a place where indigenous music makers from a range of backgrounds meet; the recording studio of the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association in Alice Springs. It soon became clear that country, rock and reggae music is an almost exclusively male practice in Aboriginal Central Australia. Formations of masculinity are therefore a central theme in this thesis. After some time, I began to travel to remote Aboriginal desert communities to meet musicians in their different home settings and to participate in music events. All along, I also followed musicians as they toured and performed in other parts of Australia.

As my work progressed, I learnt the importance of national and regional socio-political developments in the making of Aboriginal music and maleness in Central Australia. The first two chapters of the thesis outline some main forces in this ongoing history, and the third chapter looks at the social history of the main musical genres in Aboriginal Central Australia – country, rock and reggae. I also became increasingly aware of the importance of each sociomusical setting for how “mongrel” indigenous and male modes of being were made and remade. That is, the ways in which the musicians articulate and experience masculinity and indigeneity shift with different settings. To

attend to this multisided character of music and identity work, the five ethnographic chapters follow the musicians in four different sociomusical settings; the Aboriginal recording studio in Alice Springs, the hinterland music scene of Aboriginal desert communities, blackfella gigs in white dominated towns, and interstate touring ventures.

By using the racially charged concept of “mongrel” to describe formations of indigeneity and masculinity in this work, I want to draw attention to the inherently ambivalent and multilayered quality of the processes I examine. The word “mongrel” has long been part of a racist vocabulary for persons of mixed descent. It has also been appropriated and reinscribed with self-assertive meanings in blackfella vernacular. In the Aboriginal musicians’ usage, for instance, “mongrel” can assert a distinct male blackfella way of being that they recognise as somewhat “too much” for whitefella people and women. They variably see this quality as something valued and as a shortcoming. The racially stigmatising powers of “mongrel” still remain, as the men recognise that it can also be the most offensive name you call another blackfella. This shifting, multilayered and socially specific use and meaning of “mongrel” in itself demonstrates the ambiguous, partially overlapping and multiple but still distinctive forms of sociocultural meaning, practice and identification that emerge from intercultural processes of mediation.

The blackfella bar gig in Alice Springs that I walked in on two decades ago jarred any preconceived ideas I might have had about what Aboriginal music and men should sound and look like. For the blackfella musicians and patrons, however, the “mongrel” styles of music, indigeneity and masculinity performed were part of their shared, ongoing sociomusical history and ways of identifying. Despite being a ubiquitous feature of indigenous life worlds not only in the desert region, these kinds of music making have not attracted much serious attention from anthropologists as socially productive practice. Explorations of contemporary indigenous masculinities are also rare. By attending to these somewhat neglected areas, I have come to understand the social life of country, rock and reggae music making as an important medium for the articulation and mediation of contemporary ways of being male and indigenous. My thesis is an attempt to establish this insight ethnographically.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

A crowd of maybe a hundred people have made themselves comfortable on picnic rugs and folding chairs on the green lawn in front of Stage 3 of the Womadelaide Festival, Australia's biggest and most high-profile world music event. It is held bi-annually in the South Australian capital Adelaide and is this year staged in the lush grounds of the Botanical Gardens.¹ During the three-day event almost 70,000 people will pass through the gates to experience artists and musical styles from most continents on seven stages. They can also enjoy fine foods and wine and browse the "Global Village" area for all kinds of "ethnic" objects, massage, foot reflexology, feng shui and "symbolic body art".

A few indigenous Australian artists are usually included in the Womadelaide program. It is one of these acts people have come to see on Stage 3. At the announced time, a black African woman emcee enters the stage. She enthusiastically introduces the Benning Brothers from the Northern Territory as "a living legend in their own time". She informs us that the group formed in 1958. Back then, because of the racial policies at the time, they were marshalled on and off stage by a police man and a welfare officer. "How times have changed, hey?" she calls out with a triumphant laugh. She introduces the members as "a family affair", consisting of brothers Barry and Stan and their cousin Eric. "And they've got a number of whitefellas in the background, just to sweeten the juice", she adds, without naming the white drummer, bass guitarist and fiddle player.

The band starts up with a fast paced, instrumental guitar tune in hard core, North American cowboy country style. The white bass player immediately launches his body into the beat. The white fiddle player, in a purple hippie-style shirt and hair grown long, also gets into a groove, shaking his legs in what looks like an imitation of a traditional Aboriginal dance style. The three black men appear in jeans, country and western style or plain men's shirts and well-used baseball caps on their heads. They stand very still, only moving their fingers with great speed and skill over the strings, churning out catchy country guitar picking.

The black men keep skipping beats in the bars of the songs, a common feature of Aboriginal country and gospel music in Central and Northern Australia that lends it a characteristic urgent and somewhat irregular rhythm pattern. This causes the white bass

¹ Womadelaide is part of the Womad (World Music and Dance) International festival circuit. It was held for the first time in Adelaide in 1991.

player to fall behind and play the wrong notes all through the performance. The end of the first tune also goes a bit haywire when the white musicians end it before the actual finish, and front man Barry ends up doing the proper ending on his own. The audience applauds, shouts and whistles. I see a few bewildered faces, as if people do not know how to react to this rather “loose” musical act.

The performance continues with a mix of classic Hank Williams-style, yearning country love songs, not always sung in perfect tune, and a few fast tempo, instrumental tunes in the style of 1960s cowboy film soundtracks. During the upbeat tunes the white bass player gets into a head-banging act and turns laughing and yahooping towards the black lead guitarist, trying to get a call-response act going on stage. The black guitarist does not respond, does not even look at the bass player. He remains very still in a relaxed, seemingly disinterested pose, his face motionless, while completing frenetic guitar solos.

Between songs, the black men casually swap bass, rhythm and lead guitars between them, and all through the performance Barry has a big, broad smile on his face while he keeps calling out “take it away Eric!” (a cue for guitar solos), “Andrew, all the way from Tamworth” (a cue for fiddle solos) and “we’re from the Kimberleys, we’re the Kimberley boys!”

Into the third song, people in the audience begin to leave. As the performance proceeds, more follow them. When the men beside me, in t-shirts printed with the Aboriginal flag and traditional paintings, prepare to leave, I look at them questioningly. Shaking their heads, they comment on the “poor imitation of already bad American country”.

When Barry calls out, probably for the tenth time, “We’re from the Kimberleys! We’re Kimberley boys!” people start laughing. By the end of the performance the remaining audience laugh at anything the smiling Barry says. The whole act – the country tunes in classic North American style, the black men standing absolutely still and looking rather indifferent, the white men jumping around like hard rockers, the bass player’s continuous mistakes and Barry’s big grin – seems to have turned into some kind of joke for the largely white crowd.

After the final song, in which a beaming Barry excels in one of his characteristic, amazing finger walking guitar solos, the emcee dances back up on stage. “Hello ladies and gentlemen! Thank you very much for sharing *real* Australia! This is what it’s about, isn’t it? Fabulous! Very *real* Australians, doing *real* Australian things!”

Framing Aboriginal music and men

The Benning Brothers' performance raises some broader intercultural concerns that frame my explorations of the making of male and Aboriginal modes of being in Central Australia. The Central Australian musicians primarily create their sense of self within everyday blackfella and male realms. My main focus will therefore be on local dynamics of Aboriginal men's interactions and practices. However, contemporary indigenous music making and life worlds emerge also in engagements with non-indigenous and other indigenous people, ideas and practices in broader national and global realms. Indeed, the musical styles under study here are a prime example of expressive forms that continue to be made and remade at local, national and global intercultural crossroads. It is this "mongrel" cultural quality that makes these forms of music making especially interesting to explore as "a medium that mediates, as it were, mediation" (Erlmann 1999:6), in that "music in global culture ... functions as an interactive social context, a conduit for other forms of interaction, other socially mediated forms of appropriation of the world" (6).

Intercultural and cross-cultural mediations are not taking place on equal terms but involve complex negotiations of historically dominant and marginalised versions of legitimate and worthy expressions, representations, practices and identifications. The emcee's repeated reference to the "*real*" quality of the Benning Brothers is a typical example of how certain dominant notions of "authentic" Aboriginality are reinforced through a loose essentialism of everyday talk and ways of thinking. It can hardly escape the notice of anybody present that the "real" she wants us to appreciate refers to the black musicians' status as descendants of the indigenous First People of Australia. Hence, while never explicitly explaining what she means by "real" Australians, she nevertheless engages in and also implicates the Benning Brothers, their music and the audience in the reiteration of certain pervasive understandings of "authentic" Aboriginal people, values and expressive forms. Such notions are also implied in the festival program, where this act is described as "most distinctively the essence of popular Aboriginal Australian music".

Judging from the many white people who leave, these black musicians' version of "real" Australia and Aboriginal "essence" is not easy for them to identify with. What is the Aboriginal "essence" of playing American country and western music from the 1950s and 1960s? Where is the distinctive Aboriginal message in sentimental country

song lyrics? And where are the globally recognised musical markers of “real”, “authentic” Aboriginality, such as the traditional instruments didgeridu and clap sticks, indigenous languages, and lyrics on spiritual, mythical, ancestral themes?

Like most of the Central Australian musicians in this study, these performers do not vocalise any recognisable “modern”, politically activist Aboriginal sentiments about struggling with injustices and disadvantage on the margins of society, either. The only glimpse we get of their socio-political position is from the emcee’s mention of more racist times when they were chaperoned by police and welfare officers. This is followed by her celebratory assertion that these times are now gone, while, we are to presume, something “real” has survived.

In their appearance, too, the Benning Brothers and the Aboriginal musicians in this study do not exhibit widely recognised signs of traditional tribal or of politically activist Aboriginality. They do not perform with traditional paraphernalia such as painted skin, loin cloths or head-dresses, all of which are included in the now globally established imagery of Australians Aborigines. They do not exhibit any political statements such as the colours of the Aboriginal flag or t-shirts with activist slogans. They are modestly dressed like rural, small-town men. This means that they cannot be identified as proper Aboriginal cattle workers, either, which is another, albeit somewhat dated image in the national repertoire of rural black male representations.²

From their style of music and demeanour, these men may thus seem more or less “detraditionalised” and “westernised” (e.g. Heelas, Lash and Morris 1996). Ultimately, however, they do not fit this bill either. Barry Benning’s limited repertoire of verbal expression, for instance, does not exactly fit the image of a “successfully” assimilated black man. Moreover, as performers, these men have not adopted the masculine, often overtly physical and sexually suggestive gestures that are associated with global conventions of Western country or rock music (and that we saw the white band members perform). The black men’s physically minimalist stage style is a dominant feature also in the Central Australian Aboriginal music scene. Even by the low-key performance standards of global country music or the “cool” male pose of some rock conventions, these musicians come across as exceptionally bodily modest, if not totally detached. Audiences with tastes and interpretative skills shaped in global country, rock and reggae conventions may thus not feel invited to engage with the performers in a

² In dominant national perceptions, though, this was never so much a “true” Aboriginal image as a powerful white masculine imagery with a legacy in depictions of hard-working, resilient European men at the Australian colonial frontiers (e.g. Moore 1998; Murrie 1998).

shared, intercultural musical experience, which is a *raison d'être* for events such as Womadelaide. The people who do not disengage wholly by leaving Stage 3 instead seem to resort to an alternative congenial interactional genre; that of parody and humour.

A white Australian friend of mine who came along to Womadelaide commented that watching Aboriginal people trying to imitate white artists and music reminded her of the old minstrel shows. It was quaint and somewhat amusing, she thought, but hardly Aboriginal. Like a majority of non-indigenous people I meet, she seems to expect something else and rather specific from “real”, “authentic” Aboriginal music, musicians and people in general. Womadelaide obviously generates particular sets of expectations from its association with global “world music” conventions. The presentation and reception of the “Kimberley boys” nonetheless suggest some widespread and rather narrow sets of perceptions by which Aboriginal musicians and music are commonly interpreted and evaluated. Such perceptions have a history. I therefore proceed to outline some broader shifts in the socio-political landscape of Australian indigenous issues over the last four decades that continue to inform the evaluation and production of indigenous expressive forms, including music.

With this background, I want to draw attention to three interrelated processes. Firstly, Australian state policies of self-determination and a redirection of nationalistic sentiments towards multiculturalism have led to a proliferation of indigenous musical and other artistic production. Secondly, the emergence of this indigenous art sector has essentially been an intercultural process. By “intercultural” I denote not only engagements between indigenous and non-indigenous people, practices and ideas. Australian indigenous life worlds and forms of identification are immensely diverse. Interactions among indigenous people, intellectual traditions and expressive forms may thus be just as intercultural in nature. In keeping with my analytical concept of mediation (which I establish later in the chapter) my approach to “cultural” is moreover as something always already “inter-“. That is, as they emerge in social encounters and interactions, practices, ideas and forms of identification are always already socioculturally interrelated, intermingled and mediated (cf. Merlan 2005).

Nevertheless, and this is the third process I wish to emphasise, the increased attention paid to indigenous issues and arts has been accompanied by a privileging of rather monocultural notions of “the traditional” and related debates about “authenticity”. This reconnects us to the ambiguity of the “real” in the Benning Brothers’ performance.

Shifting political landscapes

The indigenous population of Australia includes Aboriginal (mainlanders) and Torres Strait Islander people (of Melanesian descent) who make up over two percent of the total population in the 2001 national census, or an estimated 410 000 persons.³ Contrary to popular perceptions, partly informed by traditionalist imagery, most indigenous Australians live in urban centres in the southeast, along the east coast, and the southwest of the continent. These were the first areas to be transformed by British colonisation and migrant settlers of numerous ethnic origins from 1788, and are now the most densely populated regions of Australia.

It was only in 1967 that all indigenous Australians were granted the same rights as other Australians under federal jurisdiction (Jupp 1997). Previously, the various Australian states defined their own classificatory terms under which they controlled and intervened in indigenous peoples' existence. These classifications were based on a number of rather arbitrary factors such as skin colour, admixtures of blood, age, sex, place of occupation, lifestyle and demeanour (Markus 1988; McCorquodale 1986; Tonkinson 1990). In the 1980s, the federal government adopted the current official definition of indigenous Australians that is based on self-identification and being recognised as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander by ones' indigenous community (Dodson 2003). Racially and morally based definitions nonetheless linger in understandings of indigenous people that circulate in Australian society and beyond.

An increasingly influential Aboriginal rights activism emerged in Australia in the 1970s and 1980s, drawing public attention to the dismal living conditions of many indigenous Australians. Energised by international civil rights, post-colonial and Fourth World movements (Dyck 1985a; Levin 1993) the Aboriginal rights agenda was also fostered and underpinned by shifting state policies, sponsorship and legislative structures at home (Beckett 1988c). A turning point came with the election of the Whitlam Labour federal government in 1972 after decades of conservative Liberal-Country Party domination (Attwood and Markus 1999:276ff). Committed to addressing historical disadvantage and a lack of recognition of rights for indigenous Australians, the Whitlam regime adopted a policy of Aboriginal "self-determination". It guided a comprehensive system of welfare subsidies and programs for medical, legal, housing

³ The number of persons identifying as Aboriginal in the 2001 census was 366 429, Torres Strait Islanders 26 046, and as both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders 17 528 (ABS 2001).

and education services. The ground was also prepared for the first Aboriginal land rights legislation, implemented in 1976 for the Northern Territory (Peterson and Langton 1983).

The Whitlam ministry moreover introduced multiculturalism as an official national government agenda for recognising and managing Australia's ethnically highly diverse population (Foster and Stockley 1984, 1988; Jupp 1989, 1997; Stratton and Ang 1998).⁴ The forging of a multi-ethnic Australia involved aspirations to move away from its British origins and increasing American influences towards a national identity anchored in a distinctive Australian landscape and historical experience.⁵ Indigenous peoples have occupied the Australian continent for some 60,000 years, organising their societies and belief systems in intimate relationship with particular territories that are fundamentally associated with ancestral, mythical events and forces. Such pre-colonial attachments have been adopted as powerful symbolic elements for anchoring a multicultural Australianness. Indigenous traditional matters have thus been drawn into an ideological struggle over how to represent national origins and history (Jupp 1991; Sutton 1992).

An ensuing "history wars"-debate involves a complex range of opinions, although participants tend to align with one of two interpretations (Macintyre and Clark 2003). At the conservative, so called "New Right" end of the spectrum, advocates often promote the Anglo-Celtic monoculturalism and version of history that has previously characterised the politics of national origin, identity and imagery (Blainey 1984, 1991, 1995; Windschuttle 1994, 2002).⁶ Here, British/European explorers, pioneers and statesmen established an economically successful nation unified by British political, legal and cultural values. At the other end of the spectrum, the nation is conceived in

⁴ The Labor Minister of Immigration, Al Grassby, announced his version of a "multi-cultural society of the future" in 1973 (Castles, Kalantzis, Cope and Morrissey 1992:12). When the Liberal government replaced Labor in 1975 it endorsed and continued to work multiculturalism into a national ideology, which was also supported by the state governments. Labor returned to federal government in 1983 and launched the first formal national multicultural agenda in 1989 (OMA 1989).

⁵ It should be pointed out that a powerful strand in the prolific writing on multiculturalism in Australia and elsewhere discusses how state-enforced multiculturalism seldom involves structural changes to unequal relations of power and rights between dominating and marginalised racial and ethnic groupings (e.g. Barry 2001; Benhabib 2002; Bennett 1998; Gamage 1993; Hage 1998; Kelly 2002; Modood and Werbner 1997; Parekh 2000; Stratton and Ang 1998). In Australia, the key policy document spells out that cultural and ethnic specificities and rights are to be subsumed under the (Anglo-) democratic system and social norms. It can therefore be argued that "Australia's policy of multiculturalism is intelligible only within a monocultural framework" (Perera and Pugliese 1998:43).

⁶ The Australian "New Right" emerged as a label in the 1970s and 1980s and encompasses a diverse range of academics, public intellectuals, business leaders and politicians in conservative quarters (Gaita 1997) who, among other things, have raised concerns about the policy of multiculturalism, increasing Asian immigration and special rights for Aboriginal people.

terms of an Aboriginal origin that is deeper in time and, for most Australians, also more abstract and mythological and therefore in a sense fixed “outside time”. This view is more often promoted by supporters of a social justice and rights agenda, generally associated with the political left. These quarters tend to present a “black” counter-history in which the nation was established through colonial and state violence against the indigenous population, including the invasion of land, killings and destruction of traditional life worlds (Attwood 1988, 1989; Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation 1994a; Manne 2003; Reynolds 1982, 1989, 2000a; Rowse 1986).⁷

The debates over national origins and history have moved notions of “the traditional” to the fore as a powerful marker for “authentic” Aboriginality, whether interpreted in positive or negative terms. In negative readings, “traditional” Aboriginal values, knowledge and customs stand for something in an ancient past. It may be valued as ethnographic memorabilia but ultimately represents something backward and thus the antithesis to progressive modern civilisation. In its positive version “the traditional” represents knowledge and a set of unique values that enrich a modern multicultural Australia and global human culture. In this reading it is something that should be recognised, protected and cultivated, by, for instance, policies of self-determination and land rights legislation.

The formulation and implementation of land rights legislation have further reinforced the central position of notions of the “traditional”. Since the first land rights acts in the late 1970s, land has been returned on special terms to Aboriginal groups who can prove a continuous traditional association and ancestral affiliation with the territory in question (Peterson and Langton 1983). The terms of such associations have been defined by the legal systems in each Australian state (cf. Keen 1984). With a 1992 High Court ruling, usually referred to as the Mabo decision, indigenous people’s title to traditional lands was recognised as a right of property under common federal law (Attwood 1996; Cowlshaw and Kondos 1995; Tonkinson 1998). The Mabo ruling led to the national 1993 Native Title legislation (Stephenson 1995).⁸ Native title is likewise determined by the performance and proof of traditional customs and beliefs. That is,

⁷ Voices on the “New Right” have labelled this a distorted “black armband view” of history, which, combined with the forging of multiculturalism and Aboriginal land rights legislations, is presented as divisive and damaging for a stable and united nation state (Blainey 1991, 1993, 1995). For social justice and rights advocates, including many indigenous groups, public recognition of past injustices have instead been seen as crucial for a racially reconciled and unified nation (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation 1993, 1994b).

⁸ The 1992 High Court ruling is so called after the late Edward Koiki Mabo who led the group that won legal title to their island homeland (Loos and Mabo 1996).

claimants have to “establish their descent from the original inhabitants of the land under claim, the nature of customary law for that land, their continued allegiance to that customary law, and their continued occupation of the land” (Povinelli 2002:157).

The increased privileging of “traditional” elements in legal, political and ideological realms has had effects upon the kinds of knowledge and history indigenous people draw on to create legitimate “authentic” self-representations and senses of self in the larger society (Jacobs 1988; Lattas 1993; Pettman 1992:107ff). A majority of indigenous Australians have long been displaced from their ancestral lands and do not know or practice the associated customs or languages. Where customary laws are still practiced, they have to various degrees been modified by the radical transformations indigenous people everywhere have experienced. Hence, many people cannot perform the legally recognised status of “traditional custodians” and have to resurrect (frequently from anthropological works) the required “old” knowledge to claim such a legitimate “true” and “authentic” status (e.g. Sutton 1988b). Their alternative and intercultural histories, personal biographies and foundational attachments to, for instance, suburban, small town, Christian missions, cattle stations or mobile spaces are thus not recognised in the privileged traditionalist notions of worthy Aboriginality (e.g. Beckett 1988a, 1996; Keen 1988a).

The Liberal-National party coalition that in the main supports “New Right” visions won the 1996 federal election and still governs in 2006 (Hage 2003; Markus 2001; Perera and Pugliese 1997; Solomon 2002). The end of the 20th century was marked by deteriorating and at times public break-down in the relationship between indigenous leaders and the federal government. New kinds of relations are now emerging, guided by the government focus on direct outcomes in policy sectors such as health, education, housing and employment. Matters of cultural maintenance, social justice and self-determination, including language preservation and community governance are now defined as “issues on which Indigenous people themselves should take the lead”.⁹

In 2006, indigenous Australians continue to show up as the statistical category with the lowest levels of income and education, and the highest rates of unemployment, infant mortality, imprisonment, chronic diseases and endemic health problems. The life expectancy for indigenous people is on an average twenty years shorter than for the rest

⁹ From the charter for the Ministerial Taskforce on Indigenous Affairs that coordinates the federal government’s indigenous policies as of July 2005 (www.atsia.gov.au).

of the population. In contrast to other colonised indigenous populations in the world this gap has increased in Australia (HREOC 2004). In the period 1997-2001 the life expectancy for indigenous women actually *decreased*.¹⁰

The last four decades have thus seen drastic changes but also continuities. Indigenous issues have moved from a marginalised, largely ignored periphery to centre stage of Australian public debate and national identity formation. This process has been accompanied by a privileging of two different and at times contradictory aspects of Aboriginality; that of resistance and that of persistence (Keeffe 1988). With debates such as those over national origins, multiculturalism and land rights legislation, the latter aspect has become increasingly dominant, involving various notions of the “traditional” (e.g. Dodson 2003). It was anticipated that increased self-determination supported by publicly funded programs would empower indigenous people to establish self-managing communities with improved living conditions where they could rehabilitate and cultivate their distinct traditional cultural forms (Myers 1995). However, the very concept of self-determination as well as the practical implementation and administration of self-managed indigenous entities have been fraught with difficulties and contradictions (Beckett 1985; Cowlshaw 1998; Hamilton 1987; Morris 1988; Myers 1985; Rowse 1988, 1998, 2002). One unquestionable result of this policy era, though, has been the emergence of an “Indigenous Sector” (Rowse 2002:1). That is, it has engendered a proliferation of state subsidised and regulated indigenous bureaucracies, organisations and services. This has not only created a legitimate space for certain forms of indigenous agency but also a continued segregation of indigenous and mainstream spheres of political, legal, economic and social activities (Howard 1982; Jennett 1987; Morrissey 2003). These developments have underpinned the emergence of a vibrant and internationally recognised indigenous arts sector, to which I now turn.

Indigenous expressive culture

Before the 1960s, indigenous Australian expressive cultural forms were in the main categorised and evaluated by criteria for “primitive art” (Torgovnick 1990:75ff). To qualify as primitive art for collectors and ethnographic museums, items and

¹⁰ The life expectancy for the general Australian population during 1999-2001 was 77 years for males and 82.4 years for females. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders it was 56.3 years for males and 62.8 years for females (ABS 2002).

performances should be made for use and practiced as meaningful in traditional indigenous society. That is, these art forms should not be made for sale, and the less contaminated by European contact, the higher their “authentic” value (Morphy 1996). Indigenous painters, writers, musicians and actors who included contemporary and Western forms of expressions or collaborated with non-indigenous people thus had a hard time being recognised as artists at all (Mundine 2000).

As a result of the described shifts in the Australian socio-political landscape, this situation has changed dramatically. In 2001, an estimated 6000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists were working in a variety of expressive forms, many of them belonging to a new generation who have passed through art institutions. Fifty-four organisations around the country also operated to primarily produce and market indigenous arts and crafts for an ever expanding national and global market, with a further estimated 100 organisations providing a base for art activities.¹¹ Also, by the turn of the century there were some fifty indigenous media associations, ninety-four licensed indigenous radio stations and 105 remote broadcasting facilities across Australia (ATSIC 1999). Specialist (often non-indigenously managed and/or owned) Aboriginal art galleries and exhibitions have flourished, private companies sponsor and invest in indigenous art, and international collectors and tourists continue to purchase indigenous arts and crafts worth hundreds of thousands of dollars annually (Morphy 1996; Myers 2002).

In the field of music making, indigenous musicians in a variety of genres continue to be integral to indigenous activist actions and community events. Live music is, for instance, a central feature of the annual nation-wide NAIDOC week, with origins in the 1920s Aboriginal rights movements.¹² A few indigenous music, arts and culture festivals also attract national and international attention. For example, the annual Garma festival, which is hosted by Yolngu people in remote Arnhem Land, is attended by thousands of people from around the world. Also, the annual indigenous music (and

¹¹ Figures are from the 2001-2002 Annual Report of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC 2002), the national representative body created by the Labor government in 1990 with political and administrative functions, including the administration of government funding for indigenous art and media projects, services and organisations. ATSIC was abolished by the conservative coalition government in 2005.

¹² NAIDOC stands for National Aboriginal and Islander Day of Observance Committee, which emerged from early indigenous rights organisations' attempts to draw attention to indigenous people's living conditions and lack of citizen rights (see www.naidoc.org.au). In 1957 a committee was formed to promote and organise one day a year when attention was focussed on Aboriginal issues. In 1975 it was extended to a week of nationwide activities around a particular theme, such as self-determination, cultural heritage and a Treaty.

sports and community) awards presentation, the “Deadlys”, is now a nationally broadcast event.¹³

Indigenous music performers also appear at mainstream music and arts festivals, and at national events such as the Australia Day celebrations. A handful of more well-known indigenous artists may also perform at high-profile occasions when Australia represents itself to a wider world, such as the 1988 bicentenary celebrations, the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games, and the 2001 celebrations of the centenary of federation. The Australian national music awards, the ARIAs, and the annual country music awards also commonly include indigenous performers and award nominees.¹⁴

This proliferation and increased appreciation of indigenous Australian art forms have emerged and been shaped in the broader forces I have discussed: Aboriginal activism and policies of self-determination and multiculturalism. As in multi-ethnic nationalistic struggles and related quests for identity elsewhere (e.g. Askew 2002; hooks 1990:103ff; Jamison and Eyerman 1998; Stokes 1994), artistic productions became increasingly important for indigenous Australians in expressing their political and personal agendas from the 1960s. Many leading activists have been actors, dancers, musicians, visual artists, photographers and writers who use their art for articulating experiences of discrimination and injustices, and for asserting cultural strength and rights to land (Ariss 1988; Ginsburg 1994, 1997, 2002; Neuenfeldt 1995, 1996).

Responding to a history of derogatory and homogenising representations of their life worlds in visual media and radio, Aboriginal activists and artists also sought control of such representative means. Langton noted in 1993, “demands for control, and for funding of community-controlled media, have been expressed at every major film and media conference during the last twenty years” (1993a:9). Such demands were rearticulated in the government ethos of self-determination in which “the central claim was that Aboriginal people should control the ways in which they are represented; or, as we might say in the 1980s, should control the production and circulation of images about themselves” (von Sturmer 1989:128). Funding and legislative structures subsequently emerged for the establishment of Aboriginal media associations, as well as for local community arts organisations and training in various aspects of the media and

¹³ For more on the history and organisation of the Deadlys, see www.deadlys.vibe.com.au

¹⁴ For the ARIA (Australian Recording Industry Association) awards see www.ariaawards.com.au, and for the country music awards, see the Country Music Association of Australia website, www.country.com.au.

arts industry (Meadows 1992; Molnar 1995; Molnar and Meadows 2001; Quigley 1987).

As part of the aspirations to foster a distinct Australian sense of nationhood, the Australia Council (for the Arts) was established in the early 1970s as a national arts funding and advisory body.¹⁵ As the government emphasised indigenous cultural and artistic production as a revenue earner, basis for self-esteem and an anchor for multiculturalism, a separate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board (now Fund) was created within the Council (Hollinsworth 1996; Myers 1995; 2002:138ff). It continues to be a major source of funding for indigenous arts projects, organisations, festivals, training institutions, individual artists, major exhibitions and touring projects (Jones 1988; Mundine 2000; Myers 2002). By the mid 1990s, more than twelve per cent of the Australia Council's total grants went to indigenous artists and projects, while two per cent of the national population was indigenous (Hollinsworth 1996). At the time, all state and territory governments, except in the Northern Territory, also funded indigenous arts and culture in excess of the indigenous proportion of their population.

The arts funding institutions continue to be staffed mainly by urban and educated indigenous and non-indigenous people who set the criteria for the kinds of indigenous art projects and artists that are deemed worthy of support. To access these funds, applicants have to adapt their activities to such criteria, which moreover shift with political climate and policy directions. Like most organisations that came to form an "Indigenous Sector", local art and media associations also commonly employ non-indigenous people as managers, coordinators, teachers, advisors and administrators. In the ethos of self-determination, the general goal was that these "experts" would mentor and train indigenous people to move into these positions over time. In most cases I know of, though, non-indigenous people and collaborating artists continue to play a central role in the everyday operations of indigenous arts organisations and projects. Most also employ indigenous persons from diverse geographical, educational, family and language backgrounds who may have little in common apart from identifying as indigenous.

While indigenous people have practiced introduced forms of music since the early days of colonisation (Clendinnen 2003), these expressive forms, too, were rarely

¹⁵ For more on the Australia Council, see www.ozco.gov.au

acknowledged or publicly supported in non-indigenous realms before the 1970s.¹⁶ The University of Adelaide took a lead by introducing a program for music training for South Australian Aboriginal people in 1971. The program developed into the Centre for Aboriginal Studies of Music, CASM, within the university in 1973 (Ellis 1985). As head of the centre, white ethnomusicologist Catherine Ellis played a central role in formulating the programs at CASM. Her successor and most tutors have been non-indigenous. Emphasising exchanges between “tribal and urban Aboriginal people” (166), CASM also continues to engage traditional Pitjantjatjara music tutors from northern South Australia, where Ellis conducted most of her research (Newsome 1999; Tunstill 1989).

Several nationally successful Aboriginal rock and reggae bands emerged from CASM during the 1980s, including Coloured Stone, Mixed Relations and Us Mob (Castles 1998). The centre continues to be a main institution for indigenous musicians to obtain formal music training. Other universities and colleges now also offer courses in traditional and contemporary Aboriginal music, and some run courses in music industry skills for indigenous musicians. Indigenous music (both popular and traditional, and in most cases including the traditionalist markers didjeridu and clap stick players) has occasionally been included in primary and secondary school curricula, too, mainly as an aid in teaching on indigenous knowledge and perspectives, and as a means to examine extra-musical issues of social justice (Dunbar-Hall 1997b; Neuenfeldt 1998b, 1998c).

The state subsidised proliferation of indigenous radio stations and media associations around the country has contributed to boost popular music production. The pioneer in the field was the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association, CAAMA, established in 1980 in Alice Springs (Batty 2003). As I describe in Chapter Four, CAAMA established the first Aboriginal recording studio and record label in Australia. Founded by one white person and two Aboriginal people, and always staffed by indigenous and non-indigenous people from various places and backgrounds, CAAMA has trained a number of indigenous music workers (as well as film and radio producers and crew) over the years. Other, smaller indigenous media groups now likewise produce

¹⁶ Public recognition of popular music in general as “serious” business, and government involvement in the mainstream music industry, was also rare before the 1980s, when the Labor government set up several reports and industry support programs (Breen 1993).

and broadcast local indigenous music, in processes of cross-cultural collaborations (Ginsburg 1994; Hinkson 1999).¹⁷

The profusion of indigenous art production and the increased attention these art forms attract have thus emerged in a dialogic, evolving process involving rights activism, state policy and funding, and nationalist and international sentiments. Indigenous artistic production, and the institutions that support and promote it, also continue to emerge through intercultural engagements. That is, whether in remote communities or big cities, these art forms are created in response and resistance to, and in accommodation and collaboration with, a range of exogenous expressive traditions, technologies, people and practices (e.g. Anderson and Dussart 1988; Jones 1992; Kurtzer 2003). This brings us back to the problematic “real” in the Benning Brother’s Womadelaide appearance; a concern with “tradition” and “authenticity”.

Interculture and authenticity

Contemporary indigenous artistic activities, like the shaping of indigenous life worlds in general, are essentially intercultural processes. The way in which I use the concept of “intercultural” in this thesis is meant to emphasise cultural formations as inherently interrelational and dialogical processes. It refers to understandings of social engagements that recognise sociocultural difference while allowing for the continuous transfer and transformation of such difference as people interact, work together and share the same sociocultural field (Hinkson and Smith 2005; Merlan 1998, 2005). Such engagements may be limited to a specific interactive situation, or may involve engagements over time in global flows of differing and changing forms of cultural practice and social orientations (Appadurai 1991; Hannerz 1996).

My use of the concept of “cross-cultural” is instead meant to draw attention to the aspects of cultural formations that involve experienced, lived and perceived sociocultural difference. It involves the mix and co-existence of elements across two or

¹⁷ Indigenous music also features in indigenous film productions, another field that has grown considerably with state support (Ginsburg 1993, 1997, 2002; Langton 1993a). For instance, the Australian Film, Television and Radio School, a central, government-established institution, has run media training for Aboriginal community and media groups since the late 1970s (Baxter and Gallasch 2000). The government-funded Australian Film Commission and the public broadcasters ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation) and SBS (Special Broadcasting Services) have also formed indigenous units that continue to be pivotal in mentoring indigenous film producers and for funding, broadcasting and marketing indigenous film. Managers and tutors in these institutions are often non-indigenous professionals who work within Western aesthetic conventions. Indigenous film makers’ careers are thus often formed in cross-cultural collaborations and engagements (Ginsburg 1994).

more perceived and lived distinct sociocultural forms. In the setting for this study, the “intercultural” engagements may involve differing indigenous forms of practice and life orientations as well as indigenous and various non-indigenous forms of life. Notions of marked sociocultural distinction – the “cross-cultural” – among people in the setting of this study mainly concern differences between blackfella and whitefella modes of being.¹⁸

Although essentially intercultural processes, it is nonetheless still the case that indigenous Australian artists and expressive forms that demonstrate certain established markers of monocultural notions of “traditionality” are the highest valued by buyers and critics. Artists who more overtly incorporate what are seen as non-indigenous aesthetics and gestures are often ignored or criticised for a lack of Aboriginal sentiments or content (Hollinsworth 1992a, 1992b; Langton 2003b; Myers 2002; Sutton 1992).¹⁹

The acrylic, so called “dot painting” movement is a case in point. Representing ancient iconography in new media, this genre of visual art has experienced the most spectacular rise to international recognition of all Aboriginal art forms (Dussart 1993; Johnson 1994; Maughan and Zimmer 1985; Myers 1995, 2002; Sutton 1988a). Dot paintings were first produced in the early 1970s as part of a government employment project in Papunya Aboriginal community west of Alice Springs (see map 1), initiated by white schoolteacher-artist Geoffrey Bardon (Bardon 1979, 1991). As the practice has spread to Aboriginal communities across the Western Desert region, it has diversified in styles, patterns and colours (Johnson 1994).

Western Desert painters usually emphasise their works as authentic expressions of a particular worldview embedded in local ancestral knowledge, powers and lands (Michaels 1994a; Myers 1995, 2002). The paintings are also essentially intercultural products. As Anderson and Dussart (1988) point out, non-indigenous art coordinators, artists, dealers and advisors play a critical role in the production of acrylic paintings in desert communities. They provide an impetus, have the necessary outside contacts to obtain materials, are willing to handle administrative and financial matters and to promote and sell the art. They are often valued as neutral agents by the artists, too,

¹⁸ My use of intercultural and cross-cultural thus connects to the historical and ongoing anthropological debate about the relationship between culture in its plural and singular forms, that is, culture as difference, as a diversity of socioculturally distinctive human “cultures” in the plural (which is implied in notions of cross-cultural engagements), or/and culture as a global ecumene of peoples that are part of and shaped by a shared, intercultural history of global transformations (Hannerz 1996:part I).

¹⁹ This is true also for indigenous people and art production elsewhere in the world, see for instance Coombe’s (1997) discussion about expressive creations by First Nation people in Canada.

because they stand outside obligations and rights within Aboriginal kin networks. Local art centres where these paintings are produced have also been established and continue to operate with government funding, public grants have been crucial for marketing and staging of national and international exhibitions, and state institutions have been major buyers of paintings.²⁰

As Western Desert paintings have entered the national and international fine art market and exhibition circuit, the main or only emphasis is often on “traditional” content (Morphy 1996; Myers 2002). That is, the works are commonly presented, desired and valorised in terms that reinforce notions of “authentic” Aboriginal expressions as fixed in customary practices and a mythological, timeless past. Much like “primitive art”, then, these paintings are represented as uncontaminated by outside influence. The privileging of such monocultural notions of authentic Aboriginal expressions means that the intercultural collaboration that underpins the acrylic art movement and other forms of indigenous art production becomes problematic and controversial. It also means that these expressive forms are disassociated from the massive disruptions and ongoing transformations of the artists’ life worlds. And it means that art containing other features can be dismissed as culturally diluted and “inauthentic”, in effect invalidating the artist’s Aboriginal status (Langton 2003a; Mundine 2000; Perkins 2003).

Concerns about authenticity thus seem to emerge from a split between indigeneity as an experiential, embodied intercultural way of life, and as a privileged set of historically formed monocultural representations (Bigenho 2002; Wade 1999).²¹ Such privileged representations are not reproduced only in non-indigenous quarters. As the notion of “the paradox of primitivism” (Prins 1997, 2002) suggests, indigenous people worldwide participate in and actively draw on the politics of traditionalist imagery as a key element in their rhetoric of self-fashioning, in counter-strategies of self-representations, and to further public awareness of land rights, language preservation and sociocultural distinction (cf. Conklin 1997; Cornell 1988; Hanson

²⁰ Anderson and Dussart (1988) also suggest that if white people stopped buying their paintings, Aboriginal people would stop producing them. In this respect, the music making in this study differs, in that people continue to make this music regardless of white audiences or buyers.

²¹ Questions of authenticity, identity and indigenous art have also been raised in relation to a few high-profile instances when white artists have produced arts and literature in the name of an indigenous alias, and when indigenous authors’ Aboriginal credentials have been questioned (Fischer 2000; Mudrooroo 1997; Perera and Pugliese 1998).

1989; J.Jackson 1989; Nagel 1996).²² This applies also to indigenous Australian artists, who adapt and rework traditionalist and primitivist stereotypes in response to market expectations and as strategic and aesthetic choices (Hollinsworth 1996).

To reconnect this ambivalent and multifaceted dynamics for reproducing notions of authenticity with indigenous music making, I wish to return to the Benning Brothers' appearance that opened this chapter. Their overtly intercultural form of music is not easy to place within traditionalist imagery. Perhaps this explains why the emcee felt that she had to emphasise their "real" Australian quality. That is, in part because of the lack of evident "authentic" Aboriginal markers, it had to be pointed out that they were in fact "real" Aborigines.

The emcee also neglected to properly acknowledge the cross-cultural musical collaboration we in fact witnessed. Similar intentional or mere habitual strategies of concealing or playing down non-indigenous collaborators are commonplace. For instance, the (only) internationally famous Aboriginal contemporary band, Yothu Yindi from Yirrkala in remote northern Australia, has always included non-indigenous instrumentalists and songwriters. These men rarely appear in promotional material, interviews and video clips.²³ The band is often presented in an all-Aboriginal traditionalist imagery, as when their music videos show happy, ceremonially painted black people in tropical settings with few signs of Western influences (Hayward 1998b; Mitchell 1993).

Indigenous musicians also adopt traditionalist imagery to "authenticate" their profile and material. For instance, indigenous artists all over Australia began to incorporate traditional elements, and in particular the instrument didjeridu in the 1980s (Hollinsworth 1996). The didjeridu is a blow trumpet traditionally used only in Top End Yolngu societies (here known as *yidaki*) and in the Kimberley region. It has nevertheless become a potent and internationally recognised marker of authentic, traditional Australian Aboriginality (and has also been appropriated globally in non-indigenous settings) (Neuenfeldt 1993a, 1994a, 1997, 1998d, 1998e; Smith and

²² Ginsburg discusses this paradox in terms of a "Faustian contract" or dilemma for indigenous media producers (1991). On the one hand, new forms of media have become important means for indigenous and minority people to express and assert identity and cultural autonomy. On the other hand, the global spread of such media and communications technology threatens to make irrelevant the very base for such identity and autonomy; local languages, imagery, intergenerational relations and respect for ancestral knowledge (cf. Cohen 1996).

²³ While mentioned in some of the many scholarly texts on Yothu Yindi, the band's cross-cultural membership is seldom the central issue discussed, either (Hayward and Neuenfeldt 1998; Magowan 1994a, 1996; Mitchell 1996:173ff; Muecke 1990; Neuenfeldt 1998a; Nicol 1998; Shoemaker 1994; Stubington and Dunbar-Hall 1994).

Neuenfeldt 1998). Other examples of traditionalist “neo-authentication” and cultural assertion are that musicians who previously used their English names began to add their tribal names on album sleeves in the 1980s, and Top End bands increasingly performed with their traditional body decorations.²⁴

Considering these developments, the Benning Brothers’ appearance seems an anomaly. In previous and later Womadelaide events it has been rare to see indigenous acts that do not perform traditionalist elements or forge a recognised black rights agenda. Tellingly, in 1993, a rock band from the southeast was dropped from the program by a white organiser because “their music doesn’t sound Aboriginal, it sounds Western” (Hollinsworth 1996:63).²⁵ From Womadelaide organisers and press reports I understand that the Benning Brothers were invited after a white festival publicist had travelled in the Northern Territory and picked up a tape of the band in the Tennant Creek general store.²⁶ I was left with the clear impression that the festival people saw the band as a kind of happenstance “discovery” by their publicist of a remote, exotic and somewhat “quirky” Aboriginal act. In Aboriginal central and northern Australia, country bands like the Benning Brothers have in fact been part of everyday life since the 1950s. While the band’s longevity is acknowledged by the emcee and in the program, it is reinterpreted in traditionalist perceptions to authenticate a “real” Aboriginal essence that evokes a quality that is much deeper in real and mythological time.

The audience response indicates that this exercise in neo-authentication partly misfired. Perhaps the split between what people experienced and what the emcee and the festival program emphasised was just too obvious. Perhaps the festival organisers were too caught up in traditionalist conceptions of all remote, northern Aboriginal people as essentially “real” and tribal to even check whether the Benning Brothers fit this imagery. Either way, I suggest that it is precisely such “failed” performances that can expose the privileged notions of “authentic” people and music as far too limiting for appreciating the multidimensional and nuanced cultural forms that contemporary indigenous Australian artists articulate and negotiate.

Having thus elaborated some privileged understandings that to various degrees frame Aboriginal music making in Central Australia, I turn to my key analytical themes.

²⁴ Similar processes of re-authentication and a renaissance of traditional features in popular music is evident in indigenous populations elsewhere, such as the “modern jojk” among Scandinavian Saami (Jones-Bamman 2001).

²⁵ The band was re-booked only after an indigenous organiser contacted the artistic director of Womad in London and promised protest actions if any local indigenous acts were dropped (Hollinsworth 1996).

²⁶ In “The Adelaide Advertiser”, February 17, 2001.

Music and identity work as mediation

The Benning Brothers' performance demonstrates the now fairly well established argument in music anthropology, ethnomusicology and popular music studies that music "is not the universal language it has sometimes been cracked up to be" (McClary 1991:25). Musical experiences and activities can certainly bring out momentary feelings of pleasure and understandings as shared beyond social and cultural differences. At the same time, the ways in which we engage and identify to various degrees, in different ways, or not at all, with particular musical pieces, styles, performance conventions and artists are always shaped by our particular biographies and social histories. That is, we interpret musical experiences through layers of prior engagements with a range of global and local musical and extra-musical ideas, imagery, values, practices and aesthetic traditions (Feld 1994; Meintjes 2003). This informs the way we practice music, how we interpret a musical experience, and what sense we make of ourselves and others as particular kinds of persons in the process. This is to say that music is a fundamentally social practice and experience through which multiple modes of identifying can be simultaneously reflected, mediated and continually constituted. This study focuses on the mediation and constitution of male and indigenous forms of identification.

I will use the concept of mediation as a central analytical tool in order to explore how indigenous and male ways of being are shaped in the social world of Aboriginal music making in Central Australia. I take mediation to be a socially constitutive process in which coherent senses of self emerge out of peoples' everyday practices and expressive forms. In using the notion of mediation I wish to bring to the fore the contradictory, ambiguous and ambivalent in the production of still deeply meaningful expressions and coherent experiences of being indigenous and male.

I use the notion of mediation as a means to connect the ways male and indigenous practices and identifications operate and are experienced and articulated differently in different social and musical settings, too. The way I have organised the ethnographic chapters (Chapters Four to Eight) is meant to reflect these multisided and site specific aspects of contemporary masculinity and indigeneity, by focusing on male and indigenous dynamics in four different settings of music activities – an Aboriginal recording studio, remote Aboriginal communities, white dominated townships, and touring ventures beyond Central Australia. In each of these settings, particular and at

times contradictory aspects of maleness and indigeneity come to the fore, aspects that may all be part of any one musician's coherent sense of self.

I also use mediation as a means to connect the various forms of masculinity and indigeneity that are articulated in different intercultural arenas, such as local and global musical, religious, professional, blackfella or whitefella domains. It is a means to connect different levels of identification, too, such as the level of concrete everyday practices and relations and the more abstract and symbolic levels of identity claims and politics of national identity.

The concept of mediation has probably been most fully developed within semiotic theory, which has evolved in close interaction with structural linguistics and symbolic anthropology (Lévi-Strauss 1966; Mertz and Parmentier 1985; Peirce 1974; Saussure 1959). Mediation is here taken as fundamental to the production of meaning in that the semiotic notion of the sign mediates between any object (such as a sound or an existing thing or event) and the mental representation (the meaningful concept) of it within a particular semiotic system (Mertz 1985). This basic semiotic model has been applied for analysing the production of meaning not only through language and symbolic systems but also in a variety of human activities. It has, for instance, become a prominent analytical base in certain strands of cultural and communication studies, and in the study of artistic expressions as systems of "languages" or "texts" (Barthes 1984, 1988; Gilroy, Grossberg and McRobbie 2000; Hall 1992; Hebdige 1979; Williams 1985).

The ethnographic study of music as "language", that is, a semiotic system through which meanings are produced, circulated, communicated and enacted in interpretive, mediating and socially constitutive processes, has also developed from semiotic theory (Feld 1974, 1994; Feld and Fox 1994; Samuels 2004; Turino 1999). In her ethnography of Zulu music and identity production in a South African recording studio, Meintjes (2003) explicitly names mediation as a central analytical concept, which has been a source of inspiration for my particular approach. Meintjes uses this concept to explore how the political (power relations) and the aesthetic (symbolic) operate through each other to produce the affective power of a distinct "Zuluness" and "Africanness" (8) in the musical style of mbaqanga. While drawing on theoretical and ethnographic insights in Meintjes' work, as well as other works on music as mediation, my point of departure differs from these texts in some important aspects.

Firstly, I do not focus on musical detail or structure. I do not set out to analyse music or musical styles in terms of a semiotic system in which identities and meanings are mediated and produced. My starting point is the social practices, interactions and lived experiences of Aboriginal musicians as they produce and perform music in different places and kinds of events. I explore how, depending on the sociomusical setting in which the musicians find themselves, and their male, blackfella and musical position in it, different aspects of valued indigeneity and manhood are emphasised and negotiated as the men articulate their sense of themselves as worthy and respected Aboriginal men and musicians.

Secondly, I do not attend to mediation as chains of semiosis of semantic or symbolic meanings apart from socially grounded factors. In the vocabulary of semiotic theory, then, I take mediation to be indexical. That is, I deal with the mediation of pragmatic meaning that is always dependent on, and embedded in, sociocultural practice and interactions. I approach the social realm of blackfella music making as mediation in that it “connects and translates disparate worlds, people, imaginations, values, and ideas, whether in its symbolic, social or technological form” (Meintjes 2003:8). Like Meintjes, I see mediation as at once an intervention and a means of contact. Similar to Fox, in his ethnography of country music in southern Texas, I approach mediation as a process that connects “the practical and concrete domains of everyday life (work, play, sociability, worship, aggression, sexuality, performance, sound, smell, taste, kinesics) with more abstract domains of memory, historical consciousness, senses of emplacement and displacement, ideologies of class, race, and gender, models of self- and personhood, poetics, theories of emotion, and structures of feeling” (Fox 2004:34).

With this use of the concept of mediation I recognise how the Central Australian Aboriginal men’s music practices involve a dialogic process of local, national and transnational appropriations and transformations (Born and Hesmondhalgh 2000; Radano and Bohlman 2000:32; Wade 2000). I aim to show how this process involves the continuation and affirmation of already established, distinctive models for being men, musicians and indigenous, and a simultaneous blurring of such musical and sociocultural boundaries. That is, mediation involves the constant interaction and exchange of ideas, practices and values from varying sources and sociocultural formations. It involves the embedding of layers and layers of intercultural and cross-cultural experiences into expressive form and everyday practice. The meanings of these layered experiences are not fixed. They are interpreted in various, ambivalent,

contradictory, co-productive and partial ways as they are reorganised and reemerge in different places, relations and practices. Thus, in the course of ongoing sociomusical practice and processes of identification, not only are already established models for being men and indigenous reaffirmed, but these models are also partially co-implicated in the continuous production of new, syncretic, what I choose to call “mongrel” meanings and distinctive forms of maleness, indigeneity and music.

My use of the racially charged concept of “mongrel” in describing the ambiguous formation of music, indigeneity and masculinity is informed by the Central Australian musicians’ use of this term among themselves. Besides using “mongrel” when something frustrated them, like when they couldn’t get the “mongrel” fingers to play the guitar the way they wanted, or when a “mongrel” piece of equipment didn’t work properly, the men also addressed themselves by the term. “You mongrel!” one of them would mutter with a sly grin to a colleague who said or did something they consider characteristically blackfella. In this use, it was an expression of male and blackfella bonding. “We’re just mongrels”, they could also agree in an assertive and at times defiant stance that demarcated the integrity of their male, blackfella domain as distinct from both women and whitefellas. As I discuss in coming chapters, this valued blackfella male quality includes something “too much”; something untidy and somewhat crude that is out of whitefella or women’s control.

On an occasion when I talked with a few musicians about their use of “mongrel”, I asked if they thought it was a positive or negative description of other people. Without hesitation one of them said “Positive!” with a thumbs-up gesture. He then reflected for a minute before adding, “Well, it can also be the most offensive you’d call another ‘fella’”. He meant another blackfella, and thus acknowledged the racially insulting power that is also attached to the term.

It is precisely the contradictory, multilayered and socially specific meanings of the concept “mongrel” that make it useful for my intention to draw attention to the complex and ambivalent recombination and reinterpretation of multiple and partial meanings that are co-produced in mediating processes over time. At its most neutral, “mongrel” refers to a dog of mixed breed. It has been appropriated and transformed into an indicator of something or someone despicable and deplorable. It has taken on particularly offensive meanings through racialising practices and speech where it has become a derogatory notion for people of mixed racial heritage, in effect dehumanising them to the lowest of animal status; a product of sexually indiscriminate dogs. Like

many powerful and racially insulting labels, such as “nigger”, “boong” or “gin” (a term for Aboriginal women that has come to take on meanings similar to “slut”), “mongrel” has also been appropriated and reinscribed with inverted and added meanings in indigenous vernacular idioms (cf. Carter 1988).

The transmission, mutation and transformation of meanings – that is, the mediating processes – embedded in notions of “mongrel” thus indicate the emerging and untidy dynamics of the formation of indigeneity and maleness that I set out to explore. The music these men produce is of course “mongrel cultural forms” (Gilroy 1993:3), too, as it is made in a syncretic dynamic in which styles and forms of different regions and cultures of the world have been reworked and reinscribed in diverse, local indigenous life worlds.

The study of music and identity

In approaching music and identity work as socially constitutive mediations, this study contributes to a long tradition in ethnomusicology and music anthropology, as well as in the more recent scholarly fields of popular music studies and anthropology of indigenous media. Ethnomusicology and music anthropology have traditionally described the function and structure of music in particular, usually non-Western societies. Earlier works approached music as reflecting and reinforcing underlying cultural patterns and cohesion of these societies. They seldom recognised music as a generative force that can transform peoples’ thoughts, practices or identities beyond their cultural mould. The elder of music anthropology, John Blacking, for instance, stated that the best music can do to people is to confirm situations that already exist (Blacking 1973:107-108).

Traditional, ancestral genres of music in Australian indigenous societies were rewarding subjects for studies of such contained cultural difference. For indigenous Australians, song and dance has been one of the main repositories and modes of transmission of local, kin and gender specific knowledge.²⁷ The songs and dancing re-enact the actions of ancestral beings that created the particular landscape, language, and norms for social practice as any one group knows it. Ancestral music genres in this way contain and transfer meaningful norms for appropriate inter-generational, gendered,

²⁷ For studies on ancestral genres of music and dance in Australian Aboriginal societies, see for example Barwick, Marett and Tunstill (1995), Bell (2002 [1983]), Berndt (1996 [1964]), Brock (1989), Elkin (1956), Ellis and Barwick (1989), Magowan (1994b), Marett (2005), Moyle (1979; 1983; 1986), Strehlow (1971), Toner (2001), Turpin (2005), Wild (1975), Wild and Kaeppler (1998) and von Sturmer (1987).

interpersonal and inter-group relationships, as well as fundamental connections with particular country. Hence, any understanding of the cultural specificity of different Aboriginal societies – their social organisation, belief systems, attachment to land, repertoire of identifications and kin classifications, use of natural resources and gendered practices – has required the study of their musical traditions.

As processes of colonisation transformed indigenous life worlds, many localised musical forms and a good deal of ancestral knowledge ceased to be practiced and transmitted. Central and Northern Australia were colonised later in the process, from the late 19th century. By then, blatantly inhumane and violent strategies to get rid of the “native problem” had increasingly given way to segregationist strategies of managing the black population away from white settlements. Especially in more remote locations of Central and Northern Australia, Aboriginal people have therefore been able to maintain, relatively speaking, more aspects of ancestral knowledge and practice. In no place, however, are these cultural forms unaffected by interactions with a changing Australian society, this including ancestral music genres (Mackinlay 2000; Wild 1987).

From the first colonial encounters, indigenous Australians have adopted and adapted a range of introduced forms of music into their everyday settings (e.g. Clendinnen 2003). With the exception of Beckett’s groundbreaking ethnographic work on Aboriginal music in small-town Australia in the 1950s (Beckett 1958), these music traditions did not interest scholars much before the 1970s. Most academic writing on “popular” Aboriginal music has been produced in popular culture, music, communication and media studies since the 1980s (e.g. Breen 1989; Dunbar-Hall and Gibson 2004; Hayward 1998a; Mitchell 1996; Neuenfeldt 1994b). Like ethnomusicologists, theorists of popular music worldwide have tried to establish how particular musics enunciate and reflect underlying social structures and relations, but with focus on sub- or countercultures *within* larger and usually Western sociocultural formations.²⁸ Earlier studies applied a rather problematic homological approach in understanding certain music styles as reflecting certain categories of difference and identification, such as class, race, gender, age groups, ideological orientation and lifestyles (e.g. Hebdige 1979; McRobbie 1980).

Studies in Australian Aboriginal popular music have likewise been mainly concerned with racial and sociocultural difference, while cross-cultural dynamics have

²⁸ My use of “musics” is informed by writing conventions in the study of music where “every music” stands for a discrete form or types of music, while “music” is the generic term encompassing all different musics (e.g. Cook 1998; Coplan 1997).

been marginal. Emerging as part of larger socio-political trends, Aboriginal popular music studies usually emphasise one of two approaches, which resonates with the dual evaluative frame that I presented earlier. On the one hand, Aboriginal rock, reggae, country, pop and other introduced music forms are investigated for their “traditional” content and meanings. The focus may be on the inclusion of ancestral styles of singing and playing, indigenous languages, mythical lyrical themes, traditional instrumentation and styles of appearance. Such studies are mostly carried out among more traditionally oriented people in geographically remote and non-urban locations (see for instance Corn 2002; Dunbar-Hall 1997a; Furlan 2005; Magowan 1994a; Neuenfeldt 1993b, 1997). On the other hand, these musics are analysed in terms of a modern activist stance of Aboriginal resistance; a tool for a marginalised, dispossessed and oppressed black minority to talk back to a white oppressive majority and power. This approach is more prominent in studies of urban musicians, or in music from remote regions that have made some degree of impact on the broader music industry (Breen 1989; Hayward 1998a; Mitchell 1996; Neuenfeldt 1991, 1996; Ryan 1998).²⁹

More recent theoretical developments in both popular music studies and ethnomusicology are moving away from the structuralist-functionalist and homological approaches to music as merely reflective of particular sociocultural forms (Coplan 1997). Most scholars now acknowledge that music also has a formative and productive role in the transformation of sociocultural identification. The focus is increasingly on processes of intercultural and transnational interplay, migration, borrowing and domestication of musical and sociocultural features (e.g. Born and Hesmondhalgh 2000; Gilroy 1993; Hesmondhalgh and Negus 2002; McClary 1991; Meintjes 2003; Radano and Bohlman 2000; Stokes 1994; Wade 2000). Anthropological works in the emerging field of indigenous media studies likewise approach these expressive forms in terms of collective and individual self-production, involving transformative mediations of cross-cultural representations and multiple forms of identification (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod and Larkin 2002).

²⁹ The resistance approach is probably best understood in the fairly recent emergence of popular music as a particular area of studies, where popular music has been studied in terms of subcultures and countercultures. For overviews of scholarly approaches to popular music see Hesmondhalgh and Negus (2002), Kaemmer (1993), Longhurst (1995) and Negus (1996). Studies of Black music have furthermore been influenced by dominant notions of Black as a category of organised struggle and of positive identification that arose in the 1960s Black Power movement in the US (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992:140). For more recent theorising of the relationship between music and race see Radano and Bohlman (2000) and Wade (2000).

In attending to the multifaceted mediating dynamics of identifications that characterise the Central Australian music scene, my analytical approach similarly attends to the socially productive aspects of music making. Many aspects of indigenous Australian modes of being have been investigated by scholars over the last century. Few have focused on contemporary formation of indigenous masculinities, though, which I find central to the production of self-worth and respect among Central Australian musicians. While I recognise that a complex range of identifications overlap and intersect as the musicians deal with their everyday existence,³⁰ my main focus will therefore remain on the mediation of Aboriginal and male forms of identifications.

Men and masculinities

In Central Australia, Aboriginal country, reggae, and rock music making is predominantly a male activity. It is mainly men who write, practice, perform and record these styles of music, which are in the main transmitted from older to younger Aboriginal men, who develop individual styles and skills with other Aboriginal men. A majority of people who hang around when musicians practise, rehearse and record music are Aboriginal men and boys. The people who surround and organise the music practices – sound engineers, producers, technicians, roadies – are black and white men.

This does not mean that women are absent or irrelevant in this musical realm. Aboriginal teenage girls may sing in family bands or other ensembles, but normally quit when they get a serious boyfriend or become mothers. A few adult local Aboriginal women can occasionally be seen singing on stage at the Aboriginal country music dances in Alice Springs, too. Female relatives may co-write songs, and real or imagined women appear in lyrics. Women are present as audiences, fans and at times insistent groupies, and male musicians dedicate songs to female relatives and wives. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women also appear in professional roles around the recording studio (see Chapters Four and Five), and a few white women act as managers for musicians. During my time in Central Australia, however, I have not come across any adult, local Aboriginal woman who regularly writes and publicly performs these forms

³⁰ Kondo (1997) and others argue, for instance, that the multiple aspects of our social identifications should be considered “as mutually constitutive and defining” (6). That is, gender, race, class, sexuality, age, nationality, and so forth should be thought of together, as intersecting.

of music, who has a core perception of herself as a musician, and who is acknowledged as such by others.³¹ Women do, however, practice Christian gospel music.

While I briefly discuss the position and exclusion of women in maintaining the all-male domain of the Aboriginal recording studio in Chapter Five, my main interest in the rest of the chapters is in male relatedness. That is, I focus on the engagements of ideas and experiences of being Aboriginal and male in practices and relationships among men.

The overwhelmingly male character of this music scene can be thought of as a strong version of the male dominated structures and masculinist discourses of popular music cultures and industries described elsewhere (Bayton 1990, 1993; Becker 1963; Cohen 1991, 1997; Finnegan 1989; McClary 1991; Reynolds and Press 1995; Walser 1993; Whiteley and Hawkins 1997). However, every music scene is shaped by being embedded in its own particular sociocultural norms and histories of gender relations. As described in numerous works, Central Australian Aboriginal societies have historically relied on an intensely homosocial division of men's and women's labour, knowledge, ancestral music practices and everyday activities (Bell 2002 [1983]; Berndt and Berndt 1996 [1964]; Ellis and Barwick 1989; Hamilton 1979, 1980, 1981; Meggitt 1962; Merlan 1988, 1991; Myers 1986; Wild 1975; Willis 2003a). Although modified by more than a century of intercultural engagements, many Aboriginal settings in Central Australia are still characterised by enduring, traditional gender-related restrictions on everyday interpersonal and inter-group relations and interactions. The specific dynamics of the all-male sociality of the Central Australian music scene must thus be understood partly in such localised gender regimes and associated models of manhood, which I discuss throughout the chapters.

My theoretical approach to male forms of practices and identifications is informed by the research field of "masculinities", within the broader field of gender (including gay and feminist) studies. While writings on male sex "roles" and the psychological development of male identities appeared from the beginning of the 20th century, the main body of masculinity theory emerged as "men's studies" in North America during the 1970s and 1980s (e.g. Brod 1987; Carrigan, Connell and Lee 1985;

³¹ One multitalented young Aboriginal woman in Alice Springs, Jacinta Castles, should be mentioned here. She writes her own original music that she occasionally performs. Brought up in a progressive Warlpiri-Irish family, she used to perform with a local hip-hop act and she occasionally teaches music. Involved in other artistic activities such as theatre production, and currently pursuing a career as an art curator, music is, however, not her main commitment.

Kimmel 1987; Messner and Sabo 1990). A “second wave” appeared in the 1990s (e.g. Brod and Kaufman 1994; Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994a; Kimmel 1996; Klein 1993; Messner 1992; Messner and Sabo 1994; Segal 1990), when Australian sociologist Bob Connell also published his influential book “Masculinities” (1995). The study of men and masculinities is now an international, highly diversified and interdisciplinary field.

Connell defines masculinity as “inherently historical” (1995:44) and as

configurations of practice within gender relations, a structure that includes large-scale institutions and economic relations as well as face-to-face relationships and sexuality. Masculinity is institutionalized in this structure, as well as being an aspect of individual character or personality (Connell 2000:29)

Like other configurations of sociocultural practice, masculinities thus emerge in certain systems of power and knowledge, and studies of masculinity tend to investigate the divergent, inconsistent and contradictory meanings of masculinities, in plural, in different historical trajectories and specific localities. In works on men of ethnic or racial minorities, the concepts of dominant/hegemonic and subordinate/marginalised masculinities have emerged for theorising hierarchical relations among different male modes of being, too.³²

A basic premise for social constructivist masculinity studies is thus that there are no inevitable or natural connections between actual men, being male, and masculinities, but that these connections are reproduced as inevitable by particular privileged sets of ideas, practices and institutions in any given time and place (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 1994b). Such anti-essentialist arguments are developed further in Judith Butler’s influential thinking of gender-as-performativity (Butler 1990, 1993, 1997a, 1997b). She proposes that there is no subject, no doer that pre-exists an action. Rather, the subject/doer is continuously created through, and is enabled by, the repeated enaction (performance) of certain norms or “regulatory regimes”. These regimes acquire authority and take on a quality of inevitability through the recurring, regular repetition over time of certain practices, ideas and values concerning male and female (and other) identities, practices and bodies. While much everyday practice tends to conform to and

³² The concepts of hegemonic and subordinate masculinity have been criticised as too static and as implying monolithic understandings of power (Worth 2002), and thus of limited use for analysing the ambiguous, overlapping, multiple and alternate models of masculinity that people draw on in different times, distinct places and particular situations as they locate themselves in appropriate or strategic ways. In Connell’s definition, though, hegemonic and subordinated masculinity are in fact seen as embodying historically and situationally specific and mobile relations that are open for contestation (1995:77ff).

thus assert certain ways of being and thinking as “natural”, an understanding of performativity as reiteration of practice also reveals all action and identity formation as inherently unstable since it always involves the possibility of “failure” to repeat. Every new action may thus expose conventions and taken-for-granted norms as not at all natural or inevitable.

Butler’s concept of the performative (developed from her re-interpretation of philosophical, psychoanalytical and speech act theory) has been criticised for being disconnected from “the facts of life”, that is, that it lacks historical, material and sociological grounding. In some aspects, though, the idea of the formation of identities as reiterative practice resonates with my use of the concept of mediation. Both notions emphasise the ambiguous, contradictory, multifaceted and emergent processes inherent in identity formations. Both concepts suggest that it is through everyday, mundane repetition or layering of certain norms and experiences in practice that already socially established set of meanings are both legitimised and inevitably transformed. The material situation, the dynamics of power relations, or the time and place are never identical. The intention of an action may “misfire”, be misunderstood and responded to in unpredictable ways. And importantly, by adding layers of experiences, every action irreversibly changes the context for renewed action (Goodwin and Duranti 1992).

The notion of the performative and the concept of mediation are thus ways of thinking about musical, indigenous and male practice as emergent, ambivalent and contingent, and not mere reflections or enactments of pre-existing norms for original or “true”, “authentic” forms of identification. This is not to say that people can reinvent themselves in endless, utterly contingent combinations. As Gilroy argues, “(w)hatever radical constructionists may say, (identity) is lived as a coherent (if not always stable) experiential sense of self. Though it is often felt to be natural and spontaneous, it remains the outcome of practical activity: language, gesture, bodily significations, desires” (Gilroy 1993:102). Such activity is always guided by taken-for-granted conventions, and conforms and responds to already established norms. That is, “practice cannot escape structure, cannot float free from its circumstances (any more than social actors are simply ‘bearers’ of the structure) ... (i)t is always obliged to reckon with the constraints that are the precipitate of history” (Connell 1987:95).

Thus, while not inevitable, the relationship between actual men, notions of being male, and ideas and ideologies of masculinity is not wholly arbitrary. It is in fact precisely the study of the interaction and particular connections made between actual

men and various ideas about being male in any given time, setting, activity, place, occupation and so forth that can tell us about the practical outcomes for, and lived experiences of, those involved.

Black and Aboriginal men and masculinities

My work also refers more specifically to studies of black men, race and masculinities, which in the main have emerged in North America and Great Britain and that focus mostly on African and Afro-Caribbean men (e.g. Back 1994; Bederman 1995; Booker 2000; Carby 1998; Clatterbaugh 1990; Kanitkar 1994; Mac an Ghaill 1994; Majors 1990; Majors and Manchini Billson 1992; Segal 1990:Ch7). These works commonly theorise black masculinities in terms of Western historical constructions that have justified colonial invasion. That is, black natives became the necessary primitive contrast and backdrop of a racial “other” in the promotion of Western civilisation (and Christianity) as evolutionary superior. To quote Segal, “the colonial image of the Black man (and woman), portrayed him (or her) as child-like, emotional, servile, hyper-sexual: the exact antithesis of white manhood” (Segal 1990:173).

As more agency-focused postcolonial theorists have shown, Western colonial categories of representing the “self” and the “other” are co-produced by such selves and others (e.g. Bhabha 1994; Mitchell 1988; Spivak 1996; Thomas 1991, 1994). That is, colonised people “themselves engage with, reproduce and manipulate colonial representations, diverting them toward more localized struggles for power, accommodation, or resistance, and nuancing and adding to them in ways that owe little (while remaining in certain respects connected) to their original configurations” (Stokes 2000:215). The above primitivist black male imagery has, for instance, been turned into positive and powerful attributes in black activist rhetoric and artistic expressions world wide. Black men being studs with huge penises, or black men possessing innate abilities to express primordial emotions through suggestive erotic musical rhythms and dance are recurring images in global popular culture (Booker 2000:195ff; Segal 1990:Ch7; Wade 2000:16ff). Such black male qualities are often presented as being closer to an original and more powerful masculinity, which white men are perceived to have lost through civilising, emasculating processes (Bederman 1995).

There is no corresponding body of work on Australian indigenous men, race and masculine imagery to that on black manhood in America and Great Britain. Such issues are, however, implied in anthropological descriptions of traditional practices and norms

for same-sex groupings and gender relations. In discussing mediations of traditional norms for appropriate blackfella and male demeanour and accumulation of worth, I thus draw on ethnographic works where Central Australian Aboriginal manhood and male relationships appear as a central theme, albeit not the intended focus. Myers' (1986) monograph of Pintupi people in Central Australia, for instance, describes male interactional and hierarchical ideals in the development of male maturity, autonomy and respected authority. Liberman's (1985) ethnomethodological study of Aboriginal and intercultural interaction in Central Australia also offers useful descriptions of male dynamics of congeniality. More classic works, such as Meggitt (1962) on Warlpiri people and Tonkinson (1974) on Western Desert Jigalong people, provide descriptions of male inter-generational and kin-related power relations and interactional customs, too. Rowse's (1998) historical investigation of the role of rationing practices for interactional conventions between Central Australian Aboriginal people and Europeans has also informed my understanding of regional intercultural dynamics in which "mongrel" male models emerge.

Aboriginal male practice and positions are also side themes in works on Aboriginal women's changing roles, most of which appeared with the emergence of women and feminist studies in the 1970s (e.g. Brock 1989; Gale 1974, 1983; Hamilton 1979, 1980, 1981). Bell's ethnography of women's ritual life in Warrabri Aboriginal community (now Ali Curung), north of Alice Springs, in the 1970s was groundbreaking (Bell 2002 [1983]). She argues that while traditionally the authority and autonomy of women's separateness were secure by their important economic and ritual role, today, "male control is the norm" (46). She suggests that this is a result of the grooming of Aboriginal men by white policy makers who are guided by Western models of men as decision-makers, leaders of community councils and heads of households. And women have responded, Bell proposes, by intensifying ritual activities in the traditionally distinctively female spheres of nurturing, healing and love.

Similar studies of Australian indigenous men's changing self-perceptions and masculine practices are rare. An exception is Davis' ethnography of the impact of modernistic political autonomy on masculine identity and subjectivity among Saibaian islanders in the Torres Strait (1998). So is Willis' works on sexual health among Central Australian Pitjantjatjara men that focus on heteronormativity, male same-sex (sexualised) practice and concepts of male sexuality, bodies and masculinity (Willis 1997, 2003a, 2003b). Musician and poet Neil Murray's semi-autobiographical book on

being a member of the Warumpi Band from Central Australia describes a contemporary all-male Aboriginal world, too, in an ethnographic, albeit not scholarly, form (1993).

Texts on colonial imagery of indigenous Australian manliness are also rare. Historians may, however, note early British officials' comments on native men's manly stature, which even gave name to Manly Cove, now a wealthy white Sydney beach suburb (Clendinnen 2003:35). Europeans also paid tribute to native men's prowess in the bush, their tracking and hunting skills, and their mastering of skills required in the pastoral industries (Reynolds 2000b). In the evolutionary terms in which these natives were commonly conceived, however, such desirable attributes in white male pioneers were in black men "taken as convincing proof that they were less evolved and closer to the animals and, what is more, doomed to disappear from the face of the earth" (Reynolds 2000b:58).

A powerful visual imagery of Aboriginal Australian men was established in the late 19th century and is most clearly typified by the internationally famous publications by Baldwin Spencer and Frank Gillen on Central Australian tribes (Spencer and Gillen 1899, 1904). While their texts on rituals with sexual acts and rape conveyed a form of masculinity that did not attract Western readers, their photographs became all the more popular as they were circulated widely in the Western world.³³ These images show bearded, wizened, dusty old desert men in loin cloths, head bands, with spears in hand and gazing out from a stone-age era, or ceremonially painted black men enacting rituals from that same pre-modern time.³⁴ Similar de-sexualised, traditionalist male images of desert Aborigines continue to appear on present-day postcards, postage stamps, dollar coins, in travel brochures and art catalogues. Not surprisingly, the Central Australian Aboriginal musicians are more likely to relate to the hyper-sexualised imagery of black American and African manhood than with that of those stone-age men. When asserting themselves as blackfella musicians and men, for instance, they may declare white male musicians as lacking "black balls" or being emasculated "girlie".

A key theme of this study is that contemporary Aboriginal modes of being men emerge as intercultural mediations involving various blackfella and whitefella models of manhood. White masculine models are thus co-implicated in producing Aboriginal male

³³ As Povinelli (2002) writes, "the majority of white Australians understood sacred acts of bestiality, ritual masturbation, same sex, and group sex as incommensurate with a modern civil society's understanding of sex and intimacy as a private, normatively monogamous heterosexual affair" (136).

³⁴ For a collection of these types of images of Central Australian Aboriginal peoples, see the recent publication of Baldwin Spencer's photographs (Batty, Allen and Morton 2005). For more on the powerful stereotypical force of early ethnographic photography, see Edwards (1992).

experiences. Literature on Australian forms of white masculinity appeared from the early 1990s and besides Connell (1995, 2000), I find the most interesting works among social, cultural and gay historians (e.g. Nile 1998).

As will be clearer in the next chapter, the most relevant historical white male types for the Central Australian Aboriginal music scene are those associated with missionaries, miners, colonial officials, police and the pastoralist industry. All those models are variously included in the persistent, albeit changing Australian masculine theme of the white "Bushman" (Castles, Kalantzis, Cope and Morrissey 1992; Moore 1998; Murrie 1998). Originally drawing on male activities on the largely all-male colonial frontier, and later taking on qualities of the Anzac (the Australian and New Zealand Armed Corps) soldiers in the world wars, this manhood myth includes a tough, physical, inventive, resilient and practical rather than intellectual manly type, unswervingly loyal to his mates, reliable in a crisis but otherwise laid back and adaptable (Garton 1998; Murrie 1998).³⁵

In reality, early pioneers frequently depended on the guidance of nameless "black boys"; Aboriginal men "who tracked, hunted, foraged and found water, showed him the finer points of bushcraft and taught him about the country" (Reynolds 2000b:9). Many of the qualities used for composing the white Bushman legend thus draw on actual practical skills of Aboriginal men. Aspects of European men's demeanour and male ideals were also adopted by Aboriginal men as they worked in rural industries, converted to Christianity and went to war as soldiers in the Anzac forces (Hall 1989).³⁶

Black women seldom appear in frontier tales and bush poetry that solidify the heterosexual, male homosocial white Bushman legend. In reality, white women were rare in the bush and it is widely documented how "(r)ape, concubinage and prostitution of Aboriginal women was endemic in rural areas" (Moore 1998:45).³⁷ Bell's older

³⁵ For discussions on the central position of the Anzac manhood myth as a symbol of Australian nationhood, and in the debate over national origin and history, see Kapferer (1988:part 2), Nicoll (2001), Pringle (1997) and Garton (1998).

³⁶ For photographic images of early adoptions by Aboriginal locals of Christian male (and female) appearance, see for instance Aboriginal preacher "Blind Moses" and his wife Sophia in the 1920s in Hill (2002:plate 2). Aboriginal men's adoptions of white cattle and sheep-workers appearance have appeared on images for as long as Aboriginal people have been used as rural labour. More often than not, the intention of these images have in fact been to show "traditional" phenomena, but the men have obviously turned up to ceremonies as they wish, adding a cattle worker hat or dressed in full cattle worker gear, as in Meggitt (1962: opposite p.79). Also, Tonkinson (1974) mentions briefly how, in Aboriginal Jigalong, the "emulation of the 'cowboy' image is every young man's aim, so broad buckles, big hats, riding boots, and tight blue jeans are popular" (59), and so are cowboy comics, movies and country and western music.

³⁷ Also see Hunt (1986). Moore (1998), moreover, questions the depiction of colonial males as fiercely heterosexual. He suspects that in the kinds of single-sex white settings of colonial and post-colonial Australia, male-to-male sex was probably commonplace.

female informants disagree with such characterisations of black women as passive victims or objects trafficked by men (Bell 2002 [1983]:98ff). They emphasise the independence of women in exercising their own initiative to secure goods or pleasure for themselves. Aboriginal men could occasionally sanction affairs between their women and white men in reciprocal strategies, too.³⁸ White men's abuse of such privileges was a common cause of violent confrontations between white settlers and local black men.

The self-declared right of white men to have sex with black women, as well as the women actively taking control of their own sexuality have had implications for notions of Aboriginal men as somewhat emasculated "weaklings". Such notions resonate in Black activist explanations for the demise of Aboriginal culture. Leading activist Kevin Gilbert, for instance, lamented how Aboriginal men "bowed to the demands of stockmen and squatters for 'black velvet'" and "to the fact of his women having to prostitute themselves" (Gilbert 1994 [1973]:6). Similar to Black American activist rhetoric, the re-masculinisation of Aboriginal Australian men has also been presented as crucial in the restoration of a healthy black society and culture, and of black male worth and honour (Booker 2000; Carby 1998; du Bois 1982 [1903]; Segal 1990:182ff).

As a result of the last decades of heightened consciousness and visibility of indigenous Australian realities and political and artistic expressions, representations of indigenous men are now more varied, complex and respectful. They nevertheless tend to adhere to the dominant format of either traditionalist/tribal or modern/activist imagery discussed previously.³⁹ Similar to non-white male populations in North America and Britain, notions of indigenous Australian masculinity have also become increasingly associated with domestic, sexual and other forms of violence, and with criminality, drinking and drug taking. In British and North American studies, such associations are commonly analysed in terms of black men's marginalised socio-economic, political and racial position in the wider society (Booker 2000; Gilroy 1987:Ch3; Majors and Manchini Billson 1992). Studies of indigenous Australia instead commonly emphasise

³⁸ Hamilton (1972), for instance, refers to Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara women describing how senior tribal men at times selected women and gave them to white men as reciprocal acts in order to secure rights to food in the earlier decades of colonisation of Central Australia. For an overview of scholarly approaches to Aboriginal gender relations, see Merlan (1988). For colonial race and gender relations, also see Pettman (1992:Ch2).

³⁹ For an illustrated discussion on the dualistic and ambiguous political iconography of traditional vs. modern-activist Aborigines, see James (1993).

colonial violence and dispossession to explain present-day problems, or, alternatively, view contemporary forms of violence as a continuation of traditional customary and ritual practices (Atkinson 1990, 2002; Bolger 1991; Burbank 1994; Langton 1988, 1993b; Lucashenko 1996; Macdonald 1988; Memmot, Stacy, Chambers and Keys 2001; Sansom 1980:102ff).

Drawing on the theoretical insights in the described works on masculinities and men, my main interest is in the merging of aspects of various models for being men, and in intersections between such male models and varying ways of identifying as Aboriginal. I present the social life of music making as an important medium for connecting and mediating such different ways of being men and Aboriginal. In the process, meaningful, distinctive “mongrel” forms of indigeneity and masculinity are produced.

I now turn to my use of terms, and to methods and fieldwork.

Indigenous, Aboriginal, Blackfella, Warlpiri, Koori...

The terms I use for indigenous Australians in this thesis is informed by the musicians’ usage. Because their preferred terms tend to vary with their personal backgrounds, age, level and type of education, political consciousness, and the extent to which they have interacted with institutions and ways of life beyond their home settings, my use of terms also varies. “Blackfella” is the most common everyday term used as a means of self- and group identification among the men, and more so in towns and among mainly English-speaking musicians. The meaning of “blackfella” is relational, contrasting with its other half, “whitefella”, which is just as common in the men’s everyday parlance for non-indigenous people. Aboriginal language speakers commonly use (also when they speak English) the equivalent words in their local language, such as the Warlpiri *yapa*, meaning Aboriginal person, and *kardiya*, meaning people of European descent.

I also use the adjectives “black” and “white” for qualifying persons and domains. In this I follow the musicians’ use of these terms as abbreviations of blackfellas and whitefellas. It does not, in other words, allude to derogatory and racist notions of “blacks”. I use the more politically loaded Black with a capital “B” in relation to indigenous Australian and global Black activism and rhetoric.

Besides the everyday “blackfella”, Central Australian indigenous people identify themselves by labels that express both language, kin and social affiliations, such as Warlpiri, Southern, Eastern or Central Arrente, Luritja, Pitjantjatjara or Warumungu

(see map 2). Based on a person's own description of belonging, I use the name of language groups when marking out where a person comes from.

Local indigenous language terms for "people" or "person" have been adopted for self-designation in different parts of Australia. A few such terms appear in this study when I refer to people from elsewhere. One is Koori, which is the common term used by indigenous people in parts of Victoria and New South Wales. Another is Yolngu, denoting indigenous people in the eastern Top End of the Northern Territory.

I use "indigenous" as the most encompassing term, and "Aboriginal" when talking more specifically about mainland people. I seldom hear either word used in everyday talk among the musicians or other Aboriginal people in Central Australia but they tend to prefer "Aboriginal" when talking to whitefellas or in more formal situations. "Aboriginal" is occasionally used as a self-reference in songs, too.

"Indigenous" has come into more common use in official Australian vocabulary in recent decades, and I hear the term more and more frequently among more educated, professional and urban indigenous and non-indigenous people.⁴⁰ In other blackfella settings, however, "indigenous" may be perceived as either a derogatory term, similar to old notions of primitive natives, or as a politically correct and de-politicised term forced upon them by an Australian state bureaucracy. Many of these people view "Aboriginal" as an empowering and desirable status that distinguishes them both as distinct from indigenous people elsewhere and as a First People with special rights in Australia. Then again, some indigenous people tell me that "Aboriginal" is the term forced upon them by a racist, colonial regime. "Indigenous" is thus used as an alternative to "Aboriginal" by some indigenous people and in some more formal settings, but neither term replaces more particular terms of identification, such as Koori or language group names.

⁴⁰ The re-evaluation of "indigenous" is linked to national and international developments. The global movement for the recognition of indigenous/First People/Fourth World people's rights in the 1980s and early 1990s, for instance, produced high-profile United Nations conventions and campaigns, such as the 1989 International Labour Organization's "Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention", the proclamation of a "Decade of the World's Indigenous people" 1995-2004 (see www.ohchr.org), an International Day of the World's Indigenous people and the establishment of a permanent international forum on Indigenous issues (see www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii). These events intersected with a peak in Australian Aboriginal activism, accompanied by increased recognition of indigenous diversity, which led to a first distinction in official Australian terminology between Aboriginal people on the mainland and Torres Strait Islanders. "Indigenous" then became a convenient official term for encompassing both groups, and has now entered everyday language in some settings.

Fieldwork

This study concerns the social worlds of music making across the vast Central Australian region (see maps 1 and 3). My fieldwork thus involved musicians from many different language groupings and places who practice music in a variety of locations. This means that I had to be highly mobile and my 4WD car was a most important research tool.

Before choosing the place for my study, I made contacts and interviewed musicians in Sydney, Melbourne, country Victoria, Perth and Alice Springs. Influenced by the aforementioned writings on Aboriginal popular music, I initially decided to split the study between Central Australia and western Victoria in order to compare a more “traditional”, remote setting and a more “political”, urbanised south-eastern place.

My choice of Central Australia was partly based on my many previous visits here when I had encountered a rich Aboriginal music scene. I subsequently established contact with the recording studio at the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association, CAAMA, in Alice Springs. The studio manager, Stan Satour, was willing to take me on as a voluntary worker in return for my following the music work in the studio. My choice of western Victoria resulted from meeting Gunditjmara musician Andy Alberts and his wife Kaye who generously introduced me to a network of Koori musicians around Warrnambool. I also made contact with male and female Koori musicians in other parts of western Victoria and Melbourne.

I drove in to Alice Springs to begin work at the CAAMA Music studio in October 2000. Two days later I was back on the road with a bunch of musicians on a month-long tour. As I met numerous Aboriginal music makers from, or connected to, the desert region during this venture, it became abundantly clear that this music scene alone was diverse and rich enough for several research projects. While keeping in touch with musicians in Victoria, I thus based myself in Alice Springs for a fifteen-month field study.

After being “baptised” into my all-male field by the touring project, I worked at the music studio in Alice Springs for eight months. During this time, I took off for the occasional week or two to follow musicians on tour or for music festivals in other parts of Australia. One of my tasks at the studio was to prepare hundreds of recordings in the CAAMA Music library for digital storage at the national sound archive. It involved listening to the tapes and detailing musicians, song titles, song writers, producers, places and dates. This work gave me a solid knowledge of localised indigenous music styles in

the region and beyond, and the names of musicians, bands and places. I also helped out in most aspects of the everyday studio operation, with work ranging from administrative and office tasks to assisting with ongoing recording projects. Because I was part of the day to day studio life for a long period, this is where some of my most enduring friendships developed.

I subsequently turned my attention to the music life of remote Aboriginal settlements. I travelled and returned to eight different communities to meet up with musicians and participate in music events. I also continued to follow musicians on tour in the Northern Territory and interstate, and travelled to numerous music events.⁴¹ The purpose of these journeys was to see how Central Australian musicians engage with different musical, social and geographical sites. I also came to know a network of music workers who are part of a national indigenous music scene.

I conducted one-to-one interviews with 45 musicians and music workers to document their musical and personal biographies and to understand how they compose music and lyrics, what motivates them, and how they perceive themselves as men, blackfellas, performers and instrumentalists. However, the main way in which I learned about music practices and male relations and aspirations was by being present as events evolved, that is, through participant observation. As ethnographic handbooks point out, this method is to use oneself as the medium of research as well as being a recorder and interpreter (see, for instance Ellen 1984; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). My own experiences and position, including my age, gender, class and sociocultural background, are thus central to how I participate and interpret, what I observe, and what I am prevented from seeing (Gupta and Ferguson 1997).

I came to this project as a white, forty year old woman, originally from Sweden and an Australian resident since 1989 (now citizen). I grew up in a large, musical and not very well-off family in a small town dominated by a Volvo car factory and military barracks. Leaving home and supporting myself from the age of 16, I worked fulltime in a music business, then on ships on the North Sea, while finishing an external college degree. My passions were music and motorbikes, both of which I practiced among working-class friends in fairly close-knit, male dominated groupings. I also travelled extensively through Western Europe. At the age of 22, I left for the big cities and

⁴¹ These included concerts in Darwin, the Tamworth country music festival, the National Folk Festival and the Tracking Kultja festival in Canberra, the Port Fairy Folk Music Festival in eastern Victoria, Womadelaide and an indigenous hip-hop festival in Adelaide, and assorted festivals and music events in Sydney and Melbourne.

finished a university degree in journalism. I then hitchhiked around Australia for a year, mostly in remote regions. The experience resulted in a book on Australian people and society (Ottosson 1988), and a fascination with desert environments. I have since also visited desert regions in other parts of the world.

I worked as a journalist for fifteen years, initially as a freelance photojournalist specialising in development and human rights issues in various parts of Asia, where I spent time in diverse sociocultural settings. After immigrating to Australia in 1989, I covered Australian social, political, economic and cultural issues for Swedish media. I returned to Sweden in 1995 to work in the news and current affairs team at the national radio. I also went back to university and completed a Master's Degree in applied social anthropology, with fieldwork in various ethnic settings in rural Uganda and a thesis on gendered practices and ideas of democracy in village council. I went back to Uganda as head of a research team that produced a government report on human rights and democracy, while beginning a PhD programme in Social Anthropology. I returned to Australia for fieldwork and have settled in Alice Springs. With this globally mobile life I have never married or had children.

Some aspects of these biographical notes made me somewhat "at home" in my field (Gupta and Ferguson 1997; A. Jackson 1989). My familiarity with music practices, all-male working-class socialities, Australian society, and deserts, for instance, was soon recognised by the musicians and made me less of a naïve stranger. The fact that English is not my first language could be looked at favourably among the Aboriginal language speakers, perhaps connecting us as non-British and non-colonisers. In a social setting where mature age (ideally) means more respect and authority, my age was mostly an advantage. Also, many of the men were in the age bracket 30-50, and we thus shared certain musical influences and memories of world events.

In gendered and racial aspects I was also an "other". Being a (heterosexual) woman, who moreover was single, seemed to be a most important factor for how people related to me and this structured my presence, relationships and what I learned.

Gendered fields

Because Aboriginal Central Australian settings in general are highly gender-segregated, Aboriginal people and organisations prefer that researchers work with their own gendered grouping (cf. Bell 2002 [1983]:8). I was aware of these conventions but expected the regional music scene to be more gender-mixed, as it was in other places I

had explored. My project thus unintentionally turned out to be rather unconventional, in that a woman was studying maleness and hung out with blackfella men over a prolonged period.

My presence created various reactions and degrees of anxiety among men and women around me that mainly concerned sex and the protection of gendered domains. Several male musicians initially approached me as a kind of sophisticated groupie and I had to negotiate proposals for sexual adventures, but probably less often than if I had been a younger woman. As the musicians realised that I am passionate about music but not necessarily musicians our relationship relaxed and friendships developed. Many women and some men on the fringes of the music activities did not seem to make this distinction, though. I encountered a fair amount of open and covert hostility throughout my field stay, especially from women and seemingly based on assumptions that I was sexually involved with or interested in particular musicians. I did not respond much to such (mainly implied) suggestions unless they came from the male musicians, in which case I wanted to clarify my independence. Most of the musicians are married or in a relationship and I know that some of them occasionally had to explain my continued presence among them to their female partners.

This situation shaped the kind of knowledge I had access to and my overall field experience. I could rarely socialise openly with individual men outside musical settings because it could be interpreted as a sexual or romantic liaison. At music events in public venues, the musicians and I often kept a "cool" distance between us in order not to fuel jealousy or misguided rumours. As a woman thus seemingly unaccompanied by any man or in the company of women, gig situations were often the most taxing and at times unpleasant field experiences as I was sexual prey to men in varying degrees of intoxication, and a target for jealous and at times drunken women.

I moreover felt that I had to choose loyalties and not mingle much with women. When I initially did mix with local women I felt like a doubly suspect person. The women seemed suspicious of my intentions among the men and expected proof of gendered loyalty in the form of information on what the men were up to. The men's comments implied suspicions that I was indeed "leaking" such information to the women, which made me out as unreliable. Because my research concerned music making, I remained loyal to the male domain and do not know about women in my field setting from much inside, personal experience.

My whiteness seemed to be less of a “problem” for the men, especially when they recognised my working class background and familiarity with music and all-male settings, bantering and sexual frankness. Being non-indigenous did, however, somewhat “neutralise” my gendered position. For instance, some men commented that a black woman could never have done a study like mine because they would not “allow” her into their male circle. In this, they refer to the gender-segregated organisation of regional Aboriginal practices, in which it would be seen as inappropriate for a black woman to hang out with men the way I did. Each man would also have to worry about regional Aboriginal norms and restrictions on how to interact with this woman, based on their relative kin, age and marital positions. They therefore envisaged that a black woman’s presence would cause unwanted tensions between her and particular musicians, between the musicians and her male kin and partner, and among the musicians (because, they said, someone was bound to have a fling with her, which would cause frictions and upset the music work).

My gendered whiteness had implications for how I was perceived by other people, too. Hanging out with musicians before and after gigs I would occasionally be subjected to derogatory comments from white men and women that implied that they saw me as a white woman “shopping” for black male sex exotica. Black men and women would likewise comment in disapproving and patronising terms that defined me as a sexual/racial tourist on their territory. All up, though, the unpleasant experiences that my gender and whiteness produced provided me with valuable insights about the very practices of gender and indigeneity that I set out to explore.

I tried to explain the nature of my research to the musicians I met, while this was not always possible in relation to each and every person I saw at concerts or festivals, as these could be rather crowded situations. As is the case with any research which involves a large number of people, the men have shown various degrees of understanding of my project, and their interest has varied from one person to the next. A few read texts and commented on my ideas throughout the project. One or two were reluctant participants from the start. A majority have showed a modest interest. When I had a draft manuscript, I did my best to locate and contact the men or part of the bands that I discuss in the texts, or the family of musicians who have passed away. When possible I travelled to where they were in order to read and discuss the content. Many of the men made insightful comments that are integrated into the final document. I sent texts to those I could not see or who were not interested to meet with me. A white

musician had deep concerns about the way he thought he came across in an earlier draft of Chapter Eight. I truly hope that the revised chapter shows the rightful respect for all involved. The responsibility for any unintentional, remaining shortcomings of my descriptions of people and events in this study is entirely mine.

Outline of chapters

Chapter Two introduces the setting and history of Central Australia. The purpose is to show the intercultural forces that continue to shape Aboriginal life and music making in the region. Chapter Three outlines the social history of the main, non-ancestral Aboriginal music styles in this region in order to establish the importance of these musics in contemporary life worlds. I also point to differences between Central Australian music making and the more well-known musical idioms of the Aboriginal Top End (of the Northern Territory) and the southeast.

Chapters Four and Five investigate the mediating dynamics of the diversified male and blackfella sociality in the recording studio of the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association. These dynamics involve competing notions of valued indigeneity and masculinity among the musicians, between the studio employees and musicians, and between the studio and the media association as a whole.

In Chapter Six I shift my attention to the articulation of distinct and shared Aboriginal and male modes of being in music performances in remote desert communities. This chapter also looks at the role of music making in the accumulation of male status in these all-Aboriginal settings. Chapter Seven moves to the setting of white dominated, regional towns. It investigates how blackfella town gigs reproduce a historical dichotomy between blackfella and whitefella people, demeanour and experiences. By attracting large numbers of Aboriginal people who make their presence known in certain ways, these music events also disturb white town orders.

Chapter Eight goes on tour with Central Australian musicians. It explores the dynamics for blackfella and male ways of identifying when the men engage with other black and white people, music and places. In Chapter Nine I sum up my main findings under the theme of mediation. I argue for a serious appreciation of the “mongrel” forms of being distinctively indigenous and male that are continually produced through everyday intercultural engagements, and that challenge more limited and privileged notions of worthy Aboriginality that persist in mainstream domains.

CHAPTER TWO CENTRAL AUSTRALIA

This chapter presents the various settings in Central Australia in which the musicians in the coming chapters produce their music and sense of self. It outlines the intercultural history of the region and the implications of state policies for regional matters in order to orient the reader to the place specific dynamics that I draw on when discussing the men's ideas and actions. The physical environment in which the musicians operate also needs a short introduction.

A good way to grasp the vastness, remoteness and rich variety of landscapes of the desert region of Central Australia is to arrive by air. From whatever direction one flies in, the last hour or two is over dry lands with only scant evidence of human presence – the occasional cattle station homestead or mining operation, and small clusters of housing on Aboriginal settlements. The landscape shifts from pink sand dunes to pale yellow and brown plains to deep red, rocky outcrops. Bushes, trees and spinifex grass add nuances of silvery green. Meandering, mostly dry river systems spread out over the plains and cut through rugged mountain ranges. Closer to Alice Springs, the one sizeable town in Central Australia, several parallel mountain ranges appear, running east-west for hundreds of kilometres like temporarily frozen, red waves moving northwards.

On the ground, the country is less accessible. The only bitumen roads in the region consist of the Stuart Highway that runs north-south through the interior, the roads to the major tourist attractions Uluru and Kings Canyon, and the network around Alice Springs. Remaining roads to Aboriginal communities, cattle stations and mines are often poorly maintained gravel with deep sandy washouts, rough rocky dips and severe corrugation. The fact that much of Central Australia is unfenced cattle country adds to the road dangers as wandering livestock, as well as wildlife such as kangaroos, dingo dogs, large emu birds, big goanna lizards and camels may appear at any time.

The desert climate swings between very hot summers and icy winters. In the hot season, October to March, the mean maximum temperature exceeds 32 °C and often stays in the high thirties to mid-forties. The cold season, from about April to September, brings freezing winds and below zero night temperatures. Rain is unusual and irregular,

the average annual rainfall a mere 287 mm. When it falls, it usually pours, and gravel roads turn into red mud and are cut off by running creeks and flooded plains.

Geographically, Central Australia covers parts of three Australian states and one territory (see map 1). This study is set in the southern half of the Northern Territory, which is a self-governing entity though not (yet) formally a state within the Australian federation. The capital of the Northern Territory is Darwin (pop. 69 000) on the tropical coast 1 500 km north of Alice Springs. The towns are linked by the Stuart Highway and a railway completed in 2004. The two towns in between are Tennant Creek (pop. 3 000) and Katherine (pop. 10 000). Other roadside stops typically consist of a roadhouse with petrol, pub, fast food and/or a restaurant, and accommodation or camping sites. A few comprise a cluster of houses that may include a small school, shop, nursing post and a police station, which services nearby Aboriginal settlements, cattle stations and tourists. South from Alice Springs, the Stuart Highway continues as the only paved road over the state border to South Australia and its capital Adelaide (pop. 1 million), 1 500 km from Alice Springs. The only inhabited places along the first 1 200 km are roadhouses and a few nearby settlements.

Out of the Northern Territory population of 200 000, 25 per cent declared themselves Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders in the 2001 census. This should be compared to Australia as a whole, where 2.2 per cent of the total population of 19.7 million identified as indigenous. More than forty indigenous languages and dialects are still spoken in the Territory. Especially in remote settings, indigenous people actively maintain ceremonial practices, and traditional norms guide many aspects of life.

Among the twenty-five languages and dialects spoken in the Central Australian region, Arrernte, Warlpiri and Pitjantjatjara dominate with 2 000-3 000 speakers in each group (IAD 2002; see map 2). Aboriginal language speakers, including many of the musicians in this study, are often multi-lingual in several Aboriginal languages while their level of Standard English skills varies widely. A kriol Aboriginal English is widespread (Arthur 1996). A number of Aboriginal Central Australians speak English only, including several of the musicians who grew up around Alice Springs or other towns, many with one non-Aboriginal parent. English is also the only language spoken by many people of mixed ancestry who were taken away from their Aboriginal families as children under former state policies, to which I return below.

Miscegenation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people has a history as long as white settlement in Central Australia. While the musicians we meet in coming

chapters primarily identify with a specific language group, most are of mixed Aboriginal or/and other ancestry. Combined with the comprehensive dispersal and relocation of Aboriginal individuals and groups over the last century, this means that the present-day kin networks to which the musicians belong tend to be genealogically highly complex and geographically scattered. In any one Aboriginal community, though, there is a density of such ties. The biographies of individual musicians further accentuate the proliferating diversity of experience and ways of identifying that continue to emerge from the regional intercultural history, which I now outline.

Early white expansion

Central Australia was one of the last colonial frontiers on the Australian continent. The first European explorers arrived in the 1860s and the subsequent construction of a telegraph line from Adelaide to Darwin through the interior in 1870-72 became the single most important factor in the expansion of colonial powers and occupation by non-indigenous, initially predominantly male people throughout the Centre (Donovan 1988). The string of telegraph stations became stops on an overland route and served as bases for pastoralists looking to establish cattle and sheep stations, gold diggers, and traders with camels and bullock wagons transporting supplies from the south. While the various groups of newcomers were met variably with curiosity and suspicion by Aboriginal groups in the region, hostile conflicts, killings and “rough justice” marked the first decades of contact in Central Australia, with devastating effects on the Aboriginal population (Austin 1992; Bell 2002 [1983]:60ff). Introduced diseases further decimated their numbers during the early colonial encounter (Hill 2002).

Among the early arrivals was a group of German Evangelical Lutherans, “religious exiles from their home country” (Hill 2002:46) on a mission to protect and convert “the natives”. In 1877, they established Hermannsburg Aboriginal mission, 100 km west of today’s Alice Springs (see map 1). The Lutherans ran a growing number of Aboriginal missions and rationing stations over the next century. Particular German Lutheran models of manhood and gender relations have thus co-existed with indigenous norms for more than a century, and have influenced, and been adopted in part by, Aboriginal people. The Lutherans’ education and vocational training aimed to make Aboriginal people reject what the missionaries saw as their primitive barbarism. Their “ration based evangelism” (Rowse 1998:80) also aimed to keep Aboriginal people in the hinterlands, in the hope that “isolated from the ‘evils of civilisation’, they could

survive as a people and be raised (away) from moral and spiritual decadence” (Parry and Austin 1998:17). The Lutherans have thus been a powerful force in establishing a still prevalent regime of segregation of Aboriginal and other people in the region. Reformed as the Finke River Mission, they continue to play a prominent role in present-day Aboriginal Central Australia, running projects and schools in remote communities and Alice Springs.

With the more systematic pastoral expansion in the first decades of the 20th century, water resources and hunting grounds were closed off without negotiation, the newcomers trespassed on ritual and restricted Aboriginal grounds, and interfered with Aboriginal women. Retaliatory chains of brutalities and mutual fear between Aboriginal locals and settlers ensued (Austin 1992, 1997; Austin and Parry 1998; Rowse 1998). Spears and sorcery proved rather inefficient, though, when retaliated against with guns. White hunting parties for a single black suspect could result in the killing of large numbers of Aboriginal men, women and children (Austin 1992; Bell 2002 [1983]:67ff; Cribbin 1984; Hartwig 1960). Some of those incidents are still powerful in Aboriginal people’s shared memory, and feature in newly composed songs such as Sammy Butcher’s sombre, acoustic instrumental guitar ballad “Massacre” and Clifford Brown’s “Coniston”, a country-rock ballad in Warlpiri language.⁴²

As white dominance became more firmly established, the violence was increasingly replaced by a management regime of state and missionary rationing of Aboriginal locals, not least to keep them in the hinterlands and away from white settlements (Rowse 1998). Aboriginal people also gathered in camps on cattle and sheep stations established on their lands and became a pool of labour, mostly compensated with rations (Larbalestier 1988; Markus 1990). Few of the pastoralists made any profit in the dry country, and the cheap and plentiful Aboriginal work force was crucial for the establishment of the still important regional cattle industry. To keep Aboriginal people in the bush, station owners were also subsidised by the state to provide their Aboriginal charges with food and clothing (Larbalestier 1988; Rowse 1998), resulting in instances of “nigger-farming” to keep stations solvent (Hardy 1986 [1978]:36).

These relationships of exploitation and interdependence involved engagements between European and Aboriginal models of manhood. As a result of Aboriginal people’s participation as labour in the rural industry up until the 1960s, the masculine

⁴² “Massacre” appears on Butcher (CAAMA Music 2002), while Clifford Brown’s “Coniston” is not in commercial release.

demeanour of European rural workers has become an important part of the regional Aboriginal repertoire of male models. In the next chapter I describe how such masculine styles, experiences and sentiments have been mediated in the emergence of country music as a core expressive tradition in regional Aboriginal life worlds.

Racial segregation and assimilation

In 1927, the Northern Territory was populated by 3 000 Europeans and 18 000 “full-blood” Aboriginal people, who in the dominant evolutionary view of the day were expected to die out, considered too primitive to survive any advanced contact with the superior British civilisation (Manne 2001:16). Very few white women were present in the interior in the early decades of white settlement, and exploitative as well as voluntary sexual relationships between non-Aboriginal men and Aboriginal women were to become intrinsic to the regional history (Bell 2002 [1983]:Ch2; McGrath 1984). Children born from such liaisons, an estimated 800 in 1918, were, however, anomalies in terms of the “White Australia” ideology, which aimed at establishing Australia as a racially pure white nation (Kane 1997; McQueen 1986; Sherington 1990; Thompson 1994; Yarwood 1962).

One of the most extreme race segregation policies in Australia was put in place for the Northern Territory in the 1920s and 1930s, called the “breeding out the colour” policy (Austin 1997:195ff; Wilson 1997). Based on ideas that the genetic makeup of Aboriginal people would be diluted and “whitened” in a couple of generations of miscegenation, “half-caste” children were to be removed from their Aboriginal kin and raised in state institutions as a step towards their becoming culturally integrated. Marriages between “half-castes” and “full-bloods” were also outlawed to prevent giving rise to more people of colour. The “half-caste” institution in Central Australia was “The Bungalow”, in operation in Alice Springs 1914-1942 (Austin 1997; Heppell and Wigley 1981). Some children grew up to become integrated into white society as adults. Numerous others endured deeply distressing conditions of physical, emotional and sexual abuse in the institutions, causing lifelong and trans-generational trauma (Wilson 1997).

By the Second World War, most Aboriginal peoples in the Centre had been forcibly moved off their traditional lands or had fled violence and starvation and sought refuge around missions and rationing depots, which also attracted people to come voluntarily for food, blankets, tools, and addictives such as tobacco, tea, sugar and

alcohol (Rowse 1998). With the recent Nazi genocide in mind, the rhetoric of eugenics and ideology of biological absorption were now replaced by a “New Deal” for Aboriginal people; social and cultural assimilation. As part of this policy shift, the government established a network of state settlements in the region during the 1940s and 1950s (Bell 2002 [1983]; Rowse 1998; Wells 1998). Modelled on British-Australian society, these assimilation centres included schools, shops, health clinics, administrative offices, community halls, and so forth. Thousands of Aboriginal people from different and at times inimical groups were trucked to these centres, where they were expected to reject their ancestry and beliefs when trained in the Australian Way of Life (Austin 1997:18). As several scholars have shown, the strategy instead produced welfare dependent communities, spatially and socially segregated from the larger society (e.g. Wells 1998; Rowse 1998; Myers 1986).

Aboriginal people did not take wholeheartedly to the Anglo-Australian forms of work ethics, domestic habits and nuclear family formation, either. In general, they continued to organise their actions according to kinship based notions of obligations and rights, speak their languages, perform ceremonies, and maintain attachments to ancestral countries, even if they could not visit them. Many traditional activities were in fact intensified by the large aggregations of people and the constant food supply provided by the settlements (Long 1964). All these practices were also inevitably modified by the white disciplining regimes. As on missions and cattle stations, each settlement also produced its own particular configurations of co-existing and co-productive norms for male and female, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal practices, relations and identifications.

As outlined in Chapter One, the last four decades have seen an increased recognition of indigenous disadvantage and rights, and an expanded space for certain forms of indigenous agency through the implementation of policies of self-determination. One consequence of these shifts is that the welfare state has increasingly penetrated Aboriginal people’s lives in Central Australia (Beckett 1985). Also, the introduction of Aboriginal rural award wages in the 1960s led to the dismissal of many Aboriginal workers. They were often left with few other options than to move to state settlements, missions or white towns and become welfare recipients (Rowse 1998).

The introduction of the 1976 Northern Territory Land Rights Act has seen large areas of land being handed back to Aboriginal claimants. The governing of state settlements, missions and some cattle station camps has also been transferred to

Aboriginal community councils and these often remote places have become permanent settlements (Peterson and Langton 1983). State grants for cultural restoration have moreover encouraged the formation of new, smaller settlements closer to people's ancestral lands (Stanley 1989). As a result, the desert region is now dotted with Aboriginal settlements.

Aboriginal desert communities

Almost half of the land in the Central Australian region of the Northern Territory is currently held by Aboriginal land trusts. Some thirty Aboriginal settlements and a large number of family camps are dispersed over this area (see map 3).⁴³ Run by Aboriginal community councils, the settlements are now commonly referred to as "Aboriginal communities" or simply "bush communities".⁴⁴ Relations within and among these communities have created a dynamic blackfella hinterland realm that is also a main space for men to establish musical and male reputation, which I explore in Chapter Six.

The biggest Aboriginal community in Central Australia is Yuendumu, about 300 km northwest of Alice Springs, with its population of around 1 000 mainly Warlpiri people (see map 1). Most other communities consist of a couple of hundred residents or fewer. Smaller family camps, so called "outstations", may comprise ten to twenty-five people. The number of people in the one community or outstation may fluctuate considerably with changing seasons and events. Mobility is recognised as a vital aspect of Aboriginal life in Central Australia and people are often on the move both within communities, and between communities, outstations and white regional towns (Musharbash 2001; Taylor and Bell 1994; Young and Doohan 1989). They travel to visit and stay with relatives, for ceremonial and "sorry business" (i.e. funeral practices), work, education, to do time in prison or receive health care in hospitals and specialist clinics, to drink, play sports, and for many other reasons.

⁴³ This refers to the administrative region of the Central Land Council, an elected statutory body established in 1974 with the purpose of representing and supporting indigenous people in the Central Australian region in land claims and consultations with miners and landowners. The CLC area covers 775 963 sq km, out of which 381 792 sq km is Aboriginal land (for more, see www.clc.org.au).

⁴⁴ The terms "Aboriginal bush towns" or "Aboriginal towns" are also in use, often to avoid confusions with meanings of "community" that refer to a set of social relations. The prefixes "Aboriginal" or "bush" are also meant to distinguish these Aboriginal dominated and restricted places from open, white mainstream Australian towns (e.g. Stanley 1989). The term "outstation" refers to family camps created some distance away from larger communities. An official, national and statistical term in use for these two and other types of indigenous Australian settlements is that of "discrete" indigenous communities; "those that comprise largely, or only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people" (HREOC 2004).

The music making I focus on in this study also generates mobility. Not only do bush musicians travel between communities and to white dominated towns to perform or record music; their families and friends also journey to support “their” bands and participate in musical happenings. Musical experiences, moreover, allow musicians and audiences to move imaginatively between both imagined and experienced places, times and ways of being (cf. Wade 2000:13). This ideational and physical mobility appears in many local country, rock and reggae lyrics about ending up in other places and longing to get back home, and about being on the road,⁴⁵ describing both events and states of mind.⁴⁶

Aboriginal bush communities in many ways look similar to other Australian small towns, with a few paved streets lined with one-family houses surrounded by yards. They may include a shop, petrol station and garage, school, church, council office, community hall, sports grounds and a police station. However, streets and houses are usually of lower standard and less well maintained than in average white towns. Houses are also often commonly severely overcrowded and there are few signs of Western-style domestic order. Yards and house verandas are the main social space for the residents, a space they often share with numerous dogs, car wrecks, assorted pieces of junk and strewn rubbish.

The socioeconomic dynamic of desert communities, moreover, differs markedly from that of other Australian towns. They are established in remote locations without economic rationale and far from mainstream labour markets. Residents depend mainly on government funding and welfare payments and there are few profit-making activities or initiatives for the production of goods for local consumption. The Aboriginal unemployment rate in desert communities is persistently high. The few existing jobs are in council-related activities and in other directly or indirectly publicly funded jobs at schools, health clinics and shops, or in community development programs and work-for-unemployment-benefit projects. Aboriginal people in these communities have the lowest level of education and the highest rate of illiteracy in Australia. The proportion of people suffering from chronic diseases such as diabetes are the highest in the country, too, and several communities struggle with a range of interlinked management and

⁴⁵ For example, “Kintorelakutu” by the Warumpi Band (Festival Records 1985), “Ghan to the Alice” by Herbie Laughton (Pindaroo Music 1999), and the North Tanami Band’s album “The travelling Warlpiri” (CAAMA Music 1995) that was named from the band’s recent touring experiences.

⁴⁶ As in “Road to nowhere” by Blackstorm (CAAMA Music 1998).

social problems, family conflicts, poverty, domestic violence, petrol sniffing and sexual assaults.

To counter this situation, various community associations, such as women centres, art cooperatives, media association and law and order teams focus on assisting the vulnerable and needy, managing community conflicts, and strengthening shared cultural values, norms, relationships and practices (Hinkson 2004; Michaels 1994b; Myers 1986, 1995, 2002). A majority of desert communities are also declared “dry”, that is, they have introduced bans on alcohol within their boundaries in order to prevent the physical and social damage created by drunkenness and excessive alcohol consumption. A problematic consequence of such restrictions is that people leave spouses, children and kin responsibilities behind to go and drink in towns, which is a recurrent lyrical theme in bush musicians’ repertoires.⁴⁷

Some community members receive royalty income from mining or tourist operations on their lands. In some places income is also generated by (partly government funded) community art centres. As described in Chapter One, acrylic desert paintings have become highly sought-after items on the international fine arts market and some regional artists have earned considerable amounts of money and fame. On rare occasions, such incomes are invested for the benefit of the whole community. Kintore community, for instance, paid for a dialysis unit for its many chronic diabetics by auctioning paintings in Sydney. In the entrenched welfare regime of many desert communities, however, these incomes are more often perceived as “spending money” and used on alcohol, gambling and second-hand vehicles that soon break down and are abandoned.

The music making under study here is not an important income-generating activity in desert communities. Aspirations to fame and related wealth are certainly part of the globally informed imagery that circulates among the musicians. In practice, though, such aspirations are adjusted to local circumstances where they cannot expect to be paid for performing in their own or neighbouring communities. When performing at regional Aboriginal festivals or in faraway communities they may ask only to be compensated for petrol costs, and sometimes they are. Bands also travel to enter Battles of the Bands competitions, hoping and in some instances counting on taking home the prize money, which they envisage will pay for the return journey. Plenty of times, of

⁴⁷ Listen, for instance, to the early cassette compilation “Wama Wanti - Drink little bit” (CAAMA Music 1988).

course, they don't win and it may take a few days or weeks to either raise the petrol money needed among relatives and friends, or to catch a ride with someone else. Or they may sell an instrument to buy petrol.

As I discuss in Chapters Seven and Eight, bush musicians' performances in white dominated towns and interstate are often imagined in contrasting terms to the music making in their Aboriginal settings. Non-indigenous performance sites are often viewed as spaces of plenty, whether in terms of money, professionalism or technological resources. In reality, their gigs in regional, white dominated regional towns such as Alice Springs or Tennant Creek are usually paid with door takings, minus sound and staging costs, or a set sum that is divided up among band members. In either case, they usually end up with anything from a mere twenty-five dollars to maybe a hundred dollars each. Bush musicians seldom receive much royalty income from commercially released recordings, either. The main market for these recordings consists of Aboriginal people in the desert region. Considering how small this population is, and that it is among the poorest in the country, the fact that musicians receive any royalty at all (which is paid out after production costs have been covered by the sales) is an indication as good as any of how highly valued these forms of music are in Aboriginal regional settings.

Entry onto Central Australian Aboriginal land and communities is restricted for outsiders, who must carry various types of visitor permits in order to travel through and remain for work, research, to film or photograph in these areas.⁴⁸ A permit holder agrees to obey all directions of the Aboriginal landholders whilst on their land. The permit system was established under the Northern Territory 1976 Land Rights Act as a way for Aboriginal people to regain and maintain control over who enters their lands and what activities go on there, partly to protect sacred and restricted sites from interference. It is also a means to control research and the use and distribution of representations of their life worlds, not least because of gendered, inter-generational and inter-group restrictions on access to knowledge, and because of cultural taboos on the use of images, voices and names of deceased persons.

This said, most desert communities constantly interact with a wide variety of exogenous people, ideas and practices. In Yuendumu, for instance, ten per cent of the residents are non-Aboriginal. While this is the highest proportion of whites in any desert community, most communities do employ non-Aboriginal people in pivotal positions in

⁴⁸ For details on the permit system, visit www.clc.org.au

the daily operation of community councils and service delivery. Whites usually manage community shops, petrol stations and mechanical workshops. They commonly comprise the management and most of the staff of the health clinics, schools and various community development programs. Non-Aboriginal tradesmen are brought in to carry out infrastructure work such as construction and maintenance of housing and roads. A string of non-Aboriginal researchers, government officials, politicians, educators, musicians, media workers, artists, art coordinators, geologists, and other professionals have, moreover, frequented desert communities over many decades.

Some of these community whitefellas develop long term relationships and become engaged in local Aboriginal socialities beyond work relations. In many cases, though, cross-cultural interactions are limited in time and to specific tasks. This tends to reproduce the historical separation of indigenous and non-indigenous life worlds. It reinforces the position of non-Aboriginal (and a few non-local, educated indigenous) people as the ones who are employed and usually better paid as “experts”, as middle-men for indigenous communities’ dealings with an array of publicly funded services and regulations, and as mediators of exogenous knowledge (cf. Cowlshaw 1999a, 1999b; Holcombe 2005).

The continued intercultural production of a racial and sociocultural dichotomy of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and orders is highly visible in Alice Springs, the main administrative and commercial centre for desert community people and itself also an important Aboriginal settlement.

Alice Springs

The township of Alice Springs spreads out on the east and west side of the Todd River. The river is usually dry, but may run or flood infrequently when the northern monsoon moves far enough south. The town is flanked by the red and rugged MacDonnell Ranges in the south, and by rising, undulating hills to the north. The area is known as Mparntwe to its original Central Arrernte inhabitants and its totemic topography was formed through the activities of the major local creative ancestors for the Arrernte – three species of caterpillar – and other ancestral creatures (Brooks 1991).⁴⁹

⁴⁹ The Europeans named the town after Alice Todd, the wife of the Superintendent of Telegraphs in charge of the construction of the overland telegraph line, and after the permanent spring by the old telegraph station just north of the present-day township.

Beginning as a tiny white settlement servicing gold miners and pastoralists in the late 19th century, the town still had only a couple of hundred white people in the early 1930s, with several hundred Aboriginal people camping around the settlement (Donovan 1988). There was also a sizeable presence of "Afghans", migrants from present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan who managed the camel strings that transported mail, stores and building material from the south, and who established market gardens and date farms in the area (Raikowski 1987). Afghan and Aboriginal people developed both working and familial relationships, and large Aboriginal-Afghan family networks are part of the social geography of present-day Alice Springs.

The town remained tiny and isolated until the Second World War when it became the major supply base for troops in northern Australia, and the road between Alice Springs and Darwin was bitumised. The influx of 10 000 military and civil personnel and a further 200 000 troops passing through town from 1940 to 1944 fuelled an expansion of the town's infrastructure (Donovan 1988; Heppell and Wigley 1981). In the post-war decades, this expansion supported the establishment of a local tourism industry with Alice Springs tour operators taking visitors to Uluru (Ayers Rock) and other spectacular natural features in the region. Tourism subsequently underpinned the doubling of the town's population in the 1960s and has been a major force for its continued growth. The tourist industry is now the largest employer in Alice Springs and Central Australia, with more than 700 000 Australian and overseas annual visitors adding a seasonal pulse to the town as they fill up the backpacker lodges, caravan parks, motels and hotels during the cooler months.

Today, Alice Springs has 27 000 permanent residents. More than 20 per cent are Aboriginal (many of mixed descent). Unlike the majority of non-Aboriginal town people, most remain in and around Alice Springs for their entire lives (Heppell and Wigley 1981). About ten per cent of Alice Springs' population are American citizens. They are mostly associated with the Pine Gap Joint Defence Space Research Facility, which was built outside the town in the 1960s. Operated by the United States Central Intelligence Agency, CIA, it is part of the Australian-United States defence alliance.

As the regional, urban centre, Alice Springs includes a regional hospital, schools and colleges, government agencies, banks, shopping centres, a cinema complex, and the usual range of businesses servicing a small town. A number of Aboriginal organisations and bureaucracies have become a prominent feature of the town since the policy shift to Aboriginal self-management in the 1970s (Batty 2003; Heppell and Wrigley 1981;

Rowse 1998). These organisations are the main local employers of indigenous people, and provide work for a large number of temporary and more permanent non-indigenous professionals and academics from Australia and overseas.

Alice Springs' neighbourhoods look similar to most Australian suburbia, with streets lined with one-family brick or fibro houses with front and back yards. The wealthy end of town, where the presence of Aboriginal people may cause residents to call the police,⁵⁰ consists of big, luxury houses around the golf course, adjacent to the international casino and top-end hotels. Many Aboriginal town residents are tenants in public housing in other suburbs. A few are run-down quarters, while others are fairly well maintained blocks of flats or free standing houses. Some Aboriginal families are also homeowners. A majority of Aboriginal townspeople, however, live in the more than twenty "town camps"; autonomous housing associations co-ordinated and serviced by the Aboriginal Tangentyere Council since the late 1970s (Rowse 1988).

The town camps have a history as long as white settlement. Aboriginal people with dealings within the town have always camped on the fringes of Alice Springs, the town itself a restricted area for Aboriginal people until the early 1960s (Green 2001; Rowse 1998). With decreasing opportunities for work or life in the hinterland, the camps grew and became permanent places of residence. Considered illegal by the white town council, they were not supplied with water, sewage control, electricity or other normal town services, and several attempts were made to get rid of them. Now serviced by a separate Aboriginal council, and on allotments on special leases, the town camps are still not integrated with mainstream town amenities. And, today as before, white town residents frequently raise concerns over the noise, rubbish and violence in many camps.

Most town camps are located on the outskirts of Alice Springs, many in the direction of the homelands of the different kin and language groups that predominate in a particular camp. A camp typically consists of a fenced-in compound of plain looking houses that are commonly overcrowded and in urgent need of repair. A few camps are well-maintained and organised. Many more deal with problems ranging from dysfunctional leadership to derelict housing, poor sanitary and health conditions, and a

⁵⁰ This was the case, for instance, when parts of the local Aboriginal film project "Us mob" about Aboriginal town camp children was shot in this area in 2004. Ironically, the script was about a couple of Aboriginal boys riding their bikes through this wealthy, white area and therefore being approached by a police car. When a real police car appeared in the middle of the film shoot, with the camera team filming from a distance, the boys thought it was part of the script and continued acting out their reality.

multitude of problems related to drunkenness. The worst camp I have visited is a renowned drinking and petrol sniffing spot. Here, a couple of people lived in a windowless tin shed, three by three metres in size, in squalor that beggars description.

Bush musicians who come to town to perform or for studio recordings may stay in a town camp. Some would prefer not to, though, because it is hard to avoid being drawn into the social and drinking activities, including drunken fracas and family conflicts. The poor state of sanitary and other services in some camps also makes it hard to function and appear in ways that are required for focused music work in the studio or for stage performances. For these reasons, many musicians choose to embark on long journeys back home to their desert community after a gig. If they have external funding for a recording project they may stay in a motel for the duration of the studio work.

The populations of town camps are in constant flux with frequent and numerous visitors from bush communities, and more so at certain times of the year. This mobility gives Alice Springs a distinct blackfella rhythm. Before Christmas and around school holidays, for instance, large numbers of bush people come to town to pick up children from boarding schools, visit relatives and shop. At Easter, too, Alice Springs becomes a busy and dynamic blackfella space when the regional football league starts with a three-day-long carnival. Aboriginal people have a highly visible presence in Alice Springs all year round, though, and more so than in most other towns in Australia. As Heppell and Wigley note, however, "(t)hat visibility, while it could be a healthy sign of racial and cultural diversity, serves to highlight very strongly the disparity between the two groups" (1981:32). This disparity is characterised by a mutual unease and persistent "othering" between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and practices.

Persistent "othering"

Aboriginal people have been part of Alice Springs town life since its earliest days as a white settlement. Their presence also continues to unsettle the white town order. As I discuss in Chapter Seven, blackfella music happenings are dense and at times emotionally charged occasions for reproducing a mutual unease between blackfella and whitefella people, which reinforces polarised ways of identifying with blackfella and whitefella ways of being present in town.

Many bush visitors, for example, look, behave and move about town in ways that do not correspond with present-day Western urban conventions. They tend to wander about, unhurriedly, in large groupings that fill up the width of pavements,

spilling out on the streets, while talking, shouting and laughing, often carrying an aroma of dust, camp fire and sweat around them. They often gather to rest, eat and socialise in public places such as the city council lawn, the main street mall or the river bed where they at times light camp fires and leave litter behind.

In clothes that are often marked by the wear and tear of living in the dusty hinterland, bush people also have their own dress standards that in many parts are adopted from early conservative Christians and Western rural workers. Many walk barefoot but usually cover up the rest of their bodies considerably more than most white people, regardless of hot or cold weather. Adult women commonly wear wide, below-the-knee length dresses or skirts, and often wear an extra, long-sleeved shirt or jacket over their tops. Older women may add head scarves or home-knitted beanies. Men often appear in somewhat wrinkled pants or jeans, with wind-breaking jackets over shirts or t-shirts, and well-worn baseball caps or felt Akubras (Australian style cowboy hats). Teenagers of both sexes tend to dress in the same oversized, silky and brightly coloured sport-style street gear that Aboriginal town youth also prefer.

The appearance and public manners of Aboriginal town residents are as diverse as their differing ways of life. Some dress and behave the way most white people do in town. Others dress and move about as do bush people, in larger groupings characterised by public visibility and at times loud ways. Habitual drinkers of course distinguish themselves, too, in often dirty, torn and smelly clothing. Aboriginal drinking parties often gather around bottle shops or bring their cartons of port, wine and beer to the river bed. These gatherings may be both loud and aggressive. At night, groups of Aboriginal youths can often be seen wandering the streets, too, looking for, and at times creating, excitement by causing damage or breaking into property and cars.

While Aboriginal people are present in as many varied ways as other people in town, their presence is the main focus of persistent complaints from white tourist operators, business people and non-Aboriginal residents that perpetuate a negative and often fearful typecasting of the racial other. The local newspapers frequently portray white town people as victims of crime, noise, drunkenness, loitering and welfare fraud, while the perpetrators are described as, or assumed to be, black youth, black drunks, or Aboriginal people in general. Front page headlines such as "Alice streets like war zone" and Letters to the Editor complaining about "drunken louts" and people not being able

to feel safe after dark appear more or less on a weekly basis with implied or direct racial references.⁵¹

Incidents of inter-racial assaults are nevertheless rare. Both victims and perpetrators of violence, crime and homicides in town and the wider region are overwhelmingly Aboriginal people, and a great deal of this is never reported. When it appears as a subject for wider public concern, the focus is usually on the one spectacular issue, such as petrol sniffing or domestic violence, which may be singled out for a temporary burst of outside interventions. Broader issues, such as continued racial and social injustice, inequality and marginalisation are basically left untouched.

An important historical factor in the persistent racial and sociocultural “othering” in Central Australia has been the systematic rationing of the Aboriginal population, away from white towns. Rowse (1998) suggests that this formalised passage of goods from a dominating white to a subordinate black party is based on culturally undemanding and unequal relationships in that it requires “only the most minimal degree of intersubjective accord” (5) and “no necessary congruity of orientations among the parties” (5). That is, while rationing brought donors and receivers into daily contact, it did not require the mutual and complex understandings that more equal interactions and acknowledged interdependence between two parties tend to produce. Instead, each party has been able to foster its speculative constructions of the “other” without much challenge, while preserving its own sets of normative behaviour, values and forms of identification.

While intermarriage and miscegenation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people is part of regional history and not uncommon in Alice Springs, such unions and their offspring are seldom acknowledged or celebrated as “multiethnic”. As in other parts of the world with a prominent presence of people of mixed ethnic or racial ancestry, social institutions and public debate tend to encourage and even require that individuals identify with and carry only a single ethnicity (Cornell and Hartmann 1998:239). This is noticeable in Alice Springs. It is consistent, too, with Cowlshaw’s (2004) observations of race relations in a small-town in south-eastern Australia, where “a binary system of identification is sustained in the face of ambiguous racial heritage” (11). Her observation that the whitefella and blackfella segments of the population have

⁵¹ Examples taken from the twice-weekly *Centralian Advocate*, September 21, 2004.

remained "other" to each other despite "intense and intimate relationships, intermarriages, and interweavings" (12), is valid also for Alice Springs.⁵²

As mentioned, numerous Aboriginal organisations and workplaces are now important features of Alice Spring's infrastructure. As Merlan (1998) observes in Katherine, however, this "shift toward qualified inclusion has involved continuing socio-spatial marginalization, jointly produced but in a situation of continuing power differences between Aborigines and others" (230). Similarly, in Alice Springs, Aboriginal organisations have come to provide a rather separate Aboriginal space. The Aboriginal recording studio that I focus on in the coming two chapters is part of this space. So are the Aboriginal health service, maternity clinic, employment and banking service, housing associations, schools and childcare institutions, hostel association, and legal aid service, to mention just a few. Aboriginal people can thus largely operate and be serviced within an Aboriginal town domain, which is also socially and administratively linked with remote Aboriginal settlements in the region.

Hence, the Aboriginal musicians' lives are formed by intercultural engagements, while also characterised by racial and sociocultural disparity and a persistent, mutual "othering". Their and other Aboriginal people's presence is seldom appreciated by a larger white population on the level of everyday practice and interactions in town. The musicians also seem to take more or less for granted that they are either ignored or seen as potential troublemakers outside blackfella town domains. This practical reality co-exists with a persistent reproduction of Aboriginal desert people and culture as ideological, symbolic types in dominant national "traditionalist" imagery, which I discussed in Chapter One (cf. Kapferer 1995). That is, the strong Aboriginal presence in this region is crucial for the ongoing construction of Central Australia and Alice Springs as an ideological landscape.

Ideological landscapes

Located in the remote, isolated heart of the continent, Central Australia and Alice Springs have long been the subject for white and more urbanised-black romantic imaginings that have been represented in explorer tales, bush poetry, music, novels, ethnographic accounts, documentary and fictional film, visual art, theatre and dance. Such representations variably draw on elements of the regions' white and masculinist

⁵² Also see Trigger's description of two distinctive social arenas of blackfellas and whitefellas in the Aboriginal settlement of Doomadgee in far north-western Queensland (Trigger 1992).

pioneer history, the considerable number of Aboriginal people who have maintained aspects of traditional customs, and the dramatic desert scenery with its peculiar wildlife.

Mountford's popular and mass-distributed publications on desert people and tourist destinations that appeared from the 1940s made an impact, for instance, with their many photos of the dusty, near naked, at times spear-holding, stone-age men that I discussed in the previous chapter (Mountford 1948, 1965). In the 1940s and 1950s, Central Australia also became an attractive base for shooting movies. Films such as "The Overlanders", about the last great Australian cattle drivers, "Jedda", about an Aboriginal girl brought up by a white family and torn between two cultures, and "A town like Alice", from Nevil Shute's war time novel, were partly shot here. They all reinforced a romantic outback imagery of a dusty frontier town with rough-cut, resilient and earthy white Australian characters, and with Aboriginal people cast in traditionalist terms of fundamental spiritual and sociocultural difference.

Such mass-distributed representations have contributed considerably to boosting the region as an "ideological landscape"; one so charged with affective and symbolic meanings that it helps to induce people's sense of national belonging (Edensor 2002:37ff). Representations of Central Australia have been charged with affective and symbolic meanings that service the Australian national self-imagery that I described in Chapter One. The masculinist white pioneer figure battling, and at least partly taming, the remote and harsh natural environment has, for instance, come to stand for more general national virtues of the white Bushman legend and its more modern version of the "Aussie battler", forged out of adversity and representing progress in general.⁵³ Homogenised representations of "authentic" desert Aborigines, and the pristine landscape in which they are firmly imagined, have instead come to stand for fixity; a distant and eternal past and a primeval naturalness that lends an imagined stability and origin to multicultural visions of Australian nationhood (Lattas 1992).

Continuously recirculated and updated in versions of popular, public and political culture that are also exported globally, ideological landscapes frequently become valued as iconic, privileged sites for domestic and international tourism and various forms of spiritual and ideological pilgrimage (Edensor 2002). This is certainly the case with Central Australia, where tourism is the major generator of business and infrastructure. The opportunity to experience a 60 000-year-old, still living Aboriginal culture is an essential part of tourist promotion of the region, and is a main motivation

⁵³ For a feminist viewpoint of this form of ideal masculinity, see Lake (1999:31ff).

for various kinds of neo-missionary pursuits and “new age” pilgrimage. Internationally successful books such as Bruce Chatwin’s “Songlines” (1987) that “pulsated with apparently authentic archetypal elaborations” (Kondos and Cowlshaw 1995:8; also see Michaels 1988) of desert Aborigines as the bearers of ancient wisdom about how to relate (spiritually) to country and life have contributed considerably to such pilgrimage.

The archetypal figure for such “Aboriginal culture” is still the wizened, “full-blood” old man that I described in Chapter One and who is portrayed on postcards for sale in Alice Springs and elsewhere. Unlike many Aboriginal people in Central Australia, these postcard blackfellas and some updated tourist brochure representations of happy, black Aboriginal children and body painted adults are never visibly of mixed Chinese, Afghan or various European ancestries. They are seldom dressed, and never pictured in a townscape or run-down desert settlements. Often they are not from Central Australia, either, where Aboriginal adults often are restrictive about visual representations of themselves and of certain landscapes because of customary restrictions. Ironically, too, it is tourists and white people who commonly dress to show off bare skin, while many regional Aboriginal people (in adopting dress codes of Christians and Western rural workers) deem it inappropriate or impractical to expose much skin at all.

Popular representations of “traditional Aboriginal desert people” also exist in sonic forms. Just as in Hollywood Western movies, where the rhythmic sound of tom-tom drums evokes the North American Indian-on-the-warpath, and melodic flute or strings accompany more romantic, close-to-nature stereotypes of them (Gorbman 2000), Australian Aboriginal people and culture are commonly manifested by the earthy, suggestive sound of the didjeridu (Kibby and Neuenfeldt 1998). As I noted in Chapter One, the didjeridu was never a traditional instrument in Central Australia. It nevertheless reappears in the hands of Aboriginal people in tourist and media representations of the desert region, and in soundtracks to video clips, television programmes and films picturing Central Australia. It is also a generic and popular piece of merchandise in Alice Springs tourist shops.

Unlike indigenous and non-indigenous musicians in other parts of the country and the world since the 1980s, Central Australian Aboriginal musicians seldom include didjeridu in their music making. In fact, they consciously avoid mixing any ancestral features, whether their own or those of other indigenous peoples’, into more recent

musical genres. These and other features of the main genres of non-ancestral music in Central Australia are the subject of the next chapter.

Summary

The Central Australian setting in which the indigenous musicians in this study practice their music and carry on their day-to-day lives continues to emerge through intercultural engagements with a legacy in colonial violence, racist state practices, missionary regimes and the establishment of rural industries. In this chapter I have pointed to how these engagements have involved partial adoptions and reworkings of various norms for masculine demeanour, and the modification of traditional indigenous practices.

Some important regional implications of successive and overlapping state policies of rationing, assimilation and self-determination for Aboriginal people have been a persistent separation of indigenous and non-indigenous life worlds. The expansion of the welfare state has also resulted in comprehensive state interventions in Aboriginal people's lives, while most aspects of those lives in Central Australia have not improved to close the gap to the standard of living, education, health and income enjoyed by the Australian population as a whole.

The continued intercultural production of a racial and sociocultural dichotomy of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal life worlds in Central Australia involves a mutual "othering", in which distinct blackfella and whitefella ways of being present are asserted, and in which multiethnic ways of identifying are discouraged.

With these regional dynamics in mind, the next chapter outlines the development of the main contemporary Aboriginal musical styles in Central Australia.

CHAPTER THREE DESERT MUSICS

Wherever one goes in the central desert region, Aboriginal people play, perform and listen to music on a daily basis. Most desert communities house at least one but often several gospel groups, one or a couple of country, rock and reggae band formations, and a number of men are skilled in playing the guitar and drums. Passing an Alice Springs town camp, one frequently hears the strumming of country, rock or reggae tunes on an acoustic guitar. A variety of music, often by regional Aboriginal musicians, is also played on cassette and CD players. Although not the subject of the same ethnographic interest and documentation as ancestral music genres, these more recent forms of music have come to dominate the everyday soundscape of Aboriginal Central Australia.

Localised styles and fusions of gospel, country, rock and reggae music are the preferred non-ancestral music genres practiced in the Aboriginal music scene of Central Australia. This chapter outlines the social history of these music styles, in order to show how they have become core expressive forms in regional life worlds. I introduce some of the male personalities who have been central in this Aboriginal musical history, and discuss how local and global masculine and music-related forms have become entangled.

At the end of the chapter I point to how Aboriginal music making in the desert region differs from that of the Top End and the southeast of Australia. Music from the latter two regions have come to represent the traditionalist and/or the political resistance models by which Australian Aboriginal popular music is commonly perceived, represented and evaluated, as discussed in Chapter One. I wish to draw attention to how the desert musicians have grounds for making music other than those two models suggest.

Some general features should be kept in mind regarding all the genres and styles of music I will discuss. Firstly, few of the Central Australian musicians have received any formal music training or read music. Most of them have learned how to play by watching and imitating older male Aboriginal musicians. Occasionally they pick up techniques by watching non-Aboriginal artists. Most of them go on to develop instrumental skills and styles of playing on their own and together with Aboriginal male relatives and friends. Workable instruments and musical equipment are scarce in many Aboriginal settings and many musicians recount how they, as boys, practised on air-

guitars and drums, or on instruments and loudspeakers made from cardboard boxes, tins and strings, while they made all the sounds with their voices. These ways of learning means that these musicians are highly skilled in picking up and applying new sounds and techniques by ear and eyes in the ongoing process of playing with others. Most musicians I have met in the desert region are also multiskilled instrumentalists who can easily swap between drums, bass, rhythm and lead guitars. Some are also keyboard, banjo or pedal steel guitar players.

Similar to descriptions of local music scenes in colonised settings elsewhere in Australia and the world, Aboriginal popular music making in Central Australia is characterised by a fusion and mix of musical genres and styles both in the one song and in the broader repertoire of any one musician or band (Bilby 1999; Collins and Richards 1989; Neuenfeldt 2001; Samuels 2004). Barber and Waterman, for instance, describe how Yorùbá music in West Africa involves a process of “incorporating fragments from a multiplicity of sources into local stylistic configurations and social strategies” (1995:243), a process in which personalities are created and consolidated “out of diverse, multifarious, overlapping materials ... often borrowed from other people” (243). This applies also to non-ancestral music genres in Aboriginal Central Australia.

Recordings with Aboriginal desert musicians are thus usually fairly eclectic affairs and these music makers can be understood more as what Negus calls “pastichists” and “synthesists”, than as “genericists” (1996:145ff). “Genericist” musicians, Negus suggests, tend to make music that fit the particular music codes and performance conventions of the one specific genre, and play everything in such a way. “Pastichist” musicians instead build stylistically heterogeneous repertoires from the various styles of music that they encounter. “Synthesist” musicians draw further on and include elements of a range of musical styles in order to create new and distinct “mongrel” musical profiles.

Apart from some older (aged fifty-plus) country and country-gospel musicians such as Herbie Laughton, Gus Williams, Trevor Adamson, Irwin Inkamala, Pantju “Punch” Thompson and Bill Wellington, and a few younger ones such as Darryl Kantawara, most desert musicians are variously country, gospel, rock or reggae acts, depending on the performance context and the particular songs they presently perform.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Many of these named country and country-gospel artists appear on CD 1 in CAAMA’s 25th anniversary compilation collection (CAAMA Music 2005). Also listen to Daryl Kantawara’s “Finke River blues” (CAAMA Music 2003) and for a selection of songs with Gus Williams, Herbie Laughton and Bob Randall, see “Old Country Mates” (CAAMA Music 2005).

Most notably Frank Yamma, Sammy Butcher and the now dissolved Alice Springs band Amunda have also, in a synthesist approach, elaborated a range of elements from various indigenous and non-indigenous musical genres and styles to craft their own distinct musical sounds and profiles that cannot easily be defined in terms of any of the common desert genres.

Many Aboriginal kids and teenagers, and some older men, are keen rap dancers and listen extensively to American hip-hop. However, I came across only a few younger musicians in Central Australia that practiced or wrote hip-hop on a regular basis. All these acts ceased when the members gradually took on adult responsibilities.⁵⁵ Hip-hop styles of music are thus not dealt with in my work.

Only a single regional Aboriginal artist, Pitjantjatjara man Frank Yamma, is marketed as a "world music" artist, and mainly outside Central Australia. Among Aboriginal people in the desert region, Frank is mainly perceived as a rock guitarist and brilliant singer, trained in his legendary father's country band. This is how they knew him before he made a national career with his more recent fusion of rock, funk, reggae, jazz and ambient music. "World music" is not a category that Aboriginal musicians or audiences in Central Australia relate much to, and the ideas and conventions that surround the world music industry have not influenced the regional music scene or practices to any noticeable degree.⁵⁶ I therefore leave discussions regarding concepts and practices of "world music" aside in this study, and focus on the dominant music styles of country, rock and reggae. Because these styles were preceded by and partly influenced by gospel music, I begin there.

Gospel influences

Aboriginal people's adoptions of introduced European music forms in Central Australia began with Christian hymns, first introduced by the Lutheran missionaries at

⁵⁵ The three active Aboriginal hip-hop acts during my fieldwork was an Alice Springs based group, Central Mob (now defunct), Thomas "TomTom" Saylor, a young Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal man living in Yuendumu, and a loose informal grouping of young town camp men in Alice Springs, usually referred to as the "Charles Creek mob". An Alice Springs teenage girl group performed a kind of pop-style hip-hop in the mid-1990s, and the Warlpiri Media Association in Yuendumu has also recorded a community CD with Warlpiri hip-hop (not in commercial release).

⁵⁶ As the editors of the 1994 "Rough Guide to World Music" point out, the criteria for being included as a World Music artist are rather woolly (Broughton, Ellingham, Muddyman and Trillo 1994). The editors make one thing clear, though; "Anglo-American rock and soul and rap and jazz and country" do not belong in World Music. In the "Rough Guide" section on Australia, this is precisely the kind of Aboriginal music presented (Breen 1994). Hence, it seems that Aboriginal music is included merely by reference to the musicians' indigenous (i.e. racial, cultural, exotic) status, and not by the actual music they produce.

Hermannsburg and followed by those of other Christian denominations (Hill 2002). For these missionaries, as in colonial missionary and evangelical movements in other parts of the world, “music served as a crucial vehicle for conversion” (Radano and Bohlman 2000:20) and traditional local music was condemned as “either primitive, or sinful, or both” (Kaemmer 1993:197).

Over time, the missionaries’ music has been reinterpreted, reworked, and new songs composed through Aboriginal people’s everyday experiences, languages, singing styles and social organisation in Central Australia. This genre has come to be called “gospel” but is not related to the style of music that is usually meant by this term; the African-American or colonial-African funky, exuberant, call-and-response singing, accompanied by exalted body movement, a music which is in turn associated with work song, soul and blues traditions (Hunter 2000). Mediating European Lutheran, Catholic and other Christian and regional Aboriginal norms for appropriate musical and bodily expressions, desert gospel is instead characterised by emotionally fairly sparse singing styles and highly composed bodily expression.⁵⁷ It is often sung in harmonies, but in a high pitched, non-melodic style that borrows from regional ancestral Aboriginal singing styles. Many recent Aboriginal gospel compositions also adopt whole melodies from “sweet sounding” pop tunes, such as Rod Stewart’s “Sailing”. In a further distinction from European hymn traditions, desert gospel is characterised by a frequent shortening or extension of bars to produce a distinct rhythmic pattern (that is common also in regional country playing). Desert gospel may be sung a cappella or accompanied by keyboard, acoustic guitar, or a full electric band set.

Gospel groups may consist of women only, men only, or be mixed-gender. In this respect, gospel is the one important exception from the otherwise prevailing male dominance of introduced forms of music making in Aboriginal Central Australia. Women gospel singers are numerous and confident and they also write gospel songs. A few women play the keyboard, which may mean that they control the musical arrangement since a keyboard provides a range of sounds and rhythm sections. I am told that women sometimes play the guitar in gospel groups but have not come across any in the numerous gospel performances I have attended.

As a musical tradition, desert gospel music is embedded in localised church socialities and activities. In its religious focus and motivation, it is further distinct from

⁵⁷ These features also characterise local appropriations of Christian hymns elsewhere, as described, for instance, in Hawaii (Stillman 1996).

the forces that shape regional country, rock and reggae music practices. The realm of gospel music would therefore require a different kind of fieldwork and other approaches than those I apply in this study. For these reasons, I leave detailed accounts of gospel practices out of my discussion.

I wish to recognise here, however, that gospel may influence other musical practices and styles, as well as the ways the musicians have come to identify as Aboriginal and as men. Some country, rock and reggae musicians sang and played in local church choirs as boys, for example. While instrumental skills are highly valued among men in this music scene, vocals are not, and there is little incentive for boys to develop singing skills. A rare site where they are able to develop a sense for harmonies and vocal techniques is the local church choirs, and skilled and versatile Aboriginal male singers in Central Australia are likely to have a background in such gospel choirs.

The historical association between gospel and country music is of course also well established, most famously through the widely popular Carter family that performed from the 1920s in the United States. In Central Australia, country-gospel bands have been a mainstay of everyday Aboriginal community life since the 1950s, albeit not readily accepted by the missionaries.⁵⁸ When country music was introduced in the Hermannsburg mission during the late 1940s and 1950s, for instance, the Lutherans perceived it as the work of the devil and banned it in the mission.⁵⁹ Local Aboriginal country devotees still practiced their music in secret. Foremost among them were Arrernte-Warumungu man Gus Williams, now in his seventies and still a formidable force in the Central Australian country music scene. Gus and a group of Aboriginal country players from Hermannsburg took their music to nearby Palm Valley, an early tourist destination in the region, where they found more appreciative audiences. By the early 1960s, the Lutherans had come to accept that country music was here to stay, and it became an integrated feature of gospel music making in the mission.

Another connection between gospel and country that is relevant for this study concerns the ways in which musicians who identify strongly with country music genres may refer to Christian ideologies and rhetoric in order to differentiate a distinct attitude

⁵⁸ For examples of desert country-gospel, listen to the Kintore Gospel Band and Mount Liebig Band (Imparja Recordings ca 1988), the Country Wranglers (CAAMA Music 1999) and Trevor Adamson (CAAMA Music 1997). Often one or more country gospel songs can also be found on albums by community based rock and reggae bands, see for example Titjikala Desert Oaks Band (CAAMA Music 1989), Blackstorm (CAAMA Music 1995) and Blackshadow Band (CAAMA Music 2000)..

⁵⁹ Hermannsburg was also the home of Albert Namatjira, the first famous Australian Aboriginal painter in the late 1930s. Namatjira and other Hermannsburg artists were instrumental in bringing country music to the mission, using part of their artwork earnings to buy gramophones and country records.

to music making and a related sense of manhood. They may, for instance, draw on Christian ideals of a morally responsible and mature manhood in order to assert themselves as country musicians and men, by condemning the “immoral” and sinful behaviours of musicians that adhere more to rock music aesthetics and male styles. I discuss such competing, genre-related ideas of manhood more in Chapter Five.

As rock, reggae and country musicians grow older it is not unusual that they gradually turn to gospel music making, especially in more traditionally oriented settings. This coincides with the increased male social and ritual responsibilities and status that comes with maturing age in local Aboriginal regimes, which resonate with aspects of ideal Christian models of adult masculinity that emphasise male responsibility for the protection and leadership of families and communities. A man’s increased commitment to making gospel music as he grows older may thus be seen as a private and public expression and affirmation of a respected model of mature manhood in which customary and Christian values are co-implicated

It is not uncommon to find rock and reggae musicians playing with the “gospel mob”, either. Warlpiri rock guitarist Clifford Brown, for instance, frequently played various instruments in local gospel bands during my field study. He simply likes the “nice sound” of gospel songs, he said. Many musicians who grew up with gospel are similarly nostalgically attached to the sound and childhood familiarity of these tunes. There are also more pragmatic reasons for joining the gospel mob. Members of community bands are frequently scattered over the region when doing time in prison, playing football in other community teams, visiting relatives, drinking in towns, and so forth. As Clifford explained, to play with the gospel mob is a good way to keep his fingers in practice while his fellow band members “get their act together”.

Importantly, too, from their somewhat elevated social and moral standing, community churches are often able to keep a decent set of instruments and sound equipment. Other musical gear (and material things in general) normally circulates and is heavily used in networks of kin and friends where it soon deteriorates, and it is usually finished off when children get their hands on it.

In contrast to local Aboriginal women, then, men move in and out of the gospel music realm with relative ease, with country music being the most closely related in terms of musical styles and values.

Country rules

One cannot overestimate the social, emotional and musical importance of country music in indigenous Australian settings. More or less every adult indigenous person I meet in Australia can recount childhoods with uncles strumming away on beat-up acoustic guitars, singing tunes of such old American country greats as Hank Williams, Jimmie Rodgers and Charlie Pride as well as Australian country legends such as Tex Morton, Buddy Williams and Slim Dusty. Mothers, aunties and sisters know their Loretta Lynn, Patsy Cline and Peggy Lee songs. The immense private and public importance country music plays in indigenous Australia has also been noted by an increasing number of music scholars and writers (Breen 1989, 1992; Brunton 1987; Dunbar-Hall and Gibson 2004; Ellis 1994; Ellis, Brunton and Barwick 1988; Narogin 1990; Reeves 1985; Ryan 2003; Smith 2005; Walker 2000). It is worth noting, too, that country music has been similarly adopted and embedded as meaningful among indigenous people elsewhere in the world (Diamond 2001; Keillor 1995; Whidden 1984).

In Central Australia, Aboriginal musicians take country music so much for granted as a constant in their lives that they often forget to mention it when I ask what types of non-traditional or whitefella music they heard when growing up. As they always have had men playing this music around them, many do not think of country as an “introduced” or whitefella music, either, but as a diverse blackfella everyday practice and musical tradition.

As mentioned, one common country style in Aboriginal Central Australia is a rustic country-gospel. Another persistent regional country style and related male imagery derives from the early non-secular American hillbilly, cowboy-style singing and Australian bush balladry. These styles arrived in Central Australia in the 1930s with travelling white showmen such as the legendary New Zealand-born Tex Morton, and Australians Buddy Williams and Slim Dusty. This music was also a mainstay of touring country variety or rodeo shows that became regular and highly popular features of rural and remote Australia from the 1940s (Latta 1991; Smith 1994; Watson 1975, 1983; Whiteoak 2003). While targeting white rural audiences, these travelling artists also attracted and inspired Aboriginal people. For some white country artists, such as Slim Dusty, Aboriginal audiences have turned out to be their most loyal supporters over a lifelong career, while white fans have turned to other musical styles (Dusty and McKean 1996; also see Fitzgerald and Hayward 2003).

From the 1950s, Hollywood western movies with singing cowboys were screened in Alice Springs and in remote Aboriginal settlements, which further contributed to the hillbilly repertoire and related male imagery in the region. Throughout the 1960s, these films also introduced the sub-genre of instrumental country guitar music, which is still prevalent throughout the desert region, mainly in the style of The Shadows and that of both sweet, ambient and fast, joyous finger picking Mexican/Spanish guitar styles.

The legacy of bush ballad and hillbilly country is most evident in the repertoire of middle-aged or older regional Aboriginal country musicians. The more prominent country style among the next generation, and popular among the “oldfellas”, too, is in the tradition of American 1950s and 1960s honky tonk style country, a style embodied by white American artists such as Hank Williams, Merle Haggard and George Jones. These styles were introduced through recordings, films, radio and later television and video. In the 1960s, rock versions of honky tonk music were subsequently adopted and developed by younger Aboriginal men. Forms of bluegrass can also be heard, most notably through the work of local musician Lyndon Reid.⁶⁰

Country shows toured remote Australia into the 1980s and thus played an important role for shaping several generations of local indigenous country styles. The shows usually included talent quests, which indigenous musicians entered. A few shows, most notably the Brian Young show in the 1970s and 1980s, would pick out the most skilled musicians in those showcases of local talent and offer them a place in the touring show band for a period (Walker 2000). Some of these indigenous men, and a few women, went on to successful solo careers, also in genres other than country music. In Central Australia, three musicians who have made a career beyond the regional Aboriginal music scene during the 1980s and 1990s were part of the Brian Young Show at one stage – Sammy Butcher, Frank Yamma and Warren H. Williams.

While thus emerging in intercultural processes, the social history of the dominating styles of Aboriginal country music in Central Australia is closely linked to a few “oldfella” Aboriginal musicians who are well-known, respected, and still influential for music makers in the region.

⁶⁰ For the bluegrass of Lyndon Reid, hear his debut album “Make a start” (CAAMA Music 2002).

Oldfella country men

The man who firmly established hillbilly country and bush balladry in Aboriginal Central Australia during the 1940s was Herbie Laughton, acknowledged as “the grandfather of country music in the Northern Territory” (Walker 2000:70). Now in his late seventies and living in Alice Springs, Herbie is a fit looking man, peering through his glasses and commonly appearing in a light brown felt Akubra. Fair skinned enough to pass for a white man, Herbie was fathered by a Russian miner and his mother was of mixed Arrernte and European ancestry. Under the “breeding out the colour” policy at the time, Herbie was taken away from his mother (who in turn had been taken from her mother) at the age of two and kept in the Bungalow, the “half-caste” institution in Alice Springs, until he was twelve. It was here Herbie first heard country music, when the yodelling hillbilly showman Tex Morton came through and performed. “First time I’ve seen anyone playing the guitar and playing the mouth organ you see! I was only about, would’ve been seven, eight then. And I thought, ‘jeez, I would love to play like that’, get into music like that”, Herbie tells me.

Released from the abuse and constant hunger at the Bungalow in 1939, Herbie spent the war and post-war years moving around the Northern Territory and South Australia looking for his mother, while surviving on work (mainly compensated with food and lodging) on cattle and sheep stations, in mining camps, the civil corps and other odd jobs. He bought his first guitar at the age of fifteen and taught himself to play the tunes of artists such as Tex Morton, Buddy Williams and Jimmie Rodgers. After the war, Herbie formed the first country band in Central Australia, playing for Aboriginal audiences at the “old Gap cottages”, the early, basic and overcrowded housing for “half-castes” in Alice Springs (Rowse 1998:190).

Herbie taught himself to read and write after leaving the Bungalow and penned his first song in 1947, the now regional classic “Old MacDonnell Ranges” (a significant feature of the Alice Springs landscape). It took another 18 years before he wrote down his next tune. From the dust and grit of working with sheep and cattle, Herbie came down with a serious throat condition that damaged his vocal cords and he gave up singing for years. He married in the early 1950s, had six children, and got a government job constructing roads all over the Territory, a job he stayed in for 38 years until he retired. He kept playing his country guitar at the road camps, which also attracted Aboriginal locals. He gradually reclaimed his singing voice, although not his ability to yodel.

In the mid-1960s, Herbie was urged to return as a stage performer by the already mentioned Gus Williams from Hermannsburg. As a boy, Gus saw Herbie perform at the “old cottages”, an experience that shaped Gus’s subsequent life long devotion to country music. Encouraged by Gus, Herbie started writing music again. By the mid-1970s he had produced a long repertoire of now classic regional bush ballads. His lyrics are firmly rooted in the Central Australian landscape and tell somewhat nostalgic stories of his own and other Aboriginal people’s life experiences through radically changing times. Some of the tunes appear on the only two albums Herbie has recorded, the first with the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association in Alice Springs in 1983, and the second in 1999 in the legendary Lindsay Butler studio in Tamworth, the country music capital of Australia.⁶¹

As he told me at his kitchen table one afternoon, it was through playing, singing and writing country music that Herbie dealt with his deep feelings of alienation and discrimination as a “half-caste”, estranged from his black kin and never feeling accepted among whites,

the only thing that kept me going was my music, you know. Like it was me’ wife, it was my friend (thumping his hand at the kitchen table), it was my... everything! I had nothing else! I taught me’self the guitar. I took me’ music from here, before I got married, up to Darwin, right through on the islands. In my music I was trying to (get) people to understand what I was going through. I wasn’t trying to put in the bad things. The bad things were hurting me. I didn’t like to put that in songs to hurt other people. I wanted to put a little bit in there, just to show that sadness I went through.

While causing such grief and sadness, Herbie’s mixed ancestry and fair skin also gave him greater freedom to move around than most Aboriginal people in Central Australia at the time. He was thus able to share his music and inspire, influence and teach people in a variety of indigenous settings. He, for instance, taught another most influential “oldfella” Aboriginal country musician in the region, the late Isaac Yamma, how to play the guitar. Herbie urged young Yamma, mostly as a joke, to go to Alice Springs town and play in the street. Yamma took the advice seriously, and his showy busking performances in Alice Springs main-street became part of the now legendary Yamma musical and personal character.

A Pitjantjatjara man, Isaac Yamma was born in the mid-1940s in the remote Western desert, to parents who had not yet seen a white man (Walker 2000). From an

⁶¹ See “Herbie Laughton” (Imparja 1983), and “Country from the heart” (Pindaroo Music 1999).

early age, he was hooked on white American Jimmy Reeves' early hillbilly style music (before his crooning career), and started performing and writing songs in Pitjantjatjara language in the late 1960s. He drilled his four sons in playing the guitar and drums and formed them into his own Pitjantjatjara Country Band that toured Aboriginal desert communities for years. Yamma's regional fame took on a whole new and mass-mediated dimension when he became one of the first broadcasters with CAAMA Radio in the early 1980s, never shy to promote himself and his music on air.

Many remarkable stories circulate about Isaac Yamma, about his unorthodox kind of hillbilly music that was interceded with yells, rap-style talking and hollers, his showy performing style in flash satin shirts and Santa Fe boots, his charismatic personality and ringing laugh. Other accounts evoke a black man with an oversized ego who demanded to be treated as a star and genius, and a stern father and husband who did not hesitate to use violence to resolve domestic and other matters. Part of the Yamma legend was made at one of the biggest Aboriginal music festivals in Northern Territory history, *Sing Loud Play Strong*, held in Darwin in 1989.⁶² Bill Davis, festival organiser and a good friend of Yamma, recalls the difficulties associated with bringing together a large number of Aboriginal musicians from different groups and regions. Many camped at the Bagot Aboriginal reserve in Darwin where the drinking went somewhat overboard, with ensuing fighting between Top End and desert people. Bill describes how Yamma yelled at the fighters to stop "or he was gonna knock them all out. Somebody cheesed him, and he took off his belt and he wrapped it around his hand. And according to legend he laid out fourteen of them... And the big point is that he knocked out two of his sons as well. So it was non-discriminatory!"

Isaac Yamma passed away in 1990. When a Central Australian Aboriginal person dies, customs prescribe a taboo on using the first name, visual representations or sounds of the person for a period that varies with his or her importance. A sign of the respect Isaac Yamma commanded as a tribal man and musician across the desert region is the restriction lasting more than a decade on using his first name, visual images of him, and on playing his music.⁶³

⁶² A selection of live performances from the festival was released as "*Sing Loud, Play Strong*" (CAAMA Music 1990) and as a video (CAAMA Production 1999).

⁶³ Isaac Yamma's released tracks on "*Desert Songs*" 1 and 2 (Imparja Recordings 1982 and 1983), "*Papal Concert in Alice Springs*" (Imparja Recordings 1988) and two cassette albums with The Pitjantjatjara Country Band (Imparja Recordings 1983 and 1988).

Gus Williams is a third, widely influential “oldfella” country music man in Central Australia. Gus does not write his own material but has been a formidable force as an organiser and promoter for Aboriginal country music in the desert region, and he has encouraged numerous young men to pursue country music careers. A Western Arrernte-Warumungu man, Gus was born in Alice Springs in the late 1930s and was taken to his grandfather in Hermannsburg mission when his parents passed away in the 1950s. While singing in the mission’s church choir in his late teens, he also took to playing the country he heard in Alice Springs and on vinyl recordings brought to the mission by his uncles. As mentioned, this initially landed him in strife with the strict Lutheran missionaries, which didn’t stop him taking a group of local men to perform (for free) for tourists at singsong camp fire sessions at nearby Palm Valley.

Gus trained his sons Warren and Baydon to play the guitar from the age of five or six and included them in his first band, which travelled around and played in Aboriginal settings from the mid-1960s. By the 1970s Gus had moved the family to his mother’s country some 500 km north of Alice Springs where he was elected community council president of the settlement of Warrabri, now Ali Curung (see map 1). Here he formed the first electric country band in the Northern Territory, the Warrabri Country Bluegrass Band, with his sons and other male relatives. In 1978, he took the band to perform at the third annual National Aboriginal Country Music Festival in Perth, Western Australia. Inspired by the experience, Gus organised the first Northern Territory Aboriginal Country Music Festival in Alice Springs. The year after, in 1980, he moved it to Ali Curung. The festival became an annual showcase for regional Aboriginal country music for a few years, attracting thousands of Aboriginal people and also interstate artists. By the late 1980s, Gus had moved the family back to Hermannsburg which had now been handed over to an Aboriginal community council. He recorded his first cassette album on his own Ntjalka Record label, followed by five more releases.⁶⁴

Besides his country music career, Gus Williams has been a strong, independent and well respected community leader and advocate for his people. This commitment earned him the Order of Australia in 1983. He has now held the position as council

⁶⁴ Gus Williams and his Country Ebony band released “Storm in my heart” (Ntjalka 1989), “I’m not trying to forget” (Ntjalka 1991), “Straight from the heart” (Ntjalka 1992), the instrumental “Southern Cross” (Ntjalka 1993), the gospel album “My kind of heaven” (Ntjalka 1993) and “Through the years” (Hadley 1994).

chairman of Hermannsburg for many years, and is an important tribal elder for the Western Arrernte.

The musical partnership between Gus and Herbie has been at the core of Aboriginal country music life in Central Australia for almost four decades as they have toured Aboriginal communities extensively and organised regular Aboriginal country shows. During my field stay, these two elderly men still headed the Alice Springs Country Music Association and emceed the fortnightly country dances that attracted hundreds of predominantly Aboriginal people. They have thus been central in creating a regular performance space for established as well as upcoming Aboriginal country musicians. In this space, certain regional country music styles and related masculine forms continue to be reinforced and transformed as younger men craft their sense of worth as respected musicians and men.⁶⁵

Oldfella legacy in youngfella fame

Warren H. Williams is currently the most successful Aboriginal country artist in Central Australia. A Western Arrernte man in his early forties, he is the oldest son of Gus Williams. Warren has thus been thoroughly schooled in “oldfella” desert country by performing with his father and Herbie since he was a young boy.

Valuing both Aboriginal and Western education, Gus sent Warren to interstate boarding colleges after he had been initiated in traditional ways. “I didn’t appreciate what he was doing at the time”, Warren says, shaking his head over the strict discipline and alien worlds he experienced in those faraway places. “But looking from where I am

⁶⁵ While these “oldfella” country music men have been well-known all over the desert region, numerous others have greatly influenced, mentored and inspired music making in their particular sub-regions, language groups and communities. It is a risky business to try to name them all because such a list could never be complete and may offend those not mentioned. Many have also passed away. However, because the musicians I have worked with frequently pay respect to their “oldfella” predecessors I wish to pay my respect, too, to the bands and musicians most often referred to. Among them are The Bushrangers in Lajamanu, the Red Sand Band in Yuendumu, Arrernte men like Greg Armstrong, Irwin Inkamala and the Country Lads, and further west, Daniel Brumby and Ted Kunia and the Country Wranglers. Southward, Pitjantjatjara men Trevor Adamson, Pantju “Punch” Thompson and Bill Wellington have been highly influential, as have the musicians playing in their supporting bands. To all other local “oldfella” country men I have not mentioned here, I extend my respect. Now in their sixties, Bob Randall and Auriel Andrews are two other well-known country musicians who originate in Central Australia but who in the main made their fame elsewhere. Pitjantjatjara man Randall was taken away as a child to the “half-caste” mission institution at Croker Island in the Top End where he was inspired to take up country music after a visit by Herbie Laughton and his “strong country” (Walker 2000). Randall’s 1962 song “Brown Skin Baby” has become a kind of anthem for generations of state-removed indigenous children. Arrernte woman Auriel Andrews was instrumental in re-launching “Brown Skin Baby” in the 1980s. Born in Darwin, growing up in Alice Springs and living most of her adult life elsewhere in Australia, Auriel is related to Herbie who she calls “uncle”. She had a big hit at the age of 22 with “Truck Drivin’ Woman” and went on to make her career through national television and touring country music shows.

at now”, he continues and opens his arms in a wide, holding gesture with upturned palms, “you know, my stepmother being white and that, too, I’m one of the fortunate ones. I know how to talk to both sides, I have always lived in both. I can talk to everyone”.

Back from boarding schools, Warren played in his father’s band and took up all the bad habits he thought came with being a true musician. He became a heavy drinker, took drugs, sniffed petrol, got into fights and all kinds of related trouble. He often performed drunk and even fell off the stage for this reason. This lifestyle also directly impacted on his musical styles. For instance, he damaged a hand in a car accident which changed the way he plays the guitar, and he credits his somewhat husky singing voice to having his nose broken more than once in fights.

After a collapse in the early 1990s when his heart almost gave up, Warren stopped drinking, smoking, taking drugs and even coffee. To recover and change his lifestyle he focused on his music. It resulted in his first original song, “Western Wind”, a full-sounding country rock tune with electric acoustic guitar reminiscent of Dire Straits. He subsequently wrote a string of strong country songs with a comfortable, swinging rock groove to them, many firmly in the honky tonk tradition. Warren released a first solo album with CAAMA in 1995. Three years later he released a second album on which several songs are co-produced with well-known Australian country and folk music artists including indigenous Jimmy Little and non-indigenous John Williamson, John Chester and Ted Egan.

By this time, Warren had formed a productive musical partnership with John Williamson, Australia’s foremost folk-country musician. The two men have toured and recorded together occasionally ever since.⁶⁶ While humbly crediting Williamson as a huge influence on his own music making and for his “good fortune”, Warren has become a highly accomplished musician in his own right; a prolific songwriter with three more albums released.⁶⁷ He continues to work with local Aboriginal musicians in recordings and performances, while also increasingly collaborating with non-indigenous Australian country artists and producers.

⁶⁶ For more on John Williamson’s “hyper-Australian style” and early collaboration with Warren, see Smith (Smith 2005:119-125).

⁶⁷ Warren’s releases include “Western Wind” (CAAMA Music 1995), “Country friends and me” (CAAMA Music 1998), “Where my heart is” (CAAMA Music 2000), “Places in between” (CAAMA Music 2002) and “Be like home” (CAAMA Music 2005). He also appears on recordings with John Williamson, and on compilation albums.

Warren's distinct style of country music is anchored in the oldfella legacy of Aboriginal desert country. At the same time, he has crafted a highly personal sound that fuses Australian folk or roots singer-songwriter traditions, and many of his lyrics are firmly embedded in the desert landscape, his Aboriginal experiences and dedicated to Aboriginal people and places. This combination, and his passionate commitment to a musical life, has proved highly successful. Beside his job as a CAAMA Radio broadcaster, Warren is now frequently invited to perform at high-profile national events – both indigenous and non-indigenous – and he continues to be nominated for and winning national music awards.

Unlike his brother Baydon who has also released an album, Warren writes songs in English only.⁶⁸ “I never wanted to write country in Arrernte”, he says, “it doesn't seem right for “real” country music”. While other regional indigenous musicians may not agree that English is a defining feature of “real” country, they nevertheless share some notions about the “real” quality of their particular country music. Such notions involve certain global and local norms for musical and male ways of identifying.

Real country men

As in any musical culture, the Central Australian Aboriginal country music scene is internally highly diverse and continuously changing. Regardless of this diversity, local Aboriginal musicians usually distinguish their country as “real” country. They commonly substantiate their notion of “real” country by contrasting it with what they perceive it is not: “American” or “Nashville” country, denoting a less “authentic”, commercially standardised pop quality and attitude. Committed local country musicians occasionally lament the fact that mainstream, white Australian country seems to develop in precisely that “American” direction. They tend to perceive their own regional music making as part of a last stronghold for “real” country.

The local meanings the Aboriginal musicians attach to “real” versus “American” country largely coincide with the opposing concepts of “hard-core” and “soft-shell”, which have long been part of understanding, identifying with and marketing different styles of country world wide (Akenson 2003; Beal and Peterson 2001; also see Fox 2004; Peterson 1997). While the particular music and performance styles, dress codes, lyrical themes and artistic imagery of “hard-core” country change over time and

⁶⁸ Baydon Williams' self-titled album was released by CAAMA Music (1999).

between places, “in general it involves looking, talking, and acting like one of the audience and not like a professional entertainer with a fine singing voice, fashionable clothes, and the professional stage manner of a soft-shell entertainer” (Beal and Peterson 2001:236). In contrast to notions of “soft-shell” country as commercial, inauthentic, insincere, slick and formulaic, the “hard-core” end of country is also generally associated with notions of “home made, traditional, authentic, sincere, honest, from the heart” (Akenson 2003:191).

Such “hard-core” features reappear in Aboriginal concepts of “real” country in Central Australia, too, where country musicians are valued for being unpretentious and for not distinguishing themselves by way of dress or manners from their blackfella audiences. These expressive features are compatible and historically intertwined with some highly valued adult male characteristics and ways of sustaining relatedness in Aboriginal desert societies. As described in the literature, generosity and unselfishness are primary virtues in gaining respect as an autonomous, mature man in these societies. This is associated with a show of “general restraint and unassertiveness of individuals over their comrades” (Myers 1986:103), and not putting oneself forward or appearing self-important (e.g. Meggitt 1962; Tonkinson 1974). Local Aboriginal norms for respected male demeanour thus correspond with the low-key, unassuming artistic imagery in “real” or “hard-core” country (Beal and Peterson 2001:234). The interculturally produced male styles of the regional rural industry that I discussed in Chapter Two also resonate with these masculine and musical forms. Local notions of a “real” quality of Aboriginal country music thus involve a merging of various, partly resonating male and musical models from which coherent, always “mongrel” senses of contemporary male and Aboriginal selves and musics emerge.

Some lyrical themes of Aboriginal desert country songs correspond with those of “hard-core” global country conventions, too. The themes of male loners expressing nostalgic and heartfelt longings for (lost) love and one’s home country, and of being down and out in a bar, in jail, or on the road and striving to become a better person, are common also in Aboriginal desert country. The theme of heartbreak and love is likewise common, although female subjects may be both human and mythical beings. The Aboriginal version of yearning for one’s home country is, moreover, mainly connected to belonging to one’s Aboriginal kin. This may be expressed through description of desert ranges, water holes or plains that are marked with specific kin-related totemic and ancestral meanings. The respect for one’s home country and people is also expressed

through lyrics about intercultural historical local events and injustices that have become part of particular groups' collective memory and shared sense of identification, such as the songs about the killings of indigenous people that I mentioned in Chapter Two.

In a music scene characterised by "mongrel" forms of genres, none of these themes are exclusive to country songs, though. They are also the most common in Aboriginal desert rock and reggae music, to which I now turn.

Desert rock and reggae

From the 1950s, various styles of Anglo-American rockabilly, rock'n'roll, rock and pop music entered Aboriginal settings in Central Australia in the form of vinyl recordings, cassette tapes and via radio. Movies, and later, television and video film are other avenues for new sounds to reach remote communities and townships, and for introducing far-away life worlds and masculine styles associated with these musics.

The earliest Aboriginal "rock'n'roll" bands and musicians in the desert region appeared in the 1970s and mainly played straight country-rock covers.⁶⁹ 1960s surf rock styles and instrumental country rock guitar music have also been persistently popular all over the region. The Surfari's surf rock tune "Wipe Out", for instance, is frequently requested and played several times at any local Aboriginal music performance. Such early country-rock bands as the Poor Boys in Yuendumu, Ilkari Maru from Docker River and the Warumpi Band from Papunya started out performing for Aboriginal audiences in their own and neighbouring desert settlements (see map 1). When CAAMA began broadcasting locally made Aboriginal music in the early 1980s, musicians all over the region were inspired to form bands and write new music in their own languages, about their own experiences, people and country. They took their songs to CAAMA to be broadcast and recorded. CAAMA thus became a catalyst for the expansion and diversification of the regional Aboriginal music scene during the 1980s.⁷⁰

The 1970s and early 1980s was the golden age for edgy, loud, male pub rock and hard rock more generally in Australia (Cockington 2001; Creswell and Fabinyi

⁶⁹ For a rare written account of such music activities in a desert community, Yuendumu, see the Warlpiri newsletter "Junga Yimi" (unknown 1996:8-14).

⁷⁰ Batty notes how a similar "renaissance in traditional dance, performance and singing" (1993:113) was engendered by the video productions of the early Aboriginal community based media associations that were established in the region in the early to mid-1980s; Ernabella Video Television (EVTV) on Pitjantjatjara lands in the South Australian border area, and the Warlpiri Media Association (WMA) in Yuendumu.

1999; Hayward 1992). This was reflected in the musical direction taken by the young and mainly male Aboriginal and white staff and musicians around the CAAMA studio, which produced black rock with a certain male attitude. Ross Muir, an early, white studio training officer captures some of this stance when describing the Wedgetail Eagles, a band from Fregon (Kaltjiti) community. They turned up at the studio and declared “‘Yeah, we’ve got these songs’, and we’d say, ‘OK! Great! Cool!’... Oh, I love them! Just the black boys from the bush. They got no suit, they got no shoes, and (it was) like, ‘all you white boys better watch out, us black boys are in town!’”

This was also rock music associated with hard drinking, drug taking and sexually potent male musicians, an image adopted by quite a few of the Aboriginal rock musicians.⁷¹ As Ross puts it,

because the fame was almost instant, you know, all of a sudden them boys who were innocent and came in with the best desire to play music, suddenly they became famous in their own sort of lunch time, when played on the radio. And they got into all the sort of accoutrements of fame. They got drinking, women... Not necessarily bad things, but if you don’t know how to do it in moderation, you’re going to go for a fall. And a lot of these people have, well, died. If they haven’t died, they’ve been in jail, they’ve hurt themselves. ... So it was amazing transformation, and it was very hard for some to take.

CAAMA Music employed its first manager, Bill Davis, in the mid-1980s. Bill is a white musician and educator with years of experience of remote Aboriginal community work and music, and he speaks Aboriginal languages. He describes the early recording men “true bush musicians”. He would tune the guitars for them before recording, and they kept de-tuning them. “It was complete unorthodoxy! The thing was that they were used to two, three strings only. And so they tuned them up. And so they played with the intervals they had! Couldn’t play tuned guitars! I’ve done it myself. You just use whatever’s there. And the song you come up with depends on the instrument you have!”

Variations of reggae music became increasingly prominent in the repertoire of Aboriginal bush musicians from the late 1980s. As part of a worldwide musical and political movement, reggae music had a huge impact on indigenous popular music all

⁷¹ As illustrated by the brief biography of Warren H. Williams earlier, variations of such imagery appear also in country music. Aspects of such imagery also resonate with certain strands of Aboriginal male culture more generally, as I will discuss in coming chapters.

over Australia, beginning in the late 1970s when Bob Marley toured Australia.⁷² A range of reggae variations have since developed in different indigenous settings and regions (Dunbar-Hall 1998). The particular styles of reggae that have emerged in the desert region are often played more in a rock (or country-rock) music register than in those of Jamaican or global reggae styles.

In this music scene, both rock and reggae styles are typically “guitarocentric”, with guitarists being the primary composers and soloists (Walser 1993:xv). Both rock and reggae include many of the globally conventional rock music parameters, such as distorted electric guitars, power chords and riffs. Aboriginal desert reggae contains the trademarks of its globally highly diffused meta-genre, such as a continuous, repetitive riff to provide a dance beat, and accented off-beats on all four beats on the rhythm guitar (Gayle 1996). These features are commonly reworked with a quickening of tempo, rock drum patterns, country style guitars, and gospel tinged keyboards. Keyboards are also commonly used for reinforcing the off-beat strumming of rhythm guitars. Both rock and reggae songs follow the standard rock song pattern of an introduction followed by alternating verses, chorus and solo guitar breaks (Regev 2002; Walser 1993).

While including standard globalised features, Aboriginal rock and reggae from Central Australia cannot be mistaken for rock music from anywhere else. As in any music scene, individual Aboriginal musicians and groups have elaborated their own recognisable playing styles. These variations nevertheless have certain “desert mob” characteristics in common. One of the most noticeable of those is a busy or dense tendency. When these musicians work their songs, for instance, they are more likely to add features in order to create a certain feel or sound than hold back, vary or nuance their playing. The songs therefore tend to leave little breathing space.

Thus typically free of musical elaborations or nuances, Aboriginal desert rock and reggae take on a distinctive straight forward, “no-frills”, somewhat rustic sound. Part of this sound also derives from the fact that vocals usually are secondary to instrumental skills for the musicians and regional audiences. In global rock and reggae

⁷² The first, nationally recognised indigenous Australian reggae band was No Fixed Address, formed by a group of young male students at CASM, The Centre for Aboriginal Studies in Music, in Adelaide, at the time Bob Marley performed in that city. The band’s musical development was strongly influenced by Marley’s style of reggae and the political and strong black identity statements of his lyrics and performances. NFA’s influence on other indigenous artists was boosted by their appearance in the 1981 film “Wrong Side of the Road”, a rather unique production in its time in that it featured an Aboriginal band, their music and the working conditions for indigenous artists in contemporary Australia (Lawe Davies 1993).

conventions, the singing voice is often used to emphasise melodic qualities or for expressing a range of emotionally evocative sounds and states of mind. In Aboriginal Central Australia, however, vocals are commonly delivered in an urgent and spontaneous manner, frequently lacking vibrato or emotional elaborations, and singers do not always develop a great range of vocal depths or nuances. In general, vocals are not the centre of attention for regional Aboriginal audiences, either. The intensity and yearning quality of a voice, the singer's social affiliations, or the local language that is sung typically produce more passionate responses than the delivery of melodic and perfect tonal harmonies according to Western musical traditions.

As a producer and broadcaster of regional Aboriginal music, CAAMA has played its role in shaping regional rock and reggae styles and lyrical themes. A main aim of the first CAAMA Music manager, Bill Davis, was to encourage musicians to make songs in their own languages on matters close to themselves and their Aboriginal communities. So they did, and so do subsequent generations of Aboriginal musicians in the region. They write rock and reggae songs in local languages and English about the detrimental effects of drinking and petrol sniffing in their communities. They sing about children crying out for mothers and fathers who have left for a drinking life in town. They sing about their attachment to specific country and home communities. In the songs, the men also anchor themselves in particular Aboriginal histories and places by recounting stories about how their people used to live on these lands in the old days. Rock and reggae songs also urge people to respect and demand recognition for their ancestral country. Numerous songs are about yearning for love, heartbreak, and the seductive danger of mythical female beings. These musicians also churn out pure, simple and fun rock'n'roll dance party music. Their lyrics and titles are typically pretty straightforward affairs and free of decorative metaphors, such as "Woman wants me to come home", "Worried about my horse"⁷³, "Soakage water hole"⁷⁴, "We are proud"⁷⁵, "Party tonight"⁷⁶ and "Land is our life".⁷⁷

As rock and reggae styles have been reworked in highly individual and localised variations, a trained ear can soon identify the geographical or social locality of a particular Aboriginal rock band or a piece of music from the overall sound, beat and

⁷³ Both songs from Blackshadow Band (CAAMA Music 2001).

⁷⁴ Jimmy Langdon (CAAMA Music 1999).

⁷⁵ Ltyentye Apurte Band (CAAMA Music 2001).

⁷⁶ Lajamanu Teenage Band (CAAMA Music 1998).

⁷⁷ North Tanami Band (CAAMA Music 2003).

styles of playing. Musicians and audiences in the region recognise and evaluate these localised styles not only through musical detail, but also through associations with individual men, or/and with the particular Aboriginal socialities in which particular styles of music operate. Papunya Rock and Warlpiri Reggae can illustrate how such sociomusical conceptions operate to produce a complex of regional Aboriginal distinctions.

Papunya Rock and Warlpiri Reggae

A regional Aboriginal rock style that is so widely recognised that it has a vernacular name is that of Papunya Rock. It alludes to the kind of basic, straight and urgent rock beat that the Warumpi Band from Papunya community developed during the 1970s and early 1980s, and that relied heavily on the characteristic guitar playing style of Sammy Butcher. An occasion that exemplifies how Sammy has come to signify the particular Papunya Rock style and sound was when the Papunya school band was recording in the CAAMA studio. The studio workers and Aboriginal musicians who walked in on the event constantly dropped comments like “ah, now that’s a real Sammy Butcher!” about a guitar riff or a shift of pace in a song.⁷⁸ In rehearsals or recordings with other bands, I similarly heard musicians refer to “a Sammy Butcher” when explaining to fellow band members how to play a particular guitar or drum pattern.

Sammy is a Luritja speaking man, now in his mid-forties, who grew up and still lives in Papunya. He learnt to play the guitar by sneaking in to the white schoolteacher’s house on his way to and from primary school, as this was where one of the few playable guitars in Papunya was kept. He mentions the Beatles and Spanish-Mexican guitar music of Hollywood western movies as important early musical influences. Later on, the style and sound of guitarist Mark Knopfler of Dire Straits clearly impacted on his guitar playing.

When Sammy returned to Papunya after boarding college in Alice Springs he and a couple of brothers and male relatives formed the country-rock band that was to become the Warumpi Band. Neil Murray, a young, white schoolteacher who came to work in Papunya soon joined the band and he and Sammy began to write songs in

⁷⁸ This would be true not only in a musical but also in a social sense as younger generations of the Butcher family were indeed members of this school-boy band. It should be noted, too, that Sammy released his first solo album in 2002 (CAAMA Music 2002), a wholly instrumental affair with Mark Knopfler-inspired guitar playing and slick Spanish style picking. He called his album “Desert surf guitar”. The term “desert surf” is also used locally for more laid back, “groovy” styles of Aboriginal reggae, and it remains to be seen how the musical and social content of this subgenre term develops.

English and Luritja together. A young, extrovert Gumatj man from Elcho Island, George Rurrumbu, who had come to the desert to learn languages, also joined the band as lead singer and co-songwriter.

As the band travelled and gave impromptu performances for Aboriginal communities in the desert region for a few years, their thumping, rustic guitar rock became immensely popular among Aboriginal audiences. In 1983, they became the first Australian band to record a rock song in an indigenous language, *Jailanguru pakarnu* (meaning "Out from jail" in Luritja), recorded with CAAMA in Alice Springs. It attracted national attention, and in the years that followed the band toured and was invited to perform at numerous high-profile music events and as supporting acts for famous white Australian rock bands all over the country.⁷⁹

When the band ventured out into the national music industry it became increasingly clear that the members had different priorities and aspirations with their music making and lives. Neil worked hard to launch Warumpi on a professional national and international circuit, while George was set on becoming a famous black rock star, not unlike his role model Little Richard. The Papunya members, by then Sammy and his brother Gordon, were mainly motivated by the pleasure of playing music and less concerned with becoming big stars in the white music industry. At times, they didn't turn up for tours or concerts because they prioritised commitments at home. They couldn't always find a lift to Alice to catch a flight, either. Their spots in the band were thus frequently filled with other, mainly non-indigenous musicians from the southeast. When Sammy's parents passed away and one of his brothers, another original member of the Warumpi Band, lost himself in drinking, Sammy effectively retired from the band in order to focus on family and responsibilities in Papunya.

During Warumpi's comeback in the 1990s, Sammy appeared for occasional performances and tours. Neil and George continued to carry the band's distinct profile as an Aboriginal band from the desert, but the music inevitably changed towards a somewhat more refined rock sound. As we shall see in Chapter Eight, this later Warumpi sound has been embraced and has taken on various political and emotional meanings among indigenous and non-indigenous followers all over Australia. For Central Australian Aboriginal musicians and audiences, though, Sammy Butcher still embodies the Papunya Rock style of the "real", original Warumpi. He has taught this

⁷⁹ The Warumpi Band released three full length albums: "Big name, no blankets" (Festival Records 1985), "Go bush!" (Festival Records 1987) and "Too much humbug" (CAAMA Music 1996). Sammy Butcher did not appear on the 1987 recordings.

style at home and it can therefore be recognised in most music coming out of Papunya, and it has also influenced Aboriginal musicians across the region.

In contrast to Papunya Rock, regional “desert reggae” is not as closely associated with a particular individual musician or band. The term is in fact seldom used in conversations between local Aboriginal musicians. They instead tend to describe this distinct music style by mouthing the basic beat, or strumming the characteristic rhythm guitar playing style on real or imagined guitars. They may also mimic a bodily pose that is common when desert guitarists play reggae; a rather disinterested attitude with one hand working overtime in a constant, upward strumming.

When I heard “desert reggae” used or shown among local musicians it often referred to music from the vast Tanami Desert region, which stretches out far to the northwest of Alice Springs (see map 1). The area is largely populated by Warlpiri people.⁸⁰ In this use, then, desert reggae more particularly denotes a Warlpiri musicality and sociality. Even more specifically, it conjures up the sound and style of the Teenage Band from the Lajamanu community (see map 1). They firmly established and made popular this Warlpiri reggae style in the early to mid 1990s. The young men in the Teenage Band picked up on this style from their uncles in the North Tanami Band, which they then fused with elements of early Lajamanu country music, Jamaican ska, and globalised versions of reggae.

One likely reason for the currently strong Warlpiri connotations of desert reggae is the work of the Warlpiri Media Association in Yuendumu, the largest Warlpiri settlement. Like Lajamanu, Yuendumu has produced a large number of rock, reggae and country musicians and band formations over the last three decades. Warlpiri Media was established in 1983 out of local concerns that Warlpiri communities would be bombarded by foreign television with the forthcoming launch of the AUSSAT broadcasting satellite (ATSIC 1999; Michaels 1986, 1987).⁸¹ As part of broader,

⁸⁰ Approximately 3 000 speakers (IAD 2002).

⁸¹ At the time of my fieldwork, Warlpiri Media produced a loose schedule of up to five hours of radio daily, most of it in Warlpiri language and broadcast through the regional PAW radio network (the Pintupi, Anmatyerr, Warlpiri Network) including nine desert communities in these three language areas. In 2006 the number of connected communities has increased to fourteen. Shows were also fed to CAAMA in Alice Springs and retransmitted throughout most of the Northern Territory, regional South Australia and parts of New South Wales. With Ernabella community south in Pitjantjatjara country, Warlpiri Media was one of the first community television stations in Australia when they started to broadcast self-produced VHS video programmes and live to air news on low power “pirate” transmitters, “unauthorized, unfunded, non-commercial, and illegal” (Michaels 1994b:98). It was illegal because this kind of service was not recognised in Australian broadcasting laws at the time. In 1989, Warlpiri Media and six other desert communities in the region finally received broadcast licences for both radio and television. Despite being continually underfunded and periodically experiencing high staff turnover, video production has

national government efforts to establish forms for indigenous self-determination, Warlpiri Media was thus formed as a means for the Warlpiri to control the influx of exogenous media representations and to control the production and circulation of self-representations, in order to maintain Warlpiri culture, language and sociality (Hinkson 1999).

Initially focusing on video production, radio activities have become a central part of Warlpiri Media's operations. As with most indigenous radio stations in the country, music is a major feature of Warlpiri Media broadcasts. They tend to prioritise locally produced music, which is also frequently requested by their indigenous audiences (Hinkson 2004). The media association added a music recording and multimedia section in the 1990s and at the time of my fieldwork their song list consisted of about forty original songs by local musicians that were broadcast regularly through the radio shows. Since then, the recording facilities have been refurbished with up-to-date digital technology. On this site, Warlpiri musicians have continuously recorded and broadcasted, and thus been able to make their particular form of desert reggae (and other musical styles) known all over the region and beyond.

As the examples of Papunya Rock and Warlpiri reggae and the historical outline of music making in the desert region show, Central Australian Aboriginal music making continuously incorporates a range of both indigenous and other local, national and transnational music styles, sounds, practices, ideas and technologies. Such elements are co-implicated in the ongoing intercultural production of distinct "mongrel" Aboriginal musical and male styles, practices and experiences.

Because of the high proportion of Aboriginal people in Central Australia and the rich and diversified musical world of this larger sociality, and also because of the presence of a large, professional music studio at CAAMA and vibrant community based media associations such as Warlpiri Media, these musicians can easily perform and produce music in predominantly blackfella settings throughout their lives. As I will discuss in relation to performances in white dominated towns and touring ventures (Chapters Seven and Eight), the musicians often talk of white musical settings (and white domains in general) as desirable spaces for achieving increased musical recognition and male worth. However, in their actual everyday music practices the

been prolific at Warlpiri Media, and some productions have received national and international acclaim (for more, see www.warlpiri.com.au).

musicians do not refer much to whitefella musicians and music making or compare themselves with them.⁸²

The men pay more attention to other Australian blackfella music making and styles. They frequently refer to other Australian indigenous musicians and compare themselves with them in ongoing music work. It is thus within a larger, blackfella dynamic realm that the Central Australian music makers predominantly define and assert their musical styles and self-perceptions as that of a distinct "desert mob". In this, they are mainly concerned with Aboriginal music and people in the Top End and in the southeast. Music from precisely these two regions has been the most influential for national and global perceptions of Australian Aboriginal popular music. Basically, certain music from the Aboriginal Top End has become a powerful standard for traditionalist imagery, while that of the southeast has provided a basis for perceptions of Aboriginal music as a political tool of resistance.

The Aboriginal desert music scene does not fit this privileged, two-sided conceptual model. I therefore end this chapter by pointing out some distinguishing features between Central Australian Aboriginal music making and that of the Top End and the southeast. It is beyond the scope of my study to analyse the historical intercultural dynamics of these two regions. My more modest aim is to draw attention to the ways in which blackfella music making in Central Australia diverts from the privileged notions of Aboriginal popular music that in the main draw on expressive forms from the Top End and the southeast.

Central Australian and Top End music

What is known as the Australian Top End is the northernmost region of the Northern Territory (see map 1). Besides Darwin (pop. 109 400) and Nhulunbuy (pop. 3 800), where Aboriginal people make up less than ten per cent of the population, the rest of the Top End has a high proportion of Aboriginal people. For instance, 80-90 per cent of the population of East and West Arnhem Land, Bathurst and Melville Islands, and 60-70 per cent of the people in Groote Eylandt and the Daly River region are indigenous.⁸³ As in Central Australia, Aboriginal language and kinship groups in these areas maintain an

⁸² As the example of Warren H. Williams showed, there are exceptions to this general statement. The musicians may also consider individual whitefellas, such as Bill Davis, as belonging to a blackfella sociomusical realm. This is often limited to particular practical, musical or social spaces and situations, though, or for particular periods of time.

⁸³ Statistics from the 2001 Census (ABS 2001).

active ritual and ceremonial life, while battling with serious problems such as poor health, illiteracy, unemployment, violence, and alcohol and substance abuse. Alike in Central Australia, too, a large number of rock, country, reggae and also blues bands have emerged in Aboriginal Top End communities over several decades.⁸⁴

The most striking difference between Central Australian and Top End non-ancestral music making is that Top End artists frequently include what have become the most powerful national and international markers of “traditional” Aboriginal Australia, as discussed in Chapter One; the traditional instruments *yidaki* (didjeridu) and *bilma* (clap sticks), and dancers with traditionally decorated bodies are common features of more recent Top End music making. Musicians also mix ancestral song styles in popular songs, or add ancestral songs on separate tracks on their albums.

In Central Australia, musicians do not mix any such ancestral/traditional features with more recent music genres. At times, desert musicians perform with the red headband that marks them as initiated men, but this may be frowned upon as inappropriate by fellow musicians and audiences. On one such occasion, for instance, a country musician took off his headband backstage and let children play with it. Other musicians commented disapprovingly, basically seeing it as defilement. On another occasion a musician appeared at the recording studio without having washed off the white body paint from a ceremonial event. This offended another musician to the degree that he walked off, stating curtly that only men who do not know their Law have to show it off. The mere presence of ancestral features at sites of non-ancestral music making can thus be seen as inappropriate.

Both Top End and Central Australian musicians write songs in local Aboriginal languages as well as in English. Unlike the Top Enders, however, the desert musicians do not negotiate with senior men to integrate ancestral narratives into rock, country, pop and reggae lyrics. On stage and on CD sleeves, Top End bands frequently introduce these stories and explain their importance for the values, beliefs and customs of their people. Bands in Central Australia rarely put ancestral song themes into context for audiences or on CD jackets.

When desert musicians do write songs on ancestral themes it is mostly on a general level, mainly referring to broader categories of natural and mythical phenomena, as in “Juu Juu” (Devil Storm) or “Yukurpa Dreaming” by the North

⁸⁴ For a detailed study of popular indigenous bands in Arnhem Land and the creative ways in which they integrate traditional influences in their repertoire, see Corn (2002). Also see Furlan (2005).

Tanami Band (CAAMA Music 1999). "Juu Juu" are bad ancestral spirits associated with certain desert storms. Without recounting any detailed narratives about these spirits, the song is a general warning for (Warlpiri) people to be wary during such storms. Jukurrpa (misspelled on the CD cover) is Warlpiri for the fundamental ideological doctrine that was laid down when the world was created, what in English is called the Dreaming/Law. The song is a general statement about the band members' mythical ancestral past and affiliations, without referring to specific events, places or beings. These songs still have specific and powerful meanings for Warlpiri listeners. As Bell notes with regard to the politics of knowledge in Australian indigenous (and other) oral cultures that are characterised by restrictions on access to certain knowledge, "(o)ne may believe in the power of a story, yet not know the details" (Bell 1998:370). That is, people must be prepared to believe and abide by norms even if they do not know the details or understand all levels of meanings of stories.

The Central Australian musicians take their separation of ancestral and non-ancestral music forms for granted and do not reflect much on it unless they are directly asked to do so. If prompted, most of them simply state that "the Law is too strong, too secret" or words to similar effect. "The Law" in its more specific meaning relates to "going through Law", which is the traditional, ritual initiation of young Aboriginal men.⁸⁵ The term is also used in a more general sense for the bodies of localised ritual, social and practical knowledge and norms that guide place and gender specific interpersonal and inter-group relationships and practices. "The Law" is conceived to come from the mythological past of "the Dreaming", when ancestral beings ("Dreamings") gave the world its shape and order through their travels and associated events. Dreamings importantly remain as life-giving forces in the landscape, embodied in rocks, waterholes, trees, animals and other natural features.

The knowledge of specific Dreamings has been held, transferred and re-enacted through narrative song and dance cycles, performed in rituals and ceremonies that are circumscribed by various degrees of sacred, secret or open status. The right to perform and the right to take part of the specific knowledge of any one song cycle or performance is, moreover, restricted according to such factors as a person's or group's

⁸⁵ For more on initiation practices and ritual and ceremonial life in Aboriginal Central Australia, see for instance Bell (2002 [1983]), Berndt (1996 [1964]), Elkin (1974 [1938]), Glowczewski (1998), Meggitt (1962), Munn (1970), Myers (1986, 1995).

gender, age, totem, kin category and sub-section.⁸⁶ Adherence to those restrictions is crucial if the life-giving forces inherent in the performed knowledge are to be recreated. The harsh consequences of breaking such restrictions are very real to the musicians. As an Arrernte musician explained with a chuckle, “I *could* sing about my Dreaming and stuff. Who can stop me? But I’ll probably end up with a spear in my leg.”

Most desert musicians state that they don’t see any reason to mix ancestral and non-ancestral musical traditions. “This is this music, and that is a different one” as one bush musician said matter-of-factly, holding his hands together to the right, and then to the left. “See? Different! Side by side!” he concluded. This compartmentalisation of musical experiences and the separation of musical idioms and expressions of different backgrounds are common also in other indigenous settings. Kaemmer (1993) notes, for instance, how Native Americans and the Inuit people of Greenland and Alaska use both ancestral and non-ancestral musical expression but do not mix them. He interprets this as a social, psychological as well as political phenomenon. He suggests, for instance, that Native Americans compartmentalise occidental and traditional music “so they can enjoy modern idioms but still use traditional music as a means to lay claim to Indian status for the purpose of obtaining land” (190).

Top End musicians, and especially those in Yolngu communities in the North East Arnhem region, in contrast state as one of their main aims to make their ancestral stories, musical elements and values more accessible through non-ancestral music forms. They emphasise how this music is a means to, on the one hand, attract and encourage younger generations to maintain their distinctive culture, and, on the other hand, open a dialogue with non-indigenous audiences in order to achieve greater cross-cultural recognition and respect. The front man of the most famous Top End band, Yothu Yindi, Yolngu musician and school teacher Mandawuy Yunupingu, has perhaps been the most public promoter of this “both-ways” approach (Neuenfeldt 1993b, 1998a).

Magowan (1994a) proposes that internal Yolngu ideological principles serve as a model for Top End musicians’ “two-ways” attitude. Other scholars have suggested to me that it may also be a result of the particular combination of missionary influences and political activist developments that shape contemporary practices in Yirrkala, a Yolngu centre and the home of Yothu Yindi (see map 1). These dynamics have

⁸⁶ For the fundamental connection between ancestral knowledge and music performance in Central Australia, see for instance Elkin (1956), Ellis (1985), Ellis and Barwick (1989), Moyle (1979, 1983, 1986), Strehlow (1971), Turpin (2005), Wild (1975).

encouraged a tradition of more open attitudes, including strategic revelation of sacred aspects, to non-indigenous people and state powers (e.g. Berndt 2001 [1962]; Morphy 1991). There is scant evidence of Central Australian people adopting similar strategies of “sharing” ancestral customs to achieve political goals or greater understanding for their life worlds in non-indigenous realms.

These different approaches have thus emerged through complex, local intercultural and cross-cultural historical processes which I don’t aim to analyse in detail. The main point I wish to make is that the fusion of ancestral and non-ancestral elements in the music of Top End bands (and especially made famous by Yothu Yindi) has become an important standard for expectations of Aboriginal Australian popular music in general. This is associated with the privileging of traditional matters in the evaluation of indigenous artistic expression that I discussed in Chapter One. For musicians in Central Australia, however, the two spheres of ancestral and non-ancestral music and knowledge are ideally kept separate.⁸⁷ This compartmentalisation of ancestral and non-ancestral musical expressions tends to be part of wider strategies to maintain the strength of ancestral traditions. In the Top End, the very linking of these expressive forms seems to achieve similar results.

Moving to differences between Aboriginal musical cultures in Central Australia and those in the southeast, the latter tends to highlight politics and resistance, while “traditional” matters take on other meanings in music and identity work.

⁸⁷ While not as common, I should mention another set of explanations that is put forward by a few more educated Aboriginal musicians but mostly by non-Aboriginal people involved with indigenous music making. They suggest that the separation of ancestral features and recent music forms is a consequence of Central Australian societies being colonised earlier and more systematically by white regimes than those in the Top End. In the process, it is argued, desert people lost more of their sacred objects and knowledge to white people, who, moreover, disseminated such restricted material widely and publicly. Desert people thus have more urgent reasons to protect what is left, in order to keep their distinct cultures strong. I am not convinced by these types of explanations. Firstly, they tend to portray interactions between indigenous and white people in stereotyped caricatures; passive, primitive and gullible natives overpowered by active, ethnocentric, white cultural robbers. Cross-cultural and colonising engagements have evidently always been more complex, pluralistic and ambiguous than that (e.g. Thomas 1991, 1994). Secondly, these interpretations tend to overemphasise the role of whitefellas for explaining blackfella motivations for music making. Desert peoples’ concerns about protecting secret and restricted knowledge are mainly intra-Aboriginal affairs. It is when particular inappropriate Aboriginal “others” are exposed to knowledge that is restricted to them that the consequences may be seriously damaging for the authority and integrity of local knowledge systems (Bell 1998; Michaels 1985; Myers 2002:65). The reason for keeping different musical idioms separate may thus be that people do not wish to display certain ancestral knowledge to particular other Aboriginal individuals and groups. Since most bush musicians in Central Australia in the main direct their music to regional Aboriginal people, not whitefella audiences, this would in fact be a more legitimate (albeit partial) explanation.

Central Australia and the southeast

The south-eastern states of New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia make up the most populated and urbanised region of Australia (see map 1). It includes the two largest metropolitan areas in the country, that of Sydney (pop. 4 million, 1 per cent indigenous people) and Melbourne (pop. 3.3 million, 0.4 per cent indigenous).⁸⁸ The national capital Canberra (pop. 312 000, 1.2 per cent indigenous) is situated between these two cities. The population of South Australia is concentrated near its southern coast, where the state capital Adelaide (pop. 1 million, 1 per cent indigenous) is located.

Today, most indigenous people in the southeast come from several generations of mixed descent, speak English as their first or only language, and organise their life worlds as a small, albeit high-profile minority in a surrounding non-indigenous majority society. As several scholars have shown (Beckett 1988a; Cowlshaw 2004; Gale 1973; Keen 1988a; Morris 1989), indigenous people in these regions tend to sustain distinctive cultural forms and ways of life, thus forming “a distinct, though heterogeneous and loosely bounded ethnic category” (Keen 1988b:3).

Many of the most vocal, radical and accessible advocates for Aboriginal rights have been urban and south-eastern indigenous groups and individuals. As Beckett notes, “(i)f the Gurindji and their friends brought land rights before the Australian public, it was the urban Aborigines who made it a national issue” (Beckett 1988b:208) (the Gurindji being a northern desert group). The south-eastern cities have also been a primary arena for Aboriginal activist campaigns and protest actions, such as the 1972 Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra, at the 1982 Commonwealth Games in Brisbane and the 1988 bicentennial celebration of British settlement in Sydney (Attwood and Markus 1999:256ff; Beckett 1988c; Bennett 1992). It is therefore self-explanatory that the genre of black protest music has a continued strong presence in the southeast, as a means to express the main themes of the Aboriginal rights movement; resistance, survival and cultural revival. And I do find that Koori musicians tend to be motivated by personal experiences of racial injustice and discrimination to a higher degree than in

⁸⁸ Out of the total Australian population of 20 million, 13.2 million people live in New South Wales (NSW), Victoria and South Australia. In NSW 1.9 per cent of the population (6.7 m) is indigenous, 0.5 per cent in Victoria (5 m), and 1.6 per cent in South Australia (1.5 m). This and the statistics in this section of the chapter are from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS 2001, 2004).

Aboriginal Central Australia.⁸⁹ The shaping of a Koori musician's career can illustrate this difference.

Now in his mid-forties, Andy is of the Gunditjmara people and grew up on an Aboriginal mission outside Warrnambool in Western Victoria. He describes a carefree childhood roaming around the forest and with male relatives playing the guitar and singing country songs by the fire down by the river every night. And there was the church music. His parents were drinkers but his father still used to teach him "culture", that is, "where I fitted in". When Andy was ten years old the welfare office moved the family into state housing in Warrnambool. Andy experienced this as a "deep culture shock". Being the only Koori kid in school "I took a lot of flak, racism, a lot of the kids were calling me names". He just "bottled it up... every day was a struggle".

Leaving school he started drinking and "ended up in a lot of strife, because of that, all that racism". He went to jail several times and describes a confused young black man struggling with his place in a racially structured environment. He was twenty years old when "it sort of clicked for me. I realised I didn't know who I was, where I fitted in. My father had told me but I didn't listen then. They didn't teach us in school that my people was massacred down the road here. It was my mob! Just down the road! I just realised it then. Changed me' attitude, it did", he says.

In the early 1980s, the Gunditjmara people fought and lost one of the first land rights cases through the Australian court system (Leonard 1981; Rutherford 1980). There was also a blockade against continued logging of the forest at the mission where Andy grew up (Clarke 2003). At this time, the local, non-indigenous band Goanna released the song "Solid Rock" that became a huge national hit. It talks of belonging to and caring for land, and recognises indigenous ownership of this country. Similar to many Koori musicians I talk with in Victoria, Andy refers to the song as a major musical and political influence; "that's what it took for me to notice indigenous issues myself. They paved the way, showing you could sing about Koori issues!"

By then Andy had played and got drunk continually in local pub rock bands. "Solid Rock" inspired him to start writing songs about his own experiences, which took him back out to the mission to talk to senior Gunditjmara men about "the old stories" that he subsequently wrote into songs. "My indigenous identity, it was always there,

⁸⁹ As mentioned in Chapter One, Koori is a common term of self-designation among indigenous people in south-eastern coastal and urban regions.

never questioned. But it became much stronger when I got angry about racism, when I see the old disappear without me knowing where I really came from!" he explains.

After a health scare when he ended up in hospital, Andy quit drinking and smoking. He has since become a highly respected and successful musician and leader of the Gunditjmarra people.⁹⁰ Through his song-writing and performing, Andy, like numerous Koori musicians, continues to explore and assert his sense of being indigenous in and against a white majority, identifying as a member of a Koori community as well as with a pan-Aboriginal commonality. Often left with mere fragments of knowledge of the norms and customs of their Aboriginal forebears, these musicians commonly draw on homogenised notions of a distinctive and universally shared Aboriginal experience and existence. In this, they incorporate traditional and spiritual elements from the desert and Top End, and other indigenous regions. Only a few of the Koori musicians I have met have been to Central Australia or engaged in any greater degree with Aboriginal people from there. Their talk about desert (and other remote living) people tends to evoke a rather nostalgic imagery of "full-bloods" living on their traditional homelands, speaking their local languages and practicing ancient ceremonies and customs. These "real" people embody the imagined "traditional Aboriginality" that the Koori musicians say that they have lost or that has been taken from them.

Selective, traditionalist and mass-mediated imagery that are part of the "ideological landscape" discussed in Chapter Two in these ways provide a kind of sociocultural palette from which Koori musicians can incorporate elements into their own music and identity work. Such imagery adds historical and spiritual depth as they articulate self-knowledge and affective alliances within a national (and at times worldwide) "common culture" of indigenes who can claim a distinctive status as original occupants with unique connections to a place (cf. Dyck 1985b; J. Jackson 1989; Levin 1993; Tonkinson 1998). When I ask what they define as "Aboriginal" in their music making, several Koori musicians refer to a "natural instinct" that they say connects them with a fundamental indigenous spirituality and oneness with the land, and which non-indigenous people lack. They commonly use a mix of biological, genetic and metaphysical terms to describe this shared spiritual ancestry of all indigenous peoples. Koori song lyrics commonly evoke such a universal indigenous spiritual/genetic/ cultural community, just as the rhetoric of protest or activist music commonly

⁹⁰ His album releases include the self-produced "Gunditjmarra Land" (1998) and "Close to home" (2001).

evoke a pan-Australian Aboriginal political community with shared and distinct experiences of oppression and discrimination.

Gilroy (1993) discusses how a trans-Atlantic black vernacular musical culture is reinforced by particularistic and narrow conceptions of cultural difference and unifying notions of blackness: "Indeed, the aura of authentic ethnicity supplies a special form of comfort in a situation where the very historicity of black experience is constantly undermined" (86). He suggests that "(t)his new ethnicity is all the more powerful because it corresponds to no actually existing black communities" (87). Similarly in Australia, the mobilisation of universal, unifying notions of an authentic Aboriginal self-identity is often anchored in a mythologised past that in fact originates in contemporary urban indigenous identity politics, articulating experiences of racism, negative stereotyping, restrictive legislation and marginalising state policies (e.g. Beckett 1988b; Keen 1988b; Lattas 1993; Tonkinson 1998).

As discussed in texts on other indigenous expressive forms such as film, video and radio, indigenous music making in the southeast can thus be understood as a form of "cultural activism" in which an "activist imaginary" is employed to mobilise a distinct indigenous identity in a white dominated society (Ginsburg 1993, 1997; Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod and Larkin 2002; Marcus 1996).

Back in Central Australia, such oppositional "talking back" to non-indigenous realms and powers are not a prominent feature of music making. Few of the desert musicians I worked with perceive their music or themselves as part of a national, pan-Aboriginal rights movement, not back in the 1980s or today. Many of these men did not even think of themselves as "Aboriginal" when growing up. For instance, and as compared with Andy in Warrnambool, Stan is the same age as Andy, is of mixed Aboriginal and Afghan ancestry, and grew up around Alice Springs. Describing his life history, Stan never mentions his Aboriginal status as a factor in his musical development or other actions. When I ask if he ever saw his Aboriginal identity as an issue, he thinks for a while as if it was a new thought. He then says, "I never really had one (Aboriginal identity) until I came of some sort of age. ... Growing up in Alice, it was never 'that way'", he says, making quotation marks in the air. "Like, we were classed in everything, but we never said anything against it. Basically all that shit started coming in the 70s, you know, racial hatred, hating whites, the Aboriginal flag, and everybody found out, well, everybody found out that they were Aboriginal! They didn't even know what it was, half of us, this including myself."

This account is about growing up and becoming aware of oneself as a particular racialised person in a certain time period; a coloured Alice Springs man growing up in the 1960s and 1970s when Aboriginal rights and activism became increasingly important on national public and political levels. In contrast to Andy, though, Stan and many of the musicians in Central Australia tend to talk of racism and black activism as something external to themselves and their everyday experiences. It was not until “all that shit started coming”, meaning southern, urban people and musicians shaped by black rights activism that they found out that they were “Aboriginal”, should hate whites, and hang Aboriginal flags on the wall. This view is consistent with the idea that it was “the assertion of equal rights that saw the emergence of ‘real prejudice’” (Cowlshaw 2004:171), and that such assertive practices were relevant mainly for urban blacks in the southeast.

Aboriginal music activities in Central Australia have unquestionably been influenced and stimulated by national black activism, which, for instance, was crucial for the emergence of regional Aboriginal media organisations such as CAAMA and Warlpiri Media. Land rights and black rights events and campaigns have also created performance and recording opportunities for desert musicians. However, whether they are town or bush musicians, of mixed descent or not, and regardless of their age, no Central Australian musician I have talked to has mentioned racist experiences or activist forms of resistance as an impetus for their music making. As coming chapters will show, their music is seldom directed at a non-indigenous realm, either, even if this is how their lyrics have occasionally been interpreted by the music industry and scholars down south.⁹¹

When talking about their motives for making music, Central Australian musicians do not talk about coming to terms with a “lost” Aboriginal identity, either. They basically know their relatedness to Aboriginal kin and country, and many express pity for blackfellas down south who don’t. In general, they tend to perceive “southerners” as a kind of culturally poorer black cousin scrambling for a sense of indigeneity that is no longer there. The desert musicians are also aware of how people down south “borrow” elements from and typecast them in romantic and homogenous ways. They variously find this entertaining, are dismissive about it, and use it to their advantage.

⁹¹ See, for example, Dunbar-Hall (1997a), Dunbar-Hall and Gibson (2004) and Mitchell (1996:Ch 5).

At times, the Central Australian musicians talk of southern and urban indigenous music as somewhat "angry", which refers to the "angry" and confrontational words of black activism and protest songs.⁹² A typical example was when a few musicians and I sat around talking about the inter-state artists that had performed at a big national indigenous festival in Alice Springs the week before. One of the local musicians commented disapprovingly that to him the southerners' music was "a bit too radical, like they always have a bloody big chip on their shoulder!" Others have spoken of the southerners' more politically informed musical attitudes as somewhat "uptight" and perhaps pretentious, reflecting the generally fairly disinterested attitude among the desert musicians towards national debates on Aboriginal issues and rights. As I will discuss in coming chapters, the desert men also tend to be uncomfortable in general with an "in-your-face", confrontational manner, because it appears as inappropriate in dominant, regional Aboriginal interactional conventions.

To sum up the regional comparisons, the desert musicians often relate to both the Top End mob and southerners simultaneously with sympathy and a somewhat self-assertive complacency. They tend to express a view of themselves as men grounded and secure within specific and demarcated Aboriginal kin groupings, language groups and in relation to certain ancestral countries. Therefore, they do not have to "flog their traditional gear" like the Top Enders, or chase a lost identity like the "angry" southerners. At the same time, they recognise nationwide common bonds and shared experience with other indigenous peoples, especially in the two regions discussed here, but also other places and occasionally worldwide. Indeed, their very preoccupation with marking out their distinctiveness in relation to blackfella musicians and people from these regions indicates how such bonds are reinforced. That is, the engagements among different blackfella music scenes and life worlds inevitably involve reciprocal influences, which are co-implicated in the ongoing production of both distinct and shared modes of identifying.

Glowczewski suggests, "(t)o claim their Aboriginality, rather than opposing themselves as a political entity versus non-Aborigines, Aboriginal people affirm themselves first as different from and eventually opposed to their other Aboriginal neighbours" (1998:335). That is, people reinforce their local Aboriginal singularities in everyday tensions between Aboriginal opponents. In this, Glowczewski suggests, they

⁹² For a good example of this "angry" black rhetoric in songs, see the cassette compilation "Rebel Voices" (Imparja Recordings 1984).

claim different and distinct modes of identifying that draw from traditional as well as cross-cultural local, national and global ideas and practices. She thus assumes that Aboriginal diversity is associated with perceptions of difference.

As Harrison argues, though, one should also recognise how “cultural similarity, or rather perceptions or attributions of similarity, can contribute to creating and maintaining ethnic oppositions and boundaries” (2002:213). That is, the very fact that people occupy similar regions of “identity space” with closely shared histories and (diverse) sources of identification tends to engender a situation where individuals and groups struggle to differentiate themselves from others in this space. People thus form a sense of selves and others in ambivalent relations of interdependence and bonding as well as rivalry and competition, that is, “by their felt resemblances, perhaps just as much as by felt differences” (229).

Both these dynamics are involved in the evolving Central Australian music scene that I have outlined in this chapter, and are put into play in the musical sites that I begin to investigate in the next chapter.

Summary

Waterman (2000) notes how the musical taste and repertoires of southern African-American blues men in the 1920s and 1930s were strongly shaped by the availability of certain styles and performers on gramophone records, and by advertising directed at black communities. These factors were in turn shaped by racialised imagery and socio-political ideologies at the time, which were also reflected in the commercial profiling of black record labels, studios and musics (Garofalo 1993; Longhurst 1995:127ff).

As I have showed in this chapter, the musical taste and styles of music of Central Australian Aboriginal music makers have been shaped by the availability of country, rock and reggae music styles, introduced by touring white artists and by recordings, movies, radio, videos and television. By being transferred between generations of Aboriginal male musicians, these expressive forms and their particular local variations have become integral to larger regional as well as discrete localised Aboriginal socialities. These forms of music practices have also been a medium for the transfer and transformation of masculine models of different and partly resonating normative traditions, including those of local Aboriginal societies, Christian missionaries, European rural workers and global country and rock music conventions.

In contrast to Waterman's observations, the mainstream music industry has showed little interest in marketing music specifically to indigenous Australian consumers, and has only been marginal in codifying particular images of Australian indigeneity for Central Australian musicians. As I have discussed, local Aboriginal music and media production sites such as CAAMA and Warlpiri Media – established as a result of socio-political processes that produced state policies of Aboriginal self-determination and from local efforts to maintain certain cultural practices and values – have been more important for the shaping of especially rock and reggae music and associated male styles in Aboriginal Central Australia.

As my comparisons between Aboriginal music making in Central Australia and that of the Top End and the southeast highlight, desert musicians do not wish to express or “share” ancestral features through their country, rock or reggae music. They are seldom motivated by political and rights activism, either. Hence, Aboriginal desert musics do not fit easily with the privileged dual standard by which most Australian Aboriginal popular music is represented and evaluated; the traditionalist and/or political resistance models. The coming chapters will explore the more important organising dynamics for this particular music scene, starting with the Aboriginal recording studio.

CHAPTER FOUR

ABORIGINAL MUSIC AND MEN IN THE STUDIO

The only southward road in and out of Alice Springs is through the Heavitree Gap, a narrow pass with steep, rugged and deep red mountain walls through the MacDonnell Ranges. Just south of the Gap, a cluster of plain looking houses makes up the "Little Sisters" Aboriginal town camp, named after the Uniting Church sisters who used to run it (Heppell and Wigley 1981). At the edge of the camp, right at the foot of the ranges, the first recording studio of CAAMA started operating in the mid-1980s.

From its humble beginnings in a shared town camp house, the music studio moved uptown to purpose-built premises in 1995, a pale red, two-storey building facing Alice Springs' main street. Its main entrance leads to the CAAMA Shop, selling indigenous music, videos, books, clothes and artefacts. The CAAMA Radio station can also be found on the ground floor front of the building, while upstairs houses the film production unit, administration and management.

The CAAMA Music studio is located at the downstairs back of the building. At the time of my work here, CAAMA Music had four employees. The studio manager and senior sound engineer Stan and assistant engineer Steve worked in the downstairs studio area. These two locally born Aboriginal men have had a hand in most recording projects and events the studio has been involved with since the late 1980s. The CAAMA Music manager and the administrator had their offices upstairs. A new manager, a white woman in her fifties, arrived just as my work at the studio began in the end of the year 2000. Two younger women, one Aboriginal and her successor part-Maori, held the administrator position during my eight months at the studio.

The studio area consists of a glass-walled studio office, the control room, and the studio stage, the latter two behind double, soundproof doors. The studio stage is a two-storey-high performance room with an open floor space big enough to fit an orchestra. The control room sits behind a wide, triple-glassed acoustic window that offers a full view of the studio stage while blocking out direct sonic contact between the two rooms.

Equipped with an automated 24-track recording unit, analogue as well as up-to-date digital recording technology for recording, mixing and mastering, the control room is the technological nerve centre of the studio operations. When I worked at the studio, this room was also a kind of inner sanctum for the male sociomusical life of the studio.

This is where Aboriginal men used to gather, often behind closed doors, sharing, comparing and evaluating their experiences and skills and different ways of being men.

In this and the next chapter I discuss how various forms of masculinity and indigeneity were negotiated in the music work and social life of this music studio at the time of my work here.⁹³ This chapter introduces CAAMA and the everyday studio activities and people. The latter part of the chapter explores the particular studio ethos – sets of ideas, values and practices – that tends to organise studio activities and relationships. I also discuss a major dynamic of this ethos that concerns tensions between notions of “professional” versus “blackfella way” practices and approaches to music making and life in general. As musicians and the studio employees negotiate such tensions, differently valued blackfella, whitefella, musical and masculine idioms are accentuated and negotiated as they reproduce a certain male and blackfella “ownership” of this musical, technological and social space.

In the upcoming chapter I further investigate how the all-male and blackfella studio “ownership” emerges through the negotiation of competing notions of manhood and indigeneity associated with musical forms of identification. I also look at the means through which the all-male and blackfella studio sociality is maintained, and how it is challenged by external “modernising” attempts.

From community to corporate Aboriginal voices

In 1979, the first dedicated Aboriginal radio program went on air in Central Australia. It was called “The Aboriginal Half Hour” and was broadcast on a commercial station in Alice Springs (Batty 2003). It was the first time that the thousands of Aboriginal people in the region, many with limited skills in English, could hear news and information in their own languages. The program was funded by the Northern Territory Education Department. Philip Batty, a white literacy teacher and community advisor in Papunya community at the time, became its producer in early 1980. He teamed up with

⁹³ The studio world I describe no longer exists. Stan and Steve were made redundant in a major reconstruction of CAAMA Music in mid-2003, when the woman manager mentioned also left. Since then, a few different men and women have held the manager and administrator positions. For about a year, Stan was contracted for particular recording projects, and other (non-indigenous, male) sound engineers were brought in as temporary studio engineers. Steve was re-employed as Music Development Officer in 2004 and was moved upstairs when the studio office was handed over to CAAMA library staff. A CAAMA reception has also been installed in the downstairs corridor. Outside people can, in other words, not freely walk down to the studio area or hang around there anymore. The traffic of visitors and “regulars” that have always given this studio its particular and shifting sociomusical dynamic has thus ceased.

Aboriginal presenter John Macumba, originally from South Australia, and the two men began to mobilise community support for the establishment of a regional Aboriginal media association based in Alice Springs. After an arduous lobbying campaign, their proposal was finally funded by the federal Department of Aboriginal Affairs. The Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association was incorporated in 1980 with Macumba as Director and Batty as Deputy Director. Macumba resigned in mid-1981 and was succeeded by CAAMA broadcaster Freda Glynn, an Aboriginal woman born and raised in Alice Springs. Glynn and Batty led CAAMA over the next decade.

In 1984, CAAMA became the first indigenous media organisation in the country to be awarded a public radio licence (Donovan 1988; Molnar 1996). CAAMA 8KIN FM was launched in early 1985 and three years later achieved the largest coverage by any indigenous radio station in Australia when accessing Australia's first domestic satellite. Today, 8KIN FM can be received all over the Northern Territory, parts of Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales.

The CAAMA Music department emerged out of the radio station's need for music for jingles, advertisements, educational programs and community campaigns. Local Aboriginal musicians were brought in for this work. When their music was put on air, musicians from all over the region soon contacted CAAMA or turned up in person and wanted to be recorded and broadcast, in order to make their languages and communities heard, too. To meet these demands, the original idea for CAAMA Music was to set up a mobile recording unit that would drive out to Aboriginal communities, record musicians and then take it back to Alice Springs to broadcast. This venture turned out to be "a disaster", in one early employee's words, which he puts down to a lack of operational skills and poor maintenance of equipment. Bill Davis was employed as the first CAAMA Music manager (see Chapter Three) with the task of setting up a recording studio in Alice Springs. When he left six years later CAAMA Music had released seventy recordings and ran a record label and music publishing company.⁹⁴

During the 1990s, CAAMA expanded considerably into a media group with four subsidiary entities set up to either make profit or generate the income to carry their own costs; CAAMA Radio, CAAMA Music, CAAMA (film and video) Productions and CAAMA Shops. CAAMA also became a major shareholder of Imparja, the one

⁹⁴ Early CAAMA Music releases were in form of cassette tapes since this was the cheaper and most common form in which people in Aboriginal communities listened to recorded music.

commercial television station in Central Australia.⁹⁵ After the expansion, the CAAMA Group and Imparja Television employed about one hundred people, with approximately seventy per cent of CAAMA and fifty per cent of Imparja staff being indigenous. Today, as a result of factors such as greatly increased competition for funding from a growing number of indigenous media associations around the country, and increased demands for budgetary prudence from funding institutions, the number of CAAMA employees has been reduced by more than half, and outside people are increasingly engaged for certain projects.⁹⁶

When representing its history, CAAMA states that its three founders (i.e. Macumba, Batty and Glynn) “had a dream. The dream was for Aboriginal voices to be heard throughout the world and for Aboriginal people to take ownership and control of their own future through a strong and vibrant media centre to be located in Alice Springs”.⁹⁷ With the loose reference to Martin Luther King’s famous 1963 speech, the establishment of CAAMA is thus linked to a worldwide Black rights movement in a kind of “activist imaginary” move. Marcus uses this term to describe how subordinate groups turn to various modes of media to pursue “goals of broad-based social change through a politics of identity and representation” (1996:6) as well as for emancipatory projects. As Appadurai’s influential works insist, such pursuits are best understood in a global cultural economy where people create “imagined worlds” of sociocultural identities based on reality as well as on imaginations that are nourished by global flows of ideas, media forms, technologies and finances (Appadurai 1990, 1991; also see Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod and Larkin 2002; Slobin 1993).

Phillip Batty’s (2003) insider account of the processes and stakeholders involved in the formation of CAAMA is informative for understanding how such “activist imaginary” and “imagined worlds” of sociocultural identities emerge in concrete practice. The “they had a dream” vision hardly existed at the time. It had to be crafted in what Batty calls “a ‘game’ that Aboriginals were obliged to play” (22) in order to acquire the benefits of the new government policy of Aboriginal self-determination. In

⁹⁵ In 1986, after applying for the remote television licence for the Australian Central zone, CAAMA formed the subsidiary company Imparja (“footprint” in Central Arrernte language). Imparja was awarded the licence in 1987 and became the first Aboriginal owned and controlled commercial television service in Australia.

⁹⁶ Public grants and loans aimed at supporting the establishment of an indigenous media sector have subsidised large parts of CAAMA’s overall operational and infrastructure costs over the years. Specific activities, such as CAAMA Music recording projects, concerts, tours and music workshops, have depended on grants from a mix of government and non-governmental funding institutions.

⁹⁷ From “The CAAMA Group”, an undated CAAMA leaflet produced in the late 1990s.

this game, moreover, non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal partnerships were crucial for manoeuvring in negotiations with government representatives and administrations, and with Aboriginal agencies and groupings, a process Batty describes as “a series of haphazard events and unforeseen circumstances” (24).

The federal governments’ preferred form for practicing “self-government” that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s was that of “incorporated Aboriginal associations”, controlled and run by Aboriginal people and supported by the “Aboriginal community”. Accordingly, the CAAMA parent corporation declares itself a “non-profit making organisation dedicated to providing communications and media services to Aboriginal people in Central Australia”, “owned” by these Aboriginal people, and governed by a committee of twelve Aboriginal community representatives.⁹⁸ The CAAMA constitution defines Aboriginal as “a person who is a member of the Aboriginal race of Australia”, which is the exact wording of the 1976 Aboriginal Councils and Association Act under which CAAMA was formed, and to which it therefore had to conform.⁹⁹

In this vein, CAAMA Music promotes itself as producing “Aboriginal Music for the world”, and its record label as representing the “Sound of Aboriginal Australia”.¹⁰⁰ The unifying profile for CAAMA Music and its record label is thus racial and sociocultural and, unlike many independent labels and studios worldwide, not based on a musical profile such as a distinct sound, genre or image. This means that the musical direction and social character of this studio is highly heterogeneous.

Stories about the early days of CAAMA Music appear on a daily basis around the studio, reinforcing its regional Aboriginal lineage that both anchor and justify present-day studio activities. The often nostalgic narratives describe a highly creative, improvised, and somewhat chaotic place, where truly committed people used the scarce material resources and funds available to create small, everyday miracles. Aboriginal people from town and bush communities would make their way to the CAAMA

⁹⁸ From “CAAMA Overview”, 1999, at www.caama.com.au

⁹⁹ The act specifies that only “members of the Aboriginal race of Australia” can become members in associations formed under its provisions (Batty 2003:215).

¹⁰⁰ These slogans appear frequently on promotional material for CAAMA Music releases and services. The studio manager was part of creating the slogan “Aboriginal music for the world” in the mid- to late 1990s. He told me that the vision was that the CAAMA Music label should produce not only “contemporary” music (i.e. country, rock, reggae etc.). The “Aboriginal” in the slogan was meant to imply “traditional” (i.e. ancestral) music, and it was envisaged that the studio should record and archive such genres in order to maintain local knowledge for the benefit of Central Australian Aboriginal language groups, as well as for a “world” heritage. The slogan was also meant to evoke associations to the global marketing term “world music”, that is, a fusion of “traditional” and “contemporary” musical traditions, which was to be another direction for the studio productions. The studio manager regretted that CAAMA Music, including himself, had not been more proactive in realising this vision.

premises night and day, adopting it as theirs. This live audience could be invigorating through their often direct input into ongoing music and radio activities. Early broadcasters and music workers also describe the problems associated with this direct community involvement, for example, when they walked out of the studio and straight into a drunken party or fight.

The narratives about the early days of the music studio largely form an account of male relationships. Then, as now, most musicians, sound engineers, technicians, managers and visitors around this studio have been men. Some managers and senior engineers have been white men, some of them from interstate. Non-Aboriginal musicians have occasionally contributed to studio recordings, too, and a few have made their own recordings here. The majority of men around the studio, however, continue to be Aboriginal and from the desert region.

After the expansion in the 1990s, it became just as important for CAAMA to achieve “corporate objectives” with strategic plans of “aggressive and innovative sales, marketing, and promotion” as it was to “ensure that all of its activities positively promote Aboriginal culture and values”.¹⁰¹ In becoming the biggest indigenous media association in the country, CAAMA has thus increasingly had to perform a balancing act between pursuing profit-making activities and servicing and representing a highly diverse constituency of largely low-income Aboriginal people. While CAAMA continues to receive national and international praise especially for its film production, I also hear Aboriginal people in desert communities express somewhat disillusioned views about CAAMA having “lost its way” and “working for their own mob, the town mob”. Those views are often based on people’s experience of no longer hearing many Aboriginal languages or much regional Aboriginal music on CAAMA radio. They mention how they no longer meet many people who know local languages or the ways of regional Aboriginal people when they enter the CAAMA building. At the same time, most Aboriginal people I meet in the region acknowledge the importance of CAAMA’s continued existence and take great pride in having “their own” internationally recognised media association. CAAMA is part of their history and collective identity, and of the Aboriginal regional topography in which they predominantly operate.

While the music production is shaped by the ideological legacy and organisational dynamics of the CAAMA Group, the particular forms of sociability,

¹⁰¹ From the CAAMA Music overview on www.caama.com.au (in 1999) and the strategic plan for CAAMA Music 1999-2001 (internal document).

personalities and ways of operating around the music studio also continue to produce its own, and within CAAMA distinct, dynamics – a certain blackfella and male ethos. In order to discuss the diverse lot of musicians and men who actively participated in recreating this particular ethos at the time of my work, I turn to an account of a day at the studio.¹⁰²

A day at the studio

It is 8:45 am Monday morning and a tall black man in jeans and a dirty football jersey walks in to the studio area. He is a member of the Blackshadow band from Mt Liebig Aboriginal community a couple of hours west of Alice Springs. The band recently recorded a mix of country, rock, reggae and gospel tunes, and even though the album still has to be mixed, mastered and released, their songs are already played on CAAMA radio, requested by regional Aboriginal audiences.

This band member has come in more or less every day lately, usually first thing in the morning and looking a bit wasted. The purpose of his visits is not always clear. Some days he asks for cassette copies of the band's recordings. On other occasions he asks for royalty money, despite the album not being released yet. This morning he wants to talk new recordings. When it seems he won't leave until he gets a response, Steve gets Stan and the men sit down in the office.

Stan makes it clear that before they will even think of investing any studio time in the band, they have to present a set of solid, well rehearsed songs. This is not always the case with community musicians, who largely make music and constantly adapt their playing in ongoing, everyday social activities and relations in their home communities. A great deal of basic pre-production work on musical arrangements therefore tends to eat up precious studio time and money, which should ideally be used for refining and improving songs and musical expressions. Stan and Steve also have to spend more time on "fixing up" those recordings in the mixing process, including bringing in other musicians for additional overdubs.

As in most cases when approached about recordings by bush bands, Stan tries to keep a balance between being "professionally" firm, through emphasising the necessity of hard, committed work to reach a standard worth recording, while not discouraging

¹⁰² I shift to present tense in this and following descriptions of the studio people and activities, despite the fact that the sociomusical world I discuss is in the past. By thus representing the studio world in the form of "ethnographic presence" I wish to create a more lively and intimate sense of "being there".

musicians' aspirations and enthusiasm. Stan and Steve are well aware, though, that any encouraging words from them may be taken as a confirmed "deal with CAAMA" for recording an album, which can cause unwanted problems for the studio. Other musicians who want to record can, for instance, accuse the studio of bypassing them. In the rather volatile and divisive environment of regional Aboriginal community and family politics, such critique often implies that the studio favours particular groupings and ignores others. Stan effectively finishes the conversation with a non-committed "Keep it up bros'!" and walks into the control room, closing the door behind him.

Soon thereafter, three other Aboriginal men wander in, obviously from out bush, in their dusty jeans and working boots. Steve again gets Stan and they all go down to the coffee-shop "for half an hour" and return almost two hours later. The men are members of the Pukatja Band, from Pukatja (Ernabella) community, south of the Northern Territory border in Pitjantjatjara territory. Stan recorded them back in the early 1990s when their tight, funky rock beat and fairly politically edgy lyrics made quite an impact on the regional Aboriginal music scene.¹⁰³ The band has not been seen much outside their community in recent years and their return to the studio to discuss new recordings is welcomed by the studio men.

While the men are gone, I carry on my day-to-day work in the studio office, preparing old recordings for digitisation and sorting out a range of administrative tasks. There are no recordings booked in today. The days or weeks when recording session are in progress, the feel of the studio space is obviously different. When bush musicians record conditions may become fairly chaotic. They usually bring or attract a whole entourage of men, women and children relatives and friends, who continually move in and out of the building, walking in and out of the control room and the studio stage, causing the sound of loud drums and wailing guitars to spill out and thus affecting the sound recorded. There are Aboriginal languages spoken, laughter and shouting, kids trying to pick pieces of equipment apart and climbing over people, furniture and sound gear. All the while, the phones keep ringing and voices keep trying to make themselves heard over the intercom system. The bush mobs also bring with them the distinct bush aromas of smoky fire wood, dusty sweat, and the strong smell of kangaroo meat and blood.

Recording sessions with musicians from town or elsewhere in the country are usually less noisy and less social happenings. Friends and fellow musicians,

¹⁰³ The self-titled "Pukatja Band" (CAAMA Music 1992).

predominantly men, frequently drop in on such recordings, too, though, to follow, judge and comment on the work from the control room, at times stepping in for instrumental or vocal work.

This morning, I am interrupted only by the normal stream of phone calls from people in the region and other parts of Australia who want to talk recordings, post-production work, sound equipment and music projects with the studio. A non-indigenous musician in Adelaide, for instance, wants help to find an Aboriginal musician for a self-produced album. What he has in mind, and why he calls CAAMA in Central Australia, is a "real Aboriginal", who knows how to play the didjeridu and sing traditional songs, which would "ground" his "modern" Australian compositions.¹⁰⁴

Several Aboriginal men also come by in person. Rod, a "cousin" of Steve's and the lead singer in their rock band Jagit wants to know if they are rehearsing tomorrow night. Warren, well-known Aboriginal country musician and CAAMA radio broadcaster, comes by a few times, keen to see Stan. Warren's lead guitarist, country-bluegrass musician Lyndon turns up briefly, as he does more or less daily. He is eager to get the recording of his first solo album off the ground but receives a let's-see-what-happens response from Stan and the music manager because he lacks funding for the project. Some local music workers, both blackfella and whitefella men, and a few male, Aboriginal CAAMA staff never stay long enough to state their business.

A white woman working for CAAMA Shops comes looking for Stan a couple of times, increasingly irritated when he is not back. A white events organiser has requested a particular song by the Ltyentye Apurte Band for the opening of an exhibition with bush toys from the band's community. Stan was going to run the song off on a CD. In the end, the shop woman sticks a note on the office door, urging him to get it for her. When the men are back, Stan looks at the note, leaves it on the door, and he and Steve take off to their respective homes for lunch.

After lunch, Stan walks straight into the control room and closes the doors, making a new attempt to finish the mixing of the Blackshadow recordings. Steve is fixing an amplifier in the studio. The shop woman returns, agitated. I direct her to the control room. She hesitates, then knocks and opens the doors and in a friendly voice asks Stan for the song. He does not answer or look at her, does not turn down the

¹⁰⁴ When I refer the matter to Stan later, he tells me to put the man in contact with Jimmy Langdon, a Warlpiri country and blues musician and knowledgeable in ancestral music genres. "He'll pull it off", he says. "But he doesn't play the didj, does he?" I ask confused. Stan shrugs his shoulders, "Can't be *that* hard. He's a muso', he might have a go at it", he says and walks off.

volume of the track playing, and keeps adjusting levels on the sound desk. She repeats the question. In the end, Stan makes a kind of hum and she leaves, frustrated. A moment later, Stan barges into the office, rummaging for the CD on desks, in filing cabinets and cardboard boxes, while swearing over people never leaving him alone. He takes off upstairs, thinking that he put the CD on the music manager's desk.

He returns with a cheerful spring in his step and a CD in his hand, closes the office door and connects the CD-player to a couple of loudspeakers. "You've got to hear this!" he says and turns up the volume. Loud, thumping rock music hits the glass walls of the office, which attracts Steve to join us. It is a live recording of the Warumpi Band performing at a big indigenous music festival a few years ago. Stan played bass and has told me that this gig was special. He now embroiders the music with one-liners about off- and on-stage events at the time. Steve chuckles and says that he can't wait to be part of it all when their rock band gets its act together.

The men return to their tasks, and Frank, a solid, dark-skinned Pitjantjatjara musician, turns up. He puts a hand on my back as a greeting and asks for "the old man", meaning Stan. I nod towards the control room but Frank proceeds to flick about things on the office desk, asking if there is any mail for him. He looks somehow "cleaned up" to me, and I assume that he is on his way to Melbourne where he is mostly performing at inner city clubs nowadays. When he is back in Alice Springs between these commitments, he is usually drawn into drinking and family conflicts and can look rather worn out. I make a comment on his good looks, ask if he is going somewhere and if he wants a lift to the airport. "Ha. Ha. *Very* funny!" he retorts, as if I was mocking him. He then casually picks up the phone, sits himself down with his feet on the desk and calls his manager in Melbourne.

The CAAMA Music studio is named after Frank's late father, the eminent regional, country music "star" Isaac Yamma, who was one of the first personalities on CAAMA Radio in the early 1980s (see Chapter Three). Frank has thus come and gone at CAAMA since its early days and has recorded his three albums to date here.¹⁰⁵ When in Alice Springs, he usually moves between dwellings and the studio seems to be one of his few permanent points, which he tends to treat as his "office". He, moreover, frequently calls the studio, for no particular reason, when he is elsewhere in Australia

¹⁰⁵ These include the self-titled "Ulpanyali Band" (CAAMA Music 1991), his first solo album "Eagle Rock" (CAAMA Music 1997), both of them engineered and mixed by Stan, and "Playing with fire – Warungku inkanyi" (CAAMA Music 1999), partially recorded in the CAAMA studio and in the Glebe Studios, Sydney, with American producer Jim Hilburn.

and at times overseas. It is thus a reference point also in his wider geographical and musical movements. His chatty calls about nothing can at times wear all of us out, while we recognise that he just wants to connect with "home". This is not only the musical and blackfella place where he belongs and started out, and where he therefore seeks affirmation, but also the source for the making of his unique Aboriginal "desert song man", world music profile when out of Central Australia.

Frank hangs up on his manager when Stan comes out for a break. They exchange a few words and Stan takes off to pick up some papers for Frank. Meanwhile, Frank takes over the control room and puts on a CD from one of his recent live performances. Even with the soundproof doors closed we can hear him listening to himself on top volume. Steve and I recognise the gig; we were there, in Broome in north-western Australia. When Stan is back, Frank leaves with a wide grin and a "see ya' later", adding "in a couple of months!" with a chuckle when he is down the corridor. This is when I remember that he is going into prison today, which explains his smart looks and response to my offer to take him to the airport.

Warren returns, finally able to tell Stan what he has been hanging out all day to do. His latest recordings, which Stan sound engineered and mixed, have come back from mastering at a Melbourne studio. We gather in the control room, close the doors, and put it on. The sound is much clearer than Warren expected. He is rapt, grinning widely throughout the listening session. Nobody says much, but Stan nods with a pleased smile over Warren's excitement. The high quality of the mastered sound is no doubt also recognition of the quality of Stan's sound recording job.

Afterward, we all walk out for a smoke at the back door. Non-smoker Warren picks up an acoustic guitar in the studio and strums a tune, clearly recognisable as a Warren H. Williams', with a particular way of doubling up the chords between the beats, giving his folk-country a comfortable swing. Rod returns, and two more Aboriginal men turn up from the backyard. One is Clifford "Scotty" Brown, a dark-skinned Warlpiri man in his early thirties and lead guitarist of the Rising Wind band from Yuendumu community. The other man is older, with a rugged, drunken man's face. His steps are somewhat unsteady but he does not seem to be drunk, more like recovering. I only realise later that he is Patrick Singleton, an influential Yuendumu music maker back in the 1970s who has since ended up a chronic alcoholic in Alice Springs.

Clifford is in town because his wife has just delivered their third child. He came by the studio a couple of times last week to see if he could record while in town. In a few words and hand gestures he tells Stan that he has a couple of songs with him now, two of his own and one co-written with the older musician. Stan looks at them as if judging if they are up to it. If he thought they were drunk, he would refuse point-blank. "Play it to me bros'!" he says.

Clifford sits down with an acoustic guitar in the studio and plays for us. The first song is a sweet-sounding ballad in Warlpiri language about the Coniston killings in 1928, when a large number of Aboriginal people were shot, a traumatic event that still evokes strong emotions in Central Australian Aboriginal communities. The second song – faster, rockier and in English – is about missing family and having to get away from a troubled situation. The third, co-written tune is called "Motorcycle Mama" and reminiscent of rocked up blues songs of the 1960s, paying homage to musicians such as John Lee Hooker and Muddy Waters.¹⁰⁶

With an hour left of the working day, Stan connects up microphones at the drums and plugs in guitars and amplifiers. He sees potential in Clifford's two songs. Ten minutes later they start recording with Scotty on acoustic guitar, the old man on drums and Warren on bass. After a few takes of the Getaway song, Stan stops the session and comes out to the studio. "Listen bros'", he says, "this way the song is just going to be plain and forgettable. It'll take you nowhere". He suggests that they pick up the tempo, gently asks the shaky old man to leave the drums to Warren, and takes over the bass himself. They work the song in a quicker pace and tighter beat, cutting out a few bars here and there. After a few takes, Stan is still not happy with the drums. He instructs Warren to get into a "chakachaka" beat on the snare drums and high hats. Warren gets it right, but tends to slip back into a kind of country beat.

The back door is open and while they are working the song, Damien, one of two Aboriginal members of the heavy metal rock band NoKTuRNL walks in. This Alice Springs act has "stayed clear of CAAMA", as their local, white manager has put it to me. They have instead signed up with a subsidiary of one of the music industry multinationals.¹⁰⁷ Damien also works in the band manager's music shop and is here to

¹⁰⁶ This is a rare strain of music in Aboriginal Central Australia and is mainly heard among middle-aged Yuendumu musicians. It can be traced back to whitefella Peter Bartlett, a self-confessed "drop-out hippie" who arrived in Yuendumu in the 1970s and started a guitar club, introducing the local Aboriginal men to the music of black American Delta blues men.

¹⁰⁷ They subsequently recorded an album in interstate studios, released as "Time flies" (Mushroom Records 2003).

pick up a PA-system¹⁰⁸ that was left in the studio after a pub gig on Friday night that Stan sound engineered.

Soon thereafter, local white musician Leon, who played at that gig, turns up through the back door. He is mostly known for his albums with modern troubadour style songs. Over the years he has also recorded heavy rock tunes with Stan in this studio for a self-financed album release. He wants to check if they can work tonight. Before he can raise the issue, Stan asks if he can play the bass, hands it over, and they start Clifford's songs from the top again. Stan places himself so they all can see him, clapping the beat, urging them to keep up the tempo. He then returns to the control room and they record the two songs in one take. They now have a basic structure to continue working from. "Let's do them on Thursday", Stan tells Clifford before the men lock up and leave.

In a few hours Stan is back, recording with Leon. It becomes a high-spirited session that lasts till midnight. By then they have put down three songs with Leon on rhythm and lead guitar, Stan on bass, and the second Aboriginal NoKTuRNL member Craig on drums. Next morning Stan is tired and grumpy. The gloom vanishes, though, when talking about last night's session. "It thumps, mate, it fucking thumps!" he beams.

The studio blackfella sociality

As this account shows, most of the people who frequent the studio on any one day are male and blackfellas from different backgrounds, and come here for many different musical and social reasons. In her ethnography of Downtown Studios in Johannesburg, South Africa, Meintjes talks of how the quality of that studio space "can come to be constructed and experienced as magical and as a fetish by music-makers who work within it" (2003:73). By "magical" she means remote from the ordinary, and by understanding it as "a fetish" she thinks of the studio as having a creative force or "spirit" lodged within it that those who earn access to it can tap into to produce "compelling art" (73).

The numerous Aboriginal men and musicians that come by the CAAMA studio, like on the day described, probably experience this studio less as a space where "compelling art" is produced and more as a well-equipped site for recording music. And this does indeed make it remote from their ordinary circumstances, where good and

¹⁰⁸ PA is short for Public Address system, the basic sound equipment for stage performances.

well-maintained instruments and equipment are rare. For community musicians who spend time in Alice Springs, and for town musicians who do not hold down a day job, any reason to come into this studio is, however, good enough. The visits are in themselves the purpose, giving workless days a sense of direction. For men such as Frank and Warren the studio is, furthermore, part of a kind of extended home as it has been part of their everyday social life and movements for many years.

To see this studio in Meintjes' terms as a "fetish" is thus to run the risk of exoticising the Aboriginal musicians' intentions and practices. The studio is nevertheless characterised by a particular "spirit", a dynamic ethos, as in distinctive sets of values and ideas that guide the organisation of work and interpersonal relations in the studio. A key tension in the reproduction of this studio ethos is that between professional and certain valued male "blackfella ways" of doing things, which I look at more closely below.

Although the practice of "professional" standards may not be the main priority for all working musicians in this studio, its "spirit" of professionalism is nonetheless an important reason for their studio visits. Like for the Blackshadow and Pukatja Band members, this is a place where they can connect with a professional music industry by producing technologically more sophisticated and commercially released recordings. In the studio, they may also become part of other people's recording sessions, they can meet other music people, be updated on upcoming musical events, and keep a check on what fellow musicians are up to. All this strengthens their position in their everyday music scene of backyards, town camps or remote communities.

The studio employees Stan and Steve in effect become mediators between the local blackfella and more professional music realms and idioms. From the musicians' point of view, it may thus pay off to improve their musical and male standing in relation to these two men. This can be achieved by visiting the studio regularly and making themselves available for whatever music work is required and thus showing the studio men their commitment to the circle of this studio and to a musical career. At best, this leads to the studio men including them in music projects, which in turn connects them to more professional realms.

Also, to make it one's business to visit the CAAMA studio is part of distinguishing oneself as a serious musician with regards to the men's self-perception and self-confidence, which is associated with their musician and male image in their everyday Aboriginal settings. When out in bush communities, I witnessed on several

occasions how musicians told fellow musicians and men that they were going to Alice Springs to “see CAAMA”. This was usually stated in a somewhat important manner, which implied that they had an appointment with the music studio and were ready for recordings. When I queried these men on the side later, none of them had been in contact with the studio recently. Most of them did not have enough songs to record an album, and some did not even particularly wish to record with CAAMA. These types of “bonding” references to CAAMA are thus principally a way to create an image of their musician and male position on an elevated, more professional level of recognition. In this they demarcate themselves in relation to other music makers and activities in their everyday settings.

If we take a closer look at the people who frequent the studio, we see that they can be categorised in three distinct, albeit internally heterogeneous and overlapping groupings based on where they live. This is associated with the orientation of their lives, which in turn informs (but in no way determines) different approaches to music making and valued forms of manhood. These are bush or community musicians, town musicians, and out-of-town-musicians. While these are my terms of categorising, they largely concur with the distinctions made by the studio men and regional musicians.

Bush or community musicians include people who have been brought up and continue to live in desert communities. The Blackshadow guitarist, the Pukatja band and Clifford Brown belong to this grouping. Bush musicians in the main practice and perform their music as part of daily social life in remote community settings, which I described in Chapter Two. They often speak several Aboriginal languages while their skills in Standard English vary. Most of these men have been “through Law”, that is, they are traditionally initiated. The degree to which they continue to participate in ceremonial activities varies. Many bush musicians do occasional gigs in Alice Springs and some perform at regional Aboriginal festivals. A few have also performed in other Australian states. Bush musicians’ day to day life is generally more oriented towards traditional, kin based norms and values. Chapter Six looks at how their music making is intimately connected to crafting their sense of manhood and social status in such localised normative settings. The examples of Papunya Rock and Warlpiri reggae in Chapter Three also illustrate how bush musicians operate within distinct localised Aboriginal musical circles, while also engaging and gaining reputation in a regional blackfella music scene.

Town musicians include men of mixed backgrounds who live around Alice Springs. They may turn up at the studio more often but are fewer in number than the bush musicians. Lyndon is a typical example of this grouping, as are Rod, Steve, Stan and the members of NoKTuRNL. Most town musicians have lived in towns or cities for most of their lives and are thus mostly oriented towards town based activities and lifestyles. In contrast to bush musicians, they speak mainly or only English, not all of them have been through Law, and their knowledge of and interest in traditional Aboriginal matters varies widely. Most of them are, however, aware of their position and associated rights and responsibilities in Aboriginal kin networks, and are acquainted with their ancestral lands. Town musicians perform mainly in Alice Springs, at times in other Northern Territory townships, and occasionally in desert communities. Some of them, such as Stan and the NoKTuRNL members, have performed extensively interstate and occasionally overseas. In contrast to bush musicians, some town musicians support themselves on music work, at least for periods of time. They also tend to aspire to musical and male recognition in a professional realm to a greater degree than bush musicians.

Frank and Warren are somewhat special cases that show what regional Aboriginal musicians have to negotiate in order to achieve national recognition and a professional career, Frank as a "world music" artist and Warren as a country musician. Both of them are simultaneously town and community musicians. That is, they grew up and are still firmly connected to their desert community socialities, traditions and commitments. They are initiated men and speak local languages. They also live in Alice Springs, and Frank interstate, for extended periods. Both have white managers, frequently perform out of Central Australia and both have performed overseas. Warren still plays with local Aboriginal musicians and at venues around Alice Springs. Frank's local performances have become increasingly rare as the fan base for his more recent styles of music mainly expands mainly in the southeast.

Around bush and town musicians at the studio, Frank and Warren tend to downplay their increasing national fame in accordance with regional Aboriginal norms of not appearing self-important (as I discussed in Chapter Three and return to in Chapter Five). Other local musicians and the studio men certainly recognise that these two men have moved into another league of music making than that of the regional Aboriginal scene. In public, however, local musicians continue to treat them as fellow local music makers. If asked, both men also appear happy to fill in as instrumentalists or back-up

singers on whatever recording they happen to walk in on, like any other local musician would. By in these ways appearing both generous and not self-important, they earn continued respect around the studio. Both of them also know that because of their increased fame, people are on the watch for any sign of big-headedness on their part. If they "slip", it would soon be amplified out of proportion, which would damage both their relationships and standing as respected men in regional Aboriginal realms.

Out-of-town musicians are basically all the other musicians. That is, they include indigenous men and at times women who come from outside the Central Australian region, record at the studio, and then leave. They may come from urbanised settings in the southeast or bush communities in the Top End and elsewhere. Some have kin in Central Australia, and a few have long-time relations with CAAMA. Most out-of-town musicians who come to record at the studio are to some degree professionally established. In contrast to the often impromptu or loosely organised recordings of town and bush musicians (that I return to below), projects with out-of-town musicians are commonly more formalised sessions, as in being funded and following a time plan.

If bush musicians walk in on recording sessions with out-of-town musicians they may stay a while to watch the studio work. They rarely enter into conversations with out-of-town people, though, and do not show the kind of intense interest that recordings with regional musicians engender. Out-of-town people basically have little relevance for the social and musical scene in which the bush musicians earn recognition and worth as men and musicians. Town musicians, who are more likely to aspire for a national career, may show greater interest for out-of-town musicians' work. However, they, too, tend to keep their direct interactions with these people to a minimum. They also tend to adopt a competitive, somewhat defensive stance, which often takes the form of a disinterested, unimpressed attitude. They may, for instance, declare to each other that "us desert mob" are just as good or superior musicians to these "big shot" visitors.

The engagements in the studio among musicians of different musical, professional and blackfella backgrounds are thus characterised by an entanglement of desire, admiration, dismissal, congeniality and competitive self-assertion, all of which is part of the particular ethos that characterises this studio. In their mediating roles and as the studio mainstays, Stan and Steve play a central role in how this ethos operates, and they therefore need some more introduction.

The studio mainstays

The direction of and decisions about the work the music studio takes on formally rest with the upstairs music manager. A number of indigenous and non-indigenous people, previously only men, have filled this position, each one wishing to implement his particular vision for CAAMA Music. On my arrival, the manager's chair had been vacant for about a year, with other CAAMA employees filling in temporarily.¹⁰⁹ Consequently, the daily operations of the studio had more or less been left in the hands of Stan and Steve. For most musicians who have worked here, it is, moreover, these two long-time employees who embody the studio, not the various managers who have come and gone. Their personal styles, approaches to music making and technological expertise are thus central for the shaping of the studio music work and relationships.

Because Stan is the studio manager during my time at the studio, anyone who wants things done in the studio has to relate to him. A skinny, light brown-skinned man in his early forties, Stan always appears in a black t-shirt, jeans, black sport shoes and his hair tied back in a small pony tail. Besides being qualified in sound engineering and media production, and holding a Certificate in Music Theory, he is also an experienced bass guitarist who has played in numerous, mainly indigenous bands all over the country since the mid-1980s. He grew up in Alice Springs as one of twelve siblings, his Aboriginal mother a Jingili woman and his father of Afghan descent.¹¹⁰ Forming his first band in primary school with a few other boys with instruments made from cardboard boxes and strings, he played bass guitar in his first real band in his early teens; a three-piece set playing "really heavy, psychedelic, druggie music".

After leaving school in year eight, Stan worked on the cattle station associated with his mother's family and did odd jobs around the Territory for a few years. Over the next decade he lived in Queensland, Victoria and South Australia, earning a living playing Australian Rules football for local teams. He became a father at the age of 17 and he and his white wife ended up around Adelaide in the early 1980s. Adelaide was a

¹⁰⁹ As mentioned, a white, middle-aged woman took up the CAAMA Music manager position as I arrived to work at the studio. She gradually took over the decisions regarding what recording projects the studio took on.

¹¹⁰ Jingili speakers come from traditional lands some 750 km north of Alice Springs (see map 2). Today there are approximately 60 Jingili speakers (IAD 2002). The "Afghans" in Central Australia came mainly from what is now Pakistan in the late 19th century and were instrumental in developing a trade infrastructure throughout Central Australia with their herds of camels (Raikowski 1987). As mentioned in Chapter Two, Muslim Afghan and indigenous people in Central Australia have intermarried, and a few Afghan and Afghan-Aboriginal families are still prominent in Alice Springs. The town's small mosque is a central feature for this community. Streets and parts of Alice Springs are also named after influential Afghan cameleer families and individuals.

hotbed for new Aboriginal music at the time, not least because of the Centre for Aboriginal Studies of Music (CASM) that I introduced in Chapter One. Stan became part of the scene, enrolled at CASM and played with various Aboriginal rock bands.

He returned to Central Australia in the late 1980s after a call from a boyhood friend who asked him to be part of a new Aboriginal rock band, Amunda, that was to record some music for CAAMA. He obviously made an impression as he was offered a sound engineer traineeship at the studio within a week. He never caught the bus back to Adelaide and has lived in Alice Springs with his family ever since.

Amunda went on to a successful national career, touring Aboriginal communities and big cities extensively for a couple of years. They released two albums and an EP before they split up in the mid-1990s.¹¹¹ Shortly after, the famous Warumpi Band (see Chapter Three) urgently needed a bass player for a performance at a big festival. Stan was flown there and the performance resulted in him being engaged as their bass player until the band broke up in the year 2000. Besides his work in these bands and at the studio, Stan played in a number of mainly blackfella band formations during the 1990s.

At the studio, as we saw in the described day at the studio, Stan sound engineers, mixes, produces and coaches musicians, and his bass guitar lines run through a large number of CAAMA recordings. He is intense, straightforward and not always very approachable when focused on music work, and some people find his more easygoing colleague and assistant sound engineer, Steve, more accessible.

Ten years younger than Stan, Steve, too, is a local Aboriginal man. No matter if it is freezing cold or sweltering hot, Steve turns up at the studio in a pair of working man's shorts, sports shirt, trainers, and a pair of sunglasses pushed up in his black hair. His Aboriginal mother is an Alyawarre woman and his father of British-Belgian ancestry. The family moved among townships and Aboriginal communities between Alice Springs and north of Tennant Creek while Steve was a child.¹¹² He was also sent briefly to a boarding school in rural Western Australia. He got a job with CAAMA at the age of 16-17, initially as a technical support trainee and occasional radio DJ, before becoming a studio trainee. He has established a small-town life in Alice Springs with his wife of Sri Lankan-Dutch ancestry and two sons.

¹¹¹ Including "Better late than never" (CAAMA Music 1987), "Civilised world" (Larrikin Records 1992), and "Pedlar Avenue" (Stunt Records 1995).

¹¹² Alyawarre people (approximately 1 500 speakers) come from country southeast of Tennant Creek, 520 km north of Alice Springs, and across the border to Queensland (IAD 2002; see map 2).

While not an experienced musician, Steve has long been a music devotee, with a preference for 1980s Aussie pub rock and hard rock. He took up practicing the guitar in public fairly recently, when he, Stan, Rod and Lyndon formed the rock band Jagit in 2000. Initially, the band played rock covers but they gradually moved on to develop some of Steve's and other members' original songs and released an album in 2005.¹¹³ Around the studio, Steve sound engineers and mixes recordings, and often does the hands-on design work on album covers. He is also, and importantly, the main "fixer" around the studio, good at fiddly, trying jobs with studio equipment and with the CAAMA Music vehicle, a dual cab four-wheel drive.

The studio ethos - "slack and black"

As I suggested earlier, the CAAMA Music studio is characterised by a distinct dynamic "ethos"; particular sets of values and ideas that guide practices and interactions. It thus connotes processes of mediation that involve the articulation and connection of variously valued male, Aboriginal and musical ways of identifying, which are co-implicated in producing a sense of blackfella and male "ownership" of this studio.

As indicated on the day at the studio revisited earlier, the organisation of everyday practises around this studio is guided by fairly informal and nonconformist attitudes to formal work structures and authority. In his role as a studio manager, Stan does not prioritise workplace rules or related paperwork. He also adopts a relaxed attitude to instructions from management on general points of order for employees. He considers many such matters unnecessary obstacles to getting on with what he thinks the studio is fundamentally here for; producing good music and developing Aboriginal musical skills and careers. Steve tends to accommodate management wishes to a higher degree, but he, too, assumes a relatively relaxed approach to structures of authority within the building.

While Steve is usually found in the building during formal work hours, Stan will always arrive at the latest at the official starting time 8.30 am, but depending on the work at hand he can be found in the studio from 8 am to midnight seven days a week when a recording project is in progress. When mixing recordings he may come and go during the day and work for a long stint late at night. He is therefore not always around

¹¹³ The album is titled "9 to 5" (CAAMA Music 2005). In 2006, as Jagit is to perform at the CMJ Music Marathon in New York City in the United States, Steve is the only remaining original member, and one of only two Aboriginal band members.

when people come looking for him, which reinforces a perception of the studio as a somewhat inefficient and undisciplined work site among people within and from outside CAAMA. Stan and Steve also tend to treat booked-in recordings or plans for upcoming studio work more as possibilities than realities and are often reluctant to provide details on times and the order of proceedings when asked. This causes further frustration among people in and from outside CAAMA who are involved in particular projects, or want to be. This adds force to views of the studio as poorly organised.

Stan, moreover, thrives on jobs that just happen. When the right combination of musicians turn up without notice and keen to record, he is likely to say "let's do it!" and can soon be seen setting up the studio, as he did with Clifford. Other ongoing tasks are thus abandoned, which can frustrate both the music manager and other people who expect these jobs to be finished at a certain time or on a certain day.

While some aspects of this "slack" approach and unpredictable organisation of activities can be understood as idiosyncrasies of the studio employees, it has a legacy in the history of the studio. Most of the stories that the men share and enjoy about past studio happenings reinforce a laid back and non-conforming approach to management directives or outside expectations. This attitude is also attested by notes in a decade worth of studio diaries. Non-conformity to formal work structures and wider social expectations is of course recognised in popular musical culture worldwide, and is an aspect of studio practices and ideologies elsewhere.¹¹⁴ In this particular studio such features are, however, frequently understood, explained and valued as specifically and valued blackfella and male-to-male characteristics, as opposed to how whitefellas do things and how men are expected to behave when women are present. That is, in contrast to whitefellas, blackfellas in general are perceived to operate in loose, flexible and negotiable ways, adapting to situations and individuals rather than complying with formal workplace rules. The latter is essentially seen by the black men as negatively valued whitefella innovations. As I discuss in the next chapter, men around the studio also value an absence of restrictions associated with appropriate behaviour between men and women.

¹¹⁴ See for example Becker (1963) on jazz musicians, Cohen (1991) on rock bands in Liverpool, and Frith and Horne (1987) on the cultivation of bohemian artistic notions in pop and rock music. So called independent studios and labels ("indies"), which CAAMA Music presents itself as being, are also often defined or define themselves by aspirations to stay outside or rebel against the organisation and work practices of a mainstream, profit-driven music industry (Bannister 2002; Frith 1996; Mathieson 2000).

The particular blackfella meanings assigned to the "slack" quality of the studio ethos emerge from and are continually reinforced by the practical and social circumstances of the musicians around this studio. Few of the Aboriginal musicians have a history of being full-time employees who organise their time or movements around standard working weeks or hours.¹¹⁵ Money and such material things as instruments and vehicles also tend to circulate within indigenous socialities according to mutual rights and obligations. This means that these musicians commonly adjust their musical activities and journeys to the resources they can access at the moment. Many of the men also move around a lot, and the timing and direction for this mobility are often unpredictable as it is decided by opportunities in the form of transport, money and other people's actions.

Hence, intentions and actual outcomes can diverge greatly in this sociomusical setting. How and when planned events like studio recordings take place, and which people end up being involved are often uncertain until in progress. Extra-musical circumstances, including the ones just mentioned, also frequently change during ongoing recording projects. Musicians may therefore leave, or may not return after a short break. Recordings in themselves are thus also fairly unpredictable processes and require a capacity for improvisation and flexibility from everyone involved. It is a widespread, taken-for-granted view among the black men that blackfellas possess such a capacity to a much greater degree than most whitefellas, because of the different ways their respective life worlds operate. Such perceptions are also frequently confirmed around the studio. As we saw with the white shopwoman on the day described, for instance, it is in the main white people who are frustrated and upset over the often unpredictable turn of events, while the black musicians and other Aboriginal people usually take it in stride.

As on the day described, the studio is also constantly contacted by people who push a range of ideas about musical projects. At any one time, Steve and Stan thus juggle a number of eventualities and possibilities, out of which only a few are realised, and usually in forms other than the original idea. In productivity terms it may look reassuring to present such eventualities as firm plans for the studio activities before

¹¹⁵ Quite a few of the musicians have been or are part of CDEPs (Community Development Employment Projects), which are government-funded, community run projects for unemployed indigenous people (Rowse 1998:214ff). The men's commitment to such work varies between individuals and depending on what else was going on around them at any particular time. I never got the impression that these jobs had much importance for their self-perception or for how they structured their time or priorities.

funding agencies, the CAAMA board, or other players in the media industry. At the same time, formalised plans create expectations, questions and demands. When things do not happen as planned on paper, or not at all, people end up disappointed or disillusioned. This partly explains the studio men's reluctance to take responsibility for such "plans" by supplying details for events.

The impromptu approach to studio activities is also linked to the musicians' and studio men's conceptions of artistic creativity, which involve ideas and values concerning blackfella and whitefella ways of making music and living in general.

Blackfella creativity and skills

While social aspects and rewards tend to be the primary creative motivation for most Aboriginal music makers in Central Australia, some of the more committed musicians, such as Warren, Clifford and Stan, tend to put personal aspects first. They express ideas about their creativity as a special force, driving their passion and love for the crafting of musical expressions. They talk of the great personal satisfaction they get from developing and possessing instrumental skills that can carry those expressions.

A town musician who has toured interstate told me that one of the attractions for him to become a musician and be part of a professional music world was the creative "attitudes and feelings" he encountered here (and that he also associated with a liberal attitude to drugs). "They're a bit up-mind of the average person in the street, so to say, 'cause there are a lot of closed minds out there", he explained. In this view, "closed minds" represent formalised and structured musical and work regimes that tend to stifle creative powers and inspiration (e.g. Longhurst 1995:58ff).

While similar ideas about creative powers are common in various intellectual traditions in the world (Negus and Pickering 2002), they are often invested with certain blackfella values and meanings in Aboriginal music realms. As mentioned in the previous chapter, for instance, many musicians in the southeast insist that their creativity is sourced from a particular Aboriginal natural or spiritual instinct and talent for music. Central Australian Aboriginal musicians are more likely to describe creativity in pragmatic terms, such as blackfellas growing up surrounded by people who sing and dance as part of their everyday social and ceremonial life. Their particular laid back attitude to music practices is thus understood to come from their familiarity with music as an everyday, and not separate or formalised, practice.

At times, they perceive this blackfella musicality as part of a wider, even global black musical expressive culture (e.g. Gilroy 1993). For instance, when asked to compare his experience of playing with blackfellas and whitefellas, one town musician found that "most Aboriginal artists, or any black artist, have a way of pushing the time out a little bit further, so that you become a little bit more relaxed, a little bit more, you know, hands on your hip, within the same time frame". To clarify, he described a whitefella drummer we both knew as playing "like he's got really tight pants on... tightening up in a way that it becomes quirky... like really tight, pink trousers, you know, that tight it's pulling your knees together".

Wong quotes an African American jazz musician talking in similar terms when he observes how non-African American musicians are "technically good but 'stiff'" (Wong 2000:71). He goes on to demonstrate, by playing an instrument, how an African American musician can play a musical phrase "with a looser, more fluid sense of rhythm and even timbre" (71). Wade gives further examples of how black musicians in Colombia describe white musicians as "very lifeless" and "like sticks" (Wade 2002:101).

Similar to many Aboriginal musicians in Central Australia, these black North and South American musicians do not so much criticise or define themselves in relation to whitefella musicians as they are able to recognise the absence and presence of blackfella features of music making. When trying to pin down exactly what those blackfella features are, the Aboriginal musicians usually describe or mimic the no-frills, direct and "live" quality of desert music making that I noted in Chapter Three. They contrast this to the more regimented and "square" ways in which whitefellas tend to play. As one musician said, "whitefellas can do it, too, but most don't. And there are square blackfellas around, too". He thought of this as a result of the way whitefellas in general, and some more "educated" blackfellas, learn music (and most other things) "from paper". That is, they play according to formal musical structures or notation while most blackfellas he knows learn music through listening, looking and picking it up in the process of playing with others.

As the reference to "tight pink pants" whitefella ways of playing indicates, the Aboriginal musicians also tend to associate white and black ways of playing music with different masculine styles. When I asked the man who made this comment what he meant, he eventually settled for the feminine word "girlie" to describe the somewhat restricted way in which he thought many white or "educated" black musicians play.

This perception of blackfella music as more masculine powerful was illustrated on an occasion when a few Aboriginal band members and I hung around after a rehearsal. They had tried out a white drummer for a few weeks, an experienced and skilled drummer. This night, however, the black band members decided to drop him. One of them argued that the guy brought "too much baggage". That is, he had a habit of constantly wanting to discuss their playing, and wanted verbal confirmation on how they should play a specific tune. He also tried hard to engage the black men in friendly small talk and get to know them. The black men tend to view this kind of continuous verbal commentary, and the need for confirmation and chatting as female characteristics. They often interpret such habits as insecurity, somewhat annoying or "uptight" when appearing in men's conduct, as I return to in Chapter Eight.

Among themselves, the black musicians seldom discussed or decided verbally how to do a tune. They reached consensus in the flow of playing and through reading each others' hand, body or facial gestures. Occasional suggestions or questions were put in one or two rather crude words. Hence, the black band members usually responded to the white drummer's talk with silence. "He doesn't play black enough!" the lead singer concluded, and qualified; "He's got no fucking balls!"

The laid back and go-with-the-flow blackfella approach to music making is in this way associated with a more powerful and desirable black masculine attitude by these musicians. The white drummer in question told me later that he had also had enough of the blackfella musicians. What he saw as their unfocused and unpredictable ways of playing and doing things, their lack of "social skills" (i.e. small talk), and nobody seemingly willing to make decisions were just "too loose to work, too frustrating", he said and shook his head.

In the actual recording work in the studio, the valued laid back and loose "blackfella way" of making music has to be negotiated in relation to another dominant aspect of the studio ethos; demands for a more professional attitude and input. This is required to produce recordings that meet the standards by which the studio releases, and thus CAAMA Music's reputation as a producer of "Aboriginal Music for the World", are judged and compared in a wider music industry and market. In negotiating such "blackfella way" and professional approaches to music production, the Aboriginal musicians and the studio men put into play different norms for accruing male respect and worth. This can be illustrated by a studio session with a community country gospel band.

Bush men playing the studio

It is the second day of recordings with the Haasts Bluff country gospel band. Steve is trying to make an old man out in the studio synchronise his singing to the music coming through his headphones. The man goes under the name of "the pastor" and is a small, weather-beaten, dark-skinned man who never takes off his well-used, black felt Akubra.¹¹⁶ He keeps getting distracted by the music in his ears and fails to sing when he is supposed to. Steve stops the tape for the sixth time on this one particular verse. He says nothing, but his body posture signals that he would rather be somewhere else.

About twenty indigenous men are cramped together on the seats behind Steve in the control room. One man is fast asleep and snoring. The others keep gesticulating and instructing the pastor, forgetting that they cannot be heard through the soundproof glass. The band comes from the Pintupi-Luritja community Ikuntji, close to the dramatic Haasts Bluff mountain peak, some three hours west of Alice Springs (see map 1). Formed seven years ago, the band has included a succession of different members. In this version it is a five-piece set, but twelve different men swap instruments and sing and play on the recording, the youngest in his mid-twenties and the oldest, the pastor, in his sixties.

Only a few of the men in the control room are part of the recordings. The rest are music makers from neighbouring desert communities who happened to be in town, heard about the recordings and want to check out what "the competition" is up to. One man is dressed in a hospital robe and has a disconnected nose tube taped to his face. He has obviously walked off from a hospital ward to be part of this happening.

The pastor gets his singing wrong again and the men in the control room exclaim a unison "aahhh!", laughing and shaking their heads and directing instructions in Luritja language at him that he cannot hear. The atmosphere is generous and supportive. Every man is allowed to make mistakes. When someone does, the others are keen to show and tell how to get it right, but in ways that will not appear superior or discouraging.

When I took them to the upstairs kitchen for a cup of tea earlier, they told me how exhausted they were the night before, after the first day. Ian Anderson, who played with the Warumpi Band in its early days, says "We're not used to doing music this

¹¹⁶ He has since passed away and I therefore refrain from using his real name.

way", laughing and shaking his head. "We finish them songs!" agrees Douglas Multa, a senior tribal elder and an original band member. John Rogers, former lead singer in the Papunya rock band Roadblock, is impressed by the sound they can produce when playing with "proper" equipment. All these men have played music since their childhood or teenage years in Aboriginal bush settings and some have recorded out there. This is their first professional studio experience, though. It is thus the first time they have been asked to break up their songs and play them individually, and do re-takes of bits and pieces separate from a group playing.

The pastor finally cuts the song, almost right, and they move on. Stan has taken over at the sound desk. In contrast to Steve who tends to limit his sound engineer role to that of a recording technician, Stan often takes on the role as a producer and professional coach, actively advising and instructing musicians to make them expand their musical expressions. He now frequently stops the tape and makes the band take the song from the start several times because the drummer slows down, the bass player makes a slight mistake, and the singers get their words wrong. A few band members correct their mistakes in the next take. Most, and especially the pastor, show no signs of having heard Stan. Without words, they keep doing their own thing.

By lunchtime, they have recorded four songs. The men gather at the studio back door. Stan explains to them how important it is that each and every one of them focuses on keeping the same, right tempo throughout a song. They all nod, chuckle at their own flaws, and comment to each other in Luritja and with hand gestures. The pastor seems more interested in the good condition of the four-wheel drive vehicles in the back yard.

Stan asks how they plan to make this recording work for them. The men look nonplussed at each other and make hand gestures to indicate to Stan that they don't follow his English. "Are you going to sell some?" Stan rephrases his question. "CAAMA, you mean?" Ian asks. "Well, that may be one option, but...", Stan replies. Like many community bands, the men take for granted that, if they record with CAAMA, their CD will soon be on the CAAMA Shop shelf. To record a CD album at CAAMA is often in itself the end goal for many of these bands, too, since this elevates their status as men and musician in their home community and the larger Aboriginal desert region.

Stan proceeds to tell them that when these recordings are done he will make them a cassette copy each to take home. He will then send them a CD when it is mixed in a week or two. "You then *own* this music. This sound is yours, to *do* something

with", he emphasises. The men watch him, waiting for his advice on what to do with it. Stan hesitates, and then says that he thinks they should sell it. Through CAAMA, maybe, but better still, they could sell copies when travelling around and performing among their own mob. More importantly, he advises, they should sit down and really listen to their own playing and arrangements and think about how they could do it better when they make new songs. Then, when they have a bunch of new songs, they can come back to the studio and "this time we'll do it properly" he holds out to them. He describes how he will put them on a click track to structure each song from start to finish and work on getting every single note right to produce an album that will "cut it anywhere". The men nod at each other, excited at the prospect of producing an album of a real professional standard.

When Steve and Stan transfer the recordings to digital tapes the week after, they like what they hear. "It has a full sound from the start, they know what they are doing", Stan nods approvingly. Steve suggests that CAAMA should release it as a community release, that is, a cassette version mainly aimed for the Aboriginal community market and for which the studio put in less mixing time than they would on a national CD release. Stan disagrees. These recordings require much more work to reach the standard he sees fit for any CAAMA release. If it had been a CAAMA Music project he would have worked plenty more with the vocals and arrangements, and he thinks that the band members need more professional coaching of their instrumental skills. However, this recording is paid for by a community health project and the three days paid for do not allow for any of that.¹¹⁷ "And that oldfella..." Stan chuckles and shakes his head, realising that the authority that the pastor commanded in the group probably wouldn't allow for much outside interference in their music anyway.¹¹⁸

Accruing blackfella male respect

In this recording session, as in many instances when bush musicians work in the studio, the musicians tell me that they greatly appreciate working with a "professional" who takes them and their music making seriously. At the same time, the studio experience tends to leave them feeling somewhat inadequate as Stan seldom shows satisfaction and always asks for more. Their musical skills are thus constantly questioned. In the studio,

¹¹⁷ The recording project was funded by an anti-petrol sniffing program based at Mt Liebig health clinic and run by the Aboriginal organisation Waltja Tjutanku Palyapayi.

¹¹⁸ The recordings were later released as "Ikuntji Gospel Band" in a cassette version (CAAMA Music 2003).

Stan and Steve are, moreover, on their home turf, possessing expertise and authority that make them the superior, and the bush musicians the somewhat inferior, men. This is not a comfortable position for any of these men. They are used to commanding certain respect as musicians and initiated men within Aboriginal regimes of accruing male status in their home communities and in the wider region. Douglas, for example, is a respected, knowledgeable tribal man who guides others in ancestral matters, and the pastor commands a high degree of respect also by his senior age and religious standing. Aspects of these forms of social and male worth and power are neutralised or reorganised in the studio setting, where professional regimes of gaining male status are the more dominant.

Stan clearly demonstrated the professional studio regimes when he intentionally pursued the issue of what the men planned to do with their recordings. He first of all wanted them to understand that studio processes and the recorded product are separate matters. More importantly, he wanted them to reflect on their studio work as a phase in their professional development as musicians. By making them imagine themselves at a more advanced stage of music making, he wanted to inspire them to want to move in that direction, where they could achieve increased male respect and worth through recognition in a professional musical realm.

In response to such attempts, bush musicians can use their particular forms of male and Aboriginal knowledge in order to manipulate their inferior male and musician position in the studio. They also make use of imagery of bush people as less "sophisticated" to evade the superior, expert position of the studio engineers. Like most bush musicians, the Haasts Bluff men do not, for instance, argue against Stan's directives on how to change songs and ways of playing even when they disagree. They instead tend to adopt an almost childlike, jovial demeanour as if they are too naïve to understand technological processes, and keep doing their thing. Bush musicians may also act as if they don't understand the studio men's Standard English, while persisting with their preferred way of playing. They moreover commonly discuss the studio proceedings with each other in their local language, well aware that the studio men cannot understand them. We saw all these "strategies" in action in the Haasts Bluff recordings.

Meeting the same musicians in other settings, they may speak fluent English. I have also found some of them busy recording and editing their music on computers in

their home community, or setting up and sound engineering stage performances. They thus show plenty of knowledge about recording processes and sound technology.

In their mediator roles, the studio men do, however, also have to accommodate certain regional Aboriginal norms for interpersonal male respect when working with bush musicians. For instance, Stan, who is in his mid-forties, mainly directs frank critique and advice at musicians younger or about his age. He rarely directs Aboriginal men older than himself, such as the pastor, regardless of how poorly he thinks they play or sing. To do so would be highly inappropriate in regional normative regimes where younger generations of Aboriginal men are to show respect and deference for, and not openly criticise or contradict, men older than themselves. As Steve is not initiated, and thus not recognised as a "full man" according to traditional norms, he also shows deference for younger initiated men. If the studio men were to breach such norms, ongoing work and the studio's reputation could be jeopardised as they would be seen as ignorant and not worthy of respect among regional Aboriginal men.

Factors such as their relative age, degree of traditional knowledge, religious standing, kin and community positions thus require certain sensitivities between the studio workers and musicians, and between recording musicians. Such "blackfella way" aspects of the studio ethos can be equally or more important than the professional dimensions or technological expertise. Hence, at times Steve and Stan, as mediators between those different idioms, have to tread a fine line between showing respect for traditional norms and at the same time putting their expertise to work in order to produce recordings that meet reasonable technological and professional standards.

At times, bush musicians complain to me that they experience a lack of respect for their male and musician status around the studio. However, most of them tend to accept or at least tolerate the unequal studio relationships as site specific. And as we saw in the Haasts Bluff recordings, the men variably accommodate, are inspired by, and manipulate this situation in order to maintain and expand their sense of male worth and respect. The place specific ways in which male-to-male and Aboriginal norms for interpersonal respect are played out around the studio are accentuated when Stan and Steve occasionally travel to bush communities to record or stage musical events. Here, the bush musicians are of course on their home turf as knowledgeable "experts" in the all-important traditional and everyday norms for music making and manhood. Here, the studio men are somewhat inferior and it is their movements and actions that are

restricted by their unfamiliarity with the intricacies of the particular local Aboriginal and male dynamics that organise these settings.

As blackfella men engage with each other in the studio, they thus negotiate different forms and degrees of intercultural Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal musical and technological knowledge and experiences, and different regimes for gaining male worth and respect. Each encounter is also an occasion for mutual recognition and partial borrowings of their different as well as shared male, blackfella and musical forms of identifying. The studio ethos thus constitute a mediating dynamic in which the men articulate diversity and difference in dialogue with each other, and thereby rework as well as assert their sense of self. In the process, they produce a sense of blackfella and male ownership.

Ownership of difference and sameness

The accumulation of the site specific intercultural engagements of diversity in the CAAMA Music studio continue to produce a distinctive blackfella and male "ownership" of this sociomusical space. Aspects of this "ownership" are anchored in the regional Aboriginal topography that the studio is part of, and that I described in Chapter Two. It is reproduced through the transfer and reworking of ideas of distinct, actual and imagined "blackfella ways" of operating that circulate in these surroundings.

One of the core musicians around the studio can illustrate how this intercultural, internally differentiated and ambiguous male and blackfella ownership is experienced. Lyndon has played with numerous Aboriginal as well as white musicians, and has worked in mainstream, non-Aboriginal work places in and beyond Central Australia. He says that he can admire the way in which "whites get into the nitty-gritty of music making, and train seven days a week." He says that he strives for such a disciplined commitment, which he associates with keeping a professional "distance" between one's music making and everyday life. Lyndon contrasts this to what he does not intend to become; like the many blackfellas he describes as "just lazy" and "who get dragged down, are held back, by all that, being traditional, all family". Those blackfellas are too close to their people, he thinks, and every other person will come to his door and demand things if they think he's successful.

Lyndon explains that he has ended up with different ambitions from those blacks, whom he goes on to qualify as "full-bloods", and says that this is "probably... the whiteness in me, I'm half white". He was fathered by a white man he has never met

and grew up in a small South Australian town, with longer periods in Central Australian bush communities and Alice Springs, and he has also lived in Adelaide. He identifies as “half-caste” and I understand that he has moved fairly freely between blackfella and whitefella realms, while being socially grounded in Aboriginal life worlds.

He goes on to say that he still prefers to play music with blackfellas. “I feel more comfortable with them. It’s about how you act, how we behave”. He raises his arm, grips an imagined bottle and gulps its content down. “You know...”, he chuckles in a gesture suggesting crude, devious behaviour. “It’s also how we sing. How our country music is as different to theirs (white people’s) as country is to rock’n’roll. It is about how we play it,” he continues and leans back in the chair in a very relaxed, smiling guitar playing figure, as if the imagined instrument was part of his body and he was lazing in warm sun. He then sits up, stiffening his back, arranging the invisible instrument firmly on his lap and playing with a serious, concentrated face, effectively showing me how he experiences the difference between blackfella and whitefella attitudes to playing music, and to things in general. Stan walks in on our conversation. He nods. “You can be your mongrel fuckin’ self”, he chuckles. Lyndon makes a thumbs-up gesture with a mischievous grin.

Emerging through the studio ethos and through talk and gestures such as these is a strong sense of blackfella ownership. It is also a particular *male* ownership, since it is predominantly men who can be “mongrel” among men in this studio, a dynamic I explore in the next chapter.

Summary

In this chapter I have presented the CAAMA Music recording studio in Alice Springs as a dynamic space for the articulation and negotiation of a diversity of musical, Aboriginal and male knowledge, experiences and values. This sociomusical diversity is mediated through a particular studio ethos – a dynamic set of ideas, values and practices through which certain laid back ways of playing music, relaxed attitudes to firm plans and rules, and a capacity for improvisation as circumstances constantly change in the studio work are conceived as distinctively blackfella and male qualities.

Aspects of the blackfella and male studio ethos have a legacy in the history of CAAMA, which was formed to represent and “empower” Aboriginal people in Central Australia. In this chapter, my main focus has been on the more practical and mundane reproduction of the studio ethos as it emerges from the everyday engagements among

the studio men, bush, town and out-of-town musicians. A main set of creative tensions that are negotiated as these different parties of Aboriginal men and musicians work together concerns professional versus "blackfella ways" of operating. In the process, the men mobilise and manipulate various regimes for gaining male and Aboriginal status and respect, in order to maintain their particular sense of male and Aboriginal worth and integrity. As this diverse lot of Aboriginal musicians and men engage with each other, they also reproduce a sense of shared blackfella and male "ownership" of this studio.

The next chapter looks at the particular male forms that are mobilised in the mediating dynamics of the studio, and how the resulting Aboriginal and male character of the studio is challenged by outside modernising forces.

CHAPTER FIVE

MEN MAKING THE STUDIO

The comfortable sound of gentle acoustic guitar picking of a slow country love song fills the dimly lit control room. Stan carefully adjusts the knobs on the sound desk to shape the vocals. The singer in the studio is Lyndon Reid, short, dark-haired, and dressed in work boots, jeans and a ripped, chequered flannel shirt on top of a t-shirt. Over the last few months he has recorded his debut solo album, a mix of his original bluegrass, country ballads and country rock songs. This is one of the final vocal overdubs. Or so we think. Lyndon will in fact insist on doing all the vocals again some weeks later, not happy with the way he sounds. Today, however, he feels right on target.

Stan stops the tape. "You sing like a fucking cow, fuck you!" he says into the desk microphone. Hearing him through his headphones, Lyndon looks up, grins and turns his backside to the window, showing with a gesture at his wriggling bum where Stan can "fuck" him. "Cunt!" he responds and thrusts a rude finger at the control room window. He then turns the finger in a circling gesture. Stan nods, backs up the tape and pushes the red blinking record button. The sound of soft guitars again fills the control room. Stan signs "recording" with a firm hand gesture. Lyndon digs his hands deep down in his pockets, waits for the introduction to finish and then starts to sing, the lyrics urging a woman to make a new, romantic start with him.

The control room doors opens and Steve steps in. He looks out in the studio and grins. "Still at it, ey? Ah, Scaggsie!" he chuckles, shaking his head. Lyndon has wanted to get this album off the ground for years and was finally able to go ahead, after receiving a grant from the Australia Council. Knowing how keen he has been, and also how much is at stake in recording a debut album, the men around the studio make mild jokes about it. Lyndon has earned the nickname Scaggsie by being a long-time fan of the North American bluegrass revivalist Ricky Scaggs, a connection which is also used by the studio men for some teasing about stardom aspirations.

Steve wants Stan to confirm the practice with their rock band tonight and then takes off for lunch. Five minutes later the door opens a tiny fraction while someone peeps in, which tells us that it is Warren, always making sure not to interrupt ongoing recordings before entering. A tall, dark-skinned man dressed in a red sports jumper and jeans, and a dirty baseball cap over black hair that hangs loose down the back of his neck, he sits down with a big smile beside me on the sofa along the back wall. He looks

at me with an air of amazement, slowly shaking his head, but waits for me to ask what's up before he says that he just cannot believe that this is all happening to him. It turns out that his latest album has climbed to the top of the weekly independent country music charts. He keeps shaking his head with a wondrous smile, looking humbled by his increasing success, which he often talks of as "good fortune". He turns to listen to Lyndon for a while before asking if the harmonies are done yet. We shake our heads and he chuckles with a tongue-smacking "that's-what-I-thought".

Warren picks up an acoustic guitar that sits on the sofa and casually strums a few chords and finger picking lines to Lyndon's love song. This adds a distinct, "sweet" Warren H. Williams' feel to it that is considerably different from the more edgy, rustic bluegrass feel that characterises Lyndon's style of playing. He then asks where Lyndon is actually planning to sell this album. "To his Port Augusta mob?" he chuckles jokingly, implying that in contrast to his own increasingly successful national career, Lyndon's debut album is destined for an audience of friends and relatives in the South Australian town where he grew up. "Well, we're thinking of flogging it in Tamworth", Stan says, focusing on Lyndon in the studio. Warren waits but Stan does not elaborate on this rather surprising statement.

Tamworth is Australia's "country music capital", 500 km northwest of Sydney. Every January this small rural town is inundated with about 50 000 country music fans, bush poets, line dancers, rodeo riders, and urban and rural cowboys for the ten-day-long Tamworth Country Music Festival. The event attracts Australia's country music elite and upcoming artists who perform around the clock in more than a hundred different venues. The cream of the country music industry can be seen here and this is also where the annual Australian country music awards are presented. When the festival started back in the 1970s, blackfella country musicians were often met by racist attitudes and not invited to perform in festival venues. Nowadays, the Tamworth Festival usually includes a couple of dedicated Aboriginal concerts and showcases, and Gus Williams and Herbie Laughton with their Central Australian mob, including Warren and Lyndon, have become annual regulars.

At times, CAAMA Music sends employees and artists to indigenous music festivals in various parts of the country. The Tamworth Festival has not been on their agenda, though. It is hard for an organisation serving Aboriginal people to justify the high cost of sending people to a mainly whitefella musical spectacle. The disinterest can also be explained by the studio's history of not prioritising country music. However,

with Warren's growing fame and an increased nationwide interest in blackfella country music lately, there has been some talk of maybe sending the studio men, a few musicians and a salesperson next time around.¹¹⁹ Launching Lyndon's CD at the festival could be a focal point for CAAMA's presence. It would obviously also be a scoop for Lyndon to have a first album launched at this pivotal country music event, a privilege that CAAMA has not as yet offered Warren. At the time of this recording session, however, nothing has been decided. Stan's tentative "thinking of" indicates that this is one of the many possibilities that circulate around the studio all the time.¹²⁰

When Lyndon sees Warren through the control room window, he changes his posture slightly, straightening his back, singing in a more focused way. After finishing the song, he comes into the control room. Warren has already left to start his shift at CAAMA Radio. Lyndon asks if it sounded alright. Stan hums vaguely, reluctant to settle for "alright" if Lyndon can do better. Next, Lyndon asks casually what Warren had to say. Stan shrugs his shoulders and concentrates on forwarding the tapes to the next song. I make a similar non-committed gesture. Stan then stands up, looks at the clock above the studio window, declares "One o'clock sharp!" and leaves through the studio and out the back door. Lyndon watches him through the control room window. "Wanker!" he says, frustrated. The fact that Stan did not respond seems to convince him that Warren did in fact say something substantial about his recordings.

When Lyndon and I part company outside the studio, him taking off to the air-conditioned public library for a midday nap and me going for lunch, he shrugs his shoulders defiantly and declares that he does not care what Warren thinks. This recording is his own project. He knows what he wants it to sound like. That's all that matters, he states firmly.

Male musical allegiance and competition

This recording session illustrates some of the dynamics of allegiance and competition in which the male musicians around the studio assert distinct and shared senses of manhood and indigeneity. Lyndon changing his musical posture in Warren's presence,

¹¹⁹ The increased interest in indigenous country was mainly the result of a widely celebrated television documentary, "Buried Country", on the rich history of indigenous country music in Australia. The documentary was accompanied by the release of a book (Walker 2000), a video by Film Australia and a double CD by Larrikin. Also see www.buriedcountry.com

¹²⁰ As it turned out, CAAMA Music did not send anybody. Warren and the Herbie/Gus entourage went to Tamworth as usual. Lyndon came as their lead guitarist and performed some of his own material as part of the Williams family performances.

the comments on Lyndon's work and aspirations, Warren downplaying his success as "good fortune" instead of as the payoff for his hard and focused work over many years, Stan's response to Warren's implied superiority, Lyndon's frustration over not knowing how a close colleague and competitor judges his work, and Stan and myself staying out of this sensitive issue is all part of what the musicians around the studio usually talk of as natural, "healthy competition" between them.

The role of reputation, prestige, respect and competition for the shaping of musical careers, cultures and styles, and of the recording industry, is recognised in studies from various parts of the world and at different historical times, although rarely made a focal point.¹²¹ Gerstin's (1998) more focused study of the subject investigates reputation building as an ever present and central force for constructing hierarchies of authority in small, face-to-face musical networks in the West Indies. He argues that it is through, and in, the interactions between musicians who know each other personally and who are directly involved with each other's musical work that they incorporate and filter ideas about identity and wider public discourse into their own immediate social and musical worlds. A major factor in this mediation of ideas, Gerstin suggests, is "the micro-politics of authority and hierarchy that arises from musicians working together, depending on one another, and competing" (386).

These observations are relevant to the negotiation of male, blackfella and musical forms around the CAAMA recording studio, where Aboriginal men like Lyndon, Stan and Warren have recorded, played, toured and made music with and around each other for years. They know each other's musical skills, techniques and preferences as well as their personal idiosyncrasies from having been directly or indirectly involved in the musical and personal dramas, the drinking and drug-taking, and the good and bad turn of events that mark the development of their respective biographies. These musicians depend on each other's help and support. At the same, they each forge and guard their own reputation, integrity and relative position in competition with each other. Although dynamics of competition and allegiance characterise the Aboriginal music scene as a whole in the region and beyond, it is particularly accentuated around the studio. Here, the men are at their most vulnerable in that they are fully exposed to fellow musicians' and the sound engineers' close scrutiny

¹²¹ For an overview, see Gerstin (1998). Also see Cohen (1991, 1997) for a relevant ethnographic study of particular male and masculine competitiveness and loyalty in the local musical scene of Liverpool, England.

and evaluation of their musical skills, choices and every single mistake they are bound to make.

In the case of Lyndon and Warren, they are both well established and skilled local country music artists with extensive stage and recording experience. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Lyndon originally comes from South Australia. He was fathered by a New Zealand man and grew up with his Aboriginal mother, a habitual drinker, and brothers and sisters of different fathers. He was taken to a Central Australian Catholic Aboriginal mission as a kid to be raised away from his home environment of alcoholic adults and lack of care. He has moved between South Australia and Central Australia ever since, working and playing music. As described in Chapter Three, Warren is firmly grounded in regional Aboriginal kin, social and musical networks, growing up and initiated in Hermannsburg mission as the oldest son of the highly respected Gus Williams, with an Arrernte mother and later a non-Aboriginal stepmother.

Warren and Lyndon have recorded, performed and toured together for the last four or five years while Lyndon has been Warren's main lead guitarist. They have also performed together to back up other musician members of Warren's family and at local country music gigs. During this period, Warren's career has taken off substantially. Apart from their different status in local Aboriginal regimes, the relative professional status has thus changed to one of increasing inequality, which inevitably creates tensions. Any word from Stan or me on Warren's comments about Lyndon's recordings is likely to be interpreted by Lyndon in ways that fuel these tensions.

With the positive concept of "healthy" competition, such at times bitter tensions can be neutralised as the musicians can keep up the appearance of a productive musical, male and blackfella congeniality and solidarity. By opening up this concept one can explore how wider musical and extra-musical norms and conventions are engaged and become entangled as the musicians negotiate their relative positions around the studio.

Healthy competition

A distinct feature of the "healthy competition" as it is played out around the Aboriginal studio is how rarely interpersonal tensions or negative opinions of each other's musical skills or styles are expressed directly between the musicians concerned. They are in the main implied or indirect. As when Warren strums the guitar to Lyndon's song, opinions and critique may be conveyed by playing a musical piece differently when the songwriter or instrumentalist in question is present. Or, as in Lyndon's session, such

implied critique may be played in the soundproof control room in the presence of the producer and other people, who in turn can pass this on to the recording musician(s). Critique and opinions are also expressed through bodily gestures, joking manners or evasive silences, all of which we see in Lyndon's session.

The talk of possible future music events that circulates around the studio is also put to work in creating allegiances, for personal positioning, and to deliver critique in indirect and non-confrontational ways. The studio men may, for instance, bring up loose ideas about projects to try them out among musicians and in the process reinforce a sense of shared goals and cooperation which bonds the musicians around this studio. Recording musicians may also take up the discussion of such ideas to push the studio men to realise the project, and, through this, implicitly position themselves and not others as participants in the event. As when Stan and Warren suggest unequally valued scenarios for the launch of Lyndon's CD, possible events may also be brought up by musicians to mark out different professional and male status, as Warren does, and that Stan then reverses in order to unsettle a man and musician who appears a bit too sure of himself.

These indirect and non-confrontational means of evaluating, critiquing and competing with each other draw on certain enduring norms for congenial sociability and for male status in Aboriginal Central Australia.

Blackfella congeniality

The avoidance of direct expression of critical views between individuals is central for how "healthy competition" is played out between the musicians around the studio. Such non-confrontational practices are characteristic for interactional customs in Aboriginal Central Australia, where everyday social relations are still to various degrees organised by traditional bodies of norms for producing and preserving harmony and congeniality. Myers (1986), Liberman (1985) and others suggest that such normative structures have emerged as pivotal for the maintenance of larger, enduring systems of cooperation and mutual help among many hunter-gatherer peoples, who tend to be highly egalitarian. That is, these practical and moral norms have effectively maintained binding associations between people who mainly live in smaller, dispersed, highly mobile and temporary groups without formal leaders or political structures, and where the autonomy of the individual is highly valued.

Today, most Aboriginal people in Central Australia live in larger, permanent settlements or towns where people often are deeply divided according to, for instance, family and language groupings. Long-running feuds and at times violent conflicts between families and individuals are commonplace. Principles of unanimity, consensus and "sharing and caring" for each other are nevertheless fundamental ideals that most Aboriginal people in the region identify with, and that are objectified in their ancestral bodies of knowledge.¹²² Direct criticism and open contradiction challenge these principles and are thought to embarrass fellow blackfellas. Such things are perceived as both an encroachment upon a person's integrity and autonomy, and as endangering relationships of mutual obligations and rights that are the substance of desired and necessary relatedness. Open disagreement is seen as somebody forcing his or her own ways upon others, which is perceived as acting egoistically, self-importantly or in a manner lacking in control. In the ideal state of congeniality all this is deemed unacceptable, at times offensive, or at least inappropriate (e.g. Liberman 1985:25ff; Myers 1986:271; von Sturmer 1981). To win respect and sustain autonomy in this ideal blackfella fellowship, a person should be seen to be generous, unselfish, self-deprecatory, and should moderate his/her own activities and views in public accordingly.

These ideals are reflected in the ways in which "healthy competition" is acted out around the studio. Here, Aboriginal music makers rarely speak of their own importance even when they are bursting to share good news for which they want recognition. Instead, as we saw Warren doing, they may make gestures to prompt others to ask before they utter self-amplifying news. When the expected praise is delivered, they tend to accept it humbly and often redirect it to a third party or impersonal force, such as "good fortune".

The frequent resort to indirect and nonverbal means for communicating opinions on each other's music making is also part of regional blackfella "etiquette".

Blackfella etiquette

A group of "bushies" wander in to the studio area. The black men wear dusty felt Akubra hats and baseball caps, dirty shirts and jeans, and hard-worn boots. The women walk a few barefoot steps behind in floral-printed, below-the-knee length skirts and

¹²² Also, such ideals are frequently asserted as actual reality when Aboriginal people not only in Central Australia wish to demonstrate a basic difference between blackfellas and whitefella society.

richly coloured t-shirts. The children, in torn t-shirts and dresses, stay close to the adults. One of the men pokes the brim of his hat with a finger as a greeting towards the office where I sit. He doesn't say a word and avoids eye contact. After a few minutes' silence I ask what I can do for them. The man in the hat moves closer and mumbles what I assume is the names of Stan and Steve. I tell them that the studio men will be back soon and suggest that they wait in the sofa outside the office. No one responds verbally or makes any sign of having heard me. The women stroll out again, the girls following. The men and boys hang around, commenting in hushed voices in Pitjantjatjara language on artist photos on the walls. They move restlessly but without hurry, occasionally glancing at me. After about fifteen minutes the man touches the brim of his hat again and mumbles what sounds like "later". They walk out, leaving only the distinct smell of the desert bush; sandy dust and a strong odour of kangaroo meat cooked over open fire.

In my first month at the studio I tried to make what I perceived as ordinary conversations with the bush musicians who frequently appeared at the studio. I would ask where they came from, if they were in town for long, and introduce myself. I soon gave up these attempts at politeness. The response, if any, was usually monosyllabic sounds and I could not detect any signs of interest in making conversation. Typically, bush musicians who visited again after a few weeks or maybe months would, however, declare abruptly that they "know" me, that is, they recognise me. They might then start to give sparse answers to the questions I must have asked months back. When I got to know some of these men better, though, and especially in their home settings, they never seemed to tire of being social, albeit not necessarily through constant chatter but by doing and experiencing things together.

The discreet behaviour combined with the show of a certain amount of embarrassment characterises the ways in which many Central Australian Aboriginal people interact, especially when meeting new people and visiting other people's places. These interactional customs are widely recognised. Liberman, among others, notes how "shyness is institutionalised in a variety of social settings" in Aboriginal Central Australian societies, where many people find it "discourteous to ask direct questions without first establishing some sort of congenial relationship" (1985:28). He notes how they commonly avoid looking into the eyes of others and are visibly uncomfortable when exposed to the gaze of others. The way they initiate communication with others is usually subtle, such as making small gestures or sounds, seldom addressing a person

directly, and not responding much to questions or talk. Von Sturmer (1981) likewise elaborates “the high degree of diffidence” (1) that characterises Aboriginal people’s ways of interacting with people they do not know. Myers (1986) describes this somewhat restrained behaviour as part of “an etiquette of ‘asking’” (99) among Pintupi people, who “exhibit ‘embarrassment’, ‘shame,’ or ‘deference’ at seeming to assume too much” (100) when moving into other people’s range.¹²³

Similarly around the studio, bush people rarely walk right up to somebody and state their business, even when they are familiar with the place. They usually stay outside the control room or office, don’t look directly at any of us working there, just kind of announce their presence and through this ask “to be admitted to the group” (Myers 1986:99). They may stand there for a considerable time until someone “invites” them by approaching them. If nobody does, they may leave without having stated their business. As is expected in this unassuming etiquette, the studio men may take some time to respond to people’s presence. This delay of course also allows the studio men to assess people’s possible intentions before deciding if they should approach and thus invite them to bring up their business.

The bush etiquette is also observed by most town musicians and to a lesser degree by the core group of men around the studio. They may knock or just walk into the control room, office or studio but they, too, usually wait for the studio men or others present to recognise them with a “what’s up bros’?” or similar gestures directed at them before saying what’s on their mind. At times, it takes half an hour, an hour, before they are addressed directly. Sometimes it never happens.

While demonstrating an appropriate discretion, the ways in which the blackfella etiquette is performed involve many tacit meanings. Individual musicians at times complain to me about incidents when they think it took too long before they were addressed by certain men around the studio, or when they experienced that they were not “invited” at all and thus not included in the studio sociality at the time. They tend to interpret such delays or non-inclusions as intentionally disrespectful or as communicating some hidden meanings and strategies. At times they are correct in thinking so, other times it has nothing to do with the musician in question. Either way, the Aboriginal men around the studio both read and exploit this blackfella interactional

¹²³ Pintupi people come from an area stretching westward from about Papunya to the Western Australian border area.

etiquette to negotiate their relative musical and male positions and recognition in the competitive studio dynamic.

During music work and in everyday interactions around the studio, moreover, elaborated or continuous verbal exchanges are rare. As with Stan and Lyndon in the recording session that I described, the men typically limit their verbal exchanges to a few crude words that are interpreted in relation to ongoing work and the people present. Various states of mind, opinions and tensions around the studio are instead expressed through eye, facial, hand and bodily gestures and silences. These gestures are interpreted through shared knowledge of local and personal histories, and the ongoing tensions and allegiances in musical and interpersonal relationships.

The blackfella etiquette and "talking without words" thus require a certain level of shared blackfella and male experience, and shared standards of what is appropriate, expected, acceptable, valued and normal, and what is not. It is obviously also a means to, or works to, exclude those without such knowledge. People who are used to verbal responses and perceive attentive verbal feedback and small talk as essential for their experience of a congenial interaction may find the silence, avoidance, implicit meanings and nonverbal communication confusing, frustrating and at times offensive.¹²⁴ Around the studio, these people are in the main non-indigenous or from other Australian regions. They occasionally comment to me (seen as a fellow whitefella and non-local) how they find Aboriginal people in Central Australia "unresponsive" and "hard to talk to".

Conversely, in terms of local interactional norms, non-indigenous people often appear somewhat rude, intrusive, self-important and ignorant. They normally walk straight up to anyone around the studio, stretch out a hand, look people straight in the eyes and introduce themselves and their business without further ado. Even if they have never been in the studio before, white people may enter and sit themselves down in the control room and begin to ask questions or comment about ongoing music work. Such

¹²⁴ For an example of similar systematic differences between group norms or styles of verbal interactions, see Stubbe's (1998) case study of how supportive feedback and silences are perceived and used very differently in conversational speech by New Zealand Maori (indigenous people) and Pakeha (New Zealanders of European, mainly British descent). She shows, for example, that in Maori interactions among Maori, a lack of verbal feedback and long silences are recognised "as having several causes, meanings and values in interpersonal relations, in comparison with the negative interpretation often placed upon silence by Pakehas" (271). The Pakeha more often "provides a more or less continuous stream of talk" (269), with frequent verbal feedbacks in their intra-interactions. Stubbe notes, too, how Maori make greater use of non-verbal rather than verbal feedback in many contexts.

whitefella ways of showing interest and friendliness are commonly met by a collective embarrassed or dismissive silence from local Aboriginal musicians.

The only person who occasionally challenges these unwitting transgressions by outsiders around the studio is Stan, who as the studio manager has a certain authority to do so. Typically, he gives such whitefellas a long, intense look, which usually makes them acutely self-conscious of their own talk and whiteness. At times, this look is not effective. On one occasion, for example, a number of white musicians and technicians from interstate worked in the CAAMA building in preparation for a big festival in Alice Springs. A group of Aboriginal musicians, along with Stan and me, sat talking in the control room when the door suddenly opened wide. A white man that none of us had seen before walked right in, said "g'day" in a forthright, cheerful manner, and tried to pass Stan who sat in the narrow space between the sound desk and the back row of sound editing modules. Stan made no signs of moving his chair and just looked at the man. Too hurried to acknowledge any of us the man said he needed to use the computer at the end of the sound desk. He continued his attempt to wriggle past Stan. When he realised that he was in fact blocked intentionally, he finally became aware of the complete silence. He looked up at Stan, then at us, made an irritated hand gesture and asked "What?" He got no answer. He now lost his momentum and let his arms hang down. After a few more moments of silence Stan said coolly: "Let's try that again, mate. From the start", and nodded towards the door. The man looked confused. "Just do the whole thing from the start, beginning with knocking on that door from the outside", Stan said calmly. The man looked shaken but did what he was told. Stan called "yeah?" to the knock, the man re-entered, stopped in the doorway, waiting. Stan nodded. "That's right, mate, you wait", he said. Without raising his voice, he then made it clear in a few words that left little to the imagination that this was a blackfella space where whitefellas cannot take their presence for granted, but where they should feel privileged to be invited.

If, on the other hand, non-indigenous visitors show restrained respect, deference, patience and wait for people to approach them, it is normally reciprocated with inviting, attentive and helpful gestures from the Aboriginal men around the studio.

Aspects of regional Aboriginal norms for communicative and interactive behaviours are in these ways put into play, reaffirmed and reworked in "healthy competition", and invest the studio dynamic with particular shared blackfella values and

meanings. In passing on competitive judgements, the men also draw on competing and shared masculine models.

Competing masculinities

One afternoon, Steve and Stan are setting up the studio for a recording session the following day. Steve plays the various instruments and adjusts the amplifiers in the studio, while Stan sets the levels in the control room. A lead is noisy and Stan goes out in the studio to change it. Steve is struggling to get a riff right on a guitar and Stan picks up the bass and starts to guide him. Two of the band members who are due to record turn up and Stan nods them towards the drums and another guitar. After closing the studio doors, they all get into a playful jam session, with increasingly wild, extended loud guitar solos, and bass and drums churning out thumping, exuberant rock beats.

I watch the men enjoying themselves from the control room and switch on the sound from the studio to also hear them. Lyndon and Warren turn up and join me. They shake their heads and comment that this was a kind of music they played when they were “angry youngfellas”. These two country musicians then start to imitate an exaggerated and repetitive guitar playing style and a robotic head-banging act while looking bored “cool”. They chuckle and Warren says that anyone can play that kind of music. Country music, on the other hand, they agree, is more demanding because you have to create different moods with fine tuned, more skilled playing.

It is fairly common for country musicians in the core group around the studio to in this way mock their colleague rock musicians as fairly immature musicians and men. The rock-playing men out in the studio in fact behave nothing like the head-banging figures that Lyndon and Warren exaggerate. As mentioned in previous chapters, Aboriginal desert musicians have not adopted the physically overt gestures of global rock convention. While the men in this jam session may produce wild, loud and thumping rock music, their physical movements are minimal and the only evidence of their emotional involvement is their exchange of wide grins. The country musicians still use the gestures of global stereotypes of rock musicians’ physically showy performance styles and male figures in order to demonstrate the contrasting blackfella masculine models they associate with these two genres. That is, they wish to present country music making as more mature, with its more composed instrumental and vocal styles, which they associate with a male imagery of “real” country musicians as more complex and sincere men.

Aspects of such competing, genre-related male imagery emerge from the different ways in which country and rock music playing works in the making. In country music, instrumentalists' main role is to submerge their contribution to the melody and stay attentive to, enhance, and counterpoint the lead vocalist's expressions.¹²⁵ If instrumentalists do this too busily or too loudly they are seen as incompetent, no matter how technically skilled and ingenious they might be. Musicians schooled in rock music expressions are in contrast expected to perform in a more conspicuous way and are valued for a narcissistic virtuosity on their particular instrument. They are expected to grab any space to show off in protracted solo playing independent of the vocal melody. As this regional Aboriginal music scene demonstrates, though, such strong musical and masculinist gestures are not necessarily executed with large physical gestures.

When put to work in Aboriginal sociomusical traditions in Central Australia these differences in executing rock and country music become entangled with norms and values regarding ideal male behaviour. The non-assertive way of playing respected country music, with selfless attention to other band members, resonates with Aboriginal norms for gaining respect as mature men, who ideally appear generous and unselfish and downplay individual assertiveness in public. Youngfella men, in contrast, are expected to and may be admired for behaving in more selfish, rebellious and irresponsible ways, as if proving themselves through self-amplification. They are not expected to have yet mastered the skills of more composed and knowledgeable men (e.g. Myers 1986:238ff). Country music male imagery thus resonates with that of Aboriginal norms for how adult men ideally behave and present themselves, having learnt the art of dignified calm. While the biological age of rock and country musicians may not differ, these generational ideals are still employed in making evaluative distinctions between music-related masculine styles.

The distinctions between indigenous country and rock male imagery are also associated with the historical development of these two genres. As described in Chapter Three, country music styles have been transferred for several generations and have come to form a continuing expressive core of Aboriginal desert socialities. Country can thus be said to constitute a sonic "oldfella" of regional musical styles. It is also literally embodied in the many older country musicians across the region. As such, country has

¹²⁵ For a detailed, ethnographic description and discussion of the practices and sensibilities of country music in the U.S., see Fox (2004).

accumulated a kind of respect that is related to the higher authority and respect that is (ideally) attributed to older, (ideally) more mature, responsible and wiser men in regional indigenous social regimes. As a more recent sociomusical tradition, rock music has yet to earn such a male and social status. Middle-aged rock musicians are certainly accorded a high degree of respect in many settings, too, but this respect is earned more on an individual basis, for a man's personal skills or selfless contributions to community life, for instance. Country musicians tend to command a certain degree of respect simply by associating themselves with the long established social history of this Aboriginal genre.

In all this it is important to distinguish between aspirations and actual practice. Most of these men do not live as they preach and cannot live as they desire. They live as they can, with the resources and conditions that structure their day to day lives in the intercultural and Aboriginal topography and the ideological landscape of Central Australia that I described in Chapter Two. Their aspirations and desires take form through their identification with country or rock music imagery and styles, but do not determine or even guide their actual behaviour. This is further complicated by the fact that most Aboriginal musicians in the region are not exclusively committed to the one genre of music. As I mentioned in Chapter Three, a prominent feature of Aboriginal music making in Central Australia is its "mongrel" quality; the fusion and mix of styles in the repertoire of any one musician or band and their skills in playing all these styles. The ways in which these men identify and express blackfella and male forms are thus often ambiguous and intermingled, and tend to shift depending on present social circumstances, the set of musicians they play with, or the kind of music event they participate in at any given time and place.

Lyndon, for instance, often avows his emotional and musical allegiance to country music and related masculine styles, combined with some Christian values. At the same time, he is a founding member of the rock band Jagit that in the main plays gutsy rock in the style of 1980s Australian pub rock acts. The other members of Jagit are fairly committed to rock music and to masculine styles that diverge from more traditional Aboriginal and Christian norms. The members' different musical preferences and associated male self-imagery certainly produce tension in this band, but they tend to be of secondary importance to the men's common project of creating a solid rock band. This includes cultivating a certain rough, streetwise, black male musical attitude. In actual life experiences, Lyndon can probably identify more with such a masculine

model than some of the other members. He grew up as a self-reliant kid among hard-drinking adults, later worked in jails, drinking heavily in periods, and he often takes a lead in the crude, macho bantering that is part of the blackfella male sociality around the studio.

Judgements about and competition between musical, blackfella and male styles, status and worth around the studio are in these ways often closely intertwined. The healthy competition among the men involves a mediating dynamic in which the men engage aspects of different and overlapping forms of valued Aboriginal manhood, which have become associated with aspects of masculine and musical styles that circulate in a continuum from the local to the national and global. The difference between country and rock musician imagery is the most accentuated and most often reiterated musical and masculine distinction negotiated competitively. Reggae music imagery is not as clearly defined, just as desert reggae is not as marked as a distinct musical style but is usually played in the rock register or/and may take on a gospel and/or country feel.

The difference between rock and country identifications is also often secondary to the primary importance of a sense of blackfella male and musical allegiance that healthy competition reproduces.

Blackfella allegiance

The Aboriginal musicians usually argue that through their mutual critical scrutinising of each other they challenge each other to do better musically. Criticism motivates and pressures them to never be complacent with their own level of skill, which results in better quality music and recordings, which leads to increased sales, more career opportunities, and increased recognition for all.

In practice this competitive model for producing increased reputation and status is racially exclusive. The musicians compare themselves almost exclusively to other blackfella music makers during ongoing music work. The rivalries and recognition they are most concerned with, and that impact most on their aesthetic choices and crafting of male styles, are those within and between blackfella musical networks. The core musicians around the studio make up one such network. These musicians also belong to different musical groupings outside the studio, and they move between such groupings.

The "healthy" musical rivalry is, in other words, seen as a productive mode for recognising and improving blackfella musical skills, for the betterment of a distinct

blackfella musical collectivity. And while the musicians at times include themselves in a national or even global community of black music making, it is the local and regional Aboriginal music scene that the men address in the black musical "brotherhood" rhetoric of healthy competition. The overarching value that is constituted through the concept and practice of their "healthy competition" is thus a blackfella allegiance. This competitive allegiance is part of the dynamic of the blackfella and male studio ethos and ownership explored in the previous chapter. It involves the connection and reformulation of co-existing, at times contradictory, at times partially resonating, but always co-productive, intercultural and blackfella norms, ideas, practices and imagery.

Whether primarily on an ideational or practical level, those various sources of identification are engaged in ways that bond the musicians even when they are deeply divided, dislike each other, disagree fundamentally with another man's behaviour or convictions, when they let each other down badly, and when they swear that they will never work with a particular colleague again. A man who rubbishes a fellow musician in a very unforgiving way can declare a day or even just an hour later that he is going on tour with this same "wanker". The gist of the justification for such radical turns of emotionally charged tensions is that those being rubbished are, after all, fellow "mongrel" musicians and blackfellas. It is in other words explained as part of the "healthy competition" among men and musicians who are not only dependent on each other but also share an idea of themselves as first and foremost members of a blackfella historical and sociocultural fellowship, and as such, distinct from whitefella life worlds.

This racially inclusive and divided but basically supportive musical blackfella "mongrel" "family" image is normally talked of in gender neutral terms. In practice, however, it reinforces the gendered character of the regional Aboriginal music scene and the studio as overwhelmingly male. The rivalries that count around the studio are those between male blackfella musicians. I have never heard or seen the musicians compare themselves with or refer to Aboriginal (or non-Aboriginal) women musicians in their music making. The ways in which musical and non-musical knowledge and information are put to work around the studio are thus selectively inclusive and exclusive not only along racial but also gendered lines. The particular masculine character of this space is, however, in constant tension with external attempts to reform it, which is the subject of the rest of the chapter.

Blackfella male studio vernacular

It is 8:30 am and Stan walks in the studio back door with fast, heavy steps, his head hanging. "My head is fucked, my hands are fucked and my sex life is fucked. I'm fuckin' fucked! This is what happens when I don't take drugs in the morning!" He glances at me from under depressed eye brows. "You look fucked too!" Shaking my head I respond "Sure. Good morning to you, too!" He continues growling while switching on the office computer to check the e-mail. Steve walks in a few minutes later. Just as he does most mornings, he checks the mood of his "boss" before saying much. He nods a good morning to me. I respond with a gesture towards Stan and make a "he's hopeless" face. Steve makes a half smiling gesture as if saying "Oh, one of *them* days?" Stan rises abruptly. "You quails should be careful making faces behind people's backs", he growls and we all chuckle. He then briskly walks out through the studio stage. "Are you coming or not?" he calls back to Steve, who resignedly shakes his head and follows. Since I'm there, they leave the studio back door open, and are off to the coffee shop down the street to take their morning cappuccinos.

As in this interaction, the core of Aboriginal men around the studio commonly communicate with each other through a somewhat limited repertoire of crude, sexualised terms and profanities, with "fuck" being the operative expression for a range of different feelings, things and actions. As we saw in Lyndon's recording session earlier, the nonverbal communication between the men also frequently consists of bodily gestures suggesting both hetero- and homosexual acts, or referring to sexualised parts of the body. While only a few of the men revel in more graphic sexualised talk and gestures, it is common practice that if a connection can be made between ongoing music work and sex in any form, it will be elaborated, often in clever, funny forms. This kind of bantering is common among the men who hang out around the studio. At times it develops into a happening in itself when a couple of men perform a kind of duel with increasingly rough insults, with other men energising the battle with laughs and comments.

The men clearly recognise their bantering as part of a blackfella and "blokey" thing that is inappropriate and can be perceived as offensive beyond their male and blackfella sociability. They therefore tone down their use of profanities and sexualised gesturing before outsiders, and especially when women are present. They also tend to

talk less altogether when women are around, while the way they change their behaviour depends on who these women are and what they are doing at the studio.¹²⁶

While an overwhelming majority of the people frequenting the studio are Aboriginal men, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women come by occasionally. The CAAMA Music manager and the administrator are women who have reason to come by the studio most days to sort out work issues with the studio men. Women working in the CAAMA shop and video production unit also turn up to ask about recordings, artists and music events, or to get sound jobs done. A number of female employees and visitors also walk by or through the studio on their way in and out of the building.

These women normally stay around only as long as their specific errand requires. The men seldom encourage them to stay, either. If a woman happens to walk in on a group of men carrying on their usual exchange of good humoured insults in the control room or by the back door, for instance, the men normally go quiet and some may leave. It is usually left to the woman to break the silence, which may be a rather intimidating experience and hardly encourages relaxed small talk. Most Aboriginal women also talk and move rather self-consciously around the studio men as compared with the way they behave when I meet them in other settings. They may giggle and fidget, appearing insecure when the men don't pay much obvious attention to their presence or to what they say. As we have seen, the men do pay attention, but usually don't confirm people's presence with many words or gestures. White women are usually more straightforward but may also seem somewhat intimidated and are at times clearly frustrated by a lack of overtly "friendly" gestures from the men, such as generous small talk, smiles or voluntary imparting of information beyond answers to direct questions.

¹²⁶ On my own role and position in the following discussion, I can probably include myself in a small category of women who could be around the studio without causing too much tension or change in the men's behaviour. I never adopted the vernacular of the men or participated much in their bantering. As mentioned in Chapter One, I am, however, familiar with similar kinds of talk and behaviour from having been a rare woman bike-owner and -rider among men in a highly masculine world of motorcycle gangs, and also sharing an interest in working on cars with my male friends in a small, working-class town. This background is in some respects similar to that of Aboriginal town musicians. While the men cut down on crudities in my presence to begin with, with time they relaxed their behaviour and, to various degrees, did not take much notice of me being there. This can probably be understood by a combination of factors, such as their behaviour not having much effect on me, and my taking part in most types of music-related activities over a long period of time. Also, I was not connected to their kin networks as a "sister", wife or "mother", and also not a "boss", which perhaps made me less contentious and interesting in the sense that the men did not lose or gain much by behaving in certain ways because of my gendered, kin or professional position.

Quite a few women, both black and white, who know the men around the studio fairly well, tend to adopt a more or less seriously flirty, flattering and teasing style of talking and acting around the men. This is usually the most rewarding approach if they want more verbally rich responses from the men, who usually catch on to and at times revel in these kinds of heterosexual word games. These interactions are on the men's terms, though. If they don't feel like "playing", or if they think the woman "tries too hard", as in adopting a style of talking they know she is unfamiliar with, they may respond with silence, especially if she is an Aboriginal woman. This effectively tells her that she is out of her bounds, or that she is acting inappropriately according to expectations that Aboriginal women do not answer back in rude ways to men in public. Even when a woman adopts more crude language as a way to mock and parody the men, and thus implicitly discipline the men's vernacular, these exchanges still recognise such vernacular as a distinct feature of the male studio sociability where women are basically defined as outsiders.

Wives and female relatives of recording bush musicians also appear at the studio, coming and going, while the men work. There is rarely any communication at all between these women and unrelated men around the studio. As expected in the dominant regional Aboriginal norms of appropriate gendered behaviour in public, both the men and the women keep a respectful distance from each other. At times, women from bush communities also work in the studio, doing vocals on community band recordings or in gender-mixed country-gospel recordings. The studio space is then soon spatially divided up in gendered ways, with women and men gathering in areas apart. While the control room, corners of the studio, and the small studio hallway may gradually shift from a male to a female space and back again during a day of recordings, the gendered division largely remains.

On one occasion close to twenty community women came in to record gospel songs with a male backing band. During the days of recordings, the women frequently gestured for me to come out in the hallway or the studio where they explained their various concerns about the way the recordings were proceeding. "You tell'im!" they instructed me, nodding towards Steve in the control room. After a few mediating efforts that Steve did not seem to appreciate because I interrupted his work and prolonged the recordings, I suggested to the women that they could tell him directly. "He'll listen, that's his job!" I tried. The women responded with laughs and giggles, jerking their heads backward. "No, no!" they exclaimed embarrassed, telling me that he wouldn't

listen to them. He didn't know their language (which I didn't, either), and they wouldn't understand what he told them because they didn't know "all them fella' machine talk".

The women thus recognised and reinforced the unequal power relations that come with being visitors on other people's spatial and social grounds, and the male-related technological authority of the studio relationships. They also extended aspects of the gender regimes of their everyday community lives to the studio space in taking for granted a social organisation where adult Aboriginal men and women and gendered knowledge and practices largely operate within parallel gendered realms. The realms of men are, moreover, invested with relatively more public and overall authority.

Indigenous out-of-town women musicians that come to work in the studio are usually in the category of "town musicians", who can be recognised by their difference to bush women. In comparison to bush women, these people have a more mainstream style of dress and display more assertive behaviour and way of talking. Some, but not all men around the studio are less "guarded" in relation to such women, even if they tend to keep a polite distance. CAAMA has produced a few albums with indigenous women singer-songwriters, all of them from towns or cities out of the Central Australian region. Most of these women are experienced in a larger music industry and Stan sound-engineered for several of them. He says that musically he finds it no different than working with men in the studio, "you just have to look after them a bit more, that's all. You know, that girlie stuff they do." Elaborating, he says that he basically has to "go softer on" women, as in holding back on the rougher speech, joking insults and non-verbal behaviours that male musicians around the studio cultivate.

The ways the vernacular and masculinist behaviours reproduce the studio as a male domain is thus similar to gendered language behaviour in other all-male relationships and spaces.¹²⁷ In his study of restaurant kitchens as male institutions, for instance, Fine (1987) shows that women have to negotiate their way through a range of sensitive and difficult issues to become "one of the boys". First and foremost, he argues, women have to learn to respond appropriately to sexual insinuations, either through

¹²⁷ The ways in which linguistic and bodily practices are used in order to create, or work to produce male and masculinist cultures and spaces have been discussed in several studies of popular music making (e.g. Cohen 1991, 1997; Finnegan 1989; Frith and McRobbie 1990 [1978]; McRobbie 1980; Reynolds and Press 1995; Walser 1993), as well as in numerous other arenas of highly gendered practices, such as sports (Messner 1992; Messner and Sabo 1990, 1994), school fraternities (Lyman 1987), prisons (Sabo, Kupers and London 2001) and body building (Klein 1993), to mention a few. Also see texts in Johnson and Meinhof (1997) on language and masculinities.

sexual innuendo or by sexual joking. From this, he proposes that it is through sexuality that men demarcate their social world and keep women out.

An implied assumption in Fine's and other writings on women in male institutions is that women in fact aspire to become "one of the boys". I hesitate to suggest this for the gender relations around the Aboriginal studio. As described, Aboriginal women from more traditionally oriented settings do not even seek to engage actively with this male realm and are mainly concerned with acting according to norms for appropriate female and male behaviours in separate public realms. More publicly assertive Aboriginal women do not seem to attempt to become gendered equals, either. From their bodily gestures, giggling and more or less serious flirting, my lasting impression is that these women more often are interested in being heterosexually attractive in feminine ways to particular men.

Only a couple of out-of-town women musicians appeared in the studio during and after my work there, brought in for additional instrumental recording work. A white female fiddler, for instance, was brought in from Darwin to play on some of Warren's songs. These sessions were very different from most other recordings I witnessed in this studio, in that the men completely abandoned even their moderated coarse language and gestures. It was unlike the instances when I have seen local Aboriginal women partake in recordings or band rehearsals, too. They frequently apologise, fidget and require a lot of supportive affirmations from the men if they are to perform well, or at all. These women also frequently seek male attention by putting on shy, flirty, helpless or other conventional feminine, at times sexually suggestive, manners. The female fiddler showed no such tendencies. She went on with her job with relaxed confidence.

An Aboriginal musician who walked in on these sessions a few times suggested, after she had left, that she must be a "lesbo" because she didn't put on any kind of feminine, flirty act. He nodded approvingly and said that he couldn't blame her. In fact, this was a rather smart strategy, he thought. If he was a woman trying to cut it as a musician, he stated, he would make out that he was lesbian, in order to escape being constantly sexually harassed and to be taken seriously by all the men in the business.

Hence, while in some general respects similar to the reproduction of male social worlds in other sociocultural circumstances, the demarcation of the studio as an all-male space also emerges from a mutual recognition on the part of men and women of particular regional Aboriginal norms for gendered interactions and homo-social groupings and practices. A means for excluding women from this space is a rather crude

and sexualised vernacular. This talk is also a means of male bonding. In this, it is the men's relationships to other men, not to women, that are of primary interest.

Studio sex - between men

A few musicians and I sit talking on the control room sofa while Stan is busy at the sound desk, copying a recording for one of them. We have a full view of the studio through the control room window. An Aboriginal woman who works in the building walks through the studio. The men go quiet and follow her movements. She is a town woman, dressed in common office style sleeveless shirt and modest skirt. When she disappears out the back door one of the men remarks, "nice pair of legs". "Shows them well, too", says another with approving tongue smacking. A third man wonders aloud if she is still with a particular local Aboriginal man. The others seem to think so, somebody saw him the other day. "Must enjoy having those legs around him", chuckles the man who first commented on them. "You wish!" chuckles another with a face indicating that he wouldn't mind being in her man's position.

The men now deliver a few imaginative descriptions and begin to imitate how this woman's male partner (and by their performance of these acts, by implication themselves) cannot take his eyes off these legs, crawls after them with his tongue hanging out, and is trapped between them. The men laugh at and with each other. One of them wonders what her man would feel about them adoring and imagining themselves between his missus' legs. Somebody responds by giving a brief account of a drunken night when this man ended up with another woman. The others nod and chuckle in unifying consensus over their "mongrel", sexual nature; "once a dog, always a dog" one of them mutters, to which another one yelps, making a cute, boyish face with begging eyes, causing another round of laughter.

The men proceed to exchange more rumours about this particular man's sexual habits in rather graphic and exaggerated sexual words. A couple of the men also throw in comments on their own sexual abilities, which they complain lack all these exciting features. This is taken as meaning the opposite for the others, who now begin to tease one of the men to get him to confirm some rumours about some old sexual "sins". He responds with shaking his head in denial but his grin indicates the opposite. "You dog!" exclaims the others, as if the rumours are now confirmed.

During a working day, men hanging out in the control room often comment in this way on women walking past the studio window. They may evaluate the way she

moves, dresses and is shaped in both flattering and critical terms, and at times with an erotic tone.¹²⁸ They may also comment in this way on women not present. The one exception to this kind of commentary is the current wives of the men present. The male studio sex talk is thus largely separated from intimacy, and the men often take care to show respect for each other's private relations and emotions.

While initially experiencing the crudest forms of this sexualised commentary between men about women as both sexist and offensive, I soon realised that it is only secondarily about women and mainly concerned with and directed at men, and in particular Aboriginal men. As on the occasion just described, speculations on Aboriginal men's sexual adventures, preferences, techniques and mistakes are also more elaborated, graphic and take up much more time than any sexualised talk about women. Women are largely represented as mirrors for, or a kind of "starter" to get to the main subject of interest; Aboriginal men's actions, sexual rivalry and relationships. Whitefella men's sexuality is seldom the subject of much elaboration unless it involves Aboriginal men in some way, such as a white man having a relationship with a black woman who is or was the partner of a black man. The black man is then usually the focus of the discussion.

This conjures up a racialised version of what Kimmel describes as "masculinity as a homosocial enactment" (Kimmel 1994:128). That is, men mainly prove and define their manhood, and in this case the sexual aspects of blackfella manhood, in relation to and under constant scrutiny of other men; "Manhood is demonstrated for other men's approval. It is other men who evaluate the performance", while women "become a kind of currency that men use to improve their ranking on the masculine social scale" (128-129). The men around the studio similarly articulate competing male status within a male blackfella realm through their sexualised talk. This talk, moreover, works to bond them and in the process reinforces the all-male blackfella domain of the music studio, and of the realm of blackfella music making beyond this particular space.

The simultaneous bonding and negotiation of differently valued masculine behaviours through sexuality emerges, not least, from the men's frequent narrating of past musical events. One afternoon, for instance, we are setting up the studio for a recording and I ask the black men present what they think of a particular Koori

¹²⁸ I am not excluded from this everyday commentary, which with time is also made (I assume selectively) in my presence. The clothes I wear, how I walk and move, my hair, the shape of my body, frequently generate both approving and disapproving comments from the core male group around the studio, and they also speculate about my sexual capabilities and preferences.

percussionist from Melbourne. Is he any good? One of the musicians knows this man from playing in interstate bands in the 1980s. He responds with a short, graphically detailed story about the percussionist in an embarrassing sexual situation that involved various plastic devices, some homosexual tendencies, and, not very significant for the story line, a woman. When he is finished he adds, "I guess he's OK". As a percussionist, that is.

On another occasion I am to leave for the Womadelaide festival in Adelaide. Very few Central Australian Aboriginal artists have performed at this festival over the years, which I bring up with a few musicians who are at the studio. "I tell you why", Stan states, "that's because blackfellas here still think more with the head down there than this one!" knocking his head. He refers to an incident when a musician from Central Australia was on the Womadelaide bill a few years back. Stan was part of his backing band. But the main man never turned up for this high-profile gig. He had gone drinking the night before and ended up "shagging some old cow", as Stan puts it, still visibly upset. The other musicians had to pull it off as best they could without the announced star "song man from the desert". Since then, no Aboriginal band from the region has been invited to a Womadelaide stage. Later, Stan explains that it is not only the professional shame from fulfilling negative stereotypes of unreliable blackfella musicians from the bush that still upsets him. More importantly, because this artist let his "lower head" rule, he let down his fellow blackfella musicians, friends and men from his home region.

The idea that Aboriginal men are victims to their natural, sexual urges is repeated in different forms and with ill-concealed pride by other Aboriginal regional musicians. They often describe events or make comments that conjure up an image of them and other local blackfella men as unable to control their natural male urges. They may use this perceived lack of control for explaining why they end up in jealousy and family conflicts, or in prison, or other kinds of trouble. They thus draw on globally well established colonial primitivist stereotypes of black men being closer to nature and therefore also possessing a more powerful male virility compared to cultured, civilised white men, who are thought to be more in control of their natural instincts (Bederman 1995; Kanitkar 1994; Moore 1998; Segal 1990). As mentioned in Chapter One, these originally Eurocentric racist and imperialist ideas have been co-opted and cultivated worldwide in positive, affirmative terms by black communities, Black rights advocates, and in black expressive cultures, including music (Carby 1998; Booker 2000; du Bois

1982 [1903]; Gilroy 1993; Mac an Ghaill 1994; Majors 1990). By the frequent narrating around the studio of past musical activities and experiences through imagined and real male sexual practices, the men thus link the all-male studio sociality to a broader musical, racialised and sexualised male realm, creating a shared sense of belonging in and identifying with a male and blackfella "imagined community" (e.g. Anderson 1991).

As I pointed out earlier, the ideas and convictions that the men express do not necessarily coincide with how they in fact behave and live. These ideas nevertheless have real and practical consequences for their personal and professional relationships and relative status. The negotiations around the studio concerning which musicians were to come along for a tour to a big, interstate country music event are illustrative. The most obvious choices would be the most committed country musicians. However, a few other musicians, who are more committed to rock playing, are in fact more skilled instrumentalists, who also know their country playing. One of these men has a highly professional approach to his music and he doesn't drink. The fact that many local musicians take the opportunity to go on a drinking bend when away from home is a recurrent problem on tours with regional bands. These men cannot always be found when it's time to leave or get on stage, and they cannot be trusted to perform well. This rock guitarist, on the other hand, can be trusted to always turn up for a performance and do a professional job. He is thus included in the tour group early on and participates in rehearsals.

About a week before they are to leave, disgruntled comments start to circulate around the studio. They never directly reach the rock guitarist but he soon tells me that he probably will be dropped from the venture. This is his interpretation of certain avoidance behaviours and evasive responses from other musicians. The misgivings mainly come from one of the leading country musicians who opposes the idea of bringing the rock guitarist. When I ask why, he says that he thinks that the rock guitarist's main motive for coming is to chase sex. He also thinks that this man probably will "score" among the less streetwise indigenous women in the country music scene. This will jeopardise his and the other blackfella country musicians' reputation, since "us country mob are more like family" who know and respect each other, including not going after each other's women.

The country musician's doubts are coloured partly by ongoing tensions around the studio that involve him and this particular rock guitarist. His stance also indicates

some general perceptions of competing masculine models that are negotiated in the all-male studio realm. The employment of a "country music family" imagery of morally responsible men who protect the (also sexual) innocence of their women is particularly effective in distinguishing blackfella country musicians as men of higher moral worth, since it draws on the all-important value of maintaining affective kin relations in Aboriginal normative regimes in the desert region, values that are also reiterated as defining Aboriginal life worlds more generally. These values often are interlaced with Christian values that emphasise male family responsibilities and monogamy. This model of valued male behaviours is contrasted with an "anti-domestic" global imagery of rock music culture, populated with rather sexually indiscriminate, promiscuous and predatory men and women.¹²⁹

In defining and identifying with distinct and competing, locally meaningful and always already mediated blackfella models for being men, the musicians thus commonly employ globally widespread music-related male imagery. I wish to repeat, though, that these ideal models for self-understanding should not be confused with actual male practice. I never detected any enduring patterns between music genre, age or lifestyles and the musicians' moral convictions, sexual yearnings and behaviours. These were highly individualised and often shifting according to particular situations, places and the present company. The men's male ideals and moral convictions still have real consequences. When the touring group leaves for the interstate country music event the rock guitarist has indeed been replaced by a guitarist who is firmly established in the local blackfella country music sociality. While a decent country guitarist, he is also unreliable when he drinks and this does become a problem during this tour. The replacement nonetheless restored some important orders of shared and competing ideas of valued masculine styles and behaviours that are mobilised, reaffirmed and negotiated in the continuous crafting of particular shared and competing blackfella musical identifications.

Moving from such internal dynamics of the all-male blackfella studio ethos, I turn to outside attempts to reform the male and indigenous character of the studio practices and sociality. Such efforts principally emerge from within CAAMA and are indicative of shifting ideological, socio-political and financial demands in the larger, national and international environment in which the media association operates and

¹²⁹ For discussions on (Anglo-American) male rock music culture as a rebellion and escape from domesticity, family life, and associated models of masculinity, see Reynolds and Press (1995).

evolves. This has led to an increased emphasis within CAAMA on the cultivation of what can be called a “modern” and “tidy” Aboriginal and gendered public profile, which does not fit easily with the social and male life of the music studio.

Tidy Aboriginality and modern black males

The music studio differs from the other activity spaces of the CAAMA building in at least two important ways. One is that the studio is the part of the building most frequented by a variety of outside, mainly Aboriginal visitors.¹³⁰ Another obvious difference is that the other entities of CAAMA are and have historically been more gender mixed.

In the process of expanding and moving up-town in the 1990s, CAAMA restructured its operational aims more in line with a mainstream world. This included establishing a respectable, “main street” public Aboriginal profile. As an Aboriginal organisation operating in a regional setting where Aboriginal people are commonly associated with the negative stereotypes of “antisocial behaviour”, as described in Chapter Two, it has been important for CAAMA (and for other local Aboriginal organisations) to both act as a role model for Aboriginal people and to keep a “clean”, modern Aboriginal profile that counteracts racial stereotyping. A sophisticated, professional image is also crucial when negotiating with funding bodies and sponsors on which CAAMA depends for its continued operations.

The studio, however, has in some respects continued to operate according to the congenial and informal blackfella praxis that characterised CAAMA’s earlier days. The parties of weather-beaten, ruffled bush mobs and untidy musicians that wander about the studio area, gather at the studio back door, and at times spill over to other parts of the building do not fit well with the efficient and “cleaned up” Aboriginality that the policies of the larger organisation aim for. The traffic of blackfella strangers also worries staff in the building more directly. Bags, money and other things have gone missing from desks in the radio area, for instance. The drinking-water fountain and toilets between the radio and studio areas are also found in rather messy states at times.

¹³⁰ The CAAMA Shop also has a high number of Aboriginal people walking in and out every day. The customer-shop assistant relations and the shop space are, however, qualitatively different from the studio relations and space. Customers in a commercial shop are not meant to stay around too long or encouraged to do so, while visitors to the studio belong, or wish to belong, to a sociality in which they cultivate relations that can last for generations.

The historically all-male and masculinist character of studio activities, including the male vernacular and “slack” blackfella organisation of work, further diverges from upstairs aims for a more modern operation. The new CAAMA Music manager, for instance, tells me that indigenous music making in Central Australia, and as an extension, the studio, reminds her of the highly male dominated music scene in larger Australia back in the 1970s and 1980s. She hopes to see this music scene move in the direction of the mainstream music industry. Here, she notes, men can no longer get away with patronising and chauvinist behaviour, and more women are involved. Several people in the management and other sections of CAAMA similarly wish to open up the male reserve of the studio and “modernise” it. This involves encouraging more equal participation of men and women and more “presentable” Aboriginal people and practices.¹³¹

Concurring with such more general aims, people in the management at times advise musicians on their appearance. A few days before a community event that CAAMA Music takes part in, for instance, somebody suggests to Lyndon that he should get a haircut and better clothes. He is told that out there he will represent CAAMA Music, which requires that certain standards be upheld. On another occasion, a bush community band arrives at the studio after travelling for a rough day and a night to get to Alice Springs. They are taken upstairs and introduced to the new manager of the whole CAAMA Group, an Aboriginal, urban woman. She soon comments on their “smell” and suggests to them that they clean up.

In both these cases, the men find the direct criticism of their appearance inappropriate. They experience it as patronising, and as suggesting that they are too “uncivilised” to realise how they appear to others. Most of the regional musicians I have met are fully aware and often self-conscious about the way their everyday appearance differs from that of the middleclass and mainstream Australian model. Bush musicians also usually make an effort with their often limited funds to renew their sparse wardrobes when in town. And all of the men want to look “clean” and attractive on stage. The model for attractive male demeanour that they adhere to is, however, that of regional blackfella life worlds, which diverges from that of mainstream, whitefella

¹³¹ I did not participate in CAAMA management or CAAMA Music meetings because the just appointed music manager thought it “inappropriate”. My knowledge of workplace rules and management policies, and how those were communicated and understood by individuals in the building, on the board and in the management, is thus based on conversations over a longer period with current and former employees, board members and management people.

Australia. I described some aspects of such difference in appearance and demeanour in Chapter Two. It also includes a valued “too much” and “mongrel” blackfella quality, which I return to in Chapter Seven.

Other upstairs interventions to reform particular “unruly” characteristics of the studio sociality include attempts to discourage people without “legitimate” business to be there. For instance, to manage the traffic of people down the studio corridor a door was installed that closed off the front entrance from the rest of the building.¹³² In relation to this, the CAAMA Music manager informs Stan and Steve that only people who are participating directly in ongoing studio work are supposed to be there. This is not in the professional or personal interest of Stan and Steve, though. As we saw in the account of a day in the studio in the previous chapter, it is an advantage for the creative, ad-lib studio ethos of music making to have a steady flow of different musicians through the studio. Their skills may become useful at any moment during recording or mixing processes. The traffic of blackfella musicians from all over the region in the studio, moreover, provides the CAAMA Music record label with its distinctive regional Aboriginal and creative foundation, which justified its establishment and underpins its continued existence. Since few people in the rest of the CAAMA building are familiar with the regional music scene or with the intricacies of studio work, it may be difficult for any of them to identify which men around the studio are actually directly participating in ongoing work. The studio men can and will thus evade instructions on such restrictions by simply acting as if nobody is “illegitimate”.

It is easier for the management and other studio “outsiders” to argue that the gatherings of men at the studio back door are social and not work activities. The studio back door is commonly left open and is frequently used by the studio men and musicians. At this door, musicians and men around the studio gather for smoke breaks, to discuss ongoing work, and make plans. As in any studio, recording sessions, mixing work and rehearsals do not always follow a nine-to-five schedule, and at times Stan and Steve and studio equipment are engaged for music events at night or weekends. The

¹³² During the end of my stint at the studio, there were also advanced plans for building a music manager office in the downstairs studio area, where she could be closer to the daily operations of the music studio. Some musicians saw this plan as a further strategy to control their activities and restrict the movement of people around the studio.

back door area often turns into a socialised male space in relation to these activities, too.¹³³

The opened or closed state of this door is a recurrent issue between upstairs management and the downstairs studio staff during my time at the studio. The management wants it closed and locked at all times. Their concerns are put in terms of security and insurance requirements. From the studio men's point of view, this is not an issue. They think that they have sufficient control of who walks in and out of the studio area. While aware that some pieces of studio equipment have gone missing over the years, they can guess where some of it has gone and it is not with people who wander in because the back door is open.¹³⁴

The studio men, moreover, consider it beneficial to keep the door open. It would be a major obstacle for ongoing work if keys have to be produced every time they and musicians use this entrance. To be able to enter the studio more informally from the back is also important in making the studio an accessible and relaxed space for many blackfella musicians. The alternative is to enter from the main street entrance, which involves passing the scrutinising eyes of the CAAMA Shop and the radio staff, all of them wary of potential shoplifters, thieves and drunks. For the studio men and musicians, the back door gatherings are furthermore productive social sites for music work. Most talk, crude or not, at the back door concerns musical matters and people, be it in this studio or elsewhere in the region, the country or the world. In an expanded sense, these gatherings therefore contribute to the maintenance of the CAAMA Music studio as an important place for exchanges and connections with broader musical realms.

For these reasons, instructions to keep the door closed and locked are frequently ignored. For instance, at one stage a spring that closed the door automatically was installed. Various heavy objects could soon be found at the door to stop it from closing. The spring eventually broke and the door was left open as usual.

¹³³ Women and white men are sometimes part of these night or weekend gatherings. But like the studio itself, given its male vernacular and behaviour, this is not a comfortable space for most of them. The black men also appear more comfortable without women and whitfellas present.

¹³⁴ The movements of music gear around the studio should be understood within the context of sociomusical relationships in which the studio has been engaged over the years. These can be described as a regime of informal and mutual exchanges of both things and work among the studio and a number of external people. Many musical events and projects run by CAAMA Music would have been difficult to accomplish if formal rules of ownership, paying rent for equipment and monetary compensation for work had been adhered to.

These are some of the everyday issues that highlight the contestation over the right to define appropriate gendered and blackfella behaviour around the studio. The studio men, and in particular Stan, interpret the increased disciplining of the studio practices as strategies to redefine the conditions for the actual music work. They are interferences in the way music work is organised, and thus intrusions on the values and ideas that constitute the blackfella and male studio ethos. Musicians around the studio also experience the increasing "disciplining", such as advice on their appearance, as intrusions on their Aboriginal and male integrity. Individual musicians may, however, also comply with upstairs instructions when it benefits their social and musical position. Some of the men support some of the changes upstairs wants to introduce, too. Not all the men agree with every aspect of the male studio ethos even if they do not voice such objections in the male groupings around the studio.

Although continually employing low-key forms of resistance to undermine and evade upstairs directives, the men around the studio never seriously question the overall aims and purposes of CAAMA. As Scott (1985; 1990) observes, struggles of everyday forms of resistance take place almost entirely within the values of an existing hegemony, and draw on them. That is, these forms of resistance emerge within a value system and worldview which is shared by the superior and subordinate parties in a particular setting, and they depend for their effectiveness upon that fact. This is illustrated by the fact that when outsiders criticise CAAMA, the core of men around the studio will express their allegiance with the organisation, and at times they adamantly defend its professed vision of Aboriginal empowerment and representation of Central Australian Aboriginal people.

These struggles, then, concern the right to define the parameters for gendered and blackfella practice and power within the organisational and normative structures of CAAMA. In this, the studio men and musicians assert their own, internally differentiated interpretations and understanding of what constitute appropriate and beneficial practices in the advancement of blackfella and male music making. They assert a sociomusical space where knowledge and experiences historically have circulated mainly among Aboriginal men, more or less out of reach of women and white men. This increasingly diverges from broader societal and ideological influences concerning more equal gender relations and better-dressed and -spoken Aboriginality that the management tends to be sensitive to.

As upstairs attempts to change the character of the blackfella all-male studio sociality and practices intensify during my time at the studio, these very practices become increasingly important for the musicians. As their resistance becomes more obvious, upstairs interventions become more formalised and non-negotiable. In this dialectic dynamic of increased tensions, the space for ambiguity, flexibility and heterogeneity tends to shrink. Instead, two largely opposing models for male and blackfella ways of being are increasingly sharply defined and defended, both of them increasingly at odds with the lived, multilayered experiences of Aboriginal musicians and men in the region.

Summary

In this chapter I have shown how the CAAMA recording studio is constituted and maintained as an Aboriginal and all-male space through investigating three main mediating dynamics of identification that also extend beyond this particular site.

Firstly, the male studio sociality emerges through competition among male musicians. A main force for male musical creativity, respect and reputation around this studio is what the musicians talk about as a natural, “healthy competition” among them. With this concept they normalise and neutralise the interpersonal and inter-group tensions and conflicting modes for identifications that are frequently engaged in the studio activities and relationships.

The ways in which different individuals and groups of musicians engage in the “healthy competition” indicate differently valued, entangled and overlapping models of Aboriginal manhood. These models involve the articulation, connection and partial merging of various masculine styles that circulate in a continuum from the local to the national and global. The resulting “mongrel” forms of blackfella and male identification emerge from the transformation of male styles that are associated with global musical genres and conventions as well as with traditional Aboriginal gender regimes and historical intercultural configurations that include values and practices with origins in Christian traditions and a Western rural industry.

Secondly, the male and blackfella “ownership” of the studio activities that the men collectively identify with is maintained through various means of excluding women. The cultivation of a blackfella male vernacular and behaviour is central in this process of bonding among black men, and in making the studio space uncomfortable for others. Historical, interculturally mediated norms and ideals for Aboriginal gender

relations and segregated gendered realms are likewise important for the simultaneous bonding of men and a related exclusion of most women.

Finally, the particular blackfella male character of this studio is continually reasserted and reworked as the men respond to external attempts to “modernise” the masculine and blackfella practices and behaviours in this space. The studio is part of an Aboriginal media organisation that operates according to changing demands and major trends in a political, commercial, professional and gendered national and international environment. The fairly rough and “mongrel” masculine character and permissive approach to the demeanour of Aboriginal people who frequent the studio are perceived as somewhat outdated and “untidy” by personnel of other CAAMA sections and by parts of the management. Attempts to refashion the studio into a more gender-mixed and “tidy” Aboriginal space are met by strategies of covert resistance and defiance as well as compliance among the men around the studio as they mark out personal and shared male, blackfella and musical integrity. In these mundane everyday struggles, competing definitions of legitimate and desired masculinity and indigeneity are asserted and negotiated.

CHAPTER SIX

PLAYING ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

Come Easter, the cold season has arrived in the Australian desert region. The Easter long weekend is also the start of the Central Australian Football League season. As with country, rock and reggae music, Australian Rules football has been an intrinsic part of everyday Aboriginal social life in Central Australia for generations. Parallel to the main league, a Country Cup is battled out between Aboriginal community teams during the winter season. Also, more or less every weekend from Easter to August, community teams travel with their home crowds to each other's communities to compete at community Sports Festivals, which are the focus of this chapter.

The main daytime attraction of the community Sports Festivals is the football, but just as important are the music activities at night. After sunset, everybody moves over to the community hall or some outdoor stage to enjoy and dance to a succession of regional Aboriginal musicians and bands long into the night. This circuit of community concerts are where many aspiring musicians make their debut as performers before larger audiences, and this hinterland music scene is where most desert community bands and musicians establish and maintain their cross-regional reputations.

A night of a Battle of the Bands is more or less mandatory for any respectable Sports Weekend and is often the highlight of the whole festival. The largest Battle of the Bands in Central Australia, and the Grand Final for the community football season, is that of Yuendumu Sports.¹³⁵ In contrast to other community festivals, Yuendumu Sports Festival has been promoted to non-indigenous visitors over the years. During its heydays in the 1980s it attracted thousands of regional, interstate and international visitors, media and musicians. Nowadays it is a less crowded affair and not so widely promoted but it is still a major happening on the regional Aboriginal musical, sports and social calendar.

As described in Chapter Two, Aboriginal desert communities were established through colonial practices of racial segregation, and they continue to operate as rather isolated from mainstream Australian society, a segregation that is now mainly justified by ideas of cultural protection and self-determination (Rowse 1998). Most community Sports festivals are also kept as Aboriginal affairs. Information and invitations are

¹³⁵ Yuendumu Sports is traditionally held on the Picnic Day long weekend in early August. The other larger and relatively fixed Sports Weekends in the region are those of Lajamanu and Papunya, held respectively on long weekends in May and early June.

usually limited to Aboriginal communities and organisations, and issued by word of mouth through Aboriginal networks. The fact that the events often are announced a week or just a few days before they take place, and also may be cancelled, postponed and then on again within the same time frame, also excludes most non-indigenous visitors since you basically have to be part of an Aboriginal network to know about it.

With a few exceptions, such as the Yuendumu Sports, visitors also have to carry a permit, which often takes more than a week to process. People who are not known by community residents are not always granted visitor permits for Sports Weekends, either. These gatherings of Aboriginal people from all over the desert create opportunities to carry out traditional cross-regional ceremonial activities. Such "traditional business" is restricted and not for general public viewing. According to some community festival organisers, this is a main reason why they are reluctant to approve visitor permits for sport weekends.

Although in the main Aboriginal places, desert communities have continuously been shaped by non-indigenous practices, policies and a range of intercultural and cross-cultural relationships, as discussed in Chapter Two. Local everyday life and music making thus emerge from a multitude of musical and intellectual traditions and normative conventions. These "mongrel" cultural forms are put into play in public ways during the music performances at community festivals and particularly so on the night of the Battle of the Bands. Entering a community Battle of the Bands is obviously about competing musically, but this is not all and is not even the most important issue at stake. Through performing at these events the musicians claim particular positions as Aboriginal men of particular families, communities and language groups, as distinct from other Aboriginal individuals and groupings in the region. These musical battles thus appear as condensed and emergent performative expressions of cross-regional Aboriginal relatedness and distinctions, in which personal and gendered identifications are also reproduced and transformed.

In some respects, community concerts can be understood as contemporary variations of traditional ceremonial activity. As several scholars have noted, and as Myers describes among Pintupi people, "singing provides a salient image of sociability...(and) whenever large groups came together in traditional times, they would sing together at night" (Myers 1986:112). Song and dance, Myers suggests, function as a "ritual process" that reduces discord and tensions between groups and individuals who do not normally camp together, a process in which participants in effect practice

relatedness. As I will explore here, more recent forms of music performance have become an important medium not only for practicing relatedness but also for forging regional differences and discrete ways of being Aboriginal and male, and for articulating everyday concerns in a public forum.

Lajamanu Battle of the Bands

It is well after sunset and the noise is deafening inside the pitch-dark Lajamanu community hall; a big, tin-roofed structure with wire-netted side walls in the centre of the settlement.¹³⁶ What sounds like hundreds of children are screaming at the top of their voices in there, while chasing each other, kicking deflated footballs around, and banging sticks noisily against the wire-netting. A couple of boys have ventured up on stage and are banging away like mad on the drum set. A large number of barking dogs add to the cacophony.

The two stage and sound engineers, hired from Darwin for this year's Lajamanu Sports Weekend, finally find the right power plug on the outside. In a sudden flash the hall is brightly lit up by many-coloured spotlights. The screaming reaches panic proportions when kids pour out through ripped-up openings in the netted walls. The kids stop in the dark night outside in excited anticipation, but they will have to wait for another hour before the highlight of the three-day festival kicks off in earnest; the Lajamanu Sports' Battle of the Bands.

The concert was, kind of, supposed to start at 7 pm. At 8.30 pm nobody has turned up at the hall except for the kids and dogs. However, as soon as a seductive reggae beat starts up in a sound check by one of Lajamanu's best-known bands, The Teenage Band, the community residents and the hundreds of visitors are on the move towards the hall. Groups of women carrying babies, blankets and water cans come from all directions with dogs at their heels. They spread their blankets on the floor along the darker long sides of the hall and sit down. Kids, teenage girls and older women join

¹³⁶ Lajamanu is located in the North Tanami desert (see map 1) and has a predominantly Warlpiri population of approximately 600. It was proclaimed as the Hooker Creek Aboriginal Reserve in 1948, a state assimilation centre that was built on traditional country belonging to the Gurindji, northern neighbours of the Warlpiri. The first Warlpiri were moved to Hooker Creek in 1949 and the main contingent was trucked here in 1952 from Yuendumu Aboriginal Reserve (est. in 1946) (Wild 1987). Being located on other people's country, the Warlpiri were reluctant to settle at Hooker Creek and staged walk-backs to Yuendumu on three occasions between 1952 and 1965. However, by the 1970s, Warlpiri and Gurindji conducted joint ceremonies at Hooker Creek (Wild 1987). They also made a joint, successful land claim over the larger Tanami Desert area in which no boundaries were drawn between their respective traditional territories (Peterson and Langton 1983). The Warlpiri occupants were granted freehold title to the Hooker Creek reserve under the 1976 Northern Territory Land Rights Act.

them, kicking the dogs away. Men of all ages gather in the dark at the back end of the hall and beside the vehicles now parked outside the wall netting. Throughout the night, they occasionally contribute to the stage effects by flashing the headlights into the hall with the beat of the music. An older black man in khaki trousers, white shoes and a sports cap bounces out into the spotlight in front of the stage and performs a kind of break dancing to the desert reggae beat, moving his arms and upper body energetically, while moving his legs in a mix of jerky, traditional dance steps and rap artist moves.

The Teenage Band finishes up when the community president, a middle-aged man with greying hair, enters the stage. He welcomes everyone to the Battle of the Bands and urges competitors to come forward and enter. At the moment there are only a few names on the contestant list. Ideally, a sports festival should have a substantial line-up for its Battle of the Bands without organisers having to prompt people. At the same time, it is part of the informal code of conduct, and also part of the competition between musicians, not to appear too keen to perform. Some men prefer to be seen as having been talked into entering by relatives and fans, with this demonstrating their musical and social status. The council president holds up five hundred dollars, the winner takes it all. The money is probably more a show of how well organised this Sports Weekend is, that is, it has been properly funded, than a bait to get those holding back to come forward. Just as many musicians will enter a Battle that offers no prize at all, only the status of winner and the opportunity to perform, which, as I return to later, in itself is to accumulate status.

The community president proceeds to speak strongly in Warlpiri language for a good fifteen minutes. The sentences are brief, intense and emphasised with firm hand gestures. He pauses now and then in silences that demand respect. The packed hall returns a respectful silence. He tells them that they are here to celebrate and enjoy music and sports and family together. What happened last night must not be repeated, it will not be tolerated. Our own people are all we have, he says, we must take care of each other, not fight amongst ourselves. So please, he appeals with authority, you married women should not dance without talking to your husbands, and you men should not hurt your women and children.

The previous night had been the first night of the festival. Lajamanu, in common with many desert communities, is "dry". That is, alcohol is banned within its boundaries. However, several festival visitors drank on their way here and during the welcoming concert married women got up and danced in the bum-gyrating "sexy

dance" that is common in Aboriginal settings all over the desert (but also elsewhere).¹³⁷ According to local norms of appropriate gendered behaviour, married women should ideally not dance in public unless with their husbands or in groups of women, and then moderately. Married women of course do not always do what is expected of them and may still get up and shake their bums, especially when drunk, which is often perceived as sexually inviting. Last night a drunken musician on stage thought that his dancing wife had gone too far. He jumped off the stage and started to bash her up, which provoked more fights when other men "disciplined" their wives, came to their relatives' help, and probably took the opportunity to settle a few old grudges as well. It all ended with a few injured people.

Tonight, the council president's speech seems to have the intended effect. During the first half of the night, before most married women and senior people retire, the dancing is unusually subdued. Women, teenage girls and boys form separate groups, mainly shuffling their feet, with serious faces and minimal bodily movements. Also, the Night Patrols – Aboriginal law and order teams of community women or men respectively – continuously circle the hall and the community in order to confiscate any alcohol and to prevent conflicts from flaring up.

The Teenage Band comes back for a couple of warm-up songs to give musicians time to enter the competition and for a judging panel to be formed. The organisers, a couple of men in their forties from prominent Lajamanu families, are looking for judges who ideally are not related to any contestants, a criterion which excludes most people present. A couple of senior Aboriginal men considered wise and respected enough to vote without bias are approached, and so am I. One of the men suggested, however, is loudly contested by the audience for being "too much related", and apparently not trusted to be "wisely" neutral, either. After some public discussion, he drops out, visibly offended. The final panel includes three judges; Warren Williams, a respected community leader from Yuendumu; whitefella Tom, one of the two Darwin sound engineers; and me.

It is now after 9.30 pm. In an attempt to manage the time factor the organisers declare that each entrant can only perform three songs. They know that contestants usually try to make an impression by extending their time on stage as much as possible.

¹³⁷ This style of dancing includes shaking one's buttocks rapidly, while twisting one's upper body in sexually suggestive movements, with head bowed in a shy, inviting gesture, and arms and hands moving up and down along the body, or held up above the head. Such dancing is practiced and encouraged from the time Aboriginal children can stand up, and a lot of energy is invested in developing personal styles.

It is common, for instance, that three minute songs are expanded to ten minute numbers in a Battle of the Bands. A great deal of time also frequently passes between songs when band members try to decide what song to do next, and they may then proceed to unhurriedly swap instruments and places on stage. Normally, the change-over of contestants also takes considerable time. An entrant may, for example, need instrumentalists to back him up. If he has specific musicians in mind, they are called out for, sometimes repeatedly. If these men do not appear, it may take some more time before volunteering musicians make their way through the crowd to pick up the instruments, unhurriedly, in order not to seem too keen. Also, people constantly move about the community throughout the night and it can take time to gather all members of a band when it is their turn to perform.

Most community Battles of the Bands proceed in the form of a musical and social crescendo that I will elaborate on in three sections. The night usually starts in a mellow mood and slow tempo with gospel and country musicians, what I call the "oldfella" acts. This refers to the "oldfella" status of the music genre and not necessarily to the age of the performers. These acts are followed by what I discuss as the "hit and miss" section with less experienced musicians or temporary band sets. They are succeeded by what are in essence the "headline" acts, that is, more established and well-known bands. These are my terms for making a common pattern clearer. Local musicians or organisers do not call them anything in particular. In lining up the contestants in this order, however, consideration is paid to both local hierarchies of meanings of musical styles, and to different Aboriginal groupings and regional relationships.

The "oldfella" acts

This night the gospel and country section includes four gospel entrants but, atypically, no country music performers. First on stage is Alan Tasman, the break-dancing Lajamanu man who entertained us earlier. With a beaming smile, he performs a couple of straightforward Warlpiri gospel songs in a crackling but passionate voice, backed up by a local man on acoustic guitar. He is followed by the "Yuendumu Choir", two Warlpiri women who sing very well, backed up by a couple of boys and girls and a Yuendumu man on acoustic guitar. Next on stage is Kumunjayi Patterson, the smooth-

singing founder of the North Tanami Band and a senior Law man of Lajamanu.¹³⁸ He performs a gospel duo with his wife Valerie, followed by Kumunjayi performing a country gospel version of Bob Dylan's "Knocking on heaven's door" in Warlpiri. The last gospel act is Wilfred Nelson, a middle-aged Yuendumu man. He asks for keyboard accompaniment. After some negotiation, he accepts a young Lajamanu keyboardist. All acts receive equally warm applause, some whistling and appreciative calls from the audience.

During the opening gospel/country section, the younger part of the audience is usually preoccupied more with extra-musical matters as they circle in gendered groupings around the hall. Men in the next generation, between the age of twenty and thirty-five, tend to divide their attention between social and musical business during this part of the night, but usually pay respect to the "oldfella" music by joining in the applauding and encouraging calling out for each new contestant. The main support and attention, however, come from the older folks and the women sitting on the blankets in the hall. If well-known honky tonk country is played, adult women and men will also be up dancing.

Gospel and country, as discussed in earlier chapters, are perceived as the "oldfella" non-ancestral music forms in Aboriginal Central Australia, from which other more recent musical styles have gradually developed. The social meanings of these music forms can be paralleled to the hierarchical social organisation of most desert societies, where senior men, the "oldfellas", are mediators of the enduring mythical order. One way in which senior men do this is through their nurturing (authority) and looking after men of subsequent and subordinate generations (Meggitt 1962; Myers 1986). In traditional ontology, too, "(j)ust as The Dreaming is the source of the present, so are the older men the source of the younger" (Myers 1986: 243). This generational model can be applied to the hierarchy of local music making, where gospel and country music represent seniority and can be said to "look after" and be the source for rock, reggae and other subsequent and subordinate "junior" generations of musical expressions. Gospel and gospel-country are also associated with the religious and moral authority of Christian values and orders in Aboriginal communities.

For these reasons, it is appropriate that gospel and country are staged first in the Battle of the Bands, in order to anchor the event in regional sociomusical hierarchies of

¹³⁸ This musician has since passed away and there is therefore a taboo on using his name. "Kumunjayi" means "no name" in Warlpiri and replaces the name of a deceased person or is used instead of the names of persons or things that are the same as or similar to the name of the deceased.

authority. This is also when all generations of men and women are present, and through their presence pay respect to this senior music and its performers-mediators, while, as mentioned, the degree to which different age sets actively engage in these performances varies.

When the next set of acts begins, younger generations pay more attention.

The "hit and miss" acts

What I call "the hit and miss" section of community Battles of the Bands includes less experienced but often keen performers, and usually also some more experienced performers who form an ensemble for the night. At times, these acts are ill prepared. Every so often they are not complete sets, either, and performers have to call out for additional instrumentalists. Willing men soon emerge, and away they go. And it is just as often a musical hit as it is a miss.

In some Battles of the Bands the "hit and miss" section goes on for hours. Tonight it has only the one act, the Pawu Brothers, made up of two young brothers of the Lajamanu Patrick family. About twenty years old, the older brother is the singer, and the younger brother plays the keyboard. They need a drummer and a call-out is made. Alan, the other Darwin sound engineer (an experienced African American drummer) is eager to fill in. The older brother is the songwriter of the three, very long reggae-rock style songs in Warlpiri language that follow. He interrupts the songs several times to instruct his obviously less experienced brother in how to play the keyboard. It takes time between songs, too, when the older brother tries to find the right sound styles on the keyboard.

This young singer's performance style is, however, well crafted. He introduces the songs with a professional flair and explains what they are about with a clear verbal delivery. He also, appropriately, dedicates each song to different relatives, in classificatory kin terms. When singing, he looks as if he is appearing on a world stage, looking out over the audience with a confident posture, somewhat akin to that of famous and sophisticated male crooners à la Frank Sinatra. But he never exaggerates. His bodily expressions are composed and humble, and with his introductions and dedications he anchors his songs and performance, and thus himself, within his kin network and the Warlpiri sociality of Lajamanu. In this, he combines some appreciated qualities in a young man moving into adulthood according to local Aboriginal norms – the ability to carry oneself with modest confidence and a certain style, while showing deference and

paying respect to senior people and circles of relatedness. He is rewarded with encouraging calls and applause, especially from middle-aged and senior men and women.

The "headline" acts

After the "hit and miss" acts, a Battle of the Bands normally proceeds to the more experienced, well-known and established bands; the "headline" acts. These contestants move the Battle towards increasingly confident sociomusical grounds, reinforcing the status of already established male musicians within a regional Aboriginal musical and social scene.

Tonight, the first entrant in this section is the Balgo Band from Balgo community across the border in Western Australia. It is now past midnight and most married women, the smallest kids and older people have left with their blankets. The floor is taken over by dancers. When their band is called up, the many Balgo visitors crowd into the hall and in front of the stage. The heavy lead singer, in clean, light-coloured trousers and t-shirt, dedicates the first song to "all family" and the home crowd erupts in ear-banging whistles and rhythmically shouts in unison, "Balgo, Balgo, Balgo!"

The five men in their twenties and thirties start up a tight, thumping rock'n'roll beat and they never let the pace down throughout the set. It is true bad-boy, hard-riffing, pumping bush rock. In a black tank top that shows off his muscular upper arms when working the guitar far up its neck, the rhythm guitarist fits the bill of conventional, global male rock musician appearance, while his bodily immobile style fits the bill of local Aboriginal male stage conventions, as discussed in previous chapters. The other men are likewise bodily highly composed and they perform in the same everyday, male desert wear that most men their age in the audience wear – dusty jeans or plain trousers, sports or printed t-shirts, hooded jackets or chequered flannel shirts, and baseball caps or knitted beanies in the colours of particular football teams.

The Balgo Band's first number is "Lajamanu", written for their host community. As a competitive strategy to attract support from the locals, it works. Lajamanu people wholeheartedly join in with the Balgo mob in enthusiastic dancing, shouting and whistling. The singer dedicates their second number to specific kin-categorised relatives in Balgo. The band ends their loud set with "Two faced woman", a regional hit number that the singer dedicates to his "brothers", that is, men in his generational set of initiates.

The placing of the Balgo Band and the way in which they carry out their performance is conditioned by local regimes for inter-group and interpersonal relations. Firstly, it is appropriate for the host community to put visiting bands first in the "headline" section. To stage the home community's headline acts first would be to inappropriately "show off". While this ordering is the same as in globalised concert conventions where star artists (in this setting the home community bands) come on stage last as the climax of the night, the rationale thus differs. The ordering principle of community Battles of the Bands primarily emerges from Aboriginal norms where one does not put oneself forward.

Secondly, the Balgo Band, as visitors on other but related people's country, appropriately returns the hospitality by introducing their performance with a song to their hosts and by dedicating it to an inclusive "all family". This embraces most people present. Most of them are connected through kin networks and cross-regional ceremonial activities in the Western Desert that predate colonisation and that were intensified through voluntary and forced relocations and cohabitation in colonial and post-colonial times (Berndt and Berndt 1996 [1964]; Heffernan 1999; Myers 1986; Tonkinson 1974). The Balgo Band thus starts their performance by reinforcing the relatedness of most people present, before, with their second song dedication, they claim positions within particular descent groups, and, with their final number, within a specific male age set.

The crowd settles down during the next act, the Kuramindi Band from Lajamanu. The band has existed for some years but has not performed widely in the region. Their songs are classic desert reggae but, this night, not well rehearsed. The men make mistakes and have trouble beginning and ending the songs, which is probably why they never get around to introductions or dedications. One of their songs is a local number about Lajamanu that gets the locals dancing and singing along, and the band receives supportive applause and whistling after their final song.

The next contestant is Chris Gallagher, the lead singer and one of the songwriters of the well established Rising Wind Band from Yuendumu. Earlier in the night I had found him sitting on his heels in a dark corner of the hall, disappointed that the rest of the band did not make an effort to get here. He just shook his head when I asked why and muttered about family problems, but did not seem to accept this explanation. He still entered the Battle of the Bands, partly in the hope that the others would turn up during the night, and partly, perhaps, as an act of defiance and show of

autonomy in relation to the rest of the band. His fellow band members never did turn up, and the Teenage Band now steps in and backs him up in three Rising Wind songs. It is unusual that a single member of an established band performs its repertoire in a Battle of the Bands, and I return to this atypical performance below. Chris has an engaging, fairly high-pitched singing voice, but he seems a bit off tonight, as if he can't focus. He receives a good response from the audience, but it may in fact be the Teenage Band they mainly applaud.

The Lajamanu Teenage Band stays on as the next competitor. As soon as they start up their characteristic and widely popular reggae rock beat, every inch of the floor fills up with dancers. Drove of young kids perform the sexy dance in front of the stage, and further back, separate circles of men and women dance together. At the back wall, another performance space is created when adolescent boys and girls take turns in performing twenty-seconds, elaborate and highly individualised version of the sexy dance style in front of their peers, after which, screaming and ashamed, they dash back into the cheering crowd.

The last contestant is the North Tanami Band. This is probably Lajamanu's most respected band, and the longest in continued, active existence. Through their now fifteen year long career of touring and performing across the Northern Territory, with songs in Warlpiri and English about common contemporary Aboriginal community concerns and (Warlpiri) history, the band is highly respected all over the desert region. Its members are all related within an extended Warlpiri family and the founder of the band is Kumunjayi Patterson, who we saw performing gospel songs earlier. He is gradually handing the leadership of the band over to his oldest son Zacharia, now in his early twenties. Zach fronts the band tonight. Neatly dressed in long khaki shorts and an ironed, short sleeved, tropical shirt, he dedicates the first song to his wife and sisters, and the band starts up a deep reggae rock groove driven by rhythm guitar and keyboards.

As when the Teenage Band performed, every person in the hall is dancing. Unlike the youthful and playful dancing to the Teenage mob, however, the North Tanami men's performance, their music and the audience's response are more composed and "mature". The dancing is more modest and intimate, with dancers closing their eyes or exchanging contented smiles. After each song, people do not scream and shout, and instead raise their arms in a forward, warm gesture, while calling out for more. Even the whistling is somewhat more tempered and respectful.

It is close to 2 am when the North Tanami Band leaves the stage, and the list of contestants is exhausted. While the judges gather to consider their verdict, the Teenage Band comes back on stage to keep the crowds on their feet.

And the winners are...

As we gather as a judging panel to pick the three best acts we follow some conventions that usually guide the selection of winners at regional community Battles of the Bands. At times, the social aspects of those conventions are more important than the evaluation of musical qualities. When we run down the list of contestants we nod in agreement that the Balgo Band gave a very good performance. In the regional norms for personal and group interactions it would look inappropriately assertive and selfish on the part of the host community if one of their bands walked away with the prize money. Because both Lajamanu and Yuendumu are Warlpiri centres, it would also be more appropriate if first prize went to visitors from outside Warlpiri country. The Balgo Band happens to be the only contestant who is not from a firm Warlpiri setting. We have a winner.

For second place we agree that we should select a country-gospel act. It is common practice in community Battles of the Bands to in this way pay respect to these more senior music forms. We soon settle for the Yuendumu Choir. They performed well, and Warren thinks that we should support women who get up on stage. For third position Warren and I can't decide between the beautifully singing Patterson country gospel duo and the North Tanami Band. In the end we award the gospel act, since it also extends to the North Tanami Band through Kumunjayi Patterson's central role in both. We thus pay respect to the host community's sociomusical hierarchy in two ways by rewarding a local gospel act, and by implication, a senior Lajamanu rock-reggae act; the North Tanami Band.

Thus considering judging conventions of community Battles of the Bands we have taken into account some extra-musical norms about appropriate inter-group behaviours and sociomusical hierarchies, which in this case was rather easy since they largely coincided with our views on musical qualities.

The winners are declared. The Balgo visitors go absolutely wild. In a chaos of noise the band is called back up for a winner's performance. But the band members are nowhere to be found. Somebody from Lajamanu shouts humorously that the guys must have taken off to Balgo, feeling defeated when hearing the superior Lajamanu acts. This

is loudly refuted with laughter and howls from the Balgo side of the crowded hall, and one of the band members is lifted up as evidence, causing an explosion of laughter.

The Teenage Band keeps people on their dancing feet for the half hour it takes to find all the Balgo Band members around the community. They then proceed to perform a set of strong, rocky songs to an enthusiastically dancing crowd. The Teenage Band then again returns to the stage, only reluctantly laying down their instruments when sound engineers Alan and Tom declare that enough is enough well after 3 am. An hour later, Lajamanu is quiet. Smoke is rising from the many campfires in the bush on the outskirts of the community where visitors have set up camps in the direction of their home countries.

I would like to further discuss three interrelated themes raised in this musical battle, in order to indicate how popular music making has become an important contemporary medium for mediating and crafting Aboriginal identities and male worth in remote Central Australian settings. The first concerns the performance and articulation of Aboriginal distinctions and relatedness at community Battles of the Bands. A second theme concerns the role these forms of music making have come to play in expressing contemporary concerns and forms of identification in remote Aboriginal settings. The third issue has to do with how musical “careers” have become an alternative and complementary way for crafting worthy and respected Aboriginal manhood.

Competing Warlpiri men

As we saw, the Teenage Band backed Chris up in his performance of well-known Rising Wind songs. That is, a well established and popular Lajamanu band replaced and played the songs of a well respected and popular Yuendumu band. The Rising Wind band is recognised for its rock beat based music, at times with a reggae mix or country feel, but mostly structured around the characteristic, edgy and distorted playing by lead guitarist Clifford Brown, who appeared in the studio in Chapter Four. The Teenage Band members know the Rising Wind songs well and made few mistakes in the performance. The songs did nonetheless take on a very different, more “flowing” feel that characterises Lajamanu style music and that does not centre the lead guitar riffs.¹³⁹

¹³⁹ The Teenage Band was formed in the early 1990s by half-brothers Alfred Rose and Kenneth Martin, the now deceased bass guitarist Darren Penn, drummer Manuel Herbert and lead guitarist Terry Banjo. They added keyboardist Asman Pelasco more recently. The (then teenage-boy) band performed in

This rather unusual performance put into play some intra-Warlpiri dynamics through which the role of popular music in forging Aboriginal difference and relatedness can be explored.

The Teenage Band no doubt collected a few cross-regional Aboriginal social points by generously and professionally helping out a fellow musician and Warlpiri countryman. They also proved their versatile musical skills by getting up on stage at short notice and playing the music of another established band well. I have no doubt that Chris was aware that the Teenage mob, who are musical colleagues and competitors to the Rising Wind band in the regional music scene, scored important sociomusical points through his decision to go solo with them as backing band. He would also be aware that this would cause reactions among his fellow band members in Yuendumu. Hence my previous suggestion that he did this partly as a show of defiant autonomy in relation to the other band members, who (according to him) could not be bothered to turn up.

These musical actions and their social effects should be understood in the sociomusical settings in which these bands operate. Apart from being played on local and regional radio and recording albums, the main way for Aboriginal bands in Central Australia to first of all be recognised and thereafter build up credibility and increasing respect as a solid act that can be perceived as representing their particular social group (whether this group is based on language, descent, or a particular bush community), is to perform frequently and widely as this particular ensemble. The fact that Chris, clearly recognised in the region as the lead singer of Rising Wind, performs their songs without

Aboriginal communities in the region for some years before recording a first album, "Echo voices" (CAAMA Music 1995). They went on to win the Battle of the Bands at the high-profile Aboriginal Barunga Festival in 1996, and released two more albums (CAAMA Music 1998 and 1999). By now the band had attracted wider attention and was invited to perform at nationally noted music festivals. They also featured in the prestigious *Rolling Stone* magazine twice and I suspect that Kenneth was quoted accurately when saying that "We're young and good looking. We're sexy boys... The girls, they go crazy for us" (*Rolling Stone Magazine*, July 1997:40). The success obviously boosted the young men's confidence and they aimed for an international career, a goal still to be attained. They released the album "Prisoner" in 2006 (CAAMA Music) in memory of bass player Penn.

The Rising Wind Band was formed in Yuendumu in 1989 (then named Desert Mulga). Lead guitarist Clifford Brown and lead singer and guitarist Chris Gallagher have been the band's leading forces. Rhythm guitarist Alistair Turner, bass guitarist Calvin Martin, and drummer Lester Marshall are the other long-time members, with other singers and instrumentalists being included occasionally. The band has played in Aboriginal communities, regional towns and at regional festivals throughout the 1990s, while struggling with "too much problems", as Clifford puts it. These were both internal band problems and personal problems for some of the members. They recorded songs at CAAMA already in the early 1990s but the recordings were aborted when the drummer never returned after a smoke break. Their debut album was released in the year 2000 (CAAMA Music 2000), followed by a second album (CAAMA Music 2004). Both bands also appear on a few CAAMA Music compilation albums.

the band, and, moreover, backed up by another regional band, is therefore a way to “talk back” in challenging terms to his own band mob.

At a later date I brought this performance up with other Rising Wind members. They did regret not joining Chris in Lajamanu after all, to reinforce and “defend” the band’s reputation and status. While they did not overtly criticise Chris’ actions, they were definitely interested in hearing details of the performance. When I told them that their songs sounded different when played by the Teenage Band, they shook their heads and looked pleased, clearly satisfied that their own sound is inimitable. That is, it was confirmed to them that the performance had not done damage to their standing as a Yuendumu Warlpiri act, as distinct from being Lajamanu Warlpiri.

As mentioned, both the Rising Wind and the Teenage Band are Warlpiri bands. Their home communities and Warlpiri occupants are tied to each other through ancestral dreaming tracks that traverse the whole of Warlpiri country and beyond, which creates “a network of spiritual bonds among all the descent groups of Warlpiri society” (Wild 1987:102). Ever since the settlements were established, Warlpiri people have also constantly moved between the two settings. At the same time, these two congregations of Warlpiri are in many ways distinct from each other – they speak recognisably different Warlpiri dialects, the historical trajectories of people in the two communities differ, and their respective geographical settings, Aboriginal neighbourhoods and accessibility have shaped different social organisations and contemporary ceremonial styles (Laughren, Hoogenraad, Hale and Granites 1996; Wild 1987).

For instance, people in Lajamanu tend to travel north to Katherine and Darwin for shopping and administrative, health and educational services. This is also where Lajamanu Warlpiri are likely to settle if leaving. Consequently, Lajamanu Warlpiri interact mainly with northern Aboriginal societies and music styles. Yuendumu Warlpiri are instead oriented south, to the administrative centre of Alice Springs. They interact mainly with Aboriginal peoples, musical traditions and languages in the southern Central Australian region. In contrast to Lajamanu, Yuendumu is also located in a sub-region with a cluster of sizeable Aboriginal communities that are dominated by non-Warlpiri people (see map 3), with which Yuendumu Warlpiri intermarry and have ongoing social, political, cultural and musical exchanges.

Yuendumu, moreover, is not only the largest Aboriginal community in Central Australia but probably also the most well-known in non-indigenous realms. People here have been the subject of internationally published works and ethnographic film on

Australian desert societies at least since the 1930s (Hinkson 1996). The establishment of Warlpiri Media in the early 1980s (Michaels 1986), the increasing fame of the work produced at the community's Warlukurlangu art centre and the widely promoted annual Yuendumu Sports festival are activities that have further attracted media people, musicians, visual artists and researchers from all over the world to Yuendumu.

Yuendumu is easier to get to than Lajamanu, too. Lajamanu is located at the end of a 110 km gravel road, turning off a one-lane bitumen road that leads to a small, basic roadhouse 170 km away, and a further 290 km to the next populated centre, Katherine. Yuendumu, in contrast, is located just off a wide road that leads to a big mining operation north of the community and on to Hall's Creek in north-western Western Australia. It is an alternative road for those seeking a shorter but considerably rougher route to the northwest. Nowadays, the road is bitumised for most of the 300 km from Alice Springs to Yuendumu and there is a modern roadhouse with petrol and food along the way.

The high proportion of non-indigenous people in Yuendumu (about ten per cent, or about one hundred people) compared to most desert communities, and the fact that they are often the ones to deal with outsiders, also make Yuendumu easier to communicate with for people who lack experience of Central Australian Aboriginal peoples. Other communities can be considerably more demanding to reach and complicated to communicate with, and also less interested and experienced in dealing with outsiders.

All this means that Yuendumu and Lajamanu people, just like people in any desert community, have engaged with different intercultural constellations and ranges of people, musical styles and activities. Particular localised forms, styles and sounds of music thus emerge from different musical and socio-political histories and evolving relationships, conditioned by their particular socio-geographical locations. Such differences are further cultivated in community music events such as the Lajamanu Battle of the Bands. In the ordering of these events and in the performances, discrete personal as well as shared ancestral affiliations, intercultural experiences and regional relatedness are articulated and negotiated. That is, these forms of music activities have come to occupy and constantly recreate a space for the ongoing elaboration and recombination of aspects of various musical, Aboriginal, intercultural and gendered practices, values and imagery.

To understand why these more recent expressive forms have become especially important and effective means for articulating and mediating contemporary experiences and multifaceted shared and distinct ways of identifying, one has to consider the particular position these expressive practices occupy among other forms of representation and expressions of identities in Central Australian Aboriginal settings.

Representing self and relatedness

As we saw in the Lajamanu Battle of the Bands, Aboriginal audiences respond with intense feelings to bands and performers from their particular home communities and family networks. It is also in the main their own home crowds the musicians dedicate their songs to and it is principally towards them that they direct their performance. The home crowd and the musicians thus participate in a mutual reproduction of shared identification, in which the musicians and their music not only express but come to represent such shared sentiments.

It is precisely such a representative status a majority of the community bands and musicians I have met in the desert region principally aspire to. To become worthy representatives for their home communities and people is thus a strong motivational force for men to forge a sustained musical life. That is, in order to achieve such a status, they try to write and perform music in ways that continue to create strong emotional responses and a shared sense of identification among their home crowds. This motivational aspect amplifies and is amplified by other important driving forces for the musicians, such as the sheer personal pleasure they get from expressing themselves through music and from developing instrumental skills, feeling attractive as men as a result of the attention they get from women, and the professional recognition they may gain in mainstream musical realms.

On the issue of representation, scholars have noted how many indigenous people in different parts of the world are reluctant to appear to represent people other than themselves, or a limited group such as the immediate family or household (Dyck 1985a). This has been used to explain traditional regimes of organising interpersonal and inter-group rights and responsibilities that often are highly specific according to kin positions and categories, gender and age groups, and in relation to specific sites and country. The authority to represent is thus seldom generalised.

Central Australian Aboriginal societies are to a great degree organised in this manner. Traditional forms for maintaining social relatedness, for organising everyday

relations and for ceremonial performances are highly specific with respect to a person's realm of authority. Such authority is defined and limited according to gender, age, totemic affiliation and associations to particular country, and so forth. In general, and as Stanner notes on political organisation and leadership in many parts of indigenous Australia, "(t)he idea of a man of authority with right and title to command them over a wide range of many things is foreign to their idea of social life" (Stanner 1968:46).

By being kept separate from the more restricted and specific ancestral forms of knowledge and expressive regimes, more recent forms of music practices have come to establish an alternative and complementary expressive and representative space. In musical events like the Battle of the Bands, people who are otherwise dispersed or segregated by gender, age, kin and communities can participate and enjoy themselves in a shared expressive space. Music performances such as these thus constitute locally recognised public fora for representing family, language and community groups in their entirety.

By not mixing the two expressive genres, ancestral and more recent musical forms have also come to address different dimensions of people's lives, and aim at different realms for their intended social effects. In his study of Warlpiri ancestral songs in Lajamanu, Wild describes these songs as "direct communications from the spirit ancestors", while also providing an "authoritative guide to social relationships and to relationships with the land" (1987:106). This authority principally rests on the capacity of ancestral song genres to connect the living and ancestral dead, and to evoke spirits that are perceived to have supreme powers to manipulate people and the environment in both benign and malicious ways. Ancestral song genres are, for instance, used (with singers as the medium for spiritual agency) for singing people to death, to make or stop rain, to assist hunters in tracking game, for healing purposes, and to attract lovers (e.g. Bell 2002 [1983]; Elkin 1974 [1938]:308ff; Strehlow 1971; von Sturmer 1987).

Central Australian country, rock and reggae musicians commonly describe the potential power and authority of their music to produce social effects in similar terms, but the areas they directly address are contemporary socio-political circumstances. More or less every desert musician's song repertoire includes songs about drink driving, petrol sniffing, parents abandoning their children for a drunken life, and people leaving the particular people and country they belong to. Bush musicians express an adamant belief that these songs can move people, emotionally and physically, to stop drinking, to return to their children, people and country, and to resume other responsibilities within

kin structures. They also acknowledge that some people cannot be moved, they are too much “lost”, as expressed in the North Tanami Band’s “Nothing we can do” (CAAMA Music 2004).

Some rock, country and reggae songs are thought to be more powerful than others in producing social action and change, and the perceived impact also depends on the place and social situation of a performance. I discuss this more in relation to town performances in the next chapter. The main point I want to make here is that country, reggae and rock performances and songs can bring up contemporary socially problematic and at times shameful issues in a cross-social expressive and representational space. Because the lyrics are kept at a general level and do not address particular persons or groupings, issues can also be presented in an appropriately non-confrontational public form. Also, as the Lajamanu leader reinforced in his “disciplining” speech, these forms of music performance are about having a good time together, and are thought of as a space for reproducing congeniality, not for infighting or confrontation.

There are few, if any other fora in Aboriginal desert communities for articulating these kinds of issues in non-specific, enjoyable and cross-social ways. Ceremonial and “traditional business” are often gender and age specific gatherings and the activities organised according to kin and other social categories. The main forum for bringing up communal issues in remote Aboriginal communities is the community council, which is the formal representative body of a whole community. However, Myers’ (1986) and Trigger’s (1992:Ch 8) descriptions of these bodies correspond with my experience of people’s perceptions of councils more as individuals (of particular families) acting in community matters vis-à-vis whitefella governments and administrations. There are also widespread expectations that councils (and council members) should “look after” people in the community, and provide them with both services, such as health and education, and material things, such as cars and housing. Like Myers, I have no impression that people understand the councils’ work or public performance as representing, maintaining and giving substance to the moral, emotional and social cohesion of their community as a whole.

I suggest that the forms of music I discuss here can stand for such a valued cohesion and relatedness of whole communities. I base this suggestion on the emotional ways in which Aboriginal people participate in country, rock or reggae music performances from their community and the larger Aboriginal desert region, and on the

elaborate ways in which they talk about these forms of music as part of their intimate and shared social history and everyday lives. The proposal that musical expressions represent communities as well as specific groupings within them is further supported by the all-encompassing turnout of people for local music events. While researchers may occasionally comment on community people's passionate interest in country, gospel and other more recent music forms, few elaborate on this matter. Myers, for instance, recognises, but only in a paragraph, how communal singing of hymns in Pintupi language gives a "substance to the relations among coresidents" (1986:269) that the activities of the community council do not. While gospel music certainly produces such cohesion, it is in the main with respect to the social world of members of particular local Christian denominations. It is thus a more restricted form for producing relatedness, identification and representation than country, rock and reggae music.

Sports, and especially Australian Rules Football, is another form of performance that offers opportunities of wide-ranging participation that also evokes a strong sense of belonging to particular as well as cross-regional socialities. Local football teams or individuals who distinguish themselves through their achievements in sports are also thought to represent their home communities and people. Musical performance does, however, add some significant dimensions that sport performance lacks; lyrical expressions and dance. Song lyrics directly express, evoke and reaffirm shared and individual histories, experiences and emotions. Dance is a way to physically engage and identify to various degrees with such experiences and emotions. In this, musical performance constitutes at the same time collective, interpersonal and personal internal "conversations" to a greater degree than any sport does. In sport performances most people are spectators that (however physically and enthusiastically) watch and evaluate the performance of a small group of men (or in softball, women). In musical performances anyone can participate directly on several physical and emotional levels in the event and the lyrical themes, as performing dancers and co-singers.

When comparing Central Australia and Top End music practices in Chapter Three, I discussed how musicians in the desert region keep more recent and ancestral musical forms and knowledge separate. As I have shown here, this compartmentalisation not only works to preserve the perceived strength of ancestral knowledge traditions. It also underpins the effectiveness of more recent forms of music making as a medium for articulating contemporary problems and "mongrel" forms of identifications in "culturally appropriate" public and socially cross-cutting ways. The

crafting of country, rock and reggae musical lives is, moreover, an important contemporary means for men to garner respect and enjoy a sense of worth.

The musical crafting of manhood

There are plenty of examples of established Central Australian Aboriginal musicians who become community leaders and representatives for their people, country and settlements. The crafting of their musical persona is an important element in the accumulation of the respect required to be elected and asked to take up such positions.¹⁴⁰

Kumunjayi Patterson, for instance, one of the founders of the North Tanami Band in Lajamanu, described to me how his music making has been a significant factor for his taking on increasing personal and public responsibilities in Lajamanu. When the band began to perform songs about Lajamanu and local matters for Aboriginal audiences across the region, people started to turn up at his house, asking him to write songs about various concerns of theirs that they wanted to bring to everyone's attention. This included fathers and mothers abandoning their children, men and women and young people leaving for towns to drink, and domestic violence. The band and their music thus became a resource for members of the larger community to bring up matters that concern all of them, and to issue moral warnings and preventative instructions.

By listening to people's concerns, Kumunjayi and fellow band members Hector and Jarmon told me that they became increasingly aware of the extent of domestic and social problems in their community. Many such issues were never brought out in public because they were shameful and intimately associated with internal family problems. By travelling and performing throughout the region, the men also saw and became aware of other Aboriginal communities' and people's concerns and situations. This, Kumunjayi said, made them even more determined to work to hold together their own people and Warlpiri ways of living in Lajamanu.

On a more personal level, Kumunjayi told me that as a consequence of this process of increased awareness, he came to reflect on his own way of living. He felt that if he sang to others about taking care of family and Warlpiri Law and to live more

¹⁴⁰ Of course, not all musicians end up as respected senior community leaders or representatives for their people and country. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the kind of local stardom musicians may earn by performing around the desert region can instead lead to heavy drinking, big-headed behaviour and sleeping with the wrong women, all of which is likely to lead to trouble with both common and tribal laws, and to violence and premature death.

responsibly, he also had to improve himself. He subsequently gave up drinking and smoking and began to actively engage in community matters. Before his untimely death in 2003, Kumunjayi Patterson had progressed to the vice chairmanship of Lajamanu community council and was a senior tribal Law man.

Talking about his musical and personal life journey, Sammy Butcher of Papunya community and a founder of the Warumpi Band similarly describes himself as a man who gained insights through touring, performing and representing his country and people in indigenous and non-indigenous settings around Australia (also see Chapter Three). As a result, he gave up drinking and increasingly focused on the many urgent social matters on his home country.

Sammy is now vice president of Papunya community council. He uses his musical talent, passion and experiences in his work to guide troubled boys and young men to develop more creative, self-reflecting and positive self-images, as an alternative to widespread destructive and self-defeating activities such as petrol sniffing and drinking alcohol. One tangible result of Sammy's work to date is Tjupi, a reggae three-piece band. It emerged from Sammy's intervention when Barnabas, a young, petrol-sniffing man attempted suicide by threatening to jump from the Papunya water tower. Sammy got him down safely, took a guitar and began to teach him music. Barnabas is now the competent and self-confident lead singer of Tjupi, and the band released a fine album in 2005 (CAAMA Music 2005). Sammy has also been instrumental in the opening of a small music studio in Papunya in 2003. His vision for the studio is to offer young people a creative space for developing musical and social confidence and skills in collaboration with senior, traditionally knowledgeable men.

Another example is Gus Williams, whom I also introduced in Chapter Three. Gus is the long-time president of Hermannsburg community council, former council president in Ali Curung community, and a senior Western Arrernte Law man. His extensive touring as a country music artist since the 1960s has contributed importantly to the respect he now commands all over the desert region and beyond. Just like Sammy, Gus expresses strong beliefs in music making as a powerful means for the shaping of "good character" and self-confidence among younger generations of Aboriginal boys and men.¹⁴¹

¹⁴¹ While not elaborating the issue here, it should be mentioned that Kumunjayi Patterson and Gus Williams are devoted, practicing Christians (in Baptist and Lutheran denominations respectively), which further boosts their social and moral status in their communities, and also shapes their personal

Terry Simmons and Geoffrey Campbell of the Titjikala Band from Titjikala community south of Alice Springs (see map 1), are further examples of men who, through the crafting of musical lives, have become more aware of their male and community responsibilities, and through this have gained the required social respect to be engaged in community work and leadership roles. At the time of my field work, both men were on the local law and order team, where only men (and women) who command a high degree of respect can be effective, since they are likely to be listened to and obeyed even in emotionally charged, drunken or violent situations.

When I travelled back to bush communities to talk to musicians about the matters I raise here, all of them, independent of each other, emphasised how they teach their music to young people (i.e. boys). They mentioned with great pride the youngfella bands or musicians they have mentored, wanted me to meet them all, and urged me to return for the next community concert they planned so I could see their "apprentices" on stage. That is, they emphasised the importance of a man's ability to teach and guide younger generations for the accumulation of male status and seniority. And their accumulated skills and reputation in country, rock and reggae music making is an important means for such intergenerational work and recognition.

While most bush community musicians have gone through Law and thus are initiated in customary ways, the degree to which they continue to accumulate male status and seniority through men's traditional activities and knowledge varies. As I have aimed to show here, country, rock and reggae music making has become another, complementary and also less socially restricted means for these men to earn increased male respect and status. Their country, rock and reggae songs, in local languages and in English, mostly refer to the shared history, country and everyday issues of their language groups, kin and home communities. By performing this music around the desert region, these men not only come to represent their particular people and places. They also become more knowledgeable of other Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, places and ways of living. As a result they often become more conscious about their own sociocultural distinctiveness as well as of the situation of their own "mob". These experiences are useful for dealing with a range of social problems that most Aboriginal desert communities struggle with, and many musicians end up as leaders and representatives for their communities. Such commitments also require involvement and

commitment to work for the improvement of their people. Both men are recognised also as gospel musicians in the region.

a certain status in traditional matters, and several musicians have become respected senior men also in the sphere of ancestral knowledge.

By being performing musicians they thus effectively become mediators of both internal Aboriginal community matters and exogenous worlds, which become central to their crafting of respected and worthy manhood in their home communities and across the Aboriginal desert region.

Performative mediations

The mediating processes I have discussed in this chapter are reminiscent of Gilroy's discussion of the creation of "mongrel cultural forms" (1993:3) through a "history of borrowing, displacement, transformation, and continual reinscription" (102) in black musical culture across the Atlantic. In Aboriginal Central Australia, just as in the "mongrel", diasporic black identity formations Gilroy explores, "(m)usic and its ritual can be used to create a model whereby identity can be understood neither as a fixed essence nor as a vague and utterly contingent construction" (102). By being articulated and negotiated in musical activities, performance, language, gestures and bodily signification, such "mongrel" forms of identification are "lived as a coherent (if not always stable) experiential sense of self" (102).

It is within such a conceptual frame one can begin to understand the "mongrel" male and Aboriginal forms of identification that, for instance, are involved in the performance of the young singer of the Pawu Brothers at the Lajamanu Battle of the Bands. Within such a frame it makes sense to him and the audience that he simultaneously portrays himself in the figure of a Frank Sinatra on a Las Vegas stage and a young, traditionally initiated and also Christian Warlpiri man and musician of a particular family, at a certain stage in the lifelong process of becoming an increasingly knowledgeable and competent Warlpiri father, husband and respected elder. In the more traditionally oriented Aboriginal settings of desert communities, the success of such a performance of multilayered musical, Aboriginal and male forms of identifying depends on the performer's ability to ground it in prevalent but always interculturally modified ancestral norms for worthy and respected male demeanour. These norms vary according to such factors as the performer's age, position in kin categories and marital status.

Turner suggests that a consistent lesson of indigenous video production, another adoptive expressive form in indigenous settings around the world, has been how these film makers "tend to draw upon deeply embedded cultural categories and social

schemas organizing forms for the complex visual representations they create and produce" (Turner 2002:80). He cautions against interpreting this in terms of preservation of a fixed "culture", but to understand it as "empowerment of social actors, whatever their degree of cultural 'purity' as defined by whatever standards, to produce their own cultural mediations" (80). Such mediations, Turner suggests, are processes in which "cultural forms, together with the capacity and motivation of social actors to produce them, are reinforced, rearticulated, and transformed in various ways through the use of new techniques of representation and new social forms of utilizing and circulating them" (80).

A lesson of rock, country and reggae music making and performances in Central Australian Aboriginal bush communities is similarly that the male musicians draw upon longstanding Aboriginal musical and social norms and traditions when representing themselves, always in relation to particular Aboriginal "others" and places, and always in intercultural dynamics. In the process, they reinforce, rearticulate and transform previous, present and possible musical and social forms for being Aboriginal and men in diverse ways. For these music makers, as for the video makers that Turner discusses, the process of music making in itself "mediates the indigenous categories and cultural forms that simultaneously inform and constitute its subject matter" (2002:82). That is, the crafting of respected male musical lives in Aboriginal desert settings involves the partial recombination and merging of various models for respected male behaviour. The men do this through an important contemporary expressive form that in itself is a "mongrel" cultural form, emerging from the recombination and merging of a variety of Aboriginal and intercultural practices, ideas and forms of identifications.

Summary

With the Lajamanu Battle of the Bands as the point of departure, this chapter has shown how more recent forms of music making and performance create a dynamic space for asserting, contesting and transforming distinct and shared forms of identifications in remote Aboriginal communities. I have argued that these forms of music activities have emerged as an important contemporary expressive means for the mediation of localised ancestral and interculturally produced norms, histories and values. I have also shown how the pursuit of a musical "career" in country, rock and reggae music has become a complementary way for Aboriginal men to accumulate male respect and status as they

craft their sense of manhood in their home communities and across Aboriginal Central Australia.

To become respected musical performers and men, the musicians must be able to manage and manipulate multiple aspects of the contemporary “mongrel” cultural forms that constitute a particular sociomusical setting. As I showed in the previous two chapters, certain professional and “blackfella ways” of making music tended to guide the music work and social world of the recordings studio. In the social world of remote bush communities, this chapter has pointed to how the men instead emphasise certain aspects of traditional norms for manhood, relatedness and distinctions to gain respect as worthy men and musicians. And, as I will explore in the coming two chapters, what counts as worthy and respected “mongrel” men and musicians in relation to town gigs and touring ventures will shift again.

CHAPTER SEVEN

BLACKFELLAS PLAYING WHITE TOWNS

The previous three chapters have explored music practices and ways of identifying in the predominantly blackfella settings of the Aboriginal recording studio and desert communities. In this chapter I shift my attention to the dynamics of blackfella music performances in whitefella dominated regional towns.

Bush musicians who have performed in regional towns frequently bring up these experiences in ongoing music activities in their home communities, or when catching up with regional music makers at community music events. In talking about town gigs, the men often emphasise their encounters with musicians or music workers who are not “bush mob”. They will mention how they saw this or that more or less well-known local or interstate white or black musician in the town venue, or maybe they mingled backstage at outdoor events. If these musicians are from “big smoke” places such as Melbourne or Sydney, this will also be elaborated. If there are interstate sound engineers or organisers involved in the event, bush musicians usually call attention to their interactions with those people, too. In their accounts of their gigs in town venues they may also refer to, and thus connect their own performance with, certain famous musicians who have performed there in the past.

In some respects, this talk is similar to that about “going to see CAAMA” that I discussed in Chapter Four. It is a way for musicians who start out in desert communities to distinguish themselves as music makers who have advanced from just “mucking around” with music in the hinterland blackfella performance circuit. Talk and experiences of performing in white dominated towns are also co-productive in the crafting of worthy and respected manhood in remote Aboriginal settings that I discussed in the previous chapter, in that these experiences are valued and useful in their home settings.

In drawing on town gig experiences to create an elevated sense of oneself as a musician and man among fellow men and bush musicians, it is, however, more often the cross-cultural quality of these experiences that boosts an image of being situated somewhat beyond, and above, the social embeddedness of the hinterland blackfella music scene. In this, town gigs are thought of as connecting them to a mainstream musical sphere; a cross-cultural artistic community that stands for what their everyday situation is not.

“Town” (and “interstate”, which I return to in the next chapter) are in this way often created as imagined stereotypes of whitefella spheres, and with ambivalent connotations. These spheres may also include blackfellas, as I discussed in relation to musical creativity in Chapter Four. They can represent a “not us” that is thought of as lacking musically, as being too “square”, “tight” and effeminate, as also discussed in Chapter Four. As mentioned in Chapter Three, Aboriginal people in these places can also be seen as lacking culturally. In the regional blackfella Central Australian topography described in Chapter Two, “town” can also represent something destructive for their own sociocultural strength because of its strong association with bush people leaving their home communities and family responsibilities for a life ruled and destroyed by grog.

At the same time “town” and “interstate” represent desirable “not everyday” spheres. The men recognise that these spheres are the dominant mainstream, while their blackfella position in the bush is a kind of backwater of both the music industry and the larger Australian society. Bush musicians’ talk of town gigs is important for reinforcing an imagery of a sphere where they can tap into greater resources and recognition, which also earn the men more recognition at home. In this, these realms are construed as desired places because they offer a way out from the everyday constraints of their blackfella music making and life, and their association with these spheres gives the men increased respect in their everyday blackfella settings.¹⁴²

This chapter explores a set of community band performances in a whitefella venue in Alice Springs. My exploration of how these events are ordered, carried out and evaluated by blackfellas and whitefellas involved will show that, in actual practice, these happenings tend to contradict the musicians’ imagery of participating and being recognised in cross-cultural realms. In fact, the organising dynamics involved in blackfella town gigs in many ways reproduce the historically established dichotomy between blackfella and whitefella activities and experiences that I outlined in Chapter Two. This racial and sociocultural divide is maintained by everyday, mundane forms of identifying with certain practices and values as blackfella or whitefella. In the process, both black and white people tend to reinforce well-entrenched ideas about racial and sociocultural “others” and one’s own kind. By attracting large gatherings of blackfellas

¹⁴² Meintjes discusses similar movements between the imagined and experienced in the construction of “a specific version of blackness” (2003:241) among Zulu musicians in a Johannesburg recording studio. Here, talk about an idealised overseas and international success are mapped onto their lived conditions at home as a kind of isolated, limiting backwater of global modernism and cosmopolitanism.

who insist, in very public ways, on their own valued “too much” “mongrel” forms of sociality and demeanour in the midst of a white dominated order, Aboriginal town performances accentuate such taken-for-granted forms of identifying.

Todd Tavern, Saturday

At 9 pm, half an hour after the doors opened, a couple of hundred Aboriginal people have gathered outside the side entrance of Todd Tavern, one of the oldest pubs/hotels in Alice Springs. The crowd spills out across the adjacent parking lot and down the town mall. They are here for tonight’s concert, a double CD-launch of the Ltyentye Apurte Band’s debut album “It’s our home – Santa Teresa” and the Titjikala Band’s “Tapatjatjaka”. There are lots of Arrernte people from town and many people have made their way here from Titjikala and Ltyentye Apurte communities, located about 90 km apart a good hour south of Alice Springs (see map 1). Both bands turned up for the sound check earlier in the day and all band members are also in the gig room in good time for the performance.

The two white security guards at the door are meticulous in their screening of people before they let anyone in. They run a metal detector up and down a black man in front of me to detect any weapons, and then ask him to show an ID and money for the ticket. The man can only produce a few coins and is asked to move away before he can ask around for contributions. Two Aboriginal women in their best bush wear – clean, brightly coloured long skirts, sleeveless tops and plastic sandals – are turned away for not wearing covered shoes. Three more men are then asked to leave. The guards deem them too drunk. I know one of them as a teetotaller and the others don’t seem particularly drunk to me, just tipsy and happy. An older woman that the guards turn away for having “had enough” is not drunk at all. She and the men before her are rather red-eyed, though, which is probably an indication of trachoma or some other eye condition common in the regional Aboriginal population, conditions aggravated by dust and grit and poor water quality in bush communities and town camps. When I reach the door, the guards do not scan me with the detector or ask for ID or money, and they let me in with my uncovered shoes.

In the gig room about fifty Aboriginal people and a couple of whitefellas are scattered around the bar and tables. As the night progresses and the room fills up, it is loosely divided up with Arrernte people gathering on one side and people related to Titjikala (a mix of Southern Luritja, Pitjantjatjara and Southern Arrernte) on the other.

Men move around to talk to other men. Women tend to stay in the group they arrived with, and many stay in the back of the room for most of the night. The four or five white men and women I can spot in the room during the night all work for Aboriginal organisations. I did not see any white person in the crowds outside.

The Titjikala Band is on first. The band began as the Titjikala Desert Oaks Band in the 1980s and was part of the first wave of regional Aboriginal artists that recorded with and was broadcast on CAAMA.¹⁴³ When their lead singer committed suicide in the late 1980s, the band “just collapsed...we stopped from there”, as Terry, lead guitarist and an original member explained to me. They later re-formed as the Titjikala Band and returned to the CAAMA studio in 1999 to record the “Tapatjatjaka” album, a collection of basic, no-frills, thumping country rock tunes and a few gospel songs. The release was delayed for more than a year, though, when their drummer committed suicide. This meant that the studio had to redesign the images on the CD cover and wait for his family’s permission to print his name, in accordance with restrictions on using a deceased person’s first name or image.

Clean shaved and dressed in neat, collared sport shirts, jeans and good shoes, the Titjikala Band starts with a contagious country-rock tune. Men and women immediately take to the dance floor. During the performance, the band dedicates each song to various relatives. They play their rock number “Titjikala is my home” three times, every time drawing a very enthusiastic response from the Titjikala side of the room. They play a few of their other more well-known tunes more than once, too. Between songs, the band members have lengthy discussions and there seems to be a wide range of opinions on what tune to do next. After about an hour, they seem to run out of songs. After another discussion lead singer Ronald simply says “thank you”, and they leave the stage.

After half an hour’s break, the Ltyentye Apurte Band starts up. This band was formed in 1994 and is known for its distinct style of edgy rock, which to a large degree centres on lead guitarist Chris’ creative playing. He and rhythm guitarist Justin formed the band and wrote the band’s first original song (in English), “Arrente tribe” about the history of their people. After performing at home and in neighbouring communities for a few years, the community’s arts coordinator took an interest in the band. The

¹⁴³ The Titjikala Desert Oaks Band released a first, self-titled (cassette) album in 1989 on the CAAMA label. The band also appears on the live recordings from the groundbreaking Aboriginal music festival “Sing Loud Play Strong” in Darwin (CAAMA Music 1990) and on compilations such as “AIDS – how could I know” (CAAMA Music 1989), “From the bush” vol. 1 (CAAMA Music 1989) and vol.2 (CAAMA Music 1992).

recording of their debut album ended up being supported by the community council through Keringke Arts with Sue, the arts coordinator, acting as the band's "manager". She has also arranged local gigs for the band and took them on a combined arts and music tour to Melbourne and countryside Victoria earlier this year.

Tonight, all but one member wear baseball caps that hide their faces. Only lead singer Farron shows off his hairstyle, having had the ends of his black hair bleached, a trendy look among local young Aboriginal people at the moment. While some of the members wear their everyday chequered flannel shirts, dusty jeans and dirty work boots, others are dressed up in new jeans and clean t-shirts. They begin with three instrumental, thumping hard rock tunes that rev up the dancing audience. The men on stage don't move much, though, and similarly to the Titjikala Band, look fairly serious and disengaged.

From the upsurge of dancers and appreciative shouting it becomes obvious that the majority of the audience are Arrernte people and this is their band tonight. When the band plays "It's my home Santa Teresa", twice, the Arrernte crowd goes wild, and a few rather drunk women crowd up to the stage, screaming and stretching out to touch the musicians. The band members at the front carefully back off and do not respond in any overt ways to this enthusiasm.

The band's stage style is more confident than I have seen before. Usually, their singers are extremely shy, seldom looking up, and often turning away from the crowd. Tonight, though, Farron actually looks at the audience and even talks between songs, dedicating them to relatives and friends. They also start up every new number without fiddling around. It seems like the Victorian touring experience has made them more "professionally" aware and relaxed about their stage manners.

They keep up the tempo right through the set, with Chris going off in tricky, well-rehearsed solo breaks. When they stop at midnight, people are reluctant to leave, some of them very drunk and happy. As soon as the lights are turned on, however, the room is quickly emptied. Stan and Steve from the CAAMA studio have sound-engineered the concert and they now speedily proceed to dismantle the stage. The band members soon say "see ya", and they are off, driving back home to their communities.

Post-talk

A week later I meet up with Titjikala Band lead guitarist Terry and rhythm guitarist Geoffrey in their home community. About their lengthy stage discussions, they tell me

that they had in fact written a song list beforehand but forgot to bring it in the commotion before leaving for Alice Springs. It can be quite a complicated process of negotiations for community bands to first of all organise a vehicle for a town trip. The Titjikala men moreover had to drive all the way south to Finke community, a several hours long trip on rough tracks, to pick up singer Ronald who couldn't get a lift north. The reason they repeated the song "Titjikala is my home" several times, Terry tells me, was that Titjikala people requested it, and they don't want to disappoint their home mob. They were also restricted in the songs they could do. Ronald wanted to perform their new songs, many of which he has written. The others realised the limitations of the inexperienced drummer who mainly knew their older numbers. They could not rehearse and "break him in" before the gig, either, because some drunken "youngfellas" had smashed up their equipment a while before.

Terry and Geoffrey are really happy with the gig, though, their measurement being their home crowd's enthusiastic response and joyous dancing. Terry's only complaint is that their wives and kids could not be there to see them. Kids are of course not allowed in pubs, but their wives did come to town for the gig. From the stage, the men could see them at the door, "trying to get in, you know... But them two big blokes stood and pushed. 'No shoes! No shoes!' And there's a black band playing in there, you know!" Terry chuckles with resigned head jerks. Geoffrey lifts his eyebrows and smirks in a similar gesture of "that's how it is, but what can one do?"

Talking about the gig with Chris from the Ltyentye Apurte Band I find that he is less satisfied with his band's performance. He is first of all put off because their second lead singer didn't turn up. He was too busy drinking somewhere in town. Chris doesn't think that they played as "tight" as they should have, either. As I discussed in Chapter Four, among the blackfella musicians, notions of playing "tight" are often associated with more disciplined and professional whitefella ways of playing. They often have an ambivalent view of this quality, at the same time admiring and desiring it and dismissing it as too regimented. Chris is clearly inspired by their recent interstate tour, and he has described to me on an earlier occasion how they received a great response from the mainly white audiences and organisers at high-profile music festivals. "They hadn't heard anything like it before", he said, shaking his head with a satisfied grin. "Blokes would come up 'after, you know, and carry on about how they really got off on "real" rock. You know, the lead breaks and that. But also different, they thought, good different, because, you know, we sing our English, mongrel English, the Arrernte."

While he was thus proud of being recognised as a classy rock guitarist on par with any white rock artist (but not being too bigheaded about it by saying “*my lead breaks*”), it was still a distinct blackfella, somewhat untidy and “mongrel” quality that distinguished them as unique.

Back home, he had now wanted them to show their best form to their local crowds and regional Aboriginal musicians and people, a form that had gained momentum from the appreciative whitefella recognition during the tour. When I remind him of the passionate response they still got from the Todd Tavern crowds, he nods, clearly proud but not satisfied. “Can’t wait for the next town gig” he concludes, keen to show what the band really can do.

Moving community and gender to town

From this concert and the musicians’ comments it appears that the social dynamic of a regional town gig in many respects recreates that of bush community performances, as described in the previous chapter. Of course, for such practical reasons as lack of vehicles and long journeys on bad roads, and because of the particular type of venue, a pub, there are not many elderly women and men and no kids at the Todd gig. Teenagers also have to stay outside. There are no dogs, either. The accessibility of alcohol in town, and in this case, the pub venue, also means that the performance takes on an atmosphere of an adult drinking happening, which I return to below.

In its social composition, however, it is almost as if a community performance setting has moved to town, with blackfella musicians performing before a more or less wholly blackfella audience made up by people from their and other regional language groups and communities. As my conversations with Terry, Geoffrey and Chris indicate, it is also their home mob to which the musicians primarily direct their music, and it is their response that counts most in the band members’ evaluation of the event and their performance, while other regional Aboriginal musicians’ and audiences’ opinions also play a role.

The gendered dynamics of town gigs are also similar to performances in bush communities. Men and women largely move in separate groups, and (sober) women behave less extrovertly and restrict their movements, while men are the public “movers and shakers”. As a concession to the requirements of appropriate behaviour in commercial town venues, the women do not sit on the floor, though.

Like Terry and Geoffrey, many community musicians want their wives and children to be present when they perform in town, to “make them proud”. Just as when they perform in community settings, their stage appearances in local towns and before regional Aboriginal crowds are a means to further reaffirm and reinforce themselves as husbands and fathers, and as men of particular positions and status in kin and community realms. In town as in bush communities, the musician’s comportment is also highly “tempered” on stage, with minimal bodily gestures. They thus adhere to regional blackfella ideal norms of appropriate and respected adult male behaviour, as discussed in previous chapters.

At the same time, there is an expectation, and some men insist on acceptance, that both musicians and audiences “play” the extra-marital sexual field to a somewhat greater degree at town gigs. The access to alcohol in towns also contributes to more overt and daring sexual behaviours around town gigs, and jealous dramas and fights are often played out both during and after these events. In the concert just described, we saw how the Ltyentye Apurte musicians stepped back when overtly pursued by dancing and drunk women. The men are well aware that the smallest indications on their part that they enjoy the women’s attention can, and often are, interpreted as sexual invitations. This is likely to cause jealous conflicts with wives, girl friends and relatives, and also with these female fans’ husbands, male partners and relatives. While big concert nights in remote communities are also framed by a heightened sexual dynamic, behaviours in these socially dense settings tend to be somewhat more closely monitored. As we saw in Lajamanu, though, when people are drunk, sexual jealousy can cause fighting around music events there, too.

Hence, while people adapt some conduct to rules and expectations of town venues, and while the drinking creates somewhat more permissive conditions for sexual and other behaviours, town performances by bush musicians largely reinforce gendered and behavioural regimes of their everyday socialities.

The musical articulation of relatedness and distinctions, and of male worth, does however take on expanded meanings in regional town gigs. This is most evident in the performance of “community songs”, such as “It’s my home Santa Teresa” and “Titjikala is my home”, which the bands repeated several times at the Todd Tavern concert.

Performing place and people in town

Most Aboriginal community bands of any standing in Central Australia have a “community song”. These tunes are about their particular desert community and the lyrics may describe its history or celebrate features in the landscape around this place. Community songs often express strong feelings for this specific place and its people. The musical styles of community songs vary. A common format is very long and emotional country-rock ballads, such as the Teenage Band’s “Lajamanu”, which is eight minutes long in its recorded version.¹⁴⁴ Other community songs are fast, catchy rock tunes, such as Ltyentye Apurte Band’s “It’s our home - Santa Teresa” or Lazy Late Boys’ “Daguragu/Wattie Creek”.¹⁴⁵ These songs may also be set to a desert reggae beat or a country tune. Some are sung in a local language, others in English, or there may be a mix of both in the song.

Most musicians tell me that they write these songs to make their own mob “happy and proud”, and these tunes always evoke strong emotional responses among people from the community in question. In this, the performance of community songs reaffirms a sense of intimate relatedness among people from a particular place, both when performed in and outside the community. These songs, then, are dense occasions for expressing and experiencing shared sentiments, social memories, history and place.

When performed outside the community, an equally important purpose of community songs is emphasised by the musicians; to make their particular place and people “heard”. In this respect, a community song is a public statement of a community’s people and country, representing and placing them on the cross-regional Aboriginal social map and beyond. Especially when sung in a local Aboriginal language, community songs are, moreover, described by the musicians as a way to prove to (primarily Aboriginal) “others” that their community is “strong”. That is, the performance of community songs demonstrates that their particular sets of local Aboriginal social relatedness and ancestral Law and customs are actively practiced. In this, community songs are contemporary forms for representing bodies of customary knowledge and practices, by using and displaying the language of particular ancestral Laws. The performance of these songs is simultaneously described as a way to reproduce the strength of such local Laws. That is, these songs contribute to actively

¹⁴⁴ On the album “Dreamtime Hero” (CAAMA Music 1999).

¹⁴⁵ On Ltyentye Apurte Band’s album “It’s our home – Santa Teresa” (CAAMA Music 2001), and Lazy Late Boys’ “Freedom Day” (CAAMA Music 1999).

keep culture strong by using the language of ancestral Laws and therefore encouraging especially younger generations to use and actively keep the language/culture alive.

The aspirations to make particular indigenous socialities “heard” through community songs make these pieces of music especially important for marking out and reinforcing differentiation and relative strength between different Aboriginal groups and communities in the region. Anybody can certainly enjoy a community song of other groupings as a great piece of music, but they can never “share” its sentiments in the same emotional and socially meaningful ways as people from that particular community and Aboriginal grouping (which may be of different language groups).

Performed community songs in this way musically define Aboriginal exclusivity, just as they are inclusively “owned” by particular Aboriginal performers and their social groups. I have never heard a community song performed by musicians other than those of the community referred to. Audiences also respond to these songs most emotionally when they are performed by the musicians who originally performed or wrote the song. This can be true also for other types of songs, such as those celebrating particular tracts of country, family outstations, or specific physical-spiritual features in the landscape to which a songwriter or group of songwriters are related through conception, descent groups, or in other socially significant ways. The community songs, however, confirm the highest degree of exclusiveness and inclusiveness of the non-ancestral song genres.

To perform community songs in regional towns has a third, important purpose and power for many musicians, which can be described in terms of the “gathering power of place” that the songs are perceived to perform. Casey (1996) describes this power as working in many ways and at many levels to conjoin our experiences of time and space with a specific place. This place provides a scene for the experience of our past and present feelings, thoughts, expressions and actions, regardless of our immediate locus.

This perceived “gathering power of place” of community songs is important because most Aboriginal desert communities have “lost” people to regional towns. That is, men and women leave, often leaving behind children and spouses and traditional responsibilities to people and country. They leave for multiple and entangled reasons, but when community people talk of a person being “lost” to town, they commonly mean those who leave to drink and who get caught up, sometimes for life, in Aboriginal grog

socialities in towns.¹⁴⁶ People also leave bush communities to get away from family conflicts, for medical conditions, for work or education. Others may aspire to build an alternative life to that of the rather restricted lifestyle of traditionally oriented regimes and dense sociability of remote communities.

The migration to towns is, not surprisingly, experienced as a major problem for those left behind. The continued existence of functioning Aboriginal socialities within customary frameworks fundamentally depends on individuals being present and practicing specific responsibilities and rights in relation to other individuals, groups and tracts of country. Numerous songs by community musicians therefore address this issue by, for instance, describing children as crying for their mothers, or urging fathers and husbands not to go to town but to stay and care for their wives and children.¹⁴⁷ However, these songs more often take the form of preventative advice and warnings directed at people who live in the communities. When it comes to convincing countrymen and women in towns to return to home country and responsibilities, it is the community songs that the musicians think are the most powerful. They are the songs that are made and performed to act on people, to move them emotionally, morally and physically to return and to remain with their people and country. Musicians are often keen to provide me with concrete examples of the effectiveness of these songs. They name men or women who have returned after being "lost" for years to town life, and they insist that the trigger was their community song. From hearing or seeing this song performed, the musicians tell me, the "lost ones" got so homesick for their country and people that they managed to give up the grog and town life, and returned home.

To perform community songs is thus to perform a kind of "gathering power of place"; a power to emotionally and physically move and transform people and their sense of belonging to a particular place; a power that is sourced from the specific social and physical place that is musically evoked in its multiple social and cosmological meanings.

¹⁴⁶ I avoid the complicated and often emotionally charged debate over the causes, effects, patterns of consumption and the role of alcohol in indigenous settings here. For more on these issues, see for example Siggers and Gray (1998), Langton (1993b). For Northern Territory perspectives, see Sansom (1980) and Brady (Brady 1988, 1991, 1992, 1995; Brady and Palmer 1984).

¹⁴⁷ Listen for example to the North Tanami Band's "Ngamarlangu" (Mother and child) on "Warlpiri, Warlpiri people" (CAAMA Music 1990), "Wama kuru wanti" (Leave the grog alone) with Titjikala Desert Oaks Band (CAAMA Music 1989), "Who's gonna wipe their tears" with Danny Plain on the compilation album "Wama Wanti" (CAAMA Music 1988), or "She's coming back" with the Areyonga Desert Tigers on "Light on" (CAAMA Music 1988).

The musicians, as mediators of such performative forces moreover accumulate status as men and musicians through re-performing community songs. As mentioned in the previous chapter, several bush musicians have become leaders and representatives for their communities. The performance of community songs is especially important in reinforcing such representative male powers, because of the perceived power of these songs to act on others.

The particular dynamic that blackfella town gigs creates, as exemplified by the “moving community to town” phenomena and by the emotional and social force generated by the music performed, thus takes the form of shared social action. This dynamic resembles the “embedded aesthetics” that Ginsburg (1994) elaborates as an orientation in indigenous video and media production. For the indigenous video producers, she argues, “the quality of work is judged by its capacity to embody, sustain, and even revive or create certain social relations” (368). These video producers understand Aboriginal media “to be operating in multiple domains as an extension of their collective (vs. individual) self-production” (368).

As I have shown, the musical power exercised by community bands in town performances and the social dynamic of these events similarly extend and amplify specific social relations, gendered regimes and individual and collective senses of place that form the substance of self-production in their everyday Aboriginal settings. A central organising dynamic of the sociomusical performance at blackfella town gigs is thus the reinforcement of distinct Aboriginal ways of identifying. That is, these music events become a source of collective consciousness which promotes particular Aboriginal kinds of identity formation.

The ways in which town gigs are organised also reinforce a distinct blackfella realm for such identity formation, a realm that is demarcated from whitefella orders by certain blackfella “mongrel” ways of behaving and appearing.

Racialising town gigs

Driving to the Todd Tavern on the night of the Ltyentye Apurte and Titjikala Band concert, I tune to the Aboriginal CAAMA Radio station. The DJ repeatedly promotes the event and urges listeners to turn up to support their local bands. According to the CAAMA Music manager, plenty of A4-size copy-machine flyers about the concert have also been distributed around town. I have not come across any flyers in public spaces around Alice Springs but saw some on in-house notice boards of Aboriginal

organisations earlier in the week. The local paper also mentioned the gig in a few lines in the entertainment pages, merely stating the names of the bands (misspelling Ltyentye Apurte) and the venue. The Todd Tavern did not put up any posters or advertise the concert.

As is often the case with blackfella gigs in Alice Springs, then, this CD launch is not promoted widely in non-Aboriginal public spaces, and is not attracting much whitefella attention. In contrast, performances by white or interstate (white and black) musicians are usually listed in the local papers' events diaries, promoted in separate ads in the local papers, and many of these artists are featured in news stories. The venues normally promote these performances, too, with posters around town. During my prolonged stay in the region only two local Aboriginal artists have received any decent amount of coverage in the local newspapers, namely Warren H. Williams and NoKTuRNL, both of whom have white managers. They are also usually promoted by the venue itself, with posters and newspaper ads.

Even when larger, not necessarily music-centred Aboriginal events are widely promoted and written up in the local press, these events are not always registered as relevant for non-Aboriginal people. For instance, the largest Aboriginal organisation in town, the Central Land Council, put on a big, free celebration to mark their 30th anniversary in 2005, featuring traditional dancing, a long line of black and white dignitaries, food, and as a finale, a rock concert with Aboriginal bands. The event was promoted in the local papers with a special advertising spread and on posters all around town. By the construction of a large stage, the raising of numerous food stalls, and the installation of an exhibition it was also obvious to everyone several days beforehand that a large event was to take place on the sports oval in the centre of Alice Springs.

I was involved in an activity involving more than a hundred non-Aboriginal town residents from a broad range of lifestyles at the time. Not one single person I talked to knew about the Land Council event. When I told them and urged some people to come and see the famous black bands performing, nobody showed much interest. Their comments made clear that they thought that events involving Aboriginal issues and people had little to do with them. Many also thought it a bit "too risky"; implying that they assumed that there would be a lot of drinking and fighting in the black crowds that gather for such an event. On the night, the large majority of people at the oval were Aboriginal, and most of the white people present were associated with various Aboriginal organisations or work with Aboriginal issues.

The existence of a lively blackfella regional music scene can thus easily escape the notice of people not connected to Aboriginal networks or life worlds, which includes a large part of Alice Springs' non-Aboriginal population and the tens of thousands of tourists that visit town annually.

This racially segregated music performance (and other events) situation is maintained by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal parties. The lack of promotion of blackfella music events in whitefella realms can be partly explained by the tight financial situation of many Aboriginal organisations, which are usually the organisers of such events. They basically rely on the informal blackfella network to do the promotion work for them. And it usually does. On the CD launch described, for instance, approximately five hundred Aboriginal people turned up outside the Todd Tavern without wider public promotion. Such racially informed strategies obviously exclude most non-Aboriginal people from even knowing about the event, which was evident at the gig at the Todd. The handful of white people in the audience was drawn from rather particular categories; all worked with local Aboriginal organisations.

More importantly, however, Aboriginal organisers usually do not show much interest in attracting non-Aboriginal audiences. When I have asked a few different organisers about the lack of promotion in non-Aboriginal places, some raised their eyebrows as if they had not really given it much thought. These events draw enough people without such promotion, anyway. Others merely stated that it is in fact an Aboriginal event, put on primarily for blackfellas, who, compared to whitefellas in town, don't have that many happenings put on for them. While these organisers did not mind whitefellas turning up, they also recognised that most white people probably would not feel comfortable in these large gatherings of blackfellas.

The absence of whitefella audiences does not concern the Aboriginal musicians much, either, which seems inconsistent with their talking-up town gigs as opportunities to gain increased recognition in a mainstream, white dominated realm. As we heard from the band members' talk after the concert at the Todd Tavern, it is in the main Aboriginal audiences they "talk back" to with their performances, and it is Aboriginal people's attention and response that primarily frame their evaluations of the event.

Hence, concrete situations commonly do not correspond with the musicians' portrayal of town performances as cross-culturally valuable and rewarding. This does not make those ideas less important or less "real". They still contribute to their self-perceptions as worthy musicians and men, as well as to other Aboriginal people's

perceptions of them as musicians and men on a more advanced level than those who only perform in the hinterland blackfella community circuit. In practice, though, musicians, organisers and audiences assert a distinctively “too much” blackfella presence that tends to limit cross-cultural engagements.

“Too much” blackfellas

Because I thoroughly enjoy the music of community bands myself, I suggested on a few occasions to different musicians that whitefellas, and especially tourists, probably would be interested in attending a blackfella concert if only they knew about it. This, I argued, could lead to increased sales of their recordings and a wider interest for Central Australian Aboriginal music in general. The musicians usually responded to this with curious looks, as if such a proposition was unimaginable or perhaps just irrelevant. Resonating with some of the Aboriginal organisers’ assumptions that blackfella gigs may be somewhat intimidating for many whitefellas, quite a few of the musicians also stated with a certain degree of assertive pride, mixed with self-irony, that blackfella gigs are just “too rough”, “too drunk”, just “too much” in general for most whitefellas. This “too much” blackfella quality is often a defining feature of the musicians’ self-declared and ambiguously valued “mongrel” status, as we saw it gestured by Lyndon in Chapter Four, for instance.

When used in relation to blackfella gigs in Alice Springs, the “too much” quality refers to the ways in which many Aboriginal people behave and look in ways that tend to unsettle the white town order of appropriate conduct and appearances, as described in Chapter Two. It is also precisely such blackfella modes of making their presence known that are commonly the subject of whitefella complaints, disciplining, interventions and at times fear and disgust. This shapes the attitudes of whitefella managed music venues in town.

Alice Springs has about ten to fifteen public pubs and member clubs with a performance space. All venues that regularly put on live music are operated by non-Aboriginal people, and only two or three of them are to some degree open for Aboriginal performers. When I have called around to find a venue for a black band, some venue managers explain that black bands “do not suit our clientele”. Others state outright that they do not put on Aboriginal bands because they do not want the rowdy, drunken blackfella crowd these bands attract. They mention the cost of extra security, the potential cost of damage to property and the risk of police intervention, which can

jeopardise their license to operate and serve alcohol. It was thus quite an achievement by the organisers, CAAMA Music, to convince the Todd Tavern to stage the Ltyentye Apurte and Titjikala CD launch, which, moreover, proceeded without any unruly incidents.

After the event, the CAAMA Music manager was a bit disappointed with the door takings, though. Despite the many hundreds of people turning out around the pub, only 130 tickets were sold. This is enough to pay the musicians but hardly covers the costs for sound and stage services. The poor door taking was no doubt related to the very strict screening at the door, which is the responsibility of the pub. Talking to the white pub staff, they told me how a black man knifed one of the security guards in the arm a few weeks ago. The doormen were therefore more tense than usual and not prepared to take any risks. There had also been a lot of (blackfella) "fighting and anger" outside the pub and its drive-in bottle-shop over the last couple of weeks, the staff told me. They connected this with rumours about the arrival of new drugs in town, and with some "family business" going on at the moment. "Family business" is a common local term for conflicts and pay-back actions within and between Aboriginal kin groups, which at times accelerate to create a tense, always-ready-to-erupt situation in the streets of Alice Springs. Informed by such a threatening blackfella scenario, the white venue applied a very strict screening and dress code at the door that excluded a large number of Aboriginal people for not wearing covered shoes or for appearing drunk.

As can be expected for live music events in pubs in many parts of the world, quite a few men and women had had a few drinks beforehand. However, several of the people I saw being turned away were in fact sober, and others only a bit tipsy. The requirement of wearing covered shoes is part of a widespread and arbitrary "dress code" that most white establishments in Alice Springs and other regional townships apply, and which is often a covert racial code for excluding blackfellas and prioritising whitefella patrons. Restaurants, coffee shops, cinemas, motels and shops in these towns, and roadhouse restaurants along the Stuart Highway, likewise commonly apply versions of "neat dress" codes in order to select their customers. The detailed content of these codes are rarely specified in writing anywhere but usually declared at the door, and thus defined in relation to each particular aspiring customer. It can and will be argued that the dress code applies to all people and therefore is not a racist strategy. In actual practice, however, these codes are mainly enforced in relation to Aboriginal customers.

They also tend to change with the colour of a person's skin, not the dress as such, as we saw when I was let in without wearing covered shoes.

A week later, another blackfella town gig illustrates how white interventions or forms of disciplining blackfella demeanour do little to moderate the "too much" "mongrel" quality that the Aboriginal musicians and audiences tend to value and cultivate as distinctively theirs. And as we shall see, it is not the cross-cultural relationships that take centre stage, either, when town gigs get out of hand and relationships and respect has to be repaired.

Todd Tavern, Friday

When I arrive at the Todd Tavern just before 9 pm, several hundred Aboriginal people fill up the surrounding area. It is a noticeably larger crowd than at the gig with the Ltyentye Apurte and Titjikala bands. The performers tonight are the Rising Wind Band from Yuendumu and the Blackshadow Band from Amanturrngu (Mt Liebig), both located west-northwest of Alice Springs (see map 3). CAAMA Music is once again the organiser, with Stan and Steve doing the sound engineering. In contrast to the two bands in the previous gig, only a few of the Rising Wind members came for the afternoon's sound check, while none of the Blackshadow guys turned up.

The atmosphere outside the pub is rowdy. I see some of the band members involved in arguments. There is some pushing and shoving in the crowds, too, and a fist fight going on down the mall. At the door, people are jostling hard to get in. The security guards refuse many people entrance but tonight, unlike the previous concert, people do not move away when asked and instead start to argue with the guards and each other.

A majority of the people who have come to hear "their" bands are Warlpiri (Rising Wind Band) and Pintupi-Luritja (Blackshadow Band). With their fairly strong and politically influential networks of families, communities and large populations throughout the Western Desert region, these people, and in particular the Warlpiri, often appear and are perceived as more assertive than many other Aboriginal groupings in Central Australia. The assertiveness applies to their interactions both with whitefella realms and to interactions with other Aboriginal groups. In his seminal work on Warlpiri people, Meggitt describes a Warlpiri "ethnocentrism" that "leads them to patronize other Aborigines in a lordly fashion whenever they meet; but, such is the Walbiri reputation for aggressiveness and fighting ability, the victims generally swallow

the sneers in silence" (1962:35). I suspect that this proposal would be met with approval by quite a few of the Warlpiri musicians I have met. They tend to talk of themselves in similar terms when expressing a Warlpiri pride and strength that they at times associate with their "warrior" status among desert peoples. They also assert this identity in songs, such as the Rising Wind's "Warlpiri Warriors".¹⁴⁸

The white doormen look increasingly intimidated by the ever noisier crowd and they proceed to close one of the two doors. Someone taps my shoulder and a hand waves towards the back of the crowd where Chris, the lead singer of Rising Wind, wants my help to get in. I shout to him to try the front bar around the corner. The staff should let performers enter the gig room from that side. A moment later, the band's lead guitarist Clifford calls out for my help from another flank of the crowd. I call out the same advice.

After some thirty minutes in the now rather aggravated crowd, one of the guards waves at me, the only white person in the crush. He stretches out his arm to drag me to the door. I hesitate, not sure how people will react to such a blatant racial prioritisation. I have already had my hair pulled and been elbowed in rather intentional ways. I also have prior, bruising experiences of being targeted as the "white bitch" at drunken and tense blackfella gigs. Some of the black men up front have met me before, though, and they direct the crowd to make way for me. In a self-conscious attempt to take the edge off my racial "free-riding", I grab the hands of a couple of women squeezed in next to me, tell the guards that they are with me, and we are let in.

The gig room appears very quiet compared to the rowdy noise outside. The predominantly blackfella audience includes Sammy Butcher with family. People approach Sammy to shake his hand throughout the evening, paying their respects to this influential regional musician. Chris and Clifford have also managed to get in, and when Clifford comes up and hugs me with a big laugh I realise that he is fairly drunk. He drags me over to meet his "oldfellas" and other Yuendumu people. I doubt that he would have made such a public show of me if sober, since he is a married man and I am a woman unaccompanied by a man, and unknown to them.

The Blackshadow Band starts up with their mix of gospel, country and reggae-rock style music while people trickle in from outside. This band formed with the support of a project aimed at distracting men from petrol sniffing and drinking. The project also funded the recording of their debut album that is launched with this gig.

¹⁴⁸ Released on "Living on Yurrampi" (CAAMA Music 2000).

Tonight, several of the original members are replaced. For instance, the lead guitarist, who wrote several of the songs on the CD, is doing time in prison, and the drummer on the album is also absent. These two replacements are obvious in their instrumental numbers, which turn out rather flat and disorganised. Barnabas, the talented lead singer, becomes the backbone of the rest of the performance with his soft, melodic vocals.

By the end of their performance the room has filled up with an increasingly loud crowd. The previous gigs' dress code has obviously been circulated. Many women wear new, covered canvas shoes and I see shining white sneakers on many male feet. The fact that the previous concert was free of incidents may also be a reason why more people are admitted tonight, twice the number of the Ltyentye Apurte and Titjikala gig.

When it is Rising Wind's turn they are visibly unorganised. They muck around on stage for quite some time, frequently yahooping into the microphones and shouting "we're here now!", "Rising Wind, yeah!" I saw Clifford drinking solidly during the Blackshadow performance. By now he is very drunk and rather cocky. He keeps ordering Stan and Steve to come up and fix this and that for him. In the end, Stan walks firmly up on stage and talks to him. Clifford then leaves the stage. The other band members look confused. After some more messing about they finally start up a song. It turns into a poor, disjointed performance with several stops and restarts. When the song ends, Chris calls out in Warlpiri for somebody to get "Scotty", Clifford's pet name. The performance is clearly falling apart and the crowd grows increasingly restless, with drunken and loud arguments erupting around the now packed room.

At the sound desk, Steve looks defeated and wants to cancel the concert before the whole thing gets out of hand. Stan looks out over the chaotic room, searchingly. He then makes his way through the crowds and gets hold of Sammy Butcher. He proceeds to the stage, says a few words to Chris, and The Rising Wind Band then leaves the stage. Sammy, his younger son Jeremiah, and Barnabas from the Blackshadow Band instead enter the stage and shortly start up a heavy, groovy reggae beat. This is Sammy's new three-piece band Tjupi, which before this impromptu appearance has only given the odd performance outside Papunya. Within minutes the whole room has turned in to a sea of swinging, singing, happy people.

After a few songs, men and women start climbing up on stage to dance in the spotlights, lifting up their t-shirts to show their naked, twisting torsos. Swiftly, one of the big bodied, white security guards moves up on stage and brusquely pushes the men and women off the stage and into the crowd. He then kicks with his workman boots to

warn people away from the edge of the stage. A couple of policemen also turn up inside. Several police have also been busy throughout the night outside the pub, controlling the tumult and picking up a number of “disorderly” people.

Tjupi saves the night inside, though, and people have to be persuaded to leave when they finish up about midnight. When I leave an hour later, it is still fairly unsettled outside. A large number of people move about restlessly in groups, throwing loud arguments between them. Police vans and Aboriginal night patrols circulate and approach black people in the streets and back lanes.

Repairing musical image, restoring male respect

When I run into Clifford with his wife and children a few days later he does not look directly at me. I make a mild joke about the “non-gig”. He shakes my hand and says “I’m alright now” with a subdued gesture that I recognise as an acknowledgement of his slightly inappropriate behaviour at the gig when “showing me off” to family and friends.

By now I know what happened on stage when Clifford, a main force of the band, disappeared, which caused the performance to fall apart. Stan first told him to get his act together. He then passed on a message from Clifford’s wife who wanted to see him outside. This is why a normally well organised, but now drunken and therefore fairly impulsive Clifford left the stage as the performance was about to start. Outside, he and his wife ended up in an argument that attracted the police. When identifying Clifford they discovered that he had an outstanding warrant in his name and he was picked up and put in the police lock-up.

The “damage done” by the Rising Wind Band’s drunken behaviour and professional failure to perform required some subsequent repair work by the band members. Looking at which relationships the men principally work to restore after a “failed” event, which is not that uncommon in the regional Aboriginal music scene, can elucidate how they construe their sense of male and blackfella worth and respect in this particular sociomusical setting. The relationships potentially damaged are at least four-fold. One concerns the relationship between the event organiser, in this case CAAMA Music, and the venue operators. Another involves the relationship between the venue operator/staff and the musicians. A third relationship affected is the one between the organiser and the musicians, and a fourth, between the musicians and the audience. In this particular gig a fifth relationship is endangered; that between the band members and

the studio men, Stan and Steve. They were first of all in charge of the direct, practical proceedings of the gig, but more importantly, have been intimately involved in shaping these musicians' work and reputation in the recording studio.

To begin with the relationship between the musicians and the studio men, the first time they meet face to face after the Todd Tavern gig is a few weeks later when the Rising Wind is lined up for a live radio broadcast from the CAAMA studio. A few hours before the broadcast, the band members walk into the studio area. Their heads are almost bowed and the way they move is even more deferential than the normal blackfella etiquette demands. Stan is in the control room setting up for the event. He sees them but does not acknowledge them with a greeting. He just continues his work at the sound desk. The band members stand quietly outside the studio, waiting for Stan or Steve to initiate communication.

They have to wait for almost two hours. Just before the broadcast starts Stan tells them in a few restrained words that by being drunks they will lose friends, and they nearly lost him at the Todd Tavern. Clifford and Chris nod. With Stan now having initiated an exchange between them, Clifford and Chris simply state that it will not happen again. This is more or less the only verbal exchange between the band and the studio men during the night. During the broadcast, the band members behave in a noticeably orderly, timid and polite way and are very attentive and responsive to Steve's and Stan's gestures. In short, they bend over backwards to demonstrate their ability to work congenially and professionally with the studio men.

At the back door after the broadcast, Clifford and Chris talk to me about recording a new album. They are doing more gospel this time, they say with a sincere, calm and matter-of-fact attitude, as if the album deal is already done and the studio recordings booked in. In other circumstances I would probably interpret this kind of talk as part of the "healthy competition" in which musicians around the studio position themselves through similar kinds of assertions. In this particular situation, however, when their relationship with the studio men is precarious, it is perhaps better understood as a gesture similar to Scotty's handshake with me earlier. That is, it is a gesture in the process of redemption and of mending relationship, in this case with the studio men. To talk of a new album as if the recordings are already in progress, while no plans for such a venture have been made on the part of the studio and for which there may not even be

any songs written, is to establish in the present a future time and place where these relationships are both restored and further developed.¹⁴⁹

Clifford and Chris also introduce me to a new singer they are bringing into the band, a man I know as a dedicated gospel singer in Yuendumu. Their gospel ambitions indicate to me that the band members are also in the process of repairing a bruised image as respected musicians and men at home in Yuendumu. That is, they are working to restore their relationship with their most important audience. Drunken behaviour is not in itself uncommon, upsetting or considered inappropriate in general in blackfella Central Australia. To drink, often excessively, is also a more or less expected part of male behaviour and sociability at town gigs, which resonates with longstanding practices and male imagery also in global country, rock and reggae music cultures. A merry and drunken Aboriginal crowd is not much perturbed by a band not getting through a performance, either. In my experience, people tend to take it in their stride if equipment or even musicians fall off stage in a drunken performance situation. As long as some musicians carry on the night of dancing and fun, people tend not to complain much.

As discussed in the previous chapter, to continuously perform in a variety of Aboriginal settings is crucial to their accumulation of respect as adult Aboriginal men and as worthy representatives of their people and communities. It is, in other words, in their own personal and socio-political interest, not so much others', that they can demonstrate a competent, responsible musician and male image, especially when out of their everyday social settings. The restitution involved in the relationship between musicians and audiences thus principally rests with the musicians and in the main concern their self-respect and self-imagery.

Clifford's and Chris' talk about playing more gospel indicates such attempts to repair a dented musical and male self-image. As I have elaborated in previous chapters, gospel is commonly regarded as a more mature, morally responsible and respectable practice in many Aboriginal Central Australian settings, compared with, for instance, rock and reggae music practices.¹⁵⁰ This is not to suggest that individual gospel

¹⁴⁹ Two years later the Rising Wind Band recorded and released a new album, "Clear my mind" (CAAMA Music 2004), featuring only the one gospel song, which supports my argument that their stated gospel ambitions were more a means to repair image than actually realising such a sociomusical re-direction.

¹⁵⁰ I have also collected several accounts by bush musicians who describe how, in some places and times, country, rock and reggae music has been perceived as the devil's work in certain quarters of their community. This was more common when these music forms were first practiced in a particular place,

musicians necessarily live and behave the way they or the churches preach, that is, as sober, responsible, monogamous family men. I have seen country-gospel musicians walk drunk off stage, too, and have no reason to assume that their extra-marital activities differ much from those of rock or reggae musicians. Moreover, the one man can in fact be both a gospel and a rock musician. As I mentioned in Chapter Three, Clifford is one of those cross-over musicians. To publicly declare an alignment with gospel practices and sociability is nevertheless to more overtly demonstrate one's aspiration and commitment to change one's "bad ways", such as drunken and promiscuous behaviour.

Hence, for established rock musicians who have messed up a town performance, and thus at least temporarily have caused damage to their musician and Aboriginal male status, a stated aspiration to do more gospel music can be to express intentions for redemption or recovery within their immediate Aboriginal social circle, as well as in the wider Aboriginal region.

None of the Rising Wind members, or any other regional musicians I have seen in similar circumstances, seem concerned with repairing their image as performers or with restoring interpersonal or male respect in relation to whitefella venue operators or staff. Just as white venue operators tend to expect blackfellas as a general category to behave unpredictably, irresponsibly or in a disorderly way, blackfellas tend to expect whitefellas in general to view them in precisely these negative ways. The musicians seldom expect white venue operators or staff to recognise them as particular bands with a name and a distinct musical profile, or as artists from a certain language group and community, either. Even fewer expect white venue staff or managers to recognise them as individual persons in their own right.

From the point of view of the white pub staff and guards, both gigs described here are framed by the recent knife attack by a black man on one of the white guards. As I described earlier, the pub staff connected this to speculations about increased conflicts and tensions among Aboriginal people, and to the circulation of new illegal drugs in town. I do not question the validity of these claims or that such a threatening

which could be both missions and state settlements. From time to time bush community residents may also blame these forms of music practices for luring young people into drug use, drinking and "running amuck". I witnessed, for instance, a community meeting where senior women and men of a community firmly identified the rock and reggae music activities in this place as a main reason for a recent increase in youth causing havoc at night. They also accused adult musicians of introducing marijuana to the young. On the other hand, at other times I have heard senior people promoting rock and reggae music activities as a way to keep youth occupied and distract them from precisely such destructive behaviour, also including drinking, drugs and sniffing petrol.

scenario creates an atmosphere in which the guards and staff are easily provoked to intervene when people act in an “unruly” way, as when dancers climbed the stage. The issue I want to point to here is how this scenario is so readily construed in terms of causal connection and racialisation of rather isolated incidents and disparate phenomena. This provides a good example of how the binary system of racial identification operates.

What is connected here, then, is one knife attack on a white guard by a black man, the illegal drug scene, and speculations about blackfella “family business” fighting. It should first be noted that inter-racial violence such as this knife attack is rare in Alice Springs. As I noted in Chapter Two, most violent crimes occur among Aboriginal people. Secondly, the illegal drug scene is not principally an Aboriginal domain in this town. And thirdly, Aboriginal family conflicts rarely directly affect white or unrelated people. The isolated action by one drunken black man against a white individual is still taken to represent a whole “other” race and culture as threatening to a whole non-Aboriginal “normality”. The rock concert situation probably facilitates associations with another imagined threat to mainstream, “normal” society represented here; the illegal use and trade of drugs. Rock cultures, like several other musical cultures, have long been linked to, and attacked for promoting, excessive drug taking, drinking and deviant and rebellious behaviour world wide (Grossberg 1993; Shapiro 1999).

The final glue for binding these negative and threatening elements together is that evasive concept of blackfella “family business”. This is a local vernacular concept that has come to be used in so many different ways and for so many practices and values by different speakers that it has few specific meanings. It still connotes something very particular, albeit ambiguous and mystified, “blackfella” for many white locals who do not engage much with Aboriginal life worlds. In its everyday use in the local papers and other white domains it often becomes a term for explaining (away) conflicts and unacceptable levels of violence among Aboriginal people as somehow part of their sociocultural makeup, rather than as symptoms of deep historical and ongoing material and socio-political inequality. The concept of “family business” is in this way operative in reproducing a definition of blackfellas as a homogenised “other” that is fundamentally different, unintelligible and in this particular case threatening for the normative “normal” order of a non-Aboriginal “us”.

As described in Chapter Two, while Aboriginal and other people have occupied the same town space in Alice Springs for decades, separate modes of identifying with racially defined practices and values persist. Such separateness lends itself to typecasting the “other” in homogenising categories rather than as a diversity of known and named persons (cf. Sansom 1980:176ff). The threatening typecast imagery of a homogenised Aboriginal “other” that has been construed from the causal association between a recent knife attack, illegal drugs and violent “family business” can explain why the sturdy, white security guards at the Todd Tavern seem blind to the obvious fact that the red-eyed Aboriginal aunties, mothers, wives and grandmothers they turn away in their bare feet or plastic sandals hardly pose any threat to them.

Turning to the organiser-venue relationship, CAAMA Music stood as a guarantor for these Aboriginal gigs’ proceeding in an orderly manner. If musicians fail to deliver or a gig gets out of hand, CAAMA Music and the whole CAAMA organisation lose credibility. Because most town venues already are wary of staging Aboriginal acts, it also negatively affects the whole performance situation for all Aboriginal organisers and musicians. It is worth noting that the Todd Tavern did not stage any blackfella community bands for a long time after the Rising Wind/Blackstorm gig, and neither did any other commercial venue in town.

Most participating blackfellas (and myself), though, thought of this concert as a rather “normal” town gig happening, with a few people ending up in the lockup and others with hangovers and a few bruises from jealous fights. When regional Aboriginal musicians mess up town performances because they are drunk, fail to show up, or their gigs end up a rowdy chaos, they are to various degrees aware of the consequences for the organisers and for the blackfella performance situation in town. These more impersonal responsibilities do not shape their actions much, though, since they tend to identify with and value these “too much” blackfella modes of being present in town.

The cross-cultural engagements and the participation in an elevated mainstream musical realm that the musicians tend to hold up as desirable in their talk about town gigs are thus only rarely realised. The blackfella and whitefella values and practices involved in the organisation and carrying out of blackfella town gigs instead tend to contribute to a historical racial dichotomy, in which binary forms for identifying as black or white are maintained and asserted. In these town settings, white orders and norms have historically defined the appropriate and inappropriate, the accepted and reprehensible, and the normative “us” and divergent “other”. At the same time,

Aboriginal people continue to insist on being present on their own “mongrel” and “too much” blackfella terms, which mostly fall within the negative category of those oppositional white definitions. The musicians also take more or less for granted that they are perceived in those negative terms in white settings, even when this is not the case. As we shall see in the next chapter, they tend to respond to such imagined or real perceptions variously with defiance, lack of interest, and avoidance of them, and by asserting their “mongrel”, “too much” quality.

It is, however, principally in the domains of blackfella relatedness that their crucial sense of self as worthy and respected “mongrel” musicians and men, fathers, husbands and members of Aboriginal kin and language groups is legitimised and reaffirmed or not. It is in this domain an imagery of participating in a whitefella musical world can produce real increased male and musician status, even when such participation is not realised as imagined.

Summary

Among Aboriginal musicians from desert communities, performances in white dominated towns are commonly talked up as distinguishing them as more widely recognised music makers and men. Town gigs are often portrayed as desirable occasions for gaining increased male and musician status through cross-cultural engagements and experiences in a mainstream, white dominated sociomusical realm.

As I have shown in this chapter, however, the ways in which Aboriginal town gigs are organised, carried out and evaluated tend to give a central place to blackfella relatedness, identifications and interactions. Those gigs are mainly promoted and seen as relevant in blackfella realms, and the audiences are in the main related Aboriginal people from the musicians’ communities and from town. The musicians direct their music making mainly to a regional blackfella sociality, and it is the relatedness and distinctions among these people that their performances address and reinforce. The performance of songs dedicated to a particular community is especially pertinent. It is also the response from blackfella crowds and other Aboriginal musicians that frames the musicians’ evaluation of their town performances. And it is almost exclusively in Aboriginal interpersonal relationships that they work to restore their male and musician image and respect after a “failed” gig.

The sociomusical dynamics of town gigs thus in fact work to restrict opportunities for cross-cultural engagements or white recognition. The interactions

between blackfellas and whitefellas around these events are more or less limited to the white ordering and policing of blackfella demeanour. Usually attracting hundreds of Aboriginal people, blackfella musical happenings in white dominated regional towns create public occasions for a fairly passionate and intense presence that is characterised by an insistence on precisely such “too much”, “mongrel” blackfella demeanour. These people gather to support “their” bands, dance, socialise, drink, chase sex, have fun and fight in ways that tend to unsettle the white town order. Blackfella town gigs thus become particularly powerful happenings for reflecting and reproducing a real and imagined division of black and white realms, where people identify with and cultivate distinct forms of sociability.

I have shown how negative or neutral conceptions of the racial “other”, as well as positive, albeit ambivalent assertions of one’s own kind, structure and are reproduced around these musical happenings. The mediating dynamics emerging from the cross-cultural engagements around town gigs thus involve certain black and white ways of behaving, interacting and identifying that tend to perpetuate wider notions of a racially and socioculturally divided reality. In the next chapter I investigate such notions further as the musicians go on tour beyond their home region.

CHAPTER EIGHT

TOURING BLACKFELLAS

Just after 3 pm on a Wednesday afternoon, two four-wheel drive vehicles with trailers fully loaded with instruments, sound equipment and rolled up swags leave Alice Springs.¹⁵¹ Eight Aboriginal musicians, roadies, and I are going north, leaving the desert for a month-long tour. The plan is to drive the 1 500 km up to tropical Darwin for a big Aboriginal concert. The journey will then continue to Broome on the north-western coast of Western Australia (see map 1). Here, a number of other artists will meet up for performances in the week leading up to and during the two-day indigenous Stompem Ground music festival. After the festival, the crew from Alice Springs are to be joined by two Central Australian acts, the Teenage Band from Lajamanu community and Pitjantjatjara man Frank Yamma who will bring non-Aboriginal band members from Melbourne. These two acts are to embark on a "Bush Tour" with gigs in small townships and Aboriginal communities on the way back to the Northern Territory and Central Australia. Returning to Alice Springs almost four weeks and more than 7 000 km later, most of this plan has been accomplished, despite practical and personal dramas that threatened to put an abrupt end to the whole venture.

This chapter explores the ordering dynamics for the blackfella and male ways of identifying that emerge as the heterogenous group of Aboriginal musicians from Central Australia engage with people, places and music practices beyond their home region. During this as in other touring projects I have followed, some larger intercultural and cross-cultural dynamics appear. One, and the more prominent dynamic, emphasises blackfella differentiation and unity. Another dynamic concerns interactions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, practices and ideas which I discuss at the end of the chapter.

To organise a blackfella tour

The planning of the Bush Tour venture begins in the CAAMA Music studio about five weeks before the departure when the studio men see an opportunity emerge from a number of musical, financial and personal circumstances. One is that CAAMA Music

¹⁵¹ A swag is a portable bush bed, rolled up when not in use. It is a common item in Central Australian households where people spend time in the bush and usually consists of a mattress and bedding in a sturdy canvas cover, into which people also roll extra clothing and other assorted overnight gear.

has placed some of the artists on their label in the line-up for the big indigenous Stompem Ground Festival in Broome. Warren H. Williams, also on the CAAMA label, will also need a band for a country music night in Broome the week before the festival. In addition, CAAMA Music has funding for organising a “Bush Tour” of Aboriginal communities with the Teenage Band and Frank Yamma. Frank is also on the Stompem Ground bill. A further factor is that the legendary Warumpi Band will be giving their final performances in Darwin and at the Stompem Ground before their formal break-up, and studio manager Stan is their current bass player (see Chapters Three and Four). A film team from CAAMA video production will document the Warumpi Band finale for a television special, and most of CAAMA management is also due in Broome for a national indigenous media meeting.

With all these artists and people related to CAAMA converging on Broome, and money available for a Bush Tour, all is in place for a high-profile promotion of the CAAMA Music label in Broome and for rejuvenating the somewhat neglected fan base in the northwest region for Frank and the Teenage Band. CAAMA Music subsequently arranges a special concert in Broome to showcase their artists, and the door taking from this event is to contribute to the Bush Tour budget. Frank’s Melbourne based manager, Simon, is contacted to organise Frank’s band there. He is also put in charge of the Bush Tour budget and responsible for booking tour venues. The studio men are responsible for organising the Teenage Band. Stan is to play bass for Warren in Broome and for Frank on the Bush Tour, Lyndon comes as Warren’s lead guitarist, and a young nephew of Warren’s is to play drums for him.¹⁵² To pay Lyndon’s and young Williams’ way to and from Broome they are engaged as roadies and extra musicians for the Bush Tour.

The studio is chaotic the day before the planned departure. The CAAMA Music vehicle and equipment trailer still need to be serviced and Stan is still chasing Herman, the sound service provider, for the PA for the Bush Tour. The final details on the funding for the venture are still up in the air, too. Management has approved a maximum \$10 000 budget. To come out in the black after fuel costs, (low budget) accommodation and pay for musicians and roadies, the Teenage Band and Frank have to perform most nights on the Bush Tour and make a profit on the door takings. At this stage, however, only four gigs are preliminarily in place. The temporary CAAMA Music manager appears in the studio area several times during the day, wanting

¹⁵² This 17 year-old nephew of Warren’s was a talented singer and musician of the Williams family (see Chapter Three). He was killed in a domestic fight in mid-2004 and I therefore do not use his first name.

confirmation that more gigs are booked in before she gives the final go ahead. Stan assures her that they can easily pick up gigs along the way. "That's how us blackfella musos' do it all the time", he tells her.

While trying to get the many technical and material aspects of a tour together, Stan and Steve are thus working with a range of uncertainties that may put the whole project off at any moment. At the same time they are chased by a string of people who want them to confirm minute details on everything from dates and places to technical and financial matters, all of which keeps changing with every hour. In this commotion, they ignore the constantly ringing studio phones. Only people who make their way to the studio and are lucky enough to catch either of them thus have any idea of what the current plan is. Frank's manager in Melbourne can in other words not find out if the tour is definitely happening, while trying to confirm and budget for more tour venues and verify times for the Melbourne musicians.

Towards the end of the day the plan is to have the vehicle packed late that night, ready to go early next day. Next morning at 9 am nothing is packed. Stan turns up in a tracksuit, clearly having just woken up. The PA needed to be fixed and he and Herman worked on it till early in the morning, with a few details still left to sort out. Steve is at home, having to put up a wall in his house before he goes away. The CAAMA vehicle is still at the workshop. Posters and CDs for the Bush Tour still have to be organised, too.

The rest of the touring crew turns up at the back of the studio. Besides Stan, Steve, Lyndon and young Williams, the crew consists of Richard ("Woe") who is the owner of the second vehicle. He is a tall, dark-skinned man in his late thirties that I come to know as a fairly reserved, knowledgeable, well-connected and sensible person. He used to be Frank's informal manager and comes as a roadie on the tour. He is taking a couple of male passengers to Darwin. Colin from the CAAMA shop is coming, too, to sell CDs and tickets at concerts. He is the only crew member who is not a musician and knows the regional music scene mainly through his work in sales and distribution of studio recordings.

We watch Stan and Steve come and go for hours. None of the men is convinced that they actually will leave today, which does not seem to faze them much. After lunch, however, the CAAMA vehicle is ready to pick up, the PA is in order, and in a last minute rush the crew is equipped with a mobile phone. Stan and Steve start to pack the gear tightly into the trailers and vehicles and a few hours later we roll north.

On the road

After a couple of hours on the road, a certain calm settles in with the realisation that the whole venture is in fact in motion. Steve feeds the cassette player with bashed up tapes from the glove box; classic Aboriginal country music, European pop, some CAAMA releases. The tape played most on this first day of the journey, however, is a live recording from an Aboriginal music festival in the Northern Territory. Stan and Frank are among the performers and the men in the car know many of the other musicians. They comment on styles of playing, how particular songs turn out, and add stories about drunken or drug-induced dramas and sexual adventures that went on at the time. They weave this in with stories about musical and male affairs from other tours and festivals. It is the kind of talk that constantly surrounds the everyday music work in the studio, band rehearsals and when musicians gather for musical events in communities or towns, and which connects them to a wider world of music making and male experiences beyond their everyday settings. By reconstructing such events, the men now create an air of excited expectation about the upcoming weeks, a sense of free flight where anything can happen and a realisation that they are going to be part of the “real” thing, which is both the energising thrill of it all and a source of some trepidation.

After a few hours sleep by the roadside where the men roll out their swags we reach the small town of Katherine (pop. 10 000) the next morning. The men are supposed to drop off posters for the concert at the Katherine Hotel that is booked for the end of the Bush Tour.¹⁵³ Colin, the “marketing” person in the crew, shows no sign of taking this task on. None of the others volunteer, either. I get a begging glance from Steve. When they are about to give it a miss, I take the posters, walk over to the pub and get hold of the white manager. He knows nothing about the concert in his venue but takes the posters. Back in the car I tell the crew that the concert is news to the hotel. Nobody seems concerned or surprised. The men just chuckle and say defiantly that the town will know “soon enough” when the bands and their blackfella supporters “hit” the place. Somebody adds that they (white town people) never say no to blackfella money, anyway.

¹⁵³ A “hotel” in small-town Australia often stands for a pub. Depending on its size, it often includes a beer garden, a front bar with pool tables, television screen and poker machines, and a more intimate lounge bar area. Many hotels serve food in a separate dining/restaurant area or/and at the bar. Not all hotels offer accommodation, but if they do, this part of the operation is usually called the “motel”, not hotel.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the blackfella musicians tend not to expect whitefellas in regional towns to register their presence or musical activities much unless they are “in their face”; too many and “too much” blackfella to ignore. They also recognise that their gigs are lucrative for white publicans, just as the Aboriginal population to a large degree sustains the whitefella small town businesses all over this remote Australian region. It is a fact that is seldom publicly recognised by white business communities, though, which mainly go public with complaints about blackfellas as disruptive or destructive.¹⁵⁴

We make a stop at the home of a friend of Stan’s to park the trailer. It is not needed for Darwin and will be picked up when we backtrack through Katherine to go west. The men have a cup of tea and some share a few joints before we continue north. The men now stop several times to tape up Bush Tour posters on road signs and telephone poles. This sudden, perhaps drug-induced urge to promote the tour turns out to be a rare event. During the rest of the trip, the crew shows limited or no interest in making use of the posters they have brought. As in relation to gigs in Alice Springs, they tend to trust the local blackfella radio stations and networks to spread the word. As around the studio, the men also tend to approach the details of the touring plan, such as set dates and times for particular gigs, more as possibilities than concrete facts. Circumstances change, and posters that lock in their movements thus narrow the space for each man and the touring party as a whole to improvise and adapt to new situations as they see fit at the time.

Precisely such a new situation appears about an hour south of Darwin when the fifth gear suddenly slips out with a loud bang in the CAAMA vehicle. Oil is seeping out of the gearbox, which is obviously finished. To me, this seems to be the end of the tour. No vehicle, no tour. In five minutes, however, Steve has figured out that an old mate with a mechanic workshop in Darwin could change the gearbox in a day. On a very noisy fourth gear we reach the workshop before closing time. While Steve consults his friend, Stan is on the mobile to the CAAMA manager. She tells him to cancel the whole venture. There is no money for a new gearbox or for a replacement vehicle, or for flying the musicians to Broome. Stan assures her that they will fix it and hangs up with a “see ya’ in Broome, Chris!” No second-hand dealer we get hold of before they lock up for the day has a gearbox for the car model, though. Steve now looks at Stan and shakes his head in defeat. A few quiet moments later they come up with a new idea. Stan calls

¹⁵⁴ For a description of similar public discourse in other rural Australian towns, see Cowlshaw (2004).

back to CAAMA and gets hold of the financial manager just as he is about to leave for the day. After some investigation he confirms that the vehicle is actually still covered by a dealer's warranty. The men just have to find the accredited workshop in Darwin.

We make our way noisily to Darwin city and stop at a main-street motel with a "vacancies" sign. After some confusion, deriving from the fact that no clear agreements have been made on how travelling costs are going to be handled or what and how the roadies are getting paid, Stan pays and allocates the men to shared rooms. The men have been talking about a shower since waking up by the roadside this morning, and there has been a fair deal of bantering about gulping down cold beers and checking out the pretty girls in Darwin. This is what the rest of the men are concentrating on for the rest of the night, while Stan takes off for a rehearsal with the Warumpi Band. Next morning he and Steve disappear early. When they are back they inform us that it will take a full week to fix the car. But they have chased up a big rental camper van that will get them to Broome and back.

During the following weeks on the road the more or less accepted uncertainty and unpredictability that shaped the departure is to be a main mode of operation of the blackfella touring party. So is the creative improvisation in solving whatever practical problems come before them, as demonstrated in the car trouble. The collective drinking late into the nights that began in Darwin will also be repeated throughout the trip. The reluctance to deal with whitefella realms, as in relation to the mooted forthcoming performance at the Katherine Hotel, will be another characteristic feature of the blackfella *modus operandi*, which I return to later in the chapter. I begin with exploring some intra-blackfella dynamics that emerge as the tour proceeds. For this I need to backtrack a bit, to the first day of the journey.

Narrating blackfella men in other blackfella places

Going north from Alice Springs, the men keep commenting on the country we pass through, connecting it with their own and other known Aboriginal families and individuals. Some of them grew up in places along the way and belong to language and kinship groups that are traditional landholders of these areas. They also share memories of performances in Aboriginal communities along the road. When we stop for breaks, the men in the two vehicles continue this exchange of names, knowledge and experiences of places we have passed. The exchanges are not conversations as such, where the men express opinions about what the others say. It is more like a sequence of

statements in which they make their contributions to re-making and re-enforcing the vast desert and savannah country as a known and relevant blackfella social and musical realm.

When the men get closer to Darwin, and even more when going west and leaving the Northern Territory, the references to known Aboriginal connections to the country we pass through gradually run out. The blackfella socio-geographical realm thus becomes an increasingly unknown and “other” space, open to the men’s imaginations and often fearful stories or complaints.

On the second afternoon in Darwin, for example, the men bring back food to the motel room. While eating they swap Aboriginal Darwin stories that they have heard. One is about “alley cats”. These unreliable feline, implicitly feminine creatures are supposed to live in alleys “out there in the Nightcliff area, ‘ey! And they follow single men around!” Another story is about “this big woman. She’s a ghost. True! She sits in the back seat of cars, only with single men, but when he looks back she’s not there. You only see her in the back mirror. She’s supposed to have thrown herself from a rock out there in Nightcliff, killing herself over a man, they reckon”.¹⁵⁵ The men make faces and draw up their shoulders as if hit by chilly winds.

Lyndon tells me later that night that he does not like Darwin. The others have also started to complain about the place by now. They don’t like the humid tropical heat or, due in part to an incident that I return to below, the motel. Lyndon’s added complaint is about “the stories in this place, you know. I don’t like them. Not my kind of thing. I don’t like being here!” The further away from known country and people the men travel, the more common these kinds of statements about feeling uneasy as blackfellas in other blackfella places become, and the more they tend to “close ranks” as a group.

One way in which they negotiate their understandings of themselves in foreign blackfella places is, as we saw, through narrating themselves into blackfella stories grounded in those places. The stories in the motel room are obviously about themselves. They are now in effect “single” men and therefore perceived as exposed to sexual temptations and social dangers, here dressed up as predatory, yearning and somewhat revengeful female figures. In telling such stories, the men put into play their own everyday dominant blackfella norms of social control and related notions of appropriate

¹⁵⁵ Nightcliff is an old beach suburb of Darwin where many Aboriginal people live and camp. The now demolished Nightcliff Hotel was a well-known performance place for Aboriginal bands from the 1970s and 1980s, as well as a famous drinking spot for blackfellas.

male and sexual behaviours, some of which I have discussed in previous chapters. These norms include aspects of Christian models for morally virtuous male behaviours, where the sacred status of monogamy within marriage looms large. They also include norms that draw on ancestral belief systems for organising kin relations, where the formation of appropriate sexual relationships is between men and women from particular kin categories, and not others. These norms are also associated with models of adult manhood. Adult Aboriginal men earn respect by being fair, authoritative and responsible in relation to their wives, children and younger men. They may be shamed and shame their families if they show disrespect for such interactional norms.

All these ideas are co-productive as the men narrate themselves in other blackfella places. Stories such as the ones shared in the motel room can operate as self-imposed warning signs for the men, promoting greater self-control and sexual discipline. At the same time, the stories demarcate the interlocutors as blackfella outsiders who lack inside knowledge of the blackfella dynamics in the place they are in, which accentuates the potential dangers of acting indiscreetly since they cannot foresee the consequences.

On tour, these modes for identifying as blackfella men co-exist and are constantly negotiated through musician imagery of global musical cultures, where non-conformity to mainstream norms, hard drinking, drugs and sexual adventures are commonly accepted, expected and valued masculine behaviours. The tension between these blackfella and musical models for masculine behaviour is a constant feature of the men's activities during the tour, and can be illustrated by the nights in Darwin.

Blackfella musicians in other places

On the first night in Darwin, as mentioned, Stan rehearses with the Warumpi Band while the rest of the crew go on a pub round. Being a woman, I do not try to join them in these male escapades. The men are back early in the morning, most of them very drunk and some also stoned. Their stories from this night will be repeated continuously during the tour and long after the return to Alice Springs, their theatrical imitation of each other becoming ever more exaggerated and funny. There is Lyndon, so drunk and stoned that he stands as a paralysed "scruffy blackfella" in the midst of the teeming, smart inner-city clubbing crowd. There is the bar where they are about to be thrown out when the smell of their dope catches the staff's attention. And there is the strip club, and the rock club with a live band. This night becomes one of the very happy memories

from the trip for the men, before any serious work started and before the weariness began to show.

Over time, the repeated re-enactments of this night sediment a self-ironic narrative of a mob of "desert rats" hitting the "big town" and being out of place in an innocent, hilarious way. Back home in Central Australia, this male self-narrative will later create a bond between the men who were part of this touring adventure. When told to others, the narratives of "wild" blackfellas on tour, moreover, reinforce a difference in male and musician status, portraying these men as more experienced, as having "been there, done that" in the exciting world of touring musicians. Touring experiences thus work as capital for enhancing male status and respect in their home setting. This dynamic is similar to what I described in the previous chapter, where I showed how talk about town gig experiences contributes to the accumulation of male and musician worth in the musicians' home settings. Touring experiences represent an even more advanced level of recognition. When featuring hard drinking, drug taking and sexual adventures, touring narratives, moreover, boost imagery of an unfettered masculinist world, largely free of the everyday Aboriginal and male behavioural restrictions that still to a large degree frame regional town gigs as described in Chapter Seven.

The third night in Darwin, after the Warumpi Band concert, the touring group team up to party into the early morning hours with the men in the Aboriginal film crew from Alice Springs. Mostly a non-drinker, Stan tries to keep out of it, but as we sit and talk in one of the rooms, the other men constantly run in and out, asking for his help in the drunken dramas out in the street. A few of the men are pursuing a couple of very drunk local girls. A couple of the others turn up to hide in the motel room, deeply shamed over their fellow men's behaviour. "You have to be fucking careful, man! This is not our place, we're fucking desert rats, we don't belong here!" one of them cringes, crouching on the floor, stoned and with his arms over his head. He declares that he cannot continue the tour, the group is now shamed. Soon thereafter another man storms in, panicking over having lost the keys to the touring van. He is followed by another upset crew member who begs Stan to come out and sort things out with those drunken, now sick, girls. When Stan drives the girls home, a second man declares that he has had enough already of this life on the road. "I am a married man, sis'!" he wails, drunk and stoned. "I have a six months old baby! There are things I can't do anymore, I have responsibilities!" he says and shakes his head in defeat.

A younger colleague of his instead craves for the freedom of being out of the blackfella regimes at home. Also very drunk, sitting on the floor in the motel room where several of the men momentarily gather while waiting for Stan to come back, he begins to recount the strict and physically painful disciplines he has to endure from the senior men in Central Australia. To prove his point, he pulls up his shirt to expose a broad scar on his lower back. "You know how hard mulga is, bros'? It's fucking hurtful, man!" he challenges them.¹⁵⁶ "I want to get out of it, bros', out on the road, become a pro' (i.e. professional musician)", he declares glumly. He goes on to describe the sound check with the Warumpi Band that he came along to during the afternoon. He tells us how these musicians are treated with respect and professionalism, how they stay in the best hotels and are paid well. He then firmly states that when he returns home he is going to turn down his older male relatives when they want him to play for them. They never treat him well or even pay him for the gigs he has done with them since a small boy, he says.

The somewhat older men in the room nod and say that with his talent he can go a long way if he gives the music his all. But all of them scold him for complaining about the "oldfellas". "Listen bros'", Colin says sternly, "you shouldn't disrespect your grandparents! We are all brought up older than we are. I had to do stuff a twenty-one-year old should when I was sixteen. Got a lot of hidings, too. I tell you, bros', we all did! You just have to take it, and get on with your life!" By bringing one of their juniors back in line, the senior men in the crew thus reinforce some basic blackfella values from home, where younger men are expected to show respect for men older than themselves, and where senior men exercise authority and responsibility in relation to younger ones.

This age-related hierarchy of male respect is reinforced within the blackfella touring group throughout the tour. As the youngest member in the crew, young Williams is, for instance, at times "bossed around" by the older men who may "order" him to run errands for them or point him to the most uncomfortable place to sleep. At the same time, they also "look after" him. Woe and Stan especially (as the oldest men in the crew), make sure he is fed (he came on this tour without any cash) and that he doesn't drink too much.

Male banter about – and participation in – hard drinking, taking drugs and chasing sex in ways that would not be advisable at home is important for articulating male bonding and prowess in the touring party. As discussed in previous chapters, this

¹⁵⁶ Mulga is a fairly common hardwood tree in the desert region.

kind of talk and activities are also part of their male musical sociality in Alice Springs and in relation to town gigs. Being on tour is, however, perceived as being “cut loose” from the social control that always to some degree circumscribe the men’s drinking, drug taking and sexual behaviours when in their home region. As we saw in the drunken situation in Darwin, individual men may disagree with aspects of such behaviours and may wish to keep it somewhat under control by referring to their everyday blackfella norms for responsible male behaviours. All of them nevertheless tend to accept and value the fact that when they are musicians and roadies on tour away from home, many restrictions are negotiable, and many of the men no doubt want to take advantage of the more permissible conditions. On their return home, through their frequent and selective talk (they never bring up the boredom, exhaustion and very non-eventful times that make up a considerable part of being on tour, for instance) about their own and others’ outrageous touring experiences that involve hard drinking, drugs, police, fighting and sex, the men also reassert themselves as more experienced and “streetwise” men and musicians. In this, then, the realm of touring involves certain male and musician imagery that comes to represent an elevation of their male and musician position at home.

A further elevating aspect of touring experiences concerns the assertion of blackfella musical brotherhood imagery.

Blackfella musical brotherhood imagery

When at home in Central Australia, the Aboriginal musicians mostly describe their touring experiences in positive terms. This is a more advanced version of the talk about town gigs, in that touring narratives elevate the narrator further and thus tend to leave both community music events and town gigs in some kind of backwater of ordinariness. As I described in the previous chapter, town gigs are often perceived as valuable occasions for cross-cultural professional interactions. Touring narratives more often emphasise interactions with other blackfella musicians and musical styles. When talking about past tours, the musicians often mention how great it was to meet up with other blackfella musicians. They talk about how they ended up in impromptu performances with this or that famous or less well-known blackfella artist. They talk about how inspiring it is for their own music making to see black musicians from elsewhere perform and to hear a wide range of Aboriginal musical styles. Talk about appreciative local Aboriginal audiences in other places is also very common and the musicians

frequently emphasise the importance of this blackfella feedback for their motivation and development as Aboriginal musicians.

The musicians thus commonly evoke an imagery of tours and music festivals as loci for producing and consolidating what Slobin (1993) calls an "affinity interculture" (68), through a mutual learning from direct contact between artists. Festivals, Slobin suggests, "can create a musical world without frontiers, one that seems to exist across, or somehow suspend above, national lines" (69). The Aboriginal musicians' touring narratives suggest a black version of such an "affinity intra-culture"; a distinct, idealised blackfella sociomusical brotherhood without frontiers. On this tour, however, as on most occasions when I have followed or met up with Central Australian musicians at festivals and on tours, there is little direct evidence of them cultivating such a musical "black brotherhood". As the Warumpi concert in Darwin can illustrate, the men seldom seek to establish blackfella bonds even across regional lines.

The Warumpi Band's second to last performance of their twenty-year-long career is part of a concert with a lineup of well established Aboriginal bands from the Top End. It is held in the beautiful outdoor amphitheatre in the tropical Darwin Botanic Gardens. When we arrive backstage, the locally very popular Wildwater Band from Darwin is on stage. A couple of thousand men, women and children have gathered in the natural amphitheatre. Here are blackfella scruffy "bushies" and dressed up "townies", and whitefella dread-locked "ferals" and modestly dressed, middle-class families. People dance in front of the stage and when the Wildwater Band finishes up they receive enthusiastic applause and whistling.

The Saltwater Band from Galiwinku in Arnhem Land is on next. Alluding to the water-related names of the Top End bands, the Central Australian men joke about being the "no water mob" as we bring a few beers and move up the grassy slope to get a good view of the stage. Eleven black men make up the Saltwater Band. They are a highly respected and popular act in the Top End and they have toured both interstate and overseas. Five of the performers are traditional dancers and singers, appearing in red hip-cloths, ornamental feathers, and bodies and faces painted in traditional patterns. The six instrumentalists and singers are dressed in a more mainstream way. One of them looks like a businessman in his white shirt and black trousers. Others appear more like hard rock musicians in tight jeans, sleeveless shirts and trendy sunglasses. The Saltwater songs are of the prevalent Top End style of smooth, reggae-island music, sung

in their local Aboriginal language, interspersed with ancestral song styles and accompanied by *bilma* (clap sticks) and *yidaki* (didjeridu).

The crew from Central Australia are not that impressed with the island style music. They make a few disinterested and rather negative comments about blackfella Top End music in general and soon lose interest in the performance altogether. They turn their attention to watching people and drinking beers instead. Stan has had a few joints and falls asleep on the grass. He wakes up just as the Saltwater Band leaves the stage with the dancing crowds applauding and shouting their appreciation. He stands up and strolls leisurely down the slope. Minutes later he enters the stage with the rest of the Warumpi Band. Large crowds of screaming and whistling people now stream down the slope to the stage, including the Central Australian crew and me.

Lead singer George shouts a hoarse "hello!" The crowd responds with a massive howl. He is in his usual stage gear – black, slim-fitting jeans patched with small Aboriginal flags, and a vest made up in the Aboriginal flag pattern. The only other remaining original band member is white guitarist and singer Neil. The white drummer Bill is from the southeast, and tonight's lead guitarist is well-known Aboriginal musician Buddy Knox, also from south-eastern Australia. All three are dressed in fairly unremarkable shirts and trousers. Nowadays, Stan is the only Central Australian in this famous Central Australian Aboriginal rock act. He performs in his normal ripped blue jeans and black t-shirt but has let his hair out of the usual pony tail and is now barefoot (feeling "safer" on stage when firmly feeling the floor, he has told me). The Central Australian film team is moving around the stage, shooting the band from all angles.

The band members are in their element, performing the most loved Warumpi numbers. A middle-aged Aboriginal woman beside me in front of the stage cannot stop laughing all through the performance. Moved and happy by the music, tears are running down her face. Other Aboriginal men and women respond in similarly emotional ways, and both black and white men and women lose themselves in joyful dancing. When the band walks off stage, the crowds screams, whistles and shouts "George, George, George!" until the band returns for an encore. They end with a captivating version of "My Island home", a country-rock ballad that has become a kind of indigenous national Australian anthem. A local black man, overflowing with emotions, grabs my shoulders and rocks me for a good minute while repeatedly crying, "was that *good*, or *what*!"

Most Central Australian musicians I meet see the Warumpi Band as in another, higher league of music making than their own. At the same time, the band was just like

them when they started out; a bunch of bush community guys in Central Australia who were passionate about making music, who built up a repertoire of locally grounded original songs, and who with their continuous performing around the desert region came to be perceived as representing their people, language and their community (in this case Papunya). Many desert musicians also participated directly in the Warumpi Band in-the-making as fellow local musicians, audiences, relatives and members of the regional blackfella sociality that shaped the band's early music and career. They can therefore identify closely with the band and its music making, and can see them as a realistic model for their own music making taking off into another league.

When the Papunya members, and most importantly lead guitarist Sammy Butcher, retired in the mid 1980s, the Warumpi Band proceeded to make their fame outside of Central Australia with white and black musicians from elsewhere. Many desert musicians talk of this as "when the whitefella took over". That is, they perceive Neil as taking the band out of their blackfella domain of musical, male and social relatedness. Warumpi became, almost, like any other blackfella band from elsewhere, grounded and meaningful in other musical practices, socialities and places. Such powerful connections are also evident in the Darwin performance, with people of all kinds of origins responding in intimate and passionate ways to the band and their music.

Hence, the Central Australian crew's attitudes to the Warumpi Band's performance are partly informed by an historical intimacy, and partly by a degree of detachment, since the band is no longer grounded in Central Australian blackfella realms. The men's immediate identification with the band is, moreover, framed by Stan's involvement with it, and is thus coloured by their individual personal and professional relationships with him. While these different and ambiguous levels and qualities of identifications are put into play within the male group, the Warumpi Band is the one band they care for in tonight's line up. It is this performance that they claim a special and direct relatedness to as the "no water mob" from the desert. Before the performance ends, I see the five of them disappearing backstage where they join the jostle of musicians, managers, stage crew, camera men, fans and groupies. They don't engage much with these people, though, and instead soon team up with the Aboriginal men in the Alice Springs film crew for a night on the town, the night of drunken dramas I described earlier.

What emerges, then, is a group of blackfella Central Australian musicians and men in a place away from home who gather and feed off the energy of devoted fans of a

band that is widely perceived and promoted as a legendary Aboriginal rock band from a desert community. While the band has in fact long been a mixed white and black band, currently with only one member from Central Australia, the Warumpi performance is thus in effect a means for the men from the desert to reinforce their own particular blackfella exclusivity. They do not show much interest in interacting with or mutually learning from direct contact with any other blackfella musicians, music or men.

This pattern is likewise clear during the week of performances and the Stompem Ground festival in Broome. Here, too, the men in the touring group show scant interest in artists from elsewhere. They mainly join the crowds when fellow musicians from Central Australia are on stage. Their comments on blackfella artists and music from elsewhere are often either disinterested or negative. They rarely engage with these musicians backstage or in the pubs of Broome, but tend to keep to their own grouping. I have observed a similar kind of disinterested or withdrawn manner in relation to other artists, both black and white, when following other Central Australian musicians on tour and when they perform at big national events. The stories they tell about these events still tend to emphasise precisely such interactions, exchanges and shared experiences with blackfella musicians and men from elsewhere.

Instead of practicing some kind of national black musical brotherhood, the Central Australian men are thus increasingly "closing ranks" when moving beyond their home region. They tend to actively engage mainly with musicians, men and music they perceive as of their own blackfella kind, and through this assert and distinguish themselves as black music makers and men from Central Australia.

Other ways in which the practices of the touring Central Australian men contradict their rhetoric of a productive blackfella musical and social affinity "without frontiers" emerge as they perform in fairly dense and intense Aboriginal social settings during the Bush Tour.

Performing Halls Creek and Beswick

It is mid-morning when the touring party drives into Halls Creek, a small, remote township in the northwest Kimberley region.¹⁵⁷ It is the third day of the Bush Tour and

¹⁵⁷ Halls Creek (pop. 1 500, out of which 1 023 were indigenous in the 2001 Census) was established by white settlers in the 1880s, when gold was discovered in the area (see map 1). Troubled and violent relations between white and black people have marked the history of the area, with a pattern of reprisal killings. From the early 1900s Aboriginal people were increasingly forced off their lands and worked and camped at cattle stations, or moved to government rationing stations and settlements. When award wages

the Central Australian crew has thus been joined by Frank, his Melbourne manager Simon and two of his non-indigenous Melbourne musicians. The other Bush Tour act, the Teenage Band, turns up later in the afternoon, travelling at their own pace in their own vehicle. During the hot and humid day, the black men more or less stay put inside and on the verandas of the community hall where they are to perform tonight. The Melbourne men and I move out more, taking walks to look at the place, finding a shower and bringing back food for all to share.

Throughout the day, groups of curious Aboriginal kids have been hanging around the men as they set up the stage. When Frank's band set rehearses a few songs in the afternoon, adult men and women are also attracted to the hall. The Melbourne men strike up conversations with these Aboriginal locals. The Central Australian men and these people acknowledge each other with nods but keep a kind of mutually respectful distance. When the Melbourne men propose a beer at a local pub before the concert starts, none of the Aboriginal men comes along.

By the time the sun sets, a large, rowdy all-blackfella crowd has gathered outside the hall. Many of the men and women are very drunk. Some have brought babies, and large numbers of young children run around making lots of noise. Some have climbed the roof and throw things at the noisy crowds below. The Central Australian men withdraw to the kitchen where they are out of sight of the people who are trying to catch their attention and pushing against doors and windows, eager to get in.

To avoid aggravating the increasingly impatient crowds, the men open the doors early. Colin and young Williams collect the five dollar entrance fee and mark the back of people's hands with a red pen. Drove of children push their way in. They then try to push their way out again. Many of the adults eager to enter also turn around and push through the crowd at the door to get back out. A number of drunken men and women do not want to pay and argue their case in increasingly aggressive and drunken manner. As people discover that a red pen marking on a black hand is hard to detect, a growing number of people also insist on already having paid. Many more try to squeeze their way in without paying or arguing at all.

were introduced for Aboriginal cattle workers in the mid-1960s, many of them were forced to leave with their extended families for Halls Creek, where they congregated in town camps. The town came into the national spotlight after confrontations between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal town population in 1996, and became known as "one of Australia's most notorious racial trouble spots" (*The Bulletin Magazine*, June 26, 2001, pp.38-39).

Frank's band starts up and people are up dancing immediately. Many more are now crushing to get in, effectively blocking the entrance for anyone trying to get either in or out. Colin and young Williams look increasingly desperate over the chaotic situation and the latter soon withdraws to join the rest of the touring crew who have gathered at the other side of the hall. I go over to help Colin, trying to make people pay and stop them pushing lest someone gets hurt in the crush. I soon find myself alone at the door when Colin also retreats to watch the commotion from the opposite wall. Simon steps in to help and when it all just gets worse he calls the police on his mobile phone.

A wild fight between a man and a woman has now erupted inside the hall and I see at least two brawls going on outside. A couple of enraged men try to climb in over the crush of people who block the entrance. Someone shouts that they are brothers of the woman in the fight inside. Drunken women have also begun to shout racial slurs at me when I ask them to move away. One very drunk woman comes at me with a stick in hand. I try to keep her off me by pressing her away with my hands when Lyndon comes up from behind, trying to make himself heard in the noise, telling me "don't touch them!" and then withdraws again. I obey and people seem less agitated by me.

In the turmoil at the door I cannot follow Frank's performance but take note of the Teenage Band starting up since this increases the pressure at the entrance considerably. A couple of policemen arrive but soon retreat when people take little note of their attempts to bring some order to the situation. A few moments later the Night Patrol arrives, the local Aboriginal community law and order team. People make way for the black patrol men who soon identify some key men and women and talk to them with stern calm. In a few moments the packed crowd that blocked the door has moved away and fights are dissolved, at least momentarily. It is now possible to let a steady stream of people in.

By this time the hall is packed and people start climbing the stage, women lifting up their shirts and dancing, wriggling their breasts before the audience who respond with howls and laughter. With more and more people up on stage, amplifiers and microphone stands start to fall over and the Teenage Band members are forced backward. They never stop playing, though, and when local men push them away to sing at the microphones the band members patiently wait for the locals to give them a turn again.

After the last song, we turn the main lights back on and the hall empties in just a few moments. Quite a few women stop outside, signing to the musicians to come over. The musicians largely ignore them. A couple of people also stay around to talk to some of the musicians who they know as distant relatives. The men keep these interactions polite and brief and begin to pack the vehicles, pretending a departure to make these people leave.

When the stage is packed, the men gather in the kitchen. Colin recounts to the others how crazy it was at the door. "It's fucking hard to handle people out of your own place! You don't know them, bros! Don't know how to talk to them! You're a stranger in their country!" he says. The others reassure him that they were right behind him, keeping an eye on the door all the time, to make sure he was OK.

During the tour, the desert men's reserved, cautious and held-back way of being present and performing when in other blackfella places was, not surprisingly, most obvious in confrontational and drunken situations such as this one. These musicians are certainly experienced in performing for rowdy and drunken Aboriginal crowds. Fights, people taking over the stage and equipment falling over are not uncommon features of blackfella concerts also in Central Australia. At times, the musicians also get involved in fights or intervene to bring a reasonable order to the event. In Halls Creek, however, where they lack knowledge of local blackfella power and kin relations, such interferences are potentially dangerous. Especially in drunken situations, their actions could easily prompt locals to physically put the Central Australian men in their proper blackfella place. That is, as visitors in other blackfellas' country they are expected to show respect in relation to local men and women, no matter how they behave.

The way in which I pushed people off me with my hands also violated blackfella integrity. "You *never* touch a drunken blackfella you don't know if you don't want to pick a fight!" as Lyndon emphasised after. My whiteness of course made my action more offensive, with its deep connotations in a history of colonial brutalities and ongoing white policing and disciplining of Aboriginal people.

The Central Australian men's wary, reserved and unobtrusive manners, and their retreat to their own mob when in other blackfella places are not limited to drunken and volatile situations, though. The week after the Halls Creek gig, for instance, we stay a few nights in Beswick Aboriginal community, an hour from Katherine (see map 1).¹⁵⁸ The community hosts the crew in two neat houses. Apart from setting up and taking

¹⁵⁸ The Teenage Band was not part of the group here. They had returned to Lajamanu for a funeral.

down the stage and performing for a small local crowd on the first night, the Central Australian men basically stay put in one of the houses, watching television, playing cards, eating, smoking some dope and sleeping. When our hosts invite us to go fishing and swimming in nearby waterholes, the black men are very hesitant to join, while the Melbourne men and I happily come along.

The touring party is invited to stay in Beswick until the next performance north of Katherine a few days later. The houses are provided for free, which is great for the tour budget. Early on the second morning, however, we are woken up to hurriedly pack up the cars. I'm not sure who decides on this sudden departure, but nobody protests and we soon take off without a goodbye to anybody. On the road towards Katherine when we start to wake up, the Melbourne men, and especially Simon, are pretty upset over the sudden departure. They enjoyed the peaceful and comfortable break in the bush community and cannot see the point of leaving just to stay in a "boring" town. Besides the budgetary consequences, Simon is most upset about leaving without explanations to Tom, our main Aboriginal host and long-time friend of his. Tom raised the money to pay for the Beswick performance and made an effort to make our stay pleasant. When Simon wants an explanation for our departure, somebody mumbles that that they are out of cigarettes.¹⁵⁹

However, the blackfella crew don't seem too sure why we are leaving, either, and they don't seem to care. They are happy to stay in Katherine where there is a wider variety of ways to kill time with its shops, food outlets and pubs, and where they may run into relatives and friends. The men check in at a Katherine motel that I cannot afford and I catch up with them later at the pool tables in a pub. From what they tell me, the black men have pretty much kept together, separate from the Melbourne men, hanging out in the motel rooms, walking the streets for food, and drinking at the pub. In this white dominated town, the blackfella "ownership" of the place is obviously less all-embracing and direct than in an Aboriginal community such as Beswick. And it is obvious that the men feel more at ease when they don't have to worry so much about their movements and actions as blackfellas in other blackfellas' places. At the same

¹⁵⁹ It turns out that it was Stan who thought we should leave. He explains to me some time after the tour that tobacco was not the issue when he decided to leave. "We had no reason to stay, that's all. There was no music or work left to do there. People get lazy", he says. He thus reinforces his aspirations for this tour as a full-time musical working experience for the participants, and during the tour he was always uncomfortable with too much downtime between performances.

time, the black men are increasingly restricted by being in whitefella ordered spaces. I now turn to how they engage with such orders on the tour.

Black in whitefella places

Hanging out in the motel in Darwin at the beginning of the tour, Steve, Lyndon, young Williams, Colin, Woe and his two male Aboriginal friends decide to try out the small motel pool. When the black men move into the small area, the white motel guests at the pool soon gather their towels, bottles of sunscreen, wet bathers, books, radio, sunglasses and water bottles, and leave. Lyndon takes a dip, with his clothes on. "I forgot to bring my beach gear", he smirks with a feminine hand gesture. I take it that he is referring to all the "gear" the white guests brought for their pool visit.

Pretty soon a motel employee appears and the men go quiet. She asks if they are guests at the motel. Steve says a simple "yep". Nobody looks at her. The woman asks for proof. The men look to each other for the plastic door card. When they finally find it, they show it to her without a word. A few minutes after she's gone the men go back to their room. "Fucking racist mob, this place", Lyndon concludes. Woe smiles. "Guess she thought we would wash off and dirty the water, ey?" he says acidly. Lyndon then suggests that "the cunt" in reception is certain to be "a poofter", he must be "with his little voice". He does an exaggerated imitation of the man's (to me rather normal) service manners and the men chuckle.

This incident is fairly typical of the Aboriginal men's engagements with whitefella dominated spaces on the tour. Here, as in most situations when they enter coffee shops, restaurants, shops and so forth, their presence is variably noted by white people with curiosity, suspicion and at times intervention. The men also more or less expect that their legitimate presence in those spaces will in some way be questioned, scrutinised suspiciously and interfered with because they are blackfellas. Not surprisingly, therefore, the men rarely sit down in food establishments or use motel facilities outside their rooms. Frank is an exception to this, perhaps because Simon keeps his money for him (which is how Frank prefers it) and thus pays for his meals. The other Central Australian men mainly buy take-away meals or supermarket food which they eat and drink by the car, in their motel rooms, or somewhere else away from the direct gaze of whitefellas.

Non-Aboriginal aspects of the places we visit are not the subject of any of the multilayered story telling the men engage in to negotiate their presence in "other"

blackfella realms, either. While such blackfella narration is open to complex and imaginative personal and shared interpretations, their interactions with non-Aboriginal “others” mostly take the form of complaints and rather one-dimensional typecasting that reinforce binary notions of blackfella and whitefella ways of acting and thinking, similar to those discussed in relation to town gigs in the previous chapter. The black men also commonly associate white manners with feminised or less masculine modes of conduct. We saw this in Lyndon’s feminine hand gesture over all the gear the white guests seemed to need for a visit to the pool, and in his mocking of the white front desk man’s service manners as gay. In mocking such manners, the black men emphasise and demarcate their own valued “mongrel” and somewhat crude and rather direct “too much” and “no bullshit” masculine approach and demeanour.

The men’s complaints or commentary on whitefella practices are seldom voiced in the presence of whitefellas. They rarely “talk back” in situations when they are approached as potential “suspects” for breaching one white code of conduct or the other, either.¹⁶⁰ Their commentary on such incidents is mainly made in the privacy of their blackfella grouping. In this they not only express the “hidden injuries” of a long history of white subjugation of Aboriginal people and practices in homogenised, derogative and reductive terms. By airing their grievances, and at times humiliation and rage, in the exclusive company of “their own” they also further buttress a shared sense of blackfella and male integrity and worth, as distinct from a homogenised, effeminate whitefella other.

Covert and silenced frustrations may, however, erupt in situations other than the ones that primarily caused them, especially when the men are drunk. In a Broome café, for example, Frank turns up for breakfast still drunk from the night before. He soon begins to accuse a German tourist in rather crude, aggressive ways for staring at him. “I’m no fucking animal in a fucking zoo”, he growls at the quite taken aback tourist who, in my view, does not stare. It was, however, impossible not to notice Frank’s entrance when he greeted me loudly by singing a few lines before sitting down with a big laugh. He now tells the man in a few more crude lines that blackfellas in fact can eat with fork and knife.

¹⁶⁰ This excludes whitefellas who are included by a blackfella group as somebody who is likely to see their point of view and accept their “too much”, “mongrel” behaviour. In many respects I was included after some “toughening up”, as one of the musicians on this tour expressed it some months later. This included them observing my response to their male bantering and occasional dismissive talk of whitefella ways before letting their guards down and behaving more as they normally do.

The blackfella crew thus tended to limit their interactions with whitefellas in general to a detached minimum during the tour. However, they had to engage directly in musical, spatial and practical terms with Frank's Melbourne musicians and manager on the two week long Bush Tour. By looking at the interactional dynamics that emerged in this touring party I explore some of the ways in which the men negotiate and articulate their mutual understanding of each other, and simultaneously of themselves as blackfella and whitefella men and musicians.

Tensions and alterations

The morning the Bush Tour party is to take off from Broome is messy. The Central Australian men are severely hung over and hard to get out of bed. Frank is still drunk from the night's partying. Stan is furious with them all for not getting their act together and helping to pack the van out in the parking lot. The Melbourne men mainly observe the situation.¹⁶¹ The Teenage Band and their Lajamanu entourage drive around and keep an eye on what happens around the touring van. On the day before they had told Steve and Stan that their bass player had taken off home to Lajamanu to tend to "family trouble".

Stan wants to be at Fitzroy Crossing, a small, largely Aboriginal township 400 km east, by the early afternoon to get the stage and sound system set up and tested before their performance tonight. Well after lunchtime they still have not left Broome. I have to travel separately and meet up with them the morning after, when they arrive at the roadhouse in Halls Creek, 300 km east of Fitzroy Crossing. The men look wasted and the tensions between them are obvious. Simon shakes his head and sets out to find the town council to get the keys to the community hall where they are to perform tonight. One of the Melbourne musicians puts a scouting hand above his eyes, gazes out over the small and rather dreary looking township and asks jokingly where one could get a latte and a hot croissant in this place. Nobody cares to smile and he is off to find a shower.

When Stan buys cigarettes, the rest of the crew gather at the back of the roadhouse. Most of them have not eaten, showered or slept since the day before they left

¹⁶¹ As mentioned in Chapter One, after reading the draft chapter, one of the Melbourne musicians was concerned about appearing inflexible, fussy and ignorant in my descriptions. This was certainly not my intention and not how the blackfella men (or I) thought of him, either. In this final text I hope that I have made it clear that I focus on specific interpersonal instances in order to discuss patterns of intercultural dynamics. I do not intend to make judgements about individuals. To respect this man's integrity I have also removed the Melbourne musicians' names and other overtly identifiable features.

Broome. They arrived in Fitzroy Crossing about 6 pm, the stage was set up and they performed for a crowd of fifty to one hundred Aboriginal people. Most of the men wanted to stay in Fitzroy Crossing to eat, clean up and sleep. Stan decided that the van was leaving. So they did.

Steve seems convinced that Stan has had enough and will take off back to Alice Springs any minute. When he looks around the corner the van is gone. The men look shocked. After throwing around a swarm of explanations for Stan being “stressed out”, they admit that he did a lot of the work yesterday. But to leave them stranded is an overreaction, they agree. They consider the practical consequences of his departure. Somebody worries about his stuff in the van, someone else about not getting paid. Steve is not pleased with having to take over the whole responsibility for this CAAMA venture. He suggests that they cut down the performances to a minimum and try to get home as quick as possible. The others agree. They then realise that they cannot fit into the one vehicle and a lot of the stage gear is in the van, too. Steve now suggests that they cancel the whole tour. Nobody contradicts him and they all seem to accept this radical change of plans.

From where I stand I can see that Stan has driven the van over to the community hall and is unloading the stage gear. I point this out. The men look over, shrug their shoulders and we all walk over to the hall. The tour is on again. Most of us help to get the gear out. Nobody speaks. Later, Stan tells me his version of events. From before leaving Broome he basically had to do everything, he says. He packed the van, drove it to Fitzroy Crossing, unloaded the van, set up the stage and sound gear, both sound-engineered and played bass during the performance, then packed up and got the equipment into the van. The others, hung over and tired, did not lift a finger to make it happen. He did not ask for help, either. He should not have to, he says; they could all see what needed to be done.¹⁶² During the day in Halls Creek conflicts flare up between him and some of the others who he accuses of not pulling their weight. He charges Simon in similar terms, too, which Simon rejects loudly by listing what he has done over the last couple of weeks to make this tour work. This is the only open conflict I see during these weeks between a blackfella and whitefella member of the touring party.

¹⁶² Talking about it months later, Stan tells me that he was most upset about the impression they made on the local Aboriginal community – slack blackfellas just hanging around and watching others work. He saw the Bush Tour as part of his larger aspiration to professionalise Aboriginal music making and wanted them to act as role models in bush communities, showing local kids and musicians how a concert is set up and how professional performers prepare. “If someone had just taken up a guitar and at least done some “workshopping” with the kids there, I would have been less pissed off”, he says.

Before the concert begins, the Teenage Band suddenly announces to Stan and Steve that they are driving back to Lajamanu after the gig. Someone passed away and they have to attend funeral ceremonies. They will join up again as soon as they can, they say. When the concert is over, the men roll out their swags on the floor of the community hall and sleep a few hours. Next morning we continue the 400 km to Kununurra. Stan drops the men and gear off by the outdoor stage where the next performance is booked in. He then takes off to return the rental van and pick up the CAAMA vehicle in Darwin.

Hence, in less than 24 hours, the tour has been on, off, and on again, and the circumstances have changed radically. The very popular Teenage Band is the big local drawcard for the Bush Tour. A main idea for this tour was to combine this regionally well established desert rock and reggae act with Frank's more recent and less well-known repertoire of more cosmopolitan fusion music. Stan was to play bass for Frank because he knows Frank's recent music well by being involved in his recordings.

With Stan and the Teenage Band gone, the now one-band tour requires flexible musicians. Replacing Stan on bass, country guitarist Lyndon has to learn Frank's more eclectic music, which he does to a workable degree after just a few rehearsals. To please the taste of local Aboriginal audiences, Frank also has to revive his old rock guitar and country repertoire, including his own songs as well as covers. He does so with ease. The Melbourne musicians, however, are not familiar with Frank's old numbers. As experienced and professional musicians they would no doubt be able to play these songs as well as other old rock and country covers. Nonetheless, Lyndon and young Williams step in as Frank's backing band for those parts of the performances, which then takes on a characteristic style of Aboriginal community performance. This style to a large degree relies on improvising as the musicians read their audiences. If the crowds don't respond, for instance, songs may be shortened. If people get up and dance, songs may instead be extended. Or the musicians may mix songs into a long musical potpourri to keep a crowd on their dancing feet.

Nobody knows when or even if the Teenage Band or Stan will turn up again. The Central Australian men seem to accept this without discussion or questions. The Melbourne men are less relaxed about the ongoing uncertainties and constant changes. This brings us to the different ways the black and white tour members operate.

Blackfella modus operandi

While an allocation of tasks and hierarchies of decision making within the Central Australian touring party is never formalised, verbalised or agreed on, some patterns are pretty much established before they leave Alice Springs. Stan is the senior sound engineer and studio manager. He is a musician with years of experience of performing in a national music scene. And he is the oldest man in the blackfella male group. He is therefore basically expected to make the decisions about musical activities and the travel agenda. The Central Australian men usually stay around until they have figured out what he is up to, and adapt their actions and movements without saying much.

This does not mean that they necessarily have the same agenda as Stan. He, for instance, expects a hundred per cent commitment and input from them all in the musical activities. To him, the tour *is* "musical activities" and he perceives them all to be on the job from the time they leave home, including the Melbourne men. Others in the Central Australian crew prefer to see time outside performances as being "off work". Lyndon, Frank and young Williams also tend to see themselves only as musicians and therefore not expected to do a great deal of the setting up and packing stage gear.

Like around the studio, Stan often makes decisions according to the situation, people and opportunities before him at any time on the tour, while keeping to the overall plan. He does not always communicate his most immediate "plans" to many others, however, apart from Steve. Hence, a lot of the time the other men in the touring party do not have a clear idea of when, where and how gigs are to take place exactly, or what their precise roles in those gigs are. They may not know, either, at what particular time the vehicles are leaving, staying, or where exactly they are heading. One consequence of this is that Steve often emerges as a crucial mediator for the success of the whole operation.

During this tour, as on most tours with Central Australian musicians I have followed, the Aboriginal men seldom ask questions about times, places or activities. Instead, they stay around each other most of the time to keep up with what *actually* happens, not relying on what somebody said yesterday or a moment ago. If somebody is missing when it is time to perform because he has not kept up with what goes on, this seldom creates much stress among these musicians. With their multi-instrumental skills someone else just steps in and does the job.

To be able to "go with the flow" and appear confident and relaxed about one's performance on and off stage within the male groupings in different musical settings

and when circumstances change thus emerge as valued, smooth male behaviour in the Central Australian blackfella touring party. To drink, smoke dope and "check out the chicks" together after the day's work is done also becomes a shared routine for most of them.

The other blackfella grouping on the tour, the Teenage Band mob, is even more flexible and less concerned with set agendas. The band basically operates according to their own agenda, moving about in their own vehicles with friends and family from Lajamanu. They touch base with Stan and Steve now and then to be informed and to let them know when something changes on the band's part. Organisational detail is largely redundant information for these men, as it is for most bush musicians I have come across. Gigs usually start in the hours after sunset and it is never very difficult to figure out where it is taking place in a community or township. They usually check just before a gig starts what the particular deal for the night is and carry out their stage performances, adapting to the particular audiences and venues as they play.

As mentioned, after a couple of performances the Teenage Band leaves the tour for funeral ceremonies, not specifying when or if they will return, only that they will try. Talking to Alfred, a main force of the band, months later, he sees no problems with this. It would have been great to perform in all the places, he says, but doesn't express any concerns for upsetting the organisation of the tour or leaving other musicians stranded. He, like most blackfella musicians I meet in Central Australia, take more or less for granted that if they fail to show up, other musicians will stand ready and pull off a performance in order not to let local Aboriginal crowds down. That is, even if the men in the Teenage Band certainly proudly perceive their own band and music as distinct and unique, they do not see themselves as irreplaceable in a stage lineup.

Hence, the ways in which the Teenage Band operates are even more adaptable to actual, immediate situations. They pay even less attention to pre-scheduled agendas than the Central Australian crew. When the non-Aboriginal Melbourne musicians join these groupings for the Bush Tour, some differences in *modus operandi* soon become apparent.

Meetings of *modus operandi*

Both Simon and the two Melbourne musicians have worked with Aboriginal Australian musicians during their musical careers. Simon, in his early forties, is a former musician who has played in Aboriginal and ethnically mixed bands over the years. He began to

organise gigs to fill in time between musical engagements and is now a full-time manager for a number of indigenous and “world music” artists. One of the musicians is about the same age and used to be a member of well-known mixed Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal band from the Northern Territory in the late 1980s. Like Simon, he is familiar with the larger Aboriginal music scene by being involved with it over two decades. At the time of my fieldwork, he played in several bands in Melbourne, preferring experimental ambience and jazz music genres. The other Melbourne musician is in his early twenties and has played with different multicultural bands in diverse genres in Melbourne, among them the Aboriginal hard rock band Deadheart.

While thus experienced in working with ethnically mixed and Aboriginal bands, these men work mainly within live performance and touring conventions of urban based, professional music scenes. Here, tour itineraries with hours, dates and places listed for sound checks, performances, checking in and out of accommodation, and departure and arrivals are standard features. In these conventions, musicians are also usually fairly specialised and irreplaceable instrumentalists or singers who are therefore updated on changes of plans without having to ask. They are then free to organise their own time around this schedule, independent of other participants. Accordingly, Simon has handed the Melbourne musicians a preliminary schedule with times and places for the performances at the Stompem Ground and Bush Tour.

Stepping out of the plane in Broome, however, the Melbourne men encounter the first of many subsequent departures from this schedule. They are met by a television crew and informed that they are going directly to the Stompem Ground venue to perform for a film shoot.¹⁶³ It is a back-up shoot for the live national broadcast of the festival the following night. The musicians are therefore instructed to wear the same clothes on stage for the actual performance next night. Casually dressed for hours on planes and airports, the men are not happy about wearing these clothes when performing at a big national festival that is televised nationally. But this is how it is done.

This incident had its prelude the day before when the television producer got hold of Stan and asked if it was OK that his team picked up Frank’s band at the airport and took them to the venue for a back-up shoot. Stan said that he saw no problems with this. When they ran into each other on the streets of Broome later in the evening the producer asked if all was OK. Stan put a thumb up with a “no problems, bros’!” This is

¹⁶³ This was a crew separate from the CAAMA film team. One hour of the first night of performances at the Stompem Ground festival was broadcast live (and with pre-recorded clips) by the national public broadcaster ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation).

easily interpreted as a confirmation that he had consulted the Melbourne musicians about the arrangement. He had not. As mentioned, Stan expects the touring party, including the Melbourne men, to be at work from the moment they left home for this tour.

The Central Australian crew also works in the "let's do it", impromptu mode of music making that I discussed as a feature of the studio ethos in Chapter Four where it is more or less taken for granted that any able musician is ready and willing to pull off a performance when it is called for. I also described the relaxed adaptability to constantly changing circumstances that characterises both the studio work and Aboriginal life worlds in general in Central Australia. The Aboriginal touring party thus see changes as something usual, not as something that has to be discussed, confirmed or communicated in detail. To "make a fuss" about every new move is basically seen as superfluous.

After a few days on the road on the Bush Tour it becomes clear that several of the blackfella men perceive the Melbourne men as somewhat "fussy". This usually refers to the non-Aboriginal men complicating the blackfella "go with the flow" by asking for verbal confirmation on what they are doing next and where, and then expecting this "plan" to be followed. As the person responsible for the touring budget, Simon understandably also wants to discuss the pros and cons of any changes and reach some kind of group consensus before a decision is made. Such attempts at a participatory, inclusive approach to group decisions produce minimal response among the Aboriginal men. As mentioned, by staying together they know what is happening when and where, and they seldom see a reason to discuss the turn of events much.

In the main blackfella *modus operandi* for this musical venture, then, the ad hoc, improvised turn of events is the general norm. It is in fact the men's ability to constantly reframe their expectations and practices with every new situation and place that makes the music performances and the whole venture alive and pulsating for the blackfella men. They largely approach touring as an emerging, always-in-the-making flow of events. For the Melbourne men, in contrast, verbal confirmation of when and where vehicles are to leave, when sound checks are to take place and when to meet before a gig are a prerequisite for them to "go with the flow". They tend to operate more as individual men independent of each other within the group. An agreed-on plan of action is a way to tune such a group of individuals into a shared project and to reduce the risk of upsets. Not knowing what is next and constant changes of plans without explanations or consultation do not contribute to such a sense of a smooth operation.

One consequence of this discrepancy in *modus operandi* is that the Melbourne men may be late or not around when the crew is leaving or when other activities are on, which can be decided on without further ado. One morning after a performance they even leave without one of the Melbourne men. He is elsewhere when they are ready to go, which is earlier than he was told the night before. He subsequently has to organise a lift with a local to the next tour location a couple of hours away.

Needless to say, this group of touring musicians, like any group of individuals who embark on a joint project, have to deal with their different ways of operating. And mostly, this touring party gets on with the work and travels without any major dramas. I would still like to focus on the tensions that do appear between the blackfella and whitefella parties on this tour, since it can tell us something about how they negotiate such tensions through certain understandings of themselves and the "other". One way of working out their differences, for instance, is to exaggerate their own practices, and to more or less jokingly mock that of the "other". This game of mutually binary typecasting becomes a kind of sideshow of the tour and can show the cross-cultural and male negotiations that are involved as the men try to make sense of their "own kind" and the "other".

Exaggerating blackfellas and whitefellas

As an aspect of his professional musicianship, one of the Melbourne musicians is rather meticulous in the ways he sets up and organises his equipment, and in how he prepares himself on stage before performing on the Bush Tour. To read and follow the other musicians, he wants to be in a certain place on the stage, and he organises his equipment and things around this position before a performance, for instance. He also jots down on a piece of paper any changes in the way they play particular pieces of music, to get it right. He is inquisitive about the blackfella musicians' techniques or ways of playing particular songs and keen to try out and elaborate new songs with them. As a seasoned performer, he, moreover, wears earplugs on stage to avoid the common occupational health hazard for musicians; impaired hearing. Experienced in touring, he also takes precautions against being too worn out by weeks on the road. He wears earplugs to sleep well, eats healthily and only occasionally participates in the black men's drinking long into the nights.

I have only seen the Melbourne musicians in a handful of performance situations in other parts of Australia and cannot describe their "normal" performance habits. They

don't seem that different in kind from those of other professional musicians I know in various parts of the world, though. They also care about details and prepare themselves and their equipment thoroughly in order to relax, improvise and deliver a strong performance.

This can be compared to the valued "mongrel" masculine regimes in which the Aboriginal musicians tend to operate. Here, men are not expected to seem to worry much about things like loud noise, impaired hearing, lack of sleep, or eating regularly and healthily. They are consequently rather worn out early on during the tour, while the Melbourne musician is in good shape and in a bright mood for most of the tour. In the music work, the black musicians certainly care about the condition of the instruments they play and the quality of sound when they perform. But they pick up and play the instruments available without worrying about any personal "rituals" before performing. They are in a way always ready and move with whatever happens, when it happens.

As the days pass, it is noticeable how some of the Aboriginal men begin to embellish a seemingly overly careless attitude to the music work. It looks to me as if they are out to prove to the Melbourne musicians that they do not need a lot of preparation before performing. That is, they show that they are skilled and secure enough to improvise and pick up whatever musical challenge comes before them. They don't respond much when the Melbourne musicians want to pin down the exact way they are playing, either. In practice, the black men seldom play a song in exactly the same way twice, which perhaps can explain their lack of response.

Some of the black men also begin to exaggerate their crude language, eating habits and other behaviours in the presence of the Melbourne men. On one occasion when we are travelling in the van, for instance, one of the Melbourne men cuts up fruit on a plate that he passes around. Frank grabs a piece but the others just look at the neat fruit arrangement. Soon thereafter, Lyndon opens the cooler and grabs a piece of the fried meat that we prepared in the motel yesterday. He rips into it with his teeth, chews with loud smacking sounds and satisfied grunts. When he is done, he rubs his greasy hands together as if he truly enjoys the feel of it, and laughs mockingly.

When the Melbourne men are not present, the black men also begin to comment on the white men's habits. I do not wish to exaggerate the importance of these comments. They are often made in passing and in a joking manner, and are not necessarily expressions of deeply felt sentiments or judgements about the individual Melbourne men. They do, however, reaffirm some typecast notions of whitefella

manners that are fairly widespread among the Aboriginal musicians I have met in Central Australia. Those notions include perceptions of careful preparation of either stage performances or fruits on a platter as somewhat effeminate. Tearing into a solid piece of meat with your hands and teeth is in some respects to talk back to such whitefella manners. It can be interpreted as parodying a stereotypical imagery of blackfella masculine strength and energy, but also of somewhat "primitive" manners, both of which are part of the ambivalent "mongrel" qualities that the black men identify with.

The Melbourne men also begin to comment on their blackfella travel companions when they are not present, at times jokingly imitating their crude language and eating habits. One of them also shakes his head over the fact that the men in the Aboriginal crew rarely overtly question Stan's decisions or express opinions of their own. Again, I don't want to overstate these as deeply serious or mean gestures but understand them more as expressions that appear in any day-to-day engagements among people who work together.

This mutual "game" of self-exaggeration, parody and commentary involves some ridiculing of the "other", but there is no sense of real malice. On one level, I interpret these gestures as assertions of one's own ways of approaching music and life matters. On another level, I take them to involve a great deal of self-mockery when the men exaggerate their own demeanour. The fruit and meat incident, for instance, works just as much to communicate to the other party that one is aware of the typecast perceptions of one's own kind. That is, by exaggerating their respective actual and perceived whitefella and blackfella manners, the men can be seen as communicating to the other party that one knows that it might look ridiculous to them (and at times to oneself, too), but this is what "we" are, so live with it.

The imitation and mocking of each other's manners can also be seen as "trying out" and playing around with the "others'" male ways of being. It may, moreover, be read as a demonstration of competence in the manners of the "other". This is to simultaneously disrupt the idea that they are in fact so different, and to show a preference for one's own valued ways of identifying with certain modes of male behaviours. At the same time, it can involve the mocking of one's own male manners.

One morning, for instance, I meet two of the Melbourne men for breakfast at a small coffee shop. We chat and laugh about the mix of minds and manners of the touring party, and how the tour will probably become a memorable experience for all

involved. One of them proceeds to pour a cup of tea and spurt out with a wry smile, “well, fuck it, I’m fucking gonna have my fucking breakfast any fucking way I fucking want it, fuck it!” He then sips his tea with the small finger sticking out prudishly. By in this way contrasting exaggerated white Anglo tea drinking manners with a defining feature of the blackfella crew’s masculinist demeanour – the constant use of the word “fuck” for all things and actions – he thus parodies the typecast habits of his “own kind” as much as the black men’s manners.

Lyndon’s meat eating performance can be seen as a similar mocking of his own “mongrel” masculine manners, by contrasting himself to the typecast whitefella manner that the making of a fruit platter represents. To borrow from Taussig’s (1993) discussions of the significance of mimesis as a means to engage with Otherness, the black and white musicians’ mimetic contestations can thus be seen as “a gateway from the Self to the Other” (Harrison 2002:222), as well as a confrontation with images of oneself.

In the main, this mutual commentary is played out with indirect gestures among the men. However, Stan and one of the Melbourne men also begin to engage in direct teasing and mocking of each other’s ways of doing things both musically and in other matters. These two men have met irregularly through their music work over two decades, and the increasingly escalated slanging matches of joking insults between them are somewhat similar to the crude male bantering around the CAAMA studio. That is, it takes place between two men who know each other well enough not to be offended. These verbal exchanges do, however, often concern the core of their respective perceptions of whitefella and blackfella male behaviours.

To begin with, most of us find these word games rather entertaining. They also basically confirm how the rest of the men think about their differences. As they escalate, however, Frank and Woe especially, who are more knowledgeable in Aboriginal traditional matters, seem somewhat put off. On one occasion when on the road, for instance, Frank and I sit and talk in the back of the van when Stan and the Melbourne musician are “insulting” each other up the front. Frank shakes his head and grins. He nods towards the Melbourne man, then, in a comic exaggeration, grabs his own throat and chokes, imitating a man who is strangling himself. “He’s not going our way” Frank chuckles, “that’s why all these...”. He finishes the sentence with making a fist, while looking around the black men in the van. “He’s the oldfella”, he then says matter-of-

factly and nods towards Stan, as if he just explained the whole cross-cultural dynamic in the touring group.

What Frank is explaining is that any fist-like feelings in the blackfella group come back to the fact that the "oldfella" in their male group is not paid the appropriate deferential respect. I wish to repeat that these kinds of comments and gestures do not take on a character of mean talk about particular individuals. Frank knows and respects this Melbourne man. He knows that he is not ignorant about Aboriginal customary matters in general. He also accepts that there will always be taken-for-granted blackfella things that are not obvious to whitefellas.

Frank finishes his commentary in the van with a cheeky smile and ominous eye gestures towards Stan, indicating a "just you wait and see", as if we just have to sit back and watch the inevitable moment when a whitefella will be properly and legitimately put in his place by a senior blackfella (i.e. strangling himself by his own actions). In this particular venture, however, such a confrontation is not necessary and it never takes place. From the Aboriginal crew's point of view, this tour is a blackfella project in which the white musicians are in a minority, where they do not decide the turn of events, and where they are not essential for the core, male blackfella sociability. The Aboriginal musicians certainly talk with respect and also admiration about the Melbourne musicians' considerable skills and professionalism. They also acknowledge how these men are no uptight or overly "square" whitefellas, and that they are part of making the tour memorable. But to put it starkly, if the Melbourne men are not happy and even choose to leave the tour it would not disrupt the situation much for the black men (as we saw is the case, too, if blackfella musicians leave). The Melbourne men can always be replaced by blackfella musicians and the performance repertoire can simply be changed to suit their skills and tastes.

The finale of the Bush Tour is staged at the beer garden at the Katherine Hotel. Stan has returned to the group a few days before, and when he and Steve are setting up the stage the Teenage Band drives into town, keen to perform. The concert turns out to be one of the best stage experiences of the whole journey. Although Frank has never really stopped drinking since the day before, he and the Melbourne men seem to revel in their musical skills. They are rewarded with passionate and loud responses from the largely blackfella crowds of several hundred people that fill the beer garden to its limits. The Teenage Band men are likewise in a very good mood, clearly enjoying themselves on stage, never letting the tempo down, and giving their all to satisfy the wildly dancing

crowds. When Frank's band is playing, the Teenage Band guys are up on the dance floor, and when they take over on stage, Frank's band members are sweating it out on the floor to support their touring colleagues, too.

When the crowds have left, the men gather around the stage, drinking, laughing and hugging each other. Stan takes a very drunk Frank aside for a brief talk, and Frank then makes an honest attempt to make a kind of speech, thanking them all for making the tour worthwhile and successful. The others applaud, shout in agreement and engage in more hugging. Before the night is over, they all agree that they definitely have to do this again. Someone suggests that the Bush Tour should become an annual event. They all shout and clap their approval, while everybody knows that it will never happen, and some perhaps are glad to leave it at that. Caught up in a shared sense of satisfaction by having accomplished this musical venture together, and a great deal of shared relief that it has come to an end and that they soon will be back in their respective homes, habits and musical scenes, the men thus end on a conciliatory note of mutual acceptance of their differences.

The musicians we have followed on this tour, like most touring musicians, will return home with experiences that change the way they see themselves and how other people see them and relate to them. The intercultural and cross-cultural musical and male engagements of interstate touring ventures thus produce transformed male and sociomusical positions from which the individual men can act, identify and are identified. I elaborate these mediating processes in the next, concluding chapter as I draw together the themes that have appeared in the different sites I have investigated.

Summary

When touring beyond their home region, the Central Australian musicians engage with a diverse range of people, practices and values in different musical and sociocultural settings. Following a particular touring venture, this chapter has explored some co-existing, co-productive and competing notions of being blackfella and male that are mobilised as the men in a sense "go abroad". Those notions inform the men's dealings with and experiences of various "others", while also shaping their self-understandings.

Being blackfella "others" in other blackfellas' country and social spaces emerges as a major factor shaping the Aboriginal men's behaviour, experiences and thoughts about places, music and themselves when touring. It becomes more important to them to identify collectively and to assert themselves as "desert mob" musicians and men, with

certain male and Aboriginal values and norms. This is evident in how they share cautionary stories about being blackfella and male strangers in other blackfella places, which reinforce a sense of being "out of place". Contradicting their common rhetoric of tours as inspiring and empowering in the coming together with other blackfella musicians, men, music styles and audiences, the desert men are mainly interested in engaging with other Central Australian blackfella performers and people. They tend to limit their interactions with blackfella others and withdraw to their own grouping.

As a result of being situated in unfamiliar blackfella settings, then, the men are made aware of and begin to reflect on their taken-for-granted ways of being and doing things, which they now assert as that of "us desert mob". In the process, the men's divergent ideas of how "we" do things are also accentuated within their group.

In contrast to the blackfella musicians' preoccupation with blackfella matters, their interactions with whitefella domains tend to be characterised by a combination of lack of interest, defiance and typecasting. The men also more or less take for granted that they are racially typecast as blackfella suspects or disturbers of white orders. Such typecasting is confirmed from time to time, which can partly explain why they keep their interactions with white people and spaces to a minimum.

In the mixed blackfella and whitefella party of the Bush Tour, the white and black musicians' modes of operating are clearly different, which causes some tensions. One way of dealing with such tensions is to exaggerate and parody one's own as well as the other's manners. In this mutual commenting on oneself and the "other", the men at the same time reaffirm, question, and dislocate certain historically established caricatures of whitefellas and blackfellas, and associated models of valued masculinity.

The different kinds of intercultural and cross-cultural engagements of touring ventures enable the mobilisation of various and overlapping modes of male, musical and sociocultural identifications. In the process "new" and multilayered male and blackfella forms of being are produced, which transforms the men's sociomusical positions and self-understandings as they return home. As I discuss my findings in the concluding chapter, these mediating processes will be made clearer.

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

In opening the thesis with a performance at Womadelaide by a group of legendary Aboriginal country musicians from remote Northern Australia, I suggested that these black men and their classic country tunes, just like the Central Australian musicians and music styles we have encountered in this study, do not make much sense to a mostly white, big city audience. These musicians, I proposed, do not deliver on the privileged and rather narrow expectations of “real” and “authentic” Aboriginal music and people that tend to dominate mainstream imagery and understandings. That is, they do not perform recognised markers of “traditionality” or a modern Black rights activist stance. This thesis has hopefully demonstrated that indigenous life worlds, sociocultural expressions and ways of identifying are much more complex, ambivalent and nuanced than such privileged notions allow for.

As described in Chapter Two, contemporary Aboriginal Central Australian life worlds have emerged from more than a century of intercultural engagements, with ongoing appropriations, adjustments, conflicts and inconsistencies regarding worldviews, social organisation, expressive practices and values among the parties involved. I showed how a mutual, historically established “othering” characterises relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and activities. This tends to perpetuate a socio-spatial order with two largely segregated but interdependent realms of social life and ways of identifying. The main regional blackfella styles of music making I delineated in Chapter Three – variations and fusions of country, rock and reggae music – continue to proliferate as part of this segregated sociocultural order. Over more than six decades, these musics have come to form an expressive core of diverse regional Aboriginal life worlds and are thus embroiled in the intercultural production of divergent notions of blackfella and whitefella social order and forms of identification.

The main body of the thesis – Chapters Four to Eight – focused on the practices and relations in four different sites for sociomusical activities – the Aboriginal recording studio in Alice Springs, hinterland Aboriginal communities, gigs in white dominated towns, and interstate touring ventures. Each of these sites engenders its own dynamics for articulating and negotiating multilayered and ambivalent but still deeply meaningful male and blackfella forms of being. In concluding the thesis I will revisit the

themes that appear in each of these settings in order to show how they are co-implicated and co-productive in the musicians' crafting of changing sense of selves as men and blackfellas. In this, I highlight my approach to music as a medium for mediating mediations – that is, as “an interactive social context, a conduit for other forms of interaction, other socially mediated forms of appropriation of the world” (Erlmann 1999:6) – as a useful tool for understanding contemporary “mongrel” forms of indigeneity and masculinity.

Situated mediations

In the CAAMA Music recording studio explored in Chapters Four and Five I showed how tensions between notions of professionalism and particular valued “blackfella ways” of being and doing music are one of the prominent dynamics in which a male and blackfella integrity and “ownership” are reproduced. I showed how this ownership emerges as the men draw on different sociomusical backgrounds, knowledge and imagery as they create music and manipulate their relative positions as worthy and respected Aboriginal males and musicians. In the process, different values, practices, imagery and ideas about being male and Aboriginal are connected, layered and partially articulated through each other in processes of mediation.

An integrated part of the mediating dynamic of the studio is what the musicians think of as “healthy competition”; their development of personal skills and individual reputation in competition and alliances with fellow blackfella musicians. In this they draw on masculine blackfella conventions that emerge from local intercultural histories and engagements, as well as from global male imagery associated with different musical genres. In this, aspects of ancestral, Christian and rural worker models for valued masculinity are intermingled with those of “hard core” country music imagery of sincere, mature, responsible men and more “out-of-control”, extrovert masculine power of global rock music imagery.

The male and blackfella dynamics of the studio are also conditioned by being part of an Aboriginal media association that has developed as part of state policies of self-determination, activist aspirations for Aboriginal self-representation, and by commercial demands and reputation in a national and global media industry. Those changing socio-political and economic forces inform the kinds of indigenous and male practices and imagery that CAAMA management wish to foster. At the time of my work at the studio, the management's preferred male and indigenous models were in

part inconsistent with the actual male and blackfella practices around the studio. The ensuing tensions involved a mutual chain of management interventions and studio resistance in which previously rather permeable forms of male and blackfella ways of being were asserted in increasingly firm configurations. Here, then, we can see how the formation of male and Aboriginal models of identification emerges in a mediating dynamic in which different levels of identification are connected – the level of concrete everyday male practices and relations, and more abstract and symbolic levels of Aboriginal identity claims and politics of national identity.

A prominent theme emerging from the male and indigenous dynamics of music making in remote Aboriginal communities explored in Chapter Six was the articulation and negotiation of regional relatedness and distinctiveness among different Aboriginal communities, kin and language groupings. In these settings, music making and events are also a means for individual men to accumulate respect as musicians and men. By writing and performing songs about their people, communities and histories in their own languages and in English, and by dedicating songs to specific individuals and groups in performances, the men position themselves in relation to specific social and kin groupings and individuals.

By travelling around and performing their music, the men can also come to represent their kin, community, country and ways of being within a cross-regional Aboriginal sociality. Their experiences of other places and people often make them reflect on their own male and kin responsibilities, and on the living conditions of their home communities. As a result, several musicians involve themselves in community affairs where the representative status and experience they have gained through their music making may translate into leadership positions and increased male status in extra-musical realms.

What we see, then, is that in the course of ongoing sociomusical practice and processes of identification, not only are already established models for being men and indigenous reaffirmed, but these models are also partially co-implicated in the continuous production of new meanings and distinctive forms of maleness, indigeneity and music.

In my discussion of blackfella music events in white dominated towns in Chapter Seven I pointed to how the hinterland dynamics of Aboriginal relatedness and distinctiveness, and gendered conventions, in some respects are “moved to town”. It is primarily within this dynamic that the musicians evaluate their town performances, and

thus their male worth. Town gigs are also thought of as occasions for cross-cultural experiences that elevate their status as musicians and men in their everyday Aboriginal settings. As we saw, however, town gigs instead tend to produce occasions for the demonstration and assertion of rather monocultural modes of identifying as blackfellas or whitefellas. Such dichotomous formations involve a historical dominance of whitefella orders in which blackfella demeanour is disciplined and controlled, while blackfellas continue to insist on being present on their own, valued "too much" terms. The male and Aboriginal dynamic of town gigs thus involves the connection of imagined cross-cultural recognition and actual monocultural assertions in the articulation of male, blackfella and musical worth.

Interstate touring ventures such as the Bush Tour described in Chapter Eight are thought of as desired occasion for cross-cultural engagements, too, among the musicians, but are also often talked about as valued opportunities for participating in a national blackfella musical brotherhood. Both these aspects earn the musicians increased male and Aboriginal status among fellow musicians and people at home. As my accounts show, the male and blackfella dynamics that are put into play by touring ventures do indeed involve both cross-cultural and blackfella intercultural interactions. The Central Australian musicians do, however, keep their direct engagements with both blackfella and whitefella "others" to a minimum and tend to close ranks as "desert mob" blackfella men and musicians.

At the same time, the men negotiate tensions concerning various norms for worthy male behaviour among themselves when they in a sense "go abroad" to unknown (but always already imagined) sociomusical territories. In this, they draw on aspects of (interculturally mediated) blackfella norms for respected masculinity in their home settings, as well as on global masculine imagery of touring rock, country and reggae musicians as free of such everyday gendered and behavioural constraints. A desire to "play hard" in the field of drinking, drug taking and sexual adventures is thus in tension with aspirations to earn increased respect within their everyday norms for responsible, mature and respected Aboriginal manhood.

A main theme appearing in the men's cross-cultural engagements on tours concerns mutual stereotyping of the "other" and of oneself. In the male and musical interactions between the desert blackfellas and urban whitefellas in the Bush Tour party such typecasting takes on a kind of double-mirrored dynamic. While both parties' comments and mimicking represent and assert the *modus operandi* of the "other" as

different than that of one's own kind, these gestures also display a curiosity about the "other" and demonstrate a capacity for cross-over. By exaggerating and mimicking stereotypes of themselves, the men moreover depict their own ways of being men and musicians as somewhat ridiculous, while demonstrating the validity as well as limitation of sociocultural and racial stereotypes.

The mediating dynamics in which the blackfella musicians constitute themselves as worthy blackfella men and musicians are thus to some degree site specific. The dynamics of these and other sociomusical sites are also interdependent aspects of the musicians' life worlds, and are connected and operate through each other as the men craft their changing sense of self.

Changing masculinities and musicians

The Central Australian musicians we followed in the touring venture in the previous chapter, like most musicians who go on tour, return home with experiences that change the way they see themselves and how other people see them and relate to them. The Teenage Band members, for instance, can return home to their remote Aboriginal community and Warlpiri sociality and tell stories of being part of the famous Aboriginal Stompem Ground festival in Broome. In doing so, they place themselves in a wider blackfella, professional musical brotherhood. By making this connection the men can improve and thus change their musical and male standing in the blackfella realm that their home community is part of. They also in a sense extend this local blackfella sociality by contributing with their experiences in a larger (imagined and actual) Aboriginal realm.

Some of the Teenage Band men's wives and countrymen came along to Broome. The band could thus receive direct support and appreciation from their home mob, who they in the main direct their music towards, and whose response counts the most for the musicians' evaluation of a gig. In the process, the band and this audience mutually reinforce their shared Warlpiri forms of identification, and the band members reinforce their male and musician status among their home mob and their capacity to represent them. These men will talk about having performed for the Aboriginal community of Fitzroy Crossing, and words about this gig will come back through regional blackfella networks. This likewise reinforces their Warlpiri, musician and male status and worth at home, and in the blackfella sociality of their wider home region.

Through the band members' narratives, and as relayed through Warlpiri social networks, it will also become known that the Teenage Band was passionately appreciated by Lajamanu Warlpiri in Katherine. In this, the band and their music come to represent and connect dispersed countrymen and ways of living as Warlpiri. And maybe their music, and especially their community song "Lajamanu", will move "lost" Warlpiri to stop drinking and come back home to their people and country. Katherine is the closest white dominated town centre for Lajamanu people, and this gig can thus also be narrated in terms of cross-cultural, professional recognition, which may be added to the band's status as elevated from that of fellow Lajamanu and other bush musicians who mainly play on the hinterland, blackfella music circuit.

By participating in the tour, the men in the Teenage Band have, moreover, reinforced their male bonds and musical standing with the main operators of the professional, blackfella male space of the CAAMA Music studio; Stan and Steve. The band has proven their commitment and capacity to turn up and perform well. The fact that they were included in a CAAMA touring venture also boosts the band's credibility and reputation among fellow musicians and people at home and across their Aboriginal region. The band did have to leave for "sorry business" but this does not put much of a dent in their standing with the studio, since funeral proceedings and other traditional business are wholly valid reasons for a no-show in this music scene.

On their part, Stan and Steve come back home as more experienced and confident in organising and seeing an interstate touring venture through. "I felt like I could've gone on tour with Deep Purple right after, that's the kind of high I was on!" Stan chuckles when describing his state of mind at the time. The narratives about the tour that soon begin to circulate as part of the blackfella male studio sociality also reaffirm Steve's and Stan's male and professional positions among the bush, town, and out-of-town musicians around the studio. In contrast to many other possible projects, this venture made the transition from talk to action. It is therefore an occasion when the "healthy competition" among the men takes a tangible form, and when their studio visits and show of commitment and professionalism in this space may pay off. In the process, Stan's and Steve's positions as mediators are asserted as they basically decide who will be invited to participate, decisions that change relative male and musician positions and reputation around the studio and beyond.

For CAAMA, the Bush Tour venture is not a wholly successful project in financial terms. The studio men also run this project as they run the studio; a more or

less exclusively male activity that the management (and women) have limited access to. After the event, a few senior CAAMA people (all of them women) ask me on the side what the men were really up to in Broome and during the tour. The questions imply that they do not trust the studio men and musicians to do a professional job. A few seem to take for granted that when out of control of management or women, the men will work as little as possible and instead indulge in drinking and chasing sex and other excessive forms of the undesirable male and untidy blackfella qualities of the studio that the management does not condone and wants to reform.

When the requested time sheets for the venture are delivered upstairs, though, there is only the odd day when the men had not been either travelling between venues, or performing. With time, the performances in Broome and the Bush Tour become feathers in the hat for CAAMA Music in that they gave the record label and its artists exposure in the wider northern region and among the Aboriginal people the association aims to service and represent. The studio men thus earn some belated credibility with CAAMA management.

An exploration of the Melbourne musicians' everyday lives is outside the scope of this study, but I think it can still be assumed that the touring experience affects their sociomusical position at home, too. For instance, next time I run into one of them at a gig in Melbourne it seems that the tour has become a somewhat romanticised memory for him. "It was unreal! It's like a whole other world out there with those guys! Simpler!" he says, not so much to me as to his fellow (white) Melbourne musicians who stand around us and who have not been on tour with Aboriginal musicians from remote Central Australia. They nod as he says that he would jump at a chance to do it again.

By connecting him with Aboriginal people in Central Australia the Bush Tour experience thus seems to earn this musician some points in an urban south-eastern music scene. As I described in Chapter Two, the ideological landscape of Central Australia is often associated with "real", "traditional" and "authentic" Aboriginal people. Regardless of whether these qualities are valued as something in the past or in the present (as I suggested in Chapter One) they are now mostly cherished in wider Australia (and beyond).

The touring experiences are thus transferred and in the process transformed as well as transformative when mediated by norms, values and practices in the musicians' home settings, be they towns, the studio, bush communities or big cities.

Similarly, when musicians return from studio recording sessions, they are endowed with an altered male and musician confidence and status in their everyday sociomusical settings. Their participation in the blackfella and male dynamics of professionalism and "healthy competition" at the studio may also alter their male and musician status in this setting itself. Like the Teenage Band or the bands at the Todd Tavern gigs, they may be rewarded by being included in town gigs and tours that CAAMA or other people around the studio organise.

Bush and town musicians' different musical and life experiences and orientations, and their different male and musical ideals and aspirations, at the same time confer upon the studio its particular blackfella and male ethos. Their presence and work in this studio underpin the rationale for CAAMA Music's existence as a means for producing Aboriginal self-representations. The management may wish to rationalise the "slack" organisation of work around the studio and "tidy up" the all-male and blackfella demeanour. This studio sociality of regional music makers is nevertheless an all-important factor when CAAMA competes for public grants for its continued operations by emphasising its status as a community based, representative Aboriginal corporation.

The dynamics of the hinterland Aboriginal community music circuit also connect to that of the other settings I have explored. The musician and male status bush musicians earn through establishing a reputation and representative role in the Aboriginal community circuit often engender the musical and male confidence and aspirations for "hitting town", "going to CAAMA" to record, and for interstate touring. As mentioned, the musicians' talk about such activities is in itself important in construing an elevated sense of self as man and musician among fellow men, musicians and other people.

To establish a reputation in the hinterland circuit may also work the other way. The studio men or exogenous festival organisers may hear about or come across musicians who have made a name for themselves out bush, and may subsequently contact these musicians for a recording project or performance. This is how the Benning Brothers came to appear at Womadelaide, for instance.

Blackfella gigs in white dominated towns are interconnected with the particular dynamics for producing male and blackfella forms of identification in the studio, bush communities, towns and on interstate tours. Town gigs are associated with imagined cross-cultural and real inter-blackfella recognition, both of which are means for boosting musicians' self-imagery, their male and musician position amongst fellow

regional musicians, and for how they are perceived in general across the Aboriginal desert region.

The particular mediating dynamics of each of the explored settings are thus co-productive as different aspects in the making of Aboriginal men and musicians. I have described ethnographically how the men draw on and recombine differing aspects of male and blackfella practices, values and ways of identifying that continuously emerge in their intercultural and cross-cultural engagements. I have pointed to the dialogic process of partial local, national and transnational appropriations and transformations of male and indigenous models that are engendered by the men's practices and relationships. I have shown how this involves the affirmation of already established, distinctive models for being men, musicians and indigenous, and a simultaneous blurring of such sociomusical boundaries. Approaching such concrete, pragmatic practices, interactions and lived experiences with the concept of mediation, I propose that the everyday engagement of ideas, practices and values from varying sources and sociocultural formations involves an embedding of layers upon layers of intercultural and cross-cultural experiences. As these experiences become part of the men's actions in different relationship and sociomusical circumstances, there is an inevitable process of displacement and reformulation. Direct experiences, imagery and differing values are thus co-implicated in the ongoing formation of ambivalent, multifaceted but distinctively blackfella and male "mongrel" ways of existing and doing things.

Mongrel music and blackfella men

As Thomas (1991:185ff) argues in relation to intercultural engagements in the Pacific, elements of differing belief systems are acted upon and reformulated by the parties as they interact and as socio-political circumstances change. There will be misinterpretations, subversive and ironic reproductions, and partial appropriations, all of which will gradually mutate and change with subsequent interactions and engagements.

In the social world of Aboriginal music making in Central Australia, too, practices, meanings, attitudes, rhetoric and norms for male blackfella manners are continuously interculturally mediated and transformed. Similar to the colonial engagements Thomas describes, these multilayered entanglements and mutations can still be construed to express qualitative difference, and in oppositional practice to that of whitefella "others". As we have seen, such difference and practice are construed in relation to blackfella "others", too.

The theme of "otherness" has reappeared throughout this ethnography, just as the "Other" has always loomed large in anthropological work and thought because of the discipline's core concern with human diversity and sociocultural difference (Hannerz 2001). Processes of collective and individual identity formation necessarily involve the attribution of meaning to experienced and perceived similarities and differences between "self" and "other", "us" and "them", whether such difference concerns belief systems, cultural forms, gender, race, ethnicity, class, or any other category of identification (Jenkins 1996; Otto and Driessen 2000). Conceptions of "self" and "other" are also co-productive in a dialogic, contrasting, always interdependent, mirroring process. That is, when one thinks of somebody else as "other", one automatically thinks of oneself as not an "other", and vice versa. How we conceive of the "other" thus helps form our conception of "self", as gendered, racial, ethnic and other distinctive social beings (Torgovnick 1990). Both concepts generate its meaning through the existence of the other and can only survive with the help of one another.

"Otherness" and "sameness", as intrinsic to identity formation, are also something that is actively made and remade through each other in an ongoing, everyday repetition of ideas and practice. As the "other" is created with certain and changing characteristics, the "self" is transformed (Benhabib 2002:Ch 1). As we saw, the blackfella musicians variously desire and dismiss, fear and admire whitefella and blackfella "others". As they engage with such "others", they also expand the repertoire from which they draw in the making of themselves. The negotiation of one's own sense of self through the "other" in this way permits a play of difference, in which multiple, partial and overlapping forms of identifying may be absorbed in the one, coherent experience of self. A process of productive ambivalence is thus central to the production of "otherness" and of self-production (Bhabha 1983).

As suggested by my outline of the ongoing "persistent othering" between blackfella and whitefella people, practices and domains in Central Australia in Chapter Two, the particular ways in which difference is defined, and the specific meanings attributed to "sameness" and "otherness", must be understood in particular historical locations, and as emerging from particular constellations of sociocultural, political, ideological and economic relationships (cf. Mitchell 2000; Stoler 1995). That is, representations of "selfhood" and "otherness" are "historical outcomes of connected peoples" (Coronil 1996:56). The ongoing making and remaking of Aboriginal men and

music is best understood as a continuum of intercultural engagements, not as interactions between distinct and opposed cultural forms or traits. Emerging from such engagements, which in essence are processes of mediation, renewed "mongrel" modes of being continue to define distinctively Aboriginal and male experiences and practice that anchor the ways in which the men present, understand and interact among themselves and with others.

These proliferating "mongrel" forms of identifying appear incongruous with privileged notions of worthy, "real" and "authentic" Aboriginality in wider national and global academic, legal, political and popular understandings. Although indigenous people's lives and expressions are as heterogeneous, ambivalent and constantly changing as any other social realities, they still tend to be evaluated in academic, legal political, nationalistic and popular terms that privilege the "traditional" as a basic reference point. The content of such a "traditional" quality is defined in as many ways as the different purposes for which it is put to use, and Aboriginal persons and groups are under pressure to prove and perform intellectual, practical and affective relationship and identification with such imagined "traditional" states of existence.

As authoritative producers of knowledge and representations of indigenous Australia, anthropologists and other scholars in the field of Aboriginal studies have been among those who have contributed to the privileging of the "traditional". Through their preoccupation with documenting and interpreting ancestral bodies of knowledge, values and practice, they have been complicit in imposing traditionalist frameworks. This has also been long acknowledged by anthropologists, even when those modes of interpretation are increasingly at odds with the contemporary indigenous lives they encounter (Attwood and Arnold 1992; Cowlshaw 1986, 1988, 1992; Hollinsworth 1992a, 1992b; Lattas 1993; Morton 1998; Thiele 1991).

Concurring with developments in social and cultural theory more generally (Heelas, Lash and Morris 1996; Hobsbawn and Ranger 1983; Keesing, Tonkinson and Tonkinson 1982), notions of "tradition" have consequently been investigated, criticised and at times dismissed altogether in Australian Aboriginal studies. Such notions, it has been argued, are inadequate tools for understanding the changing dynamics of internal politics and agency within and between indigenous settings, or the intercultural and cross-cultural dynamics in which indigenous life worlds are formed (Austin-Broos 2001; Cowlshaw 2001; Merlan 1998, 2005; Taylor, Ward, Henderson, Davis and Wallis 2005). Despite these insights, anthropological studies of indigenous Australia

still tend to focus on continuities (i.e. traditions) and on non-urban (i.e. traditionally oriented) people and practices.

Popular, "non-traditional" music is among the everyday and regular phenomena of indigenous people's contemporary lives all over Australia, as it is in indigenous populations elsewhere (Diamond 2001; Neuenfeldt 1991, 1994b, 1995; Samuels 2004). These practices are largely ignored by anthropologists in Australia. Perhaps they are seen as too mundane, too obvious, and too much associated with Western practices to be a subject for serious anthropological theoretical inquiry. That is, they are "too much" "mongrel" and ambiguous cultural forms, and not enough associated with what is taken to be distinctively Aboriginal, that is, "traditional" matters.

After observing and hanging out with blackfella desert musicians in all kinds of settings and situations, I think that it is precisely because these expressive forms are so obvious and mundane that they merit special attention. I believe that it is through such everyday phenomena we can better understand what is most indicative of Aboriginal personal and social relations. It is through attending to these and other forms of overtly intercultural and cross-cultural practice that we can begin to account for the dynamic, ambiguous, contradictory and multifaceted ways in which indigenous people experience, act and identify in their contemporary lives.

My use of the concept of mediation is thus an attempt to expand the ways in which we can theorise our ethnographic explorations of inter- and cross-cultural engagements in the production of nuanced and distinctively indigenous experience as profoundly meaningful and coherent. As an analytical concept, mediation can be a tool for understanding how meanings and practices can be transferred and at the same time inevitably transformed. It can provide a conceptual means to connect concrete everyday practice and relations with more abstract levels of identity formation, and with flows of global imagery. These processes are at the core of the practices and social worlds through which the "mongrel" music, male and blackfella ways of being that I have investigated continue to emerge.

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